The U.S.-Israeli Relationship
in the Reagan Era

by
Helena Cobban

INTRODUCTION

During the first seven years of the Reagan administration, the kinds of justification publicly adduced by U.S. officials for their government's support for the State of Israel shifted significantly from the moral reasoning that had previously prevailed in U.S. public discourse, toward a cluster of strategic justifications. This shift in the official rhetoric was accompanied, furthermore, by concrete policy moves which tied the defense structures of the two countries much closer together than ever before. Most prominent among these moves was the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on strategic cooperation, concluded between the two sides in November 1981. (The MOU was suspended by the American side after Israel extended its jurisdiction into the occupied Golan Heights in December 1981; but it was reinstated in late 1983). The MOU was followed by a number of other agreements of significant security-related agreements, such as Israel's 1986 inclusion in the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) research program, and the Reagan administration's designation of Israel, in late 1987, as "a major non-NATO ally".

In the last year of Reagan's term, the eruption and continuation of the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) in the West Bank and Gaza, and more particularly the means by which the Israelis tried to end it, provoked a wave of soul-searching in many sectors of the American public, including the American Jewish community. In many of the discussions that resulted, the moral content of the United States' ties to Israel re-emerged as a theme of major public concern. Despite this new climate of public opinion, however, and despite the administration's identification of a major disagreement with the Israeli government over the applicability of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, strategic collaboration continued on its previous course during 1988. Indeed, while the disagreement over Resolution 242 was at its sharpest, in the spring of that year, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed simultaneously in Washington and Jerusalem that codified and further institutionalized the existing strategic agreements between the two states.[1]

The shift in the foundation of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, from one based primarily on moral considerations on the U.S. side to one based on strategic considerations, provoked significant debate inside Israel. There, several analysts openly queried the value to their country of too close an alignment with the United States in general, or with the strategic agenda of the Reagan administration in particular. In the United States, by contrast, the claims of those who vaunted Israeli's contribution to U.S. national security met with little serious or informed comment in the public arena. This allowed a situation to develop in which those inside the U.S. administration—and under Reagan they were many—who had

a strong interest in building up the Israeli military-industrial complex were able to pursue this aim at the U.S. taxpayer's expense, remarkably free of serious oversight. Meanwhile, the possible costs to U.S. national security inherent in this situation were only infrequently subject to systematic public examination.[2]

What follows, then, is an attempt first to chart the shift in the nature of the U.S. tie to Israel, from one based primarily on moral considerations to one based on strategic arguments; then to assess the arguments of Israel's 'strategic salesmen' in the United Stated by reference to, among other sources, some portions of the strategic debate within Israel itself; and finally to examine the change in the political dynamic of the U.S.-Israeli relationship that resulted from the shift to a 'strategy-based' link.

Part 1: The Shift from the Moral to the Strategic Basis for the Relationship

The shift in U.S. declaratory policy whereby the nature of the relationship with Israel came increasingly to be described in terms of Israel's strategic worth to the United States, did not start with the Reagan administration, though it was greatly intensified during those years. Previous traces of a similar shift can be identified as early as the period immediately following that June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Political scientist Steven Spiegel has noted of U.S. attitudes in that period, that,

> conservatives and military officials became more sympathetic to the Israelis . . . The Israelis were now positively contributing to U.S. security: their combat experience and capture of Russian equipment provided information important to the American military in Vietnam . . . Israeli's new conservative sympathizers were more likely [than its previous more liberal supporters] to agree with its military approach to conducting foreign policy and with the need for advanced weaponry.[3]

It was against this background that President Lyndon Johnson secretly approved an increased exchange of intelligence with the Israelis. In early 1968, the Israelis stepped up their requests for U.S. military technology. In order to help argue their case for Johnson's approval of the sale of Phantom (F-4) fighter planes, they sent as Ambassador to Washington their former chief of staff, Yitzhak Rabin: this choice symbolized the change in the tenor of the bilateral link. That October, Johnson decided to approve the Phantom sale. Amidst the pro-Israeli rhetoric generated by the U.S. presidential election of that year, he spelled out that he would not ask for any of the quid pro quos such as Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab areas, or Israeli agreement to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, that were being urged on him by his Secretaries of State and Defense.[4]

Under President Richard Nixon, the receptivity of the two governments to each other's strategic arguments deepened. Nixon's speechwriter, William Safire, wrote later of Nixon's, "admiration for

the nationalism and guts of the Israelis."[5] Steven Spiegel noted that, "The Israelis reciprocated with a genuine admiration for Nixon as the first president who looked on them as a strategic advantage for American interests. Naturally, they preferred to be an asset rather than a ward."[6]

In this atmosphere of growing mutual strategic admiration, U.S. military aid to Israel made two signficant upward steps under Nixon. The first of these occurred in Fiscal Year (FY) 1971, when military aid (loans plus grants) increased from less than $100 million per year to an annual level higher than $300 million. Three years later, the level of military aid leaped again in the aftermath of the 1973 Middle East war. Over the three years FY1974 through FY 1976, the average annual level of military aid rose above $1.4 billion.[7]

Under President Gerald Ford, the level of military aid was brought back to $1.0 billion a year from FY1977 on. But more power in foreign policy decision-making was meanwhile devolving onto Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who proved himself eager to maximize Israel's strategic value to the United States. It was during Kissinger's 'vicardom' of U.S. foreign policy that the U.S. and Israel started holding regular (though still sub-ministerial) meetings on strategic issues. According to the Director of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessments, Andrew Marshall, it was "in the mid-'seventies" that the Israelis requested the opening of high-level channels between the Pentagon and their Ministry of Defense to discuss strategic planning. Periodic meetings between the two sides started in 1976, while the Labor-led coalition was still in office in Israel and Ford was President of the United States.[8]

President Jimmy Carter came into office in January 1977 with an attitude that was very supportive of Israel. But, in a break from the views of his predecessors, Carter's attitude stemmed more than the traditional moral justifications for supporting Israel than from full-scale endorsement of Israel's strategic claims.[9] Under Carter, military aid to Israel was kept at the $1.0 billion mark—except for the single year 1979 when, in conjunction with the conclusion of the Camp David accords, the administration requested and received an additional $3.0 billion from Congress, which was earmarked for construction of Israel's new military airbases in the Negev.[10]

The contrast between Carter's view of Israel and that of his successor was stark. In an article published in August 1979, Ronald Reagan wrote of, "Israel's geopolitical importance as a . . . military offset to the Soviet Union," and of its value, "as perhaps the only remaining strategic asset in the region on which the United States can truly rely." The future president concluded that, "Only by full appreciation of the critical role the State of Israel plays in our strategic calculus can we build the foundation for thwarting Moscow's designs on territories and resources vital to our security and our national wellbeing."[11]

President Reagan's policies after coming into office were in line with this rhetoric. The wording of the above article, moreover, reflected a theme that was strongly evident throughout the first years of his

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administration: namely, Reagan's tendency to view the Middle East (like all other regional issues) primarily through the prism of the East-West conflict. To this theme was added an emphasis on the threat posed by "international terrorism", which was magnified after the President was injured in an assassination attempt in Washington D.C. ten weeks after he took office. The perceived strength of the terrorist threat served to increase the value of strategic cooperation with an Israel that had won world renown for its counter-terrorist efforts.

Reagan's predilection for viewing Israel as a strategic asset was reinforced by many of the first people he appointed to top positions. His Vice President George Bush had stated during the 1980 campaign that, "It is in the strategic interest of the United States to maintain Israel's strength and security".[12] His first national security advisor, Richard V. Allen, had previously given a warm endorsement to the writings of the hawkish and pro-Israeli defense analyst Joseph Churba. His Secretary of State, Alexander M. Haig, was later to be described by *The Jerusalem Post*'s Wolf Blitzer as "a pro-Israel advocate in the administration".[13] Haig viewed as his first goal in the Middle East the creation of an American-Israeli-Arab 'strategic consensus' that would confront the Soviet Union there. When it became clear that the Arabs would not enter into such an arrangement alongside Israel, and that they gave priority to regional, rather than East-West threats, he became the architect of the bilateral U.S.-Israeli 'Memorandum of Understanding' on strategic cooperation (MOU) that was concluded in November 1981. To represent the United States at the United Nations, Reagan chose Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, who in 1982 described herself as, "a very good friend of Israel", and reassured her American Jewish audience that, "There are a good many of us throughout the administration, beginning at the top."[14]

The sole doubter at cabinet level was, by all accounts, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. It was not that he was soft on the core issue of 'the Soviet threat'. Far from it. But his view, which was reinforced by a great part of the institutional wisdom within both his own department and the State Department, was reportedly that countries such as Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia could, given their size and location, make a greater contribution to sustaining the U.S. defense posture in the Middle East than could Israel.[15]

