

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE US-ISRAEL SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP: 1981-1989

by

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(Under the Direction of LOCH K. JOHNSON)

## ABSTRACT

International relations theorists have long sought to better understand geopolitical alliances and the factors that influence their creation and development. Previous literature in the alliance politics sub-field of international relations has largely ignored the political processes that lead to the development of the closest and most extensive alliances a state maintains. Scholars have identified these alliances and commonly refer to them as constituting “special relationships”. Previous studies about special relationships have failed to identify the distinctive traits of special relationships. This study will allow scholars to better understand the nature of special relationships and the political processes that lead to their creation by advancing a new conceptualization of the topic. A model explaining the development of the US-Israel ‘special relationship’ during the Reagan Administration will be used as a case study.

INDEX WORDS: Alliance, Special Relationship, United States, Israel, Foreign Policy,  
Ronald Reagan, Middle East, Cold War, Political Elites, Political  
Institutions

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated my family and to all of those who have played a role in my intellectual development as a Doctoral Candidate in the School of Public and International Affairs at The University of Georgia.

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I am forever indebted to all of those who supported me in my academic endeavors over the years. Moral support from my mother Andrea Lukoff has been consistent from childhood until today. My father Murray Lukoff taught me the value of hard work and persistent study in the pursuit of a meaningful professional career. As I progressed through graduate school, I found my Brother Jay and Cousin Harrison always there for me through times thick and thin. I had the distinct honor of meeting my wife Hilary while enrolled at The University of Georgia. She has provided me with consistent love and support each day.

I was inspired to study Political Science over a decade ago as I sought understand why the United States was engaged in two wars in the Middle East while an undergraduate at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth. Since then, I have immersed myself in political life as both a student and participant-observer. I gained valuable experience at George Mason University, learning the ways of Washington as I pursued a Master of Public Policy and observed national security policymaking in-action as an intern at the Pentagon. At Boston College, I studied abroad for the first-time at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and had the chance to learn under the tutelage of Dr. Avraham Sela who showed me the realities of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict through our many discussions and visits to Israeli landmarks and Palestinian villages.

At the University of Georgia, I quickly found a mentor in Dr. Loch Johnson. Dr. Johnson opened my eyes to the discipline of Intelligence Studies and played a formative role in shepherding me through the process of securing my first academic publication, passing

comprehensive exams, and completing my dissertation. Dr. Lihi Ben-Shitrit opened my eyes to many new perspectives on Israeli politics as we carried out fieldwork together at the epi-center of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on the Holy Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Dr. Jeffrey Berejikian taught me the nuances and complexities of foreign policy decision-making and was instrumental in leading me to explore the complexities the area political psychology in my scholarship. Dr. Rongbin Han spent many hours of his time helping me craft the methodological framework of my dissertation.

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## **PREFACE**

When President Ronald Reagan died in 2004, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (the leading grassroots lobbying organization for Israeli interests in the United States), described his impact on the Israeli-American relationship as “dramatic” and indicated that several of his key decisions were of “monumental importance” to the Israeli-American diplomatic relationship.<sup>1</sup> During his presidency, the Reagan Administration’s foreign policy towards Israel was justified on “strategic rather than moral terms,” as it had been under previous administrations.<sup>2</sup> The impact of Reagan's foreign policy towards Israel would have a long term impact on both countries strategic and political standing in the Middle East.

Critics of the US-Israel relationship have existed within the foreign policy establishment in Washington in both Democratic and Republican administrations before, after, and even during Reagan's tenure in office. In the years before President Reagan, the United States and Israel were nominally allies in the Cold War. However, it would be an apt comparison to say that the relationship between Washington and Jerusalem paled in comparison to America’s special relationship with Great Britain. Today, the United States-Israel bilateral relationship is oftentimes compared to the US-UK ‘special relationship’. This begs a question: What political factors create special relationships in general, and the US-Israel special relationship in

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<sup>1</sup> Block, J. (2004). AIPAC Mourns the Loss of President Ronald Reagan. Washington, D.C., American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

<sup>2</sup> Cobban, H. (1989). “The US-Israeli Relationship in the Reagan era.” *Conflict Quarterly* 9(2): 5-32., 6.

particular? Previous studies in both the US-Israel relations and alliance politics literatures have yet to adequately answer these prescient questions.

This study is the first of its kind to introduce a qualitative measurement that describes the specific factors that constitute a 'special relationship. Providing a measurement that describes the factors that make special relationships uniquely different from other forms of bilateral cooperation will add to existing literature on alliance politics by ascribing meaning to a specific form of geopolitical alliance that is well-known by scholars and practitioners alike but has been inadequately conceptualized to date. This will create a framework for scholars interested in the study of alliance politics to measure and assess the nature of special relationships. By gaining a more complete understanding of the nature of special relationships, alliance politics scholars will be able to draw conclusions about countries' foreign policy priorities and the prospects for future bilateral collaboration between any allied dyad in the international system.

Second, it will improve our existing understanding of American foreign policy toward Israel during the Reagan Administration and the major political events that impacted bilateral ties between the two countries in the years between 1981 and 1989. This time period was described by Tom Dine, President of AIPAC (1980-1993), as being "the golden years of US-Israel relations."<sup>3</sup> It is my intention to argue that the US-Israel special relationship was actualized during this time because Reagan's policy beliefs catalyzed his administration's commitment to develop the relationship in light of major policy disagreements between Washington and Jerusalem on a range of issues. Due to the fact that a number of primary source materials have only recently been declassified, this consequential time period in US-Israel relations has been understudied by American foreign policy scholars to date.

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<sup>3</sup> Dine, T. A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

Finally, I hope that the findings garnered from this study can hasten the development of integrative studies that provide a more realistic assessment of the complex factors that shape American foreign policy in the international system. The model created in this study could be replicated by alliance politics scholars eager to understand the dynamics between any two allied states. Key to accomplishing this goal, will be a better understanding of individual leaders and the psychological factors that lead them to make crucial decisions that shape the international system.

## INTRODUCTION

The creation of a ‘special relationship’ with Israel was not a foregone certainty at the dawn of the Reagan Administration even though President Reagan was largely perceived by political observers as an especially pro-Israel candidate during the 1980 election. Reagan’s Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and National Security Advisor William Clark were “fierce critics of Israel.”<sup>4</sup> Michael Thomas described a “perceived hostility to Israeli interests among career civil servants in the State Department and Pentagon” at the outset of the Reagan Administration in 1981, which led to significant pushback against the idea of strategic cooperation with Israel.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, major events that occurred early in Reagan’s presidency such as Israel’s bombing of Iraq’s Osirak nuclear facility in June of 1981, the annexation of the Golan Heights, and the outbreak of the Lebanon War in 1982, sparked major policy disagreements between Washington and Jerusalem in general, and President Reagan and Prime Minister Menachem Begin in particular. These disagreements led to an initial arms embargo, the suspension of strategic cooperation, an American endorsed condemnation of Israel before the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and a threat from prominent cabinet members in the administration to downgrade relations between the two allies.

Nonetheless, considering these circumstances, a host of new agreements were signed and institutionalized into permanent bilateral initiatives between the two nations. Similarly, several

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<sup>4</sup> Ross, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration (Email Correspondence) L. Lukoff. Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, M. T. (2007). American Policy Toward Israel: The Power and Limits of Beliefs, London; New York: Routledge, 2007., 63.

informal political agreements were agreed upon between the two governments that would enhance the bilateral relationship in subsequent years. I will discuss how the policies and political agreements signed during the Reagan Administration were far more generous to Israeli interests than those that had been signed during prior administrations. To showcase this, I will describe the policy outcomes that were documented in each of the most consequential areas of the US-Israel special relationship before the Reagan Administration in order to establish a baseline to gauge the changes that occurred by the end of his presidency. To understand why the relationship between Israel and the United States grew closer, one must closely scrutinize the key drivers of American foreign policy decision-making and the factors that shaped the policy outcomes observed at the end of the Reagan Administration.

This study will depart from previous studies on political alliances by highlighting the ways that individual leaders can catalyze alliance development in the international system. Foreign policy scholars who study individual leaders, and political psychology, have noted that these areas of inquiry have failed to gain widespread interest throughout the scholarly community. Relatively few studies consider psychological variables to be consequential units of inquiry. To fill this void, Juliet Karabo argues that scholars ought to develop models that focus on “decision-making processes, perceptions, beliefs, and motivations as important factors to consider in international relations assessments.”<sup>6</sup> It is the goal of this study to showcase the impact that foreign policy elites and their beliefs have in shaping alliances in the international system.

When studying foreign policy, it’s important to note that elite decision-makers do not operate in a vacuum. They exist alongside other variables that must be accounted for in

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<sup>6</sup> Kaarbo, J. (2015). "A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory." International Studies Review (2): 189., 204.

assessments of foreign policy outcomes. Variables such as the foreign policies of other states, international institutions, major world events, interest groups, legislative bodies, and public opinion attempt to alter the trajectory of American foreign policy. The best way to account for all of the relevant confounding factors that impact foreign policy is to develop a theoretical framework that can account for all of the most relevant factors that can be identified as being consequential. This task is best achieved by means of archival research, case study development, and process tracing to parse out the casual mechanisms responsible for shaping the outcome. To add additional insights, and to fill in gaps in the public record, a series of interviews were carried out with a number of key stakeholders in the United States and Israel that played a role in the events and policy decisions examined in this study. Finally, it is the goal of this study to develop a theoretical framework that showcases how special relationships develop in general, and the US-Israel relationship in particular.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **The Dependent Variable: The US-Israel Special Relationship**

#### **Introduction**

Political alliances have long intrigued scholars looking to better understand state behavior in the international system. This chapter provides an overview of the alliance politics literature in the discipline of international relations. It examines an understudied alliance, the ‘special relationship’, and advances a new conceptualization of the term. A theory about the nature of the US-Israel special relationship is offered in all its component parts. Each area of the ‘special relationship’ is operationalized for empirical testing.

#### **The Study of Alliance Politics**

The study of geopolitical alliances emanated from the field of diplomatic history. The geopolitical conditions that precipitated World War I and World War II as well as America's quest to secure allies around the world during the Cold War led many scholars to see alliances as units of analysis worthy of further inquiry in international relations. However, in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, international relations experts began to focus on other factors in the international system such as globalization and democratization. Even though international relations experts focused their efforts elsewhere, this development did not negate the fact that alliances were being cultivated by nearly every country seeking to improve its position in the international system.

Alliances are meaningful political relationships that have the ability to shape the political, security, economic, and cultural aspects of a state's foreign policy and can even define the very

nature of the international system as a whole as was seen during World War I and World War II. Alliances can provide tangible benefits to a state such as security guarantees, political support in international organizations, modernized armaments, market access, and cross-cultural exchanges. Likewise, alliances can negatively impact a state if, for example, an alliance commitment draws a state into an unwanted military conflict. Since an alliance may bring one party into a conflict it wants no part of, a certain distance is oftentimes created by both states. This goes for both the more powerful and weaker state in an alliance. A larger state would not want to wage a war that their smaller ally unnecessarily provoked with a greater power. Similarly, a weaker state may not want to become a sidekick in the military adventures of their larger protectorate that do not serve their own national interests. Such a conflict, if waged against a stronger adversary, could turn the alliance from a benefit into a burden. In essence, both parties will seek to maintain the positive aspects, such as a security and deterrent benefits of the alliance, without the obligation of signing a guaranteed ticket to a costly and bloody war with their fellow alliance partner.

The give and take between states in an alliance manifests itself in the degree of political cooperation that materializes in practice. Some alliances may be little more than signed pieces of paper between two leaders. Others may be far more robust in both size and scope. Robust alliances may have joint military commands, intelligence sharing agreements, and a free-trade area where commerce and trade can go on unimpeded. Within this wide span of possibilities, alliance partners may choose to hasten cooperation or practice distancing techniques. Distancing techniques such as preventing the sale of cutting-edge military technology, withholding intelligence, or implementing tariffs can become sources of contention. As both states seek to become more powerful actors on the international stage, power asymmetries in the alliance can evolve over time. One state can become weaker or stronger, leading a client state to have the

ability to surpass its one-time patron. A previously harmonious alliance can become fraught with tension and rendered null and void altogether.

Since Thucydides first wrote about alliances during the Peloponnesian War, political scientists have sought to better understand *why* states create and disband alliances. This became an important area of inquiry for scholars because alliance politics were oftentimes seen as harbingers for the outbreak of international conflict. Diplomatic historians have always been intrigued by alliances more so than their scholarly counterparts in the discipline of political science. Alliances are oftentimes viewed as arrangements that can bring disparate nations and cultures into one family in order to address a threat of mutual concern. Alliances offer political and economic benefits and a degree of additional comfort in an anarchical global system. Despite their importance, alliances are rarely subjected to the autopsy that political scientists regularly perform on areas of inquiry such as legislative bodies and international institutions. This state of affairs is especially interesting since alliances are multifaceted political institutions with breadth and depth in a number of key areas (such as international trade) that are usually of interest to scholars when studied as separate subjects. Since alliances are rarely studied in a fashion that measures all of their qualitative aspects, little emphasis has been placed on creating a standard measure that will allow alliance politics scholars to assess them in empirical form.

### **What are Alliances?**

It has been established thus far that alliances are consequential political phenomena in the international system. Understanding alliance dynamics is vitally important in order to understand some of the most consequential political relationships and geopolitical events in world history. James D. Morrow argues that alliances are “a critical tool in international politics” and that we

“largely misunderstand them.”<sup>7</sup> In an anarchical world governed by nation-states, it is only natural that nation-states within the international system will seek out allies that will complement their own respective military, political, and economic capabilities. We know that alliances are important because without them a state would become isolated and its capabilities limited to whatever it could produce solely within its own borders. As the world has grown more globalized over time, the formation and development of alliances has become a higher national priority for many leaders eager to expand the global footprint of their country on the international system.

Alliances that states pursue vary both in nature and in form. This complicated state of affairs has contributed to a genuine lack of understanding in the discipline of political science about the nature of alliances and the factors that make them distinct from other forms of bilateral cooperation. A lack of understanding about alliances emanates from the fact that there is little agreement within the discipline of political science as to what they actually are. This state of affairs has stunted the development of a progressive scientific agenda on the subject. This fact was noted by Glenn H. Snyder who proclaimed that the study of alliances is “one of the most underdeveloped areas in international relations theory.”<sup>8</sup> In the absence of a universal definition, fewer scientific studies on alliances have taken place. and what exists in the literature on alliances has been largely defined by historians or case experts.

If one is to develop a theory about alliances, a scholar must know exactly what an alliance constitutes. As was previously noted, previous descriptions of this unique form of political cooperation have varied. There is a debate that exists among scholars that study alliances about the conditions that precipitate their commencement and the component parts that

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<sup>7</sup> Morrow, J. D. (1991). "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances." *American Journal of Political Science* (4): 904., 1.

<sup>8</sup> Snyder, G. H. (1991). "Alliances, Balance, and Stability." *International Organization* 45(1): 121-142., 121.

define their existence. Alliances are oftentimes misunderstood because they are sometimes compared to other forms of international cooperation such as pacts, treaties, partnerships, or security communities. This state of affairs spawned a plurality of definitions of the concept in subsequent studies.

For example, Friedman et. al, describes an alliance as a relationship between two or more states which includes:

- A. Pairing or collaboration with one another for a limited duration regarding a mutually perceived problem;
- B. Aggregation of their capabilities for participation in international affairs;
- C. Pursuit of national interests jointly or by parallel courses of action;
- D. The probability that assistance will be rendered by members to one another.<sup>9</sup>

Patrick J. McGowan and Robert M. Rood state that alliances have features such as “interstate cooperation or coordination over a problem; combination of state capabilities; pursuit of state interests; and mutual assistance.”<sup>10</sup> Ole R. Holsti, Terrence P. Hopmann, and John D. Sullivan argued that an alliance is “a formal agreement between two or more nations that collaborate on national security issues.”<sup>11</sup> This definition was used by the authors in order to avoid the inclusion of formal bilateral agreements on non-military issues. This was due in part to the fact that such agreements are far more prevalent in the international system than are agreements on military issues. The Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) dataset expanded on this definition by stating that alliances are:

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<sup>9</sup> Friedman, J.R., et al. (1970). *Alliance in International Politics*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon [1970], 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> McGowan, P.J. and R.M. Rood (1975). "Alliance Behavior in Balance of Power Systems: Applying a Poisson Model to Nineteenth-Century Europe." *The American Political Science Review* (3): 859., 859-860.

<sup>11</sup> Holsti, O. R., et al. (1973) *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies*, New York, Wiley [1973], 4.

...written agreements, signed by official representatives of at least two independent states, that include promises to aid a partner in the event of military conflict, to remain neutral in the event of conflict, to refrain from military conflict with one another, or to consult/cooperate in the event of international crises that create a potential for military conflict.<sup>12</sup>

This definition was different from previous definitions by focusing on the intent of each partner in the alliance. The definition used by Douglas M. Gibler and Meredith R. Sarkees in *The Correlates of War Formal Interstate Alliance Dataset, 1816-2000*. They outline four distinct characteristics of alliances:

- 1) At least two members of the alliance must be qualified system members
- 2) The alliance must be a defense pact, neutrality or non-aggression pact, or an entente
- 3) The effective dates of the alliance have to be identified.
- 4) A written agreement must be formalized between alliance partners.<sup>13</sup>

This definition differed from previous descriptions by adding time constraints to the equation. In essence, whether one adopts a more limited or holistic conceptualization of what constitutes an alliance, it is clear that the component characteristics of alliances have been hotly debated by international relations scholars for decades.

Even though scholars have long differed over the definition of what constitutes an alliance in the international system, this has not in any way negated the importance that such bonds still hold when studying international relations. Alliance politics scholars have long studied the political conditions that lead states to form and dissolve alliances. A plethora of

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<sup>12</sup> Leeds, B.A., et al. (2002). "ALLIANCE TREATY OBLIGATIONS AND PROVISIONS, 1815-1944." *International Interactions* 28(3): 237-260.

<sup>13</sup> Gibler, D. M. and M.R. Sarkees (2004). "Measuring Alliances: The Correlates of War Formal Interstate Alliance Dataset, 1816-2000." *Journal of Peace Research* (2): 211., 211.

historical studies have sought to explain how alliance dynamics contributed to the outbreaks of World War I and World War II. Similarly, numerous studies were carried out to understand the dynamics of political relationships formed between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries during the Cold War.

After the Cold War, scholars studied alliances by examining them as if they were living and breathing organizations. These studies saw institutionalization as a panacea for greater cooperation within alliances. Concomitantly, scholars observed that some states would cultivate “special relationships” with some of their allies and not others. These alliances were developed, cultivated, and expanded because of shared interests in multiple areas of bilateral cooperation. These alliances differed significantly from those a state would maintain with its other allies. Such circumstances have made them an object of inquiry for alliance politics scholars. Understanding the unique nature and political importance of special relationships is important because it will shed light on the reasons why states choose to invest significant resources in another ally given the potential pitfalls, such as war entrapment, that special relationships could have for both states.

### **Alliance Formation & Dissolution**

Alliances and their formation have long intrigued international relations theorists. Whether it was Thucydides's *Melian Dialogue*, or Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, alliances have been identified as objects of intrigue since at least the 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. As previously mentioned, modern studies of alliances grew out of the need to understand newly created alliance systems such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact which had become defining features of the international system in the aftermath of World War II. Subsequent attempts by American policymakers to secure allies in the third-world, that were being simultaneously courted by the Soviet Union,

played a formative role in giving credence to the idea that alliance formation was a consequential subject worthy of empirical inquiry by political scientists.

Early studies of alliances such as *Nations in Alliance* examined intra-alliance dynamics and the factors that hastened alliance formation. This study examined the processes at play "underneath the hood" of alliances that led to their development and or dissolution.<sup>14</sup> These studies drew heavily on concepts discussed in examinations of organizational behavior. William H. Riker<sup>15</sup>; Mancur Olson<sup>16</sup>; and Richard Zeckhauser<sup>17</sup> were heavily influenced by theories of collective action and coalition building in their studies on alliance formation and dissolution. Robert Endicott Osgood examined the interconnectedness of the political and military aspects of NATO in the article *NATO: The Entangling Alliance*. Osgood found that healthy civil-military relations accelerated the development of weapons systems, joint military exercises, and the eventual consolidation of NATO as an alliance.<sup>18</sup> Donald S. Zagoria examined communist alliance practices in *The Sino-Soviet Conflict and the West* and found that ideological differences amongst members of the Warsaw Pact negatively impacted alliance cohesion between member states.<sup>19</sup> Eventually, studies on alliances that drew on concepts discussed in organizational theoretical literatures would lose favor as scholars began to look anew at the systemic conditions that led states to seek security alliances to fend off threats to their national security.

Alliance politics scholars began to look anew at the international system and found that systemic factors could not be ignored in studies on alliance formation. The constant pursuit of alliances by world powers for decades led many realist scholars of alliance politics to see that

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<sup>14</sup> Liska, G. (1962). *Nations in alliance*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press [1962].

<sup>15</sup> Riker, W. H. (1962). *The Theory of Political Coalitions*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962 (1965 printing).

<sup>16</sup> Olson, M. (1965). *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965.

<sup>17</sup> Olson, M. and R. Zeckhauser (1966). "An Economic Theory of Alliances." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* (3): 266.

<sup>18</sup> Osgood, R. E. (1962). *NATO, the Entangling Alliance*, [Chicago]: University of Chicago Press, [1962].

<sup>19</sup> Zagoria, D. S. (1962). "The Sino-Soviet Conflict and the West." *Foreign Affairs* (1): 171.



power politics mattered. Louis René Beres argued that “alliance reliability was greater in bipolar systems than in multipolar ones.”<sup>20</sup> His arguments were premised on the notion that a greater number of interactions between states occur in multipolar systems that undoubtedly lead to cross-cutting loyalties that challenge alliance durability. Disagreeing with their thesis, H. Brooke McDonald and Richard R. Rosecrance studied the Bismarckian system of alliances in Europe during the 1880s and found that there "is no ineluctable tendency toward a polarized structural balance in the international system as a whole." <sup>21</sup> Their study stresses the importance of statesmen and the impact their actions can have on managing tensions between multiple states in conflict with one another.

Balance of power theory became a popular approach to studying alliance formation and dissolution. Initially, realist scholars such as Hans J. Morgenthau disputed the importance of balance of power theory arguing that it was a largely misunderstood concept that was poorly applied to studies of alliances in the international system.<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Waltz disagreed arguing that alliances were really attempts by states in balance of power systems to pool their resources in order to counter the threats posed by other states and or alliances.<sup>23</sup> Friedman et. al saw the alliance process and the political conditions that arose from it as being the primary factor underlying the stability of the balance of power system.<sup>24</sup> Waltz's ideas about balance of power systems were further developed in Michael D. Ward<sup>25</sup> and Stephen M. Walt<sup>26</sup>. In his book, *The*

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<sup>20</sup> Beres, L.R. (1972). "Bipolarity, Multipolarity, and the Reliability of Alliance Commitments." *The Western Political Quarterly* (4): 702., 703.

<sup>21</sup> McDonald, H. B. and R. Rosecrance. (1985). "Alliance and Structural Balance in the International System: A Reinterpretation." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (1): 57., 80.

<sup>22</sup> Morgenthau, H. J. (1967). *Politics Among Nations; The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York, Knopf [1967] 4th ed.

<sup>23</sup> Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., ©1979., 48.

<sup>24</sup> Friedman, J. R., C. Bladen and S. J. Rosen (1970). *Alliance in International Politics*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon [1970]., 23.

<sup>25</sup> Ward, M. D. (1982). *Basic Research Gaps in Alliance Dynamics*, Denver, Colo.: Graduate School of International Studies, University of Denver, 1982., p. 15.

*Origins of Alliances*, Walt argued that nations formed alliances, and sought to grow them, as a response to perceived threats to national security. When a threat in the international system was present, Walt argues, states would decide to either "balance" or "bandwagon" against it. Walt describes balancing behavior as "a state allying with others against an existing threat" and bandwagoning as "aligning with the source of danger."<sup>27</sup> Thomas J. Christensen & Jack Snyder examined alliance patterns among the European great powers before World War I and World War II. They use the concepts of "chain-ganging" (joining with an ally unconditionally) and "buck-passing" (free-riding off the third parties to maintain the alliance) in order to explain alliance formation behavior that precipitated each conflict.<sup>28</sup> Christensen & Snyder find that perceptions of offensive military advantage were key in giving rise to "chain-ganging" before World War I and that perceptions of defensive advantage gave rise to buck-passing trends that were observed after 1939.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Eric Gartzke argued that state perceptions were key to understanding alliance formation in the international system.<sup>30</sup> He also argued that states form alliances based on prior interactions with other states.<sup>31</sup> Perceptions are important because they have the ability to change an actors' initial beliefs in future interactions. For example, if *State A* was attacked by *State B* in a prior interaction, then it is less likely that *State A* will perceive *State B* to be a future ally in the way that it would *State C* (a nation with no record of hostilities). These studies showcased the importance of systemic conditions as well as the unique psychological factors that explain why states in alliances behave as they do.

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<sup>26</sup> Walt, S. M. (1987). *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Christensen, T. J. and J. Snyder (1990). "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity." *International Organization* (2): 137.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>30</sup> Gartzke, E. (2002). "Alliances, Perceptions, and International Politics." *Unpublished*: 43.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Systemic considerations mattered considerably less with the onset of American hegemony and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Thereafter, alliance politics scholars gave credence to both external and internal considerations in their studies concomitantly. Stephen M. Walt argued that alliances would endure or collapse depending on “rational” (it’s no longer serving the interests of both states) and “irrational” (domestic politics, personal pique, or misperception) political conditions.<sup>32</sup> For Walt, alliance institutionalization became a key metric to understanding alliances and their duration. He described the creation of “elaborate decision-making procedures and an extensive supporting bureaucracy” as factors that led alliances to endure over time.<sup>33</sup>

Many scholars examining alliance formation and dissolution have long pointed to the process of institutionalization as a consequential topic worthy of further inquiry. Broadly speaking, institutionalization refers to the process which leads alliances to transform into formal institutions.

In the process of institutionalization, an alliance will turn from a political commitment between two or more states into an organization where those commitments become formalized into a living and breathing bureaucratic structure designed (in theory) to maintain the alliance. Institutions serve as a forum for cooperation, information sharing, and political integration. Systems are put in place that allow for members of the institution to cooperate with one another as well as to air their respective grievances in policy debates. These factors minimize conflict and put members of the institution on the same page as they confront common threats and shared challenges.

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<sup>32</sup> Walt, S.M. (1997). “Why Alliances Endure or Collapse.” *Survival* (00396337) 39(1): 156-179., 156.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

Some scholars view NATO as an institution rather than a mere agreement between consenting states to combat common threats in the international system. Robert Keohane and Celeste Wallander argue that the process of institutionalization best explains NATO's continued existence in the aftermath of the Cold War.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Robert McCalla states that NATO members have adopted three strategies to ensure NATO's continued existence:

- 1) Use existing norms and procedures within NATO to deal with new problems rather than create new ones
- 2) Modify NATO as necessary, possibly including cuts and downsizing, to deal with problems that existing structures cannot
- 3) Use the regime as the basis for ties to other actors, state and non-state, in pursuit of regime goals.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, both scholars' findings were refuted by D. Scott Bennett. Bennett argued that alliance institutionalization had no impact on alliance duration and that the longer alliances existed the less likely they would be to endure over time.<sup>36</sup> In the aftermath of this debate, institutionalization became a topic that alliance politics scholars would focus on as they sought to differentiate between longstanding alliances such as NATO and other bilateral alliances observed in the international system.

Since alliance politics scholars identified institutionalization as a factor explaining alliance formation and dissolution, the process of institutionalization has come under closer examination. Institutionalization has been viewed as a panacea to prevent conflict and increase cooperation by alliance politics scholars. Geoffrey P.R. Wallace examined the impact of alliance

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<sup>34</sup> Keohane, R. and C. Wallander (1995). Contending Approaches on Security Institutions. International Studies Association Annual Convention.

<sup>35</sup> McCalla, R.B. (1996). "NATO's Persistence after the Cold War." *International Organization* (3): 445., 464.

<sup>36</sup> Bennett, D. S. (1997). "Testing Alternative Models of Alliance Duration, 1816-1984." *American Journal of Political Science* (3): 846.

institutionalization on conflict onset in the international system and found that states with greater degrees of institutionalization were less likely to go to war.<sup>37</sup> Wallace paints a picture of institutionalization as a remedy for large states to employ in order to rein in their smaller alliance counterparts that could spawn an unwanted conflict. Institutionalization became seen as being path dependent in nature and leading to closer cooperation between states that cultivated the development of institutions to tighten their alliance commitments. Ruike Xu elucidates this concept and argues that institutionalization and path dependence are key to understanding the development of the special relationship between the United States and Great Britain.<sup>38</sup> Suhnaz Yilmaz sees Turkey's admission as a member of NATO, and the subsequent institutionalization that cemented its participation in the alliance between 1945 and 1952, as being the most consequential factors that bolstered Turkey's national security, improved its ties to the west, and endured as a priority in Turkish foreign policy in future years. By applying institutional theory to the study of alliances, these scholars shifted discussions on alliance behavior towards assessments of internal processes and dynamics and away from studies focusing on systemic factors that necessitated the formation and dissolution of alliances.

### **Special Relationships & Alliance Politics**

What constitutes a 'special relationship'? At face value, the term describes a unique alliance that is different from others that a state maintains. A failure to explain the factors that distinguish "special relationships" from other alliances has led to a situation where any close alliance has been referred to as constituting a "special" relationship. Ruike Xu and Wyn Rees

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<sup>37</sup> Wallace, G. P. R. (2008). "Alliances, Institutional Design, and the Determinants of Military Strategy." Conflict Management and Peace Science (3): 224.

<sup>38</sup> Xu, R. (2016). "Institutionalization, path dependence and the persistence of the Anglo-American special relationship." International Affairs **92**(5): 1207-1228.

Yilmaz, Ş. (2012). "Turkey's quest for NATO membership: the institutionalization of the Turkish–American alliance." Journal of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies **12**(4): 481-495.

have noted that US presidents have referred to the existence of 29 special relationships.<sup>39</sup> This has had the effect of turning the term “special relationship” into a catch-all phrase without any tangible meaning. This has made it harder for scholars to discern the differences between special relationships and other types of alliances.

It is my intention to lay out the structural characteristics that define special relationships. The lack of uniformity among scholars attempting to define the parameters of the US-Israel ‘special relationship’ provides a unique opportunity to articulate a more robust definition of this unique type of geopolitical alliance. A proper definition of what constitutes a special relationship will accomplish three goals that are important for both scholars of international relations and practitioners in the field of diplomacy. First, a proper conceptualization will bring clarity to a nebulously defined concept in international politics. Scholars will be able to identify special relationships more easily. This state of affairs has been prevalent because many of the scholars that have previously written about special relationships have been concerned about developing a narrative discourse in their studies as opposed to narrowly defining the concept so that it can be studied empirically. Second, it will be easier to distinguish real special relationships from alliances that are merely referred to as such by politicians. By identifying the existence of special relationships, scholars and practitioners alike will learn more about the foreign policy priorities of states that maintain them. Third, a better understanding of how to identify special relationships will allow one to better discern consequential security, political, and economic relationships that may impact international politics in a significant way in the future.

Some scholars of alliances have viewed national security interests as the primary factor that hastens the development of special relationships. Such assessments are premised on the

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<sup>39</sup> Xu, R. and W. Rees (2018). "Comparing the Anglo-American and Israeli-American Special Relationships in the Obama Era: An Alliance Persistence Perspective." *Journal of Strategic Studies* **41**(4): 494-518., 1.

notion that America's strategic interests dictate which countries the United States pursues special relationships with. Those that see national security interests as the foundation of a special relationship believe that common security concerns are a justification that legitimizes a need to build, sustain, and improve the bilateral relationship. For example, Michael Smith argues that President George W. Bush's assertive foreign policy gave renewed salience to special relationships.<sup>40</sup> He cites Bush's cultivation of the Anglo-American and US-Poland special relationships in the run-up to America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as examples. Both countries would later become participants in President Bush's multilateral "coalition of the willing" that assisted the United States in its military incursions in the Middle East.

Ethnic and cultural factors have long intrigued scholars of special relationships. For some states, alliances are not merely pieces of paper signed between states with common interests. They are affirmations of in-group solidarity. For example, any study of the Arab League would be incomplete without ascribing some importance to the shared ethnic and cultural traits of the various member states. For example, Simon Tate states that "special relationships have been the product of a heady mixture of political expediency, cultural ties, historical legacy, geopolitical strategy and personal friendships."<sup>41</sup> Abraham Ben-Zvi describes the special relationship paradigm of the US-Israel relationship "as emanating from sentimental and emotional set of attitudes towards Jerusalem premised on moral, cultural, and religious premises rather than on geostrategic terms."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, M. (2011). European Responses to US Diplomacy: Special Relationships, Transatlantic Governance and World Order [article]: 299., 308.

<sup>41</sup> Tate, S. (2012). A special relationship? British foreign policy in the era of American Hegemony, Manchester ; New York : Manchester University Press, 2012., 5.

<sup>42</sup> Ben-Zvi, A. (1993). The United States and Israel: the limits of the special relationship, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993., 14.

Some scholars also argue that ideas have a particular salience in special relationships. Countries with similar political ideologies and founding principles may be predisposed to seeing international politics in a similar light. Such commonalities and shared principles would serve as a foundation for a special relationship to develop. One such study in this tradition, Alex Danchev argues that “belief is a major condition that is at the heart of special relationships” and that special relationships constitute “a community of beliefs.”<sup>43</sup> Danchev describes the kindred nature of Anglo-American relations at the outset of the Cold War as the peak of the Anglo-American community of beliefs. Both British and American leaders were anti-communist, capitalist, democratic, and Christian. When the Soviet Union fell and a common enemy that was the antithesis of what both states stood for no longer became a threat, he argues, Anglo-American relations hit a low-point as they did in the early 1990s. In a similar vein, David Reynolds argues that “similar interests, reinforced by a shared ideology, common language, personal contacts, and friendships help develop special relationships.”<sup>44</sup> Collectively, these scholars advance an argument in which common beliefs serve as an antecedent condition necessary for special relationships to develop. Once common beliefs are shared, the conditions for increased bilateral cooperation will naturally develop especially if a rival with an adversarial political ideology threatens both states.

### **The Anglo-American Special Relationship**

The term “special relationship” has often been used by political observers to describe an especially close state of diplomatic relations between two countries. There is no singular definition for what constitutes a ‘special relationship’ in the alliance politics literature. The

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<sup>43</sup> Danchev, A. (1998). *On specialness: essays in Anglo-American relations*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan; New York : St. Martin's Press, 1998., 593.

<sup>44</sup> Reynolds, D. (1985). "A 'special relationship'? America, Britain and the international order since the Second World War." *International Affairs* 62(1): 2, 5-6.



origins of this concept can be traced to descriptions of United States-United Kingdom relations in the aftermath of World War II. During this time, the United States sought to develop alliances in Europe to contain Soviet infiltration of the continent. To achieve these ends, the United States created the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and injected \$13 billion into the ailing European economy through the Marshall Plan.<sup>45</sup> The procurement of American support was carried out by European states to ensure “economic development and security from the United States.”<sup>46</sup>

An alliance is never a one-way street. States pursue alliances for different reasons. Some states seek security and others may seek improved economic ties. In the aftermath of World War II, Great Britain was interested in cementing closer ties with the United States so that they could sway American foreign policy in a manner that was most commensurate with their own national interests. The case of Great Britain serves as the most noteworthy example of a NATO member whose national interests were closely linked with influencing Washington’s behavior on the international stage. Prime Minister Winston Churchill felt that an especially close and robust diplomatic relationship with the United States would “bring about world peace and prosperity.”<sup>47</sup> Churchill coined the term ‘special relationship’ in his 1946 ‘Iron Curtain Speech’ in an effort to convey the mutual importance of maintaining a healthy Anglo-American bilateral relationship.<sup>48</sup> By paying homage to the importance of strong bilateral ties between the two nations, Great Britain was able to curry influence with American policymakers and the general population. In the late 1940s, with the heyday of British colonialism nearing its end, diplomats in the British

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<sup>45</sup> Weissman, A. D. (2013). "Pivotal Politics—The Marshall Plan: A Turning Point in Foreign Aid and the Struggle for Democracy." *The History Teacher* (1): 111.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, M. (2011). European Responses to US Diplomacy: Special Relationships, Transatlantic Governance and World Order [article]: 29., 306.

<sup>47</sup> Broumnd, T. R. (2016). The Special Relationship: Anglo-US Relations since 1776. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. J. Butler. Online, Oxford University Press: 2., 1.

<sup>48</sup> Churchill, W. (1946). The Sinews of Peace Speech (Iron Curtain Speech). United Kingdom, International Churchill Society.

Foreign Office sought to maintain a viable leadership presence on the international stage even though their status as a superpower was waning. This objective could only be accomplished by forging closer ties with American policymakers. This was done by developing a concerted lobbying strategy to advance British interests in the United States.

In this sense, the notion of an Anglo-American special relationship has been a device used by a declining power for trying to harness a rising power to serve its own ends.

Avoid public confrontation; seek private influence. Propitiate openly; manipulate secretly. These are the tactics of this form of alliance politics.<sup>49</sup>

British diplomats were naturally suited to work the American political system to their own benefit. They were able to relate to their American counterparts in ways few other foreign dignitaries could. British diplomats saw their American counterparts as mere images of themselves. British political elites, predominantly White Anglo-Saxon Protestants of upper class standing, saw their brethren across the Atlantic as part of an “Anglo-Saxon brotherhood”.<sup>50</sup> Both Great Britain and the United States shared a common language, form of government, ethnicity, culture, religion, and economic system. These commonalities buttressed the mutual strategic interests both countries held. These factors defined America’s first ‘special relationship’ with another state. The concept of developing and cultivating a special relationship was actualized and internalized by American policymakers after World War II. It was this experience that later led American policymakers to identify the existence of another special relationship that the United States had been slowly developing.

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<sup>49</sup>Reynolds, D. (1985). “A ‘Special Relationship’? America, Britain and the International Order Since the Second World War.” *International Affairs* 62(1): 2., 2.

<sup>50</sup> Vucetic S. (2011). "A Racialized Peace? How Britain and the US Made Their Relationship Special." *Foreign Policy Analysis* (4): 403., 4.

## **The US-Israel Special Relationship**

The Israeli-American diplomatic relationship is among the most closely followed in both countries. Scholars, policy analysts, government officials, and civilian observers alike are keenly interested in understanding the facts and circumstances surrounding the past, present, and future aspects of the relationship between the two allies. The Israeli-American diplomatic relationship is seen in Israel as the most important diplomatic relationship the Jewish state has today. In the United States, Israel is a crucial ally in the Middle East and is seen as a tremendous asset to American economic, military and cultural interests in a region where the United States has few stable and reliable allies. Common cultural, religious, political, and economic interests naturally make diplomatic relations between the United States and Israel fundamentally different from many other relationships each state maintains.

This state of affairs makes understanding the nuanced relationship between the two countries all the more important for international relations scholars and policymakers studying geopolitical alliances and the factors that impact their development in the international system. Israel and the United States are remarkably similar in many ways. Both countries have similar cultures, political institutions, economic systems, and security interests. The United States is a country founded on Judeo-Christian values. Israel is country that exists in the cradle of the biblical world and serves as the spiritual hub of three major monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Similar to Israel, the founding fathers of the United States believed in religious pluralism. George Washington famously wrote a letter to the Jewish congregation in Newport Rhode Island giving them his word that they were welcome to worship freely in the

United States. The Zionist Movement saw the state of Israel as the actualization of Jewish self-determination similar to how the early Puritans saw the United States as a "New Jerusalem." <sup>51</sup>

Both Israel and the United States are active in the other's political affairs because both states have a vested interest in ensuring that the symbiotic bilateral relationship continues as it benefits both nations. Such circumstances reflect a dynamic where each state is so concerned about the relationship that they seek allies within the other's body politic. Supporters of Israel in the United States have organized an interest group (AIPAC) that has been ranked as one of the strongest lobbying organizations in Washington. AIPAC officials regularly meet with Israeli government officials to share information and plot legislative strategies. According to Tom Dine, "Israel's domestic supporters in the United States have had tremendous success in swaying American officials to make policies favorable to Israel national interests."<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, American officials have long sought access to Israel's military hardware, strategic intelligence, and economic markets. In the international sphere, American NGOs on both the left and right of the political spectrum have sought to impact Israel's policies in the Middle East peace process and its positions on religious life. As it pertains to the peace process, American policymakers and NGOs have long pushed initiatives to determine the nature of Israel's future borders, its sovereignty over Jerusalem, and its policies towards the Palestinians. Many of the leading Jewish organization's in the United States regularly criticize domestic political decisions made in Israeli politics on contentious religious issues such as the laws of Jewish conversion and prayer rituals at the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

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<sup>51</sup> Gardner, R. S. (2002). A History of the Concepts of Zion and New Jerusalem in America from Early Colonialism to 1835 with a Comparison to the Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Department of Religious Education. Provo, Utah, Brigham Young University. **Master of Arts in Religious Education**: 149.

<sup>52</sup> Dine, T. A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

## **A Diplomatic Introduction to the US-Israel Special Relationship**

The United States formally commenced diplomatic relations with Israel in 1948 when President Harry S. Truman recognized Israel. Israel was not initially a state that policy planners in Truman's State Department saw as an ally worth cultivating a close bilateral relationship with, let alone a special relationship on par of America's relationship with Great Britain. The State Department led by Secretary of State George C. Marshall argued vehemently against helping create a Jewish state.<sup>53</sup> Truman's domestic policy advisor Clark Clifford supported the decision. This led to a showdown in the Oval Office, where Marshall confronted Truman telling him:

I said bluntly that if the President were to follow Mr. Clifford's advice and if in the elections I were to vote, I would vote against the President.<sup>54</sup>

Secretary of State George Marshall's views, and those of his contemporaries at the State Department, were premised on the notion that cultivating a close relationship with Israel would cost the United States with its Arab partners in the Middle East, pushing them further into the embrace of the Soviet Union. As Dennis Ross argues, this viewpoint, that a close relationship with Israel would cost America its relations with its Arab allies, would become conventional thinking at the State Department during both Republican and Democratic administrations.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, there was also an ethnic and political skepticism inside the intelligence community about having a close relationship with Israel due the presence of many Russian Jews habituating the country and their socialist political leanings.<sup>56</sup> Israel fought its 1948 war of Independence with arms from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union had actually been the first state to

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<sup>53</sup> Radosh, A. and R. Radosh. (2009) A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel, New York: Harper, ©2009. 1<sup>st</sup> ed.

<sup>54</sup> Holbrooke, R. (2008). Washington's Battle over Israel's Birth. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company.

<sup>55</sup> Ross, D. (2015). Doomed to succeed: the U.S.-Israel relationship from Truman to Obama, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015. First edition.

<sup>56</sup> Kahana, E. (2001). Mossad-CIA Cooperation. United States, INTEL PUBLISHING GROUP, INC.: 409.

recognize Israel at the United Nations in 1948.<sup>57</sup> Ephraim Kahana noted that James Angleton, who oversaw the Israeli portfolio at the CIA between 1951 and 1975, approached his Mossad counterparts with "respect and mistrust."<sup>58</sup>

Skepticism about Israel's allegiances in the Cold War would eventually change after Israel ceased its neutrality policy in the Korean War at the request of the United States.<sup>59</sup> The nature of the bilateral relationship between Israel and the United States would evolve over time as geopolitical circumstances in the Middle East during the Cold War led American policymakers (in the same agencies that were once skeptical of embracing Israel), to see Jerusalem as a reliable ally that could benefit American interests. The common interests shared between the two countries spawned a natural diplomatic partnership at a time when the world was divided between east and west. Throughout the Cold War, policy disputes between the two countries ensued on a range of issues related to the Middle East peace process, The Lebanon War, Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights, bombing of the Osirak nuclear facility in Iraq, Israeli settlement building in the West Bank, and the espionage mission of Jonathan Pollard. Yet in light of all of these major disagreements, and other smaller ones, the alliance between the United States and Israel blossomed into a special relationship. Despite the fact that both policymakers and experts note the existence of a special relationship between the United States and Israel, there is a lingering debate about the nature of the special relationship and the factors that make it unique in comparison to other bilateral relationships.

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<sup>57</sup> Dayan, A. (2006). The Communists Who Saved the Jewish State. *Haaretz*. Israel.

<sup>58</sup> Kahana, *Mossad-CIA Cooperation*, 410.

<sup>59</sup> She, G. (2015). "Ben-Gurion, the Korean War, and the Change in Israeli Foreign Policy." *Israelis* 7: 205-214.

## **Previous Definitions of the US-Israel Special Relationship**

The precise origins of the US-Israel ‘special relationship’ are a source of debate among scholars of US-Israel Relations. Bernard Reich argues that the United States has been linked in a special relationship with Israel even before the United States first recognized Israel in 1948.<sup>60</sup> John Dumbrell and Axel R. Schäfer trace the beginning of the US-Israel special relationship to a conversation between US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban in 1953 where Secretary Dulles stated that the United States: “ascribed to their friendship with Israel a special importance going beyond that which normally attaches to their friendship with other countries.”<sup>61</sup>

Government officials and policymakers that have participated in US-Israel relations are quick to cite the Anglo-American ‘special relationship’ as a historical parallel similar to the US-Israel ‘special relationship’. In December 1962, President John F. Kennedy told Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir that “the United States has a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East, really comparable only to that which it has with Britain over a wide range of world affairs”<sup>62</sup> Since the US-Israel bilateral relationship became referred to as a ‘special relationship’, historians and political scientists have framed discussions about the nature of the special relationship in disparate terms with differing levels of conceptual complexity. For example, a robust definition is set forth in Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov who argues that:

The special relationship thesis generally maintains that the United States and Israel have a unique and unparalleled partnership, with high levels of friendship, amity, trust, and

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<sup>60</sup> Reich, B. (1984). The United States and Israel: influence in the special relationship, New York: Praeger, c1984., viii.

<sup>61</sup> Dumbrell, J. and A. R. Schäfer (2009). America's 'special relationships': foreign and domestic aspects of the politics of alliance, London; New York: Routledge, 2009., 174.

<sup>62</sup> Gilboa, E. (1987). American Public Opinion Toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, c1987., 1.

political and military cooperation. Each side occupies a special position in the other's domestic and foreign policies. The relationship is not limited to decision makers but also involves the two societies, which ensures its endurance in times of conflict.<sup>63</sup>

A more cogent conceptualization of the term 'special relationship' is offered by scholars such as Shai Feldman, Karen Puschel, and Michael Thomas. Shai Feldman argues that the Israeli-American 'special relationship' is premised on "shared American values such as individual freedom, opportunity, a pluralistic democratic system of governance, a free enterprise economic system, and a commitment to human rights."<sup>64</sup> Karen Puschel made similar observations noting that: "Americans viewed Israel positively due similar moral and religious underpinnings and an appreciation for the common cultural, political and ideological ties between the two nations."<sup>65</sup> Michael Thomas argues that the special relationship "is a phrase used to refer to one set of explanations for favorable American policies toward Israel, in contradistinction to strategic arguments for cooperation and support."<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Stephens argues that "a shared sense of victimhood led the United States into a special relationship with Israel."<sup>67</sup> Stephens elaborates on this point by stating that both Israel and the United States have suffered over time from the militaristic actions of common enemies (Islamic fundamentalists) who have sought to exploit schisms between the Judeo-Christian West and Islamic Middle East as a means to undermine both American foreign policy in the Middle East and the legitimacy of a Jewish nation-state.

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<sup>63</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, Y., et al. (1998). "The United States and Israel since 1948: a "Special Relationship" Diplomatic History 22(ii): 231-262., 231.

<sup>64</sup> Feldman, S. (1996). The future of U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1996., 5.

<sup>65</sup> Puschel, K. L. (1993). US-Israeli strategic cooperation in the post-cold war era: an American perspective, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press; Jerusalem: Jerusalem Post, 1993, ©1992., 12.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas, M. T. (2007). American policy toward Israel: the power and limits of beliefs, London; New York : Routledge, 2007., 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> Stephens, E. (2006). US policy toward Israel: the role of political culture in defining the "special relationship", Portland OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2006., 69.



To this point, it has been established that previous definitions of 'special relationships' have yet to coalesce around a common definition. Such circumstances inhibit the ability of political scientists to study the political factors that impact their development. Some definitions may be descriptively rich, but lack clearly differentiated component parts that can be operationalized into distinct variables. Previous definitions of special relationships have also ignored the role of both formal and informal institutions as well as joint policy initiatives that both states develop to foster closer ties on foreign policy issues of mutual concern. The process which these institutions develop has yet to be elaborated on as well. Understanding the process which leads to the creation of special relationships allows scholars to better understand the differences between special relationships and other types of alliances. Understanding the size, scope and nature of the component parts of a special relationship allows one to carry out an honest assessment of the factors that lead to the development of special relationships. In order to assess the factors that develop special relationships, a definition that can be operationalized must be conceptualized.

### **The Nature of the US-Israel Special Relationship**

For the purposes of this study, I will look at the areas of strategic cooperation (military and intelligence), international diplomatic support (on nuclear policy, at international institutions, and in the Middle East peace process), as well as collaboration in the areas of trade policy and human rights. Special relationships can be differentiated from other forms of bilateral cooperation by identifying the most consequential areas of bilateral cooperation between the two governments and understanding how the nature of the policy initiatives initiated between them differ from other alliances in the international system. In this study, I will describe how each area

of collaboration in the special relationship manifests itself in the bilateral relationship and why the area of collaboration is a vital component part of the special relationship itself.

