

From 1967 to 1990, more than a quarter of the Jews who lived in the Soviet Union emigrated, fleeing the Soviet government's policies of forced assimilation. Their journeys from the Soviet Union to Europe, the United States, and Israel became important and divisive political issues for Israel and the American Jewish community. American Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee were essential to the world-wide Soviet Jewry advocacy movement, representing a critical shift in 1960s American Jewish advocacy—from focusing on universalistic causes, such as the civil rights movement, to more 'Jewish-centric causes.' This paper explains this shift in advocacy in relation to a rise of Holocaust consciousness in the late 1960s—a result of a confluence of political, social, and structural changes, including the American responses to the Six Day War in 1967. However, advocacy for Soviet Jews also tested the relationship between American Jews and Israel. The Israeli government, through its covert Liaison Bureau, was instrumental in equipping American Jewish organizations with the resources and motivation to elevate the Soviet Jewry issue to the tops of their agendas in the 1960s. Yet, by the early 1970s, American Jewish organizations charted an independent course of action, both from Israeli directives and US foreign policy—a remarkable deviation from the established pattern of American Jewish deference to the objectives of the Israeli government. This divergence in American Jewish and Israeli strategic prioritization vis-à-vis Soviet Jews was due to the development of American Jewish Holocaust consciousness in the late 1960s, distinct from Holocaust memory in Israel.