Part 2: The Strategic Relationship Takes Shape

The Reagan administration's path toward the establishment of strategic links with Israel was not to be all smooth. Already, before the conclusion of the 1981 MOU, the administration had several intimations that its dealings with Israel might not be easy. In June 1981, Israeli F-16s recently supplied by the United States bombed the Iraqi nuclear facility in Baghdad, in apparent contravention of U.S. legislation governing arms transfers abroad. The following month, the IAF used other U.S.-supplied planes to bomb targets in Beirut. And in September 1981, Israeli Premier Menachem Begin outraged Reagan and embarrassed Haig, when, during a state visit to Washington planned as a U.S.-Israeli

lovefest, he campaigned publicly in Congress and the press against the administration's plan to sell AWACS early-warning aircraft to Saudi Arabia.[16]

The administration continued to fight for Congressional support of the AWACS sale; and in October, it won by a Senate vote of 52-48. The Israelis were quick to salvage what they could from their defeat: it was partially as a "compensation award' to them for having lost the AWACS battle that the administration the following month responded to urgings from Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon to conclude the MOU.[17]

Since the administration's earliest weeks in office, Haig and some of his staff in the State Department had reportedly been considering formalizing the strategic discussions with Israel that had continued since 1976. Once former official close to this endeavor recalled that, while it was the Israeli side that provided the original push for formalization, "NSC and State came to feel that the American side should agree to this, because formalization would help to get the Pentagon on board."[18] In April 1981, Haig held extensive talks with Premier Begin in Israel. In September 1981, State Department Counsellor Robert C. McFarlane had travelled to Israel and Egypt as Haig's envoy, to conduct talks on strategic issues in both countries. Egypt's President Sadat was killed the following month; in the view of many of the American officials involved, this development only magnified the urgency of reaching a strategic agreement with the Israelis.

When the MOU was finally concluded, at a meeting between Sharon and Weinberger in Washington at the end of November, it spelled out that the planned strategic cooperation was designed against, "the threat to peace and security of the region caused by the Soviet Union or Soviet-controlled forces from outside the region introduced into the region." It provided for joint military exercises, including naval and air exercises in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, cooperation for the establishment and maintenance of joint readiness activities, and the establishment of a joint supervisory council, whose meetings were to be chaired when possible by the Secretary of Defense and the Minister of Defense.[19] In an interview broadcast by Jerusalem radio the next morning, Sharon opined that, "Israel got most of what it wanted through this agreement".[20]

Some American supporters of the MOU hoped that its conclusion might help to rein Israel in from taking the kind of rash actions that could de-stablize American interests in the Middle East. But they were soon to be proven wrong. On December 14, Premier Begin tabled the resolution in the Israeli Knesset that extended Israeli law to the occupied Golan Heights. Four days after the resolution was passed, the State Department announced the suspension—but not the cancellation—of the MOU. Begin's counter-response was tough. Calling in U.S. Ambassador Samuel Lewis, he read him a vituperative lecture asking, "What kind of talk is this, 'punishing Israel'? Are we a vassal state of yours? Are we a banana republic?"[21]

Thus ended the first, abortive phase of formal strategic cooperation. However, once the dust had settled from the Golan affair, relations soon

got back to a working footing. The Americans were particularly grateful to the Israelis that in April 1982, they completed the final stage of the withdrawal from Sinai that was a cornerstone of the Camp David accords. Sharon visited the United States in May 1982 where, according to the respected Israeli writers Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, he gave undeniable hints to Haig that the expected Israeli action in Lebanon might go well beyond merely striking at the PLO.[22] Begin was scheduled to follow him in June.

In early June, Begin and Sharon presented the United States with another bombshell, in the form of their massive invasion of Lebanon. Ze'ev Schiff wrote that, at last-minute Israeli cabinet meetings held before the invasion was launched, "It was clear to many Israeli ministers that based on what Washington was saying behind the scenes—unlike what it was saying in public—Israeli was already assured of U.S. support."[23] Haig, whose position within the administration had been seriously eroding since early spring, hotly denied that any green light had been given to Israel. However, his own record of the position he took in the spring 1982 meetings with the Israelis could very well have been open to such an interpretation from that audience.[24] Seasoned Israeli analyst Zvi Lanir later commented that the Reagan administration, "did not realize its own responsibility in the affair. Israel went to war only after its leaders felt they had received American permission to do so." He explained that ever since the war of 1973 had brought home to Israelis the extent of their dependence on the United States, Israeli leaders would not take a war decision without getting an advance "blessing" from the Americans.[25]

As the IDF became bogged down around Beirut in late June, the Reagan administration became rent by a visceral split over the issue. This pitted Haig against national security adviser William Clark (who had replaced Richard Allen in January 1982)—as well as against influential White House insiders like Vice President George Bush and Chief of Staff James Baker. Clark, who favored a tougher American attitude toward the Israeli action, won out over Haig in the last week of June, and on June 25 Reagan announced Haig's resignation.

Haig was replaced as Secretary of State by George Schultz, who had been Labor Secretary and Secretary of the Treasury under Nixon, and since then had been a top executive with the Bechtel Corporation. The circumstances of Shultz' arrival at State, his expertise in the field of labour negotiating, and his business experience in the Arab world, were taken as indications that he might stand up to the Israelis much more than his predecessor. Certainly, his first few weeks in office seemed to bear out that speculation. The Israelis were forced to allow the PLO forces to make a peaceful exit from Beirut carrying sidearms. The U.S. government produced the first comprehensive statement of its position on settling the Arab-Israeli conflict ever issued explicitly in the President's name, which notably did not endorse Israel's claims to sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza. And—following the revelation of September's refugee camp massacres in Beirut—the United States

peremptorily ordered the Israelis to withdraw from the city, interposing a Multi-National Force (MNF) of U.S. and West European troops between the IDF and the city.

Over the seven months that followed September 1982, however, Shultz' resolve to carry out a U.S. interests-centered policy—whether in Lebanon, or on the Arab-Israeli peace issue—eroded badly; and one of the interesting questions concerning U.S. policy toward Israel in the Reagan era focuses on how this came about. Some pro-Israeli analysts described what happened as the 'return to realism' of a policy that, at the time of the Reagan plan's announcement, had been fundamentally unrealistic.[26] One such analyst, Martin Indyk, produced a list of additional factors that had led to Shultz' turnaround. This list, probably correctly, included the American consideration that, "at the end of 1982, Congress made clear that it would not support a campaign of diplomatic pressure [against Israel]." Indyk also mentioned the effect on Shultz of the replacement of Begin and Sharon by Yitzhak Shamir and Moshe Arens as Israel's Premier and Defense Minister, respectively.[27] One further factor was the influence on the new Secretary of a number of key pro-Israeli aides in the State Department: an especially crucial role in this respect was played, according to several administration insiders, by Under-Secretary Lawrence Eagleburger.[28]

Whatever his motives, by April 1983 Shultz had decided to cut a deal with the Israelis over Lebanon that ignored Syria's strategic concerns there completely. This decision, and the U.S.-Israeli-Lebanese agreement that resulted on May 17th, defused the brewing confrontation between the United States and Israel. What it did not achieve was any stablization of the situation in Lebanon, where the Syrians were able to provide support for the many local opponents of the agreement. In October 1983, one group of local dissidents, thought to be a radical Shiite grouplet, orchestrated a devastating truck-bomb attack against the Marines barracks in Beirut that killed 241 Marines.

The ability of the Reagan administration to react effectively to this challenge was constrained, at the military level, by the reluctance of the Department of Defense (DoD) to commit any more forces to a mission in Lebanon that they already considered dangerously ill-defined.[29] At the political level, the American reaction was more clearcut. A bare six days after the explosion, President Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 111 (NSDD-111), which reinstated the concept of strategic collaboration with Israel. Two days after the NSDD was signed in Washington, Eagleburger was sent to Israel to discuss it with the new Israeli Premier, Yitzhak Shamir. Eagleburger reportedly told his host that, "the president wanted to discuss strategic cooperation in Lebanon, in the Middle East generally, and everywhere." In what was described as "a kind of political down payment", Eagleburger reportedly informed the Israelis that part of the $1.7 billion they were now receiving annually in military aid could henceforth be spent on developing the *Lavi* jet-fighter, rather than—as is normally the case with American Foreign Military Sales (FMS) aid appropriations—being limited to purchasing American products.[30]

The October 1983 NSDD provided a much more durable basis for the development of U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation than its precursor of 1981. When Premier Shamir visited Washington in November, the two sides agreed to the establishment of a new, formal Joint Political-Military Group (JPMG) that would convene every six months. President Reagan announced that the JPMG would, "give priority to our mutual interests posed by increased Soviet involvement in the Middle East. Among the specific areas to be considered are combined planning, joint exercises, and requirements for prepositioning of U.S. equipment in Israel."[31]

The JPMG held its first meeting in January 1984, and over the next four years its achievements in shepherding increased strategic cooperation appeared impressive. Naval vessels from the U.S. Sixth Fleet started making regular port calls to Haifa; the United States leased 25 Kfir C-1 fighters from Israel to simulate Soviet MiG planes in combat training; fleets from the two countries held joint anti-submarine warfare (ASW) maneuvers and passing exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean; Sixth Fleet aviators conducted bombing practice against targets in Israel's Negev Desert; several squadrons of USAF F-16s were deployed in Israel for joint exercises with the Israeli Air Force. In May 1986, Israel became the third country, after Britain and West Germany, to sign on to the SDI research and development program; the FY 1987 DoD budget bill reportedly authorized about $70 million for prepositioning American war material in Israel; and in July 1986, Israel agreed to the installation of Voice of America transmitters which would beam American programming into the southern parts of the Soviet Union.[32]

