INTRODUCTION

A considerable part of the small state literature deals with the seemingly disproportionate power of the small nation versus its larger ally. This paper deals, however, with a somewhat neglected aspect of the small state relationship with its extra-regional ally—the sources of tension in the bilateral interaction. The small state's influence is often remarkable, but the truth is that in the long term the small power is obviously at a disadvantage and has to nurture carefully its contacts with its larger ally. A more general phenomenon is the small power's desire to minimize tension with its patron rather than to maximize its influence.

This paper looks at the sources of tension between Israel and the United States. Israel is an American ally. The relationship between the two countries is often called “special,” although the character of this specialness is not clear. It has been cogently argued that since 1973 two trends make this relationship quite problematic. The first is Israel's dramatically growing dependency on the U.S.—political, economic and military. The second is America's growing interest in good relations with Israel's regional rivals. These rivals, the Arab states, have gained greater international leverage following the energy crisis of the 1970s. This paper expands the search for the strains in the U.S.-Israeli relationship. Four main sources of the stresses are identified. They stem from structural factors of the international system, differing strategic interests, internal politics, and differences in personalities and perceptions. Israel is the case study of interest to the author, but this typology is also of use in other similar relationships.

STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Relations between states are obviously a function of the type of international system in which they operate. Israel, like other small states linked to the U.S., has benefited from the bipolar dimension of the present international system, since as long as the U.S. is dedicated to policies of global involvement, a small ally is assured of some American support. Even during the détente years the diminished competition between the superpowers was beneficial for most small states. It increased their range of available policies, without drastically reducing their bargaining power to secure superpower support for their policies.

Interestingly, the United States-Soviet Union competition has not been the dominant factor in the relations of conflict and cooperation

56
among Middle Eastern states. The most important dimensions have been inter-Arab rivalry and the Arab-Israeli conflict. This limited bipolar dimension has enhanced the autonomy of regional actors, but also the ease of the superpowers’ intervention. However, in the 1967-73 period the Arab-Israeli region was more bipolar than ever before. Since 1967, the United States has perceived Israel as an effective barrier to the Soviet threat in the core area of the Middle East. The 1970 Jordanian crisis, in which Israeli forces deterred an intensified Syrian effort to undermine the pro-Western Hashemite regime, further strengthened this perception. Moreover, the growing Soviet commitment to Egypt and Syria triggered a similar commitment on the part of the United States to Israel, in spite of their differences. The issues of dispute between Israel and the United States—the character of a Middle Eastern settlement (Israel’s borders and the Palestinian question), the American role in a future settlement, and the scope of the United States aid to Middle Eastern countries—were temporarily set aside. The bipolar dimension was dramatically stressed when the United States placed its forces on alert on October 25, 1973, in reaction to an anticipated Soviet military move in the Middle East.

Yet the post-1973 period has been characterized, primarily because of Egypt’s efforts, by a loosening of the bipolar dimension. After the October War Egypt welcomed an increased American role in the region. The Americans took advantage of the opportunity to limit Soviet influence in a vital area by restraining and pressuring the Israelis. The anti-Soviet role of Israel decreased in importance as Soviet influence in the region dwindled and as less problematic actors than Israel, such as Egypt and Sudan, assumed an anti-Soviet role. As a result of the Iraqi-Iranian war even Iraq has lost some of its anti-Western fervour. Consequently, the issues of dispute between Israel and the United States, which had been obscured in the years of bipolarity, reemerged following the 1973 war.

This war underscored another unfavourable structural change, as far as Israel was concerned, in the political economy of the world. The energy crisis, as it became known, made the United States and particularly its European allies vulnerable to the pressure of the Arab oil-producing nations. This was obviously at the expense of Israel. In an energy-thirsty world Arab oil-producing countries carried greater weight than before. The divergence of opinions between Israel and the United States acquired a significance far beyond a regular inter-state dispute. Israeli “intransigence” became a “block” to pursuing vital interests. As a result of the loosening of bipolarity and of the oil crisis, Israel’s role as a regional ally became more problematic and there has been an increase in the instances where tensions between the two states have obscured their mutual interests.