### **Strategic Support**

Cultivating a military relationship with the world's foremost superpower has been, and continues to be, a hallmark accomplishment of Israeli foreign policy. American political and military support played a formidable role in turning Israel into a regional military power. Initially, Israel did not receive arms from the United States as an embargo existed under Truman and Eisenhower. The weapons Israel used to win the 1948 War of Independence came from Czechoslovakia and those used to wage the Six Day War in 1967 came mostly from the French and British.<sup>68</sup> The existence of a potential strategic relationship with the United States was realized after Israel saved the American-backed Hashemite regime in Jordan from collapse in 1970. American resolve to maintain the budding strategic partnership was tested during the Yom Kippur War of 1973. After Israeli forces were pushed back from their fortifications on the Suez Canal by Egypt, and simultaneously attacked on the Golan Heights by Syria, the Nixon Administration airlifted 22,395 pounds of military aid to Israel in an unprecedented show of support from the United States.<sup>69</sup>

The parameters of the strategic relationship would grow over time and evolve as both Israel and the United States adapted to shifting geopolitical conditions in the Middle East. The core elements of the strategic relationship were premised on military and intelligence cooperation. On the military side of the equation, America would allow Israel to purchase top-notch American weapons systems, with preferable financial arrangements, that would incentivize

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<sup>68</sup> Shoval, Z., (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>69</sup> Wambold, A. (2014). "Operation Nickel Grass: Turning Point of the Yom Kippur War ", 2018, from <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2014/10/operation-nickel-grass-turning-point-yom-kippur-war/>.

growth in the Israeli economy in general, and the Israeli defense industry in particular.<sup>70</sup> This tacit agreement, referred to as *Israel's Qualitative Military Edge*, became an informal institution that served as the foundation of the US-Israeli strategic relationship during the Cold War. Not only was this arrangement beneficial to Israeli interests, but it also had a positive impact on the United States for the following reasons:

- 1) Israel would receive weapons systems from the United States (that it could not build itself) and retrofit them with its own advanced technology.
- 2) Israel would receive a guarantee that its Arab adversaries would not be sold technology from the United States that was of higher quality than was sold to Israel.
- 3) Providing Israel with a qualitative edge ensured that Israel would become dependent on American weapons systems since the United States controlled access to the maintenance services and spare parts of the weapons it sold to Israel.
- 4) The United States, as opposed to European nations such as Great Britain and France, would maintain dominance of the Israeli arms market as an American relationship would negate Israeli use of European arms and systems.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, Israel became a reliable partner that would provide the United States with captured Soviet weapons and high-tech weapons and weapons systems that American firms had yet to produce. For example, Israel provided the United States with a captured MiG-21 fighter jet it obtained when an Iraqi fighter pilot defected in 1966, over a thousand Egyptian and Syrian T-54 and T-55 tanks, a complete Egyptian SA-6 surface-to-air missile battery, and even an entire advanced Soviet P-12 radar system.<sup>72</sup> Such actions were also a major propaganda coup for the

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<sup>70</sup> Meridor, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>71</sup> Zakheim, D. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>72</sup> Ofek, R. (2018). Israel's Intelligence Contribution to US Security: The Cold War Years. BESA Center Perspectives Tel Aviv, Israel, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies., 2.

United States during the Cold War for two reasons. First, it provided proof that American weapons were superior to Soviet arms thus benefitting the American arms industry. Second, it convinced countries that remained neutral in the Cold War that the United States could do a better job protecting them than the Soviet Union could. Third, the battlefields in the Levant would also prove to be valuable testing grounds for Israeli military systems that were then sold to the United States. The first Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) purchased by the United States from Israel, *The Tadiran Mastiff*, was successfully used in the Lebanon War by the Israeli Defense Forces. In future years, the Tadiran Mastiff was later deployed in battlefield surveillance missions by the US Marine Corps.<sup>73</sup>

### **The Three Legs of Diplomatic Support for Israeli Foreign Policy**

#### **Diplomatic Support for Israel's Nuclear Program**

Israel is routinely targeted for criticism at the UN and in other international forums for its nuclear ambiguity policy. Publicly, the Israeli government neither confirms nor denies that it has nuclear weapons. This position is referred to as Israel's policy of *nuclear ambiguity*. Initially, Israel came under scrutiny from the Kennedy Administration for the build-up of its Dimona Nuclear facility and its refusal to adhere to the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) safeguards regime.<sup>74</sup> It was not until 1969 that the Nixon Administration would develop an ambiguous stance on Israel's nuclear program and relax its demands to rigorously inspect Israel's nuclear facility at Dimona.<sup>75</sup> Nixon's decision to tacitly accept Israel's position on nuclear weapons ensured that future American presidents would either neglect the existence of the

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<sup>73</sup> Zakheim, D. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>74</sup> Kennedy Jr., J. F. (1963). Letter to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion Regarding Visit to Dimona. Department of State. Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office. **Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963**: V. XVIII.

<sup>75</sup> Oren, A. (2014). Declassified Documents Reveal How U.S. Agreed to Israel's Nuclear Program. Haaretz. Israel.

program entirely, or tacitly endorse its value as an extended deterrent of American interests in the Middle East.

A crucial cornerstone of American political support for Israel would go by the wayside if the United States outed Israel as a nuclear weapons state. Because the United States has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, any admission by the United States of the existence of Israel's nuclear program would lead to a suspension of American military aid and potential economic sanctions. It would also erode international norms that frown on nuclear weapons development that the United States brought to fruition after World War II. Thereafter, any other ally of the United States that was interested in obtaining nuclear weapons would come to question why the United States would not endorse a nuclear program for their country. If the United States actively pursued a policy to remove and or inspect Israel's nuclear facilities, Jerusalem would find itself estranged from its biggest arms supplier and subjected to intense political pressure that may force its leaders to relinquish a weapon that has been a cornerstone of Israeli security and deterrence in the Middle East since the late 1950s. For these reasons, the ambiguity policy enacted under Nixon has remained in place.

### **Diplomatic Support in International Institutions**

Israel's policies towards the Arab world in general, and the Palestinians in particular, have remained a permanent fixture on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) as the Palestinian cause remains a priority for the international community. To blunt international criticism, the United States has traditionally acted as Israel's protectorate by voting against or vetoing anti-Israel resolutions at the UN and other international forums. These efforts became especially important for Israel after the passage of UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 in November of 1975. UNGAR 3379

declared that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination."<sup>76</sup> The passage of UNGAR 3379 was a major moral and political setback for Israel and its supporters at the UN, as the resolution's passage effectively equated Israel's national ethos with racism. Such efforts were a part of a calculated strategy by the Palestinian Liberation Organization and its supporters in the non-aligned bloc.

Actions criticizing Israel at the United Nations had three specific consequences for Israel's national interests. First, it created the potential for Israeli decision-makers to be arrested abroad and brought before international tribunals for war crimes. The notion that an Israeli Prime Minister or emissary could be arrested in a foreign country would be a serious blow to Israel's legitimacy as a nation-state and its standing in the international community. Second, it could harm Israel's trade relations with countries across the globe and inhibit its efforts to procure arms from its allies in the west. The Arab League Boycott of Israel after the Yom Kippur War in 1973 was a harrowing experience for Israel. It was but one instance of an international boycott, if replicated on a broader scale, which could have posed an existential threat to Israel's economy. Third, it would inhibit Israel's ability to benefit from participation in multilateral institutions. If the Arab and Islamic states and their allies in the non-aligned bloc made Israel's policies towards the Palestinians a litmus test for their participation in an international organization, it would negatively impact Israel's ability to collaborate with other countries in the international community. Such a contingency would put intense pressure on Israeli leaders to make concessions to the Palestinians in the peace process its leaders may be reluctant to make in order to alleviate the international isolation.

Throughout the history of the UN, Israel's adversaries have abused forums such as IAEA, UNESCO, and the UNHRC (where Israel is a permanent fixture on the institution's agenda).

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<sup>76</sup> U.N. General Assembly. Resolution 3379. G. Assembly. New York, NY, United Nations. **Thirtieth Session**

These abuses materialize in the form of anti-Israel resolutions, challenging the credentials of Israeli diplomats, and pressure campaigns designed to prevent Israeli diplomats from obtaining key leadership positions in the UN. Because of such efforts, Israel has yet to serve as a member of the Security Council.<sup>77</sup> No Israeli citizen has ever been appointed to a senior management position at UN headquarters in New York even though Israel has been a member of the UN since 1948. Due to these challenges, Israel has had a precarious position at the United Nations. Israel has needed to maintain the support of a permanent member of the Security Council to ensure that it can participate in international institutions without the threat of being sanctioned.

Many states in the Non-Aligned Movement and Arab League lack formal diplomatic relations with Israel. Such circumstances mean that these countries oftentimes vote in a single bloc that automatically sides against Israel on a range of issues from the legitimacy of its nuclear program to its policies towards the Palestinians. This has made the preservation of American political cover at the UN a vital priority for Israeli diplomats. Without American support, Israel and its supporters believe that it could become the target of an international pressure campaign comparable to the one waged against South Africa by the international community during the 1980s and subjected to additional anti-Israel resolutions akin to UNGAR 3379.

### **Diplomatic Support in the Middle East Peace Process**

The special relationship between the United States and Israel is premised on close international diplomatic cooperation between the two allies in the Middle East peace process. Although the degree of support for Israeli positions has varied across administrations, the United States has long sought to preserve its status as a third-party mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Israel has sought out US support as a third-party mediator in the Middle East peace

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<sup>77</sup> U.N. Security Council (2018). "Countries Never Elected to the Security Council." Retrieved November 5, 2018, from <http://www.un.org/en/sc/members/notelected.asp>.

process because without the support of the world's largest superpower, the international community would likely seek to impose a peace agreement on Israel that would be unfavorable to its national interests. Every Israeli government has sought to avoid a nightmare scenario where outside powers hostile to Israel's interests leverage their collective powers at the United Nations to enshrine into international law the final-status terms of an Israeli-Palestinian accord. Israel has long sought American assurances that international conferences on the Arab-Israeli Conflict are either prevented or commenced with the explicit promise that they are not designed to dictate final-status terms to Israel. Absent American support in the Middle East peace process, international pressures, rather than Israeli domestic political considerations, could shape the terms of a future peace agreement. Such a scenario would mitigate the agency that democratically elected officials and their constituents in Israel have over their own sovereign affairs. America's commitment to serve as a third-party mediator in the Middle East peace process has been critical to preventing other states from determining Israel's borders, its sovereignty over Jerusalem, and its future demographics.

### **Trade**

Economic relations have played a major role in shaping the nature of the relationship between the United States and Israel. In Israel's early years, its economy was moribund and largely dependent on development assistance from western countries such as France, Great Britain, and Germany. The economic relationship was largely one-sided. For instance, "US aid to Israel between 1948 and 1965 averaged \$63 million per year, of which 95 percent was for economic development and food."<sup>78</sup> Unlike most Middle East countries, Israel does not have

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<sup>78</sup> Nathanson, R. and R. Mandelbaum. (2012). *Aid and Trade: Economic Relations between the United States and Israel, 1948-2010. Israel and the United States: Six Decades of US-Israeli Relations*. R. O. Freedman. Boulder, CO, Westview Press., 126.



vast oil reserves or lucrative natural resources it can sell to fuel America's industrial base. In Israel's earliest years, it was predominantly an agriculture-based economy with few lucrative exports or preferential trading agreements. After fighting wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982, Israeli defense spending took up a large part of Israel's domestic expenditures. In addition to maintaining a bloated defense budget, subsequent Israeli governments maintained irresponsible monetary and fiscal policies that were unsustainable over the long-term. By the early 1980s, the collective weight of these poor decisions had led Israel to become a country plagued with hyper-inflation, a currency crisis, and weak exports.

The United States played a consequential role in rescuing Israel's economy from the brink of collapse when it created the Joint Economic Development Group (JEDG) in 1985 as a means to jointly collaborate on an economic stabilization plan package that would solve Israel's economic maladies. Generous amounts of foreign aid were given by the United States on friendly terms that ensured that Israel would make major domestic reforms to its fiscal and monetary policies without incurring significant risk in the process. Loans were turned into grants and provided to Israel on favorable negotiating terms in future years. The United States and Israel signed a free trade agreement as part of the economic stabilization package in 1985. In the wake of its implementation, Israeli exports to the United States rose by 200%.<sup>79</sup> Through increased trade with the United States, and the implementation of sound fiscal policy, the Israeli economy reversed its downward trajectory.

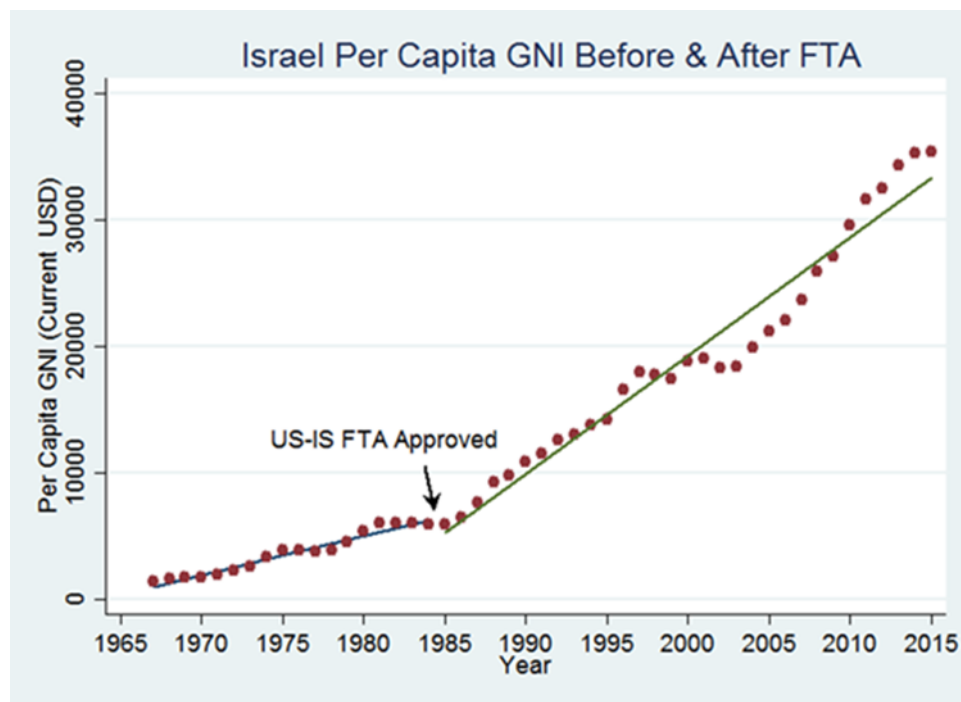
In the wake of the creation of the JEDG and the signing of the US Israel Free Trade Area Agreement, over a decade's worth of sustained economic growth would come to fruition. American financial assistance changed Israel from a donor state to an exporter. The following

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas, M.T. (2007). American policy toward Israel: the power and limits of beliefs. London; New York : Routledge, 2007., 4.

graph showcases domestic economic growth in Israel, measured in per capita Gross National Income (GNI), that occurred after the fiscal stabilization package and the US-Israel Free Trade Area Agreement were signed in 1985.

**FIGURE 1**



As part of the economic stabilization package, the United States gave Israel permission to use American foreign military assistance to subsidize its own domestic arms industry. Foreign military sales abroad have long been vital to the health of Israel's export sector and its economy as a whole. This policy would significantly impact Israel's economy and its national defense.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Meridor, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. [University of Georgia](#). L. Lukoff.

American generosity towards the Israeli armaments industry had a multiplier effect that assisted Israel's economic, military, and political interests concomitantly for three reasons. First, it provided a fiscal stimulus to a major industry in Israel's domestic economy that was also vital to preserving Israel's national security. Second, it allowed Israel to subsidize its defense exports so that it would profit from the sales at higher rates. Third, the healthier Israel's defense export sector was, the easier it would become for Israel to cement new strategic partnerships with countries outside of the Middle East and mitigate the likelihood that Israel would become isolated in the global economy because of its policies in the peace process.

Americans of all three major Abrahamic faiths remain connected with Israel for spiritual and religious reasons. This leads to regular pilgrimages from faith-based groups in the United States that play a crucial role in keeping Israel's tourism and hospitality industry afloat economically. Israel's domestic economy is enabled by the fact that American Jews, Christians, and Muslims regularly travel to Israel to see sites such as the Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. A large presence of American Jews, both religious and non-religious, spend time or reside permanently as dual-citizens in Israel. These individuals act as an informal bridge between the two countries both culturally and economically. Their existence is inextricably linked to the trade relationship between the two countries.

Today, American mega-corporations such as Coca-Cola, McDonalds, and Exxon Mobil dot Israel's landscape. Facebook, Google, Apple, and other Silicon Valley start-ups maintain research and development facilities in Israel. This has occurred in no small part because Israel's technological sector has blossomed since the economic stabilization package was implemented in 1984 in areas such as computing, agriculture, military, water, and medical technology. The growth of Israel's economy in these areas has created a situation where Israel no longer needs

foreign economic assistance from the United States and can tout itself as a trade partner rather than a patron-state to American policymakers.

While the American-Israeli trade relationship is consequential to both countries in general, the relationship itself is far more consequential to the Israeli economy as a whole in particular. The United States economy as a whole could survive without unimpeded access to Israeli markets. However, the health of the Israeli economy would be severely hampered if trade barriers to the American market were implemented. In the past, American presidents that have sought to limit trade relations with Israel (by cutting aid or threatening sanctions) have done so out of a belief that pressure on the Israeli economy would compel Israeli leaders to make concessions to the Palestinians that they may be unwilling to make on their own accord. Today, critics of the Israeli government in the United States and abroad have called for a boycott of goods produced in Israeli settlements. They have done this because they see the reduction of trade in Israel as an effective lever to enact pressure against the Israeli government to change its policies. Israel's most strident critics have started an international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against the Israeli government, businesses, and civil society groups in an effort to use economic pressures as a means to hasten the creation of a Palestinian state. Supporters of the BDS movement have cited international pressures brought to bear on South Africa in the 1980s as a model to apply on Israel today.<sup>81</sup>

Subsequent Israeli governments have sought to avert punitive economic measures from the United States by touting the importance of the trade relationship to American policymakers through public diplomacy efforts and the development of bilateral organizations designed to promote US-Israeli trade. For example, the Israeli embassy in Washington touts the fact that U.S.

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<sup>81</sup> Boycott Divestment Sanctions Movement (2018). "Overview: What is BDS?". from <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds>

companies make up two-thirds of the more than three-hundred foreign-invested research and development centers in Israel, while Israeli companies maintain the second-largest source of foreign listings on the NASDAQ after China.<sup>82</sup> NGOs such as the Association of America-Israel Chambers of Commerce and formal working groups such as the Binational Industrial Research and Development (BIRD) Foundation and the US-Israel Binational Agricultural Research and Development (BARD) Fund have been enacted to cement economic ties between business leaders in both countries. For these reasons, a robust trade relationship has become a vital component of the US-Israel special relationship. The health of the trade relationship, and the degree to which American policymakers seek to alter it to wrestle concessions from Israel in the peace process, is oftentimes a bellwether for the overall health of the bilateral relationship.

### **Human Rights**

What role do human rights play in American foreign policy? Early studies answering this question focused on fiscal considerations and the degree to which they impacted decision-making. Studies in this tradition include *Human rights and U.S. foreign assistance from Nixon to Carter*<sup>83</sup>; *The Role of Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Assistance Policy: A Critique and Reappraisal*<sup>84</sup>; *Human Rights Practices and the Distribution of U.S. Foreign Aid to Latin American Countries*<sup>85</sup>; and *Do Human Rights Matter in Bilateral Aid Allocation? A Quantitative Analysis of 21 Donor Countries*.<sup>86</sup> Collectively, these studies focused on the impact that human rights abuses had on U.S. foreign aid allocations. These early studies found that human rights

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<sup>82</sup> United States Embassy in Israel (2018). Fact Sheet U.S. – Israel Economic Relationship. <https://il.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/fact-sheet-u-s-israel-economic-relationship/>

<sup>83</sup> Stohl, M., D. Carleton and S. E. Johnson (1984). *Human rights and U.S. foreign assistance from Nixon to Carter*.

<sup>84</sup> Carleton, D. and M. Stohl (1987). "The Role of Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Assistance Policy: A Critique and Reappraisal." *American Journal of Political Science* (4): 1002.

<sup>85</sup> Cingranelli, D. L. and T. E. Pasquarello (1985). "Human Rights Practices and the Distribution of U.S. Foreign Aid to Latin American Countries." *American Journal of Political Science* 29(3): 539.

<sup>86</sup> Neumayer, E. (2003). "Do Human Rights Matter in Bilateral Aid Allocation? A Quantitative Analysis of 21 Donor Countries." *Social Science Quarterly* (3): 650.

practices have no practical implication in influencing decision-making on U.S. foreign aid allocations. While focused on elite-decision-making, these studies eschewed a focus on the impact that human rights can have on non-economic issues such as dissidents and refugees. They also neglected the role of domestic politics, and interest groups that play a role in shaping human rights policy in the United States. While providing us with meaningful understanding of the impact that human rights have on foreign aid allocations, these studies did not look specifically at how the United States linked economic incentives that were not foreign aid allocations (such as Most-Favored Nation status under GATT) to make human rights policy decisions.

The cause of human rights has also been seen as a harbinger of American values. A. Glenn Mower argues that presidents have taken up human rights considerations because they represent American moral values and American interests.<sup>87</sup> Colin Peterson argues that presidents take an internationalist approach that focuses on human rights on the macro (national boundaries) and micro (within societies) levels simultaneously.<sup>88</sup> Policymakers oftentimes see moral considerations embodied in human rights laws as being consequential to distinguish democracies and free societies from brutal authoritarian regimes as well. For example, Elliot Abrams (former Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs) noted that “the cause of human rights allowed the United States to maintain moral clarity over the Soviet Union during the Cold War.”<sup>89</sup>

Human rights issues regularly confront American presidents and their foreign policy advisors. The United States is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and

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<sup>87</sup> Mower, A. G. (1987). Human rights and American foreign policy: The Carter and Reagan experiences, New York: Greenwood Press, c1987.

<sup>88</sup> Peterson, C. (2012). Globalizing human rights: private citizens, the Soviet Union, and the West, New York: Routledge, 2012.

<sup>89</sup> Abrams, E. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

many other international conventions and human rights treaties. The State Department regularly publishes country-wide human rights reports and conducts data gathering activities on human rights abuses in every country on a frequent basis. Outside actors interested in influencing human rights policy oftentimes form interest groups take up the cause of their countrymen abroad in the United States. Political activists from such groups regularly lobby administration officials to make diplomatic overtures or public statements against the regimes of countries committing human rights violations. Similarly, they also lobby members of congress to pass laws that acknowledge human rights abuses by individual states. These actions are usually given added weight from testimonials provided by subject matter experts, and even ex-dissidents, at oversight hearings in the House and Senate Foreign Relations Committees.

Some countries are even sanctioned for their human rights abuses when their leaders fall out of the good graces of American officials. However, this is not always a certainty. Some nations that also abuse human rights, but are strategic allies of the United States, may have their violations glossed over or ignored altogether. For example, the United States was harshly criticized before the International Criminal Court for supporting the regime of Augusto Pinochet in Chile as he tortured thousands of his political opponents and their supporters. Pinochet earned the good graces of American policymakers because he was a staunch anti-communist leader who supported capitalism in a region with many Marxist-Leninist regimes backed by the Soviet Union. Such policies have the practical effect of linking the United States to the practices of regimes that have values and systems of government that are 180 degrees different from America's political institutions.

The topic of human rights is one area of American foreign policy that each president must confront. The federal government's legal responsibilities on human rights, and the moral

standing that American presidents strive to maintain as the leader of the free world, have led human rights concerns to become an area of American foreign policy that is a staple in its bilateral relationships with other nations. Many American politicians often espouse the virtues of American democracy and the benefits of our economic system and culture. The degree to which the United States holds other countries up to its standards are closely observed by foreign governments, NGOs, and individual citizens around the world.

The cause of human rights has also played a major role in defining the U.S.-Israel special relationship. Political support for Israel in the United States has been framed in human rights terms by subsequent American presidents dating back to the Truman administration. Support for Israel has been seen by subsequent American presidents as a means of defending the civil rights and religious liberties of Jews that were once subjected to the atrocities of the Holocaust during World War II and pogroms in Soviet bloc countries and the Arab Middle East.

As the fate of diaspora Jewish communities suffering inside the Soviet Union and Ethiopia appeared on the radar of American policymakers during the Cold War, the State Department took actions to ensure their safety by facilitating emigration to Israel and other Western states. According to Dr. Josef Olmert, who worked on securing the release of both diaspora communities as an aide to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, American support for the Soviet and Ethiopian Jews during the Cold War “boosted Israel’s confidence and proved the relevance of Zionism.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Olmert, Dr. J. (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.



## Operationalization of Variables

For this objective, this study will conceptualize a ‘special relationship’ as:

*A qualitatively different bilateral relationship, from others a state maintains, that is a product of institutionalized (formal or informal) bilateral policy agreements on matters pertaining to strategic cooperation on military and intelligence issues as well as international diplomacy, trade, and human rights.*

In this study, I will look at institutionalized bilateral policy outcomes in each area of the U.S.-Israel special relationship. Each policy outcome will be identified by identifying the variables and causal mechanisms that led to its creation. Policy outcomes are conceptualized as being:

*Bilateral agreements or policy initiatives that were implemented and institutionalized in a formal or informal agreement between Israel and the United States* .

The policy outcomes documented between 1981 and 1989, in each component of the special relationship, will be assessed:

Policy Outcome 1A: Strategic cooperation agreements on military issues

Policy Outcome 1B: Intelligence sharing and covert action collaboration

Policy Outcome 2A: America’s ambiguity policy toward Israel’s nuclear program

Policy Outcome 2B: American diplomatic support for Israel in international institutions

Policy Outcome 2C: American diplomatic support for Israel in the Middle East peace process

Policy Outcome 3: The U.S.-Israel Free Trade Area Agreement and Israeli economic growth

Policy Outcome 4: Soviet Jewish emigration rates between 1981 and 1989

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **The Independent Variable: The President of the United States**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I provide a roadmap of previous studies on foreign policy decision-making in order to better understand the existing literature on the subject. Studies examining the personal belief systems of individual policymakers have long been performed by political scientists seeking to better understand the factors that impact foreign policy decision-making in the international system. I discuss Ronald Reagan's foreign policy beliefs and how they shaped his foreign policy towards Israel. Previous literature about the US-Israel relationship is discussed in order to provide context to Reagan's unique approach to the bilateral relationship relative to his predecessors. I then identify beliefs that Ronald Reagan held on specific policy topics relevant to U.S.-Israel relations, before his presidency, as a means to create a baseline to measure the nature of the impact the beliefs had on specific policy outcomes observed in the bilateral relationship.

#### **The International System and Foreign Policy Decision-Making**

Political scientists have long debated the factors impacting the various foreign policies of individual countries in the international system going back to Thucydides. Debates about the factors determining foreign policy in the international system were long dominated by grand theorists in international relations literature, which focused first and foremost on structural conditions in the international system. Premised on an assumption that states are rational actors

that seek to maximize their own utility, “neorealist” scholars such as Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer have long argued that states act as security seekers in a zero-sum game based on relative power. Neorealist literature (Morgenthau<sup>91</sup>; Waltz<sup>92</sup>; Mearsheimer<sup>93</sup>) focuses on the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis and sees other variables, such as domestic politics and individual leaders, as inconsequential to understand how states behave in the international system. Political realism became a favored theory among policymakers in the United States after Secretary of State Henry Kissinger popularized the theory during the 1960s and 1970s.

Neoclassical realists sought to redefine realism to account for factors that had been ignored in previous neo-realist assessments of state behavior. In a compilation of essays published in 2009, Stephen E. Lobell, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Norrin Ripsman advanced the theory of neo-classical realism.<sup>94</sup> Collectively, neo-classical realist scholars argued that a state’s foreign policy is driven not only by systemic level conditions and a state’s relative material capabilities, but also by variables within the state. Neo-classical realists saw utility in carrying out studies on variables such as decision-makers, elites, institutions, domestic politics, state resources, ideology, regime type, and public opinion. Neo-classical realism shifted debates among international relations theorists away from systemic level conditions in favor of integrative theories that mixed systemic and unit-level variables in studies of state behavior. Neo-classical realists created an intellectual climate that allowed for political scientists to consider leaders and their behavioral tendencies in future studies.

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<sup>91</sup> Morgenthau, H. J. (1967). Politics among nations; the struggle for power and peace, New York, Knopf [1967] 4th ed.

<sup>92</sup> Waltz, K. N. (1979). Theory of international politics, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., ©1979.

<sup>93</sup> Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). The tragedy of Great Power politics, New York: Norton, ©2001.

<sup>94</sup> Lobell, S. E., N. M. Ripsman and J. W. Taliaferro (2009). Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy, Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Not all scholars saw the utility of adding new corollaries to realism or other grand theories that had become popular in political science literature such as constructivism (Hopf<sup>95</sup>; Wendt<sup>96</sup>) and neoliberalism (Moravcsik<sup>97</sup>). David Lake argued that political scientists should eschew a focus on grand theory in favor of mid-level theories of specific phenomena in the international system.<sup>98</sup> As international relations scholars began to look anew at mid-level theories, many came to question the core tenets of realism and the factors that shaped foreign policy in their assessments of the international system. For example, Byman and Pollack argued that neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz were wrongheaded in assuming that human nature was a constant, and therefore useless in explaining why states go to war.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, studies critiquing the rational actor model that underlined realist theories became popular among “behaviorist” scholars. These scholars sought to provide psychological explanations that could be studied empirically which showed that human agency was consequential in the foreign policymaking process of individual states and that Machiavellian assumptions about the motivations of state behavior made by realists were misguided.

### **Early Studies of the Individual and Foreign Policy Decision-Making**

Many of the most noteworthy studies in international politics have been premised on the rational actor model which effectively assumes that individual leaders are interchangeable and will make similar decisions if placed in comparable situations. The assumptions inherent in the rational actor model, that individuals make transitive choices premised on an expected utility

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<sup>95</sup> Hopf, T. (1998). "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory." International Security (1): 171.

<sup>96</sup> Wendt, A. (1995). "Constructing International Politics." International Security (1): 71.

<sup>97</sup> Moravcsik, A. (1997). "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics." International Organization (4): 513.

<sup>98</sup> Lake, D. A. (2011). "Why 'isms' Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress." International Studies Quarterly (2): 465.

<sup>99</sup> Byman, D. L. and K. M. Pollack (2001). "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In." International Security (4): 107.

function, is rarely challenged. This has led to fewer studies taking place on individual leaders in general, and the impact of political psychology in foreign policy decision-making more specifically. Such circumstances effectively inhibited the ability of scholars to measure, and assess, psychological characteristics in their assessments of foreign policy outcomes in the international system. Fewer studies on the role that political psychology played in international relations took place at a time when policymakers, which were acting as participant-observers, witnessed the president and his closest advisors acting as driving forces guiding American foreign policy decision-making.

Studies that departed from the rational-actor model took off when then contemporary behavioral scholars, who oftentimes published in mediums such as *Political Psychology*, started to examine variables “within the state.” By focusing on variables at the sub-state level, these scholars continued a tradition of research that had previously been popular among historians and psychologists inspired by the work of early psychoanalysts. Early historians and political scientists interested in studying the psychological dynamics of individual world leaders performed what became known as “at-a-distance” studies. As Byman & Pollack note, understanding individuals will give one a better idea about the strategies of a state and the reaction of other nations to a state’s foreign policy decisions.<sup>100</sup> “At a distance studies” used psychoanalytical tools to make sense of the role that historical events played in shaping the worldviews of elite decision-makers. These early “psycho-biographers,” as they became known, did not know the individual leader being studied on a personal level. Early psycho-biographers, such as Sigmund Freud, were more broadly focused on pinpointing salient life experiences that were “unusual, abnormal or pathological” that had the potential to shed light on the reasons why

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

leaders made key political decisions later on in life.<sup>101</sup> Hanns Sachs's study of Otto von Bismarck's dreams and the underlying factors that influenced his pursuit of German reunification was the first major attempt to unpack previous life experiences and their impact on policy decisions made later on.<sup>102</sup> Likewise, George & George's study of Woodrow Wilson's phenomenology set the methodological foundation for future studies on foreign policy elites.<sup>103</sup> In performing at-a-distance studies, psychobiographer Jerold Post recommended the following advice:

Finally, successful psychobiographers must have an appreciation for complexity, realizing that the personality of any political actor is always expressed in a context - that is, in institutional variables, situational variables, and those aspects of political culture that the leader has internalized during the course of his or her political socialization or that affect his or her performance even if not internalized.<sup>104</sup>

Psycho-biographers changed their methodological approach by adopting a more holistic approach that looked at various attributes unique to each decision-maker. Instead of focusing on a single event, a new generation of behaviorist scholars performed studies that sought to unveil the component parts of an individual's decision-making calculus and the factors that were most clearly linked to foreign policy decision-making behavior. Stephen G. Walker's study of Henry Kissinger's conduct during the Vietnam War linked Kissinger's beliefs with the foreign policy choices he made in negotiations with the North Vietnamese.<sup>105</sup> During the Vietnam War,

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<sup>101</sup> Post, J.M. (2003). *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders: With Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, c2003., 13.

<sup>102</sup> Sachs, H. (1913). "Ein Traum Bismarcks (A Dream of Bismarcks)." *Internationale Zeitschrift Fur Psychoanalyse* I: 80-98.

<sup>103</sup> George, A. L. and J. L. George (1956). *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: a personality study*, New York: J. Day Co., [1956].

<sup>104</sup> Post, *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders: With Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton*, 20.

<sup>105</sup> Walker, S. G. (1977). "The Interface between Beliefs and Behavior: Henry Kissinger's Operational Code and the

Kissinger was a major policy actor whose beliefs played a formative role in shaping the policy outcomes that came about after the negotiations with the North Vietnamese. From this study, elite beliefs became viewed as a potential causal mechanism that could play a role in policy formation and implementation. Other studies focusing on the psyche of individual presidents (Barber<sup>106</sup>; Post<sup>107</sup>; Cottam<sup>108</sup>) and presidential advisers (Holsti<sup>109</sup>) continued in this tradition.

Early psycho-biographers attempted to explain the visible differences between leaders by describing key life experiences and the impact they had in shaping an individual leader's worldview and policy choices. Collectively, they only scratched the surface in explaining the complex nature of the internal factors that shape elite decision-making behavior. Early psycho-biographies were criticized for lacking scientific rigor as these studies were mostly premised on anecdotal evidence gathered from secondary sources. Because they did not have access to their subjects of study, the findings produced in these studies were criticized for being too subjective and unscientific. Despite such flaws, these early studies had the effect of shifting future discussions in international relations towards the topic of political psychology and foreign policy decision-making behavior. Conceptualizing and operationalizing the various psychological phenomena observed in historical studies and qualitative at-a-distance studies subsequently became the focus of future scholarship.

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Vietnam War." The Journal of Conflict Resolution (1): 129.

<sup>106</sup> Barber, J. D. (1972). The presidential character; predicting performance in the White House, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall [1972].

<sup>107</sup> Post, *The psychological assessment of political leaders: with profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton*, 13.

<sup>108</sup> Cottam, R. W. (1977). Foreign policy motivation: a general theory and a case study, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, ©1977.

<sup>109</sup> Holsti, O. R. (1962). "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study." The Journal of Conflict Resolution (3): 244.

## Contemporary Studies of the Individual and Foreign Policy Decision-Making

### Operational Code Analysis

Psychoanalytic studies of individual foreign policy elites gradually fell out of favor as political scientists moved away from carrying out individual case studies. Contemporary behavioral studies in political science can trace their roots to 1953 when Nathan Leites published *A Study on Bolshevism*.<sup>110</sup> A core portion of Leites's book inspired Alexander L. George to pioneer the operational code approach. Studies using operational code analysis (George<sup>111</sup>; Walker<sup>112</sup>; Johnson<sup>113</sup>; Walker<sup>114</sup>; Walker & Falkowski<sup>115</sup>; Walker, Schafer, Young<sup>116</sup>; Marfleet<sup>117</sup>; Renshon<sup>118</sup>) focused on an individual's core and instrumental beliefs, collective life experiences, and the ways in which these factors shape an individual leader's decision-making behavior. Operational code studies would oftentimes focus on a series of events and the degree to which these formative experiences shaped future political decisions. These studies were executed through qualitative or quantitative content analysis of an individual leader's public statements and policy positions without referencing psychoanalytic techniques used in prior studies.<sup>119</sup> The

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<sup>110</sup> Leites, N. (1953). *A Study of Bolshevism*. Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press [1953], 1953.

<sup>111</sup> George, A. L. (1969). "The "Operational Code": A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making." *International Studies Quarterly* 13(2): 190.

<sup>112</sup> Walker, S. G. (1977). "The Interface between Beliefs and Behavior: Henry Kissinger's Operational Code and the Vietnam War." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (1): 129.

<sup>113</sup> Johnson, L. K. (1977). Operational Codes and the Prediction of Leadership Behavior: Senator Frank Church at Midcareer. *A Psychological Examination of Political Leaders*. M. G. a. T. W. M. Hermann. New York, NY, Free Press: 82-119.

<sup>114</sup> Walker, S. G. (1983). "The Motivational Foundations of Political Belief Systems: A Re-Analysis of the Operational Code Construct." *International Studies Quarterly* (2): 179.

<sup>115</sup> Walker, S. G. and L. S. Falkowski (1984). "The Operational Codes of U.S. Presidents and Secretaries of State: Motivational Foundations and Behavioral Consequences." *Political Psychology* (2): 237.

<sup>116</sup> Walker, S. G., M. Schafer and M. D. Young (1999). "Presidential Operational Codes and Foreign Policy Conflicts in the Post-Cold War World." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (5): 610.

<sup>117</sup> Marfleet, B. G. (2000). "The Operational Code of John F. Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis: A Comparison of Public and Private Rhetoric." *Political Psychology* (3): 545.

<sup>118</sup> Renshon, J. (2008). "Stability and Change in Belief Systems: The Operational Code of George W. Bush." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (6): 820.

<sup>119</sup> George, A. L. (1969). "The "Operational Code": A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making." *International Studies Quarterly* 13(2): 190., 195.



pioneering work of Alexander L. George cemented the importance of studying the individual psychological characteristics of elites in studies on foreign policy decision-making.

Even though a new generation of scholars began studying the role of political psychology in foreign policy decision-making with the advent of operational code analysis, many existing studies categorized psychological characteristics in a manner that made them difficult to operationalize and test empirically. Two studies in this tradition include Milton Rokeach's study on beliefs, attitudes, and values<sup>120</sup> as well as K.E. Boulding's study on the learning process of the nation-state.<sup>121</sup> Oftentimes, conceptualizations of variables that were overly broad in nature led to debates in the literature that became internecine squabbles about subject definitions rather than robust discussions about the psychological characteristics of individual leaders.

Decision-making scholars gradually began to recalibrate debates in the literature away from broader debates about the nature of subject definitions and studies on individual psychological characteristics took form. Margaret Hermann suggested that four types of personal characteristics existed to study: "beliefs, motives, decision style, and interpersonal style."<sup>122</sup> Mark Schafer noted the importance of factors such as "beliefs, images, stereotypes, attitudes, and perceptions."<sup>123</sup> Collectively, each of these areas of interest became the focus of study for political psychologists studying international relations and foreign policy in some way, shape, or form. The following studies on perceptions, personality, images, and beliefs are rough

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<sup>120</sup> Rokeach, M. (1968). Beliefs, Attitudes, and Values: A Theory of Organization and Change, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1968. [1<sup>st</sup> ed.].

<sup>121</sup> Boulding, K. E. (1967). "The Learning and Reality-Testing Process in the International System." Journal of International Affairs (1): 1.

<sup>122</sup> Hermann, M. G. (1980). "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders." International Studies Quarterly (1): 7., 8.

<sup>123</sup> Schafer, M. (2000). "Issues in Assessing Psychological Characteristics at a Distance: An Introduction to the Symposium." Political Psychology (3): 511., 517.

estimates of where previous studies on political decision-making have been focused in the literature in previous years.

### **Perceptions**

As Richard K. Herrmann & Vaughn P. Shannon argue, perceptions are an important phenomenon to study because they are “a cognitive representation of the circumstance and context in which foreign policy decisions are made.”<sup>124</sup> Understanding the perceptions individual foreign policy decision-makers have of specific actors in the international system can lead to the development of theories that help scholars understand why individual actors make specific foreign policy choices. In his study of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Steven Spiegel argues that perceptions and philosophical views of key leaders are the most important variables to study when carrying out assessments of foreign-policy decision-making.<sup>125</sup> In his study of American policymakers’ perceptions of the Soviet Union, Richard Herrmann argued that perceptions of threat can influence general perceptions of other states.<sup>126</sup> Likewise, Charles Kupchan argued that elite perceptions of the relative balance of power can bring about changes in the security environment.<sup>127</sup> Zoltan Buzas developed a two-step theory describing the role that racial prejudices have on shaping threat perception and behavioral tendencies in the case of the Anglo-Japanese alliance between 1902 and 1923.<sup>128</sup> Collectively, these studies focused on identifying an individual’s frame of mind about the actions of another actor in the international system.

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<sup>124</sup> Herrmann, R. K. and V. P. Shannon (2001). "Defending International Norms: The Role of Obligation, Material Interest, and Perception in Decision Making." International Organization (3): 621., 625.

<sup>125</sup> Spiegel, S. L. (1985). The other Arab-Israeli conflict: making America's Middle East policy, from Truman to Reagan, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, ©1985.

<sup>126</sup> Herrmann, R. (1986). "The Power of Perceptions in Foreign-Policy Decision Making: Do Views of the Soviet Union Determine the Policy Choices of American Leaders?" American Journal of Political Science (4): 841.

<sup>127</sup> Kupchan, C. (1994). The vulnerability of empire, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

<sup>128</sup> Búzás, Z. I. (2013). "The Color of Threat: Race, Threat Perception, and the Demise of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902–1923)." Security Studies 22(4): 573-606.

## **Personality**

Personality became a unit of analysis in behavioral studies after psychologists linked specific personality traits with both peaceful and aggressive decisions. These scholars favored the use of personality due to its stable nature and ability to be studied and measured through established diagnostic tests and coding systems that were able to assess personality by means of content analysis from a distance. The five-factor model of personality (Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism), was initially applied to predict decision-making behavior. This model was later improved by Gallagher & Allen whose study of American presidents found that personality and risk propensity could predict decisions to employ military force abroad.<sup>129</sup> Personality assessments of individual leaders, carried out at-a-distance, have remained taboo since the American Psychiatric Association passed the Goldwater Rule which outlawed the practice of ascribing psychological conditions to individuals that one had neither examined nor received an affirmative consent to release their diagnosis to the public.<sup>130</sup>

## **Images, National Role Conceptions, Analogies and Cognitive Style**

Studies on topics such as images, historical analogies, and national role conceptions became consequential units of analysis to models assessing foreign policy decision-making tendencies among elites after K.E. Boulding identified historical images and national images as factors essential to understanding the nature of the international system.<sup>131</sup> Without an understanding of these factors, political scientists would be incapable of assessing the degree to

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<sup>129</sup> Gallagher, M. E. and S. H. Allen (2014). *Presidential Personality: Not Just a Nuisance*. Great Britain, Blackwell Publishing Ltd: 1., 7.

<sup>130</sup> American Psychological Association (2010). *The Principles of Medical Ethics with Annotations*. A. P. Association. Washington, D.C. 3.

<sup>131</sup> Boulding, K. E. (1959). "National Images and International Systems." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2): 120.

which an individual's previous experiences shaped his future decisions. Studies that focused on images measured the degree to which they solidified a leader's individual assessments of existing actors in the international system. Herrmann et.al argued that images are important to study because they help individual decision-makers derive meaning about the intentions of actors in the international system.<sup>132</sup> Shannon L. Blanton stated that Ronald Reagan's image of El Salvador acted as an information processor in his foreign policy toward the country between 1980 and 1984.<sup>133</sup> In his study of John Foster Dulles, and his views of the Soviet Union, Ole R. Holsti argued that leaders make foreign policy decisions based on their own assessments of the images of other states (as well as their own) in the international system.<sup>134</sup> K.J. Holsti found that policymakers make decisions premised on their own state's national role conception in relation to other states in the international system.<sup>135</sup> In their study of historical analogies, Dyson & Preston argue that political leaders make use of historical analogies during foreign policy decision making.<sup>136</sup>

Cognitive style became an area of interest in the 1980s after Betty Glad linked Ronald Reagan's "black and white" thinking with his tendency to see the Soviet Union as "the embodiment of evil."<sup>137</sup> In a similar vein, Stephen Benedict Dyson later examined the conceptual complexity of Margaret Thatcher and argues that her "black and white" world view was responsible for her positive relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev and her uncompromising

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<sup>132</sup> Herrmann, R. K., J. F. Voss, T. Y. E. Schooler and J. Ciarrochi (1997). "Images in International Relations: An Experimental Test of Cognitive Schemata." International Studies Quarterly (3): 403.

<sup>133</sup> Blanton, S. L. (1996). "Images in Conflict: The Case of Ronald Reagan and El Salvador." International Studies Quarterly (1): 23.

<sup>134</sup> Holsti, O. R. (1962). "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study." The Journal of Conflict Resolution (3): 244.

<sup>135</sup> Holsti, K. J. (1970). "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy." International Studies Quarterly (3): 233.

<sup>136</sup> Dyson, S. B. and T. Preston (2006). "Individual Characteristics of Political Leaders and the Use of Analogy in Foreign Policy Decision Making." Political Psychology (2): 265.

<sup>137</sup> Glad, B. (1983). "Black-and-White Thinking: Ronald Reagan's Approach to Foreign Policy." Political Psychology (1): 33., 45.

positions that favored confrontation over accommodation with opposing parties in the German reunification debate and the Falklands Crisis.<sup>138</sup> Collectively, these studies focused on historical recollections and the degree to which their reminiscence could shape decision-making tendencies observed among foreign policy elites.

### **Studies on Political Beliefs**

Studies on beliefs and belief systems have proven to be a controversial subject to study over the years due to the existence of competing definitions about their nature that have developed over the years. Collectively, political scientists studying beliefs saw them as worthy of further inquiry because of their tendency to act as causal mechanisms that could change (or not change) an individual's observed behavior and decision-making tendencies. Early studies on political beliefs, such as *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*, argued that belief systems existed on a continuum and were "a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence."<sup>139</sup> P.E. Converse saw belief systems as being problematic to measure and test empirically due to their continuous and fluid nature. Deborah W. Larson shared a similar viewpoint and saw studies on schemas as preferable to study instead due to their potential linkage with complex cognitive processes.<sup>140</sup> Others disagreed. Robert Jervis saw beliefs as being "consistent, stable, and balanced" in nature.<sup>141</sup> Scholars that viewed beliefs in this manner saw them as worthy subjects of empirical inquiry because they could be easily identified in surveys, speeches, diaries,

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<sup>138</sup> Dyson, S. B. (2009). "Cognitive Style and Foreign Policy: Margaret Thatcher's Black-and-White Thinking." *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique* (1): 33.

<sup>139</sup> Converse, P. E. (2004). *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*. *Political psychology: Key readings*. J. T. Jost and J. Sidanius. New York, NY, Psychology Press: 181-199., 2.

<sup>140</sup> Larson, D. W. (1994). "The Role of Belief Systems and Schemas in Foreign Policy Decision-Making." *Political Psychology* (1): 17.

<sup>141</sup> Jervis, R. (1976). *Perception and misperception in international politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, [1976], 117.

government documents, and interviews. Beliefs were viewed as units of analysis that could provide us with a more lucid understanding of the underlying psychological processes that inform elite decision-making behavior in the international system. Shapiro & Bonham noted that “beliefs represent both the congealed experiences of the decision maker and his expectations about the decision environment.”<sup>142</sup> Robert Jervis argued that the beliefs of elites influenced decision-making due in part to the fact that humans are naturally predisposed to link their beliefs to the environment they are assessing.<sup>143</sup> Walker, Schafer, and Young later advanced the argument that “decision-makers would act on previously held beliefs by fitting incoming information into already existing images or ignoring information altogether if it ran contrary to one’s own beliefs.”<sup>144</sup> Elizabeth N. Saunders subsequently noted that beliefs have the power to be causal in nature, shape threat perception, and impact how states make decisions about military interventions.<sup>145</sup>

Early studies on American foreign policy beliefs (Holsti & Rosenau<sup>146</sup>; Chittick, Billingsley & Travis<sup>147</sup>; Creed & Rosati<sup>148</sup>) focused on identifying belief systems of elites during the Cold War and their rate of change over time. These studies were oftentimes conducted by identifying foreign policy beliefs of consequential opinion leaders from popular surveys answered by respondents to surveys commissioned by organizations such as *Who’s Who in*

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<sup>142</sup> Shapiro, M. J. and G. M. Bonham (1973). "Cognitive Process and Foreign Policy Decision-Making." *International Studies Quarterly* (2): 147., 161.

<sup>143</sup> Jervis, *Perception and misperception in international politics*, 120.

<sup>144</sup> Walker, S. G., M. Schafer and M. D. Young (1999). "Presidential Operational Codes and Foreign Policy Conflicts in the Post-Cold War World." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (5): 610., 612.

<sup>145</sup> Saunders, E. N. (2009). "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy." *International Security* (2): 119.

<sup>146</sup> Holsti, O. R. and J. N. Rosenau (1986). "Consensus Lost. Consensus Regained? Foreign Policy Beliefs of American Leaders, 1976-1980." *International Studies Quarterly* (4): 375.

<sup>147</sup> Chittick, W. O., K. R. Billingsley and R. Travis (1990). "Persistence and Change in Elite and Mass Attitudes toward U.S. Foreign Policy." *Political Psychology* (2): 385.

<sup>148</sup> Rosati, J. and J. Creed (1997). "Extending the Three- and Four-Headed Eagles: The Foreign Policy Orientations of American Elites during the 80s and 90s." *Political Psychology* (3): 583.

*America* and the *Chicago Council on Foreign Relations*. These studies examined the degree to which major events or policies impacted a respondent's foreign policy beliefs. Domestic politics also came into focus in studies of American foreign policy beliefs. Studies such as Maggiotto & Wittkopf<sup>149</sup>, Wittkopf<sup>150</sup>, and Holsti and Rosenau<sup>151</sup> examined the degree to which foreign policy beliefs overlapped with domestic political beliefs and the role beliefs played in fomenting partisanship and ideological fervor among American opinion leaders.

In the 1970s, psychologists popularized cognitive consistency theory. George & Bennett noted that cognitive consistency theory "posits that a stable reference point links some individual elite decision-makers beliefs with foreign policy choices."<sup>152</sup> Studies using cognitive consistency theory would examine the degree to which belief systems changed and the extent to which leaders were predisposed to implement policies commensurate with their own pre-existing belief systems. For example, Chaim D. Kaufmann examined the belief systems of German diplomats and discussed the impact psychological biases had on nineteen German diplomat's policy positions over a series of bargaining rounds during the 1905 Moroccan Crisis.<sup>153</sup> Kaufmann's findings confirmed that prior belief systems played a formative role in shaping elite decision-making behavior.

However, not all scholars of American foreign policy saw cognitive consistency theory as applicable to foreign policy decision-making. Creed & Rosati argued that the foreign policy

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<sup>149</sup> Maggiotto, M. and E. R. Wittkopf (1981). "American Public Attitudes toward Foreign Policy." International Studies Quarterly (4): 601.

<sup>150</sup> Wittkopf, E. R. (1986). "On the Foreign Policy Beliefs of the American People: A Critique and Some Evidence." International Studies Quarterly (4): 425.