The total volume of FMS aid to Israel rose only slightly in the wake of the October 1983 decision, from $1.7 billion in the FY 83 budget, to a constant annual level of $1.8 billion in the latter half of the decade. However, the Israeli military establishment extracted clear benefits from four other developments in the U.S. military aid program in the post-NSDD era. First, the proportion of FMS funds given as grant aid, rather than as a loan, was raised from a pre-NSDD level of 40-50 percent to a full 100 percent. Second, a clearly defined and larger share of the FMS funds could now be spent on 'offshore procurement', that is, pruchases from the Israeli defense industry (in the FY 1988 budget this amount was $400 million). Third, a further part of each FMS grant, totaling $150 million in each of the FY 88 and FY 89 budgets, was designated as 'directed offsets', forcing U.S. contractors supplying Israel to spend that amount on purchases of spares and subsystems inside Israel. (Israel's total take from these last two categories of offshore FMS funds between FY 76 and FY 89 would come to $6.5 billion, much of it spent on the Merkava tank and the Lavi). Finally, Israel received vastly increased funding under some 18 to 20 DoD line items other than the FMS budget. This was the case, for example, with the 54 percent share it won in FY 87 of the Foreign Weapons Evaluation Program appropriation; and with the funding of its ATBM system from the SDI budget, which would reportedly bring another $480 million of DoD funds into Israel over three years.[33]

By the end of 1988, these and other programs had enabled Israel's defense industries to sell military goods worth at least $240 million to the United States—up from $9 million in 1983.[34] When Secretary Shultz had addressed the annual convention of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) the previous year, he had had some grounds for his boast that, "America's support for Israel has never been stronger or more steadfast."[35]

In December 1987, the flow of U.S. aid to the Israel military establishment was increased even higher, when Yitzhak Rabin, now Defense Minister, signed a further MOU with the United States, which formally designated Israel as a "major non-NATO ally". This category of states had been created by Congress the previous year. It was publicly listed as including Israel, Egypt, South Korea, Japan, and Australia; however, when the House of Representatives tried to list specific weapons systems to receive funding under this program, all six of these systems were Israeli. The terms of the December 1987 agreement reportedly included joint research and development programs, and further American procurement of Israeli-manufactured military products.[36]

The Israeli government's achievement in gaining access to U.S. resources under the rubric of 'strategic collaboration' was all the more impressive since it occurred during a period when U.S.-Israeli relations were rocked by a number of developments that in the context of any country other than Israel would have proved extremely damaging in Washington. These included the Jonathan Pollard spy affair, which broke in November 1985; the involvement of Israeli officials in the 'Irangate' scandal; and disagreements such as those over the Arab-Israeli peace process, Israel's military and other ties to South Africa, the massive cost over-runs (at the U.S. taxpayer's expense) on the Lavi, and Mordechai Vanunu's October 1986 revelations concerning the status of Israel's nuclear weapons program.

With all these issues still in the news, one reporter judged in April 1987 that, "March may have been the cruelest month ever in U.S.-Israeli relations."[37] Nevertheless, political and diplomatic disagreements between the two sides still seemed not to dent the ongoing strengthening of the strategic ties—even after the disagreement over the Arab-Israeli issue became more acute in 1988.

In early 1988, one of the first achievements of the Palestinian intifada was to bring Secretary Schultz back into the arena of Arab-Israeli peacemaking. This time round, one of his major objectives was to extract commitments from Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians that the "land-for-peace' trade embodied in Security Council Resolution 242 applied on the West Bank and Gaza fronts. Israeli Premier Shamir refused to give such a commitment (as did, until December 1988, the PLO). Some of Shamir's domestic critics warned that his intransigence might affect the flow of American strategic goods to Israel, as had happened under earlier U.S. administrations: they were proved wrong. In April 1988, the Israeli defense producer Soltam was awarded a U.S. Army contract to supply mortars and ammunition worth up to $1 billion.[38] That month,

too, a new strategic MOA was signed with Israel on the 40th anniversary of Israel's independence.

These developments prompted Israeli defense analyst Dore Gold to question the relationship between the strategic-military and political-diplomatic tracks in U.S.-Israeli relations. He judged that, under Reagan,

> strategic cooperation between Washington and Jerusalem developed *on a separate track* from the diplomatic relationship. As strategic ties with Israel came to be perceived as an American interest, it made no sense to condition their growth on diplomatic process [progress?] in the area of Arab-Israeli negotiations."

Part 3: Push and Pull Factors

If the U.S. government was generally eager, under the two Reagan administrations, to strengthen the military aspects of its relationship with Israel, this feeling was also being strongly stimulated by the Israelis and some of their American friends. In 1977, power in Israel had passed out of the hands of the Labor Alignment which had dominated Israeli political life since Independence in 1948: from 1977 through 1984, the government was dominated by members of the rightwing Likud Bloc; and for four years thereafter, the country was ruled by a Likud-Labor coalition. Whereas Labor had traditionally had many supporters amongst both Jews and non-Jews in the liberal democratic camp in the United States, Likud's arrival in power in 1977 caused some American friends of Israel to fear that Israel was starting to lose its moral appeal. In late 1979, for example, the former President of the World Zionist Organization, Nahum Goldmann publicly expressed his regret that, "Israel is losing its moral qualification and is becoming only a small, aggressive state, . . . thus losing the respect and the admiration of the larger part of world public opinion . . ."⁴⁰

In 1985, *Jerusalem Post* correspondent Wolf Blitzer recalled that, "It was not all that long ago when most Americans tended to cite primarily moral and emotional reasons for their support of Israel . . . The strategic basis for the American-Israeli alliance was seldom cited." He then described one of the factors that changed this situation:

> The case for stressing the strategic side of the story has intensified in recent years. Israeli officials themselves have encouraged this trend, fearing that the massive sums of U.S. military and economic assistance to Israel might cease to be acceptable to the American public and Congress unless explained in such a hardnosed way. If Israel were to be demonstrated to provide a useful military and strategic service to the United States on the other hand, the aid becomes justified on the basis of self-interest as well as national morality.⁴¹

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The Israeli government's lead in de-emphasizing Israel's moral appeal to U.S. public opinion was followed by pro-Israeli American personalities such as former American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) director Morris Amitay, who at a 1983 conference declared that, "Moral authority has very little influence in politics. Few would attempt to convince a congressman to vote for an aid bill for Israel with an appeal on behalf of Israel's 'moral authority'. Rather, I would make an appeal based on Israel's value."[42]

Israel's strategic arguments were taken up with enthusiasm by Tom Dine, who succeeded Amitay as AIPAC Executive Director in 1980. Dine's first big fight on AIPAC's behalf was the 1981 campaign against the Saudi AWACS deal. Though he lost that one, he immediately thereafter set about arming himself and his supporters with the kinds of arguments needed to ensure that AIPAC would never lose another big fight over a Mideastern strategic issue. He hired a former RAND Corporation strategic analyst, Steven Rosen, as AIPAC's Director of Research and Information, and set Rosen and a stable of other strategic 'experts' to work producing a glossy set of pamphlets advertising Israel's strategic 'virtues' to each of the American services.[43] In the first of these pamphlets, Rosen concluded that, "Israel offers clear and substantial advantages as a prepositioning site for U.S. projection forces . . ." A later pamphlet argued to its U.S. Navy readers that, "Israel would . . . require no more than 1200 combat sorties to destroy the entire Soviet fleet in the region . . . If Israel had no other concerns, this could be accomplished in a single day."[44]

These kinds of arguments received a ready hearing in some parts of the State Department and the DoD—a fact that was all the more surprising since both these agencies had traditionally been concerned about the broader strategic costs to the United States of tying its defense posture too closely to that of Israel. What had changed in each of these two agencies with the advent of the Reagan presidency was the appointment to high-level positions of a number of individuals who seemed pre-disposed to sympathize with the arguments of Israel's strategic salesmen. In the State Department these individuals included Secretary Haig himself, who encouraged the legitimation throughout the Department of the 'strategic Israel' argument, a phenomenon which to a significant extent outlived his tenure in Foggy Bottom. In the Pentagon, they included Assistant Secretary for International Security Policy (ISP) Richard Perle, and Deputy Under Secretary for Trade Security Policy Steven Bryen, who had previously been intensively investigated on suspicion of having handed secret Pentagon documents over to Israeli officials in Washington. While the ISP slot gave Perle no direct role in the formulation of Pentagon policy on the Middle East, he nonetheless enjoyed much power within the building and was in a good position to help out his friends there, as well as to obstruct technology transfers to the Arab states of the Middle East. He and Bryen were for several years the U.S. representatives on NATO's technology transfer body, COCOM, which dealt with many matters of strategic interest to Israel.