The bilateral relationship between a superpower and its small regional ally is in itself problematic. This relationship of the extra-regional power, the United States, to Israel can be regarded as a patron-client arrangement. It is characterized by a reciprocal, but
asymmetrical flow of benefits and by the absence of coercion on the part of the patron state in spite of vast differences in resources, capabilities and material needs. This relationship between the extra-regional power and its local ally is inherently unstable and unsatisfactory. The local power is consulted by its larger ally only on those matters to which it can make a contribution (as the big power sees it), and it tends to suspect its larger ally of seeking a regional agreement at its expense. The unequal partners in the alliance have, as well, conflicting perspectives. The United States, for example, sees things from a global perspective, tending sometimes to "global parochialism" while Israel's perspective is essentially regional. Furthermore, Israel, being a small state, has limited margins of security, while the United States is used to larger ones. There is also an inevitable tension between United States' actions to further its own presence in the region and actions to protect its client, which cannot be allowed to fall.

**STRATEGIC INTERESTS**

No consensus exists in the United States as to Israel's strategic importance. The evaluation of Israel's strategic contribution and the consequent responsiveness to its interests fluctuates according to changing international circumstances. Obviously, Israel is geographically situated in a place of strategic importance. But so is Egypt. Moreover, a comparison between small Israel and the many Arab countries and the potential that some possess, illuminates the problematic nature of siding with Israel. Indeed, United States' diplomatic history in the Middle East does not show a consistent support for the Jewish state.

The benefits to the United States from supporting Israel, however, outdo the stress this connection puts on American-Arab relations. First, a good case has been made that the United States' friendship with Israel has only marginal influence on the Arab stand toward the United States. The conflict with Israel is only one of the factors that mold the position toward Washington. Second, Israel helps the survival of pro-Western regimes in the Middle East. Third, Israel strengthens Western military capabilities in this important region. Israel's military infrastructure, its air force, navy and ground forces, are an important contribution to the Western alliance. The Soviet presence in Afghanistan and the instability in the Persian Gulf area indicate the growing need for Western bases in the territory of a stable ally in the eastern Mediterranean. Fourth, it is Israel's stability which constitutes Israel's greatest asset for the West. Israel is a more reliable ally than any other Middle East nation. The political course of other regional actors is fraught with uncertainties. The emergence of a regime hostile to Western interests in countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey or Greece, is not a far-fetched scenario. The Iranian turn of events is a vivid example. Finally, even if Israel's existence were indeed a burden for the United States, its demise might be infinitely worse.
The above view has not been fully adopted by American decision makers. Even when Israel is indeed regarded as a strategic asset, it is quite obviously, after 1973, a rather costly one. Furthermore, some circles in the United States view Israel as a burden or an outright liability. The Arab-Israeli conflict seems to hinder the spread of American influence in the Middle East, particularly now that this region has become more important in the world and more threatened by Soviet expansionism. Even the anti-Western turn in Iran, which seemed to enhance Israel’s strategic importance, pointed out the increased importance of Islam in the region’s politics and consequently the difficulties involved in being allied with the Jewish state. The growing Western interest and dependence upon Middle Eastern oil and other structural factors accentuated Israel’s strategic marginality.

American policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict has oscillated since 1973 between two main perspectives: a comprehensive course and a “step by step” approach. The comprehensive approach attempts to find solutions for all issues of dispute in order to reach a peaceful regional environment. The “step by step” approach is less presumptuous and realizes that most problems are complicated and that only through a lengthy process can all sides be accommodated. Therefore, it attempts to reach ad hoc arrangements to reduce regional tensions in the hope that in due time further agreements can be accomplished. The radical stance of the comprehensive approach seems to be the more threatening to Israel, since it obviously requires concessions on its part, in spite of the fact that this approach is more specific as to the Arab political quid pro quo. To a great extent the comprehensive approach stresses more than the other approach the urgency of finding a solution. This urgency is usually the result of viewing the Arab-Israeli conflict as the main threat to American interests in the Middle East. The greater urgency emanating from American diplomacy exerts greater pressure on Jerusalem to accommodate Washington. Invariably, American efforts in the direction of a comprehensive formula, like Carter’s attempts to revive the Geneva Conference in 1977, or Reagan’s Middle East initiative of September 1982, evoked Israeli opposition, and a turbulent period in Israeli-American relations followed.