<sup>151</sup> Holsti, O. R. and J. N. Rosenau (1996). *Liberals, Populists, Libertarians, and Conservatives: The Link between Domestic and International Affairs*. Eire (Ireland), BUTTERWORTH-HEINEMANN: 29.

<sup>152</sup> George, A.L. and A. Bennett (2005) *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, © 2005., 193.

<sup>153</sup> Kaufmann, C. D. (1994). "Out of the Lab and into the Archives: A Method for Testing Psychological Explanations of Political Decision Making." International Studies Quarterly (4): 557.

preferences of American leaders were diverse and complex and did not change significantly during the turbulent years of the post-Vietnam era.<sup>154</sup> Competing theories about stability of beliefs, and their overall usefulness as a unit of analysis in foreign policy assessments, led many foreign policy scholars to favor studies that relied on rationalist explanations to explain foreign policy and state behavior in the international system. This was emblematic of an overall aversion in political science to perform studies that included psychological variables as consequential units of empirical inquiry. As a result, fewer studies of the belief systems of individual leaders were performed as many scholars were turned away from including psychological variables in their studies that were premised on debatable theories of psychology that were difficult to replicate independently and test in studies empirically.

### **The Presidency in American Foreign Policy Decision-Making**

In many ways it is self-evident to say that the beliefs of the president of the United States matter in understanding how American foreign policy is created. However, many neorealist scholars such as Kenneth Waltz introduced theories into international relations literature that argued that individual leaders, while important in domestic politics, were inconsequential to understanding state behavior in the international system.<sup>155</sup> This is in large part because many neorealist foreign policy scholars designed their studies premised on rationalist assumptions. Neoclassical realists and behaviorist scholars have begun to challenge these assumptions in their assessments of American foreign policy. Valerie M. Hudson noted the importance of crafting actor-specific theories of foreign policy premised on the study of individual leaders or groups.<sup>156</sup> Actor-specific theories have largely been premised on the identification of an individual's

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<sup>154</sup> Creed and Rosati, *Extending the Three- and Four-Headed Eagles: The Foreign Policy Orientations of American Elites during the 80s and 90s*, 583-623.

<sup>155</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1-251.

<sup>156</sup> Hudson, V. M. (2005). "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations." *Foreign Policy Analysis* (1): 1.



beliefs. Drawn through methods such as content analysis of public speeches, studies focusing on the beliefs of U.S. presidents are now seen by some scholars as being more important to foreign policy than public opinion (Johnson)<sup>157</sup> and institutional variables (Newmann)<sup>158</sup>.

A litany of studies in American foreign policy literature have identified the president of the United States as the most consequential unit of analysis worthy of study in order to understand foreign policy decision-making behavior. Creed & Rosati note the importance of presidential elections to the conduct of American foreign policy because presidents, and the advisers they appoint, oftentimes hold diverse foreign policy orientations that can bring about differing policies in practice.<sup>159</sup> Therefore, it is essential that studies are carried out on individual presidents if we are to find out how and why specific foreign policy decisions are made in the United States. In Valenty and Feldman, Fred Greenstein argues that the power of the U.S. President is paramount in the national security realm.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, Stephen L. Spiegel argues that the president can shape foreign policy due to the centrality of his political position within the administration.<sup>161</sup> William Quandt has argued that this is no different as it pertains to the U.S.-Israel relationship.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Johnson, L. K. (2015). American foreign policy and the challenges of world leadership: power, principle, and the constitution, New York: Oxford University Press, [2015].

<sup>158</sup> Newmann, W. W. (2014). "Kennedy, Johnson, and policy toward China: testing the importance of the president in foreign policy decision making." Presidential Studies Quarterly (4): 640.

<sup>159</sup> Creed and Rosati, *Extending the Three- and Four-Headed Eagles: The Foreign Policy Orientations of American Elites during the 80s and 90s*, 583-623.

<sup>160</sup> Valenty, L. O. and O. Feldman (2002). Political leadership for the new century : personality and behavior among American leaders, Westport, Conn. : Praeger, 2002.

<sup>161</sup> Spiegel, S. L. (1985). The other Arab-Israeli conflict: making America's Middle East policy, from Truman to Reagan, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, ©1985., 2.

<sup>162</sup> William Quandt (1984;1986;1993;2005) has argued that the president, and his closest advisors, are the most consequential actors worthy of empirical inquiry when assessing consequential policy decisions made in US-Israel Relations. Quandt advances the argument that variables such as domestic politics, bureaucratic politics, and interest groups, are complementary, rather than primary, factors explaining policy choices in US-Israel relations.

## **The Presidency and U.S.-Israel Relations**

Israel has its fair share of supporters and detractors in the academic and policy communities. Whether the topic is American support for Israel's viewpoints in the peace process or the utility of selling arms to America's Arab allies in the Middle East, there are oftentimes few things that both Israel and its detractors agree on. The debate about the utility of maintaining a robust U.S.-Israel relationship has continued unabated since then. Both supporters and detractors of Israel in the United States have held positions of influence in both major political parties and in the various executive agencies and legislative committees that shape foreign policy towards Israel. However, there is one issue that neither party would seriously question. The U.S.-Israel relationship is unique, consequential, and worthy of further empirical inquiry. Understanding U.S.-Israel relations opens up the opaque world of American foreign policy in the Middle East and the history of American intervention in a region that has been critically important to the national interests of the United States.

By tracking the U.S.-Israel relations over time, one can carefully deduce the impact major policy decisions made by both American, Israeli, and other consequential actors have had on the Middle East and in the context of the history of the U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship. This process can only be unveiled by documenting a series of major events and revealing the causal mechanisms that led to specific observed policy outcomes of consequence in the bilateral relationship. Understanding the decisions that successive American and Israeli governments have made in bilateral relations has been important for the scholarly community to examine because doing so sheds light on the nature of a relationship that is among the most important that the United States has cultivated in the Middle East since President Truman first recognized Israel in 1948.

Existing literature on U.S.-Israel relations reflects the schism that has developed in the United States about the necessity of maintaining a close bilateral relationship with Israel and its benefits for American national interests in the Middle East. Many of these studies are predominantly focused on the Middle East peace process and the broader Arab-Israeli Conflict. Fewer studies have focused on the U.S.-Israel relationship from an alliance politics perspective where individual aspects of the bilateral relationship are identified, examined, and assessed within a broader theoretical framework that ascribes meaning to each of the primary areas of the bilateral relationship. Likewise, existing studies have failed to create an analytical framework that can be applied by alliance politics scholars to use in their own assessments of other bilateral relationships that are of consequence in international relations.

The existing literature on U.S.-Israel relations falls within five broad camps. The first is made up primarily by critics of the U.S.-Israel relationship who cite domestic politics as a key factor explaining the existence of the U.S.-Israel special relationship. The second is made up of studies carried out by ex-policymakers and diplomatic historians whose narratives unpack American foreign policy towards Israel in a sequential order within and across administrations. Third are policy-oriented studies that provide analytical assessments about specific areas of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Israel. Fourth are studies on events and policy decisions made during a single presidential administration. Finally, studies that analyze the U.S.-Israel relationship by drawing on theoretical concepts drawn from the alliance politics and special relationships literature are examined.

## Critical Studies of U.S.-Israel Relations

Critics of the U.S.-Israel special relationship oftentimes argue that it is imprudent for the United States to support Israel over Arab and Islamic states in the region because their collective natural resources and geostrategic importance offers more to the national interests of the United States in the Middle East than anything offered by Israel. Supporters of a closer relationship with the Arab states over Israel have been historically categorized in American foreign policy parlance as “Arabists.” The number of foreign service officers and members of the permanent bureaucracy in the State Department that have served in Arab and Islamic states at any given time far surpasses those with experience in, and sympathy for, Israel. This unique state was documented in Charles Fetter’s seminal study of America’s first ambassador to Israel, Charles Knox. Fetter describes Knox, a self-avowed Zionist, as anomaly in Truman’s State Department where policy experts with “Arabist” sympathies and negative perceptions of American Jews were endemic throughout the agency at the time of Israel’s founding in 1948.<sup>163</sup>

Those critical of the U.S.-Israel relationship such as George W. Ball have long argued that America’s strategic interests in the United States have been impeded by American support for Israel.<sup>164</sup> Those critical of the U.S.-Israel relationship critique Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians, its positions in the peace process, and its military and national security policies. They argue that Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians and its reliance on American military and political support ill suit American interests (and Israeli interests) in a region dominated by Arab and Islamic states. For these critics, American policies have been an impediment to advancing a balanced approach in the Middle East peace process and have effectively undermined the Arab world’s view of the United States and its reliability as an ally in the region.

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<sup>163</sup> Fetter, H. D. (2012). "Two & three air raids daily. What a bother': an American diplomat in Israel during the War of Independence." *Israel Affairs* **18**(iv): 546-562., 547.

<sup>164</sup> Ball, G. W. (1977). "How to Save Israel in Spite of Herself." *Foreign Affairs* (3): 453.

Cockburn & Cockburn critiques the U.S.-Israel intelligence sharing relationship and highlight America's role as an enabler of Israeli policies, such as targeted killings, that violate international law.<sup>165</sup> Ari Ben-Menashe assesses the U.S.-Israel intelligence sharing relationship through the lens of a former Israeli intelligence operative who was betrayed by his own government.<sup>166</sup> Ben-Menashe, a participant in the hostage negotiations with the Iranians in the 1980s, sheds light on the nature of the intelligence sharing relationship between the United States and Israel during the Iran-Contra scandal and in the early 1980s while he worked as a member of Israel's Military Intelligence Directorate. Ben-Menashe was an active participant who facilitated arms sales from the United States to Iran during the 1980s and played a role in developing Israel's nuclear weapons program relationship with the apartheid government in South Africa. Ben-Menashe's criticism of the clandestine relationship between the CIA and the Mossad emanates from his alleged betrayal by both his Israeli and American counterparts after his arrest in the United States for violating the Arms Export Control Act.

Camille Manşūr<sup>167</sup> and Nasser Aruri<sup>168</sup> criticize the United States for carrying out an imbalanced policy in the Arab-Israeli Conflict. These authors see the United States as being overtly biased in favor of Israel to the detriment of the legitimate grievances and political aspirations of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Similarly, Paul Findley advances an argument that states that the public image of the United States is sullied in the Arab world because of America's perceived closeness to Israel and the exorbitant nature of military and

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<sup>165</sup> Cockburn, A. and L. Cockburn (1991). Dangerous liaison: the inside story of the U.S.-Israeli covert relationship, New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, ©1991.1st ed

<sup>166</sup> Ben-Menashe, A. (1992). Profits of war: inside the secret U.S.-Israeli arms network, New York: Sheridan Square Press; Lanham, MD: Distributed to the trade by National Book Network, ©1992.

<sup>167</sup> Manşūr, C. (1994). Beyond alliance: Israel in U.S. foreign policy, New York: Columbia University Press, c1994.

<sup>168</sup> Aruri, N. H. (2003). Dishonest broker: the U.S. role in Israel and Palestine, Cambridge, MA: South End Press, ©2003.

political support Washington affords Israel.<sup>169</sup> Findley, a former congressman from Illinois, provides interviews with former members of Congress who perceived the primacy of pro-Israel lobbying organizations, such as AIPAC, as the key causal mechanism explaining why the United States has cultivated a special relationship with Israel.

Scholars of the U.S.-Israel special relationship have also identified domestic politics as the causal mechanism that explains American foreign policy towards Israel. In 1985, Nimrod Novik authored the first study on American attitudes towards the U.S.-Israel relationship.<sup>170</sup> Novik identified Israel's supporters in the United States as being a "veto group" in the American electorate that could disproportionately impact Democratic primaries and even general elections. Novik's study, which was limited in its time frame from 1977 to 1984, did not link American attitudes towards Israel to foreign policy decisions made by U.S. presidents in the Middle East and made rather narrow predictions about future support for Israel's policies among members of the American Jewish community.

A broader critique about the impact of domestic politics in the U.S.-Israel relationship is discussed by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*.<sup>171</sup> Walt and Mearsheimer argue that an "Israel Lobby" made up of a loose coalition of actors such as Jewish and Christian religious organizations, interest groups, think tanks, and pro-Israel policymakers are culpable for creating a "special relationship" between the United States and Israel that has been overwhelmingly negative for the United States. Walt and Mearsheimer argue that American support for Israel has fomented anti-American sentiments in the Middle

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<sup>169</sup> Findley, P. (2003). They dare to speak out: people and institutions confront Israel's lobby, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, ©2003.3rd ed.

<sup>170</sup> Novik, N. (1985). The United States and Israel: domestic determinants of a changing U.S. commitment. Boulder, Westview.

<sup>171</sup> Mearsheimer, J. J. and S. M. Walt (2007). The Israel lobby and U.S. foreign policy, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

East due to the salience of the Palestinian cause in the Islamic world. The authors argue that the U.S.-Israel special relationship ought to be downgraded as it served as an impetus behind Osama bin Laden's decision to attack the World Trade Center on 9/11 and America's decision to invade Iraq in 2003. *The Israel Lobby* was hotly debated in Washington as diplomats intimately involved in U.S.-Israel relations considered the idea that American foreign policy was determined by the activities of any single, or collective lobbying organization interested in U.S.-Israel relations, as being wholly unsubstantiated.<sup>172</sup> The authors' methodological approach was also criticized as they neither interviewed the actors that constituted the "Israel Lobby" nor consulted primary sources that definitively linked Israel and its supporters to driving bin Laden to attack on 9/11 or invade Iraq in 2003.<sup>173</sup> Walt & Mearsheimer opened up a conversation about the role interest groups and lobbying activities play in determining American foreign policy towards Israel and the broader Middle East. Despite being critiqued by policymakers, *The Israel Lobby* has become a foundational reading in many American foreign policy seminars that discuss the U.S.-Israel special relationship and its impact on American national interests.

### **Ex-Policymakers and Diplomatic Historians**

The topic of U.S.-Israel relations is covered in the biographies of most American presidents and those of their respective secretaries of State. A similar situation exists for Israeli prime ministers whose defining experiences in office relate to Israel's wars, the Palestinian conflict, and political issues surrounding the fate of the Jewish diaspora. The topic of America's relationship with Israel is rarely the primary focus of a president's foreign policy agenda or a topic that a president feels obliged to write on after they leave office. The exception to this rule

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<sup>172</sup> Fishman, B. (2008). "Review Essays: The 'Israel Lobby': A Realistic Assessment." *Orbis* **52**: 159-180.

<sup>173</sup> Gelb, L. H. (2007). *Dual Loyalties*, The New York Times Company: 18.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/23/books/review/Gelb-t.html>

is President Jimmy Carter, who authored a book critical of Israeli policy in the West Bank and Gaza on the subject that was highly controversial for its title, *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid*.<sup>174</sup>

Despite intense public interest on the subject in both the United States and Israel, the theoretical literature in political science on U.S.-Israel relations is rather thin. Most studies that focus on U.S.-Israel Relations have been written by former government officials (Quandt<sup>175</sup>; Miller<sup>176</sup>; Abrams<sup>177</sup>; Ross<sup>178</sup>; Arens<sup>179</sup> recounting their own personal experiences while serving in government. These studies showcase the policymaker's personal knowledge of the consequential events that occurred in U.S.-Israel relations during their time serving in government. Even if a policymaker is open about their ideological leanings and political loyalties, any autobiography (no matter how well-written) must be seen as an incomplete piece of scholarship. Such circumstances arise from the fact that autobiographical accounts oftentimes do not provide an accompanying addendum with primary source documents that corroborate their personal experiences. Also, former government officials are oftentimes biased actors that selectively critique individuals whom they had major disagreements with while ignoring their own fault in events that reflect poorly on their public service record. Rare is the case when a person blames themselves for a specific policy failure they contributed to even if they were the main actor responsible. For example, few presidents or diplomats would be likely to admit that their own actions hurt American or Israeli interests in the Middle East and the overall quality of

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<sup>174</sup> Carter, J. (2006). *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, New York: Simon & Schuster, ©2006.

<sup>175</sup> Quandt, W. B. (1993). *Peace process: American diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1967*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution; Berkeley: University of California Press, ©1993.

<sup>176</sup> Miller, A. D. (2008). *The much too promised land: America's elusive search for Arab-Israeli peace*, New York: Bantam Books, 2008.

<sup>177</sup> Abrams, E. (2013). *Tested By Zion: the Bush administration and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

<sup>178</sup> Ross, D. (2015). *Doomed to succeed: the U.S.-Israel relationship from Truman to Obama*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015. First edition.

<sup>179</sup> Arens, M. (1995). *Broken covenant: American foreign policy and the crisis between the U.S. and Israel*, New York: Simon & Schuster, ©1995



the U.S.-Israel relationship. Policymakers are oftentimes cognizant of the fact that the historical record will be founded on their recounting of key events that occurred while they were in the room and others were outside looking in.

Aaron David Miller's book draws primarily on interviews with former officials that were actively engaged in the Middle East peace process when he served as an advisor in the State Department under each administration from Presidents Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush.<sup>180</sup> He offers a critical assessment of the flawed approaches that subsequent American presidents have tried in the peace process and gives an up-close-and-personal assessment of the challenges that face peace negotiators tasked with reconciling the disparate opinions, narratives, and political interests of the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Dennis Ross served in both Republican (Reagan and H.W. Bush) and Democrat (Clinton and Obama) administrations. Ross assesses American foreign policy towards Israel under each presidency from Truman to Obama. In *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama*, Ross argues that subsequent presidencies of both political parties have assumed that having closer relations with Israel will cost the United States political support from Arab leaders.<sup>181</sup> He argues that Arab leaders are far more interested in maintaining close relations with the United States regardless of whether the United States maintains a special relationship with Israel in general, and its policies towards the Palestinians in particular.

Moshe Arens authored a book in 1995 providing an Israeli perspective on the U.S.-Israel relationship.<sup>182</sup> Arens served as Israel's Ambassador to the United States (1982-1983) and later held positions as Foreign Minister (1988-1990) and Defense Minister (1983-1984, 1990-1992).

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<sup>180</sup> Miller, *The much too promised land: America's elusive search for Arab-Israeli peace*, 1-407.

<sup>181</sup> Ross, D. (2015). Doomed to succeed: the U.S.-Israel relationship from Truman to Obama, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015. First edition.

<sup>182</sup> Arens, *Broken covenant: American foreign policy and the crisis between the U.S. and Israel*, 1-320.

Arens was a staunch critic of the Reagan Administration for canceling funding of the LAVI fighter jet and a skeptic of the peace process and the PLO's intentions under Yasser Arafat. He describes how he adamantly opposed American efforts to interfere in Israeli politics by President George H.W. Bush and his Secretary of State James Baker on issues related to loan guarantees for Soviet Jewish migrants and the Middle East peace process. Arens' testament is unique in that he not only provides an insider's account from an Israeli perspective into the ways that American foreign policy impacted Israel's foreign policy but also the ways in which the decisions made by the Bush-Baker team compromised the domestic political standing of his own Likud Party in the 1992 elections that brought Yitzhak Rabin and the Labor Party into power.

Diplomatic historical accounts such as Reich<sup>183</sup>; Schoenbaum<sup>184</sup>; Spiegel<sup>185</sup>; and Stephens<sup>186</sup> look at the evolution of the U.S.-Israel relationship across presidencies. These historical studies largely focus on America's role in the Middle East peace process in the years preceding the book's publication. These assessments are most useful when examined alongside government officials that served in office alongside the authors. Diplomatic histories of U.S.-Israel relations primarily document a series of major events and consequential policy decisions made by American presidents in sequential order and assess the utility of the policies that were enacted. Broader theoretical claims about alliances and special relationships that would be interesting to an audience of political scientists are omitted in favor of additional description and narrative discourse. The comparative method and case study-approach premised on strong theoretical underpinnings used by political scientists is instead replaced with the scholarly method of historical imputation used by scholars in the humanities.

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<sup>183</sup> Reich, B. (1984). The United States and Israel: influence in the special relationship, New York: Praeger, c1984.

<sup>184</sup> Schoenbaum, D. (1993). The United States and the state of Israel, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>185</sup> Spiegel, *The other Arab-Israeli conflict: making America's Middle East policy, from Truman to Reagan*, 1-522.

<sup>186</sup> Stephens, *US Policy Toward Israel: The Role of Political Culture in Defining the "Special Relationship"*, 1-339.

The most notable study in this tradition, *The United States and the State of Israel*, traces the origins of the Zionist movement in the United States starting before the birth of the state of Israel.<sup>187</sup> David Schoenbaum examines the maturation of American Jewish political organizations and their successes and failures in voicing support for Israel in the United States. This piece of scholarship is a candid reflection of how various American presidents have come to support or oppose various Israeli policies or political actions that were taken prior to the Oslo Accords in 1993. In a similar tradition, Robert O. Freedman published a compilation of essays on specific components of the U.S.-Israel relationship between 1948 and 2012.<sup>188</sup> A series of authors both American and Israeli provide assessments of American-Israeli military cooperation, trade, the peace process, and the Iranian nuclear threat to Israel. Freedman's book also focuses on domestic debates about Israel in the United States. The authors examine an array of subjects such as the lobbying activities of interest groups aligned with American Jews and Evangelical Christians and public support for Israel in the American electorate.

### **Policy Oriented Studies**

Military cooperation has been an area of prime interest for scholars of U.S.-Israel relations. Israel has received approximately \$100 billion in military support from the U.S. government since the U.S. started providing foreign military assistance to Israel in the early 1960s.<sup>189</sup> The U.S. also ensures that Israel maintains a *Qualitative Military Edge* (QME) over its Arab neighbors. This state of affairs has led both scholars and policy analysts to focus on the subject with intense interest. It is impossible to understand American military strategy in the Middle East without fully understanding the impact America's commitment to Israel's QME has

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<sup>187</sup> Schoenbaum, *The United States and the state of Israel*, 1-404.

<sup>188</sup> Freedman, R. O. (2012). *Israel and the United States: six decades of US-Israeli relations*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, [2012].

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 145.

on other countries in the region. Since Israel has received a guarantee from the U.S. that it will maintain its QME relative to its Arab neighbors, America's bilateral military arrangements with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, and the Gulf Emirates become contingent on the nature of the U.S.-Israel military relationship. Practically speaking, this means that any weapons system that America sells to an Arab state must be technologically inferior in comparison to a weapons system sold to Israel.

Previous studies on the U.S.-Israel military relationship, such as *The Future of U.S.-Israel Strategic Cooperation*, examine the evolution of strategic cooperation and the political circumstances in American politics that necessitated closer military relations between Washington and Jerusalem.<sup>190</sup> In this book, Shai Feldman traces shared values between Israel and the U.S. as being a factor that cemented bilateral military cooperation between Israel and the United States during the Cold War. Karen L. Puschel argues that bilateral military cooperation was expedited by the fact that Israel could defend itself with its own military, without American troops, and that it had proven itself as a regional power after its overwhelming victory in the Six Day War of 1967.<sup>191</sup> This relationship, enhanced by American pledges in the Camp David Accords, was actualized when the U.S. and Israel agreed to a formal strategic cooperation agreement during Reagan's first term in office.

Dore Gold examines Israel's role in American Middle East security planning.<sup>192</sup> His study describes how American military strategists approached including Israel in their regional security plans. It also describes the factors that led the American military establishment to see Israel as a

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<sup>190</sup> Feldman, S. (1996). The future of U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1996.

<sup>191</sup> Puschel, K. L. (1993). US-Israeli strategic cooperation in the post-cold war era: an American perspective, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press; Jerusalem: Jerusalem Post, 1993, ©1992.

<sup>192</sup> Gold, D. (1988). America, the gulf, and Israel: CENTCOM (Central Command) and emerging US regional security policies in the Mideast, Jerusalem, Israel: Jerusalem Post; Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, ©1988.

strategic asset rather than a regional pariah with nothing to offer the United States in the Middle East. In a 1993 study, Dore Gold looks at the impact that Israel's status as a Major Non-NATO Ally has had on American-Israeli defense industrial relations.<sup>193</sup> His study assesses the state of the American-Israeli military industrial relationship and reflects an overall viewpoint that the U.S.-Israel arms trade – that was incentivized and developed when Israel became a Major Non-NATO Ally – has been lucrative for both states.

Ari Ben-Menashe approaches the American-Israeli military industrial relationship from a practitioner's perspective.<sup>194</sup> Ben-Menashe describes his career as a military intelligence operative who was personally involved in Israel's controversial arms trade relationship with South Africa and efforts to procure materials for Israel's nuclear program. His autobiography provides an insider's glimpse into the ways that Israel assisted the Reagan administration during the Iran-Contra Affair. Ben-Menashe, who later received asylum in Canada, reveals that he felt abandoned by his Israeli counterparts after he divulged information about Israel's international arms relationships when he was arrested in the U.S. for violating the Arms Export Control Act.

Mohamed El-Khawas and Samir Rabbo examine the impact that U.S. foreign aid has on Israeli policy in both the domestic and international spheres.<sup>195</sup> They advance an argument that U.S. military aid has allowed Israel to get away with policies that undermine the peace process, the human rights of the Palestinians, and America's standing with the Arab world. They are sharply critical of Israeli Prime Ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir and the role they played in commencing the Lebanon War. They see the Likud Party's intransigence over the

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<sup>193</sup> Gold, D. (1993). Israel as an American non-NATO ally: parameters of defense-industrial cooperation in a post-cold war relationship, Boulder: Westview Press; Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Post, 1993.

<sup>194</sup> Ben-Menashe, A. (1992). Profits of war: inside the secret U.S.-Israeli arms network, New York: Sheridan Square Press; Lanham, MD: Distributed to the trade by National Book Network, ©1992.

<sup>195</sup> El-Khawas, M. A. and S. Abed Rabbo (1984). American aid to Israel: nature and impact, Brattleboro, Vt. : Amana Books, ©1984.

Palestinian question, and interest in expanding West Bank settlements, as immoral actions enabled by the Reagan administration. Reagan is viewed by El-Khawas and Rabbo as being an enabler of Israeli policy for refusing to demand Israeli concessions in the peace process after signing a generous MOU with Israel in 1983.

### **Studies Assessing the U.S.-Israel Relationship by Presidency**

Scholars of U.S.-Israel relations have primarily performed studies on specific events and or policies that took place during one presidential administration. Scholars focusing on event-specific topics have sought to assess the utility (or lack thereof) of various presidential decisions taken during a consequential event and/or time period. These studies have largely delivered a more detailed assessment of the various causal mechanisms both internationally and domestically that shape Israeli and American foreign relations. Far more studies have occurred on the time periods from 1948 to 1981 due to stringent declassification standards that exist in both Israel and the U.S. A brief summary of the existing literature on presidencies from Truman to Reagan will be assessed here.

#### **U.S.-Israel Relations from Truman to Carter**

Against the advice of Secretary of State George Marshall, Truman solidified Israel's status as an ally of the U.S. by recognizing Israel in 1948. Henry D. Fetter describes how the nascent Jewish State impressed U.S. diplomat Charles Knox, who was America's first ambassador to Israel and served in his post during Israel's War of Independence.<sup>196</sup> Knox's positive views of Israel were rare in a State Department whose corridors were dominated by diplomats like Marshall who favored closer ties with the Arab world over Israel. Bruce J. Evensen describes how an irate Truman was so perturbed by the impact of "mid-level state

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<sup>196</sup> Fetter, *'Two & three air raids daily. What a bother': an American diplomat in Israel during the War of Independence*, 546-562.

department staff” who opposed his position recognizing Israeli statehood that he was willing to call the Arabs’ bluff that that they were to sever relations with the U.S. over Washington’s recognition of Israeli statehood.<sup>197</sup>

At this time, there was even a general sense that Israel could fall under the influence of the Soviet Union due the presence of many Russian immigrants friendly to the egalitarian ideals of socialism occupying leading roles in Israel’s political establishment. Even though the Soviet Union was the first state to recognize Israel, and Soviet satellite Czechoslovakia sold arms to Israel during its 1948 War of Independence, Israel became a pro-Western state that saw its future as tied to having closer relations with the West as opposed to Moscow.

America’s bilateral relationship with Israel was seen as an albatross around the neck of policymakers in the Eisenhower Administration who saw America’s future interests in the region as best served through closer ties with oil producing nations such as Saudi Arabia.<sup>198</sup> Isaac Alteras argues that Eisenhower did not see Israel as a consequential issue for the American Jewish community and that he perceived most American Jews to be anti-Zionists.<sup>199</sup> This was coupled with the fact that Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles made it a key strategic objective to avoid antagonizing Arab leaders in the region with the potential to fall into the Soviet embrace and potentially impede the free flow of oil from the Middle East. Israel’s collusion with Great Britain and France in the 1956 Suez Crisis led calls to sanction Israel. A worry that the U.S. would “lose Egypt” fed American skepticism about maintaining close ties with Israel. Even though the U.S. had courted Nasser, his ultimate embrace of Soviet weaponry earned the ire of the Eisenhower administration and the American public. Richard J.

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<sup>197</sup> Evensen, B. J. (1993). "The limits of presidential leadership: Truman at war with Zionists, the press, public opinion and his own state department over Palestine." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (2): 269.

<sup>198</sup> Merkley, P.C. (2004). *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004., 29.

<sup>199</sup> Alteras, I. (1985). "Eisenhower, American Jewry, and Israel." *American Jewish Archives* 37(2): 257-274.

McAlexander states that Gamal Abdel-Nasser's public image in the U.S. in 1958 was akin to that of Mussolini and Hitler and that this discursive narrative became prevalent in American political discourse in the late 1950s.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, McAlexander argues that this led not only to Nasser's declining image within the Eisenhower administration, but also to the origins of the U.S.-Israel special relationship.

A tense and adversarial relationship under Eisenhower warmed during the Kennedy administration. Asaf Siniver argues that Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban set the stage for closer relations between Israel and the U.S. due to his diplomatic decisions at the U.N. to develop close personal ties with American policymakers and his focus on developing trade relations with the U.S.<sup>201</sup> As American and Israeli interests in the Middle East converged, and Israel abandoned its policy of neutrality in the East-West conflict, Israel became viewed in the U.S. as fellow democratic ally in a region rife with unstable dictatorships backed by the Soviet Union.

Domestic politics also played an increasing role in the evolution of U.S.-Israel relations during the Kennedy years. Democratic political advisers such as Mike Feldman urged Kennedy to depart from the pro-Arab policies of his predecessors. Feldman urged closer relations with Israel because Kennedy had won 80 percent of the Jewish vote in the 1960 presidential election and retaining those supporters was a prerequisite for Democratic success in the 1962 congressional mid-term elections and Kennedy's future re-election campaign.<sup>202</sup> Thereafter, Kennedy was the first American president to tell Israeli officials that the U.S. had a special

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<sup>200</sup> McAlexander, R. (2011). *Couscous Mussolini: US perceptions of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the 1958 intervention in Lebanon and the origins of the US-Israeli special relationship*. Great Britain, Taylor & Francis: 363.

<sup>201</sup> Siniver, A. (2015). "Abba Eban and the Development of American-Israeli Relations, 1950-1959." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* **26**(1): 65-83.

<sup>202</sup> Ross, *Doomed to succeed: the U.S. -Israel relationship from Truman to Obama*, 72.



relationship with Israel.<sup>203</sup> Abraham Ben-Zvi discusses how Kennedy became the first president to lift an existing arms embargo to Israel in order to facilitate the sale of advanced Hawk missiles to it in 1962.<sup>204</sup> Similar studies such as Tal<sup>205</sup> and Levey<sup>206</sup> highlight internal deliberations within the Kennedy administration about the importance American policymakers placed in preventing the outbreak of war between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Kennedy did not maintain a no-strings-attached relationship with Israel. Kennedy's political support was largely dependent on securing Israeli commitments to his broader plans in the Middle East in general, and his nuclear non-proliferation policies in particular. This led the Kennedy administration to support a policy that would require Israel to submit to regular inspections of its nuclear facilities by American officials. Avner Cohen argues that Kennedy knew that Israel had an active nuclear weapons program and he perceived its very existence as a direct threat to geopolitical stability in the Middle East.<sup>207</sup> Douglas Little describes the Kennedy administration's efforts to prod Israel into relinquishing its nuclear program so that Egypt would not fall further into the hands of the Soviet Union.<sup>208</sup> He cites Kennedy's failure in convincing Nasser to detach himself from the Soviet Union as an impetus that hastened a growing the U.S.-Israel special relationship. Ultimately, Kennedy failed to live long enough to institutionalize the security guarantees he promised Israel or fully develop the special relationship he first mentioned in his 1962 meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. Kennedy's death also prevented the

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<sup>203</sup> Alsaeed, I. H. (1989). "The Origins and Meaning of America's Special Relationship with Israel." Dissertation Abstracts International. Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences **49**(10): 3134-3134., 527.

<sup>204</sup> Ben-Zvi, A. (2004). "Influence and arms: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and the politics of arms sales to Israel, 1962-1966." Israel Affairs **10**(i-ii): 29-59.

<sup>205</sup> Tal, D. (2000). "Symbol not Substance? Israel's Campaign to Acquire Hawk Missiles, 1960-1962." International History Review **22**(2): 304.

<sup>206</sup> Levey, Z. (2004). "The United States' Skyhawk Sale to Israel, 1966: Strategic Exigencies of an Arms Deal." Diplomatic History (2): 255.

<sup>207</sup> Cohen, A. (1998). Israel and the bomb, New York: Columbia University Press, ©1998., 102.

<sup>208</sup> Little, D. (1993). "The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68." International Journal of Middle East Studies (4): 563., 572.

implementation of a comprehensive pressure campaign to thwart the development of Israel's nuclear weapons program as his successor Lyndon B. Johnson would carry out a foreign policy with priorities elsewhere.

Upon assuming the presidency, Johnson put Middle Eastern affairs on the back burner as he focused much of his foreign policy on achieving victory in the Vietnam War. Johnson made a major commitment to Israel's security by selling Israel 280 M48-A Patton Tanks and 48 Skyhawk fighter bombers between 1965 and 1966.<sup>209</sup> No previous American president had sold such offensive weapons to Israel. Johnson remained indecisive about the more robust security commitment that Israeli leaders sought. This stance would backfire as his reluctance to organize an international coalition to break the Egyptian blockade of the Straits of Tiran hastened Israeli war-planning efforts to pre-emptively strike against the collective armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on 5 June 1967. Johnson's unwillingness to ingratiate himself as a key mediator prior to the outbreak of the Six Day War was largely due in part to his reluctance in placing the U.S. in a second costly war. After a major victory over its Arab neighbors in the Six Day War in 1967, the U.S. considered Israel to be a rising regional power.<sup>210</sup> Such circumstances hastened American efforts to bring about a just peace in the region that were favorable to its strategic ally.

In the aftermath of the Six Day War, Johnson immersed himself in the thicket of Arab-Israeli peacemaking. Johnson articulated *Five Principles* for Arab-Israeli peace in the wake of the war that he hoped would usher in an era of harmony between Israel and its Arab neighbors:

Every nation in the area has the fundamental right to live and to have this right respected by its neighbors, justice for the refugees, the right of innocent maritime passage, limits on

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<sup>209</sup> Ben-Zvi, A. (2004). "Influence and arms: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel, 1962-1966." *Israel Affairs* **10**:(i-ii): 29-59.

<sup>210</sup> Ben-Zvi, A. (1993). *The United States and Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993., 224.

the arms race, and respect for political independence and territorial integrity of all states in the area.<sup>211</sup>

Johnson's *Five Principles* culminated in the passage of U.N. Resolution 242, which laid the parameters for bringing about a political settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Alfred L. Atherton, Jr. argued that in the wake of the Six Day War, the Johnson administration was "too passive during this time period and missed a key opportunity to bring about a peaceful end to the Arab-Israeli Conflict."<sup>212</sup> The Arab League rejected peace negotiations with Israel at the Khartoum Summit shortly after the Six Day War ended. This decision ensured that the core issues at the heart of the Arab-Israeli Conflict would remain unresolved despite the passage of UNSCR 242. These circumstances ensured that Richard Nixon would enter office with another Middle East war looming on the horizon.

The Nixon administration adopted a more hands-on approach to American-Israeli relations early in his presidency. Unlike Kennedy and Johnson, Nixon made ending the Israeli-Arab conflict a strategic priority of his administration and a crucial component of his foreign policy towards the Middle East.<sup>213</sup> His policies reflected a balanced approach premised on supporting Israeli security while attempting to forge an international consensus to bring about a decisive end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nixon saw the Middle East as a tinderbox ready to explode at any given moment due to a dangerous mix of Soviet arms, radical Arab dictators antagonized by Israel's existence, and an optimistic IDF fresh off a major victory over the combined armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan during the Six Day War in 1967. Trying to defuse tensions in the region, Nixon attempted to internationalize the conflict by bringing the Soviets, Europe and the U.N. into the negotiations. These actions raised alarm bells in Israel and led to a

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<sup>211</sup> Reich, *The United States and Israel: Influence in the Special Relationship*, 12.

<sup>212</sup> Atherton Jr., A.L. (1984). "Arabs, Israelis- and Americans: A Reconsideration." *Foreign Affairs* (5): 1194., 1198.

<sup>213</sup> Reich, *The United States and Israel: Influence in the Special Relationship*, 19.

hardening in the Israeli position against a comprehensive settlement premised on U.N. Resolution 242. To allay Israel's concerns about an imposed settlement from the great powers, Secretary of State William Rogers proposed an initiative, later known as the Rogers Plan, which called for direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab states. For Israel, the terms of the Rogers Plan were unacceptable and bilateral ties soured. To allay Israel's fears of an escalation in the ongoing War of Attrition, Nixon reassured Golda Meir that the U.S. would privately renege from the bold declarations it had made in the Rogers Plan.<sup>214</sup>

Nixon's perceptions of Israel would later change after the 1970 Jordanian Crisis when Israel coordinated with the U.S. to preserve the Hashemite Kingdom from being overthrown by guerillas from the Black September faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Noam Kochavi describes Nixon's evolution on Israel's importance to American interests in the Middle East and how his changing views on were instrumental in expediting the largest transfer of American-made weaponry (since the Berlin blockade of 1948) to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.<sup>215</sup> Nixon's Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was initially reluctant to commit the U.S. to intervene decisively on Israel's behalf because of his worry that a full-blown Israeli victory would disturb the balance of power in the region.<sup>216</sup> At Nixon's insistence, an arms shipment from Washington to Jerusalem was ordered and a devastating Israeli defeat averted that simultaneously earned Nixon widespread praise from the Israeli public.<sup>217</sup>

A critique of Nixon's foreign policy towards Israel is advanced by Boaz Vanetik and Zaki Shalom. Vanetik & Shalom argue that the U.S. catalyzed the Yom Kippur War and that Kissinger's diplomatic efforts undermined the prospects of a peaceful settlement to the Arab-

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>215</sup> Freedman, *Israel and the United States: six decades of US-Israeli relations*, 30.

<sup>216</sup> Alsaheed, *The Origins and Meaning of America's Special Relationship with Israel*, 581.

<sup>217</sup> Kochavi, N. (2008). "Joining the conservative brotherhood: Israel, President Nixon, and the political consolidation of the 'special relationship', 1969-73." *Cold War History* 8(4); 449-480., 450.

Israeli Conflict that was not aligned with Israel's national interests.<sup>218</sup> In post-war negotiations, Kissinger attempted to broker a regional peace agreement by performing multiple rounds of "shuttle diplomacy" between Israel and its neighbors. These efforts culminated in the passage of the Sinai I and Sinai II agreements. Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy started a process that provided Egypt with the political cover it needed to commence peace negotiations with Israel. During the Carter Administration, U.S.- Israeli bilateral ties were defined by major policy disagreements between Carter and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Stewart R. Jones and Jimmy Carter describe how issues such as Soviet participation in an international conference to address Arab-Israeli peace, and the future of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, sparked tensions between the Likud Party and the Carter Administration.<sup>219</sup>

U.S.-Israeli relations were complicated by Carter's frosty relationship with Prime Minister Begin. Begin was ideologically oriented and had a vision of a "greater Israel" that was neither shared by Carter nor Egyptian president Anwar Sadat.<sup>220</sup> Shibley Telhami describes how Begin's ideological predispositions and detail-oriented approach to negotiations led to the implementation of an optimal bargaining strategy.<sup>221</sup> He goes on to describe how Carter effectively pushed Sadat to make concessions because Carter knew Sadat was more amenable to making them as he pushed harder to wrap up a desperately needed, and wanted, foreign policy accomplishment. William Quandt discusses the flaws of the Carter administration's bargaining strategy at Camp David and argues that Carter was caught off guard by Begin's ideological commitment to keeping full control over the West Bank and Jerusalem as well as Sadat's

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<sup>218</sup> Vanetik, B. and Z. Shalom (2011). "The White House Middle East Policy in 1973 as a Catalyst for the Outbreak of the Yom Kippur War." Israel Studies (1): 53., 53.

<sup>219</sup> Jones, S. R. and J. Carter (1993). Israel in the Carter years: Likud policy with regard to the West Bank and Gaza 1977-1980. London, Adelphi.

<sup>220</sup> Meridor, D. (2017) US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>221</sup> Telhami, S. (1992). "Evaluating Bargaining Performance: The Case of Camp David." Political Science Quarterly (Academy of Political Science) **107**(4):629.

inability to speak decisively on behalf of the Palestinian cause.<sup>222</sup> Begin and Carter were often at loggerheads over Middle East policy and lacked a warm personal relationship. Arlene Lazarowitz describes how Carter's entreaties to the Arab world, and his support for a Palestinian state, were all sources of great tension with the American Jewish community.<sup>223</sup> This tension occurred because Carter developed a foreign policy unconcerned with domestic political considerations. A lack of interest in engaging the American Jewish community was seen as a factor that led to Carter's electoral defeat in the 1980 presidential election.<sup>224</sup> Ronald Reagan, the former Republican governor of California, eventually defeated Carter in the general election and appeared ready to implement a pro-Israeli agenda in line with the views of many of his neoconservative advisors.<sup>225</sup>

### **U.S.-Israel Relations under Reagan**

Studies on events in the U.S.-Israel Relationship during the early years of the Reagan administration have often focused on the chasm that developed in the relationship after the policies of the Begin government ran contrary to those of an administration that sought to maintain a strategic partnership with moderate Arab leaders in the Middle East in addition to relations with Israel. Mitchell G. Bard argues that the "Israel lobby" (AIPAC) was not strong enough to stop a sale of AWACs planes to Saudi Arabia in 1982 because the prestige of the presidency outweighs the leverage interest groups have on foreign policy.<sup>226</sup> Bard discusses how

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<sup>222</sup> Quandt, W. B. (1986). "Camp David and Peacemaking in the Middle East." Political Science Quarterly (Academy of Political Science) **101**(3): 357.

<sup>223</sup> Lazarowitz, A. (2010). "Ethnic influence and American foreign policy: American Jewish leaders and President Jimmy Carter." Shofar (1): 112.

<sup>224</sup> In the 1976 presidential election Jimmy Carter received 71% of the Jewish vote. In the 1980 presidential election Carter received only 45% with Reagan receiving 39% and Independent John Anderson receiving 15%. (2018). "U.S. Presidential Elections: Jewish Voting Record (1916-Present)." The Jewish Virtual Library. from <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-voting-record-in-u-s-presidential-elections>

<sup>225</sup> Quandt, W.B. (1993). *Peace Process; American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution; Berkeley: University of California Press, © 1993., 336.

<sup>226</sup> Bard, M. G. (1988). "INTEREST GROUPS, THE PRESIDENT, AND FOREIGN POLICY: HOW REAGAN

the Reagan administration and its allies crafted a comprehensive public relations strategy with communications firms, big corporations, oil companies, (and even the active coordination of Nixon, Carter, and Ford) in order to ensure that the sale of AWACs airplanes were sent to Saudi Arabia under an arms agreement previously negotiated during the Carter years. Nicholas Laham draws on archival sources from the Reagan Presidential Library that detail intimate meetings between Reagan and members of Congress during the AWACs sale debate in 1982.<sup>227</sup> Laham focuses on the political capital that Reagan expended and the political pressures that the administration brought to bear on wavering Republican senators that were more interested in siding with Israel over the Saudis. Laham sheds light on the fact that Reagan became personally involved in the AWACS sale because he believed that a congressional rejection of the arms sale would signal to America's allies that a presidential commitment was meaningless unless approved by Congress.

Kathleen Christison assesses the actions of Reagan's Secretary of State George Shultz in the Arab-Israeli peace process between 1982 and 1989.<sup>228</sup> She finds that Shultz had a reactive approach to Arab-Israeli peacemaking that compounded the problems that an already disinterested president faced in a region that was reeling from the effects of the Lebanon War. She ascribes these circumstances as dealing a death blow to the Reagan Peace Plan and the development of a Strategic Consensus between Israel and the Arab states in the region. Martin Indyk does a comparative study of Reagan's Middle East diplomacy during his first and second terms in office.<sup>229</sup> He provides explanations for the failure of Reagan's strategic consensus

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SNATCHED VICTORY FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT ON AWACS." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18(3): 583-600.

<sup>227</sup> Laham, N. (2002). *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia: the Reagan administration and the balancing of America's competing interests in the Middle East*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002.

<sup>228</sup> Christison, K. (1989). "The Arab-Israeli Policy of George Shultz." *Journal of Palestine Studies* (2): 29.

<sup>229</sup> Indyk, M. (2012). "Reagan and the Middle East: Learning the Art of the Possible." (1): 111.

strategy, and his September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative, during Reagan's first term. Indyk argues that the Reagan Administration was "derivative, reactive, weak, and ambivalent" in its diplomatic approach to the Middle East region, placed too much faith in the Saudi Arabia to play a constructive role in peace negotiations, and wrongfully viewed the politics of the Middle East from the East-West prism of the Cold War.<sup>230</sup> In Reagan's second term, Indyk cites the Reagan Administration's opposition to an independent Palestinian state and its reluctance to recognize the PLO as a legitimate party in the negotiations as factors that prevented additional accords from coming to fruition during the 1980s. These beliefs, coupled with his assessments of the significant impact that domestic politics and ongoing regional conflicts have on the willingness of regional leaders to take risks in the peace process, provide one a true picture of the constraints leaders in the region have in brokering an accord between Israel and the Palestinians.

Previous literature on the U.S.-Israel relationship under Reagan have also focused on the nature of the security and intelligence partnership that developed between 1981 and 1989. Bard & Lenhoff argue that Reagan's support for a joint CIA-Mossad airlift of Ethiopian Jews to Israel from refugee camps in Sudan constituted a rare deviation from the Reagan administration's record of placing national interests over humanitarian concerns.<sup>231</sup> In 1985, Vice President George H.W. Bush was instrumental in convincing Sudanese President Gafaar El-Numeiry to allow 7,800 refugees to embark on planes for Israel via Europe even though Israel and Sudan were still technically in a state of hostilities against each other.<sup>232</sup>

Despite receiving increased military assistance from the U.S. during the Reagan administration, the signing of a strategic cooperation agreement, and a newfound status as a

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>231</sup> Bard, M. G. and H. Lenhoff (1987). The humanitarian side of the Reagan administration; the rescue of Ethiopian Jews. The Humanist, American Humanist Association: 25.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 26.



Major Non-NATO Ally, the U.S.-Israel military relationship during the Reagan Administration was challenged by a dispute over U.S. financial support for Israel's LAVI fighter jet. Dov Zakheim describes his experiences as an undersecretary in Reagan's Defense Department where he was tasked with monitoring American tax dollars allocated towards the development of the LAVI fighter jet in Israel.<sup>233</sup> After coming to an assessment that the project was running well over-budget, and Israel would be better off purchasing American F-15s instead, Zakheim initiates a political process that ends in the withdrawal of American financial assistance from the LAVI project. His candid memoir highlights the impact the dispute had on his personal life and the toll that it took on his standing in the Orthodox Jewish community in the U.S. Zakheim elaborates on the ways that the LAVI fighter, a source of great pride in Israel (because it was the first fighter jet developed in Israel), became a sore spot in U.S.-Israel military relations during the Reagan administration.

### **U.S.-Israel Relations from an Alliance Politics Perspective**

What makes the U.S.-Israel relationship different from other close bilateral relationships that the U.S. maintains with its allies? Scholars studying U.S.-Israel relations from an alliance politics perspective have sought to answer this question. These scholars have coalesced around the idea that a "special relationship" has formed between Israel and the U.S. that is qualitatively different from other relationships that both states maintain. Paul C. Merkley argues that American foreign policy towards Israel is heavily influenced by the religious convictions of American presidents.<sup>234</sup> Religious beliefs, though they are tempered by political and legal commitments that are secular in nature, are still a decisive factor that explains American behavior in its relationship with Israel. The notion that the U.S.-Israel relationship is premised on

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<sup>233</sup> Zakheim, D. S. (1996). *Flight of the Lavi: inside a U.S.-Israeli crisis*, Washington : Brassey's, ©1996.

<sup>234</sup> Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus*, 1-279.

constructivist determinants, such as religious beliefs, rather than geopolitical considerations, is a minority opinion among scholars that study the U.S.-Israel special relationship.

Elizabeth Stephens sees political culture as one of the most consequential factors impacting American foreign policy toward Israel and the development of a special relationship between the two countries.<sup>235</sup> Stephens sees political culture as one of the most consequential variables that compliments an existing partnership underlined by shared political interests. Stephens describes political culture as being responsible for creating a framework for which American policymakers view Israel. Appeals to the common beliefs and values endemic in American political culture has led American policymakers to see Israel as a nation with a common fate. Key among these are common religious values (Judaism and Christianity) and common ideological enemies (fascism and communism). Stephens describes how Israeli appeals to American values during the Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, and George H.W. Bush administrations were decisive in creating a special relationship between Israel and the U.S.

Abraham Ben-Zvi examines U.S.-Israel relations from the perspective of an international conflict theorist.<sup>236</sup> His study is narrowly focused on conflict between Israel and the U.S. and avoids broader theoretical questions about the meaning of the “special relationship” that the U.S. and Israel are a part of. Ben Zvi sees the U.S.-Israel relationship as a unique dyad in the study of international conflict that defies conventional wisdom on core principles of conflict mediation and crisis behavior. Political disputes that would lead to war in some dyads do not in the case of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Explaining this puzzle makes Ben Zvi’s contribution unique in the study of U.S.-Israel relations. The disputes that exist between Israel and the U.S. are described as qualitatively different because they take place within a different framework from other dyads.

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<sup>235</sup> Stephens, *US Policy Toward Israel: The Role of Political Culture in Defining the “Special Relationship*, 1-339.

<sup>236</sup> Ben-Zvi, *The United States and Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship*, 1-312.

The way the Israelis and the Americans handle their outstanding grievances are dealt with through a combination of accommodation and coercive methods.