The presence in crucial State, Pentagon and NSC slots, of individuals who were willing to sympathize with the Israeli government's battery of 'strategic' arguments provided essential agency-level backup to a President whose gut instincts were already deeply pro-Israeli. The effects of this combination on the way U.S. Mideast policy was made has rightly been described by writer Richard Straus as "revolutionary". Straus recalled that AIPAC's founder, I.L. Kenen had described his organization's mission as being, "to lobby the Congress to tell the president to overrule the State Department". Perceptively, Straus asked, "But what happens when the State Department doesn't need to be overruled?"[45]

Part 4: The Strategic Arguments Assessed

One of the most comprehensive presentations of the case that a close relationship with Israel was in the strategic interests of the United States was presented in a Fall 1986 article in *Orbis* by Steven Spiegel.[46] Spiegel wrote that,

> Israel can be viewed in the global military contest from five perspectives: its intelligence techniques, the implications of its battlefield experiences, the combination of a tight defense budget and a penchant for innovation, the effect of its activities on the calculations of Soviet planners, and the impact of its military performance on the reputation of U.S. arms.[47]

His judgment was that, in each of these five fields, a close relationship with Israel offered clearcut benefits to the United States. One additional argument, not made by Spiegel but offered in a more apologetic spirit by other Americans favoring close strategic ties with Israel, was that such ties offered the United States more hope of being able to rein in an Israeli military establishment that might otherwise run out of U.S. control.[48] These six arguments for close strategic ties thus need to be examined.

Intelligence:

Spiegel described Israeli intelligence as, "widely regarded as the best in the Middle East". "Shared information," he said, "has enabled the United States to save on training, deploying fewer intelligence operatives and utilizing fewer facilities."[49] It was apparently true that in one of the cases he referred to, acquisition of Nikita Khrushchev's historic speech at the 20th Soviet Communist Party Congress, Israel' Mossad intelligence organization played a crucial role. Some of the other achievements he cited were less clearcut. Warnings of possible assassination attempts against pro-Western Arab leaders such as King Hussein or Anwar Sadat, for example, have always been two-a-penny, and have come from many other quarters as well as Israel.

Reliance on Israel to be the United States' eyes and ears in the Middle East was something the U.S. intelligence community never was prepared to accept, despite the decades-long relationship between the

Mossad and the CIA's former chief of counter-intelligence, James Angleton.[50] Indications that reliance on Israeli intelligence might be damaging for the United States were never stronger than during the Lebanon crisis of summer 1982, when Secretary Haig appeared to take at face value General Sharon's claims that he could rout the PLO and install a pro-Western government in Beirut without causing any disruption to Western interests in the region.

1982 was not the first occasion Israeli intelligence had failed badly. In his book-length history of the Israeli army, Ze'ev Schiff noted that, while the Aman military intelligence organization (long considered the flagship agency of the Israeli community) had registered several significant achievements since Israeli Independence, it had also been responsible for some serious failures. These included its failure to use available information in order to predict the Arabs' 1973 offensive.[51]

American officials involved in the strategic collaboration with Israel give Israel varying amounts of credit in the intelligence field. In Spring 1988, Director of the DoD Office of Net Assessments Andrew Marshall judged that it was valuable for the United States, "to share the Israelis' understanding of the governments and societies of the region."[52] "Where is the line of their effectiveness?" asked another DoD official. "The closer in any area is to them, the better their intelligence is; and the further away, the spottier it is. But we have to remember that their assessments reflect their national goals, so Americans should always hold them up to a strong light."[53]

Another American defense analyst, working on a Congressional staff, judged that Israeli intelligence had been, "No good since Sharon came in as Defense Minister." He claimed that Sharon had so politicized the process of intelligence collection and distribution that many of Israel's most experienced intelligence analysts had quit, and others were severely demoralized from internal infighting. In this sense, he judged that the Pollard affair, which revealed serious mismanagement of the Israeli intelligence-gathering process at the highest levels, "was only one symptom of the malaise of Israeli intelligence."[54]

According to some reports, this situation improved somewhat after Sharon's departure from the Defense Ministry. Nonetheless, the picture that emerges from informed Israeli accounts, plus a realistic assessment of U.S. interests throughout the region, indicate that for the United States to plan for the long term on 'saving' resources by relying on Israeli intelligence in the Middle East would pose a serious risk to its ability to adopt informed and independent policies based upon American national interests.

Lessons Learned from Israel's Battlefield Experience:

Spiegel wrote that this experience demonstrated, "the relative utility or weaknesses of established weapons", and revealed, "the latest innovations of the Soviets".[55] This last claim is largely unfounded, since the Soviets have always been much more conservative about transfering

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their state-of-the-art military technology to friends in the Middle East than has the United States. The result of this imbalance was that, during the 1982 Lebanon fighting, for example, the Israelis learned a lot about spooking the radars of Soviet-built SA-6 missiles in the Bekaa Valley; but the SA-6 was a 15-year-old system, and in spooking it, the Israelis reveal-ed much useful data to the Soviets concerning the capabilities of front-line NATO systems such as the E-2C Hawkeye, the F-16 fighter, and the Shrike and other precision-guided missiles used.[56] The diplomatically worded judgment of one high-level Pentagon official concerning the Israelis' compromise of NATO technology in this encounter was that, "Israel has a very special situation. We might have preferred to protect that technology until we were in a more sensitive situation."[57]

Both the Soviets and the United States were able to learn lessons from the Bekaa air-defense battles that would help them in planning for the much broader-scale conventional front-line in Central Europe. But the Soviets' lessons were more valuable, and were acquired at smaller cost in terms of compromise of their own systems, than those the United States was able to learn. Meanwhile, as one DoD official monitoring the strategic relationship with Israel reported, the lessons Israel's battle ex-periences provide for U.S. force planners are "earned the hard way" in terms of other U.S. inducements. "We do get some useful lessons from Israeli experience," one non-Pentagon defense analyst familiar with the region observed. "But we have to extract them with difficulty. And the cost to us is tremendous."[58]

Israel's Tight Defense Budget and Innovation:

Spiegel wrote that this, "creates intriguing solutions to conventional defense problems at lower costs."[59] At some levels of technology this might be true. However, at the higher-technology end of the spectrum, the creativity of the Israeli defense industry has on occasion seemed to be directed more to creative book-keeping—of the kind that in the context of *American* defense contractors has repeatedly aroused the ire of the U.S. Congress—than to actual defense solutions.

A prime exemplar of this phenomenon was provided by the ill-fated Lavi project. Originally conceived in the mid-1970s by Air Force Com-mander Ezer Weizman as a small, light general-purpose plane, by 1982 the concept had developed serious specification-ballooning, analogous to that which plagued the American F-16 project. Under Israel Aircraft In-dustries (IAI) chief Moshe Arens, the Lavi was re-conceived with a heavier, more costly engine and a correspondingly heavier, more costly avionic payload.[60] With the U.S. Congress regularly and uncritically ap-propriating FMS funds for the project, costs ballooned to the point where the IAI management itself was unable to keep track of them. By April 1986, IAI chief David 'Ivri was reporting the fly-away price of the Lavi as, "between $13.5 million and $15.5 million" per plane.[61] However, two months before that, a team of U.S. cost analysts headed by an experienced DoD systems analyst, Deputy Under-Secretary Dov Zakheim, had concluded that the real cost of the program, based on an

initial product run of 300 planes, would be $13 billion—that is, around three times the per-plane figure mentioned by 'Ivri.[62]

Zakheim later argued that the whole affair, and the formal strategic cooperation that had allowed close American scrutiny of the project, would ultimately prove beneficial *to Israeli security*, since they subjected Israel's military R&D establishment for the first time to such cost-scrutiny procedures, which were much more rigorous than anything the Israelis themselves had in place.[63] Whatever the value of this argument, the Lavi affair, and the $1.3 billion it cost the U.S. taxpayer between 1980 and 1986, could scarcely be said to have been in the interests of the United States.[64] Spiegel's contention that, "the United States inevitably benefits in its larger [defense] programs from sharing Israeli concepts and ideas" would thus seem open to serious challenge.[65]

The Effect of Israeli Activities on Soviet Planners:

Spiegel could actually have made a better case than the one he made in this article, since one focus of intense concern to Soviet planners is the question of Israel's nuclear capabilities.[66] However, Spiegel, like most of Israel's other American supporters remained absolutely silent about Israel's nuclear capabilities. The first argument he adduced was that of the lessons learnt during the Bekaa Valley battles between Israel and Syria in 1982. His judgment concerning the air defense battle was that, "both sides learned valuable lessons . . . but the Western powers still have the advantage," and even that, "about 20 percent of [the Soviets'] entire defense budget" had had its effects nullified when their front-line air defense systems were compromised in the Bekaa.[67] However, he based this argument on the premise that the Syrians had front-line Warsaw Pact systems destroyed during the Bekaa fighting, which they did not; in fact, the 'balance of lessons' learned from this engagement was not in the West's favor (see above).