Regardless of the type of approach that Washington has preferred in dealing with the Middle East, United States Middle Eastern policy has been characterized since 1973 by a very active role and by great involvement in reaching agreements in the Arab-Israeli arena. Kissinger mediated the 1974 and 1975 agreements between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Syria. President Carter initiated the Camp David conference to achieve the initial framework for further negotiations between Israel and Egypt. However, only a presidential Middle Eastern tour brought about the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Similarly, the United States’ efforts were crucial in reaching an Israeli-Lebanese accord. Secretary of State Schultz, using “shuttle diplomacy” in 1983, “convinced” both sides to reach an accepted for-
Spring 1984

The unprecedented intensity of American Middle East diplomacy is viewed ambivalently in Jerusalem. A greater American role in the region is welcomed, but the more numerous pressures on Israel are feared and disliked.

Another area in which disagreement between Washington and Jerusalem causes tensions is the American Middle East arms sales policy. The Israeli quest to maintain an adequate regional military balance (obviously as defined in Jerusalem) is in conflict with the American objective of strengthening the military capability of other regional actors to meet contingencies unrelated to the Arab-Israeli arena (obviously as seen from Washington). Israel is quite worried about the military build-up in pro-Western countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and even Egypt. Israel objects to the American sales of certain advanced weapon systems to its Arab neighbors. Israel fought hard in the spring of 1978 against Carter's proposal to sell sixty F-15s to Saudi Arabia. Further, it was furious at the linkage between the supply of its F-15s and the transfer of similar planes to the Saudis and the supply of F-5s to Egypt. Similarly, Israel conducted a strong campaign in 1981 against the American decision to sell AWACs and F-15 enhancement equipment to Saudi Arabia. Both deals were finally approved. Yet President Carter and President Reagan had to invest great efforts to assure congressional approval for these arms transfers, as a result of the heavy Israeli lobbying against them. Israeli influence on the Hill has been considered as obstructing American Middle East policy.

The inevitable linkage between American arms and Israeli responsiveness to United States' wishes has been used by both parties to achieve some of their goals. Israeli regional concessions have more than once been conditioned upon massive American arms deliveries. On the other hand, the United States, subtly or bluntly, has used Israeli desire for an adequate arsenal to secure greater Israeli cooperation than Jerusalem had initially been willing to provide. Indeed, the American Middle East arms transfers have been and will continue to be a serious bone of contention between the two countries.

NATIONAL POLITICS

It has often been noted that the nature of the American political system facilitates the influence of small allies, since it enables a well-organized lobby to have considerable impact on foreign policy decision making. The Israelis, with the support of American Jewry, have organized a powerful lobby, which exerts significant influence, though its extent has often been exaggerated. This exaggerated image of power is occasionally quite useful, but it is also counter-productive. It feeds anti-Semitic images and the issue of double allegiance of the American Jews has been raised again. This effect causes embarrassment to many Jews and hampers the effectiveness of the Israeli lobby. Indeed, when ethnicity is a clear obstacle to United States foreign policy its influence dissipates under the weight of the "national in-
terest." Thus, for example, the Israeli lobby lost the struggle against the "triple airplane deal" in 1978 and against the AWACs sale in 1981.

The struggle around these arms transfers was accompanied by some remarks by influential Americans which could have been construed as anti-Semitic. Israel, the Jewish state, was quite apprehensive of such an atmosphere, which exacerbated the tensions between the two countries.