Ben-Zvi describes America's ability to apply coercive and accommodative tactics as being muted by overlapping strategic interests and the existence of a "special relationship" between the U.S. and Israel.<sup>237</sup> These paradigms are akin to the foundation that underlies the unique bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Israel. The policy outcomes that arise in the U.S.-Israeli relationship are defined as being the overall product of an interaction between the interests of the United States and constraints that Israel and its supporters place on American decision-makers. Sometimes American and Israeli interests overlap, and Israel is perceived by the U.S. as a strategic asset. When they do not Israel is described as a strategic liability. The U.S. tries to influence Israel through a combination of deterrence and coercive diplomacy and Israel tries to impact American behavior by placing constraints that limit potential policy options that the U.S. employ to shape Israeli decisions. These constraints may take the form of congressional pressure or rallying public opinion in the U.S. Ben-Zvi elaborates on this unique dynamic by describing seven disputes in U.S.-Israel relations between 1953 and 1990.

Michael Thomas describes the impact that beliefs have on American foreign policy towards Israel. His study describes the implementation of policies in the Arab-Israeli Conflict during the Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush administrations.<sup>238</sup> He describes the special relationship between Israel and the U.S. as being a product of beliefs that become embedded into the policymaking process. Specifically, Thomas argues that:

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>238</sup> Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel: The Power and Limits of Beliefs*, 1-253.

Most important are beliefs, both moral and strategic, about the identity and role of Israel.

Also relevant are the beliefs about Arabs and Palestinians, Islam, and terrorism and

(during the Cold War) Soviet communism.<sup>239</sup>

Thomas outlines the various actors whose beliefs are consequential to the U.S.-Israel special relationship. He then identifies the constraints that impact American foreign policy toward Israel by citing the impact that individual decision-makers and institutions have on the policy process that determines the nature of the U.S.-Israel relationship. This strategy allowed Thomas to create a framework for which he could discern meaning from a set of policy outcomes and the actors involved in implementing them. This study was influenced by the framework employed in Thomas's study. However, the framework Thomas employed is limited because it failed to fully outline all the component parts of the U.S.-Israel special relationship. Specifically, Thomas fails to consider the importance of America's political support for Israel's nuclear program, the breadth and extent of the intelligence sharing relationship, and the importance of human rights in the bilateral relationship.

America's support for Israel's nuclear program has played a consequential role in keeping the special relationship intact. This is most important because if American support for Israel's nuclear program were to cease, the strategic and military relationship would fall apart due to American laws such as the Arms Export Control Act and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that the U.S. is required to abide by. Thomas also only mentions the nature of the intelligence sharing relationship in passing. The nature of this relationship, and the specific policy mechanisms established and institutionalized from it, have become one of the most important mechanisms for Israel to develop closer strategic ties with the U.S. Because of the consequential nature of the intelligence sharing relationship, and the degree of collaboration

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<sup>239</sup> Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel: The Power and Limits of Beliefs*, 1.

between the two services, conflict in the intelligence sharing relationship (such as the Jonathan Pollard Affair) have cast a major shadow over the entire U.S.-Israel relationship.<sup>240</sup>

Thomas also fails to outline the cause of human rights as being a factor that is consequential in bilateral relations between Israel and the U.S. Human rights and common values were instrumental in the formation of the U.S.-Israel relationship during the Cold War. American presidents, to differing degrees, used the cause of human rights as means to draw moral distinctions between the Eastern bloc and the West during the Cold War. In the realm of U.S.-Israel relations, American support (both political and economic) for Israel's diaspora communities in the Soviet Union and Africa became a key focus for American diplomats in the State Department. The very essence of Israel, its Jewish population, would have been significantly diminished in future years had a mutual interest in protecting the human rights of Jewish citizens living outside of Israel not been a top priority for leaders in both countries.

Existing studies that view the U.S.-Israel special relationship from an alliance politics perspective have provided a dearth of material about broad ideological and value-based principles that underpin the special relationship. Efforts to study the primarily policy areas of the U.S.-Israel special relationship have identified many of the most consequential areas examined in this study. What they have not done is identify each of the specific areas that constitute a special relationship and operationalize it in the U.S.-Israel case. This study will attempt to provide alliance politics scholars with a model to understand special relationships in general, and the U.S.-Israel special relationship in particular.

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<sup>240</sup> Policymakers that participated in US-Israeli intelligence sharing activities from both the United States (Dov S. Zakheim and John D. Negroponte) and Israel (Dan Meridor and Sallai Meridor) told me (in separate interviews) that the Pollard affair created a sense of skepticism and caution in an otherwise close intelligence sharing relationship.

## **The American Presidency and Alliance Development**

Previous scholars have yet to examine the degree to which presidential beliefs play a role in alliance development. A study examining this question would explain the ways that a president can implement policies leading to a closer alliance. Such a study would also start a discussion in international relations literature on the broader importance of the presidency and its role in acting as an agent of change in the international system. A successful theory linking a president's beliefs with specific policy outcomes observed in an alliance could tell us a great deal about the importance of the presidency (or any head of state for that matter) in international politics. Such a finding could spark further academic inquiry into individual leaders and could possibly lead to the development of mid-range theories that can better help political scientists understand the role that individuals play in shaping foreign policy outcomes. In this sense, it will recalibrate an interest in studying foreign policy elites and will give further evidence that they are of consequential importance in studying foreign policy and state behavior in the international system.

### **Operationalizing Ronald Reagan's Beliefs**

Studies using cognitive consistency theory have long shown that leaders are predisposed to implement policies commensurate with their own pre-existing belief systems. Therefore, we would expect that presidential beliefs, if readily identified, could be an indicator of future decision-making tendencies. In Alan Jacobs's analysis of the implications of cognitive ideational theories, he makes the following observation about the nature of cognitive constructs such as beliefs:

Because cognitive constructs are relatively resistant to change, we should see evidence of relative stability over time in both actors' ideas and in the choices that are hypothesized to result from them, even as material conditions change.<sup>241</sup>

Cognitive ideational theories have long been used in studies of the US-Israel relationship. For example, Michael Thomas noted that American foreign policy debates about the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship have long been premised on an understanding of the personal belief systems of individual policymakers.<sup>242</sup> Therefore, we would expect that Reagan's beliefs, like those of other presidents, would be appropriate to use in an assessment of his foreign policy towards Israel.

Therefore, we would expect that if stable beliefs are positively identified, and operationalized, they could be used to draw up hypotheses for empirical testing. This aspiration can only be accomplished by documenting the relevant beliefs in either private correspondence or public statements. Fortunately, Reagan left a long paper trail in his years of public service that one can review in order to positively identify his beliefs on issues relevant to U.S.-Israel relations. He had a weekly radio show before he was president (that was later transcribed in its totality) and kept a diary that he wrote in regularly throughout his presidency. This diary has since been published and is cited at numerous points throughout this study. These sources coupled with a long paper trail of declassified documents that document his participation in key meetings relating to U.S.-Israel relations has made it possible to identify his beliefs before and during his presidency.

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<sup>241</sup> Bennett, A. and J.T. Checkel (2015). Process Tracing from Metaphor to Analytic Tool, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015., 57.

<sup>242</sup> Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel: The Power and Limits of Beliefs*, 1-253.

## **The Nature of Ronald Reagan's Beliefs**

Political Scientist Stephen L. Spiegel argues that when Reagan's beliefs were articulated into policy, his aides would only succeed in changing his policies when they were able to convince him that a new policy was consistent with his own beliefs.<sup>243</sup> Reagan's rigid belief system developed from his collective life experiences. When Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, he was sixty-nine years old and had already gone through an ideological transformation from progressive to conservative. Reagan spent his formative years as an actor in Hollywood. He even served as president of the Screen Actors Guild and frequently interacted with individuals sympathetic to communist ideals. By the time he became president, Reagan was staunchly anti-communist, devoutly religious, and sympathetic towards the idea of laissez-faire free-market capitalism.

Reagan's ideological transformation impacted his views on foreign policy and the state of Israel. During World War II, he witnessed the atrocities of the Holocaust on film. This experience, along with a slew of Jewish friends he made during his years in Hollywood, led Reagan to become sympathetic towards Israel and Judaism. Reagan saw atheistic communism as anathema to his Judeo-Christian beliefs. His belief in free enterprise, forged during his years as a spokesman for General Electric, further ensconced his aversion to Soviet communism. Reagan's beliefs about foreign policy were formed within this framework. As a pro-western democracy, in a region with many Soviet-backed Arab dictatorships, it is easy to understand why Reagan came to sympathize with Israeli political aims in the Middle East.

In this study, I will look at seven beliefs that Reagan held on specific policy topics relevant to the U.S.-Israel relationship that he held before his presidency. Testing beliefs empirically could take place if an individual leader's beliefs are easily identifiable and capable of

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<sup>243</sup> Spiegel, *The other Arab-Israeli conflict: making America's Middle East policy, from Truman to Reagan*, 402.



being differentiated from the observed policy outcomes in a non-tautological fashion. This can be done through the identification of pre-presidential beliefs. Since pre-presidential beliefs are exogenous to the policy outcome under examination, they negate any possibility that tautology will be extant. Similarly, the intervening variables used in this study prevent potential problems with tautology as well. These factors ensure that the validity of the findings made in this study reflect a causal process that shaped the policy outcomes observed in the U.S.-Israel relationship during Reagan's presidency.

Examining presidential beliefs and the confounding factors that impacted American foreign policy towards Israel between 1981 and 1989 will showcase how and why the U.S. developed its special relationship with Israel. Positive results will show that a special relationship develops when the president's pre-existing beliefs catalyze a series of policy outcomes that result in institutionalized areas of bilateral cooperation. The model used in this study will showcase this process in a manner that also explains the confounding factors that either attempt to expedite, or stymie, a special relationship from developing.

*1A. Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about the Soviet Union Security Threat in the Middle East*

*1B. Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about Intelligence Policy*

*2A. Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about Nuclear Weapons*

*2B. Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about International Institutions*

*2C. Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about the Middle East Peace Process*

*3. Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about Trade*

*4. Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about Human Rights*

The pre-presidential beliefs identified in this study will be drawn from primary and secondary sources where Reagan stated his positions in each of these issue areas.

### **Intervening Variables**

#### **Policy Catalysts and Policy Constraints**

The actors identified as catalysts or constraints were determined after an assessment of the available primary source material in each case study revealed that they were actors that played a consequential role in the decision-making process and subsequent policies that were implemented. A model of foreign policy cannot accurately identify the most consequential causal mechanisms that shape foreign policy outcomes without addressing the presence of other actors that are capable of shaping foreign policy outcomes. George Tsebelis referred to these actors as “veto players”.<sup>244</sup> In a similar vein, Jeffrey T. Checkel described actors impacting observed policy outcomes as being “policy entrepreneurs.”<sup>245</sup>

Jonathan W. Keller has noted that during times of international crises Reagan had the ability to act as a “domestic constraint challenger” who would overrule opposing domestic factors such as his advisers, Congress, the media, and public opinion who criticized his approach to governing.<sup>246</sup> Such assessments reflect a narrative that describes Reagan as a decision-maker capable of overcoming obstacles and political pressures that sought to prevent him from implementing his preferred policies. This study will assess Keller's claim that Reagan's policy proposals were capable of implementation because of his ability to overcome political constraints as it pertains to American foreign policy towards Israel.

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<sup>244</sup> Tsebelis, G. (2011). Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

<sup>245</sup> Checkel, J. T. (1997). Ideas and international political change: Soviet/Russian behavior and the end of the Cold War, New Haven: Yale University Press, ©1997.

<sup>246</sup> Keller, J. W. (2005). "Constraint Respecters, Constraint Challengers, and Crisis Decision Making in Democracies: A Case Study Analysis of Kennedy versus Reagan." Political Psychology 26(6): 835.

This study will examine two forms of intervening variables capable of shaping foreign policy outcomes: policy catalysts and policy constraints. Policy catalysts and policy constraints manifest themselves in both domestic and international politics. Despite being the chief executive and agenda-setter of American foreign policy, the president of the U.S. is not the sole actor that influences foreign policy outcomes. Within the executive branch, members of the president's Cabinet, and the bureaucracies they manage, engage in foreign policy decision-making and implementation daily. For example, Scott Crichlow found the belief systems of presidential advisers and foreign ministers have the power to constrain foreign policy outcomes.<sup>247</sup> These factors cannot be ignored given their ability to change presidential decision-making and alter potential decisions.

Similarly, political institutions such as Congress, and non-governmental organizations such as lobbying organizations, are extant features of the American political system. Institutions are a key intervening variable that must be accounted for in any assessment that seeks to account for intervening factors that impact foreign policy outcomes. Scholars have noted the importance of institutions in foreign policy assessments. For example, Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane found that political institutions can mediate between ideas and policy outcomes.<sup>248</sup> These actors, whether individuals or institutions, seek to impact the policymaking process in a manner favorable to their own interests.

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<sup>247</sup> Crichlow, S. (2005). *Psychological Influences on the Policy Choices of Secretaries of State and Foreign Ministers*. Norway, SAGE PUBLICATIONS: 179.

<sup>248</sup> Goldstein, J. and R. O. Keohane (1993). Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993., 20-21.

## **Policy Catalysts**

Catalysts advance the ability of the president to shape foreign policy outcomes that align with his beliefs. In this study, I will define policy catalysts in the following fashion:

*Policy catalysts are domestic or international political actors, and/or events, that assist the president in his efforts to implement his preferred policies.*

Catalysts are chosen in this study by means of their relevance and salience to each specific policy area under study. They are time and context specific. Certain catalysts may be prevalent in one case but not another. The federal government is a hierarchical governing system with thousands of employees acting to implement the president's policies daily. No president can attend every bilateral meeting or diplomatic reception abroad even if he wanted to. In his absence, career civil-servants and political appointees (such as ambassadors), become policy stakeholders and are often the first American officials to view events as they occur in real-time. The way these actors interpret and relay the president's foreign policy positions can have a considerable impact on the policy outcomes that transpire later.

Catalysts may manifest themselves in domestic or international politics. The president is not a dictator that can alter world events at his own whim. Even though his physical movements may be limited, he is never entirely isolated and is constantly surrounded by teams of political advisors and appointees in the White House. Though these actors may sometimes hold opposing beliefs to those of the president, the president has a variety of tools at his disposal that he can use to marginalize differing opinions and shape policy outcomes that align with his beliefs. Key among these is his ability to appoint personnel who will go the distance over opposition to advance his preferred policies. Catalysts advance the ability of the president to shape policy outcomes favorable to his beliefs. These influential actors are consequential allies for any

president that seeks to implement a foreign policy decision that has either domestic or international opponents.

### **Domestic Catalysts**

Domestic factors within the U.S., such as congressional pressure and interest group lobbying, can impact policy outcomes. Congress plays a role in foreign affairs given the powers granted to it under Article II Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution. Members of Congress have created standing committees with budget authority and appropriations responsibilities over areas such as foreign aid and arms sales. For example, Israel has historically received annual allotments of foreign aid and economic assistance from the State Department's annual budget. This state of affairs turns the actors on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee into stakeholders in the development of American foreign policy towards Israel. Similarly, America's foreign military assistance, which Israel receives allotments of each year, must be affirmed by the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. The visuals of oversight hearings and the ability of individual members to use the bully pulpit to rally for the president's policies can never be entirely ignored.

Presidents and their advisors are regularly lobbied by interest groups. Interest groups also seek to enlist the support of government officials, Congress members, and citizens in the broader body politic so that they can work towards implementing policies that align with their preferred positions on issues they support. Interest groups can activate and mobilize their supporters outside of government and rally their allies inside both the executive and legislative branches of government to their side. Such clout effectively turns interest groups into stakeholders whose support is solicited because of their influence in shaping policy debates and the hearts and minds of key decision-makers.

## **International Catalysts**

Domestic considerations are but one catalyzing factor that shapes foreign policy in the U.S. Outside actors, such as world leaders and foreign diplomats, are catalyzing actors that may work towards implementing a presidential foreign policy prerogative that aligns with their own national interests. State visits, personal phone calls, written correspondence, and international summits are all opportunities where these actors will make their intentions known that they are in agreement with a specific foreign policy choice of an American president and that they will work towards its implementation.

Events that occur abroad can also have a considerable impact catalyzing an executive decision. Such catalysts may include factors such as salient political events abroad, global economic conditions, military strikes, civil unrest, and the policy decisions of international institutions. Presidents respond to events abroad for a myriad of reasons. They may be apt to respond to placate an ally or simply because doing so is necessary to ensure that their own policy goals can be continued to influence a fellow head of state.

## **Policy Constraints**

*Policy constraints are domestic or international political actors, and/or events, that oppose the president in his efforts to implement his preferred policies.* Policy constraints are factors that work against the implementation of policies favorable to the president's beliefs. Policy constraints are chosen in this study by means of their relevance and salience to each specific policy area under study. They are time and context specific. Certain constraints may be prevalent in one case but not another. Constraints can alter, or block, the president's preferred policies from being enacted. They may be overridden by the president and catalysts that oppose their position. For example, the president and his secretary of state may be able to implement

policies that are opposed by a domestic actor (such as Congress) or an international actor (such as another head of state). The extent of their opposition may also serve as a mitigating factor that "waters down" proposals favorable to the president's ideal policy outcome.

### **Domestic and International Constraints**

This study will examine two forms of constraints: domestic and international. *Domestic constraints* are domestic factors within the U.S. that can impact policy outcomes. Individual advisors, intra-administration squabbles, congressional pressures, and lobbying opposition are examples of internal constraints.

*International constraints* are international factors outside of the U.S. that impact policy outcomes. International constraints may include factors such as the foreign policies of other countries, salient political events abroad, global economic conditions, NGO activity, and the policy decisions of international institutions. Both domestic and international constraints can exist simultaneously or independent of one another. Constraints can prevent the president from shaping policy outcomes that align with his beliefs, although their existence does not negate the possibility that the president's beliefs will be actualized into policy. They are an important factor that must be accounted for because they reveal the identity of the power players in major policy debates and reflect the ideas of actors opposed to the president's base instincts on policy.

Constraints can also be salient events that have the effect of altering the trajectory of current plans. For example, an ongoing war in neighboring countries may challenge or negate the prospects of a peace treaty being signed between two states. Nicholas Veliotis, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs (1981-1983), noted that diplomats in the State Department "had to always be cognizant of the fact that political events in the Middle East were

always interconnected in some way.”<sup>249</sup> This observation is consequential because of the impact that salient world events have in influencing the strategic decisions of multiple actors involved in the process of making and implementing foreign policy decisions.

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<sup>249</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **An Overview of the Research Design**

#### **Hypotheses:**

I test the following hypotheses to measure the impact of Ronald Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs on the policy outcomes that were observed in the U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship between 1981 and 1989.

#### **Strategic Cooperation**

H<sub>1a</sub>: Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about the global security threat posed by the Soviet Union increased U.S.-Israel military cooperation.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about intelligence policy increased US-Israeli intelligence sharing and cooperation.

#### **International Diplomatic Support for Israeli Foreign Policy**

H<sub>2a</sub>: Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about nuclear weapons led Reagan to oppose the existence of Israel's nuclear program.

H<sub>2b</sub>: Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about international institutions led Reagan to support Israel in international forums.

H<sub>2c</sub>: Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about the Arab-Israeli conflict led to the implementation of policies that maximized the national interests of Israel in the Middle East peace process.

#### **Trade**

H<sub>3</sub>: Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about free trade led him to pursue economic policies that decreased barriers to trade with Israel.

## **Human Rights**

H<sub>4</sub>: Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about human rights led to higher rates of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union.

## **Methods**

The causal mechanisms that impacted the development of the U.S.-Israel special relationship will be assessed using a mixed multi-methods approach. By examining these factors, I hope to shed light on the development of the U.S.-Israel special relationship and the key factors that impacted the growth and maturation of the alliance. Four specific qualitative methods were employed throughout the duration of this study: case study analysis, within-case analysis, deviant case analysis, and process tracing. Each methodological approach was necessary in order to ensure the highest level of conceptual clarity and validity could be ensured.

### **The Benefits of Case Study Analysis**

The methodological approach employed in this study is justified on the grounds that the questions asked are best answered by looking at the factors that explain how and why the U.S. developed a special relationship with Israel. After gathering and analyzing primary and secondary sources, I then divided the totality of U.S.-Israel relations into separate policy areas, with each policy area constituting one area of engagement in bilateral relations. For example, all aspects of military cooperation, and the policies enacted in this arena, were split into a distinct case study. Next, a series of events that were consequential to the development of the policy outcomes in each area were delineated. Andrew Bennett & Alexander L. George note that each instance or class of events is characterized as being representative of a case.<sup>250</sup> I then constructed each case study by identifying a series of events and policy initiatives encompassed in one domain of a special relationship. In each case study, I will explain the catalysts and

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<sup>250</sup>Bennett & George, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 17.

constraints that shaped the observed policy outcome and the degree to which Reagan's beliefs were consequential in shaping it.

The events and policies examined in this study were rich in historical detail. My assessments had to find a way to account for all the consequential factors that impacted a set of specific policy outcomes in each case that I had identified as being consequential and worthy of empirical inquiry. In the complicated domain of alliance politics, not every case is one-dimensional in nature. I found throughout the duration of my study that individual policy areas of bilateral cooperation oftentimes entailed an understanding of multiple sub-units within it. Since the policy outcomes observed in this study were often complex and multi-faceted in nature, within-case analysis was employed when consequential sub-units that fell within the boundaries of a case needed closer introspection. Bennett & George note that working with a subclass of a general phenomenon is an effective strategy for theory development.<sup>251</sup> The aspirations of case study research, and even within-case case study research, cannot be achieved without a strategy that ensures that conceptual validity of the case outcomes can take form. To accomplish this objective, I employed a method known as process tracing.

### **The Benefits of Process Tracing**

I will evaluate the trajectory of the U.S.-Israel special relationship in each case study by using a method called process tracing. Process tracing is an effective method to employ because it can help unveil causal mechanisms linking deductive theory to case outcomes. It is especially beneficial in case study research and small-n studies where historical detail and accuracy is paramount. I employ process tracing because it is a methodological tool that will assist me in my efforts to assess the ideational theory I plan to examine (whether Reagan's pre-presidential

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 78.

beliefs had a causal impact on the policy outcomes that were observed in U.S.-Israel relations between 1981 and 1989).

In large-n studies, the quest to derive findings that display correlation across cases is paramount. However, in case study research unveiling causation within a single case is the defined objective. In small-n studies, the nature of the research question is fundamentally different and thus requires a different methodological approach in order to derive valid findings. Successful process tracing entails taking one's data and identifying steps in a logically defined sequence. In this task, omitted variables may be found and spurious ones discarded. By carrying out these actions, previous theories about the subject under assessment can be amended or rendered obsolete. Most importantly, it assists the social scientist by inspiring improvements to existing studies and can lead to the development of ideas for future research projects.

Process tracing also aids case study researchers in their quest to reject alternative explanations that may explain existing cases on the same subject. Intervening variables and causal mechanisms that reinforce discounted theories can be identified and excluded from the study afterwards. In this task, social scientists that employ process tracing ensure that the findings they make are original in nature. This allows the researcher to effectively add to the existing body of literature in their discipline and advance the pursuit of knowledge in a positive fashion. Political Scientist Jack Levy has argued that “process tracing may be better suited for exploring the possibility of learning than large-n quantitative studies.”<sup>252</sup>

Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel argue that process tracing has been used by scholars that seek to examine the impact that ideas have over time and within a case.<sup>253</sup> The ideational theory developed in this study seeks to find out the extent to which a set of exogenous

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>253</sup> Bennett, A. and J. T. Checkel (2015). Process tracing: from metaphor to analytic tool, Cambridge; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2015., 57.

beliefs impacted a series of policy outcomes. Bennett & Checkel argue that process tracing is useful in assessing ideational theories because it helps to showcase agents of change that may have influenced learning by the actor under study.<sup>254</sup> Such circumstances reflect the need to account for confounding factors that are time and context specific in a specific policy environment. This study employs process tracing because it is uniquely apt for an assessment of the American system where foreign policy decisions are made by a unitary executive in a hierarchical bureaucratic system with a variety of veto players and stakeholders with power to influence policy outcomes both inside and outside of the system itself.

### **Data**

The data used in this study is primarily drawn from primary source documents published by the American and Israeli governments. Primary sources such as public statements and classified documents have been shown to be reliable sources of data for empirical testing.<sup>255</sup> Deborah W. Larson noted the importance of historical documents stating that “historical documents can provide an ‘unobtrusive’ measure of policymakers’ beliefs and perceptions when they are not being observed and have less reason to manipulate their language.”<sup>256</sup> Historical documents used in this study take the form of declassified documents, speeches, cabinet minutes, diplomatic cables, interviews, memorandums, and written correspondence between high ranking Israeli and American policymakers.

Data was gathered for this dissertation in Israel on two separate trips to Israel (May-July 2015 and June 2017). During each of these research trips, this author worked as a Visiting Research Fellow at Hebrew University in Jerusalem which allowed secure access to a number of

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>255</sup> Marfleet, B.G. (2000). “The Operational Code of John F. Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis: A Comparison of Public and Private Rhetoric.” *Political Psychology* (3): 545.

<sup>256</sup> Larson, D.W. (1988). “Problems of Content Analysis in Foreign-Policy Research: Notes from the Study of the Origins of Cold War Belief Systems.” *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (2): 241., 253.

research facilities in Israel. Data was also gathered at the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at Hebrew University, Haifa University, The Menachem Begin Center, the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, and the Israeli State Archives in Jerusalem. To date, this author interviewed five Israeli officials who served in various advisory and political posts in subsequent Israeli governments between 1981 and 1989. Over 3,000 pages of primary and secondary source materials that discuss Israel's foreign policy toward the United States were also gathered.

Likewise, primary sources from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California are drawn upon. The Reagan Presidential Library has declassified over 300 pages of White House documents on U.S.-Israel Relations between 1981 and 1989. The data gathered from the Reagan archives include speeches, public statements, policy memorandums, intra-administration correspondence and diplomatic cables between policymakers in the Reagan administration and their counterparts in Israel. Likewise, this author procured over a thousand pages of documents from the Library of Congress, U.S. National Archives, State Department, U.N., and the personal papers of former congressmen and administration officials whose portfolios included U.S.-Israel relations. Documents and archival materials from interest groups and nonprofit organizations intimately involved with Israeli-American foreign relations were also gathered. Accompanying these primary sources are relevant books, journal articles, newspaper articles, and two interviews with advisors who were active participants in U.S.-Israel policy discussions during the Reagan administration.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Case Study I**

#### **Early Strategic Cooperation Between the United States and Israel**

##### **Introduction**

During the 1980 presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan stated that Israel was “perhaps the only remaining strategic asset in the (Middle East) region on which the United States can truly rely.”<sup>257</sup> The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and fall of the Shah of Iran that same year, led Reagan to pursue a foreign policy premised on alliance building in the Middle East. This chapter examines the Reagan Administration’s approach to building a strategic partnership with the Israeli government. It also examines the political dynamics that impacted the nature of the strategic relationship and the policies that came to fruition during Reagan’s presidency.

##### **Reagan’s Pre-Presidential Beliefs about the Soviet Union Security Threat in the Middle East**

Reagan viewed the Soviet Union as the primary geostrategic threat the U.S. faced in the Middle East. In his quest to prevent further Soviet infiltration into the region, Reagan saw Israel as the most capable ally that the U.S. could rely on in such efforts. This linkage led Reagan to see Israel as a bulwark worth fortifying in order to prevent Soviet influence in the region. Reagan’s views about Israel’s perceived importance as a check to Soviet interests was first documented in a private letter he wrote in 1970 nearly a decade before he was elected president.

Let me sum up the Middle East situation as I believe it is and has been. Israel outnumbered one hundred to one in the population of unfriendly surrounding nations, has

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<sup>257</sup> Weinraub, B. and G. Boyd (1979). Recognizing the Israeli Asset. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., Arc Publishing., 25

held its own with the help of American military supplies. In addition, the U.S. presence in the area has kept the Soviet Union outside the Middle East, at least as an active participant. If ever the United States gave up that role, it wouldn't make much difference whether or not we supplied arms to Israel.<sup>258</sup>

Reagan's assessment that Israel was America's most consequential ally in the Middle East was reinforced after the Iranian revolution. Reagan perceived the fall of the Shah to be a major setback for American influence in the Middle East as a key strategic ally was lost. Reagan's views about Israel's role as a strategic asset in the Middle East to actively thwart Soviet influence and reinvigorate America's position in the region was discussed in an interview with Bernard Weinraub and Gerald Boyd in the *Washington Post* on 15 August 1979:

The fall of Iran has increased Israel's value as perhaps the only remaining strategic asset in the region on which the United States can truly rely...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 well-being.<sup>259</sup>

Ronald Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs about the Soviet threat emanating from the Middle East in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution demonstrate that he viewed American interests as necessitating a closer strategic partnership with Israel on security-related issues.

During the 1980 presidential campaign, Reagan argued that the Carter administration had compromised America's strategic position in the Middle East by ignoring Soviet advances in the

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<sup>258</sup> Reagan, R., et al. (2003). *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, New York: Free Press, 2003., 443.

<sup>259</sup> Weinraub and Boyd, *Recognizing the Israeli Asset*, 25.



region and decreasing defense spending.<sup>260</sup> Specifically, he claimed that the Soviets invested "three times more than the US in strategic arms and twice as much in conventional arms."<sup>261</sup> The Reagan campaign had tapped into a general sense of pessimism about the state of American foreign policy in the Middle East. According to Nicholas Veliotis, this sense of pessimism was fed by three specific events that occurred during Carter's tenure in office:

- 1) The fall of the Shah in Iran;
- 2) The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan;
- 3) The rise of Soviet proxies in Ethiopia, Angola, and Mozambique.<sup>262</sup>

The decline of America's position vis a vis the Soviets in the Middle East became a rallying cry during Reagan's campaign as he vowed to establish a greater presence in the Middle East in order to signal to the Soviets that the U.S. was not jettisoning itself from the region.<sup>263</sup> Reagan spoke in apoplectic terms about Carter's defense strategy in the Middle East region arguing that his policies were "a temptation to America's adversaries rather than a deterrent."<sup>264</sup>

Furthermore, Reagan argued that Carter lacked trustworthiness because he had decided to agree to sell:

- 1) Sixty F-15s to Saudi Arabia;
- 2) One hundred main battle tanks to Jordan;
- 3) U.S. licensed turbine engines for Iraqi warships.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Reagan-Bush Presidential Campaign: Tenets of Middle East Policy. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 7-13.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Veliotis, N. A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>263</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Ronald Reagan's US News Interview on October 6, 1980. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 6.

<sup>264</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Reagan-Bush Presidential Campaign: Tenets of Middle East Policy. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**

<sup>265</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan before BNai Brith Forum. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**

At the time, each of these countries lacked formal diplomatic relations with Israel and had yet to recognize its right to exist. When Reagan entered office in January 1981, the Soviet Union became the top priority underlying American strategic thinking for the Middle East region. For Reagan, the military option was but a facet of his strategy to prevent the Soviet Union from making in-roads in the Middle East. Strong strategic intelligence needed to be garnered to devise strategies that would prevent surprises such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Key to accomplishing this goal would be the cultivation of alliance relationships where intelligence and political issues could be exchanged on a regular basis in an efficient and effective manner. These factors were noted in the 1980 Republican Party Platform statement on alliances:

In pledging renewed United States leadership, cooperation, and consultation, Republicans assert their expectation that each of the allies will bear a fair share of the common defense effort and that they will work closely together in support of common Alliance goals. Defense, budgets, weapons acquisition, force readiness, and diplomatic coordination need to be substantially increased and improved.<sup>266</sup>

It is within the context of these political aspirations that the Reagan administration would approach strategic cooperation with Israel in the Middle East.

### **U.S.-Israeli Strategic Military Cooperation Before 1981**

Even though Reagan came into office as a strong proponent of U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation in the Middle East, there was little for the U.S. military to build on in terms of an existing strategic infrastructure in Israel. During the early years of Israel's existence, the U.S. kept Israel at a distance and even maintained an arms embargo for a short time period. During the Six Day War of 1967, Israel established that it could defeat Soviet weapons systems on the

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<sup>266</sup>. Haig, A. (1980). Reagan/Bush Committee Policy Statement on Alliances. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 4.

field of battle after routing the combined armies of its Soviet backed Arab neighbors. Intelligence gathered from the Soviet weapons retrieved during the conflict assisted the U.S. in its efforts to better understand the nature of Soviet weapons systems it was up against in the ongoing Vietnam War.<sup>267</sup> On the political level, Israel's intervention on behalf of Jordan during Black September in 1970 “bailed out the King Hussein” at a time when his regime was nearly deposed by a joint effort from Syria and the PLO; both Soviet proxies in the region.<sup>268</sup> After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, former Israeli Minister of Intelligence Dan Meridor noted that: “Israel became a strategic partner of the United States.”<sup>269</sup> This decision was actualized when Israel received a massive airlift of American armaments from the Nixon administration at Nixon’s insistence and his Chief of Staff Alexander Haig who “oversaw the arms shipment from his bedside late at night” shortly after Nixon greenlighted the request, according to his former State Department Chief of Staff Sherwood Goldberg.<sup>270</sup> At this time, foreign assistance to Israel (both military and economic) rose from \$480.9 million in 1973 to roughly \$2.6 billion the following year.<sup>271</sup> Despite the close support that the U.S. had provided to Israel at a time of its greatest need, the breadth and extent of the strategic relationship, and the terms and conditions that underlined its existence, remained formally undefined.

During the Carter administration, military aid levels remained constant at \$1 billion dollars per year with the exception of 1979 when the U.S. used \$4 billion of military aid as an incentive for Israel to give up its oil resources, air bases, military installations, and settlements in the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt.<sup>272</sup> In an effort to define the nature of America’s commitment to

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<sup>267</sup> Reich, B. (1995). *Securing the covenant: United States-Israel relations after the Cold War*, Westport, Conn.; Greenwood, c.1995., 38.

<sup>268</sup> Zakheim, D. S. (2018). *US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>269</sup> Meridor, D. (2017). *US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>270</sup> Goldberg, S. (2017). *US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>271</sup> Reich, *Securing the Covenant. United States-Israel Relations After the Cold War*, 6.

<sup>272</sup> Cobban, *The US-Israeli Relationship in the Reagan era*, 7.

Israel, a Memorandum of Agreement was reached in 1979. The 1979 MOA was signed by the Carter administration to provide the Israeli government with security assurances in the event that the terms of the treaty were violated by Egypt. At the time, it was the largest sum of American military aid ever provided to another country. However, the 1979 MOA was not a gesture of a budding strategic partnership. It was perceived in Israel as payback for concessions (oil reserves, military installations, and settlements) that Israel signed over to Egypt for the sake of advancing peace. The 1979 MOA was signed at time when Israel's Arab enemies, such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, were receiving advanced weapons from both the U.S. and Europe. The unprecedented financial support provided by the U.S. did not ease Begin's worries about Israel's regional security concerns nor provide him with the document he wanted that formally identified Israel as an ally of the U.S. on the strategic level. The MOA formally outlined the parameters of American military support for Israel in the wake of an attack by Egypt. The agreement was largely influenced by the actions of the Egyptian military during the Six Day and Yom Kippur Wars as the MOA promised American military and economic assistance in the wake of "a naval blockade that impeded Israel's maritime rights, an abrogation of the demilitarization of the Sinai, or an armed attack."<sup>273</sup> However, the MOA was not broadly applicable to other Middle Eastern conflicts that Israel was involved in. This made the Israelis perceive American reassurances that Washington "would not send arms to any country that would transfer arms to a third party for an attack on Israel" and would be "receptive to Israeli requests for military and economic assistance" as vague promises that lacked the breadth and extent of a true strategic commitment made from one ally to another.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> United States of America and The State of Israel (1979). Memorandum of Agreement between the Governments of the United States of America and the State of Israel. Atlanta, GA, Center for Israel Education.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

The nature of the strategic partnership between the U.S. and Israel prior to Reagan's arrival in Washington was minimal at the operational level as well. The U.S. had neither a military base nor any contingency plan to station troops in Israel in the event of a war in the Middle East. This made it difficult for members of the American military establishment to immediately see Israel as a natural strategic partner capable of doing what Reagan envisioned when he campaigned for president when it already had forces stationed in the Persian Gulf. The military establishment was interested in protecting a free flow of oil from the Middle East and protecting an agreement that had been signed with the Saudis three years before the creation of the state of Israel. Since Franklin D. Roosevelt first made securing access to Middle Eastern oil supplies a strategic priority in 1945, American policymakers had envisioned a free flow of oil from the Middle East continuing unabated.<sup>275</sup> Israel's ability to help the U.S. was not considered to be a viable policy alternative to cooperating with the Arab states in the Persian Gulf.<sup>276</sup> In 1981, the military establishment in the U.S. believed that America's Arab allies in the region namely Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, and Iraq were better positioned to ensure a free flow of oil from the region than Israel was. Furthermore, any American-led joint strategic relationship that included Israel in these contingencies was opposed by the Egyptians and the Saudis "so long as Israel occupied the West Bank."<sup>277</sup> These constraints were extant when Reagan tasked his administration with creating a strategic dialogue with Israel that could advance American interests in the Middle East upon entering office in January 1981.

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<sup>275</sup> Roosevelt, F.D. (1945). *Attitude of the American Government Toward Palestine*. K. I. Saud. New Haven, CT, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy.

<sup>276</sup> Veliotis, N. A. (2018). *US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration (Email Correspondence)*. L. Lukoff. Washington, D.C.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

## **The Development of U.S.-Israeli Military Strategic Cooperation Prior to 1983**

When Begin went to Washington in 1981 for his first meeting with Reagan, he took advantage of the recent change in presidential leadership by seeking a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the future parameters of strategic cooperation between the U.S. and Israel. The tenor of U.S.-Israel relations changed markedly when Carter and his foreign policy team left office. Israel was discussed in a different context than it had been under previous presidents. A sea change in framing of Israel as an ally was noted by American Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis:

Reagan used the word "ally" without embarrassment throughout the campaign, and because bureaucracies eventually respond to political leaders, it did not take very long for others to start thinking of Israel in an alliance framework as well.<sup>278</sup>

Eliyakim Rubinstein, an Israeli diplomat who negotiated the terms of the 1981 Strategic Cooperation MOU, believed that Israeli negotiators felt that "there was a feeling that Reagan saw us (Israel) as a strategic partner."<sup>279</sup> Since Reagan had made closer relations with Israel a policy priority, he tasked both the State and Defense Departments with crafting a document outlining the parameters of a future strategic relationship with Jerusalem. Practically speaking, the 1981 Strategic Cooperation MOU negotiations were a chance for the U.S. to cement closer political relations with Israel after Begin and Carter's tumultuous relationship had led to a cooling in U.S.-Israeli relations. They were also a chance for Israel to showcase the various ways that it could use its military to assist the U.S. in its regional plans for the Middle East.

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<sup>278</sup> Lewis, S.W. (1986). Policy Focus Newsletter. Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Washington, D.C. Issue 3: 4, 6., 4.

<sup>279</sup> Rubinstein, E. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

### **Domestic Catalyst – Secretary of State Alexander Haig**

There is an old saying in Washington that "personnel is policy." The biggest difference between Carter and Reagan as it pertained to strategic cooperation with Israel had to do with the personnel changes that took place. Reagan's favored policy decisions were designed to bring about U.S.-Israeli cooperation at the strategic level. According to Dov Zakheim, the change in presidential leadership was perhaps the biggest factor impacting military cooperation:

President Carter was not sympathetic to the idea that Israel was a strategic asset to American military interests in the Middle East. However, Carter's Secretary of Defense Harold Brown was quite sympathetic to Israel. In the Reagan years it was flipped. You had a president who was instinctively sympathetic and a Secretary of Defense who was instinctively cautious. He wasn't anti-Israel. I think that was a misunderstanding, but he cautious (should it be "was cautious?"), much more cautious.<sup>280</sup>

The Pentagon was also only partially involved in policy negotiations relating to the strategic relationship with Israel during the Reagan administration's early years. Tensions between the Pentagon and the State Department over the utility of developing a strategic relationship with Israel would become a staple in internal policy debates within the administration between 1981 and 1983. The State Department was staffed by Reagan with political appointees that were anti-Communist and pro-Israel. Secretary of State Alexander Haig was perceived as being "a big supporter of Israel."<sup>281</sup> His Counselor (Robert McFarlane), Director of Policy Planning (Paul Wolfowitz), and Ambassador to the U.N. (Jeane Kirkpatrick) "were all identified as supporters of

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<sup>280</sup> Zakheim, D. S. (2018). US-Israel relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>281</sup> Ross, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration (Email Correspondence). University of Georgia. L. Lukoff. Washington, D.C.

Israel,” according to Nicholas Veliotos, who worked alongside them, as Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs from 1981 to 1983.<sup>282</sup>

### **International Constraint: The Weinberger-Sharon Discord**

The 1981 MOU was a product of negotiations that took place between Ariel Sharon and Caspar Weinberger. The U.S. was aware that Israeli demands for a strategic relationship were extensive. Such requests were noted when National Security Advisor Richard Allen wrote a letter to George H.W. Bush outlining a laundry list of demands he expected to see from the Israelis. The Israeli negotiating team led by Sharon was hoping for the creation of an extensive strategic partnership. Specifically, the U.S. anticipated that Israel would ask for the following items:

1. F-15s fighter jets provided on a grant basis;
2. Real-time intelligence data and improved surveillance due to recent arms sales to Saudi Arabia and ongoing Israel withdrawal from Sinai Peninsula;
3. Support in the Middle East peace process;
4. A promise to rein in Saudi rejections of Israel;
5. A permanent U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean;
6. American promises to preposition sensitive military equipment at its new base in the Negev Desert;
7. Restriction of military exports to countries that support terrorism such as Iraq;
8. New bidding opportunities for Israeli companies to compete for overhaul and maintenance contracts;
9. Procuring Israeli quality support services to help repair aerospace, air frames, engines and avionics equipment used by the United States;

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<sup>282</sup> Veliotos, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.



10. Sole source contracts set aside for Israeli firms in areas such as procurement of spare parts to the U.S. military spare parts;
11. American support to sell arms in countries where the U.S. cannot for policy reasons;
12. Israel and U.S. defense contractors should be allowed to compete in the same countries;
13. Coproduction of U.S. & Israeli defense articles;
14. More work towards implementing 1979 MOA allowing Israel to compete for U.S. defense contracts;
15. American support allowing Israel to sell systems to U.S. companies that would be sold to 3rd party countries;
16. American support allowing Israel to sell surplus equipment to third countries which have less sophisticated weapons systems.<sup>283</sup>

In military negotiations with the United States in general, and the 1981 Strategic Cooperation negotiations in particular, Israel provided the U.S. with an extensive list of demands for assistance for two reasons according to Dov Zakheim:

- 1) Sometimes the U.S. would surprise them and give them more than they originally expected;
- 2) If the administration would reject their terms, they would lobby a supportive Congress for them instead.<sup>284</sup>

There was considerable debate within the Israeli negotiating team about what exactly Israel should provide for the U.S. in a strategic relationship as well. A core tenet of Israeli defense

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<sup>283</sup> Allen, R.V. (1981). Memorandum to the Vice President: Israeli Military Wish List. The White House. Simi Valley, California, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. **Israel Folder**.

<sup>284</sup> Zakheim, Dov S. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

doctrine in 1981 was to have only Israeli soldiers fighting its wars. The Israelis knew that the U.S. was eager to enlist Israel and its military forces as allies in a potential conflict with the Soviet Union as Reagan had espoused the benefits of having Israel as an ally in the Middle East in the event of a potential regional conflict with the Soviet Union during the presidential campaign.<sup>285</sup> Eliyakim Rubinstein, a member of the Israeli delegation that negotiated the 1981 Strategic Cooperation MOU, noted that he perceived the Americans as being “overly eager to include language in the MOU that would bind Israel to act militarily in a potential conflict against the Soviet Union.”<sup>286</sup> Thus, it was consequential for Israel to soften the nature of the MOU terms so as to avoid signing a legal document that obligated Israel to wage war with the U.S. against the Soviet Union. To make matters more complicated, this task had to be accomplished while Israel expressed its willingness and ability to actively assist the U.S. in its efforts to undermine Soviet infiltration of the Middle East.

Since Reagan had made it a presidential priority for his Near East Affairs Bureau to sign a strategic cooperation agreement with Israel, it was inevitable that some form of an agreement was going to be signed between the two countries. It was believed by the administration that a strategic cooperation agreement would “not only repair U.S.-Israeli relations but it would also allow Reagan to achieve a political victory on a foreign policy issue he had campaigned on.”<sup>287</sup>

In the early days of Reagan’s first term, Israel’s specific role in American contingency planning in the Middle East was unclear as the Pentagon led by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman John Vessey were skeptical of developing a close strategic relationship with Israel. Their predecessors in the Carter administration had been

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<sup>285</sup> Quandt, W. B. (1993). *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution; Berkeley: University of California Press, © 1993., 336.

<sup>286</sup> Rubinstein, E. (2017). *US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>287</sup> Veliotis, N. A. (2018). *US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

skeptical of a formal strategic relationship and had shied away from Israeli efforts to hasten bilateral cooperation. There are four arguments that underlined the beliefs of Israel's skeptics in the American security establishment at this time. First, the Arab-Israeli Conflict was "viewed by the military brass as a zero-sum game."<sup>288</sup> Either America was with Israel or the Arabs. Any American initiative to help the Israeli military was believed to be viewed by the Arabs as a hostile act endangering their countries security interests. Similarly, any effort to bolster the military capabilities of America's moderate Arab allies in the region would be viewed by Israel as a signal that the U.S. could not be trusted to maintain its existing security assurances. The Arabs saw American support for Israel as contrary to the initial commitments made by the U.S. three years before Israel's founding. In an effort to bolster America's strategic position in the Middle East, Franklin D. Roosevelt met with King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud on board the U.S.S. Quincy on February 14, 1945. In this meeting, Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed to provide military support and assistance to Saudi Arabia in exchange for an agreement that would ensure American access to Saudi oil supplies in the Persian Gulf.<sup>289</sup> Thereafter, it became conventional wisdom in the Defense and State Departments that vital American interests in the Middle East were predicated on maintaining a close strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Arab nations in the Persian Gulf.

Second, the same military establishment that saw Israel in a dim light for policy reasons also believed that its leaders had killed American sailors in a wanton act of aggression and had lied about their culpability in the Liberty incident. Former Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte noted that "the military establishment never quite forgave Israel for killing thirty-four American sailors when it inadvertently sunk the U.S.S. Liberty during the Six Day War on 8

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<sup>288</sup> McFarlane, R. C. and Z. Smardz (1994). *Special Trust*, New York: Cadell & Davies, ©1994., 186.

<sup>289</sup> Roosevelt, F.D. (1945). *Attitude of the American Government Toward Palestine*. K. I. Saud. New Haven, CT, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy.

June 1967.”<sup>290</sup> Suspicions lingered among many top leaders in the U.S. that the attack had been deliberate and not an accidental attack on a ship mistaken as an Egyptian warship. Skeptics of Israel’s response to its role in the Liberty incident included Johnson’s Secretary of State Dean Rusk:

I was never satisfied with the Israeli explanation. Their sustained attack to disable and sink *Liberty* precluded an assault by accident or some trigger-happy local commander. Through diplomatic channels we refused to accept their explanations. I didn't believe them then, and I don't believe them to this day. The attack was outrageous.<sup>291</sup>

Third, Sharon undermined the MOU negotiations by advancing ideas about U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation that were completely at odds with his counterpart Weinberger. Sharon’s disagreements with Weinberger were observed by U.S. Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis:

Sharon described the scope of future strategic cooperation in grandiose, far-reaching terms. He sent cold shivers down the backs of most of the people on the American side of the table—and maybe even some on the Israeli side.<sup>292</sup>

For Weinberger, Sharon’s grandiose plans to use the Israeli military as an extension of America’s defense infrastructure in the Persian Gulf was unfathomable and anathema to America’s interests in the region.

Fourth, policy differences between Weinberger and Sharon were exacerbated by personal tensions between the two leaders. Undersecretary of Defense Dov Zakheim, who was a political appointee serving under Weinberger from 1981 to 1987, noticed obvious tensions between the two leaders during his time in the Pentagon:

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<sup>290</sup> Negroponte, J.D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>291</sup> Rusk, D. and D.S. Papp (1990). *As I Saw It*, New York: W.W. Norton, ©1990. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 388.

<sup>292</sup> Lewis, S.W. (1986). Policy Focus Newsletter. Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Washington, D.C. **Issue 3: 4,6.,4.**

Weinberger was much more attuned to what the Arabs were concerned about. He felt that the relationship with Saudi Arabia, in particular, was crucial. In those days, not like today, the Saudis were negative about Israel. He also did not get along with Sharon. Cap Weinberger was one of the most gentlemanly people I've ever met, and Sharon ticked him off. He was the only person that he ever yelled at. So, you had a combination of a guy who already was more attuned to what the Arabs were saying, and his opposite was somebody he didn't like.<sup>293</sup>

Collectively, each of these factors played a role in shaping the outcome of the negotiations.

What resulted from these negotiations eventually assuaged the concerns of both the U.S. and Israel even though Sharon's grandiose plans for strategic cooperation were disavowed. For the U.S., the terms were especially vague and only created a broad framework that could be suspended unilaterally at any point in the future (which it would be after Israel annexed the Golan Heights less than a year later). The vague terms outlined in the MOU did not anger America's Arab allies because they "viewed it more as more of a political exercise than a binding commitment that effectively threw American weight behind Israel in the event of a conflict in the Middle East."<sup>294</sup> Rather than trumpet the agreement as a major foreign policy success, Weinberger sought to deny Sharon a public relations victory by signing the MOU in the basement of the Pentagon without any media members present.<sup>295</sup>

For Israel, the 1981 Strategic Cooperation MOU was perceived by Begin as piece of paper that effectively changed the tenor of U.S.-Israel relations by acknowledging for the first

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<sup>293</sup> Zakheim, D.S. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>294</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff

<sup>295</sup> Lewis, S.W. (1998). Interview with US Ambassador to Israel Samuel W. Lewis. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Officers Oral History Project. P. Jessup. Arlington, VA., 174.

time that Israel was an ally of the U.S. in writing. Specifically, the Strategic Cooperation MOU outlined the following shared interests and strategic objectives:

- 1) To deter the U.S.S.R. through military cooperation in the Middle East;
- 2) To cooperate in joint military activities;
- 3) To create coordination mechanisms establishing joint activities between the U.S. and Israeli militaries;
- 4) To create a coordination council that meets periodically to further the MOU's objectives;
- 5) To develop joint working groups to address issues such as cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, research and development, joint readiness, defense trade, and other areas.<sup>296</sup>

The policies created in the 1981 MOU were more aspirational than they were formal. The details of the working groups and the explicit terms for future collaborative efforts were not determined at the signing of the accord. The language that was codified in the initial negotiations only set a framework for future discussions that were to occur about strategic cooperation. Nonetheless, Begin trumpeted the agreement as a major victory for Israel and effusively praised President Reagan at a state dinner held in his honor on September 9, 1981:

Mr. President, today we achieved much in Washington, thanks to you. I shall leave town knowing that our cooperation in the field of security and strategy—in the face of a world danger to lose all the values we believe in, which make life worthwhile to live—will be

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<sup>296</sup> United States of America and State of Israel. (1981). Strategic Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding. Department of Defense. Washington, D.C.

concrete and close. This is a real achievement, again, thanks to you, Mr. President, to your wisdom and the warmth of your heart.<sup>297</sup>

The festive atmosphere would last less than a year. Three major events would take place over the course of the next two years that would effectively put the concept of U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation on ice and put unprecedented strain on U.S.-Israel relations.