The second argument Spiegel adduced seemed more valid, and has formed the basis for more visible U.S. coordination with the Israeli military than has the air-defense issue. This argument concerned Israel's naval and air capabilities in the Eastern Mediterranean, as noted in the AIPAC paper quoted earlier. Interviews with serving and former DoD, State Department and NSC analysts reveal that for the United States, the collaboration in the Eastern Mediterranean has seemed the most beneficial element of the strategic cooperation with Israel.

The Eastern Mediterranean, however, is not an area of primary strategic concern to U.S. strategic planners. As one defense analyst on Capitol Hill described it, "The East Mediterranean is a sideshow to the Persian Gulf oilfields or the Suez Canal."[68] Another analyst (formerly with the NSC) portrayed U.S.-Israeli collaboration in the Eastern Mediterranean as important in providing air cover to the United States' sea lines of communication (SLOCs) with the Gulf. However, a high-level Pentaton official dealing with these issues judged baldly that the United States, "cannot use the Eastern Mediterranean cooperation with Israel with respect to the Gulf region."[69] This judgment seems realistic,

since not only would direct military involvement with Israel be rejected by all of the Gulf states under now-foreseeable circumstances, but also Israel itself would likely be unwilling to divert substantial assets away *from its own immediate defense in a major East-West confrontation. In* the one major military task that the United States did face in the Gulf in 1987-88, namely the protection of the re-flagged Kuwaiti tankers, it was notable that the Pentagon did not choose to call upon any help from Israel.

Thus, while the naval collaboration in the Eastern Mediterranean became the most visible of the United States's joint strategic ventures with Israel, the contribution it made to the worldwide U.S. military planning was still extremely limited. This was particularly the case since Israel has never entered into any treaty obligation to commit its forces to the Western effort in the event of a global war against the Soviet Union. And indeed, as veteran military assistance analyst Harry Shaw pointed out, "Israelis are . . . consistently hesitant to spell out the circumstances under which Israel would be willing to risk fighting Soviet forces when it *has a choice in the matter.*"[70]

Israel's Military Performance and the Reputation of U.S. Arms:

This point is primarily of interest to those who seek to maximize U.S. military sales worldwide. However, many even in this group question Spiegel's implied claim that Israel's actions are of net benefit to the U.S. arms industry. The major problem, according to nearly all the U.S. officials interviewed, has been that though Israel's battlefield performance may have enhanced the reputation of U.S. arms, nevertheless Israel's political actions have ensured that few third world countries can afford to buy these arms, however great their reputation.

The problem here lies in Israel's tendency to gobble up most of the available FMS money, which is what the United States uses to lend to that majority of those customers who cannot (as the Saudis can) pay cash for their purchases. In FY 86, for example, Congressional earmarking of FMS funds for particular countries, including Israel, still left around $2 billion for the Pentagon to allocate at its discretion.[71] Two years later, that figure had shrivelled to between $200 and $300 million, according to one Pentagon analyst. He said that as a result, "strategically important countries such as Somalia have dropped off the map as far as Americans arms sales were concerned," and that Israel's earmarkings were largely to blame.[72] Another veteran defense analyst estimated that the United States has had to stop giving security assistance to "some 30 or 40 countries" in order to keep the level of military aid to Israel and Egypt at the level that became institutionalized subsequent to Camp David.

For his part, the Pentagon analyst did admit that the size of the funds appropriated by Congress for Israel's security assistance probably pushed up the total level of U.S. FMS sales worldwide, and had a certain "tailwind effect" in terms of the FMS sales to Egypt or other countries on the earmark list. "We don't object to the lack of flexibility we are left with in our worldwide planning." When Net Assessment's Andrew

Marshall was asked about the tailwind effect, he replied that, "My first impression is that Israeli arms aid gobbles up a large fixed amount of money. The main thing one hears is about the constraints on foreign aid money, and the amount which is earmarked for Israel and Egypt."[3]

Links Increase American Control of Israeli Military Actions:

One of the most forthright proponents of this argument, a former NSC analyst, was frank in admitting that in the case of the 1981 MOU, "it never worked out that way, because of Lebanon." He explained that, "We didn't realize what we were dealing with in Sharon." His more modest version of what the United States might hope to achieve with the post-1983 iteration of strategic collaboration was that, "it might develop a stake in the relationship on behalf of *both* sides." However, he noted that while this had been shown to be true "to some extent" in the case of the Labour Alignment and the IDF, it had not been demonstrated so much in the case of Likud.[4]

That this analyst's more modest version of the leverage dynamic might be the maximum the U.S. could expect out of the relationship seemed to be indicated in a presentation given in July 1986 by Menachem Meron, who had seen service both as a military attaché in the Israeli Embassy in Washington and as Director-General of Israel's Ministry of Defense. Referring to the 1981 MOU, Meron said that, "Washington believed that because of the MOU, there would be no more 'surprises' or unilateral moves on Israel's part. That was very far from the Israeli perception." Referring to the difference between the 1981 and 1983 versions of collaboration, he gloated that, "there was the realization that local powers can, in some cases, possess inherent advantages over a superpower."[5]

Some systematic consideration should also be given, however briefly, to the actual and potential downside costs to the United States of the close strategic relationship with Israel. The relationship has, as noted above, resulted in some compromise of U.S. and NATO military technology and operations to the Soviets. One must also assume that, since no intelligence community anywhere can be considered leakproof, there is a serious chance that close intelligence coordination with Israel may have resulted in some compromise of intelligence data and methods to the Soviets. Certainly, the case of former Knesset aide Shabtay Kalmanovich, who was convicted in Tel Aviv District Court in December 1988 on charges of spying for the Soviets, indicates that U.S. intelligence agencies should exercise extreme caution in what they share with an Israeli intelligence community already rent with malaise, and now also apparently penetrated by the Soviets.[6]

One high-level Pentagon official pointed out that risks of such compromise exist in any alliance relationship. But he noted that Israel differed from other U.S. allies both because of the special aggressivity of the Israeli defense industry in acquiring advanced U.S. technology, and because of the existence of a strong political push factor, coming from organized public opinion and from the U.S. Congress, that has pushed

successive administrations into close strategic ties with Israel. This official considered, however, that the principal downside cost to U.S. national security from the relationship with Israel stemmed from the extent this relationship curtailed U.S. links with the moderate Arab states. He added further significant nuance to this view when he noted that, "Dealing with Israel on issues of arms transfers to the Arabs is one matter; but the real difficulties come from dealing with a Congress which on this issue is more pro-Israeli than the Israelis themselves."[77]

Richard Armitage, Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs (ISA), noted that one result of Congressional and public pressure against arms sales to Arab countries has been that pro-Western Arab states became less stable because of the fear engendered by their inability to obtain their basic defense needs from the United States. In several cases, they have also turned elsewhere for the systems they wanted—a development the United States also regards as less stable, because other countries' weapons come with fewer follow-on controls. "We end up losing political capital in the Middle East," he concluded. "We lose actual capital, and we lose influence. Because of these factors, and also because of the lack of control over some Arab weapons systems, the whole area is slightly less stable."[78]

Part 5: Out of Synch

It was an irony of history that, in precisely the same period when Israel's 'strategic salesmen' in the United States were having their biggest impact on official U.S. policy (1983 through 1987), the strategic studies community in Israel itself was wracked by a debate of the first importance, whose net effect was to call into question many of the basic assumptions that were still accepted by the 'strategic salesmen' in Washington. Many of the latter, however, continued their work seemingly untramelled by self-doubt.

The strategic debate in Israel was part of the deep, national-wide soul-searching that accompanied and followed the erosion of the IDF's position in Lebanon (though some of its antecedents can be traced back before June 1982). In the debate, defense of the invasion of Lebanon was left primarily to its architect, Ariel Sharon. In May 1985, he was still listing the invasion's achievements as follows:

> —The PLO was eliminated as a major political and military element . . . The defeat of the PLO engendered the most positive effect in Judaea, Samaria [the West Bank] and the Gaza Strip . . . —Our deployment deep into Lebanon and on the flank of the Damascus plain in effect destroyed the Syrians' ability to attack us in the Golan as well . . .
> —Our real political and strategic situation . . . has improved immeasurably[79]

These judgments concerning the invasion were challenged by the conclusions reached by many other Israeli strategic thinkers, both inside and outside the military. For example, as early as September 1982, Aman

chief Yehoshua Saguy had judged that, "The Syrians have not been substantively weakened militarily . . . If we talk about numbers, equipment and weapons, the Syrians have not been defeated. Moreover, they have been strengthened."[10] In December 1982, noted Hebrew University military historian Martin Van Creveld judged that:

> By 1982 the IDF was, relative to its size, as well armed as any force the world has ever seen . . .
>
> In Lebanon, this combination of quantity with technological sophistication made it possible to avoid any kind of military thought . . . Commanded by the same officer who, in 1973, threw away the cream of the Golani Brigade in a pointless frontal attack against the Syrians on Mt Hermon, the IDF in Lebanon piled tank upon tank and gun upon gun.
>
> A command and control system superior to anything previously employed made it possible to achieve good interarm cooperation and, above all, spew forth vast amounts of ammunition to destroy the country which the IDF had allegedly come to save.
>
> The results, nevertheless, were disappointing. The traditional superiority of individual Israeli troops and crews over their opponents took a nosedive . . . [11]