The American political system, which allowed Israel to become an effective force in Washington, is similarly open to Arab attempts to counter the Israeli influence. Arab oil and petro-dollars, coupled with a more articulate Arab-American constituency, have been increasingly successful in putting across to the American public the Arab point of view in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arabs can nowadays more easily mobilize American group interests to advance their cause. Oil companies have always been on the Arab side. They are now joined by hard-pressed military industries looking for cash-paying clients and by construction companies that have a great stake in continuing to do business with the Arab world.

In contrast to the growing Arab impact on the American scene, Israel's influence seems to be diminishing. In the long run the demographic developments in American Jewry—a very low birth rate, assimilation, geographic dispersal, and the movement to less important "electoral" states—indicate a serious gradual erosion in the Israeli influence on political affairs—an ominous sign for Israel. Decreasing Israeli influence and growing Arab political clout in Washington are becoming a source of great discomfort in Israel's relations with the United States.

Israeli politics have also not always been conducive to cordial relations between Washington and Jerusalem. Since 1977 Israel has been ruled by a Likud-led coalition government. Menachem Begin, who served as prime minister until October 1983, and his successor Itzhak Shamir, both belong to the nationalist Herut party. For Begin, as well as for Shamir, Jewish sovereignty over all of the Land of Israel is an article of faith. Therefore, the Likud governments were and continue to be dedicated to a settlement policy designed to create a politically irreversible situation in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza District. Consequently, as long as the Likud is able to remain the central force in Israeli politics, any American plans for eventual Israeli disengagement from Judea, Samaria and Gaza immediately become a source of great tension between Jerusalem and Washington. For example, the September 1982 Reagan proposals were denounced by Begin without delay as unacceptable and were followed by a rather long period of stormy relations. Only when Jordan failed several months later to join Reagan's initiative and the Americans realized that Israeli cooperation was needed to see their interests in Lebanon prevail did the relations return to normal. As the Israeli communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza spread and the whole area is gradually being incorporated into Israel, the issue of control of these areas will
become a greater bone of contention.\textsuperscript{17}

The rival Labor party differs from the Likud bloc on Judea, Samaria and Gaza, but a wide consensus does exist as to the vital need to retain control over Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Moreover, even Labor insists on military control over Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Therefore, it seems that the Israeli body-politic has reached the limit of territorial concessions. These widely held convictions in Israel preclude what Washington may call additional Israeli “flexibility.” A change in Israeli thinking is, of course, a possibility, albeit a small one. In the meantime, Israeli politicians adopting “flexible” positions on the territorial issue are doomed to be on the margins of the Israeli political spectrum.

Furthermore, Israeli politics in spite of the decline of ideology in the Jewish state are, nevertheless, still highly ideological, particularly in comparison with the pragmatism characteristic of American politics. This difference, which Americans do not always perceive, is a constant irritant. Another structural characteristic of Israeli politics that has often puzzled American officials is the influence of stresses within a coalition government, and indeed the stresses within the governing party itself, which limit the freedom of action of the Israeli negotiating teams. For example, the Rabin government could hardly negotiate the future of Judea, and Samaria, as long as it needed the National Religious Party to overcome a non-confidence vote in the Knesset. Similarly, the Likud bloc needs the votes of the right wing Tehia party.

Internal politics in both the United States and in Israel contain the seeds of future tensions and confrontations. The Israeli influence in Washington seems to be in decline. Furthermore, Israeli politics seem to preclude greater responsiveness to American desires. Besides, in Israel no less than in other countries, it is quite popular to say no to the Americans.

PERSONALITIES AND PERCEPTIONS

There are various approaches in the field of international relations that contend that foreign policy is determined by systemic factors, national interests, or bureaucratic politics. These approaches minimize, however, the great role of the decision makers in shaping foreign policy. The leaders and their perceptions have great importance. Nowadays, diplomacy is still highly personal, particularly as summit meetings take place quite often. Compatible personalities can foster trust and understanding between nations, while dislike produces opposite results.

The introvert Rabin did not appeal to President Carter who found the Israeli prime minister “excessively rigid and stiff-necked.”\textsuperscript{18} Carter’s feelings were leaked to the press and became part of an unfriendly atmosphere toward Israel.