### **International Constraint - The Israeli Attack on Iraq's Osirak Nuclear Facility**

In June 1981, Israel carried out Operation Opera and destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear facility without providing the Reagan administration with advance notice. Initially, Reagan was apoplectic about the attack. On June 7, 1981, Reagan wrote the following entry in his diary:

Got word of Israeli bombing of Iraq—nuclear reactor. I swear I believe Armageddon is near. Returned to W.H. at 3p.m. More word on bombing. Begin informed us after the fact.<sup>298</sup>

An imminent crisis was on hand with Israel less than a year into Reagan's presidency. These actions led to calls by Israel's critics in the administration to adopt punitive measures that would decrease bilateral strategic cooperation. Such punishments, if implemented, could have effectively destroyed any chance of military cooperation with Israel while Weinberger served as Secretary of Defense. The U.S. was caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, an attack on an Arab state by Israel caused immediate tensions in America's relationship with its Arab allies in the Middle East because of America's close relationship with Israel. On the other hand, Iraq's nuclear ambitions were well known to both the U.S. and Israel as the Carter

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<sup>297</sup> Reagan, R. and M. Begin (1981). Toasts of the President and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel at the State Dinner. The American Presidency Project.

<sup>298</sup> Reagan, R. and D. Brinkley (2007). The Reagan Diaries, New York: HarperCollins, ©2007. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 24.

administration had been apprised of Israel's potential plan.<sup>299</sup> This information never made it into the hands of the policymakers who would craft a contingency plan in the event of an Israeli attack. Because of this, the administration was caught off guard. A wedge was drawn between the U.S. and Israel as well as between the U.S. and the Arab states. Such circumstances necessitated a crafted response that would assuage both parties without further straining relations with both Israel and the Arabs. This was a significantly difficult diplomatic challenge for the U.S. In 1981, Iraq was still in a state of hostilities against Israel (it did not sign an armistice after the Israeli War of Independence in 1948). Israel's supporters in the Reagan administration noted this state of affairs and thus argued that the U.S. should not view the raid on Osirak as an illegal attack.<sup>300</sup> Reagan also felt that any harsh condemnation of Israel by the U.S. would only exacerbate tensions in the region and undermine Middle East peace. In his writings Reagan details his own internal deliberations and motivations regarding the response to the strike writing that:

Under the law I have no choice but to ask Cong. to investigate & see if there has been a violation of the law regarding use of Am. produced planes for offensive purposes. Frankly, if Cong. Shall should decide that I'll grant a presidential waiver. Iraq is technically still at war with Israel & I believe they were preparing to build an atom bomb.<sup>301</sup>

Ultimately, Secretary of State Haig was able to convince Reagan by telling him "that someday the United States would be indebted to Israel for destroying the facility."<sup>302</sup> Reagan's sympathies

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<sup>299</sup> Shipler, D. K. (1981). Israel Jets Destroy Iraqi Atomic Reactor: Attack Condemned by the U.S. and Arab Nations: Raid Held Essential: Begin Says Aim was to Bar Nuclear Strikes by 'Evil' Leader in Baghdad, The New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company: 1.

<sup>300</sup> Anonymous. (1981). Themes on the Israeli Raid. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations during the 1980s.**, 18.

<sup>301</sup> Reagan and Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, 24.

<sup>302</sup> Goldberg, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.



for Israel's predicament blunted sanctions that could have compromised the U.S.-Israel military relationship. However, the Osirak raid did not come without its consequences for U.S.-Israeli military relations. The U.S temporarily suspended a shipment of six F-16 fighter jets to Israel.<sup>303</sup> More importantly, the affair sowed the seeds of mistrust between the Reagan administration and the Begin Government. Such mistrust would only worsen over time and was not without its consequences for America's strategic cooperation with Israel, which faltered as a result. The long-lasting impact of Begin's actions was noted by Robert "Bud" McFarlane who served as Counselor at State under Haig in 1981 and later as National Security Advisor to Reagan from 1983 to 1985:

Later in 1983, it (strategic cooperation) was reinstated, but it never reached its full potential, owing primarily to the exploitiveness of the Begin government and the animus toward Israel harbored by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger.<sup>304</sup>

### **International Constraint: The Golan Heights Annexation**

The terms of the MOU were ultimately renegotiated because they were suspended when Israel annexed the Golan Heights on December 14, 1981. The Golan Heights Law brought the strategic mountainous territory, seized from Syria during the Six Day War in June of 1967, into Israeli administration and jurisdiction. Begin made the decision to annex the Golan Heights for two reasons:

1. Syria promised to reject any ties with Israel, even if the PLO would recognize Israel;
2. The continued presence of Syrian missiles in Lebanon.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Evans, A. (2017). A Lesson from the 1981 Raid on Osirak. Sources and Methods: A Blog of the History and Public Policy Program. The Wilson Center.

<sup>304</sup> McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 187.

<sup>305</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). The Golan Heights Law 5742-1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights was rebuked by both the U.S. and the international community. This decision led the Reagan administration to temporarily suspend the 1981 Strategic Cooperation MOU with Israel. Subsequently, Israel received a formal condemnation in the U.N. Security Council that was approved unanimously.<sup>306</sup> The suspension of the MOU effectively shelved ongoing strategic cooperation meetings between Israel and the U.S. that were still in their early formative stages. The Golan annexation was yet another example of a major decision, done without prior consultation with the U.S., that increased tensions between the Begin government and the Reagan administration.

### **Domestic Constraint – AIPAC Opposition to Saudi and Jordanian Arms Sales**

Begin also sharply disagreed with the Reagan administration's decision to sell F-16 aircraft and ground-to-air Hawk missiles to Jordan as well as AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia. In a letter to Reagan on February 16, 1982, Begin voiced his disapproval and challenged Reagan's promises that he made to him on Israeli security during their first initial meeting:

Forgive me, Mr. President, my candor, but it was out of this concern that we in Parliament yesterday joined hands, supporters of the administration of the day and its opponents alike, because all of us are deeply perturbed. If those sophisticated weapons are to be supplied to Jordan, just as similar ones have already been committed to Saudi Arabia, what will become of the qualitative and quantitative edge you were so kind to promise me to maintain so that Israel might deter aggression and prevent war which is what all of us so deeply wish.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Medzini, M. (1981) Security Council Resolution 497 (1981): The Golan Heights Law. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

<sup>307</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Exchange of Letters Between President Reagan and Prime Minister Begin, 16 February 1982. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

Initially, Begin promised the Reagan administration that he wouldn't lobby against the AWACS sale in congress.<sup>308</sup> However, during his initial trip to the U.S., Begin met with American Jewish groups and voiced his disapproval of the AWACS sale to the Saudis violating his pledge to the Reagan administration.<sup>309</sup> Begin then green-lighted a resolution in the Knesset condemning the U.S. for selling arms to the Saudis and the Jordanians.<sup>310</sup> Begin's rebuke of the Reagan administration's arms policies surprised Reagan because he believed that the sale did not negate his pledge to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge.<sup>311</sup> Subsequently, AIPAC mobilized to lobby both chambers of Congress in order to defeat both the arms sale to Jordan and the AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia.<sup>312</sup> This state of affairs put tremendous pressure on the Reagan administration both domestically and internationally. It led America's allies in the Arab world to believe that Israel had veto power over American foreign policy. It also complicated Reagan's relationship with congressional Republicans as the issue put members of his own party in a tough spot politically.

The Reagan administration did not see Israeli criticism of the arms sales as being justified. After all, Saudi Arabia had never attacked Israel and had no intentions to do so at the time. The AWACS planes were defensive in nature and American support for the systems was prerequisite for their operation. This led Weinberger to see Israeli criticism as misguided and unjustifiable in strategic terms. In addition to this, the Israeli security establishment did not see

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<sup>308</sup>Midgley, J. and R. Reagan (1984). "What Took Mr. Reagan to Beirut and Back." *Political Quarterly* **55**: 391-401., 394.

<sup>309</sup> Laham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia: the Reagan administration and the balancing of America's competing interests in the Middle East*, 122.

<sup>310</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Statement in the Knesset by Prime Minister Begin and Knesset Resolution, 15 February 1982. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

<sup>311</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Exchange of Letters Between President Reagan and Prime Minister Begin, 16 February 1982. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

<sup>312</sup> Dine, T.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. *University of Georgia*. L. Lukoff.

the weapons as being an imminent threat and had agreed to privately greenlight them in exchange for intelligence on Iraq the sale in a meeting with CIA head William Casey.<sup>313</sup>

### **Domestic Catalyst – Haig’s Intervention on Behalf of Israel**

What arose from the strategic cooperation negotiations between the U.S. and Israel was a Memorandum of Understanding “that was of very little substance but was trumpeted by Prime Minister Begin as a sign of an alliance and a great accomplishment.”<sup>314</sup> The nature of the strategic cooperation MOU in 1981 was vague because seemingly minor policy disputes were severely exacerbated by personal tensions between Sharon and Weinberger. Begin's decisions to bomb the Osirak nuclear facility, annex the Golan Heights, and oppose arms sales to the Saudis and Jordanians had the practical effect of dampening ties between the U.S. and Israel on strategic issues during Begin's tenure as prime minister between from 1981 to 1983. However, both Reagan and Secretary of State Haig were able to blunt their actions by pushing forward with the policy of strategic cooperation with Israel even though it started as a minimal relationship, was temporarily suspended and had received major pushback from the Pentagon.

Ultimately, both the F-16 sales and the Strategic Cooperation MOU were reinstated by President Reagan. Perhaps the most important legacy of the strategic cooperation relationship between 1981 and 1983 was that the relationship was preserved by Reagan and became a foundation for the expansion of U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation that took place when the administration issued National Security Decision Directive 111 in November 1983. By suspending the agreement rather than shelving it altogether, the Reagan administration created a dynamic that allowed for the terms of the deal to be re-negotiated when political tensions dissipated and the time for actualizing the relationship became a true necessity for American

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<sup>313</sup> Persico, J.E. (1990). Casey: The Lives and Secrets of William J. Casey from the OSS to the CIA. New York, NY, Viking., 253-254.

<sup>314</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

security interests after the Syrians and Hezbollah attacked American diplomatic and military facilities in Lebanon in 1983.

### **Domestic Catalyst – The State Department under George Shultz**

George P. Shultz became Secretary of State after Haig resigned on 5 July 1982. Shultz was an economist that had previously served in the Nixon administration as Secretary of Labor. Initially, the appointment of Shultz to serve as Secretary of State raised alarm bells in Israel and among its supporters in the U.S. Shultz was perceived as an individual with sympathies towards the Arab world given the fact that he had worked as president of the Bechtel Corporation and had worked on a number of business projects in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf. These fears were short-lived, and Shultz would move quickly to dispel the myths that he saw as pervasive during a tense time period of U.S.-Israeli relations. Shultz would become intimately involved in ensuring the implementation of U.S.-Israeli Strategic Cooperation that had been suspended in 1981. Shultz enacted policies that turned U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation into a “formal institutionalized process.”<sup>315</sup> During his time as Secretary of State, Shultz changed the bureaucratic culture at Foggy Bottom by breaking down bureaucratic cultural norms that prohibited Jews from serving in posts dealing with U.S.-Israeli relations and the Middle East.<sup>316</sup> Even though Shultz was not at the Pentagon, his office oversaw strategic dialogue with Israel. This responsibility gave Shultz power to negotiate with Israeli officials on military related issues in addition to his responsibilities dealing with the Israeli government on subjects such as the Middle East peace process and foreign aid.

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<sup>315</sup> Shultz, G.P. (1985). “The United States and Israel: Partners for Peace and Freedom.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* (4): 122., 124.

<sup>316</sup> Ross, D. (2017). *Memories of an Anti-Semitic State Department*. New York Times. New York, N.Y., The New York Times Company.

## **International Catalyst – The Lebanon War of 1982**

Renewed strategic cooperation between Israel and the U.S. became increasingly necessary as American-Syrian relations floundered after Assad was found to be actively undermining the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement by supporting low-intensity warfare against American troops via its proxies in Lebanon. The bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut and the subsequent attacks on the Marine Barracks led to the loss of America's most valuable security and intelligence assets in Lebanon. At this time, the Reagan administration considered closer strategic cooperation with Israel as a possible solution to ensure the success of America's existing diplomatic and security objectives in Lebanon and throughout the broader Middle East. On July 12, 1983, the NSC convened a meeting on America's security strategy in the Near East and South Asia. During the meeting, the NSC determined that "Israel's strategic location, quality forces, and developed military infrastructure would help the United States in its efforts to counter ongoing Soviet efforts to infiltrate the region."<sup>317</sup> On September 10, NSDD 103 was signed which outlined America's political strategy in Lebanon. NSDD 103 called for increased efforts to secure Israel's northern border with Lebanon while ensuring the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the country.<sup>318</sup> The Reagan administration increased assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces and humanitarian assistance to expedite these objectives. By ensuring Israeli security and Lebanese sovereignty, the Reagan administration hoped to ensure that the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement it had helped negotiate between Israel and Lebanon would succeed. The CIA had made an analytical assessment that a successful Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty could serve as a momentum boost to the administration's plans for Arab-Israeli peace, as it would give

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<sup>317</sup> Reagan, R. (1983). National Security Decision Directive Number 99: United States Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia. National Security Council. Washington, D.C., National Archives: 6.

<sup>318</sup> Reagan, R. (1983). National Security Decision Directive 103: Strategy for Lebanon. The White House. Washington, D.C., National Security Council.

confidence to America's moderate Arab allies that the U.S. could successfully wrestle concessions from Israel.<sup>319</sup> For the administration, closer strategic cooperation with Israel became a necessity to ensure the success of both the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement and the Reagan Plan.

Views about the importance of strategic cooperation with Israel were held by Robert C. McFarlane. McFarlane had recently been promoted from Middle East Envoy to serve as National Security Advisor. He was intimately involved with the negotiations through his various trips to the region since his appointment. McFarlane argued that American security interests were best served by convincing the Israelis to stay situated in their defensive positions in southern Lebanon. This argument was advanced despite the fact that Reagan had earlier told Begin that he needed to withdraw his troops from Lebanon as conditions on the ground had changed. McFarlane showcased this perspective at a National Security Planning Group Meeting held on October 18, 1983:

Even as we encourage Israeli withdrawals on the ground, we should accept that firmness (and even occasional violence) on their part toward Syria, and Syrian surrogates (e.g. PLO) represent the strongest incentive for Syria to withdraw.<sup>320</sup>

However, the military establishment was cool to the idea of further intervention in Lebanese political affairs. Weinberger and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General John Vessey had staked out positions arguing that the U.S. needed to withdraw from Lebanon and that closer strategic cooperation with Israel in Lebanon would damage America's relations with moderate Arab states in the region.<sup>321</sup> The Pentagon saw a looming quagmire where American troops would become entrenched in another sectarian conflict against Soviet proxies for the sake of ensuring the

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<sup>319</sup> Anonymous. (1983). Talking Points for the DCI on the Arab-Israeli Peace Process for 24 May 1983. Central Intelligence Agency. Washington, D.C., CIA Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room.

<sup>320</sup> Dur, P.A. (1983). National Security Planning Group Meeting on 18 October 1983. The White House. Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration, 1.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

success of a weak pro-American regime in the developing world. Eight years removed from Vietnam, and in the wake of a presidential election year, the voices in-favor of disengagement prevailed with Reagan. Thereafter, American troops relocated from the streets of Beirut to naval vessels situated in the Eastern Mediterranean. American naval vessels would become engaged in open hostilities with Syrian troops but remained too distant to influence Syrian withdrawal. Shortly afterwards, the U.S. withdrew from Lebanon altogether.

After American troops withdrew from Lebanon, the lion's share of Washington's military and intelligence assets in the country were lost. This meant that the U.S. became increasingly dependent on Israeli assistance in areas such as counter-terrorism. In previous years, the U.S. had yet to confront the security challenges posed by Middle Eastern terrorism. Sallai Meridor noted that the Reagan administration came around to an understanding that Israeli cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism was necessary because terrorism "had yet to hit the shores of the United States."<sup>322</sup> American policymakers had failed to pre-empt the terrorist threat emanating from Lebanon and had paid for it dearly in both blood and treasure. To hasten efforts to establish a bilateral relationship that would allow the U.S. to benefit from Israeli knowledge on terrorism and other strategic issues in the Middle East, the U.S. would need to lift the suspension on the strategic cooperation agreement that had been shelved when Israel annexed the Golan Heights in 1981.

### **International Catalyst – Personnel Changes in the Israeli Government**

Bad blood that had fueled the Weinberger-Sharon discord dissipated when a changing of the guard occurred in Israeli politics. Begin resigned in October 1983 and had spent his last year

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<sup>322</sup> Meridor, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.



in office secluded from the national spotlight as he battled depression.<sup>323</sup> Sharon was ousted from his position as defense minister on February 14, 1983 after he was reprimanded for his role in the Sabra and Shatila massacres by the Kahan Commission. A changing of the guard in Israel smoothed efforts to renew strategic cooperation between the two governments because personal tensions between the leaders no longer complicated political negotiations between the two governments. This state of affairs was noted by Reagan in his diary after his first meeting with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on November 29, 1983.

He (Shamir) & his team of course have spent 2 days in meetings at State, the Pentagon etc. I think things are well on track & a lot of suspicion etc. has been washed away on both sides.<sup>324</sup>

Shortly after Shamir met with Reagan, a new election was held in Israel. The government that was once led by Begin and Sharon was replaced by a national-unity government jointly led by Shimon Peres (Labor) and Yitzhak Shamir (Likud). In their power sharing agreement, Shamir and Peres would swap positions as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister after two and a half years and Yitzhak Rabin (Labor) would maintain a permanent position as Defense Minister. Over the course of the next five years, the Israeli government would maintain a consistent policy that favored closer strategic cooperation with the U.S. while ensuring that public spats and disagreements that occurred with American leaders took place outside of the public limelight as they had between 1981 and 1983.

### **Domestic Catalyst – National Security Decision Directive 111**

On October 29, 1983, Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 111. NSDD 111 called for renewed strategic cooperation between Israel and the U.S. that had been

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<sup>323</sup> Lewis, *Interview with US Ambassador to Israel Samuel W. Lewis. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Officers Oral History Project*, 228-231.

<sup>324</sup> Reagan and Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, 200.

suspended after Israel annexed the Golan Heights in 1981. At the November 23 meeting between Shamir and Reagan, the two leaders signed agreements that formally commenced a renewed strategic dialogue under different institutional parameters. In May 1982, the Reagan administration had identified Israel's qualitative military edge as being a regional priority that would help the U.S. gain support from "the most military powerful state in the region."<sup>325</sup> In previous administrations, American presidents had professed the importance of protecting Israel's qualitative military edge against its Arab neighbors. However, the institutional infrastructure needed to sustain Israel's qualitative military edge was non-existent. Reagan heralded the newly created Joint Political-Military Group (JPMG) as an accomplishment that would allow the U.S. and Israel to realize their shared dreams of strategic cooperation at a press conference on the White House lawn after his meeting with Shamir on November 29, 1983:

I am pleased to announce that we have agreed to establish a Joint Political-Military Group to examine ways in which we can enhance U.S.-Israel cooperation. This group will give priority to the threats 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.<sup>326</sup>

From the 29 November meeting between Reagan and Shamir, two other formal institutions were created that would be staffed with representatives from both countries. These bi-lateral programs included the Joint Security Assistance Planning Group (JSAP) and the Joint Economic Development Group (JEDG). In each bilateral institution, subjects such as new arms sales, trade,

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<sup>325</sup> Reagan, R. (1982). National Security Decision Directive Number 32: U.S. National Security Strategy. The White House. Washington, D.C., National Security Council.

<sup>326</sup> Reagan, R. and Y. Shamir (1983). Remarks of the President and Prime Minister Shamir of Israel Following Their Meetings. Simi Valley, CA, The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum.

economic assistance, military aid levels, and technology transfers would be discussed and negotiated through regular political consultations. Within in the context of these joint initiatives, the Reagan administration would officially codify agreements that would allow the U.S. to develop an institutional infrastructure that could ensure Israel's qualitative military edge over its Arab neighbors.

### **Domestic Constraint – The Cancellation of the LAVI Project**

The LAVI fighter jet was Israel's first domestically designed and equipped fighter jet. It was to become the Israeli Air Force's fighter jet of the future. When the program was conceived in the early 1980s, it was believed that it would be able to replace the Israeli Air Force's existing fleet of Kfir, Mirage 5 and F-15A fighter jets. The Pentagon had initially funded the joint-project as a means to usher in a new era of defense industrial collaboration between the two militaries. By funding the project jointly, the Reagan administration believed it was supporting a project that would help Israel become less dependent on American weapons systems in the future.

The LAVI was viewed in Israel with great pride as its development employed 5,000 skilled scientists and engineers.<sup>327</sup> The LAVI's biggest proponent in Israel was Moshe Arens. Arens served as Ambassador to the U.S. in 1982 under Begin and later as minister of defense from 1983 to 1984 and Minister without a Portfolio from 1984-1988 in the Peres-Shamir unity government. Arens had come to his position in the cabinet with significant defense industry experience having previously served as the deputy director general at Israel Aircraft Industries.

Dov Zakheim became the point man in the Reagan Pentagon on the LAVI fighter jet project. As Deputy undersecretary of defense for planning and resources, he was influential in terminating the project due to the exorbitant costs incurred on American taxpayers by supporting

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<sup>327</sup> Clarke, D.L. (1994). "The Arrow Missile: The United States, Israel and Strategic Cooperation." *Middle East Journal* (3): 475., 477.

the joint initiative. The Reagan administration invested more than \$2 billion in the project and the LAVI's cancellation was seen by Zakheim as a necessary decision to make due to the exorbitant costs of the project and the fact that he believed that Israel would be better off both purchasing F-16 fighter jets from the U.S.

The decision to cancel the LAVI was widely panned by its supporters in Israel. When the decision was made to cancel the program, Arens quit his position as Minister without a Portfolio citing the LAVI's cancelation as the deciding factor leading to his resignation from government.”<sup>328</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, of *The New York Times*, observed despair among the workers who lost their jobs as the Israeli cabinet voted 12-11 to cancel the fighter jet:

Hundreds of other workers for the company, who expect to lose their jobs with the termination of the LAVI project, gathered at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. There, they carried coffins of Mr. Peres and Mr. Rabin and mourned for the LAVI. They tried to bring a model of the plane to the Wailing Wall but were prevented by the police from doing so.<sup>329</sup>

The U.S. decision to cancel the LAVI led to a major row in U.S.-Israeli relations on the international level. The multifaceted nature of the dispute impacted domestic politics in both Israel and the U.S. respectively. The LAVI project even embroiled the organized Jewish community in the U.S. The politics of the LAVI project turned intensely personal for Zakheim:

I was thrown into this maelstrom of pressures and counter-pressures several years after the project had been started. What the Israelis have come to call *parashat ha-lavi*, the Lavi episode, was for me far more than just another aspect of my duties as a fourth-tier

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<sup>328</sup> Friedman, T.L. (1987). Arens Quits Israeli Cabinet Post Over Jet Decision. The New York Times. New York, N.Y., The New York Times Company.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

Pentagon official. I found myself in direct conflict with powerful leading Israeli politicians with who I was personally linked, albeit indirectly.<sup>330</sup>

Zakheim, an Orthodox Jew, was even vilified as a traitor to the Jewish people by Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens. Arens called Zakheim “a traitor to the family”.<sup>331</sup>

One of the silver linings of the LAVI affair for Israel was the fact that after the project was suspended the assistance funds that were to be allocated to the LAVI were transferred to the development of the Arrow Missile Program. The Reagan administration made missile defense a cornerstone of its national security doctrine and encouraged its allies (including Israel) to participate in joint projects through the Strategic Defense Initiative. The Arrow missile was designed to shoot down incoming ballistic and cruise missiles from as far as 600 miles away.<sup>332</sup> In February 1986, Zakheim convinced defense minister Yitzhak Rabin that American support for missile defense was a worthwhile expenditure:

I went to Rabin and I suggested that now that LAVI was dead he ought to put some money into missile defense. He initially dismissed the idea literally with a wave of a hand. He then realized that missile defense made a lot of sense for Israel and once we agreed to the sharing of costs then both sides went into it whole hog.<sup>333</sup>

Missile defense was not the only area of defense collaboration that indirectly benefitted from the cancellation of the LAVI. Shortly after the project was discontinued, the U.S. agreed to a package of sweeteners to heal the wounds caused by the LAVI affair. Four specific ideas to improve military relations were discussed in a memorandum sent on Oct. 14, 1987 by assistant

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<sup>330</sup> Zakheim *Flight of the Lavi: Inside a U.S.-Israeli Crisis*, , p. xiv

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>332</sup> Clarke, *The Arrow Missile: The United States, Israel and Strategic Cooperation*, 475-476.

<sup>333</sup> Zakheim, D.S. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

secretary of state Richard W. Murphy to Shultz in advance of his upcoming meeting with Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres:

1. Israel interested in reduction of F-16 price by eliminating non-recurring costs;
2. Greater funding for joint R&D on SDI/ATBM and Arrow Missile Program;
3. Improved Israeli access to U.S. armed forces European workload contracts;
4. Increased DOD procurement in Israel.<sup>334</sup>

Despite the fact that the Reagan Administration allowed Israel to use LAVI funds for other projects, the LAVI would continue to cause headaches for defense planners in the Pentagon after its cancelation.

The LAVI's cancelation meant that Israeli Air Force Industries owned the blueprints to a technologically advanced aircraft that had been successfully designed, tested, and developed as a prototype. The LAVI became attractive to other buyers in international arms market. Zakheim found out that Arens sold the LAVI's design to China after he left government:

This is the way that I understood that it worked. When Arens left the government, he went to work for a guy named Shaul Eisenberg who was Israel's biggest businessman with prominent connections in China. Arens became Eisenberg's vice chair. Then what I understand to have happened was that Arens said to the Chinese that you cannot pass any details to the Chinese government. So Israeli engineers would go over there and not pass any papers. They worked as advisers. And I think the jet the Chinese developed was called the J-10. That jet looks like the LAVI's twin brother.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Murphy, R.W. (1987). Your Meeting with Foreign Minister Peres on Bilateral Issues. G.P. Shultz. Washington, D.C., Department of State.

<sup>335</sup> Zakheim, D.S. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

When asked about the existence of a Chinese-Israeli arms relationship, former Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Zalman Shoval (1990-1993, 1998-2000) denied the claims.<sup>336</sup> Claims that Israel sold LAVI technology to China would linger until 1996 when the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence issued a report confirming allegations that LAVI technology had been found in Chinese fighter jets.<sup>337</sup>

## **Policy Outcomes**

### **The Joint Political Military Group**

In 1984, Israel and the United States agreed to create the JPMG. The agreement was later expanded upon in 1988 when the accord was renewed. The JPMG was to serve as a forum for both Israel and the U.S. to discuss “joint cooperative efforts such as combined planning, joint exercises, and logistics.”<sup>338</sup> The JPMG was an inter-agency group jointly chaired by the Director-General of the Israeli Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs that met twice each year. The JPMG was developed as a forum where American officials and their Israeli counterparts could share intelligence and discuss political affairs behind closed doors. In 1984, this was particularly important development in U.S.-Israel relations because both Israel and the U.S. made foreign policy decisions in the bilateral relationship in the public domain without prior consultation before they occurred.

For Israel’s part, its decision to bomb the Osirak nuclear facility in Iraq and annex the Golan Heights came without prior consultation with their American counterparts while the U.S. had issued Reagan’s September 1<sup>st</sup> Initiative without consulting the Israelis before its release. A lack of communication between Israel and the U.S. had an impact in bilateral relations in both

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<sup>336</sup> Shoval, Z., (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>337</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence. (1997). Worldwide Challenges to Naval Strike Warfare. Department of the Navy. Washington, D.C., 28.

<sup>338</sup> Medzini, M. (1988). Memorandum of Agreement between Israel and the United States, 21 April 1988. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives.

cases. The U.S. suspended F-15 shipments to Israel for the Osirak attack and later suspended the 1981 Strategic Cooperation MOU after the annexation of the Golan Heights. These actions stunted the development of an initiative that Reagan had identified as a presidential priority prior to his election. Similarly, when Israel summarily rejected Reagan's September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative, the categorical rejection damaged American soft power in the Middle East because it showed the Arab states that the Reagan administration was incapable of bringing Israel to the negotiating table to discuss its regional peace plan. The JPMG was specifically created as a mechanism to ensure that neither state would surprise the other on major strategic issues and that "no day light" would exist between the two allies on issues of consequence for both states. This informal understanding became a new norm in the bilateral relationship under Reagan. The "no day light principle" would signify a cohesive bond linking the foreign policymaking units of both countries at the strategic level. Moshe Arens, Israel's Ambassador to the United States (1982-1983), signified this accomplishment as the pinnacle of his accomplishments at his post in Washington:

By the time I left Washington twelve crisis-packed months later, I had succeeded in establishing a new *modus operandi* in the U.S.-Israeli relationship; we not only were allies but also had to behave as allies. Whatever differences of opinion we had, we discussed among ourselves but did not voice openly. We shared common goals, and even though we frequently differed on the way to pursue those goals, we were united by the understanding that we had to work in concert if we were going to achieve them.<sup>339</sup>

The creation of a new informal institution in the bilateral relationship would effectively diminish future rows between the two governments. It would ensure that existing conflicts between the

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<sup>339</sup> Arens, M. (1995). *Broken covenant: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis Between the U.S. and Israel*, New York: Simon & Schuster, ©1995., 27.



two governments could be addressed in a manner that did not allow critics of a close U.S.-Israeli relationship (such as Israel's Arab enemies) to exploit the schisms between the two governments in pursuit of their own national interests.

### **The Joint Security Assistance Planning Group**

Another institution created after the implementation of NSDD 111 was the Joint Security Assistance Planning Group (JSAP). JSAP was a joint effort co-chaired by the Director General of the Ministry of Defense and the Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science, and Technology. It met once each year and became a bilateral forum for Israeli and American decision-makers to address Israel's requests for security assistance.<sup>340</sup> This institution was consequential for both Israel and the U.S. because it allowed both countries to realize Israel's potential as a major non-NATO ally. Within JSAP, American officials and their Israeli counterparts would discuss areas for joint-industrial and technological collaboration. This allowed both Israeli and American defense contractors to both share and transfer consequential military technology and weapons systems. Long-term research and development projects between the U.S. and Israel were also discussed. These efforts would bear fruit in future years when the jointly created Arrow Missile Defense System became operational. The Arrow Missile Defense system allowed Israel to neutralize incoming volleys of short and long-range rockets and ballistic missiles.

JSAP was also a forum which allowed American military strategists to include Israeli officials in their regional contingency planning operations. Upon the creation of JSAP, the Reagan administration made it a strategic priority to schedule regular military exercises with Israel in preparation for a potential war with the Soviet Union. The idea of Soviet conflagration

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<sup>340</sup> Near East Affairs Bureau. (1988). Memorandum of Agreement with Israel. Department of State. Washington, D.C., Department of State Virtual Reading Room: 4., 3.

involving Israel almost came to fruition during the Lebanon War of 1982. On June 10, 1982, Robert McFarlane penned a top-secret letter to Judge Clark describing Moscow's readiness for a war against Israel:

I refer here to this morning's evidence of elevated READINESS of Soviet airborne forces and their movement to the airlift associated with their deployment. I am sure that you appreciate the short and long-term implications of a greater Soviet involvement in the area – an outcome both of us surely must seek to avoid.<sup>341</sup>

When strategic cooperation negotiations resumed, it became a strategic imperative for the U.S. to cement closer military-to-military ties with Israel in order form a joint front against the Soviets and their proxies in the Middle East. Careful communication with Israel would allow the U.S. to prevent similar scenarios in the future.

Even though Weinberger favored closer strategic cooperation with the Arab states over Israel, Secretary of the Navy John Lehman would become a close friend of Israel and a key official that shaped the policies that led to closer levels of strategic cooperation between the two allies.<sup>342</sup> The Israeli Navy opened its port in Haifa to the U.S. Sixth Fleet which led to the development of regular joint naval exercises, anti-submarine maneuvers, and passing exercises for a future conflagration in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>343</sup>

The Israeli Air Force and the U.S. Air Force also ushered in closer cooperation through joint training exercises. American and Israeli pilots practiced bombing exercises and joint flight maneuvers in the Negev Desert Air base that had been previously constructed after the Camp David Accords. These joint training missions took on an increasing importance for the U.S. Air

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<sup>341</sup> McFarlane, R. (1982). Letter to Judge Clark to be sent to Prime Minister Begin on behalf of President Reagan. The White House. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. **Israel Folder.**

<sup>342</sup> Ross, D. (2017) US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration (Email Correspondence). University of Georgia. L.Lukoff. Washington, D.C.

<sup>343</sup> Cobban, *The US-Israeli Relationship in the Reagan era*, 12.

Force because Israel had successfully grounded Soviet MiG fighter jets in air-to-air combat operations during the Lebanon War. More importantly, Israel had successfully used American weapons against Soviet systems in the air and on the ground. This experience benefitted American weapons manufactures and served as a selling point that the U.S. could use in its efforts to convince skeptical nations that they would be better off siding with the U.S. over the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

### **Foreign Military Assistance Levels**

The nature of U.S.-Israeli foreign military assistance changed during the Reagan administration. After NSDD 111 was signed and Shamir visited Reagan in Washington on November 22, 1983, Reagan agreed to ask Congress for improved terms for security assistance to Israel.<sup>344</sup> During the Reagan administration three specific developments in military aid to Israel took place. First, foreign military assistance to Israel increased steadily over the course of Reagan's eight years in office. Second, military aid to Israel was converted from loans to cash grants in 1984. Third, Israel was afforded the opportunity to bid for American defense contracts and to establish collaborative partnerships with the American arms manufacturing industry. Fourth, the U.S. continued to supply Israel with military aid, even after Israel antagonized officials in the Reagan administration for running afoul of the terms in the Arms Export Control Act. The following chart showcases changes in American military aid levels to Israel during the Reagan administration:

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<sup>344</sup> Reagan, R. and Y. Shamir (1983). Remarks of the President and Prime Minister Shamir of Israel Following Their Meetings. Simi Valley, CA, The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum.

**Table 1**  
**Military Aid to Israel in Billions**  
**1981-1989<sup>345</sup>**

| Year | Military Aid | Form           |
|------|--------------|----------------|
| 1981 | \$ 1.0       | Loans & Grants |
| 1982 | \$ 1.4       | Loans & Grants |
| 1983 | \$ 1.4       | Loans & Grants |
| 1984 | \$ 1.7       | Grants         |
| 1985 | \$ 1.7       | Grants         |
| 1986 | \$ 1.722.60  | Grants         |
| 1987 | \$ 1.8       | Grants         |
| 1988 | \$ 1.8       | Grants         |
| 1989 | \$ 1.8       | Grants         |

### Increased Aid

Aid levels were held constant or increased each year of the Reagan administration. The largest one-year spike in aid (\$4 billion) occurred after Israel completed its withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula in line with the terms of the Camp David Accords. The signing of NSDD 111 in November 1983 ushered in an increase of \$3 billion in military aid and a conversion of all future foreign military sales (FMS) loans to cash grants the following year. On April 6, 1984, Reagan wrote a letter that was presented at AIPAC’s annual policy conference. In the letter, Reagan touts his support for changing the composition of American aid “from a combination of grants and concessionary loans to one of purely cash grants”.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Sharp, J.M. (2014). “U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel.” Congressional Research Service: Issue Brief: 1-30.

<sup>346</sup> Reagan, R. (1984). Letter to AIPAC Annual Policy Conference. AIPAC Committee. Washington, D.C.:1.

## **Defense-Industrial Collaboration**

When NSDD 111 was signed, the Reagan administration decided to “consider Israeli requests to spend FMS funds for items made and or developed in the United States” and to “renegotiate the terms of the 1979 MOA on defense cooperation and procurement.”<sup>347</sup> This policy decision by Reagan had a significant benefit for Israel’s defense industry. Research and development – as well as the production of high-tech systems – were a crucial component of Israel’s defense export base. The newfound ability to collaborate with American arms manufacturers would help to cement Israel’s status as a future player in the arms market of the world’s largest military. Sallai Meridor, who served as an aide to Moshe Arens in 1983, noted the importance of this policy decision to Israel’s economy and national security:

I saw the value of US help for Israel. Not only buying American weapons for Israel but also helping us develop our own qualitative edge by developing the capacity of our own high tech and defense industry. One of the major achievements of the Reagan Administration, which was largely advocated by members of the Senate, but welcomed by the administration, was to allow Israel to get some of the assistance not in ways of vouchers to buy American weapons but to develop Israeli systems instead. I think this was an extremely important element of the Reagan years in particular. It was important for the defense of Israel and the economy of Israel.<sup>348</sup>

For the U.S., Israel was a perfect partner to establish a defense-industrial relationship as its defense sector was primarily focused on research and development and the production of high-tech systems that were not being produced by American defense contractors.

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<sup>347</sup> Reagan, R. (1983). National Security Decision Directive Number 111: Next Steps Toward Progress in Lebanon and the Middle East. The White House. Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>348</sup> Meridor, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

This development was noted by Maj. General (res.) David Ivry, Director General of the Israeli Defense Ministry (1986-1996):

While our R&D capabilities are high, our production requirements are more limited, which can make production lines expensive. Joint ventures with American industry, merging our special R&D capabilities with their advanced production facilities, is certainly one area for fruitful cooperation.<sup>349</sup>

One high-tech system purchased by the Marine Corps from Israel during the Reagan administration was the Tadiran Mastiff Drone. Zakheim described the Tadiran Mastiff as “the first drone the US military used that actually worked in combat situations.”<sup>350</sup> The establishment of a defense-industrial relationship with the U.S. occurred at an opportune moment for the Israeli economy. In 1984, Israel’s economy was suffering from hyper-inflation and domestic defense expenditures that were in the process of being cut as part of the Economic Stabilization Plan (ESP) enacted under the Peres-Shamir unity government. As part of the ESP, the U.S. sought to find ways to revamp the Israeli economy and reduce Jerusalem’s dependency on foreign aid. Finding ways to bring additional sources of revenue to the Israeli defense sector became a key engine behind Israel’s economic revitalization efforts.

### **U.S.-Israeli Strategic Defense Initiative MOU**

On March 26, 1985, Israel was formally invited to be a participant in the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). The U.S. signed a MOU with Israel to collaborate on SDI research projects in May 1986. This partnership allowed Israel to further ingratiate itself with American military planners in the Pentagon, where it had historically lacked supporters. It would also ensure that Israel stayed in Reagan’s good graces by showing its potential as a “strategic asset”

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<sup>349</sup> Gold, D. (1993). Israel as an American non-NATO ally: parameters of defense-industrial cooperation in a post-cold war relationship, Boulder: Westview Press; Jerusalem, Israel: The Jerusalem Post, 1993., 6.

<sup>350</sup> Zakheim, D.S. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

through its participation in the program. SDI was the brainchild of Reagan. It was his research and development project that sought to “point the way to advanced defenses that could protect millions of people.”<sup>351</sup> SDI concerned Soviet military planners. They viewed SDI as a bargaining chip in arms control talks and wanted to find a way to take it off the table in negotiations with the Americans.<sup>352</sup> SDI’s very existence as a defensive missile field posed an existential threat to the Soviet Union as it effectively negated the impact of Moscow’s first-strike capability. For SDI to become reality, the U.S. would need to fund research & development projects that could deliver on a concept that was derided by its opponents as “Star Wars.” Key to accomplishing this goal would be the development of human capital and collaborative initiatives. These investments could make futuristic technologies not yet seen on the battlefield – such as high-tech lasers and rail guns – a reality.

In meetings with State Department officials during the Reagan administration, Israel marketed itself as a nation that could help the U.S. achieve its goal of developing superior technologies in both military and non-military realms. These talks took place in a joint institutional arrangement called the Binational Research and Development (BIRD) Foundation. Created in 1977, the BIRD Foundation was a joint institutional partnership between Israel and the U.S. that was founded with the intent of cementing closer working relationships between Israeli and American scientists. The BIRD Foundation was influential in expediting joint Israeli-American projects in areas such as “agriculture, communications, construction technologies,

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<sup>351</sup> Reagan, R. (1985). Radio Address to the Nation on Soviet Strategic Defense Programs. Washington, D.C.

<sup>352</sup> Graham, L.R. (1985). Urgent Mailgram. National Jewish Coalition. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library: 1.

electronics, electro-optics, life sciences, software, homeland security, renewable and alternative energy, and other technology sectors.<sup>353</sup>

From 1985 to 1989, John D. Negroponte served as Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. In this position, Negroponte served as the American co-chairman of the BIRD Foundation. Negroponte noted the importance of the BIRD Foundation in expediting collaborative partnerships between the U.S. and Israel that were mutually beneficial to both countries:

The BIRD Foundation was a very clever device. Instead of repaying a loan to the US Treasury, Israel would return some commodity credits that we had extended to them in earlier years. The conditions for research & development in BIRD was that it had to be done in Israel, and it had to be binational where both American and Israeli scientists worked together. So, I had a window of opportunity (to develop BIRD) because I went to Israel a couple times a year in connection with that foundation to see the great collaboration that existed between U.S. and Israeli scientists. The interconnections (developed in the BIRD Foundation) are really an extensive part of the US-Israel relationship.<sup>354</sup>

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Israel was experiencing a rapid influx of migrants from the Soviet Union eager for employment. Many of the newly arrived migrants were scientists and engineers that Mikhail Gorbachev had sought to deny safe passage to Israel out of a fear that their emigration would expedite a brain drain from the Soviet Union. Institutional partnerships

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<sup>353</sup> Israel- U.S. Binational Industrial R&D Foundation (2018). “About BIRD.” from <http://www.birdf.com/what-is-bird/>.

<sup>354</sup> Negroponte, J.D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.



such as the BIRD Foundation allowed for Israel and the U.S. to lay the groundwork necessary to expedite the research and development phases of the SDI in both countries.

For Israel, the invitation to participate in SDI was a testament to the capabilities of its science and space technologies. Israel was the only country in the Middle East that had successfully launched a satellite into space and maintained an active space program. Despite having a space program, the Israeli security establishment was initially lukewarm to the idea of participating in a military project using its space capabilities. Rabin saw conventional warfare against Israel's regional adversaries, as opposed to inter-continental clashes from countries afar such as the Soviet Union, as the most likely contingency the IDF needed to train for. Zakheim recalled a meeting with Rabin when he asked Israel to participate in SDI:

We got started in 1983. The Israelis signed up in a way, but I remember going to Rabin, and again I think it's in the book, and suggesting that the Israelis participate in the SDI program. He initially dismissed it. When he came around to realizing that Iran was probably his biggest threat, they went ahead. The issue of course was who was going to pay for what. I actually cooked up the percentage. We would pay about 80% and they would pay about 20%. Nominally they were with us up virtually from the start. That was in part because Israel always wanted to be with us.<sup>355</sup>

After initial hesitation, the Israeli government found that SDI participation could have benefits in other realms of warfare that could yield future dividends. R&D funding for systems such as high-speed computers, lasers, communications, fiber optics, jamming, and miniaturization would undoubtedly yield future gains in the development of tactical missile defense systems. Improved missile defense would buttress Israeli deterrence against future attacks from Syria and Iran. The presence of advanced Soviet SS-21 missile defense systems in Syria were an ominous sign that

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<sup>355</sup> Zakheim, D.S. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

Israel needed to stay one step ahead of its rivals if it was to maintain its qualitative military edge over its regional adversaries. Shortly after Israel joined SDI, a joint partnership was forged to create the Arrow Missile Defense system.

Israeli participation in SDI would also provide Israel's defense sector with a new injection of foreign assistance. This would allow Israel to address its economic and national security concerns simultaneously. Israeli defense contractors such as IAI, Tadiran, IMI, Rafael, El-Op, Elta, and Elrisa would all benefit from the aid.<sup>356</sup> This would allow them to increase hiring and boost exports. Israel was awarded SDI contracts worth \$174 million (which accounted for 52 percent of all SDI funds dispersed for countries) on May 6, 1986.<sup>357</sup> Many of these contracts were provided to scientists and engineers who performed research on dozens of Israeli research and development projects in areas such as "high speed computers, lasers, communications, fiber optics, jamming, and miniaturization" and even "directed-energy and kinetic-energy weapons programs."<sup>358</sup> These efforts were vital to ensuring that the concept of strategic missile defense could become a reality. By pumping SDI funding into Israel's hi-tech R&D sector, many newly arrived Soviet Jewish migrants would benefit. Their employment in the defense industry would improve Israel's national security and hasten efforts to facilitate their absorption into Israeli society on a permanent basis. According to Sallai Meridor, who served as a political adviser to Arens under Shamir's Government, these workers would have a long-lasting impact on Israel's economy:

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<sup>356</sup> Parcness, J.M. (1985). Invitation to the Strategic Defense Initiative. Israel and SDI. AIPAC Committee. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. **Israel Folder**: 78., 6.

<sup>357</sup> Gold, *Israel as an American non-NATO ally: parameters of defense-industrial cooperation in a post-cold war relationship*, 25.

<sup>358</sup> Parcness, *Invitation to the Strategic Defense Initiative*, 10-11.

The rapid economic growth of Israel in the last two decades cannot be done without understanding the value of the talented people brought to Israel from the former Soviet Union.<sup>359</sup>

Israeli participation in SDI was perhaps the most politically salient example of strategic cooperation in the U.S.-Israeli military industrial relationship between the years of 1983 and 1989. Since Reagan placed an emphasis on SDI in his foreign policy, Israeli participation in the project was magnified in the international media. The importance of Israel's participation in SDI was valued by American policymakers because many of America's European allies remained hesitant to join the program, likely out of fear of antagonizing the Soviet Union.<sup>360</sup>

#### **The Legal Designation of Israel as a “Major Non-NATO Ally” of the U.S.**

Upon the signing of the National Defense Authorization Act of 1987, Israel was designated as a major non-NATO ally of the U.S. Dating back to the 1980 presidential campaign, the Reagan administration had prioritized alliance building as essential component of its foreign policy doctrine:

Our foreign policy can draw strength in great measure from our allies and friends, as long as we nourish their trust and confidence... In a Reagan Administration there will be no sudden reneging on American commitments.<sup>361</sup>

After its designation as a major non-NATO ally, Israel was now codified in American law in the same category as America's closest non-NATO allies such as South Korea, Japan, Egypt, and Australia. This development was noted at a joint press conference with Reagan and Shamir at the White House on March 16, 1988:

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<sup>359</sup> Meridor, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>360</sup> Parcness, *Invitation to the Strategic Defense Initiative*, 3.

<sup>361</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Reagan/Bush Committee Policy Statement on Alliances. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers**.

Prime Minister Shamir and I also reviewed our countries' robust and vital bilateral relationship. As you know, Israel has been designated one of our major non-NATO allies and friends, and we have developed a solid basis of strategic cooperation between our two countries. Strategic cooperation is a symbol of our converging needs and our mutual commitment to ensuring that no wedge will ever be driven between us.<sup>362</sup>

The designation of Israel as a major non-NATO ally was not a mere formality. It had both psychological and material benefits for Israel's national security. On the psychological end, the agreement helped buttress Israel's deterrent capabilities by cementing closer political relations with the world's largest military. Zakheim who worked in the DoD during this time, described the designation as "a signal of America's support for Israel's qualitative military edge over its regional adversaries."<sup>363</sup> Shamir told *Israel Radio* that "the U.S. declaration is of considerable significance in the first place, political significance. For the first time, Israel is formally considered an ally."<sup>364</sup> Some analysts in Israel saw the designation as a psychological deterrent, akin to a formal alliance, without a legally binding commitment.<sup>365</sup>

On the material level, the designation allowed Israel to bid for U.S. defense contracts. Key among the contacts negotiated during the Reagan administration were Remotely Piloted Drones, Soltam Mortars, and Tadiran Radios.<sup>366</sup> During the Lebanon War, Zakheim had seen the success of Israeli Remotely Piloted Vehicles (RPVs) in battle and immediately sought to

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<sup>362</sup> Reagan, R. (1988). Remarks Following Discussions with Prime Minister Shamir of Israel. National Archives and Records Administration. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

<sup>363</sup> Zakheim, Dov S. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>364</sup> Fisher, D. (1987). U.S. is Granting Israel Non-NATO Ally Status Move Should Bring Strategic and Economic Gains, Shamir Says; Egypt Gets Same Rating. Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles, CA, Tribune Media., 1.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Gold, *Israel as an American non-NATO ally: Parameters of Defense-Industrial Cooperation in a Post-Cold War Relationship*, 31-35.

purchase Israeli systems for future use.<sup>367</sup> By 1988, the U.S. and Israel signed a formal MOU on sharing RPV technology.<sup>368</sup>

Prior to the implementation of NSDD 111, the idea of American-Israeli strategic cooperation remained on ice. The discord that had emerged between the Begin government and the Reagan administration had effectively stunted the development of a relationship that Reagan supported both before and during the early years of his presidency. Ties thawed between the two governments as mutual security interests in Lebanon necessitated closer ties between the Israeli and American security establishments. Personnel changes in Israel hastened efforts to commence new negotiations on strategic cooperation in 1984 and later in 1988. New forums for strategic cooperation were touted by Reagan at a joint press conference with Shamir on March 15, 1988:

For example, strategic cooperation—something other administrations shied away from—is now a commitment our two governments have made to each other. It responds to our mutual needs and is a reminder to all that no wedge will be driven between the United States and Israel. Our commitment to close relations and to Israel's security has been reflected in our foreign aid levels, our commercial cooperation of research and defense, and the vital and historic free trade agreement that we have signed.<sup>369</sup>

The results of the negotiations would end in the creation of three formal institutions and one informal arrangement. During the Reagan administration, The JPMG, JSAP, JEDG, and Israel's designation as a major Non-NATO ally were created. The JPMG and JSAP were vital to ensuring that Israel's qualitative military edge was actualized as they created a permanent forum

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<sup>367</sup> Zakheim, D.S. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>368</sup> Government of the United States and the State of Israel. (1988). Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Development of Improvised Multi-Mission Optronic Stabilized Payload (MOSP) for Remotely Piloted Vehicles (RPVs). Department of Defense. Washington, D.C., Jewish Virtual Library. **U.S.-Israel Formal Agreements.**

<sup>369</sup> Reagan, R. (1988). Remarks to Supporters of Israel at White House Briefing on United States Foreign Policy on March 15. Washington, D.C., Administration of Ronald Reagan. **Public Papers of the President.**

for security and defense officials to negotiate agreements, share information, and cooperate in joint defense ventures. Despite being a forum for economic cooperation, the JEDG was vital to ensuring that domestic reforms were implemented in Israel. Without economic reforms in Israel, the development of a robust defense-industrial relationship between Israel and the United States would have been severely compromised during the Reagan Administration.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Case Study II**

#### **Contemporary Strategic Cooperation Between the United States and Israel**

##### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the growth and development of the US-Israeli intelligence sharing relationship during the 1980s. Since 1956 when Mossad operatives provided the CIA with Nikita Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, Israel has sought to leverage its intelligence capabilities in order to consolidate its alliance with the United States.<sup>370</sup> The Carter Administration remained skeptical of expanding its intelligence relationship with Israel due to the strong opposition emanating from certain quarters of the national security establishment.