In 1983, the head of the General Staff's long-range planning branch, Col. 'Immanu'el Wald, produced a study that examined the historical antecedents of the IDF's failures in Lebanon. He noted that: "In the Six Day War [of 1967] the IDF beat more than three Arab armies, on three fronts, with an investment of only 6 percent of the GNP. In the Yom Kippur War [of 1973] the IDF was barely even against two armies, on two fronts, with double the investment. In the Lebanese War the IDF did not even manage to defeat one army, on one front, under optimal conditions and with an investment of 18 percent of the GNP."[12]

The following year, veteran intelligence analyst Zvi Lanir produced a study which concluded that,

> The utilization of the army in the Lebanese war was marked by an excess of force and overwhelming superiority in firepower. The enemy was to a certain extent outgunned rather than outmaneuvered, pounded into submission instead of being outflanked, and crushed by siege instead of being overwhelmed by a war of movement . . .
>
> But in the final analysis, the basic contradiction of the war stemmed from the attempt to achieve Clausewitzian goals through the utilization of a military machine trained and indoctrinated to attain a decisive victory in a war of denial fought to protect the existence of the state. In the end, this threatened the attainment of the Clausewitzian goals themselves.[13]

Lanir, like many other Israeli strategic thinkers in this 'post-Lebanon' period, sought to re-examine the deepest foundations of Israeli doctrine. "Israeli doctrine is in crisis," he stated in an interview in July 1987. He attributed this crisis to the fact that, "the state has had no clearly defined war aims in any of its wars since 1956 . . . " He judged that the experience of the Middle East war of that year had demonstrated to Premier David Ben-Gurion that it would be impossible for Israel to impose peace on its neighbors through political means. "This led to the shift to the doctrine without political aims." Lanir recalled that since 1979, he himself had considered that the regional environment had changed sufficiently that Israel could now think of making peace with its neighbors. But the official doctrine, "never caught up."[44]

Some of the most hallowed tenets of Israeli strategy and operational art also came under the microscope. Professor Dan Horowitz reconsidered the value of Israel's traditional manpower policy of remaining 'A national in arms', and only after careful weighing of the pros and cons did he come to the conclusion that it remained appropriate.[45] A general from the Defense Department's Yad Tabenkin think-tank wrote that the mythic Israeli military concept of the large-scale 'breakthrough' was now redundant.[46] The IDF's time-honoured tradition that commanders should always 'lead from the front' came in for some serious criticism.[47] There were also many discussions about the financial costs of maintaining Israel's huge defense establishment.[48]

Israel's strategic thinkers turned their attention, as well, to their country's burgeoning strategic relationship with the United States. For his part, Sharon maintained in an interview that, "Both sides have no alternative. The United States has no ally like Israel, and vice versa." He explained that, whereas Soviet power was balanced in Europe by NATO, and in Asia by the Chinese, "the only place where there is no organization dedicated to this end is the Middle East. The counter-Soviet balance here is provided by Israel."[49]

Other Israeli strategic thinkers evinced a more nuanced appreciation of the relationship. Ze'ev Schiff, of *Ha'aretz,* wrote that,

> The deepening of the [U.S.-Israeli] strategic ties, together with the growth in aid, has created, perhaps inevitably, a sense of over-confidence in many Israelis, the belief that what exists between the two countries today can be taken for granted . . . Even if Israel were to shun friendly advice from Washington and ignore U.S. interests, according to this belief, there would be no American reaction . . . There are some extremist groups in Israel who believe that the U.S. cannot afford to desert Israel, regardless of what the latter does.[50]

The Jaffee Center's Shai Feldman, meanwhile, judged in a 1988 interview that the strategic links with the United States had brought great benefits to Israel, both materially and in terms of an enhancement of Israel's capacity to deter its foes. "But there have been costs," he added. "There has been the perception of Israel elsewhere in the world as being

allied to an imperial power; and the overwhelming benefits of the alliance have enabled Israel to avoid difficult choices." Feldman said he considered that, despite the huge growth in the strategic dimensions of the relationship, its core remained the essentially moral argument based on Israel's democratic character. "The strategic arguments are the frosting on the cake, but the moral arguments are the cake itself," he said.[91] This judgment was underlined in an April 1988 analysis by the Jaffee Center's Dore Gold, who wrote that,

> American strategic assets around the world like Turkey, Pakistan, the Philippines or Honduras receive aid in tens or hundreds of millions of dollars. Israel's ability to receive billions of dollars does not emanate from strategic considerations alone.[92]

CONCLUSIONS

The emphasis on Israel's strategic benefits to the United States, as opposed to 'merely' its moral worth, was one of the President Reagan's fundamental beliefs when he came into office in 1981; and from his earliest days in the White House, the strategic tie with Israel became an operational leitmotif of his administration's policy in the Middle East.

During Reagan's first two years in office, however, the relationship went through a number of stormy periods, with the disagreements coming to a head over the issue of the scale of Israel's June 1982 invasion of Lebanon. On the key question of General Sharon's desire to prevail over the Syrians in the eastern sector, as well as the western and central sectors of Lebanon, Reagan finally insisted on Israel's compliance with the ceasefire the United States wanted to bring about in the east.[93] When Haig, by contrast, tried to allow Sharon more time to succeed in the east, he lost the President's confidence. The lack of U.S. confidence in Sharon over the June 1982 fighting, along with other disagreements over Lebanon including the events of mid-September 1982, continued to sour the bilateral relationship for some months thereafter. It was only after Sharon was replaced as Israeli Defense Minister by Moshe Arens, and the United States had started to experience its own difficulties in Lebanon, that the relationship began to sweeten again in the Spring of 1983.

The strategic collaboration that was launched at the end of 1983 then ushered in a five-year period that brought to Israel considerable strategic and economic benefits, that were apparently de-linked from Israel's compliance with U.S.-defined norms of political or diplomatic behavior. How had this come about, and what would be the lasting effect of this development on the relationship between these two states?

If Richard Straus's model is accepted, then the two key changes came when the United Stated had first a President, and then a Secretary of State, who no longer needed to be pushed by Congress and the pro-Israel lobby because they believed that the United States was a net beneficiary of strategic value in its relationship with Israel. The first of these changes occurred the day Ronald Reagan stepped into the White

House. The second would have come about with Alexander Haig's tenure at State, except that this was cut short by the disagreements of 1982, which brought George Shultz to the State Department in his place (and also left Reagan seriously angry with Israel for a short while). By October 1983, as noted above, the Israelis had succeeded not only in restoring Reagan's traditional view of Israel's strategic allure, but also in persuading George Shultz that his best interests lay in pursing the strategic link as well.

Several explanations for Shultz's turnaround have already been discussed. An additional reason, as mentioned by several Reagan administration officials, may have been that Shultz saw some benefit in demonstrating his 'machismo' on the anti-Syrian issue, at a time when he was still battling hard to over-ride Secretary of Defense Weinberger's unyielding stance on the larger issue of relations with the Soviet Union. Building up the strategic ties with Israel would also have helped Shultz defuse the criticism aimed against him and his Department by powerful conservative and neo-conservative figures in Congress, who strongly supported the arguments of Israel's strategic salesmen.

With the October 1983 NSDD, State and the White House then succeeded in 'boxing in' a reluctant DoD into the strategic relationship. Though many in the Pentagon still viewed the relationship with extreme scepticism, they now saw no realistic way to avoid it. They thus decided to continue working within its formal framework in order to limit its negative fallout as much as possible, while garnering from it what benefits they could—such as, for example, increased Congressional support for SDI and other controversial big-ticket defense budget items. For example, in May 1988, Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci told AIPAC's annual conference that, "Those who consider themselves friends of Israel and who want to cut SDI funding should be asked how they plan to meet Israel's security needs in a changing and more threatening military environment."[94]

The role of Congress in all this deserves special mention, for by the mid-'80s Congress did not need to be pushed by what was everywhere referred to as simply "the Lobby", in order to tilt markedly toward Israel on a whole range of issues. Many members of Congress had long been used to applying different standards to actions undertaken by Israel and those undertaken by any other government, including their own, across a wide range of issues. In the 'strategic Israel' euphoria of the mid-'80s these double standards extended to clear cases of defense contractor mismanagement (the Lavi affair), and nuclear proliferation (as evidenced by the Vanunu revelations). Nor did Congress's much-vaunted concern about the role of White House officials in the Iran-contra affair carry over into any sustained concern about the role of their Israeli co-conspirators. The only issue that caused a momentary Congressional pause for thought amidst this euphoria was the question of Israeli arms sales to South Africa, but this was rapidly swept back under the rug after the Israeli government promised in 1987 that it would conclude no new arms agreements with the apartheid state.

The net effect of these developments at the policymaking level was that from late 1983 onwards Congress, the State Department and the White House were all competing with each other to confer strategic and economic benefits upon Israel's defense establishment. Each of these American institutions wanted a share of the action, and more important- ly a share of the credit. Even the Defense Department sought to extract out of the situation whatever it could. Under these circumstances, the strategic relationship with Israel became a virtual political football for which different branches of the American policymaking establishment competed fiercely, while on occasion showing scant regard for the United States' broader national security interests.