Begin’s strong personality towered over Israel foreign policy in the 1977-83 period. Begin probably belongs to the aggressive type of
personality, that is characterized by a tendency to bring the conflict to its extreme limit. In spite of the general Israeli interest in minimizing tensions with the United States, Begin did not hesitate to point out the differences between the two countries and seemed to savor the fact that Israel refused to go along with American desires. For example, following the United States' suspension of the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Cooperation in December 1981, in reaction to the extension of Israeli law to the Golan, Begin actually exacerbated the situation by submitting the American ambassador in Israel to a gruelling tirade about Israel being an independent state that could not be bullied by the United States.

Begin's rather pompous style and pedantic legalism when negotiating exasperated many on the American side. More than once was he described as a barrier to peace. According to Weizman, Begin held a rather unusual dichotomic view of the world — Jews vs. the Gentiles. This Jewish prism of foreign affairs is, however, not uncharacteristic of other Israeli leaders. Nevertheless, this fact does not make such a perspective any more comprehensible or acceptable to foreign leaders.

Misunderstandings occur because leaders of different cultures or mentalities fail to perceive the modus operandi of the other side. Klaus Knorr relates such misperceptions to what he calls "apparently irrational behavior." Indeed, Begin has occasionally seemed to be willing to take risks incomprehensible in Washington. In addition American officials have been handicapped, as Dayan observed, by "a superficial grasp of the Middle East, its peoples and their problems." Even if Dayan's verdict is somewhat harsh, it is true that the Israelis usually have a greater familiarity with American politics than the Americans have with Israeli politics.

The problems in the American-Israeli relationship are also related to the Israeli image in the United States. Israel still has a great appeal to many Americans because it is a democracy, an immigrant nation with a pioneering heritage facing overwhelming odds and because of the Holocaust. Yet, Israel is increasingly criticized. Interestingly, the United States and other Western democracies seem to have developed a lower degree of tolerance of imaginary or actual abuses of human rights in Israel than of such abuses in their own countries or in those of their ideological adversaries. The West seems to be hampered by an inability to sort out the facts when confronted with the political vocabulary of its adversaries' propaganda. The changing image of Israel is, of course, only a partial explanation of its tensions with the United States. National images should be regarded not only as causative but also as symptomatic. Success in propaganda cannot be separated from the successful use of other dimensions of power.

In addition, the post-Vietnam mood, which has not evaporated, still undermines American commitments abroad. The new American isolationists, in contrast to the old, want to disengage from Asia and
not from Europe. The commitment to Europe is not like that to other parts of the world. It is based upon racial and cultural affinity. This makes it easier for the United States to detach itself from the destinies of non-European allies like Israel, Taiwan or Korea. Israel, although it has emerged as a Western society, is a Middle-Eastern (Asian) nation in terms of geographic location, religion, language, and to a large extent, ethnic origin. In addition, Israel is Jewish. In many instances, traditional anti-Semitism takes the form of anti-Zionist or anti-Israeli attitudes.

CONCLUSION

This paper has concentrated on the sources of tension between Israel and the United States. Israel is the minor partner in this relationship. Jerusalem has more to lose if its relations with Washington deteriorate. After all, the American link is a cardinal component in Israel's security. Yet the factors that could lead to greater strain between the two countries are hardly within Israel's control. Israel has no influence over systemic changes that affect its fortunes on the international political market. Its influence over the election of American officials, or over their strategic thinking, is minimal. Nevertheless, in spite of the inbuilt tensions in the bilateral relations, the "abandonment of Israel" is by no means inevitable. Neither the United States nor Israel is interested in an international divorce. A discussion of what both countries should do in order to prevent unnecessary tensions is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is quite clear, particularly for Israel, that this is not an easy job and that it requires great sophistication and a careful choosing among difficult options.

Footnotes

13. Ibid., p. 320.
25. See Daniel P. Moynihan, "Further Thoughts on Words and Foreign Policy," Atlantic Community, 17 (Fall 1979), pp. 1-10.