The breadth and extent of the intelligence cooperation partnership changed during Reagan's tenure in office. The intelligence sharing relationship became highly valued by both Reagan's Director of Central Intelligence William Casey and his National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane. It was so important that it even continued in the wake of the Jonathan Pollard and Iran-Contra scandals. The findings from this chapter show that the Reagan Administration institutionalized its intelligence sharing relationship with Israel as a means to expand America's intelligence capabilities in the Middle East and consolidate its strategic partnership with Israel.

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<sup>370</sup> Kahana, *Mossad-CIA Cooperation*, 409.

### **Reagan's Pre-Presidential beliefs about Intelligence Policy**

Preceding his election, Reagan had professional experience dealing with intelligence-related policy issues. CIA historian William Dujmovic's assessment of Reagan's pre-presidential intelligence history noted that Reagan had numerous engagements with intelligence-related issues prior to his election. He engaged with intelligence policy issues in the following forums:

- 1) His appointment to serve as member of The Rockefeller Commission;
- 2) His development of training films for Army Air Corps Intelligence during World War II;
- 3) His work as an FBI informant in Hollywood tasked with outing Communist spies in the film industry;
- 4) His role as a supporter of the CIA-backed Radio Free Europe;
- 5) His possession of a "Q" Security Clearance from the Atomic Energy Commission due to his oversight responsibilities of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory as Governor of California.<sup>371</sup>

Reagan's experience on the Rockefeller Commission appeared to have been the most formative in shaping his beliefs about intelligence policy. The Rockefeller Commission, headed by Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, examined illicit CIA activities carried out inside the U.S. After serving on the Rockefeller Commission, Reagan gave a series of speeches on his radio show between 1975 and 1979 outlining his views on intelligence policy. In these speeches, Reagan outlined his beliefs about the intelligence community and its proper role in the U.S. Three main themes came to light in Reagan's speeches and general statements about intelligence-related issues in the years prior to his presidency.

- 1) Reagan feared Soviet infiltration of the federal government and Congress;<sup>372</sup>,

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<sup>371</sup> Dujmovic, W. (2011). Ronald Reagan, Intelligence and the End of the Cold War [electronic resource]: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA, November 2, 2011, [Washington, D.C.]; Central Intelligence Agency, Historical Collections, 2011.



- 2) Reagan feared that America's allies abroad were endangered by Soviet propaganda and covert operations;<sup>373</sup>
- 3) Intelligence oversight activities in the U.S. had been excessive in their criticisms of the CIA.<sup>374</sup>

Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs on intelligence-related issues reflect a desire to see increased counterintelligence measures targeting Soviet intelligence activities in the U.S. and abroad. Reagan also voiced support for less stringent congressional oversight of the intelligence community, and overall support for CIA autonomy in the implementation of its policies and programs.

How did Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs impact U.S.-Israeli intelligence relations during his administration? This chapter will examine this question in four parts. First, it will look at U.S.-Israeli intelligence sharing prior to 1981. Second, it will examine the most consequential events that occurred during the intelligence relationship between 1981 and 1989. Third, it will assess the impact of the Pollard espionage case on the intelligence sharing relationship. Finally, it will provide an assessment of the policy outcomes that arose by the end of the Reagan administration.

### **U.S.-Israel Intelligence Relations before Reagan**

James Jesus Angleton, the CIA Counterintelligence Head from 1954 to 1975, was the most consequential American official responsible for cultivating the U.S.-Israel intelligence sharing relationship in the years before the Reagan administration. Angleton was given control over Israeli affairs at the CIA in the 1950s. Angleton pursued establishing an intelligence

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<sup>372</sup> Reagan, R., et al. (2001). *Reagan, in His Own Hand*, New York: Free Press, ©2001.,126-127.

<sup>373</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Reagan/Bush Committee Policy Statement on Alliances. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**

<sup>374</sup> Reagan, et al., *Reagan in His Own Hand*, 125.

relationship with Israel as he saw value in establishing a relationship with a country with numerous assets inside the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.<sup>375</sup> Angleton initially approached the intelligence sharing relationship with Israel adhering to the moniker “respect and mistrust.”<sup>376</sup> In the early 1950s, Israelis were viewed skeptically by the intelligence community in the U.S. due to the country’s socialist economic system and the Soviet origin of many of its leaders. Angleton acted independently and managed the Israeli portfolio for nearly three decades, endearing himself to Israeli policymakers in a manner few other American officials have since. When Angleton passed away in 1987, a tree was planted in his honor by the heads of the Mossad and Shin Bet (Israel’s domestic security service). A memorial stone was also dedicated to his namesake in Jerusalem.<sup>377</sup> According to acclaimed journalist Seymour Hersh, Angleton was supportive of Israel’s nuclear program and may have even provided Israel with “technical nuclear information” in the 1960s.<sup>378</sup>

Formal intelligence sharing between the U.S. and Israel commenced in 1951 when Mossad Head Reuven Shiloah signed a formal agreement on intelligence cooperation with CIA Director Walter Bedell Smith.<sup>379</sup> Human intelligence (HUMINT) sources behind the Iron Curtain were a rarity for the CIA in the early 1950s. In February 1956, Israel was able to prove its worth to the CIA by obtaining a copy of Nikita Khrushchev’s speech before the 20<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress, where he denounced Stalin and his totalitarian policies. While this act may have endeared Israel to amenable officials such as Angleton, it did little to assuage skepticism within

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<sup>375</sup> Kahana, E. (2006). *Historical dictionary of Israeli intelligence*, Lanham, MD.: Scarecrow Press, 2006., 13.

<sup>376</sup> Kahana, E. (2001). *Mossad-CIA Cooperation*, 410.

<sup>377</sup> Frankel, G. (1987). The Secret Ceremony. *The Washington Post*. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company.

<sup>378</sup> McConnell, J. (1986). “Israeli Spies in the US.” *MERIP Middle East report* (138): 35., 36.

<sup>379</sup> Kahana, *Mossad-CIA Cooperation*, 410.

the broader security and intelligence community about Israel's usefulness to the U.S. in the Middle East.

The skepticism prevalent within the intelligence community about the necessity of having closer relations with Israel existed for three reasons. First, it was conventional wisdom among many of those in the intelligence establishment that America's Arab allies would balk at a closer American-Israeli strategic partnership.<sup>380</sup> Arab sensibilities were of the utmost concern throughout the 1970s because America's core national interests in the Middle East necessitated a free flow of oil from the region. The political crises that developed when Israel joined Great Britain and France in the Suez War of 1956, and the subsequent Arab Oil Embargo implemented after American intervention on behalf of Israel during the Yom Kippur War of 1973, were signals to intelligence officials in the Middle East that a strategic alliance with Israel could have grave political and economic consequences for American interests in the Middle East. Second, the USS *Liberty* incident created a sense of resentment that was not easily forgotten among leaders in the U.S. security establishment.<sup>381</sup> On June 2, 1967, 34 American sailors were killed, and 75 more injured, when an Israeli naval patrol-boat torpedoed the *Liberty*. The *Liberty* was conducting electronic surveillance off the north Sinai coast while Israel was actively engaged in hostilities with its neighbors. The Israeli government apologized for the incident, and the American government obliged. But questions have lingered since as to whether Israel was forthcoming in its post-mortem assessment of its role in the attack.<sup>382</sup> Third, in the wake of Angleton's departure from the CIA, the Israeli liaison office he helped create in 1975 was shuttered. This made Israel's efforts to secure intelligence about its Arab neighbors far more

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 412-413.

<sup>381</sup> Negroponte, J.D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>382</sup> Rostow, E.V. (1967). Memorandum for S/S – Mr. Walsh. Department of State. Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration.

difficult than it had been previously. Thus, the U.S.-Israel intelligence sharing relationship after Angleton's departure resorted back to one premised on a foundation of mistrust and skepticism prevalent within the broader intelligence establishment.

During the Carter administration, policy disagreements over the Middle East peace process and a general skepticism about the merits of a closer bilateral relationship negatively impacted the intelligence sharing relationship between the U.S. and Israel. Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski noted that "Israel had deprived the United States of its negotiating positions before the Camp David summit"<sup>383</sup> at a time when the U.S. was serving as a third-party mediator in peace negotiations with Egypt. The Carter administration had long considered the Begin government to be less than forthcoming on sharing confidential information and subsequently downgraded relations between the two countries' security establishments. A CIA study in 1979 concluded that two of the principal goals of Israel's intelligence service were to collect information on secret U.S. policy decisions concerning Israel as well as the collection of scientific intelligence in the U.S. and other developed countries.<sup>384</sup> When Reagan assumed office, Robert McFarlane was tasked by Haig with establishing a strategic dialogue with Israel and repairing relations between the two countries' security establishments. It was apparent to McFarlane that the robust partnership on intelligence issues that had once blossomed in earlier years had faded:

The relationship (American-Israeli intelligence cooperation) I discovered had not been nearly as good as it ought to have been. There seemed to me to be a palpable lack of trust to say the least, even hostility in some quarters, toward being open and comprehensive in what we would share with Israel. I talked to colleagues who had served during the Carter

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<sup>383</sup> Pear, R. (1985). Experts Say U.S. and Israel Have a History of Cooperation on Intelligence. New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

years and they acknowledged that. So it seemed to me that we had a lot of work to do to change that. I welcomed the opportunity to engage with Israeli counterparts and my colleagues in the Reagan Administration towards improving the relationship.<sup>385</sup>

The tenor of the intelligence sharing relationship would change as Israel and the U.S. became more open in what they shared with each other on a range of common strategic threats. These efforts grew in no small part because of the interest Reagan's Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) William Casey had in improving the quality of America's intelligence on the Soviet Union and the ability Israel had to aid the U.S. in its efforts to keep the region – and the regimes of its key allies – stable and secure.

#### **Domestic Catalyst – CIA Director William Casey's Approach to Israel**

Wolf Blitzer, Washington correspondent for the *Jerusalem Post*, noted that Casey was seen as the most pro-Israeli CIA DCI ever and made “previously restricted information, including satellite photography, routinely available to Israel” during his time at Langley.<sup>386</sup> U.S.-Israeli intelligence cooperation would become reinvigorated under Casey's leadership. Casey's interest in cementing closer intelligence ties with Israel was not born out of any natural pro-Israel leanings. Instead, they were inspired by a need to accomplish three specific objectives in the Middle East that threatened the CIA's ability to gain a competitive edge. First, the U.S. had limited intelligence assets inside the Soviet Union. This inhibited America's human intelligence sources and the degree to which they had access to understanding Soviet military systems. Second, with the toppling of the Shah, the U.S. lost its foothold in Iran. Third, the rise of Soviet-backed insurgencies in Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia and terrorist threats that

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<sup>385</sup> McFarlane, R. (2018). US-Israel Relations Under Reagan. *University of Georgia*. L. Lukoff.

<sup>386</sup> Blitzer, W. (1987). Mossad-CIA Ties Legacy of Casey and Angleton. *The Wall Street Journal*. New York, NY, Dow Jones & Company.

posed existential threats to America's allies in the region, led the U.S. to place a newfound emphasis on cultivating strategic partnerships to prevent further regional losses.<sup>387</sup>

### **Domestic Catalyst - America's Quest for Intelligence Assets behind the Iron Curtain**

First, Casey hoped to tap into Israel's HUMINT sources inside the Soviet Union. Over the years, Israel had nurtured a network of agents and informants through its connections with Jewish dissidents in countries behind the Iron Curtain. Casey's biographer Joseph E. Persico described Israel's assets behind the Iron Curtain as "a rat line" that would help the Reagan administration in its efforts to aid the Polish Solidarity Movement and increase the quality of its human intelligence assets.<sup>388</sup> Jewish dissidents played a significant role in the East-West power struggle. Their voices allowed the U.S. to maintain moral clarity over the Soviet Union. As political actors in the international arena, their heart-wrenching tales about living conditions in Soviet gulags shamed Soviet decision-makers before the world. Highlighting the stories of individual Jewish dissidents suffering in Soviet prisons allowed the U.S. to use their plight as a means of undermining the moral legitimacy of the Soviet system and win the battle of hearts and minds in the Cold War.

### **International Catalyst - Satellite Imagery on Iraq's Nuclear Facilities**

Shortly after he arrived at the CIA, Casey provided Israel with satellite images of Iraq's Osirak nuclear facility in exchange for the Israeli government's acquiescence to an American AWACS deal with Saudi Arabia.<sup>389</sup> Israel bombed the Osirak reactor and eliminated the facility with minimal damage to the surrounding civilian population before the plant became operational. A nuclear showdown with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was ultimately averted.

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<sup>387</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). *US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>388</sup> Persico, J. E. (1990). *Casey: The Lives and Secrets of William J. Casey from the OSS to the CIA*. New York, NY, Viking., 236.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 253-254.

### **International Catalyst – Common Terrorist Threats Emanating from Lebanon**

Second, Casey was intent on preserving the viability of American-backed regimes in the Middle East. The U.S. and Israel invested significant resources preserving the regime of Bashir Gemayel and the Maronite Christians in Lebanon. Lebanon quickly became the test case for America's efforts to combat terrorism and ensure the regional stability of its neighbors. The presence of both the PLO and Hezbollah in Lebanon challenged the ability of American decision-makers to react to crises that U.S. allies in the region looked to for signals of Washington's resolve in the Middle East.

The PLO posed an existential threat to Israel, Lebanon, and many of the region's Arab governments. The Reagan administration was initially supportive of Israeli war aims to rid the PLO from Israel's northern border.<sup>390</sup> Though they would often champion the Palestinian cause publicly, Shultz quickly learned that the Arab governments in the region wanted to do all that they could to ensure that Arafat and his compatriots were not repatriated to their country upon leaving Beirut in August 1982.<sup>391</sup> This seemingly contradictory position stemmed from a fear that an armed PLO (whose members were well-trained and backed by the Soviet Union) would pose an existential threat to their regimes' if given safe harbor in their respective countries. Through careful diplomacy, the U.S. was able to ensure that the PLO, after being badly damaged by Israeli forces, would leave Lebanon severely weakened militarily.

Successful efforts to counter the PLO in Lebanon created a dynamic that spawned a second and more serious terrorist threat for both the U.S. and Israel. The Israeli intervention in Lebanon and America's diplomatic efforts to break the impasse made effective counter-terrorism

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<sup>390</sup> Meridor, D. (2017). *US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia, L. Lukoff.

<sup>391</sup> Shultz, G.P. (1993). *Turmoil and triumph: my years as Secretary of State*, New York: Scribner's; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, © 1993., 58.

policies even more consequential for the U.S. Sallai Meridor noted that Israel had informed their counterparts in the Reagan administration that a newfound national security threat was looming that the U.S. was unprepared to address:

During the 1980s, Israel had already been fighting terrorism. People in America had not yet felt that terror would hit the shores of the United States. The roots of American understanding that counterterrorism was important started during this time period.<sup>392</sup>

Americans quickly became informed of the terrorist threat over the course of the next two years. Hezbollah, a newly founded Iranian-backed Shiite militant group, was culpable for a series of attacks against American diplomatic, intelligence, and military personnel situated in Lebanon. Prior to Israel's intervention there, Iranian-backed Shiite militias were primarily occupied with threats from Palestinian guerillas in southern Lebanon.<sup>393</sup> Israel's invasion of southern Lebanon, and Arafat's subsequent departure from Beirut, roiled Lebanon's fragile political system. The same Shiite civilians who had initially welcomed Israel's efforts to counter their common Palestinian adversary turned their fire against Israel and the U.S.<sup>394</sup> Afterwards, southern Lebanon became a fruitful ground for recruitment for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah. The void that was created in Lebanon was then exploited by the Assad regime. Syria sought to continue their military occupation and maintain their historical dominance of the country's fractured political system at the expense of American and Israeli interests. The collective efforts of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah created a common (and enduring) terrorist threat for both Israel and the U.S. This made regional cooperation on counter-terrorism policy a vital priority for both Israeli and American policymakers.

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<sup>392</sup> Meridor, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>393</sup> Sela, A. (1998). The Decline of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order, Albany: State University of New York Press, c1998., 267.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.



The successful attacks against American assets in Lebanon also created an intelligence gap for the U.S. in more than one domain in Lebanon. The U.S. lost diplomatic and intelligence experts, physical infrastructure, and key military personnel trained as peacekeepers in the country. In the political sphere, the U.S. lost 63 American diplomats when the U.S. Embassy was bombed on April 18, 1983 and 64 when the embassy annex was bombed on September 20, 1984. Among the dead at the American embassy attack was CIA Agent Robert Ames. Ames was Shultz and Casey's top Middle East expert and an individual who had maintained close ties with the lead planner of the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre, PLO Security Chief Ali Hassan Salameh.<sup>395</sup> Ames was seen by his contemporaries as "a controversial spy" who had cultivated relationships with PLO leaders by "befriending them" in order to procure intelligence on their activities.<sup>396</sup> His knowledge of the region and its political actors was among the best in the CIA (he was awarded the CIA's Distinguished Intelligence Certificate) and he personally briefed Reagan on Middle East issues on numerous occasions.<sup>397</sup> Ames also played a formative role in developing Reagan's September 1<sup>st</sup> Initiative to solve the Arab-Israeli Conflict. He additionally acted as a balancing voice in Reagan's inner circle whose sympathies in the Middle East lay with the Arabs and the Palestinian cause rather than Israel's. Since the Nixon administration, Ames had started using his influence with Salameh and other key leaders in the PLO in an attempt to see if they would be amenable to a political settlement rather than a path of armed resistance toward Israel. His back-channel with the PLO was ended prematurely upon his death on April 18, 1983.

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<sup>395</sup> Bird, K. (2014). *The Good Spy: The Life and Death of Robert Ames*, New York: Crown Publishers, [2014]. First edition., 157.

<sup>396</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). *US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>397</sup> Bird, *The Good Spy: The Life and Death of Robert Ames*, 290.

On the physical and military levels, American assets were successfully hit on three separate occasions. A bomb exploded outside of the American Embassy in Beirut, which led to the deaths of 63 diplomats on April 18, 1983.<sup>398</sup> The headquarters of the Multi-National Force in Lebanon was destroyed on October 23, 1983, leading to the deaths of 241 American Marines.<sup>399</sup> The U.S. embassy annex was bombed on September 20, 1984, causing the deaths of 23 civilians and the wounding of both the American and British ambassadors.<sup>400</sup> These losses contributed to the Reagan administration's decision to withdraw its forces from Lebanon. They also effectively ensured that the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement brokered by Shultz, to bring peace between Israel and Lebanon, became stillborn. The failure of America's diplomatic efforts in Lebanon was at a time when the administration was seeking to use the Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty as a means to build momentum for the Reagan Plan in order to commence direct negotiations between Israel and Jordan over the fate of the West Bank and Gaza. Over the course of the next decade, a hostage crisis would ensue in Lebanon as Shiite militants linked to Iran strategically targeted Americans and other Westerners to extract political concessions from the West in exchange for their return. Through a common need to address the political threat posed by Iranian-backed hostage takers, Israel saw an opportunity to use its intelligence assets inside Iran as a means to assist the U.S. in its efforts to free hostages the Reagan administration had sought to return from Lebanon.

### **International Catalyst – Israeli involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair**

After the fall of the Shah's regime in 1979, the U.S. lost one of its most consequential strategic allies in the Middle East. The U.S. embassy was famously shuttered and American diplomats were taken hostage on national television. Israel had sold weapons to Iran before the

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<sup>398</sup> Quandt, W.B. (1984). "Reagan's Lebanon Policy: Trial and Error." *Middle East Journal* **38**(2): 237., 244.

<sup>399</sup> Eisenberg, L.Z. and N. Caplan (2010). *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace*. [electronic resource]: patterns, problems, possibilities, Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, c2010. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 65.

<sup>400</sup> Boustany, N. (1984). Bomb Kills 23 at U.S. Embassy in Lebanon. *The New York Times*. New York, NY, The New York Times Company.

fall of the Shah and was eager to facilitate its connections within the country to help the Reagan administration free American hostages held by Shiite extremists in Lebanon.<sup>401</sup> This led officials in the Reagan administration to increase ties with Israel's intelligence services to reclaim the hostages. The Iran-Contra operation represents a period of significant military-intelligence cooperation between the U.S. and Israel. However, the fallout from the operation's publicization appears to have had minimal impact on U.S.-Israel relations or American public opinion of Israel. The Reagan administration took the brunt of the criticism for the initiative and the Israeli officials that had planned it faced little to no backlash in Israel for their role in the bungled operation.

Rapprochement with Iran had long been an American foreign policy priority during the Cold War. The Carter administration initially sought contact with the Islamic republic in an effort to re-establish a strategic dialogue with America's one-time regional ally. In Fall 1979, the U.S. conducted three secret negotiations with Iranian officials, including a meeting on November 1, 1979, between Brzezinski and Iranian PM Mehdi Bazargan in Algiers.<sup>402</sup> The publicization of this meeting led to a major backlash in Iran that culminated in the storming of the U.S. embassy and the taking of hostages.<sup>403</sup> This made Iranian officials reluctant to conduct future negotiations with the U.S..<sup>404</sup>

As the Reagan administration pursued a regional policy in the Middle East to counter the Soviet Union, McFarlane felt that U.S. interests in the Gulf region were best served by trying to re-establish a relationship with the Iranian regime.<sup>405</sup> The U.S. sought a strategic dialogue with

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<sup>401</sup> Hunter, J. (1986). "Israeli Arms Sales to Iran." Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (Special Report), 2.

<sup>402</sup> Anonymous. (1986). US/Iranian Contacts and the American Hostages. US National Security Council. Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration: 53., 1.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

Iran primarily to align American and Iranian policy on issues such as countering Soviet expansion and securing the release of American and European hostages held by Iranian-backed Shia terrorist groups.<sup>406</sup>

Israel maintained covert channels with Iranian actors close to the ruling regime and sought to leverage these ties to assist the U.S. in pursuit of its regional goals.<sup>407</sup> However, Israel also had interests that did not necessarily overlap with those of the U.S. By shipping arms to Iran from 1979 to 1982 and again from 1984 to 1986, Israel sought to preserve a strategic balance in the regional conflict between Iran and Iraq.<sup>408</sup> Israel was concerned about the implications of Iranian defeat in the Iran-Iraq War as Saddam Hussein remained an existential threat to Israeli security interests.<sup>409</sup>

The origins of Israeli involvement in the arms-for-hostages scheme date back to December 1980. At this time, Morris Amitay resigned as the executive director of AIPAC, and General Menachem Meron, Israel's military attaché in Washington, D.C., asked Amitay to approach U.S. officials to gauge their opinions on sending war materials to Iran.<sup>410</sup> At some point between 1981 and 1982, he felt that he'd gained tacit approval from NSA Richard Allen to send some spare parts for weapons systems to Iran.<sup>411</sup> NSC staffer Michael Ledeen brought the proposal to the attention of McFarlane in Spring 1986 after visiting Israel, where he discussed

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 1-3.

<sup>407</sup> Shultz, G.P. (1985). Telegram from Secretary of State Shultz to National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane on 6 June 1985. R. McFarlane. Washington, D.C., National Security Council, 1.

<sup>408</sup> Shipler, D.K. (1986). Israel was Reportedly Given Differing Signals by US on Iran Arms Sales. New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company., 1.

<sup>409</sup> Poindexter, John A. (1986, January 4). *Covert Action Finding regarding Iran*, 1.

<sup>410</sup> Shipler, *Israel Was Reportedly Given Differing Signals by US on Iran Arms Sales*, 1.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

U.S. and Israeli security relations with Director-General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, David Kimche.<sup>412</sup>

Israeli-American covert action collaboration was ongoing throughout the Reagan administration. After encountering Congressional resistance to assisting the Contras, the Reagan administration sought the support of allied states to aid the Contra's war effort.<sup>413</sup> Operations Tipped Kettle I and II saw Israel compensated by the U.S. for supplying Nicaraguan Contra groups with war materials captured from the PLO during the 1982 Lebanon War.<sup>414</sup>

Despite domestic legal constraints from Congress, the U.S. maintained its loyalty and collaborative partnership with the Israelis even as several other countries attempted to facilitate a U.S.-Iranian dialogue prior to 1986.<sup>415</sup> The Reagan administration's commitment to the Israeli intelligence services can be viewed as a product of the trusting partnership between the two countries' intelligence services. Israel even supported the Afghan rebels at the behest of the U.S.<sup>416</sup> Furthermore, the Reagan administration remained constrained in its efforts to carry out covert action operations alone in the Middle East because it lacked the intelligence capabilities in the region necessary to operate independently.

The start of the Lebanon War in June 1982 embroiled both countries and their respective intelligence services in the same conflict. The war led the U.S. to become increasingly reliant on Israeli intelligence. The 1983 Beirut Embassy Bombing left eight members of the CIA dead and

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<sup>412</sup> Anonymous. (1986). *US/Iranian Contacts and the American Hostages*. US National Security Council. Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration: 53., 3.

<sup>413</sup> LeoGrande, W.M. (1998). *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, c1998., 387.

<sup>414</sup> US District Court for the District of Columbia. (1986). *United States of America v. Oliver L. North, Defendant*. Criminal No. 88-0080 02 – GAG. US District Court for the District of Columbia. Brooklyn, NY, City University of New York – Brooklyn. **Iran-Contra Facts.**, 1.

<sup>415</sup> Anonymous, *US/Iranian Contacts and the American Hostages*, 1.

<sup>416</sup> Persico, *Casey: The Lives and Secrets of William J. Casey from the OSS to the CIA*, 311.

severely damaged U.S. intelligence capabilities in Lebanon and the Middle East.<sup>417</sup> In 1983, the CIA named agent William Francis Buckley as their Beirut Chief-of-Station and tasked him with rebuilding U.S. intelligence capabilities in Lebanon.<sup>418</sup> Buckley was America's foremost expert on the Middle East and terrorism.<sup>419</sup> Matthew Levitt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy cites an unnamed senior CIA official saying of Casey's reaction after Buckley was kidnapped:

It drove him almost to the ends of the earth to find ways of getting Buckley back, to deal with anyone in any form, in any shape, in any way, to get Buckley back. He failed at that, but it was a driving motivation in Iran-Contra.<sup>420</sup>

It appears that Buckley's kidnapping compelled Casey to support what would become the Iran-Contra operation. Buckley's kidnapping provides context to the CIA's decision to lend its transportation resources for a shipment of 18 HAWK anti-aircraft missiles delivered to Tabriz on November 25, 1985 without a Covert Action Finding.<sup>421</sup>

At the time of the request, Casey was out of the country, so Associate Deputy Director for Operations Clair George and Deputy Director John McMahon approved and oversaw the operation.<sup>422</sup> The CIA conducted this shipment without a Finding, but McMahon noted that any future shipments would require one.<sup>423</sup> Concerns arose over this shipment, likely due to the absence of a Finding, and they procured the return of the 18 HAWKs to Israel in February 1986,

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<sup>417</sup> Sahimi, M. (2009). The Fog over the 1983 Beirut Attacks. Teheran Bureau. Los Angeles, CA, Public Broadcasting Service., 2.

<sup>418</sup> Levitt, M. (2015). Why the CIA Killed Imad Mughniyeh. Politico. Washington, D.C.

<sup>419</sup> Sieff, M. (1987). Iranian played US, Israel from both ends of an arms deal. Washington Times. Washington, D.C., News World Communications., 1.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Casey, W. (1986). Transcript of DCI Casey's Testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on Israel's Role in Iran-Contra. House of Representatives. Washington, D.C., CIA Historical Collections.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

after Reagan issued his Presidential Finding on the operation.<sup>424</sup> The Reagan administration had considerable motivation to procure the hostages' release. However, McFarlane knew the administration could not be seen negotiating with terrorists or trading arms for hostages and regularly voiced his concerns throughout the operation.<sup>425</sup> Nonetheless, the Reagan administration persisted in its efforts to secure the hostages' release despite the legal consequences of continuing the venture.

In June 1985, Michael Ledeen, a civilian consultant with the NSC, learned from Kimche that Israel had established a relationship with Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iranian expatriate living in Europe interested in contacting the U.S. government.<sup>426</sup> Ghorbanifar claimed that his contacts in the Iranian government held influence sufficient to the task of procuring the release of U.S. hostages.<sup>427</sup> On June 14, 1985, Hezbollah hijacked TWA Flight 847 and took many hostages, including U.S. citizens. Israeli officials got Ghorbanifar to use his connections with Majlis Speaker Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Velayati to intervene and procure the release of all the hostages.<sup>428</sup> This act demonstrated the validity of Ghorbanifar's contacts in Iran and cemented his position as a reliable intermediary with the Iranian government.

After Israel shipped 508 TOW missiles to Iran in August 1985 with tacit U.S. approval, Islamic Jihad released U.S. hostage Benjamin Weir on September 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>429</sup> Islamic Jihad used Israel's October 2, 1985 bombing of PLO positions in Tunis as an excuse to execute U.S. hostage Buckley on 4 October.<sup>430</sup> Despite the death of the U.S. government's highest priority

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<sup>424</sup> Anonymous, *US/Iranian Contacts and the American Hostages*, 6.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Sieff, *Iranian Played US, Israel from Both Ends of An Arms Deal*, 1.

<sup>429</sup> Anonymous. (1986). Chronology of Events: U.S.-Iran Dialogue. Central Intelligence Agency. Washington, D.C., CIA Electronic Reading Room., 1.

<sup>430</sup> Fisk. R. (1985). US Hostage May Have Been Killed Months Ago; William Buckley Kidnapped by Islamic Jihad. *The Times*. London, England, Times Newspapers.

hostage, the operation continued, and it later came out that Buckley had died in June 1985.<sup>431</sup> This action demonstrated the reliability of Israeli contacts with Iran and the plausibility of shipping arms to Iran via Israel. The U.S. delivered some spare parts for HAWK missile systems in late May 1986, and U.S. hostage Lawrence Jenco was released on July 26, 1986.<sup>432</sup> The U.S. shipped 500 TOW missiles to Iran on October 29, 1986, and U.S. hostage David Jacobsen was released on November 2, 1986.<sup>433</sup> While U.S. officials ostensibly held that they would not ship arms to Iran in exchange for the release of U.S. hostages, the correlation of arms shipments and hostage releases indicates that the arms shipments did lead, at least in part, to the release of several U.S. hostages.

Israel played a significant role as a facilitator of the exchanges. They provided the U.S. with the initial contact of Ghorbanifar, and the U.S. accepted Israel's assessment of his trustworthiness without doing their own due diligence.<sup>434</sup> The U.S. undertook the operation in part to moderate the Iranian government and bolster its position domestically through success on the battlefield. In hindsight, it is clear that there were no viable moderate factions that U.S. assistance would empower. In fact, U.S. support and overtures to the Rafsanjani government, which could be deemed moderate compared to other Iranian political elements, may have even exacerbated the moderate-radical divide. Considering the U.S. largely relied on Israeli intelligence regarding the tenability of this objective, it seems that the prospects of moderating the Iranian government were either overestimated or exaggerated.

Throughout the course of the operation, Israel acted as the staging ground for arms shipments to Iran. In some cases, Israel shipped its own weapons to Iran, and the U.S. later

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<sup>431</sup> Sahimi, *The Fog Over the 1983 Beirut Attacks*, 1.

<sup>432</sup> Anonymous. *Chronology of Events: U.S.-Iran Dialogue*, 2.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Anonymous, *US/Iranian Contacts and the American Hostages*, 1.



replenished Israeli stocks. In other cases, the U.S. shipped weapons to Israel, who then shipped them to Iran. Israel also acted as an intermediary for Iranian payments for weapons shipments. The Iranians would transfer the money to Israel who would then transfer the money to CIA-controlled Swiss bank accounts.<sup>435</sup> Israel was consistently involved in covert meetings between U.S. officials and Iranian contacts during the arms for hostages' negotiations and provided material support to further the arms for hostages' operations.

Israel faced some backlash from the American media and some U.S. officials after Iran-Contra became public knowledge. For example, Israel sought to downplay its role in the face of media backlash and allegations by Attorney General Ed Meese of gross Israeli involvement.<sup>436</sup> Despite the criticism, the Iran-Contra affair appears to have had a minimal negative impact on U.S.-Israel relations in general, and the intelligence sharing relationship in particular. The extensive nature of the contacts during the arms for hostage crisis showed that the Reagan administration was willing to trust Israeli intelligence sources and tradecraft in a highly consequential covert action mission for its broader Middle East policy. More importantly, the Iran-Contra scandal did not inhibit the U.S. from deepening its strategic ties with Israel as the following year Israel was named as a Major Non-NATO ally of the U.S. and became the recipient of a renewed (and enhanced) strategic cooperation agreement in 1988.

### **The Ethiopian Jewish Refugee Crisis**

In 1979, American Jewish groups began voicing concerns about the fate of their co-religionists living in Ethiopia. Ethiopian Jews, also known as *Falashas*, were caught amidst a civil war raging between the Ethiopian King Haile Selassie and a Soviet-backed insurgency. Ethiopian Jewish refugees from the conflict, such as Baruch Tegegne, showed up in synagogues

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<sup>435</sup> Frankel, G. (1986). Israel Denies Funding Contras; Government Confirms Role in Arms Transfers to Iran. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company., A1.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

across the U.S. relaying the message to American Jews that their Ethiopian co-religionists were on the brink of experiencing a “second Holocaust.”<sup>437</sup> Concomitantly, a famine ensued, forcing the Ethiopian Jews to migrate north towards Sudan. According to one estimate, the population of Ethiopian Jews had dwindled from 1 million to roughly 25,000.<sup>438</sup> Groups such as the American Association for Ethiopian Jewry were formed and sought to expedite a mass emigration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel. Under its law of return, Israel affords diaspora Jews the right to become citizens. Thereafter, it became a priority for the organized Jewish community in the U.S. to prod the Israeli and American governments to enable the exodus of Ethiopian Jews to Israel where they would be afforded full-citizenship under Israel’s Law of Return.

Begin was openly supportive of facilitating Jewish emigration from Ethiopia during this time. However, bureaucrats in the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, and in the Jewish Agency, came under direct criticism by activists in the U.S. for dragging their feet in facilitating the planned exodus.<sup>439</sup> Criticism that Israel was not doing enough to help Jews in need was a product of two factors. First, Israel had a strategic relationship with Ethiopia. It was one of Israel’s few allies in Africa. Ethiopia purchased Israeli arms and economic goods. It also served as a potential base of operations for Israel to build intelligence channels on the African continent. The Israeli government did not want to be seen criticizing one of its close allies for its human rights practices. Second, Ethiopian Jews were subjected to racism and religious discrimination in Israel. Many Israelis questioned the validity of the theory that the Ethiopian Jews were descendants of the Queen of Sheba and one of the “lost tribes” of Israel. Their prayer rituals and religious customs were unlike any other Jewish diaspora community living in Israel. Some

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<sup>437</sup> Chira, S. (1982). Speakers at Rally Seek Help for Ethiopian Jews. New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company.

<sup>438</sup> Editorial (1984). The Endangered Falashas. The Wall Street Journal. New York, NY, The Dow Jones Company.

<sup>439</sup> Kraut, G.N. (1979). Black Ethiopian Jews Face a New Holocaust Ignored by the World. The Atlanta Constitution. Dunwoody, GA, Cox Enterprises.

leading religious figures in Israel questioned whether they were even Jewish. The religious authorities in Israel asked that they go through with a ritual conversion before becoming Israeli citizens.

The dire economic and security conditions in Ethiopia necessitated a swift response. A famine and a raging civil war in Ethiopia led the Ethiopian Jews to migrate north where they were herded into refugee camps on the Sudanese border. The squalid living conditions in the refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan created a dire situation where disease and famine were rampant. Under these circumstances, a mass evacuation was needed to ensure that the Ethiopian Jews would survive as a people. It is within this context that Operation Moses and Operation Sheba were planned and executed.

#### **International Catalyst – Joint Covert Action Planning in Operation Moses**

The Israeli government had secretly managed a series of smaller evacuations from Ethiopia under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office of Secret Aliyah Activity that was funded by the Carter administration.<sup>440</sup> These early efforts led to a small but steady influx of Ethiopian Jews into Israel. Subsequently, the plight of the Ethiopian Jews became a cause of concern for both the Reagan administration and the U.N. High Commission for Refugees as conditions in Ethiopia deteriorated. A larger evacuation mission was planned as political and economic conditions for the Ethiopian Jews worsened amidst a major famine and a popular uprising against the Moscow-backed Derg Military Junta.

The evacuation became known as Operation Moses. Operation Moses was facilitated by large sums of money from American Jewish donors and a Boeing 707 donated by Trans

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<sup>440</sup> Katz, N. and I. Kessler (2000). "A Most Professional Experience: Operation Moses" Journal of Jewish Communal Service (2): 98., 98-99.

European Airways in Belgium.<sup>441</sup> Funds to assist the operation were then provided to State officials Princeton Lyman, Richard Krieger, and Jerry Weaver.<sup>442</sup> On the Israeli side, Efraim HaLevy, who went on to serve as Head of the Mossad in the late 1990s, became the point man for Israel alongside Yehuda Dominitz of the Jewish Agency. Between November 21, 1984 and January 5, 1985, the Israeli Mossad and the State Department facilitated 36 flights that brought 7,800 Ethiopian Jews to Brussels and then Tel Aviv. The airlift was a mixed success. On one hand, the intelligence services of both countries had successfully cooperated in organizing a massive airlift in difficult circumstances. On the other hand, the details of the operation were leaked to the media by Peres, preventing future airlifts from taking place at the time.<sup>443</sup>

### **Domestic Catalyst – George H.W. Bush’s Diplomacy in Sudan**

On March 22, 1985, *The Washington Post* reported that the CIA was said to have planned and executed an air rescue from a refugee camp in Gedaref, Sudan.<sup>444</sup> Operation Sheba had commenced. Sudanese President Gaafar Nimeiry was reluctant to allow Mossad and CIA operatives to perform an airlift in Sudan out of a fear that Islamic extremists opposed to his regime would label him as an Israeli puppet. Mossad and CIA operatives secured a passenger jet and built makeshift runways to facilitate the airlift. The operation was facilitated by an American promise to unfreeze \$15 million in military aid held from Nimeiry’s government.<sup>445</sup>

George H.W. Bush personally negotiated the agreement on Reagan’s behalf. George H.W. Bush secured an agreement that would allow Khartoum to promise to turn a blind eye to

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<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>444</sup> Powers, C.T. (1985). Falasha Airlift Reported (U.S. Said to Take Refugees to Israel). *The Washington Post*. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company.

<sup>445</sup> Bard and Lenhoff, *The Humanitarian Side of the Reagan Administration: The Rescue of the Ethiopian Jews*. The Humanist, American Humanist Association: 25., 26.

the massive airlift undertaken by six U.S. Hercules transports.<sup>446</sup> During Operation Sheba, 636 Ethiopian Jews were saved from the Sudanese refugee camps over the course of two days.<sup>447</sup>

According to Mitchell Bard, the CIA acted with precision during the operation:

The CIA, which is frequently criticized for its actions, in this case carried out a humanitarian mission with precision and in the clandestine fashion in which it's set up to operate. The operation was also financed by the U.S., which gave the Jewish Agency more than \$3 million out of the president's emergency fund for transportation.<sup>448</sup>

Considering the operation's tactical success, the political component that allowed the air lift to take place fell neatly into place at the last possible minute. Shortly after Operation Sheba, on April 6, 1985, Nimeiry was deposed by General Abdul Rahman Swaraddahab.<sup>449</sup> The joint-covert action initiative took place at the latest possible moment as the incoming regime did not have diplomatic relations with Israel and opposed the secret air lift.

### **International Constraint - The Pollard Espionage Mission**

The U.S.-Israel intelligence sharing partnership experienced a significant shock in 1985 when Navy Intelligence analyst Jonathan Pollard pled guilty to spying on behalf of Israel against the U.S. When Pollard was arrested and charged with spying for Israel, Israeli cabinet officials were thrust into diplomatic crisis mode. To mitigate the damage Pollard caused to U.S.-Israeli relations, Prime Minister Shimon Peres initiated a policy of plausible deniability where his government was to collaborate with federal investigators on one hand and simultaneously refuse to admit responsibility for Pollard on the other. The talking points from Jerusalem stated that

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>447</sup> Bard, M. G. (2002). *From Tragedy to Triumph: The Politics Behind the Rescue of Ethiopian Jewry*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002., 165.

<sup>448</sup> Bard, *From Tragedy to Triumph: The Politics Behind the Rescue of Ethiopian Jewry*, 167.

<sup>449</sup> Willis, D.K. (1985). Airlift of Ethiopian Jews to Israel May Sour US-Sudan relations. The Christian Science Monitor. Boston, MA, Christian Science Publishing Society.

Pollard was part of a “rogue operation” and not a spy handled by their government. Peres brushed off allegations of Israel’s role in the Pollard scandal as “attempts to foul the atmosphere between the two countries.”<sup>450</sup> Three factors influenced Israel’s decision to deny their connection to Pollard:

- 1) Admitting responsibility for Pollard would damage U.S.-Israel bilateral relations;
- 2) Pollard’s botched espionage mission would damage the credibility of the Israeli defense and intelligence community;
- 3) Pollard was not yet an Israeli citizen and the cabinet had no legal responsibility to prod Washington for his release.

In response to Pollard’s arrest, Israeli officials dismantled the Bureau of Scientific Relations, known in Hebrew as Lekem, the obscure Israeli outfit that oversaw Pollard’s espionage. The officials culpable for the operation (Aviem Sella and Rafael Eitan) were not extradited to the U.S. to stand trial. In what was a slap in the face to the Reagan administration, Israeli officials transferred them to plum jobs as Commander of the Tel Nof Air Force Base (Israel’s largest) and Chairman of the Board of Israel Chemicals, respectively.<sup>451</sup> This act angered Secretary of State George Shultz so much that he urged a boycott of the Tel Nof base so long as Sella remained commander.<sup>452</sup> Israel’s policy of plausible deniability continued into 1987, when Prime Minister Shamir addressed the media after Pollard was formally sentenced to life in prison:

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<sup>450</sup> Zelizer, B. (2001). “Defending the American Dream: Coverage of the Jonathan Pollard Spy Case.” *Qualitative Sociology* (2): 203.

<sup>451</sup> Frankel, G. (1987). Indicted Officer Gets Strong Israeli Backing. *The Washington Post*. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company.

<sup>452</sup> Kumaraswamy, P.R. (1996). “The Politics of Pardon: Israel and Jonathan Pollard.” United States, *Institute of Arab Studies* (3): 17.

The State of Israel has no connection with Pollard or his family. The State of Israel did not hire him and did not assign him espionage missions. Therefore, the situation of his family may be a human problem, or a moral problem, but not a problem with which the state, as such, has to concern itself.<sup>453</sup>

As Israeli officials denied that Pollard was one of their own, their American counterparts were furious. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger was apparently so angered by Pollard's espionage that he called him a traitor "who deserved to be shot."<sup>454</sup> When allegations surfaced in an article written by Bob Woodward and Walter Pincus that implied Israel had been managing another spy in the U.S., dubbed "Mr. X," at the same time they were handling Pollard, Attorney General Ed Meese hardened in his opposition to releasing Pollard from prison.<sup>455</sup> The Reagan administration drew a red-line in the sand prohibiting Israeli espionage operations in the U.S. Whereas James Angleton turned a blind-eye to Israeli espionage operations in the U.S. during his time in Langley, the Reagan administration was less-forgiving when Pollard was caught spying.

Surprisingly, the Pollard affair had little impact on the blossoming intelligence sharing partnership that was developing between the two governments. Former Israeli Intelligence and Atomic Energy Minister Dan Meridor has argued that the intelligence Israel procured from Pollard did not "harm the community of interests between the United States and Israel or impact the sharing of information, operations, assessment, sources, things (on intelligence) we did together."<sup>456</sup> Sallai Meridor (Israel's Ambassador to the United States from 2006-2009) noted

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<sup>453</sup> Friedman, T.L. (1987). Shamir Says Pollard's Fate is No Concern of Israel. The New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company.

<sup>454</sup> Stevenson, W. (1991). A 20<sup>th</sup>-century Dreyfus? U.S. Navy Man Knew of Iraq's Secret Weapons: Was Warning Israel Really Such a Crime? The Toronto Sun. Toronto, Canada.

<sup>455</sup> Woodward, B. and W. Pincus (1988). Mr. X in Pollard Spy Case Still Hunted U.S. Probers Feel Sure Israel Was Using Another American. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company.

<sup>456</sup> Meridor, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

that Pollard's imprisonment served more as a reminder of what *not* to do in the intelligence sharing relationship rather than an excuse to cancel intelligence sharing relationship altogether:

The Pollard case was seen as a symbol that everyone should know that if something of that kind was done in the future there will be no mercy. In light of Pollard's espionage, cooperation between the US and Israel boomed in future years.<sup>457</sup>

The most tangible impact the Pollard case had on U.S.-Israeli intelligence sharing relations came in the form of the blowback the case had on the American Jewish community. Pollard's case fed allegations that American Jews were more loyal to Israel than the U.S. According to Tom Dine, allegations of dual-loyalty were precisely what he, and other officials at AIPAC, had ardently worked to prevent as activists advocating for a stronger U.S.-Israel relationship:

Pollard is the biggest disappointment I think in my professional career because it was everything, we stood to show was not true, that the Jews had a dual loyalty. And Pollard was the example, the worst example of the worst case, and it's a very sad case because he was so in need of attention and money.<sup>458</sup>

The Pollard case also created a heightened sense of skepticism among counterintelligence officers in the CIA about the latent potential of American Jews for recruitment by Israeli agents.<sup>459</sup> These observations were also observed by Dov Zakheim during his service in the Reagan and Bush Administrations:

It (The Pollard case) had a huge impact. I think people just were much more hesitant about opening up to the Israelis. Until that point, it had become a very comfortable relationship. Despite Weinberger's own apprehensions, it was a comfortable relationship.

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<sup>457</sup> Meridor, S. (2017). US-Israel relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>458</sup> Dine, T.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>459</sup> Defense Investigative Service. (1995). Counterintelligence Profile: Israel. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C., Daniel Patrick Moynihan Papers. Box 1609.



Pollard did two things. He didn't freeze U.S.-Israel relations, but he made them more complicated. The other thing of course is that he made it exceedingly difficult for young Jewish persons to get security clearances. That has not entirely dissipated to this day.

Despite its salience, Pollard's espionage operation was not consequential enough to cancel U.S.-Israeli intelligence sharing activities. The U.S. lacked capabilities in many areas the Israelis were experts in, such as counter-terrorism, HUMINT recruitment inside the Soviet Union, knowledge of Soviet weapons systems, and operational knowledge inside key countries of interest to American policymakers such as Lebanon and Iran.

### **Policy Outcome**

The U.S. and Israel increased the breadth and extent of their intelligence sharing relationship during the 1980s. A common Soviet enemy and a mutual interest in bringing down the Iron Curtain led the U.S. to cultivate an intelligence sharing relationship that had withered prior to the Reagan administration. Both countries cooperated in joint covert action initiatives the other side encouraged. The U.S. sought Israeli cooperation in Iran and Lebanon. In return, Israel received backing from the administration to facilitate two purely humanitarian covert action operations in Ethiopia and Sudan. The intelligence sharing relationship endured in light of the Pollard and Iran-Contra scandals. Permanent institutions were created where sensitive intelligence was to be shared. The creation and development of JSAP and the JPMG became formal institutions that both governments turned into hubs for intelligence sharing on issues of mutual concern.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **International Diplomatic for Israeli Foreign Policy**

#### **Support for Israel's Nuclear Program**

This chapter examines America's diplomatic support for Israel during the Reagan Administration. It discusses American support for Israel's nuclear program and the Reagan Administration's voting decisions in international institutions on issues related to Israel. Finally, the chapter scrutinizes American support for Israel in the Middle East peace process. It finds that American support for Israeli foreign policy in the Middle East peace process ebbed as political events in the Middle East led President Reagan to change his initial approach to Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

#### **Introduction - The Carter Administration and Israel's Nuclear Program**

Jimmy Carter came into office with a distinct plan to address nuclear non-proliferation. He favored a strict nuclear safeguards regime that placed a greater emphasis on penalizing countries for violating international laws and treaties related to nuclear weapons. In an address to Congress in 1977, Carter laid forth his legislative aspirations on nuclear-related issues:

Among our shared goals are: an increase in the effectiveness of international safeguards and controls on peaceful nuclear activities to prevent further proliferation of nuclear explosive devices, the establishment of common international sanctions to prevent such proliferation, an effort to encourage nations which have not ratified the Non-Proliferation

Treaty to do so at the earliest possible date, and adoption of programs to enhance the reliability of the United States as a supplier of nuclear fuel.<sup>460</sup>

In theory, this meant that Carter would work to bring Israel, a state that was not a signatory to the NPT, into the group of nations abiding by the tenets of a nuclear non-proliferation regime. However, in practice, the Carter administration had to decide whether it would strictly adhere to its nuclear non-proliferation goals or risk alienating the Israelis and sacrificing America's position as an arbiter in the Middle East peace process. After the "flash in the sea" incident in 1979, the Carter administration punted on the issue of Israel's nuclear program by failing to rule that a joint South African-Israeli detonation had occurred. Carter would then adhere to America's ambiguity policy on Israel's nuclear program that had been in place since the mid-1960s. Nonetheless, the issue of Israel's nuclear program maintained a constant presence on the international non-proliferation agenda because of the Arab states' insistence on creating a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East as well as the actions of member states overseeing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), who had long sought to bring Israel's Dimona nuclear facility under the IAEA's Safeguards regime.