During the first Reagan administration, enthusiasm for the 'strategic Israel' concept could be seen as the fruit of a marriage between two of that period's strong trends in American public and official opi- nion: the long-established sympathy with Israel, and the same rise in a hawkish, confrontational view of international affairs that had catapulted Reagan into the White House. During Reagan's second term, this latter trend stalled, and then reversed. One result at the administra- tion level was Shultz's victory in 1985-86 in steering Reagan into a renew- ed arms control process with the Soviets. After Shultz had won this vic- tory (and after the Democrats' victories in 1986's midterm congressional elections), he was no longer so dependent on the goodwill of hawkish pro-Israelis in Congress.

This development had little immediate effect on the policies Shultz pursued toward the Israelis. As noted above, throughout 1987 he con- tinued to confer military benefits on Israel while making little effort to rein back such frowned-upon Israeli actions as the creeping annexation of the occupied territories. Then, in early 1988, in response to the Palesti- nian *intifada*, Shultz once again turned to Arab-Israeli peace-making. On this occasion, some of those who most publicly urged him to press Israeli Premier Shamir over the 'land for peace' issue were a group of 30 Senators. The Senators, many of whom had long records as friends of Israel, expressed open dismay over Shamir's seeming intransigence on this issue.[55] What appeared to be happening was a surprising reveral of everything in the Straus formula: Congress and some influential parts of the American Jewish community now appeared to be pushing the State Department to press Israel to make concessions to the Arabs.

The changes in the American Jewish community's relationship with Israel that had preceded this development have been examined elsewhere. Suffice it to say here that in early 1988 many parts of the American Jewish community felt it necessary to reaffirm the importance of the moral basis for their support for Israel. By then, it seemed that among a broad segment of American public opinion, including Jewish opinion, the strategic arguments for supporting Israel were having less and less of an effect, by comparison with the enduring moral factor.

At the operational level within the administration, 1988 saw a slow but continued erosion of the reluctance to confront the Israeli

government that had been evident throughout the preceding years. In December 1988, Secretary Shultz finally made the judgment that the PLO had met the conditions set down in 1975 for beginning a dialogue with the United States. Despite the vociferous protests of Israel's political leaders, he instructed the U.S. Ambassador in Tunis to open the dialogue immediately. Signficantly, he won the quiet support of most significant American Jewish leaders for his action.

Did those years of close U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation from 1983 through 1988 bring any lasting benefit to the U.S. taxpayer? Had they received value for the $1.8-plus billion worth of resources the U.S. had pumped into the Israeli defense establishment in each of those years? Despite the Reagan administration's rhetorical and policy emphases on Israel's strategic worth, as Reagan left office the answer to this question still lay, in good part, within the 'soft' field of moral reasoning. Even the authoritative Pentagon official charged with running International Security Assistance, Assistant Secretary Richard Armitage, concurred with this view. He judged that the relationship could only be said to have given value to the U.S. *if the moral imperative were added to the strategic judgement.*[96]

Endnotes

1. See "U.S. cool on signing pact with Israel", *Jerusalem Post International Edition* (hereinafter *JPIE*), 30 April 1988, pp. 1,2.

2. One of the most thoughtful of such analyses was Harry J. Shaw, "Strategic dissensus", *Foreign Policy*, No. 61 (Winter 1985-86), pp. 125-41.

3. Steven L. Spiegel, *The other Arab-Israeli conflict: Making America's Middle East policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 159-60.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-64, and William B. Quandt, *Decade of decisions: American policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1967-76* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 65-68.

5. William Safire, *Before the fall; An inside view of the pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), p. 567.

6. Spiegel, p. 179.

7. Bernard Reich, *The United States and Israel: influence in the special relationship* (New York: Praeger, 1984), pp. 148-149.

8. Interview with Andrew W. Marshall, Director of Net Assessment, U.S. Department of Defense, February 1988. For an appraisal Kissinger's relative weight in Ford's decisionmaking, see Spiegel, pp. 286 and 312-14.

9. See, for example, Jimmy Carter, *Keeping faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam, 1982), p. 274.

10. *See* Reich, *loc. cit.*

11. Ronald Reagan, "Recognizing the Israeli asset", *The Washington Post*, 15 August 1979, p. 25.

12. Quoted in *Near East Report*, 9 Jan., 1980, p. 7.

13. Wolf Blitzer, *Between Washington and Jerusalem* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 61.

14. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *The Reagan phenomenon and other speeches on foreign policy* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1983), p. 118.

15. Weinberger came to the Pentagon from the San Francisco-based engineering firm Bechtel Inc., which had numerous contracts in the Arab world. But that need not have been a decisive or immutable factor influencing Weinberger's thinking on Middle East issues, as was indicated later on in the Reagan years when fellow Bechtel alumnus George Shultz became one of the Israel's strongest supporters ever in the Secretary of State job.

16. For details, see Laurence 1. Barrett, *Gambling with history: Ronald Reagan in the White House* (New York: Penguin, 1984)), p. 273.

17. For this evaluation, see *ibid.*, p. 276, and Reich, p. 105. The fact that Sharon's advocacy of this step did not reflect a unanimous preference within Israel's professional military establishment was indicated in an October 1981 Israeli press interview with their defense attaché in Washington. See Yosef Pri'el, "Relations with American military establishment", in *Davar*, 19 October 1981, p. 12; as translated in *Joint Publications Research Service* (hereinafter *JPRS*), p. 72.

18. Author's interview with former official who asked not to be named, March 1988.

19. *The New York Times*, 1 Dec. 1981, p. A14.

20. See *Foreign Broadcast Information Service — Middle East section* (hereinafter *FBIS-ME*), 1 Dec. 1981, p. 12.

21. Barrett, p. 277.

22. Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), pp. 72-75.

23. Ze'ev Schiff, "Green light, Lebanon", in *Foreign Policy*, No. 50 (Spring 1983), p. 75.

24. See Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and foreign policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), p. 327. In implicit corroboration of Schiff's contention that, "Haig issued no threat against Israel's forthcoming military action", Haig made no mention here of any threat having been delivered.

25. Author's interview with Zvi Lanir, Jerusalem, July 1987.

26. Two such analyses had titles of telling condescension. They were: Nimrod Novik, *Encounter with reality: Reagan and the Middle East (The first term)* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center, and Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1985); and Martin Indyk, "Reagan and the Middle East; Learning the art of the possible", in *SAIS Review* (Winter 1987), pp. 111-38.

27. Indyk, p. 123. Samuel W. Lewis, who was U.S. Ambassador to Israeli at the time, has corroborated this assessment: See his contribution to Robert Satloff, ed., *Strategy and defense in the Eastern Mediterranean: An American-Israeli dialogue* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1987), p. 103.

28. This was also the view of Bernard Gwertzman. See his article, "Reagan turns to Israel", *The New York Times Magazine*, 27 Nov. 1983, p. 65.

29. The unclear nature of the MNF's mission was one of the problems identified by the DoD's commission of inquiry into the incident. See *Report of the DoD Commission on Beirut International Airport terrorist act, October 23, 1983* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 20 December 1983), p. 134.

30. Gwertzman, p. 63.

31. *The New York Times*, 30 Nov. 1983, p. A8.

32. List from Satloff, pp. 121-4; and from interviews.

33. Totals as given in interview with a DoD official who asked not to be named, February 1988; and from Congressional Research Service, Memorandum of 8 March 1988, "U.S. laws that benefit Israel", p. 10.

34. 'Strategic Cooperation Maturing', *Near East Report*, 21 November 1988, p. 195.

35. Secretary of State George Shultz, "Working for peace and freedom", *State Department Current Policy*, No. 957, (1987) p. 3.

36. See Robert S. Greenberger, "Israel seeks to obtain the kind of financial aid that NATO members get from U.S. government", *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 Feb. 1987, p. 70; and Hirsh Goodman, "Rabin in U.S. to sign agreement", *JPIE*, 19 December 1987, p. 4.

37. Christopher Madison, "Tensions with Israel", *National Journal* (4 April 1987), p. 815.

38. See Dore Gold, "Strategic ties with the U.S. go on regardless", *JPIE*, 16 April 1988, p. 8.

39. *Ibid.* (Present author's emphasis.)

40. Nahum Goldmann, "Israel, the US, and American Jewry—A complex relationship", *New Outlook* (November/December 1979), p. 20. Goldmann had also been the founder and first Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

41. Blitzer, pp. 72-73.

42. Morris J. Amitay, "A field day for Jewish PACs", *Congress Monthly*, (June 1983), p. 11. In an interview with the author in March 1988, defense analyst Dov Zakheim made the additional argument that, if Israel were to base its appeal to the United States primarily on moral considerations, then the Palestinians could also make a case for U.S. support on these grounds.

43. Tom Dine declined to be interviewed for this project.

44. See the following pamphlets in the series *AIPAC Papers on U.S.-Israel Relations* (published in Washington, D.C.): Steven J. Rosen, "The strategic value of Israel", p. 11; Martin Indyk, Charles Kupchan and Steven J. Rosen, "Israel and the U.S. Air Force", p. v; and W. Seth Carus, "Israel and the U.S. Navy", p. 10. Indyk later left AIPAC and set up his own organization, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP).

45. Richard B. Straus, "Israel's new super-lobby Washington: Reagan and Co.", *The Washington Post—Outlook Section*, 27 April 1986, p. C1-2.

46. Other similar presentations worth noting include Gerald M. Steinberg and Steven L. Speigel, "Israel and the security of the West", and Howard R. Teicher, "Strategy and politics: A U.S. perception", in Aurel Braun, ed., *The Middle East in global strategy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1987); and many publications from AIPAC and WINEP (see note 44).

47. Steven L. Spiegel, "U.S. relations with Israel: The military benefits", *Orbis*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Fall 1986), p. 476.

48. This argument was adduced in an interview with a former State Department official friendly to Israel, March 1988.

49. Spiegel, "U.S. relations . . . ", p. 476.

50. See Andy Court, "Spy Chiefs Gather to Honor Israel's Friend in CIA", *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 Nov. 1987, p. 1.

51. See Ze'ev Schiff, *A history of the Israeli army, 1874 to the present* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 194-203, *passim*.

52. Author's interview with Marshall, February 1988.

53. Author's interview with DoD official who asked not to be named, February, 1987.

54. Author's interview with expert who asked not to be named, March 1988. This sense of a deep malaise pervading many parts of the Israeli intelligence community was portrayed clearly in 'Akiva Eldar, "Still in the captivity of the conception", *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), 8, 9 10, and 14 May 1984, as translated in *JPRS*, NEA-84-102, pp. 28-36.

55. Spiegel, "U.S. relations . . . ", p. 480.

56. For details of these lessons, see Helena Cobban, "Lessons learned by the Soviets from Israel's June 1982 strike against Syrian ground-based air defenses in Lebanon", in *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual, No. 10*, ed. David R. Jones, (Gulf Breeze, Florida: Academic International Press, 1987), pp. 257-270. Spiegel's version of what happened in the air-defense battle showed the hyperbole typical of the pro-Israeli 'strategic salesmen': he claimed that, "Israel proved that there was a means of breaking the antiaircraft missile wall that the Soviets thought they had developed against Western air forces." Speigel, "U.S. relations", pp. 488-89.

57. Author's interview with a DoD official who asked not to be named, March 1988.

58. Author's interviews with officials who asked not to be named, February and March 1988.

59. Spiegel, "U.S. relations . . . " p. 481.

60. A good summary of the specification- and cost-ballooning that afflicted the Lavi is given in Joshua Brilliant, "The Lavi project; Plane that shouldn't have been", *The Jerusalem Post* (daily), 1 July 1987, p. 6.

61. "General David 'Ivri interviewed on Lavi project", *Bita'on Heyl Ha'avir* (Tel Aviv), No. 50-51, April 1986, pp. 16-20; as translated in *JPRS*, NEA-86-083, p. 33.

62. Dov Zakheim, "Yet the Lavi lingers on and on . . . ", *The Washington Times*, 26 August 1987, p. D2. For two views on how these figures came to differ, see the David 'Ivri interview cited above, p. 34, and Richard C. Gross, "The great Lavi debate", in *Defense Science and Electronics* (September 1986), pp. 7-10. As of July 1987, a few months before the project was finally cancelled, the Israelis reportedly planned to build only 100 planes, which would have made the per-plane cost even higher. See Joshua Brilliant, *op. cit..*

63. Author's interview with Dov Zakheim, March 1988.

64. Cost estimate from Clyde R. Mark, *Israel: Foreign assistance facts (Updated May 27, 1988)* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service Issue Brief, #IB85066), p. 6.

65. Spiegel, "U.S. relations . . . ", p. 483.

66. This issue has been widely discussed in the Soviet media since 1985. See Helena Cobban, "Soviet views of Israel as an American ally and a nuclear power", in Helena Cobban, ed., *Military dimensions of Soviet Middle East policy* (College Park, Md.: Center for International Security Studies at Maryland, 1988).

67. Spiegel, "U.S. relations . . . ", pp. 492, 489.

68. Author's interview with an analyst who asked not to be named, February 1988.

69. Author's interviews with analysts and officials who asked not to be named, February and March 1988.

70. See Shaw, p. 131.

71. The list of countries for which Congress earmarks funds includes Israel, Egypt, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Morocco.

72. Author's interview with an analyst who asked not to be named, February 1988. Secretary of State George Shultz has also noted this same effect, with respect to both security assistance and economic assistance. In an appeal to an AIPAC audience in May 1987, he asked, "When you cut from $23 billion to $16 billion, and you have $8 billion, say, going through as a constant, then everything else is brutalized." Shultz, p. 2.

73. Author's interview with Marshall.

74. Author's interview with an anlyst who asked not to be named, March 1988.

75. Menachem Meron, "An Israeli perspective on strategic cooperation", in Satloff, pp. 107, 109.

76. For details of the Kalmanovich case, see *FBIS-ME*, 11 Jan. 1988, p. 43; 12 Jan. 1988, p. 58; 20 Jan. 1988, p. 34; 1 Feb. 1988, p. 49; and 7 March 1988, p. 36; and "Spy Jailed for 9 Years", *JPIE*, 24 Dec. 1988.

77. Author's interview with a DoD official who asked not to be named, March 1988. Richard Straus has noted that, "Pro-Israel sentiment on Capitol Hill seems to have taken on a life of its own, independent of the wishes of AIPAC or Israel itself": Straus, *op. cit.*

78. Author's interview with Richard Armitage, March 1988.

79. "Ariel Sharon assesses Lebanon war", in *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, 24 May 1985, weekend supplement, p. 7, and 31 May 1985, weekend supplement, pp. 2, 7; as translated in *JPRS*, NEA-85-124, p. 79. Contradicting the first of Sharon's points, Meron Benvenisti has noted that the level of Palestinian civil disobedience in the occupied territories leaped from 1982 on, setting the stage for the outbreak of the *intifada* five years later. Meron Benvenisti, *1987 Report* (Jerusalem: The West Bank Data Base Project, 1987), p. 40.

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80. Y. Saguy in "IDF commanders discuss war goals, accomplishments", *Yedi'ot Aharonot,* 17 and 26 Sept. 1982; as translated in *JPRS,* NEA-82-434, p. 95. Soviet arms transfers to Syria over the next few months made Saguy's conclusions even more valid.

81. Martin Van Creveld, "Not exactly a triumph", *The Jerusalem Post,* 10 Dec. 1982, weekend supplement, pp. 6, 7; as reproduced in *JPRS,* NEA-82-577, pp. 48-49.

82. Although Wald's study received the official sponsorship of Chief of Staff Moshe Levy, its findings were for a while the subject of a high-level cover-up. See "Rabin instructs IDF high command to discuss Wald report", *Hadashot,* 19 May 1986, p. 5; as translated in *JPRS,* NEA-86-083, p. 28.

83. Zvi Lanir, "Political aims and military objectives—some observations on the Israeli experience", in Zvi Lanir, ed., *Israeli security planning in the 1980s; Its politics and economics* New York: Praeger, and Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center, 1984), p. 42.

84. Author's interview with Zvi Lanir, July 1987.

85. Dan Horowitz, "Strategic limitations of 'a nation in arms' ", *Armed Forces and Society,* Vol. 13, no. 2 (Winter 1987), pp. 277-94.

86. Zvi Timor, "Defense budget: Strategy error since 1967", *'Al Hamishmar,* 26 Mar. 1985, p. 9; as translated in *JPRS,* NEA-85-073, pp. 73-74.

87. Alex Fishman, "The IDF: The lessons of Lebanon", *'Al Hamishmar,* 5 June 1985, pp. 6-11; as translated in *JPRS,* NEA-85-134, p. 46.

88. See, for example, *ibid.*; and Eliezer Sheffer, "The economic burden of the arms race between the confrontation states and Israel", in Lanir, ed., pp. 142-65.

89. Author's interview with Ariel Sharon, July 1987.

90. Ze'ev Schiff, "U.S. and Israel: Friendship under strain", *The National Interest* (Winter 1987/88), p. 7. Schiff noted, too, that, "Especially but not only in the case of Israel, we have witnessed the ability of the smaller partner to push the bigger to engage in policies the latter did not want to engage in . . . The most vivid example of this is the creeping Israeli annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the continuing settling of these territories by Jews.": Schiff, p. 12.

91. Author's interview with Shai Feldman, February 1988.

92. Gold, p. 8.

93. Yair Evron, *War and intervention in Lebanon: The Israeli-Syrian deterrence dialogue* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 137.

94. See Helen Dewar, "Carlucci: Israel gains from SDI", *The Washington Post,* 16 May 1988; and "Israel: 'Faithful friend' ", *Near East Report,* 23 May 1988, p. 83.

95. For the text of the Senators' letter, see *The New York Times,* 7 March 1988, p. 6.

96. Interview with Armitage, March 1988.