When Reagan was elected in November 1980, he received an electoral mandate to change the Carter administration's foreign policy and its handling of geopolitical affairs in the Middle East. However, several questions about the future direction of American policy in the nuclear non-proliferation sphere emerged. Reagan's aversion to nuclear weapons was well known, even as he embraced Israel as a major strategic partner. Were Reagan's beliefs about nuclear weapons salient enough to change American foreign policy towards Israel's nuclear program? How would

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<sup>460</sup> Carter, J. (1977). Nuclear Non-Proliferation Message to Congress on 27 April 1977. White House. Santa Barbara, CA, The American Presidency Project.

the Reagan administration handle domestic and international policy debates that pitted America's 'special relationship' with Israel against its obligations as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty? How would Reagan's policies vis a vis Israel's nuclear program be impacted by America's relations with its moderate Arab allies? Reagan would confront these questions early in his first term. This case will examine Reagan's beliefs associated with nuclear weapons that he had formulated prior to his election, to see what (if any) impact they had in determining his administration's policy towards Israel's nuclear program.

### **Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs on Nuclear Weapons**

Prior to his election in 1981, Reagan had stated that Israel was a "strategic asset" to the U.S. and that maintaining strong bilateral ties with Jerusalem were important to the success of his foreign policy in the Middle East.<sup>461</sup> For Israel, maintaining its nuclear deterrent has long been seen as a necessary precondition to its survival and national security interests in a region where it is outnumbered by its Arab neighbors. In 1961, President Kennedy adopted a harsh policy towards Israel's nuclear program. He sought to bring Israel's nuclear facility in Dimona into the IAEA's Safeguards regime. Ultimately, Kennedy was unsuccessful in his efforts as he would die in office before the end of his first term. Since the Kennedy administration, Israel has sought and received diplomatic reassurances from subsequent American presidents guaranteeing the survival of its nuclear program. In the years afterwards, the international community came to view nuclear non-proliferation as a threat to humanity that demanded a global response. The U.S. assumed a key leadership role in this effort. In 1978, the U.S. signed and subsequently ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). When Reagan came into office in November 1981, the U.S. was legally bound by the terms of the NPT. The NPT banned military and nuclear

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<sup>461</sup> Bard, M.G. (2018). "Ronald Reagan (1911-2004)." The Jewish Virtual Library, from <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ronald-reagan>.

cooperation with non-signatory states that admitted to possessing nuclear weapons. Israel was one such state. Since the early 1960s, each president had to confront the fact that the American intelligence community had identified an active nuclear weapons program existing outside the bounds of the NPT and IAEA safeguards regime in Israel. Rather than admit to its existence, each president since Kennedy has maintained an "ambiguity" stance on Israel's nuclear program.

The best way to explain Reagan's approach to Israel's nuclear program is to parse the record for statements he made on nuclear weapons prior to his presidency. Knowing these circumstances, an important question remained to be answered. How would the Reagan administration approach the sensitive topic of Israel's nuclear weapons program when it became a topic of discussion in international institutions? Prior to his arrival in Washington, Reagan had spoken out publicly on foreign policy issues directly related to the worldwide threat posed by nuclear weapons. He was opposed to the idea of nuclear warfare, favored the development of defensive systems that could prevent it, and supported the implementation of policies that, in an ideal world, would bring about the end of nuclear weapons once and for all. Reagan said in his memoirs that he pursued policies "to create a world without nuclear weapons with a religious mission during his presidency."<sup>462</sup> As early as 1968, Reagan supported funding the creation of missile defense systems capable of preventing nuclear warfare.<sup>463</sup> Such ideas were unconventional given the existing missile defense technology available at the time had not yet perfected the practice of ballistic missile defense.

In the 1960s, the idea of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) dominated American military thinking. This bothered Reagan on a personal level. Reagan told Ed Meese, then his future attorney general, that MAD was "politically and diplomatically, militarily, and morally

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<sup>462</sup> Lettow, P.V. (2005). *Ronald Reagan and his Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, New York: Random House, © 2005. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 6.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

flawed.”<sup>464</sup> In his concession speech at the 1976 Republican National Convention, Reagan cited the threat of nuclear warfare as “a challenge to humanity.”<sup>465</sup> Reagan’s pre-presidential views showcased a strong aversion to nuclear weapons. Reagan tended to see a world free of nuclear weapons as the optimal policy outcome on non-proliferation policy. Given Reagan’s aversion to nuclear weapons, we would expect that he would pursue policies that would decrease American support for Israel’s nuclear program. Practically speaking, this would mean that the administration would shelve the existing ambiguity policy (which tacitly acknowledged the existence of Israel’s nuclear weapons program outside the boundaries of the NPT) in favor of an approach that favored the implementation of punitive measures required of the U.S. under the conditions of the treaty.

Having been in office for less than a year, Reagan was immediately confronted with a policy challenge that had confronted each of his predecessors during the Cold War. How should the U.S. confront issues surrounding Israel’s nuclear program? Broadly speaking, the official policy of the U.S. prior to Reagan’s arrival in Washington was that the U.S. supported Israel’s view that it will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. However, this policy was challenged after Israel bombed Iraq’s Osirak nuclear facility. This case will examine the events that led Reagan to adopt policies that provided political support for Israel’s nuclear program. Even though Carter and his predecessors had supported America’s ambiguity policy on Israel’s nuclear program, the Reagan administration would experience new events that had yet to occur under previous administrations such as:

1. The bombing of a nuclear facility under IAEA safeguards
2. Documentation of a nuclear weapons test by Israel

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>465</sup> Reagan, R. (1976). Remarks at the 1976 Republican Convention. Kansas City, MO, Republican Party.

3. Public revelations by a whistleblower from Israel's nuclear program

America's obligations to the AECA and the NPT would force the Reagan administration to look anew at the necessity of political support for Israel's nuclear program.

### **International Constraint - The Israeli Raid on Iraq's Osirak Nuclear Facility**

On June 7, 1981 the Israeli Air Force bombed the Osirak Nuclear Facility in Iraq. The Israeli attack on Osirak was a watershed moment in U.S.-Israel relations and in the formulation of American foreign policy towards Israel's nuclear program. Having only been in office for just over three months, Reagan was forced to confront the fact that a key ally of the U.S. had just bombed a nuclear facility that was under IAEA safeguards inside a country that was a signatory to the NPT. Making matters even more complicated for the Reagan administration was the fact that Iraq was also a country that the U.S. was simultaneously courting as an ally to counter Soviet and Iranian influence in the Middle East. The Reagan administration was caught between a rock and a hard place. It had four competing obligations to consider in its response to the attack on Iraq's atomic reactor.

1. America's bilateral relationship with Israel;
2. America's relations with the Arab world;
3. American domestic law;
4. American obligations as a signatory to the NPT.

In the aftermath of the Osirak raid, Israel came under a torrent of criticism from the international community. Reagan adopted a nuanced approach. He neither used the full weight of his legal powers to sanction Israel nor provided the level of political support Israel wanted from the U.S. in international institutions. For example, at a press conference on June 16, 1981, Reagan was asked two questions of profound importance about Israel's nuclear program:

- 1) Was it appropriate that Israel had yet to sign the NPT?
- 2) What were his thoughts about Israel's failure to submit all of its nuclear facilities to inspections by IAEA?

The reporter was sifting for an answer that would have shed some light on what American foreign policy toward Israel's nuclear program would be during his tenure in office. Reagan answered the question as follows:

Well, I haven't given very much thought to that particular question there, the subject about them not signing that treaty or, on the other hand, how many countries do we know that have signed it that very possibly are going ahead with nuclear weapons? It's, again, something that doesn't lend itself to verification. It is difficult for me to envision Israel as being a threat to its neighbors. It is a nation that from the very beginning has lived under the threat from neighbors that they did not recognize its right to exist as a nation.<sup>466</sup>

Reagan had made it known that he was passionately against nuclear weapons and the thought of nuclear war. Naturally, one would suppose that a dissonance existed because of his stance on Israel's nuclear program. According to John D. Negroponte, who worked on nuclear issues on the NSC under Reagan:

He (Reagan) simply did not see Israel's nuclear program as a threat in the way he saw the Soviet Union's arsenal. For Reagan there was a clear dichotomy between the two. The Soviet threat was seen as a more immediate issue. The administration somewhat turned a blind eye to Israel's nuclear program.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Reagan, R. (1981). Press Conference on June 16, 1981. White House. Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States.

<sup>467</sup> Negroponte, J.D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.



On November 13, 1981, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 487. UNSCR 487 criticized Israel's bombing of the Osirak reactor and its failure to sign the NPT and submit all of its nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguards.<sup>468</sup> Shortly afterward, U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim published a report critical of Israel's nuclear program and its non-proliferation policies.<sup>469</sup> America had to strike a proper balance of criticizing Israel without drawing the ire of its government and domestic allies in the U.S. It also had a vested interest in placating the rage of Arab states that were incensed by Israel's attack on Iraq. Arab support was also greatly valued by Reagan and Weinberger in their quest to thwart Soviet incursions into the Middle East. Former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban criticized the U.S. vote in favor of UNSCR 487 stating that "there was no justification for the U.S. vote in favor of the most damaging resolution ever taken against Israel at the U.N."<sup>470</sup> Over the next eight years, the Reagan administration would carve out foreign policy stances on Israel's nuclear program at international institutions that would have political ramifications for Israel's international diplomatic standing.

### **International Constraint: Israeli Foreign Policy Towards Iraq's Nuclear Program**

On June 8, 1981, Israel announced the reasons for its attack on the Osirak nuclear facility in Iraq. At the time of its attack, Israel was still technically at war with Iraq. After Israel defeated the Iraqi Army in its 1948 War of Independence, Iraq was one of the few hold-outs in the Arab world that refused to sign an armistice agreement with Israel and recognize its right to exist as a

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<sup>468</sup> United Nations General Assembly. (1981). A/RES/36/27. New York, NY. **56<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting.**

<sup>469</sup> Waldheim, K. (1982). Study on Israeli Nuclear Armament. New York, NY., Department of Political and Security Council Affairs: United Nations Centre for Disarmament: 30.

<sup>470</sup> Bureau of Near East Affairs. (1981). Media Reaction/Press Review on June 21, 1981: UNSC's Resolution Condemns Israeli Raid. Department of State. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. **Israel Folder:** 2., 2.

nation-state. In an official statement, the Embassy of Israel in the U.S. justified its attack based on self-defense:

We learned that this reactor, despite its camouflage, is designed to produce atomic bombs. The target for such bombs would be Israel. This was clearly announced by the ruler of Iraq. After the Iranians had inflicted slight damage on the reactor, Saddam Hussein stressed that the Iranians had attacked the target in vain since it was being constructed against Israel alone.<sup>471</sup>

The Israeli attack took place in early June 1981 because the Israeli government believed that that the reactor would become operational sometime between July and September of the same year.<sup>472</sup> If Israel had bombed the facility after the reactor had become operational, the nuclear fallout from the event would've been cataclysmic and caused the loss of life of thousands of Iraqi civilians in and around Baghdad. The preventative attack carried out in June 1981 avoided this possible scenario.

The Israeli attack on Osirak was premised on intelligence dossiers of the technical nature of the nuclear reactor at Osirak that I recently uncovered last summer in Israel. In 1975, Iraq signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with France. The Iraqis supplied the French with an Osiris type research reactor that was designed to cultivate the expertise needed to produce military-grade plutonium rather than nuclear power.<sup>473</sup> The Iraqis worked with French and Italian firms to develop Osirak and developed the technical knowledge to separate plutonium and handle highly radioactive materials.<sup>474</sup> It was believed that the facilities adjacent to the reactor

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<sup>471</sup> Government of Israel. A Special Statement by the Government of Israel on 8 June 1981. Embassy of Israel in Washington, D.C. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. Documents on US-Israel Relations: 37-38.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> On, B. (1981). The Iraqi Nuclear Threat. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **Documents on US-Israel Relations under Reagan**: 13., 10-11.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 15.

were capable of processing about 10 tons of natural uranium and 7-10Kg of plutonium per year with the capacity to expand to upwards of 25 tons of uranium, if updated.<sup>475</sup> The technical analysis of Iraq's nuclear facilities in 1981 led to only one logical conclusion: Iraq was developing a nuclear weapons program.

Technical intelligence that revealed Iraq was developing a nuclear weapons program coupled with a belief that Saddam Hussein wanted to “drop nuclear bombs on our population centers” led PM Begin to order the attack.<sup>476</sup> In carrying out the attack, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) used American-made aircraft, flying over Saudi and Jordanian territory, to bomb a facility that was under IAEA safeguards in a country that was a signatory to the NPT. Israel had made an assessment that the Iraqis had developed a strategy to produce military grade plutonium in a manner unobservable to IAEA inspectors.<sup>477</sup> A complicated puzzle now confronted the Reagan administration and the international community. Israel, attacking a country it was still technically at war with, had used American-made weapons to carry out a pre-emptive strike against a country that was a signatory to the NPT and also a country the U.S. was courting as a strategic ally in the Middle East.

### **International Constraint: The Arab Reaction to Osirak**

The condemnation of Israel's bombing of the Osirak nuclear reactor was harshest in the Arab world. The prime strategic implication for American foreign policy was the impact the attack would have on the implementation of the Camp David Accords. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat told a Japanese interviewer that Israel's attack “returns us to the old era before the

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<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>476</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Interview with Prime Minister Begin on 8 June 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7:1981-1982.**, 71.

<sup>477</sup> On, B. (1981). The Iraqi Nuclear Threat. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **Documents on US-Israel Relations under Reagan:** 13., 19.

peace process.”<sup>478</sup> General Ali of Egypt, a close advisor to Sadat, called the attack “a serious crime.”<sup>479</sup> Concomitantly, Arab diplomats phoned their counterparts in State and demanded that the U.S. order Israel to pay reparations to Iraq for the attack.<sup>480</sup>

The Arab press was more unforgiving in its criticism of Israel. The Arabic publication *AR-RA'Y* criticized the U.S. for initially defending Israeli aggression and holding enmity toward the Arabs.<sup>481</sup> Press reports in Kuwait linked the U.S. to Israel's attack. Such perceptions, whether real or imagined, had serious implications for American foreign policy and the credibility of the U.S. as an ally of the Arab world in the Middle East. Kuwaiti official Ahmad Al Saladdun said “Israel does not arm itself. It is armed by America, where sixty-seven percent of Kuwait's investments are. Israel has managed by means of Arab investments to reach the Gulf.”<sup>482</sup> As resounding criticism from the Arab world filtered into Washington, the Reagan administration found itself liable for Israel's attack on Iraq's nuclear facilities by guilt through association. The Israeli attack on Osirak led the Arab world to open a new diplomatic front against Israel in international institutions. Seeking international recognition condemning Israel's attack on Iraq's nuclear facilities coupled with punitive sanctions would become a staple of Arab diplomacy throughout the 1980s in forums such as the U.N. and the IAEA. This confronted Secretary of State Alexander Haig in the aftermath of the attack. Haig would become as a key player in crafting the Reagan administration's diplomatic strategy on how to handle a brewing crisis that

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<sup>478</sup> Anonymous. (1981). Sadat Shocked at Israel's Strike on Iraq but Remains Committed to the Peace Process. American Embassy in Cairo. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations during the 1980s**: 3., 47.

<sup>479</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Interview with Prime Minister Begin, 8 June 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**, 72.

<sup>480</sup> Feith, D. J. (1981). Memorandum for Richard V. Allen on 16 June 1981. National Security Council. Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>481</sup> Anonymous. (1981). Media Reaction on June 17, 1981. Department of State. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations during the 1980s**.

<sup>482</sup> Anonymous. (1981). Media Reaction on June 10: Israeli Raid on Iraqi Nuclear Facility. US Embassy in Kuwait. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations in the 1980s**: 2., 9.

simultaneously threatened America's strategic interests in the Middle East and the political legitimacy of the NPT.

### **Domestic Catalyst - The Reagan Administration's response to Osirak**

The Reagan administration was particularly sensitive to Israeli concerns in foreign policy largely due in part to the fact that many of its members saw Israel as a strategic asset to the U.S..<sup>483</sup> The Osirak bombing posed a unique challenge to policymakers in the Reagan administration. The U.S. had to balance other competing interests in its foreign policy. In addition to America's relations with Israel, the Reagan administration had to consider its obligation to enforce the AECA. The appearance that the Reagan administration was preparing to punish Israel for carrying out an attack it deemed vital to its national security interests led some to believe that the Reagan administration was adopting a hardline approach towards Israel. Reagan was explicit his decision to investigate Israel for potentially violating American law was something that was beyond his control.

We were bound by law. The law in delivering American weapons says for defensive purposes only, and they cannot be used in any other way. And without warning here was, apparently, an attack on a neighboring country using the weapons that we had provided. And the law was very specific. There had to be an investigation of this.<sup>484</sup>

The nature of the debate within the administration about the degree to which the U.S. would punish Israel was fiercely debated and sparked an intense competition between Haig and Weinberger on how the U.S. should react to the event. Haig was supportive of Israeli concerns about Iraq's nuclear program and the logic behind its application of military force to neutralize a

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<sup>483</sup> Feldman, S. (1982). Israeli Nuclear Deterrence: A Strategy for the 1980s, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982., 231.

<sup>484</sup> Reagan, R. (1981). Interview with the President on December 23, 1981. White House Press Conference. Glass, A., B. Shore, A. Devroy, et. al. Washington, D.C., White House Office of the Press Secretary.

potential threat from a country that it was still technically at war with. Haig reflected these views in internal administration debates:

Within the Administration, reaction to the Israeli raid combined with astonishment and exasperation. Some of the President's advisers urged that he take strong, even punitive measures against Israel. I argued that, while some action must be taken to show American disapproval, our strategic interests would not be served by policies that humiliated and weakened Israel.<sup>485</sup>

Schisms within the Reagan administration on the issue soon became public after Weinberger told the media that the president was going to suspend F-16 sales to Israel before he contacted PM Begin to inform him of the decision.<sup>486</sup> This led to a public row between Begin and Weinberger on the legality of Israel's attack on Osirak and how it should be perceived in the U.S. In intra-administration debates, Weinberger favored sanctioning Israel and cutting of diplomatic relations. Weinberger was a strong supporter within the administration for favoring closer relations with the Gulf Arab states.

Even though Haig and Weinberger were caught off-guard by Israel's attack, the intelligence community was not. In 1981, William Casey met in Tel Aviv with Israeli Intelligence Chief Major General Yitzhak Hoffi and commenced an intelligence sharing agreement on Iraq's nuclear program.<sup>487</sup> Casey, known for his penchant to carry out covert diplomacy outside of official channels, promised the Israelis intelligence cooperation on matters pertaining to Iraq's nuclear program in exchange for its promise not to fight an upcoming AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia.<sup>488</sup> Intelligence cooperation on Iraq's nuclear reactor was

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<sup>485</sup> Haig, A. (1984). *Caveat: realism, Reagan, and foreign policy*. New York: Macmillan, ©1984., 184.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> Persico, *Casey: The Lives and Secrets of William J. Casey from the OSS to the CIA*, 253.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 253-254.

confirmed in Israel by PM Begin.<sup>489</sup> However, there was no public acknowledgement by the Reagan administration of the breadth and extent of its intelligence sharing relationship with Israel on matters pertaining to Iraq's nuclear program or its tacit agreement with Israel to link the intelligence as part of a deal to halt their opposition to the upcoming sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia.

According to U.S. Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis, intelligence assessments shared between the U.S. and Israel confirmed that Iraq was enriching uranium at its Osirak facility.<sup>490</sup> This state of affairs, if it had been shared to the public at the time, would have been a major blow to the IAEA safeguards system and the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Within the Reagan administration multiple stakeholders were vested in a variety of policy outcomes in the aftermath of Israel's raid on the Osirak facility in Iraq. The actors involved in advising Reagan believed that America's response should consider the interests of Israel, the Arab States, and the Reagan administration's obligation to enforce U.S. law. The importance of America's strict adherence to the NPT and the effectiveness of the IAEA safeguards regime were not among the key considerations that Reagan's advisers considered in adopting an appropriate policy response to Israel's raid on Iraq's nuclear facilities.

### **Domestic Constraint: Congress Convenes Hearings on Osirak**

In the aftermath of the Osirak bombing, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs convened two separate subcommittee hearings on the attack. PM Begin appealed to the American public "not to permit punitive action against Israel because of the deed it was

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<sup>489</sup> Anonymous. (1981). Repercussions of Strike on Iraq Nuclear Installation on 15 June 1981. Israel Foreign Ministry. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations in the 1980s.**

<sup>490</sup> Lewis, S.W. (1998). Interview with US Ambassador to Israel Samuel W. Lewis. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Officers Oral History Project. P. Jessup. Arlington, VA., 160.

compelled to take for its own life.”<sup>491</sup> In the attack’s aftermath, Alexander Haig submitted a letter to Congress indicating that Israel used U.S.-supplied F-15 and F-16 aircraft; the document added that a violation of the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement of 1952 between Israel and the U.S. “may have occurred.”<sup>492</sup> The language of Haig’s letter was carefully worded to prevent the administration from having to produce a report on the Osirak raid to Congress. This allowed the Reagan administration to avoid the production of a report that could have further damaged U.S.-Israel bilateral ties.

Criticizing the raid, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Charles Percy (R-IL) suggested that Israel ought to come under further CIA surveillance for bombing Iraq’s nuclear facilities.<sup>493</sup> The Democrat-led panel in the House used the hearings to criticize State for lacking a coherent nuclear non-proliferation policy.<sup>494</sup> Among the most strident critics of the Reagan administration’s stance on non-proliferation policy was Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA). Markey’s views critical of the Reagan administration reflected a commonly held perception among arms control advocates in Congress that the Reagan administration did not take nuclear non-proliferation issues seriously. During the hearings, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Nicholas Veliotis revealed that the Reagan administration’s official policy on nuclear non-proliferation was still under review.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Anonymous. (1991). Repercussions of Strike on Iraq Nuclear Installation on 15 June 1981. Israel Foreign Ministry. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations in the 1980s.**, 33.

<sup>492</sup> Haig, A. (1981). Letter to The Honorable Charles H. Percy regarding potential Israeli violations to the Arms Export Control Act from Osirak nuclear facility strike. C.H. Percy. Washington, D.C., United States Senate: 2., 1-2.

<sup>493</sup> United States Embassy in Israel. (1981). Media Reaction: Press Review on June 16, 1981. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. **Israel Folder.**, 19-20.

<sup>494</sup> House of Representatives. (1981). Israeli attack on Iraqi nuclear facilities: hearings before the Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs, on Europe and the Middle East and on International Economic Policy and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Ninety-seventh Congress, first session, June 17 and 25, 1981. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1981., 2.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 42.



The Reagan administration was also criticized by Congress for failing to take the initiative in strengthening the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime. The Reagan administration appropriated \$5.1 million for IAEA safeguards in fiscal year 1981, a number that many members of Congress saw as inadequate. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Walter J. Stoessel stressed the importance of the NPT and IAEA safeguards regime to the Reagan administration in his testimony before the panel:

While the NPT and the IAEA safeguards regime, which was operative in Iraq, obviously did not allay the fears of Israel in this situation, the regime is still critical to any effective nonproliferation effort. While we can all agree that we should seek to strengthen existing safeguards, without even today's safeguard, the kind of suspicion and mistrust that contributed to Israel's act would be more widespread in the world.<sup>496</sup>

The hearings were used as a tool by the Democrat-led House to force the Reagan administration to come clean about its ruling on the use of American-made weapons used by Israel in the bombing of Osirak. They were also used by arms control advocates to push the Reagan administration to roll-out its nuclear non-proliferation policy. Congress did not pass a law nor implement any form of punitive sanctions on Israel for the attack. Many Democrats such as Rep. Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Sen. Alan Cranston (D-CA) were sympathetic to Israel's position on the Osirak raid. Others who were more critical of Israel may have been deterred from punishing Israel because AIPAC was lobbying members of Congress to support Israel's position on the Osirak raid.<sup>497</sup> Nonetheless, the congressional hearings on the Osirak raid established a precedent that showed that Congress was concerned about America's obligations as a founding member of

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>497</sup> Dine, T.A. and D.M. Bloomfield (1981). Appendix 5: Letter and Statement from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. The Honorable Clement J. Zablocki, Chairman of House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs. Washington, D.C., Committee on Foreign Affairs United States House of Representatives.

the NPT, the rules and norms associated with violating it, and Israel's behavior as a U.S. ally in the Middle East.

At a White House press conference on June 16, 1981, Reagan addressed Israel's attack on the Iraqi nuclear plant. Reagan argued that the attack "did appear to be a violation of the law regarding American weapons that were sold for defensive purposes."<sup>498</sup> In light of these circumstances, Reagan suspended the sale of four F-16 fighter jets to Israel. Initially the Israeli attack on the Osirak facility shocked Reagan, leading him to believe that "Armageddon is near."<sup>499</sup> Behind closed doors, Reagan administration officials lamented that they had lost confidence in the leadership abilities of PM Begin and hoped that he would lose his upcoming re-election bid.<sup>500</sup> The Reagan administration released a statement to the press noting that Israel had failed to properly exhaust all of the non-military avenues available to it.<sup>501</sup> Anger among many of his closest advisors, Congress, and the Arab world created a climate where multiple stakeholders inside and outside of the Reagan administration wanted to enact revenge for Israel's decision to bomb the Iraqi nuclear facility at Osirak.

Interestingly enough, Meese noted that Reagan was personally sympathetic to Israel's choice to bomb the Iraqi nuclear facility.<sup>502</sup> Reagan's decision to suspend four F-16s to Israel could've been far worse for Israel considering the fact that arms transfers worth upwards of \$2 billion dollars in fiscal year 1981 were in the pipeline.<sup>503</sup> Reagan wrote in his diary that he had

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<sup>498</sup> Reagan, R. (1981). The President's News Conference on 16 June 1981. White House. Santa Barbara, CA, The American Presidency Project.

<sup>499</sup> Reagan and Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, 24.

<sup>500</sup> United States Embassy in Israel. (1981). Tel Aviv Media Reaction June 1981. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. **Israel Folder**: 2., 4.

<sup>501</sup> Anonymous. (1981). Themes on the Israeli Raid. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations during the 1980s.**, 18.

<sup>502</sup> United States Embassy in Israel. (1981). Media Reaction: Press Review on June 16, 1981. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. **Israel Folder.**, 19.

<sup>503</sup> House of Representatives. (1981). Israeli attack on Iraqi nuclear facilities: hearings before the Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs, on Europe and the Middle East and on International Economic Policy

no choice but to suspend arms to Israel and report to Congress that Israel had used U.S. arms for offensive purposes.<sup>504</sup> But if Congress had given him the opportunity to use his executive powers to mitigate Israel's abrogation of the AECA, he noted that he would've granted a presidential waiver.<sup>505</sup> In light of these circumstances, Reagan addressed the press on June 16, 1981 where he showed sympathy and understanding for Israel's decision to carry out the Osirak raid:

On the other hand, I do think that one has to recognize that Israel had reason for concern in view of the past history of Iraq, which has never signed a cease-fire or recognized Israel as a nation, has never joined in any peace effort for that—so, in other words, it does not even recognize the existence of Israel as a country.<sup>506</sup>

Reagan's sympathetic beliefs towards Israel's bombing of Iraq's nuclear facilities, and the minimal punishments exacted for the attack, showed that Reagan still considered Israel to be an important ally even though the attack had caused heartburn among many of his key advisers inside his administration and among allies in the Arab world. Reagan's policy decision to suspend four F-16s to Israel was premised entirely on domestic legal constraints rather than any form of animosity toward Israel or beliefs about protecting the credibility of the NPT or IAEA. Between June and August 1981, the U.S. suspended an additional sale of 12 fighter jets to Israel for its military conduct in southern Lebanon. The suspension of fighter jets to Israel (14 F-16s and two F-15s) lasted all of ten weeks and didn't inhibit ongoing strategic cooperation between the U.S. and Israel.<sup>507</sup> On the surface, these actions may seem insignificant as Israel was able to get the fighter jets shortly afterwards. They were not. They created a culture of mistrust and

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and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Ninety-seventh Congress, first session, June 17 and 25, 1981. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1981., 7.

<sup>504</sup> Reagan and Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, 24.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Reagan, R. (1981). The President's News Conference on 16 June 1981. White House. Santa Barbara, CA, The American Presidency Project.

<sup>507</sup> Weisman, S.R. (1981). Reagan Ends Ban on Selling Israel 16 Jet Warplanes. The New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company.

skepticism in the U.S.-Israel relationship. This skepticism was felt between Begin and Reagan and within the security establishment of the U.S. The Osirak raid did not change Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs that Israel was a "strategic asset" or inhibit his administration's ongoing plans to improve Israel's military capabilities.<sup>508</sup> What it did do was catalyze a series of events that would lead Israel's adversaries to seek punitive measures against the country in other international institutions. The attack brought about a newfound international focus on Israel's nuclear ambiguity policy and forced the Reagan administration to formulate a nuclear non-proliferation strategy to handle threats to the credibility of the NPT and IAEA safeguards regime.

UNSCR 487 did not include any form of punitive measures against Israel and took place shortly after Reagan mentioned that there would neither be a downgrading of bilateral ties nor future suspension of arms to Israel. It was a mild form of punishment that could've been far worse had Reagan not been sympathetic to Israel's justification for the attack on Osirak. The passage of UNSC 487 marked the end of the Reagan administration's public criticism of Israel's nuclear policies.

### **Domestic Catalyst - The Reagan Administration's Reaction to the Flash in the Indian Ocean**

Israeli nuclear policy during the Reagan administration was referred to by nuclear weapons experts Avner Cohen and Benjamin Frankel as a policy "surrounded by ambiguity."<sup>509</sup> PM Begin announced in a press conference on February 24, 1981 that "Israel will not be the first (party) in the Middle East to introduce nuclear weapons. We have stated it (before), and we shall

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<sup>508</sup> United States Embassy in Israel. (1981). Media Reaction/ Press Review on June 12, 1981. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel. Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations in the 1980s**. 3., 38.

<sup>509</sup> Cohen, A. and B. Frankel (1987). "Israel's Nuclear Ambiguity. (cover story)." Bulletin of Atomic Scientists **43**(2): 15., 15.

stand by it.”<sup>510</sup> On February 21, 1980, Israel had proposed a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East modeled on the Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Treaty of Tlatelolco.<sup>511</sup> Even though Arab diplomats had long urged further scrutiny of Israel’s nuclear facilities, supporting the Israeli resolution would have meant diplomatic recognition of the state of Israel. Formally recognizing Israel as a nation-state with a right to exist by means of an international treaty (even one neutralizing Israel’s nuclear program) was a policy option that Arab diplomats would not pursue.

Israel first initiated its proposal to create a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East during the Carter administration. The proposal was made shortly after a CBS-TV Report linked Israel to a nuclear explosion that was reported off the coast of South Africa in 1979.<sup>512</sup> Referred to as the “flash in the sea,” reports of a joint South African-Israel nuclear test picked up steam in the press after Israeli state television aired a program on Israel-South African nuclear coordination on December 21, 1980.<sup>513</sup> The Carter administration found itself in a compromising position after the test. If the U.S. pressured the Israeli government, it could risk compromising the Carter administration’s position as a third-party negotiator in ongoing peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt. Subsequently, the Carter administration convened a panel of scientific experts led by Dr. Frank Press, science adviser to the president, after the administration came under intense political pressure to investigate the incident. The Carter panel determined that a test did not occur. However, a panel of independent scientific experts disagreed.<sup>514</sup> The findings of the Carter panel did not bring the issue to an end by the time Reagan assumed the presidency

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<sup>510</sup> Blum, Y. (1981). Letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations Kurt Waldheim on the situation in the Middle East: Establishment of a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone in the Region of the Middle East. United Nations General Assembly. Jerusalem, Israel. Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations during the 1980s.**

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>512</sup> Catudal, H.M. (1991). Israel’s Nuclear Weaponry: A New Arms Race in the Middle East, London: Grey Seal, 1991., 83.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

in 1981. The rumors linking Israel to the nuclear explosion in the Indian Ocean were subsequently dismissed by the Reagan administration. An official statement from the administration noted that “the flash in the ocean” was actually a meteorite landing in the sea.<sup>515</sup>

If the Reagan administration had sided with scientific experts that believed Israel had carried out a nuclear test in conjunction with South Africa, Israel could’ve been outed by a member of the Security Council for committing a nuclear test in violation of the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) that Israel had ratified in 1964. Such a revelation would have posed a serious threat to the nuclear non-proliferation regime and put the U.S. in a position where it had to choose between upholding its obligations as an NPT member and preserving its bilateral relationship with Israel. By dismissing the incident altogether, the Reagan administration adopted a policy favorable to Israel over one that would have bolstered the enforcement mechanisms of the NPT and solidified norms discouraging nuclear weapons testing.

### **Domestic Catalyst: The Reagan Administration’s Decision to Neglect the Mordechai Vanunu Revelations**

Mordechai Vanunu was a nuclear technician employed at Israel’s top-secret Dimona nuclear facility. The Dimona facility in which he worked was partially built with French and American assistance in the 1950s. Since its inception, Israel’s Dimona facility has never been submitted to the IAEA safeguards regime. It is believed that the Dimona facility is the location of a six-story underground uranium processing facility and the main site of Israel’s nuclear weapons program.<sup>516</sup> While working at Dimona, Vanunu began to have internal doubts about the morality of Israel’s top-secret nuclear program in which he worked. Vanunu came to the personal conclusion that the Israeli public ought to know about its nuclear program regardless of

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>516</sup> Murphy, P. (1986). U.S.-U.K. Bilaterals: Israeli Nuclear Issues. Department of State. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of State Virtual Reading Room., 1.

whether or not he would be jailed for his crimes. Vanunu's convictions against nuclear secrecy led him to take 57 pictures of Dimona's "Machon 2" plutonium production facility after all of his colleagues had departed from the facility at the end of a workday in 1986.

After taking pictures of the internal components of the Dimona reactor, Vanunu left Israel to find a publication that would publish the pictures and corroborate the existence of Israel's nuclear program. Vanunu's pictures were published in a series of articles in *The Sunday Times* in the fall of 1986. The news stories revealed that Israel had somewhere upwards of 100-200 nuclear weapons.<sup>517</sup> Technical readouts of the photographs led nuclear analysts to conclude that the Dimona facility could produce roughly 40 kilograms of plutonium a year, enough for 10 nuclear weapons.<sup>518</sup> Nuclear weapons experts from across the globe such as Gary Milhollin, Leonard Spector, and Frank Barnaby corroborated the existence of Israel's nuclear program based on the pictures of the Dimona reactor provided to *The Sunday Times*.<sup>519</sup> George Carver, former CIA deputy director, told the press that Vanunu had "said relatively little which people who follow the issue didn't know... he dotted the Is and crossed the Ts."<sup>520</sup> Evidence of a burgeoning nuclear weapons program at Dimona forced Israeli and American officials into addressing an uncomfortable issue that could potentially have had major implications for the state of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and the future of the U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship.

Despite presenting a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone resolution to the U.N. in 1980, Israeli officials did little to formally alleviate concerns that they were enriching uranium

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George Washington University. (2018). "National Security Archive." The Vanunu Articles Declassified. from <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/about>.

<sup>518</sup> Donnelly, W. H. (1988). Issue Brief: Israel and Nuclear Weapons. Washington, D.C., Congressional Research Service., 4.

<sup>519</sup> Brumley, B. (1987). Experts Accept Claims About Israel's Nuclear Capability. Department of State News Ticker. Washington, D.C., State Department Online Reading Room., 1.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

and developing nuclear weapons. In 1981, former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan told the *New York Times* that Israel had the capability to quickly make nuclear weapons.<sup>521</sup> After the Vanunu Affair became public, Israeli PM Shimon Peres called a report describing Israel as the sixth-ranked nuclear power as being “sensationalist.”<sup>522</sup> Such reports added an additional layer of suspicion to the activities that were taking place at Dimona. Since the facility was not subject to IAEA safeguards, the activities that took place at the reactor facility were essentially an unknown element in nuclear energy circles. Or were they? The veil of secrecy shrouded around Dimona was further complicated by the fact that the U.S. had played a key role in its creation in 1955 and had an active nuclear cooperation agreement with Israel until 1977.<sup>523</sup> Nuclear observers were suspicious about claims made by the Reagan administration that it did not have an active relationship with officials in Israel’s nuclear program. Nuclear expert Gary Milhollin alleged that the United States had supplied Israel with heavy water for its nuclear weapons program in the 1960s.<sup>524</sup> Richard Sale, a writer for *Aerospace Daily*, claimed that in 1981 Israel had deployed Jericho-II missiles equipped with nuclear warheads in the Negev Desert with the help of American scientists.<sup>525</sup>

While the Reagan administration did not have an active international agreement with Israel allowing for full nuclear cooperation, there was one in place calibrated to facilitate nuclear safety and technical information exchange between the two states.<sup>526</sup> When the Reagan administration was questioned about the Vanunu revelations and the existence of Israel’s nuclear

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<sup>521</sup> Donnelly, *Issue Brief: Israel and Nuclear Weapons*, 4.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>523</sup> Rosenthal, M.D. (1987). US-Israeli Bilaterals: Proliferation Concerns. State Department. Washington, D.C., National Archives., 1.

<sup>524</sup> Murphy, *U.S.-U.K. Bilaterals: Israeli Nuclear Issues*, 2.

<sup>525</sup> Donnelly, *Issue Brief: Israel and Nuclear Weapons*, 4.

<sup>526</sup> United States of America and State of Israel. (1988). Agreement for the Exchange of Technical Information and Cooperation in Nuclear Safety Matters. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Washington, D.C., Department of State., 1-12.



weapons program, declassified documents reveal that State crafted a nuanced message to ensure that the U.S. did not out Israel as a nuclear weapons state. Publicly, U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering stated that the U.S. would not take a position on Israel's nuclear program after the Vanunu affair.<sup>527</sup> Privately, State had prepared itself with talking points designed to diffuse the issue without giving Israel's nuclear program an official affirmation or condemnation:

- 1) As you know, my government has long been concerned by the existence of unsafeguarded nuclear facilities in Israel;
- 2) Under U.S. law and policy, we cannot engage in significant nuclear commerce with any non-nuclear weapons state which does not accept safeguards on all its nuclear activities. Therefore, we do not engage in significant nuclear cooperation or commerce with Israel;
- 3) The U.S. government has long urged, and continues to urge, Israel to accept comprehensive safeguards, preferably by adhering to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons;
- 4) I would point out that Israel continues to state that it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East.<sup>528</sup>

These talking points were used throughout the duration of the Reagan administration each time an allegation about Israel's nuclear program was posed to U.S. officials. They were politically effective because they allowed the Reagan administration to maintain an aura of plausible deniability around a foreign policy issue that could've had disastrous effects on the state of the U.S.-Israel bilateral ties as well as the credibility of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. In the aftermath of the Vanunu Affair, international pressure continued to build on Israel to come clean about the state of its nuclear program. Israel was condemned at the 1987 IAEA General

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<sup>527</sup> Donnelly, *Issue Brief: Israel and Nuclear Weapons*, 10.

<sup>528</sup> Anonymous. (1987). Israel: Background on 5 February 1987. Department of State. Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration. **Virtual Reading Room**.

Conference for not submitting all of its nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguards. That same year, Israel had a diplomatic falling out with Norway after Oslo demanded that Israel return a shipment of 20 metric tons of heavy water it had loaned to Israel under a 1959 agreement.<sup>529</sup> In light of these events, the Reagan administration maintained a consistent policy on Israel's nuclear program and did not deviate from the ambiguity policy it had pursued consistently for eight years. Considering all of the events that occurred during the Reagan administration, by the time Reagan left office in 1989, the official U.S. policy on Israel's nuclear program had not changed.

### **Policy Outcome: America's Nuclear Ambiguity Policy towards Israel's Nuclear Program**

If the U.S. admitted that Israel had nuclear weapons and that it was enriching uranium at Dimona, the Reagan administration would have come under intense pressure from Congress to cut military and economic assistance to Israel as it had after Israel attacked the Osirak reactor in 1981. Given the Reagan administration's interest in protecting its strategic relationship with Israel, such circumstances were not only politically untenable but also counter to American strategic interests in the Middle East where Israel was seen as a counterbalancing force to Soviet interests in the region. Outing Israel's nuclear program would also have opened up the Reagan administration to further scrutiny about the state of America's covert involvement with the Israeli nuclear program. There was simply no appetite in an administration already mired in Iran-Contra to take on another highly charged foreign policy affair when it didn't have to.

Another consequence of outing Israel as a nuclear weapons state would be the impact that such a revelation would have on the legitimacy of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. If the U.S. allowed Israel to obtain nuclear weapons outside of the NPT, countries like South Africa,

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<sup>529</sup> Murphy, *U.S.-U.K. Bilaterals: Israeli Nuclear Issues*, 3-4.

India, Libya, and Pakistan would also seek American affirmation for their nuclear programs. Collectively, these countries would advance the argument that the U.S. provided Israel with preferential treatment and that the NPT was really being used by the U.S. as a legal mechanism to advance American geopolitical interests at their behest.

It appears that Reagan's belief that Israel was a "strategic asset" to the U.S. had a profound impact on his administration's foreign policy toward Israel's nuclear program. On more than one occasion, Reagan was willing to link American support for the IAEA safeguards regime to the organization's treatment of Israel. Early in his administration Reagan had staked out a public position that he did not see Israel's nuclear program as a threat. It appears that within the context of his national security strategy and the actions taken by his administration throughout the duration of his presidency, Reagan did not perceive Israel's nuclear program to be a threat to international security in the way that he perceived the Soviet nuclear arsenal to be.

## **International Diplomatic Support for Israeli Foreign Policy in International Institutions**

### **Introduction**

This section examines Reagan's support for Israel in international institutions. It discusses his skepticism of international organizations, such as the United Nations, and its various organs. Reagan viewed the United Nations as an institution that had become a tool of Soviet interests and a body ill-equipped to mediate the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Despite Reagan's staunch support for Israel in forums such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, American support for Israel had its limits. Despite the fact that Reagan's UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick voted alongside Israel on numerous occasions, the Reagan Administration voted against Israel in the UN Security Council after Prime Minister Begin made the decision to bomb Iraq's Osirak nuclear facility in June of 1981.

### **Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about International Institutions**

Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs about the United Nations and other international organizations show a significant degree of skepticism about their effectiveness as institutions capable of addressing international policy challenges. Reagan viewed the UN as a failure in the security realm for its inability to prevent, and properly mediate, the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam.<sup>530</sup> On economic and political matters, Reagan perceived the UN as being a tool that the Soviet Union, and its allies in the non-aligned bloc, would use to curtail American influence. Reagan criticized the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (a conference to address

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<sup>530</sup> Reagan et al., *Reagan in His Own Hand*, 162-163.

global land and economic issues) for being premised on “Marxist ideals”.<sup>531</sup> He viewed the U.N. Covenant on Economic & Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights “as mechanisms that would curtail American rights to ownership of property”<sup>532</sup> and saw participation in the Genocide Convention “as a potential opportunity for communist nations to file war crimes charges against the United States in the International Criminal Court.”<sup>533</sup> Reagan tended to view international institutions and international law as being inherently biased against the United States and its allies. These beliefs undoubtedly sowed seeds of discontent about the political benefits they would have in advancing his administration’s foreign policy objectives.

Reagan’s skepticism towards international organizations was fueled by its standing record on the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Reagan criticized the United Nations for biased resolutions that castigated Israel for its policies towards the Palestinians and their regional allies. Reagan addressed these issues in a speech he gave on US-Israel Relations before the B’Nai Brith Forum on September 3, 1980. In this speech, Reagan told the audience that: “Israel is being increasingly isolated by international terrorism and by U.N. Resolutions designed to undermine Israel’s position in the world.”<sup>534</sup> During the presidential campaign, Reagan pledged to “provide political support to Israel in the United Nations whenever members of that body seek to pass resolutions that unfairly attack the Jewish state.”<sup>535</sup> Such statements reflect a general perception that Reagan saw the UN in his pre-presidential years as an institution that unfairly attacked Israel and that he would respond to such efforts by taking Israel’s side in disputes with other states. In his pre-presidential years, Reagan viewed the UN as a forum that was neither conducive to advancing

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 167-168.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>534</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan before the B’Nai Brith Forum. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 8-9.

<sup>535</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Reagan-Bush Presidential Campaign: Tenets of Middle East Policy. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**

American interests nor capable of advancing the Middle East peace process in a manner commensurate with American national interests. Collectively, each of Reagan's early statements about the UN reveal a healthy dose of skepticism with the overall utility of the body as a forum capable of addressing pressing security, economic, and political issues of importance to the United States. We would expect that Reagan would adopt policies that would support Israeli preferences at the United Nations.

### **American Foreign Policy Toward Israel at the UN Prior to 1981**

American support for Israel can also be gauged by assessing the voting patterns of both countries on issues related to the Arab-Israeli Conflict at the United Nations and other international organizations. The Arab-Israeli Conflict has maintained a permanent presence on the agenda of the United Nations since the body first recognized Israel as a nation-state in 1948. The United Nations has played a formative role in shaping the contours of the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The passage of UNSCRs 242 and 338 have long served as the goalposts for peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states. UNSCR 242 was passed after the Six Day War in June of 1967 as an effort to establish a precedent that would lead Israel to cede lands conquered during the Six Day War in exchange for peace with the Arab states. Peace talks between Israel and the Arabs took on increasing importance on the international agenda after the Yom Kippur War in 1973 and the passage of UNSCR 338. The Yom Kippur War and the subsequent Arab oil embargo shocked the international community and reinforced the importance of addressing the Arab-Israeli Conflict at Turtle Bay.

Various efforts were made to advance the peace process and aid the Palestinian cause at the United Nations after 1973. In 1974, Yasser Arafat visited the United Nations and was given a platform to speak before the organization despite his status as the leader of an organization (the

Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO]) that the federal government recognized as a terrorist organization. The Palestinian cause took on a newfound importance at the UN after Arafat's speech as the Soviet Union and its allies in the non-aligned bloc rallied to their side. In 1975, UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 was passed. UNGAR 337 equated Zionism with racism. This event turned the UN into a lightning rod for criticism by Israel's supporters in the United States. During the years after the passage of UNGAR 337, a bevy of anti-Israel resolutions were passed in various UN bodies. In March of 1980, President Carter supported a resolution in the Security Council that criticized Israel for its settlement building practices in the West Bank. In the wake of this vote, Reagan castigated President Carter for his vote in a speech made before the B'Nai Brith Forum in December of 1980.<sup>536</sup> Reagan promised to support Israel at the United Nations if elected president. Therefore, we would expect that the Reagan Administration would pursue a voting strategy at the UN that sought to prevent Israel from being condemned for its policies.

Discerning the nature of American support for Israel at the United Nations and other international organizations can be done by searching for specific cases where American support for Israel materialized in a voting forum.

### **Domestic Catalyst – The Appointment of Jeane Kirkpatrick as Ambassador to the United Nations**

Jeanne Kirkpatrick was appointed by President Reagan as United States Ambassador to the United Nations. She was the only female member that served on Reagan's National Security Council with an impact on the administration's foreign policy towards Israel. When Jeanne Kirkpatrick was appointed UN Ambassador, she immediately set out on a path to address the institution's policies towards the Arab-Israeli Conflict. She also observed that the UN was

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<sup>536</sup> Haig, *Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan before B'Nai Brith Forum*, 1-14.

oftentimes used by the Soviets and their Arab allies to criticize Israel while more important conflicts in the world went unaddressed:

...the Soviets, the PLO, and the radical Arab states are able to use the UN not as a place for conflict resolution, but as a forum for the pursuit of the war against Israel by other means. Thus, anything Israel does or can be suspected of doing is characterized as criminal, while real crimes committed by others are totally ignored or even justified”<sup>537</sup>

Kirkpatrick’s sought to chip away at the institutional bias of the UN against Israel. This process was to be done by opposing efforts to ostracize, and even expel, Israel from various UN bodies. Kirkpatrick had the full confidence of President Reagan in changing the UN’s culture in this endeavor. This was noted in an address before the B’nai B’rith International in Toronto, Canada, on 18 October 1982:

The fact of the matter is that words do matter; ideas have consequences. And if the idea of Israel’s illegitimacy is allowed to take hold within the international community, the ideological framework for Israel’s ultimate annihilation will have been laid. With that in mind, I repeat this evening what I have often said in the past, and what President Reagan has often said in the past. The U.S. will not participate in, and will withhold its funding from, any UN body which illegally excludes the state of Israel.<sup>538</sup>

As UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick sought to provide international political support to Israel not only by voting against resolutions critical of Israel policy but also by threatening to jettison the organization altogether if anti-Israel resolutions were enacted that sought expel Israel from the UN’s affairs.

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<sup>537</sup> Kirkpatrick, J.J. (1988). *Legitimacy and Force*, New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books, © 1988., 37.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



### **Domestic Catalyst – American Voting at the IAEA**

The United States was a founding member of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) under the Atoms for Peace Program that President Dwight Eisenhower created. The IAEA is an international regulatory body whose mission is to prevent nuclear non-proliferation and expand the peaceful use of nuclear energy for peaceful means. The United States found itself caught between two competing interests when Israel attacked Iraq's Osirak nuclear facility in June of 1981. Two competing questions faced Reagan Administration officials:

- 1) Should the United States support efforts to chastise Israel that it had promised it was going to oppose?
- 2) To what extent would supporting Israel undermine America's commitment to international efforts to prevent nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy ?

The Reagan Administration adopted a bifurcated strategy to the Osirak raid. Initially, the Reagan Administration sided against Israel when it voted for UN Security Council Resolution 487. UNSCR 487 condemned Israel for bombing Iraq's Osirak nuclear facility which was under IAEA safeguards. American criticism of Israel was short-lived. Those critical of Israeli policy sought to use the IAEA to enact further sanctions. Thereafter, the Reagan Administration changed policy and became a stalwart defender of Israel in international institutions on nuclear related issues.

The IAEA Board of Governors voted 29-2 with 3 abstentions (with the United States in opposition) to condemn the Israeli attack on Iraq on June 12, 1981. This state of affairs was quite interesting as the United States had previously voted for a resolution at the Security Council criticizing Israel for the raid. The IAEA resolution condemning Israel's bombing of Osirak was

a harbinger of worse things to come for Israel in the IAEA. On September 24, 1982, the IAEA General Conference rejected Israel's credentials even though its nuclear research reactor at Nahal Soreq was under IAEA safeguards at the time. This led the Reagan Administration to walk out in protest and reassess its policy regarding participation in the IAEA.<sup>539</sup> The United States continued its participation in the IAEA, but threatened to withdraw again in 1983 at the IAEA General Conference after the IAEA Board of Governors considered dismissing the Israeli delegation from the conference.<sup>540</sup> After repeated attempts to alienate Israel in the IAEA, Congress and the Reagan Administration teamed up to pass the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1985. This law made all U.S. funding for the IAEA in fiscal year 1986 and 1987 contingent on Israel being allowed to participate in all IAEA activities.<sup>541</sup>

There was a general sense among arms control experts in the Reagan Administration that the existing IAEA safeguards regime was ineffective and that the institution itself was not accomplishing its stated objectives. These observations were noted by Under Secretary of Defense Fred Ikle:

This agency (IAEA) made it easier for exporters of nuclear technology in several countries to pretend that their practices were safe... Never mind that highly enriched uranium was accumulating in large amounts in many countries, it was under agency 'safeguards'.<sup>542</sup>

Given its contempt for the IAEA, and its overall ineffectiveness in preventing horizontal proliferation, it is not surprising that the Reagan Administration opted to use its participation in the body to protect its bilateral relationship with Israel. The Reagan Administration could have

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<sup>539</sup> Donnelly, *Issue Brief: Israel and Nuclear Weapons*, 12.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>541</sup> Donnelly, *Issue Brief: Israel and Nuclear Weapons*, 11.

<sup>542</sup> Dine and Bloomfield, *Letter and Statement from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee to The Honorable Clement J. Zablocki, Chairman House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 1-9.

easily allowed Israel to be kicked out of the IAEA and sanctioned by its members. Instead, a policy was pursued to protect bilateral ties with Israel over one that would have strengthened the IAEA as an international institution.

### **Policy Outcome – A Bifurcated Approach at the United Nations**

American support for UN Security Council Resolution 487 was perceived as a major slight to Israel in diplomatic circles. President Reagan and his UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick had promised to vote in favor of Israel at the UN only to side with its adversaries less than a year into Reagan's first-term. However, the passage of UNSCR 487 did not initiate American sanctions on Israel as it could have. This happened because Reagan was sympathetic to Israel's concerns. Reagan made the following observations in his diary on June 10, 1981:

More meetings about the Israeli bombing. Under the law I have no choice but to ask congress to investigate and see if there has been a violation of the law regarding use of American Produced plans for offensive purposes. Frankly, if congress should decide that I'll grant a Presidential waiver. Iraq is still technically at war with Israel and I believe they were preparing to build an atom bomb.<sup>543</sup>

When other countries sought to further isolate Israel after the passage of UNSCR 487, the Reagan Administration blunted their collective efforts confirming his support. Diplomatic efforts to punish Israel for its nuclear policies in the IAEA sparked a backlash that led the Reagan Administration to threaten on multiple occasions to leave the IAEA if Israel was sanctioned in the body. The administration later took the unprecedented step of linking U.S. funding and participation in the IAEA to Israeli participation in all agency activities. Publicly, the Reagan Administration urged Israel to join the NPT and submit all of its facilities to IAEA safeguards.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Reagan and Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, 24.

<sup>544</sup> Donnelly, *Issue Brief: Israel and Nuclear Weapons*, 3.

Privately, the intelligence community knew an attack was imminent and had even shared intelligence on Iraq's nuclear program with Israel.<sup>545</sup> The Reagan Administration's approach to the Israeli attack shifted as support for Israel took precedence over adherence to the appeals of Israel's detractors at the IAEA.

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<sup>545</sup> Persico, *Casey: The Lives and Secrets of William J. Casey from the OSS to the CIA*, 253-254.

## **International Diplomatic Support for Israeli Foreign Policy in the Middle East Peace Process**

### **The Peace Process 1.0: Reagan's Strategic Consensus Plan**

#### **Introduction**

This section examines the catalysts and constraints that confronted the Reagan Administration in its efforts to bring about a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli Conflict during the tenure of Secretary of State Alexander Haig (1981-1982). Haig sought to develop a “strategic consensus” to solve the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The old axiom “a friend of my enemy is my friend” guided Reagan’s early approach to the conflict and the geopolitics of the region. Since the leading powers of the Arab League (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon) as well as Israel, were firmly aligned with the United States against the Soviet Union, there was an initial hope that a breakthrough could emerge in the peace process due to their interests in maintaining a strong strategic partnership with the United States. Reagan’s plans for the region, built on Carter’s approach to the peace process and the legally binding Camp David Accords, obligated the Reagan Administration to adhere to the terms expected of the United States in the agreement.

#### **Jimmy Carter & the Middle East Peace Process**

An assessment of the policy disagreements between the United States and Israel over the Arab-Israeli Conflict during the Carter Administration provides a baseline that allows one to assess changes in American foreign policy that were observed at the end of the Reagan

Administration. In the years preceding the Reagan Administration, President Jimmy Carter invested significant political capital and effort in advancing the Middle East peace process. The biggest foreign policy accomplishment of the Carter Administration was undoubtedly the signing of the Camp David Accords. The Camp David Accords, which culminated in the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty, ended hostilities between Egypt and Israel and established full diplomatic relations between the two former adversaries. The signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty did not actualize Carter's dream of Middle East peace as the Palestinian question was left to the fate of future "Autonomy Talks" between Israel and Egypt. By the end of 1981, neither Israel nor Egypt were willing to forego the benefits of a bilateral agreement over Carter's concerns about the necessity of addressing the fate of the Palestinians.

Since the Palestinian question was not resolved at Camp David, the Carter Administration later chastised Prime Minister Begin as the party worthy of blame for failing to bring about an end to the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Carter saw Begin's support for Israel's settlement enterprise and his insistence on maintaining control over the entirety of the lands between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River as decisive factors preventing the creation of a Palestinian state. This later led the Carter Administration to condemn Israel before the UN Security Council. This act frayed already fraught relations between Carter and Begin and decreased Carter's political support in the American Jewish community at a time when he was simultaneously running for re-election.

In the run-up to the presidential election of 1980, American foreign policy in the Middle East came under closer public scrutiny. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian hostage crisis led to a public debate in the United States about the utility of Carter's Middle East policies in general, and his focus on the Arab-Israeli peace process at the expense of other

conflicts occurring in the region in particular. Carter's Middle East policies were not solely criticized by Republicans. In the Democratic presidential primary of 1980, Carter was challenged by Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA). In the New York Primary, which he would go on to win, Kennedy brandished himself as the pro-Israel candidate and berated President Carter for his inadequate support of Israel. This criticism was brought forth due to a belief that Carter was insufficiently supportive of Israel in the peace process and was more sympathetic to the proclivities of the Arab world and the national aspirations of the Palestinians. Beliefs that Carter was insufficiently supportive of Israel were brought about during the campaign due the strained relationship between Carter and Prime Minister Begin. Strained relations between the two leaders led to a perception that US-Israel relations were on a downturn. Both leaders were critical of the other's negotiating promises. Carter felt Begin reneged on his commitment to freeze settlement building in the occupied territories throughout the duration of the West Bank and Gaza autonomy talks (Carter's position was refuted by Israeli negotiators Zalman Shoval and Eliyakim Rubinstein).<sup>546</sup> Similarly, Begin was angered that Carter had sought to convene an international conference on the Middle East peace process that included the Soviet Union.<sup>547</sup> Carter's attempts to bring Jordan into the Camp David Accords as a future negotiating partner on the Palestinian question without his approval further complicated relations between the two leaders.<sup>548</sup>

Prime Minister Begin ensured that the Camp David Accords were left intentionally vague on the subject of the future fate of the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. The fate of the Palestinians and their political aspirations were to be addressed in "autonomy talks" between the US, Israel and Egypt. When Reagan took office, Sadat and Begin were still in office

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<sup>546</sup> Shoval, Z. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> Lewis, *Interview with US Ambassador to Israel Samuel W. Lewis*, 104-105.

and the United States was positioned as the sole mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Key to moving forward the peace process would be the implementation of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty and a jumpstart in the dormant autonomy talks to deal with the fate of the Palestinians.

The *Strategic Consensus Approach* to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict was formulated by the Reagan foreign policy advisory team in the run-up to the presidential election. The Reagan/Bush campaign issued a policy statement showing their willingness to serve as a catalyst in the peace process premised on UNSC 242.<sup>549</sup> The Reagan/Bush campaign later introduced articles into the Republican Party Platform that outlined their preferred format for future negotiations:

Peace between Israel and its neighbors requires direct negotiations among the states involved. Accordingly, a Republican administration will encourage the peace process between Egypt and Israel, will seek to broaden it, and will welcome those Arab nations willing to live in peace with Israel.<sup>550</sup>

The broad parameters outlined by the Reagan campaign became more detailed as the issue became more salient in the election. A key difference between Carter and Reagan was that Reagan looked at the Arab-Israeli Conflict and saw the Soviets as the actors antagonizing both Israel and the Arabs. He linked the struggle in the Middle East as akin to the broader conflict taking place between east and west elsewhere:

Today the countries of the Middle East and Persian Gulf are encircled as never before by Soviet advisers and troops based in the Horn of Africa, South Yemen, and Afghanistan...

The Soviet goal is clear—to use subversion and the threat of military intervention to

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<sup>549</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Reagan-Bush Presidential Campaign: Tenets of Middle East Policy. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 9-10.

<sup>550</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Republican Party Platform on Israel. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 10.



establish a controlling influence over the regions' resource-rich states, and thereby gain decisive political and economic leverage over Western and Third-World nations vulnerable to economic coercion...<sup>551</sup>

Reagan saw that Carter had made three cardinal sins in the region that he exploited throughout the 1980 campaign. First, Reagan felt that Carter had been overly critical of Israel (by allowing a resolution critical of Israel in the UN to pass) and felt that such measures were counterproductive to advancing the peace process.<sup>552</sup> Second, Reagan felt that Carter failed to understand that the Jewish state was a "strategic asset" rather than a liability for the United States in the Middle East.<sup>553</sup> Third, Reagan felt that Carter had failed in his efforts to bring American, Israeli, and moderate Arab interests together in a joint coalition despite their mutual enmity toward the Soviet Union and their proxies in the region. Reagan sought to do the opposite of Carter as president. As a result, the issues Carter prioritized (Camp David) were not given top priority by the administration during the first year of Reagan's presidency.

### **Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

Reagan's statements about the Arab-Israeli Conflict before his election reflect a general perception that he perceived the Arab world as the party most responsible for perpetuating the conflict. He chastised the Arab states for "failing to integrate the Palestinians into their populations"<sup>554</sup> and questioned the existence of the Palestinians as a separate and distinct nation:

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<sup>551</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Republican Party Platform: Middle East/Persian Gulf. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. *Personal Papers.*, 9.

<sup>552</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Reagan/Bush Committee: Middle East Policy Peace Through Security. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 90.

<sup>553</sup> Haig, A. (1980). "Israel" in Republican Party Platform from Speech to B'nai B'rith 3 September 1980. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 10.

<sup>554</sup> Reagan et. al, *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 218.

There is no common heritage as a people other than their Arab relationship and they were not at any past time a nation. Therefore, one has to wonder if nationalism is a strong force among them and how many would choose to live in a new Palestinian state.<sup>555</sup>

Reagan's beliefs about the best solutions to solve the Palestinian refugee crisis in 1979 were starkly different from previous American positions and a clear departure from the Camp David framework negotiated by the Carter Administration. Instead of suggesting the creation of a separate Palestinian governing entity (the term state was never uttered by Reagan), Reagan preferred a policy that would hasten their assimilation into existing states in the region:

What if the Arab states & Israel were to offer citizenship to any who wanted to emigrate?

What if all of us helped to fund such emigration? It might eliminate a vexing problem. It might be worth a try.<sup>556</sup>

He supported the 1980 Republican Party Platform which stated that "the creation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank was a destabilizing force that would be destabilizing and harmful to the peace process."<sup>557</sup> Reagan argued that the Jordanians should take in "80% of the Palestinians proportionate to the British division of the Mandate of Palestine."<sup>558</sup> To accomplish this goal, Reagan favored expanding the Camp David talks to include moderate Arab states such as Jordan.<sup>559</sup> He also acceded to the 1980 Republican Party platform that chastised European and Soviet efforts suggesting that the PLO could become a viable partner as a party to the West Bank autonomy talks.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> Ibid.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Republican Party Platform on Israel. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 10.

<sup>558</sup> Thomas, M.T. (2007). American policy toward Israel: the power and limits of beliefs, London; New York: Routledge, 2007., 59.

<sup>559</sup> Haig, *Republican Party Platform on Israel*, 10.

<sup>560</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Republican Party Platform "Middle East/Europe". Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**

What remained to be seen was the extent to which Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs would impact existing American policy in the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Would Reagan continue to uphold American commitments made in the Camp David Accords or would he disband Carter's policies that he had criticized during the presidential campaign? Reagan came into office at a time when his administration was planning an approach that was to be 180 degrees different from Carter's. President Carter doggedly pursued the peace process and the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. He was genuinely sympathetic towards the plight of the Palestinians and even supported a resolution condemning Israeli settlement building policies in the United Nations Security Council. In contradistinction to Carter, Reagan was more apt to link the Palestinians with terrorism and their national movement for an independent state on their ancestral homeland as an illegitimate effort aided and abetted by the Soviets to undermine American interests in the Middle East.

### **Domestic Catalyst - Rebooting Camp David and Actualizing the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty**

In an effort to bring the Arabs and Israelis together, on April 5, 1981, Reagan sent Haig on a fact-finding mission to Israel to discuss Israeli adherence to the Camp David Accords, the dormant autonomy talks, and the development of an American-led Multinational Force in the Sinai.<sup>561</sup> When Reagan assumed office in 1981, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Gulf States were staunchly pro-western, received American military support, and were opposed to destabilizing efforts brought by Islamic extremist groups and Soviet backed regional powers such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and the PLO. The "enemy of my enemy is my friend" paradigm informed American perceptions towards the Arab world during this time. The Reagan

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<sup>561</sup> Haig, A. and M. Begin (1981). Statements by Prime Minister Begin and Secretary of State Alexander Haig After Their First Meeting on 5 April 1981. White House. Washington, D.C., 1-2.

Administration hoped that a combination of realpolitik and pragmatism would push the rest of the Arab world to embrace Israel as Egypt had done when it made peace with Israel in 1981.

Egypt expected that the Reagan Administration would continue Carter's commitments made at Camp David and take an active role in Middle East peacemaking. The United States had agreed to supply \$1 billion in arms sales on a yearly basis to Cairo and was expected to serve as the primary actor responsible for maintaining a peacekeeping presence (UNDOF) on the new Egyptian-Israel border and overseeing Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was also hopeful that Reagan would jump-start the peace process by pressuring Israel to address the Palestinian question. Haig believed that Sadat's continued engagement in the peace process was vital for any efforts to succeed in moving the peace process forward and creating a strategic consensus between Israel and the Arab states.<sup>562</sup> At Camp David, the United States had proven to Egypt that they could play a meaningful role in Middle East diplomacy by using a combination of carrots and sticks that could bring Israel to the negotiating table and make concessions. The Israelis also showed an interest in continued American engagement in the peace process. In a Press Conference on February 24, 1981, Begin called on the United States, as a party of Camp David, to renew the autonomy talks in order to build on the momentum in the peace process created after the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty.<sup>563</sup> Begin had stated that Israel was abiding by its obligations under Camp David and that costly investments Israel made on the Sinai Peninsula were compromised for the sake of peace. The Israelis expected that the United States would stay actively engaged in ensuring that the Egyptians followed through with their obligations made at Camp David. For Israel, the United

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<sup>562</sup> Goldberg, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>563</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Press Conference with Prime Minister Begin, 24 February 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

States served an important role as Israel's primary strategic supporter both militarily and politically.

Israel hoped to cement closer political and military ties with the United States before peace process negotiations were to continue. Militarily, the Carter Administration had initiated talks on military and strategic cooperation that were left unfinished. The terms of the 1979 MOA were vague and lacked the depth need to actualize the strategic partnership. Israel was hopeful that closer military cooperation could be cemented between the two allies once Reagan took office because of lingering threats from their common enemies in the region. Politically, Israel hoped that the United States would stymie efforts by the Arab states to sanction Israel at the United Nations. Preventing the passage of anti-Israel UN Resolutions, similar to UNGAR 3379, which had equated Zionism with racism, became a top-priority for Israel in its bilateral relationship with the United States.

A key factor in creating the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty was a convergence of strategic interests vis-à-vis the United States. Both countries needed the United States for military and economic support and were estranged from the Soviet camp. From the outset, the Reagan Administration aimed to broaden the peace process to include its moderate Arab allies in the region as envisioned by Reagan during his speech to the B'Nai Brith Forum in 1980, where he called on the Jordanians to join the peace process.<sup>564</sup> It was hoped that Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and other moderate Arab leaders would eventually join the peace process and play a constructive role in addressing the Palestinian question. To expand the actors in the peace process, Reagan even went so far as to task his Assistant Secretary of State Nicholas Veliotis

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<sup>564</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan before the B'Nai Brith Forum. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 11.

with reaching out to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.<sup>565</sup> This act was controversial but not unsurprising. President Carter had also sought to reach out to the PLO during his time in office in an effort to reconvene the Geneva Conference.<sup>566</sup> Since the PLO was designated by the State Department as a terrorist organization, “any such contacts with Arafat were strictly out of the question until he’d accept the positions on 242 and 338 and Israel’s right to exist.”<sup>567</sup>

Prior to 1988, when the Reagan Administration recognized the PLO, all formal communications with the PLO would take place either through the CIA or through exchanges with Palestinian intermediaries that were not members of the PLO. The United States first established intelligence contacts with the PLO by means of CIA operative named Robert Ames. Shortly after Secretary of State Henry Kissinger banned formal diplomatic communications with PLO in 1973, a caveat in the agreement opened the door for Ames’s back-channel meetings with PLO leaders.<sup>568</sup> Ames became a top Middle East advisor to both CIA Director William Casey and Secretary of State George Shultz. Ames was a controversial spy at the CIA because he “befriended members of the PLO” rather than blackmailing or extorting them into supporting American political objectives.<sup>569</sup> The covert channels Ames established with the PLO were developed with the intent of moderating their positions on Israel and the peace process.

The strong backing the PLO had in the Arab world buttressed its position in peace negotiations. In the Arab world, the Camp David Accords had been very unpopular and the idea of making peace with Israel had led Egypt to become a pariah state in the Arab world. Richard W. Murphy described the Palestinian cause as “the great rallying cry” of the Middle East in the

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<sup>565</sup> Veliotes, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>566</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan before the B’Nai Brith Forum. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 6.

<sup>567</sup> Murphy, R.W. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>568</sup> Veliotes, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

decade after the Camp David Accords.<sup>570</sup> The PLO was wildly popular with the Palestinian street in the West Bank and Gaza and had been designated as the authoritative political representative body of the Palestinian national movement by the Arab League at the Rabat Conference in 1974. Because of his stature as the titular leader of the Palestinian national movement, Yasser Arafat became a political player that could not be ignored in peace negotiations. His position as PLO Chairman was strengthened by his support from the Soviet Union, who saw Arafat as a thorn in the side of the west, and a regional proxy capable of sowing unrest in the heart of the Arab world and in Israel. Reagan's efforts to include new actors in the peace process (that were not participants at Camp David) would be severely hampered by a series of events that effectively upended his plans to bring new countries and actors into the fold.

#### **Domestic Catalyst – Alexander Haig Develops the Strategic Consensus Doctrine (1981-1982)**

Reagan appointed cabinet members with differing perspectives and sympathies in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Reagan was naturally sympathetic to Israel but the details of his foreign policy approach in the region were heavily influenced by the personnel that he chose to serve in the consequential positions that dealt with the Middle East peace process. His Secretary of State Alexander Haig was seen as being more supportive of Israeli interests, as was his UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. Haig had played a formative role as President Nixon's Chief of Staff in overseeing an emergency arms shipment to Israel at the height of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and was a close confidant of Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon.<sup>571</sup> Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair General John Vessey were more sympathetic to the concerns of Arab leaders, as they viewed America's strategic interests in the Middle East

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<sup>570</sup> Murphy, R.W. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>571</sup> Goldberg, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

as being inextricably linked to having warm relations with countries such as Saudi Arabia. Counselor (and later National Security Advisor) Richard Clark and Vice President George H.W. Bush were also seen as being more sympathetic to the Arab perspective. This state of affairs led to a clash of ideologies and interests when the Reagan Administration began crafting a new strategic doctrine that was designed with the intent of protecting America's security interests in the region while advancing the peace process concomitantly.

The principals were not the only advisors that played a major role in the Reagan Administration's foreign policy towards the Arab-Israeli Conflict between 1981 and 1982. At this time, career civil servants staffed many of the key positions in the State Department and had regular and direct access to the key leaders in the region. Nicholas Veliotis served in the State Department as Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs after serving as Ambassador to both Egypt and Jordan. He played a major role in developing a regional policy that included Israel in the Reagan Administration's strategic plans. US Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis had become a trusted confidant of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin during the Carter Administration and was asked by Secretary of State Haig to continue serving in his post in Tel Aviv. Lewis would serve as a trusted and reliable interlocutor between Israel and the United States and was oftentimes the first American present in Israel when major events occurred that impacted the peace process. Special US Envoy to the Middle East, Philip Habib, also played a formative role as he was tasked with negotiating a ceasefire in Lebanon and jumpstarting the peace process. Habib became an important actor with broad authority on issues related to the Arab-Israeli Conflict between 1981 and 1982 and earned the personal trust of Reagan (he was later awarded a Presidential Medal of Freedom and nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize) when he was in the field negotiating on behalf of the administration.



Alexander Haig assumed the position as Secretary of State with the assumption that he would be the Reagan Administration's "vicar" of American foreign policy. Haig came to the position of Secretary of State with a considerable amount of foreign policy experience having served in Vietnam and later as Supreme Allied Commander of NATO and Chief of Staff to President Nixon. Haig served on Reagan's foreign policy advisory council during the 1980 presidential campaign and played a major role developing Reagan's talking points and speeches on the subjects of Israel and the Middle East peace process. Haig had endeared himself to Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon when he oversaw efforts to ensure that Israel received an emergency arms shipment during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.<sup>572</sup> He was seen as being pro-Israeli and anti-Communist. However, Haig intimidated Reagan's advisors because of his military credentials. These factors, along with potential rumors that Haig might run for president someday, led Reagan's closest advisors (Caspar Weinberger, Richard Clark, and Ed Meese) to keep him at arm's length.<sup>573</sup>

Haig served as Reagan's Secretary of State between January 22, 1981 and July 5, 1982. Despite serving as Secretary of State for less than two years, Haig was an important factor in determining the outcome of Reagan's "strategic consensus" doctrine. Haig assumed the role of America's top diplomat with an existing commitment to serve as the third-party mediator in the context of the Camp David talks. By inheriting Carter's commitment to Middle East diplomacy and the Camp David Accords, Reagan (and Haig by extension) had predetermined obligations they had to fulfill to maintain the trust of Egypt and Israel. Reagan believed that Carter's "obsession with the peace process" had been overly harsh on Israel and that efforts to bring distance between Washington and Jerusalem had led the United States to become sidetracked

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

from addressing threats emanating from the Soviet Union in the Middle East. In an effort to combat the pressing Soviet threat, Haig sought to develop a “strategic consensus” between Israel and America’s anti-Soviet moderate Arab allies. If implemented successfully, it was hoped, a “strategic consensus” could be used to build momentum to continue the Middle East peace process.

Upon assuming office, Haig’s efforts to develop the “strategic consensus” were complicated by a series of events that pushed the Israelis and the Arabs further apart politically despite their mutual antagonism toward the Soviet Union. William Quandt, who served as an NSC staffer and Middle East peace negotiator under Nixon and Carter would later remark: “American involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict can never be entirely isolated from other developments in the Middle East.”<sup>574</sup> Events that transpired in the Middle East between 1981 and 1982 would constrain the ability of the Reagan Administration to bring together Israel and its Arab neighbors. The pursuit of addressing the joint threat emanating from the Soviet Union together via collective action between Israel and its neighbors would become a formidable task for Haig to accomplish in his first year as Secretary of State.

Shortly after Reagan assumed office, Israel had publicly stated that they were willing to discuss the multi-national force in the Sinai and jumpstart talks over Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank.<sup>575</sup> However, Reagan’s interest in taking over the role as third-party mediator in the autonomy talks was in doubt as he had promised during the campaign that he would not pursue Arab-Israeli peace at the expense of America’s core interest in the Middle East. As the third-party mediator responsible for developing a strategic consensus between the Israelis and Arabs, American interest in jump-starting the peace process would be watched closely both in Jerusalem

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<sup>574</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, 156.

<sup>575</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Press Conference with Prime Minister Begin, 24 February 1981. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

and across various Arab capitals in the Middle East. Reagan's initial reluctance to take on Arab-Israeli peacemaking, as President Carter had done, allowed his administration's strategic consensus strategy to become hostage to ongoing events in the region. It also effectively allowed Israel and its Arab neighbors to pursue policies that were at odds with the ideals of the Camp David framework. This decision would obfuscate efforts by Haig to bring both Israel and its Arab neighbors to the negotiating table even though both parties had a stake in preventing further Soviet infiltration of the region.

While the Palestinian autonomy stalled talks remained stalled, a series of conflicts would take place that would constrain the ability of the United States to develop the strategic consensus strategy. These events included:

- 1) An Israeli attack the Osirak Nuclear Facility in Iraq;
- 2) A pre-existing agreement to sell F-15s and AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia;
- 3) The assassination of Anwar Sadat;
- 4) The Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights;
- 5) The Lebanon War.

The Israeli and Arab responses that resulted from these events would obfuscate the implementation of Reagan's Strategic Consensus strategy. Concomitantly, these events took place at a time when the Reagan Administration was deeply divided over the direction of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Bureaucratic in-fighting and squabbles within the administration about US support for Israel's position complicated an already complicated project in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. This state of affairs was cogently described by Michael Thomas:

When policy fights concerned Israel, the division was between those who counseled heavy strategic reliance on Israel and those who accepted a commitment to ensure Israel's security but who were dubious of its value in the East-West conflict.<sup>576</sup>

Since the Reagan Administration lacked a coherent national security and foreign policymaking apparatus at the outset, tensions became exacerbated as policies and personalities jockeyed for influence inside the cabinet and the permanent bureaucracies that dealt with the Middle East. This conundrum would further complicate the development of a strategic consensus between the United States, Israel, and the Arab world because foreign officials would oftentimes receive differing messages from key officials engaged in Arab-Israeli issues in the State, Defense, and intelligence communities. This state of affairs would result in Israel receiving mixed signals about the degree to which American support for their policy decisions would materialize and would often force Israeli leaders to chart a course on their own. A disjointed approach from the White House would lead the Arab states to doubt American resolve to reign in Israeli actions that they saw as being detrimental to the peace process and stability in the region.

### **International Constraint - The Israeli Attack on the Osirak Nuclear Facility in Iraq**

On June 7, 1981, the Israeli Air Force bombed the Osirak Nuclear Facility in Iraq. Having only been in office for just over three months, President Reagan was forced to confront the fact that Israel had just bombed a nuclear facility of an Arab state that the United States was simultaneously courting as an ally to counter Soviet and Iranian influence in the Middle East. On June 8<sup>th</sup>, Israel announced the reasons for the attack. In an official statement, the Embassy of Israel in the United States justified its attack based on self-defense:

We learned that this reactor, despite its camouflage, is designed to produce atomic bombs. The target for such bombs would be Israel. This was clearly announced by the

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<sup>576</sup> Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel: The Power and Limits of Beliefs*, 63.

ruler of Iraq. After the Iranians had inflicted slight damage on the reactor, Saddam Hussein stressed that the Iranians had attacked the target in vain since it was being constructed against Israel alone.<sup>577</sup>

In 1981, Israel was still technically at war with Iraq. After defeating the Iraqi Army in its 1948 War of Independence, Iraq was one of the few hold-outs in the Arab world that refused to sign an armistice agreement with Israel and recognize its right to exist as a nation-state. The Israeli attack took place when it did because the Israeli government believed that the reactor would become operational sometime between July and September of the same year.<sup>578</sup> If Israel had bombed the facility after the reactor had become operational, the nuclear fallout from the event would've been cataclysmic and caused the loss of life of thousands of Iraqi civilians in and around Baghdad.

The Israeli attack on Osirak was carried out based on technical reports that showed that the reactor was being geared for weapons development instead of peaceful energy production. In 1975, Iraq signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with France. The Iraqis supplied the French with an Osiris type research reactor that was designed to cultivate the expertise needed to produce military-grade plutonium rather than nuclear power.<sup>579</sup> The Iraqis worked with French and Italian firms to develop Osirak and developed the technical knowledge to separate plutonium and handle highly radioactive materials.<sup>580</sup> It was believed that the facilities adjacent to the reactor were capable of processing about "10 tons of natural Uranium and 7-10Kg of Plutonium

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<sup>577</sup> Government of Israel. (1981). A Special Statement by the Government of Israel on 8 June 1981. Washington, D.C. Embassy of Israel. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. Documents on US-Israel Relations under Reagan., 37-38.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> On, B. (1981). The Iraqi Nuclear Threat. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. Documents on US-Israel Relations under Reagan, 10-11.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 15.

per year with the capacity to expand to upwards of 25 tons of Uranium, if updated.”<sup>581</sup> The technical analysis of Iraq’s nuclear facilities in 1981 led to only one logical conclusion: Iraq was developing a nuclear weapons program.

Technical intelligence that revealed Iraq was developing a nuclear weapons program coupled with a belief that Saddam wanted to “drop nuclear bombs on our population centers” led Prime Minister Menachem Begin to order the attack.<sup>582</sup> In carrying out the attack, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) used American-made aircraft (flying over Saudi and Jordanian territory) to bomb a facility that was under IAEA safeguards and a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Israel had made an assessment that the Iraqis had developed a strategy to produce military grade plutonium in a manner unobservable to IAEA inspectors.<sup>583</sup>

The Osirak attack had a grave impact on the peace process because the raid caused severe angst in the Arab world. The raid estranged the United States from Israel and further distanced Israel from the Arab world. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat told a Japanese interviewer that Israel’s attack “returns us to the old era before the peace process”.<sup>584</sup> General Ali of Egypt, a close advisor to Sadat, called the attack “a serious crime”.<sup>585</sup> At the same time, Arab diplomats phoned their counterparts in the State Department and demanded that the United States order Israel to pay reparations to Iraq for the attack.<sup>586</sup> The Arab world saw the United States as an enabler of the Israeli attack and chastised the Reagan Administration for not doing enough to prevent it. The Arabic publication *AR-RA’Y* criticized the United States for initially

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>582</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Interview with Prime Minister Begin on 8 June 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. 7: 1981-1982., 71.

<sup>583</sup> On, *The Iraqi Nuclear Threat*, 19.

<sup>584</sup> Israeli FM in Cairo. (1981). Cairo Press Review: Sadat Shocked at Israel’s Strike on Iraq but Remains Committed to Peace Process. Menachem Begin Presidential Library., 7.

<sup>585</sup> Medzini, *Interview with Prime Minister Begin, 8 June 1981*, 71.

<sup>586</sup> Feith, *Memorandum for Richard V. Allen on 16 June 1981*, 1.

defending Israeli aggression and holding enmity toward the Arabs.<sup>587</sup> Kuwaiti official Ahmad Al Saladdun said “Israel does not arm itself. It is armed by America, where sixty-seven percent of Kuwait’s investments are. Israel has managed by means of Arab investments to reach the Gulf.”<sup>588</sup> As resounding criticism from the Arab world filtered into Washington, the Reagan Administration found itself, by guilt through association, as liable for Israel’s attack on Iraq’s nuclear facilities.

The Osirak bombing posed a unique challenge to policymakers in the Reagan Administration working on the Middle East peace process. The Reagan Administration was particularly sensitive to Israeli concerns in foreign policy largely due in part to the fact that many of its members saw Israel as a strategic asset to the United States.<sup>589</sup> Prior to the attack on Osirak, CIA Director William Casey met with Israeli intelligence Chief Major General Yitzhak Hoffi. In their meeting, Casey arranged for a “quid pro quo” where Israel was provided intelligence on Iraq’s nuclear facilities in exchange for having the Israeli government accede to an American arms deal with Saudi Arabia.<sup>590</sup> In light of the covert intelligence agreement, the Israeli attack on Osirak complicated America’s relations with Israel and had the practical effect of driving the two allies further apart. Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir noted that American diplomatic efforts to prevent the crisis had been a failure and that the United States never voiced its concerns about a potential Israeli attack on Osirak.<sup>591</sup> Making matters worse, the United States earned the ire of

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<sup>587</sup> Anonymous. (1981). *Media Reaction on June 17, 1981*, 1.

<sup>588</sup> Anonymous. (1981). Media Reaction on June 10: Israeli Raid on Iraqi Nuclear Facility. U.S. Embassy Kuwait. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. **US-Israel Relations in the 1980s**: 2., 9.

<sup>589</sup> Feldman, *Israeli Nuclear Deterrence: A Strategy for the 1980s*, 23.

<sup>590</sup> Persico, *Casey: The Lives and Secrets of William J. Casey from the OSS to the CIA*, 253-254.

<sup>591</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Interview with Foreign Minister Shamir in Maariv, 12 June 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7:1981-1982.**, 92.

Israel by voting in-favor of a UN Security Council Resolution that condemned Israel for the attack on Osirak.<sup>592</sup>

The covert agreement arranged between Hoffi and Casey did not negate the fact that the Reagan Administration was legally obligated to act against Israel for its attack on Osirak. The Reagan Administration had to adhere to its legal responsibilities of enforcing the Arms Export Control Act of 1952. President Reagan was adamant that his decision to investigate Israel's bombing of Osirak was something that was beyond his control:

We were bound by law. The law in delivering American weapons says for defensive purposes only, and they cannot be used in any other way. And without warning here was, apparently, an attack on a neighboring country using the weapons that we had provided.

And the law was very specific. There had to be an investigation of this.<sup>593</sup>

The nature of the debate within the administration about the degree to which the United States would punish Israel was fiercely debated and sparked an intense competition between Secretary of State Alexander Haig and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger on how the United States should react to the event. Secretary of State Haig was supportive of Israeli concerns about Iraq's nuclear program and the logic behind its application of military force to neutralize a potential threat from a country that it was still technically at war with. Haig reflected these views in internal administration debates:

Within the Administration, reaction to the Israeli raid combined with astonishment and exasperation. Some of the President's advisers urged that he take strong, even punitive measures against Israel. I argued that, while some action must be taken to show American

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<sup>592</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Israeli Cabinet Statement on the Security Council Condemnation, 21 June 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives, 7:1981-1982., 105.

<sup>593</sup> Reagan, R. (1981). Interview with the President on December 23, 1981. White House Press Conference. A. Glass, B. Shore and A. Devroy. Washington, D.C., White House Office of the Press Secretary.



disapproval, our strategic interests would not be served by policies that humiliated and weakened Israel.<sup>594</sup>

Deep schisms within the Reagan Administration soon became public after Weinberger told the media that the President was going to suspend F-16 sales to Israel before he contacted Prime Minister Begin to inform him of the decision.<sup>595</sup> This led to a public row between Begin and Weinberger on the legality of Israel's attack on Osirak and how it should be perceived in the United States. In intra-administration debates, Weinberger favored sanctioning Israel and cutting of diplomatic relations. Discord within the administration over the direction of US foreign policy in the Middle East complicated the already difficult task of getting the Israelis and Arabs on the same side of a strategic consensus in the peace process.

In the aftermath of the bombing of Osirak, the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs convened two separate subcommittee hearings on the attack to determine a policy response to the event. Prime Minister Begin appealed to the American public "not to permit punitive action against Israel because of the deed it was compelled to take for its own life."<sup>596</sup> Secretary of State Haig submitted a letter to Congress indicating that Israel used U.S.-supplied F-15 and F-16 aircraft; and that a violation of the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement of 1952 between Israel and the United States "may have occurred."<sup>597</sup> The language of Haig's letter was carefully worded to prevent the administration from having to produce a report on the Osirak raid to congress. This allowed the Reagan Administration to avoid the production of a report that could have further damaged U.S.-Israel bilateral ties.

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<sup>594</sup> Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, 184.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> Repercussions of Strike on Iraqi Nuclear Installation on 15 June 1981. Israel Foreign Ministry. Jerusalem, Israel, Menachem Begin Heritage Center. US-Israel Relations in the 1980s., 33.

<sup>597</sup> Haig, *Letter to The Honorable Charles H. Percy Regarding Potential Israeli Violations to the Arms Export Control Act from Osirak Nuclear Facility Strike.*,1-2.

At a White House Press Conference on June 16, 1981, President Reagan addressed Israel's attack on the Iraqi nuclear plant. President Reagan argued that the attack "did appear to be a violation of the law regarding American weapons that were sold for defensive purposes."<sup>598</sup> The Reagan Administration released a statement to the press noting that Israel had failed to properly exhaust all of non-military avenues available to it.<sup>599</sup> In the aftermath of the attack on Osirak, President Reagan suspended the sale of four F-16 fighter jets to Israel. Behind closed doors, Reagan Administration officials lamented that they had lost confidence in the leadership abilities of Prime Minister Begin and hoped that he would lose his upcoming re-election bid.<sup>600</sup> Yet the view that the raid was a strategic setback for the United States was not held by a sympathetic Haig. According to Haig's Chief of Staff Sherwood Goldberg, Haig told Reagan that "someday you will get on your knees and thank Israel for destroying the reactor."<sup>601</sup>

The Osirak raid did not change President Reagan's belief that Israel was a "strategic asset" or inhibit his administration's ongoing plans to improve Israel's military capabilities.<sup>602</sup> To the contrary, Reagan stated that if Congress had given him the opportunity to use his executive powers to mitigate Israel's violation of the Arms Export Control Act, he would have granted a presidential waiver.<sup>603</sup> President Reagan addressed the press on June 16<sup>th</sup> and showed sympathy with Israel's decision to attack the Iraqi nuclear facility:

On the other hand, I do think that one has to recognize that Israel had reason for concern in view of the past history of Iraq, which has never signed a cease-fire or recognized

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<sup>598</sup> Reagan, R. (1981). *The President's News Conference on 16 June 1981*.

<sup>599</sup> Anonymous, *Themes on the Israeli Raid*, 18.

<sup>600</sup> United States Embassy in Israel. *Tel Aviv Media Reaction June 1981*, 4.

<sup>601</sup> Goldberg, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>602</sup> United States Embassy in Israel, *Media Reaction/ Press Review on June 12, 1981*, 38.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

Israel as a nation, has never joined in any peace effort for that—so, in other words, it does not even recognize the existence of Israel as a country.<sup>604</sup>

Between June and August of 1981, the United States suspended an additional sale of fighter jets to Israel for its military conduct in southern Lebanon. The suspension of fighter jets to Israel (fourteen F-16s and two F-15s) lasted all of ten weeks and didn't inhibit ongoing strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel.<sup>605</sup> President Reagan wrote in his diary that he had no choice but to suspend arms to Israel and report to Congress that Israel had used US arms for offensive purposes.<sup>606</sup> Reagan's decision to suspend four F-16s to Israel could have been far worse for Israel considering the fact that arms transfers worth upwards of \$2 billion dollars in fiscal year 1981 were in the pipeline.<sup>607</sup>

### **International Constraint - Sadat's Death and the Implementation of the Camp David**

#### **Accords**

On October 6, 1981, Egyptian Prime Minister Anwar Sadat was assassinated during a military parade in Cairo. Since the signing of the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty in 1979, Prime Minister Begin had become close friends with Sadat and saw him as a genuine partner for peace. Sadat's passing came as a real test to the integrity of the treaty and whether or not Israel would withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula. Israeli officials were confident that President Hosni Mubarak would end up sharing Sadat's desire for a peaceful Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and normalization of Israeli-Egyptian relations.<sup>608</sup> Nonetheless, the loss of Sadat was a major

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<sup>604</sup> Reagan, *The President's News Conference on 16 June 1981*.

<sup>605</sup> Weisman, *Reagan Ends Ban on Selling Israel 16 Jet Warplanes*, 1.

<sup>606</sup> Reagan and Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, 24

<sup>607</sup> House of Representatives, *Israeli Attack on Iraqi Nuclear Facilities: Hearings before the Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs, on Europe and the Middle East and on International Economic Policy and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Ninety-seventh Congress, first session, June 17 and 25, 1981*, 7

<sup>608</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Press Conference with Prime Minister Begin upon his return from President Sadat's funeral, 10 October 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7:1981-1982**.

setback in the peace process. During his short time in office, Reagan had developed a close friendship with Sadat and came to view him as a balanced voice in Middle East affairs.<sup>609</sup> Sadat's replacement Hosni Mubarak was nominally committed to the peace process however his early efforts after assuming office were spent consolidating his domestic position in Egypt rather than engaging peacemaking.

The ink on the Egyptian-Israeli treaty was barely dry and Israel had yet to withdraw its military from the entirety of the Sinai Peninsula after Sadat's assassination. Even before Sadat's assassination, the implementation of the treaty had become a priority for the newly minted Reagan team. On January 19, 1982 Israel and Egypt concluded their talks over Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. The Israeli withdrawal would come at a significant strategic cost to Israel. Israel lost airfields, oil resources, and settlements by withdrawing from the Sinai Peninsula. Even though Israel had gained a peace treaty with Egypt, a cold peace ensued afterwards. Bilateral relations were actualized in ministerial level meetings rather than cross-cultural exchanges between Israeli and Egyptian civilians. The benefits of a peace treaty for Israel came in the form of a quiet and demilitarized southern border. Israel's Ambassador to the United States, Moshe Arens, described his efforts to relay to the Americans the significant costs Israel had incurred by signing the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty:

I argued that the United States, having urged Israel to sign this treaty, which in addition to everything else involved an almost unbearable economic burden for Israel, owed Israel additional economic assistance in compensation.<sup>610</sup>

During the implementation, of the treaty, there was a brief dispute over the ownership of Taba (a resort town on the Mediterranean) that threatened the entire agreement. The disagreement was

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<sup>609</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). *US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>610</sup> Arens, M. (1995). *Broken Covenant: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis Between the U.S. and Israel*, New York: Simon & Schuster, ©1995., 26.

dealt with through international arbitration, with Egypt eventually winning the case settlement. On April 20, 1982, Israel successfully carried out its terms of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty by withdrawing all of its troops from the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>611</sup>

### **International Constraint - The Israeli Annexation of the Golan Heights**

On December 14, 1981 the Israeli Knesset ratified, with over a two thirds majority, the Golan Heights Law. The Golan Heights Law brought the strategic mountainous territory seized from Syria during the Six Day War of 1967 under full Israeli administration and jurisdiction. Israeli leadership avoided using the term ‘annexation’, but this law in effect turned the Golan Heights into Israeli territory. Israel annexed the Golan Heights for military purposes, although sizable settlements would be built in the area in future years. Any military that maintained control over the Golan Heights would be able to shell Israel’s civilian population centers with impunity. Control over the Golan Heights would give any Arab army a major strategic advantage in the event of an armed conflict with Israel. This made Begin hesitant to give the land back to Syria even though the international community made regular calls on Israel to hand back the territory at the United Nations.

When the Knesset passed the law, international reaction was especially dramatic and sternly worded. There had been reports that Begin had made the decision to annex the Golan after hearing a speech where Hafez al-Assad “rejected the notion of making peace with the Zionists in 100 years.”<sup>612</sup> Such actions only exacerbated Begin’s worst fears that his Arab neighbors sought Israel’s destruction. The United Nations and the Arab states applied great pressure on Israel in the wake of the annexation. Reacting to the attack, the Reagan

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<sup>611</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Interview with Defense Minister Sharon in Ma’ariv, 22 January 1982. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7:1981-1982.**

<sup>612</sup> Lewis, *Interview with US Ambassador to Israel Samuel W. Lewis*, 186-187.

Administration suspended the 1981 Strategic Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding.<sup>613</sup> These factors not only brought Israel further apart from the Arabs, but it also sullied the Reagan Administration's perceptions of Israel as a cooperative partner on regional security issues.

### **International Constraint - The Outbreak of the Lebanon War**

The civil war in Lebanon spanned from 1975 to 1990. During this time period, a protracted ethnic conflict ensued within Lebanon between the Sunnis, Shiites, Phalangists, Druze, Palestinians, and the occupying Syrian Army. Additionally, Israel would carry out reprisal attacks into Lebanese territory in order to stop sporadic reprisal attacks from PLO guerillas in the north. Seeking a friendly ally on its northern border, Israel and the United States actively cultivated a relationship with the Christian Phalange Party led by Bashir Gemayel.

Prior to the Israeli invasion in June of 1982, Lebanon was under Syrian occupation with large swaths of the country, especially in the Bekaa Valley, occupied by the Soviet armed Syrian Army of Hafez al-Assad. Historically, Syria had always seen Lebanon as its rightful territory and thus saw a need to solidify their presence in the country. When Syrian fighter jets were shot down in the Bekaa Valley in September of 1981, it was inevitable that any future Israeli invasion into Lebanon would lead to further Israeli-Syrian clashes.<sup>614</sup>

In addition to Syria's presence in Lebanon, the Palestinian Liberation Organization had gained a stronghold in Southern Lebanon after it was expelled from Jordan in 1970. The PLO, and its leader Yasser Arafat, had established a base in Beirut and his soldiers were able to operate freely within the Palestinian refugee camps throughout Lebanon. The United States was naturally sympathetic to Israeli concerns about the need to address the source of the attacks on its

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<sup>613</sup> Stork, J. (1982). "Israel as a Strategic Asset." Middle East Research and Information Project. (Report #105 Reagan Targets the Middle East., 3.

<sup>614</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Interview with Prime Minister Begin in Yedioth Ahronoth, 28 September 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**, 163.

northern border. Despite its support for Israel's security needs, the United States was weary of backing a military operation in the Middle East that could spark a Soviet-American military showdown. After all, Syria, who occupied Lebanon, was a Soviet-backed proxy whose military was outfitted with state-of-the-art Soviet weapons systems.

Israel invaded Lebanon in June of 1982 in what became known as “Operation Peace for Galilee.” The stated justification for the war was to stop PLO guerilla units from carrying out Katushya rocket attacks on Israeli communities in the Northern Galilee region. Roughly 70,000 Israeli soldiers, 1,000 tanks, and the Israeli Air Force were used to wage war in Lebanon. After the initial invasion, which was actually welcome by the Christian Phalangists, and their leader Bashir Gemayel, mission creep began to set in as Israel became intertwined in a civil war that had been ongoing for roughly seven years. For Israel, the invasion of Lebanon had broader goals than to simply root out PLO guerillas in the North. Defense Minister Ariel Sharon sought to defeat the organization altogether and establish Israeli hegemony in the Levant. Sharon, who at the time was adamantly opposed to an independent Palestinian state, believed that a Palestinian state already existed in Jordan.<sup>615</sup> According to Dr. Avraham Sela, Sharon sought to wage war in Lebanon to accomplish the following strategic objectives for Israel:

- 1) Elimination of the PLO as a military and political power, which would facilitate the implementation of Israel’s autonomy plan in the occupied territories and the possible replacement of the Hashemite regime by a Palestinian government.
- 2) Create a strong Lebanese government led by Bashir Jumayyil, that would ally itself with Israel and secure withdrawal of the Syrian forces from Lebanon.<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Ziv, G. (2013). “Simple vs. Complex Learning Revisited: Israeli Prime Ministers and the Question of a Palestinian State. “Foreign Policy Analysis (2): 203., 209.

<sup>616</sup> Sela, A. (1998). The decline of the Arab-Israeli conflict: Middle East politics and the quest for regional order, Albany: State University of New York Press, c1998., 255.

As Sharon pursued his regional strategy, the Israeli Defense Forces clashed with Syrian troops in the Bekaa Valley attacking 19 Syrian SAM sites and downing 23 Syrian MIG fighter jets.<sup>617</sup> Israel and Syria had been regional rivals having fought wars against each other in 1948, 1967, and 1973 before signing a ceasefire on 31 May 1974. In 1981, Israel had formally annexed the Golan Heights that it captured from Syria during the Six Day War sparking a newfound crisis between the two countries. Heightened tensions between Damascus and Jerusalem brought about an increased likelihood that a great power war could start in the region. For the Reagan Administration, a ceasefire agreement that weakened Syria and decreased their ability to impact the political situation in Lebanon became a strategic priority due to their alignment with Moscow. Ambassador Phil Habib was then entrusted by President Reagan to negotiate a ceasefire and hasten the removal of PLO, Israeli, and Syrian forces from Lebanon.<sup>618</sup>

At this time, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon decided to push past the initial 25km buffer zone he hoped to establish in southern Lebanon. He decided to push forward towards Beirut even as he engaged in negotiations with Special Middle East Envoy Phil Habib. Despite being of Lebanese descent, Phil Habib had no previous diplomatic experience negotiating in the Middle East. Habib had worked as Kissinger's emissary in Vietnam and was not intimately familiar with Middle Eastern leaders and the complex geopolitical forces at play inside Lebanon. During his mission brokering a ceasefire, Habib sent a series of frantic cables back and forth to the State Department outlining his frustrations with American and Israeli policy in Lebanon. Habib found himself at odds with Secretary of State Alexander Haig as Haig lobbied Reagan to support Israeli reprisal attacks against the Syrians at the same time Habib was seeking to broker a

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<sup>617</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Excerpts from Press Conference with Defense Minister Ariel Sharon on 9 June. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7:1982-1984.**

<sup>618</sup> Quandt, *Peace process; American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, 340.



truce to end the fighting.<sup>619</sup> Habib recollected his frustrations with American policy in a memorandum transcribed by Nicholas Veliotis:

Phil wants the Israelis to know that their present small-scale activity around the southern edge of the city is not providing useful pressure. To the contrary, it is making the U.S. appear to have no control over the Israelis at the very time Phil needs to give credible assurances of safe conduct for the other side.<sup>620</sup>

Since Reagan supported Habib's mission and his efforts to broker a ceasefire, Israeli and American policy in the ceasefire negotiations clashed.<sup>621</sup> Reagan became directly involved to break the impasse that threatened the ceasefire talks. He told his National Security Council at a meeting on 4 August 1982 that he was "getting extremely tired of a war whose symbol has become a burn baby with no arms."<sup>622</sup> These stark words, from a president that was initially sympathetic to Israel's needs to invade Lebanon, showed that Reagan saw the policies of Begin and Sharon in Lebanon as being directly against American interests in the region. On August 12, 1982, Reagan called Prime Minister Begin and told him that the Israeli siege on Beirut had become "a Holocaust."<sup>623</sup> Reagan then verbally dictated an ultimatum to Prime Minister Begin threatening the future of the US-Israel relationship:

Last night we were making significant progress toward a settlement that would result in the removal of the PLO from Beirut. That progress was once again frustrated by the actions taken by your forces. There must be an end to the unnecessary bloodshed, particularly among innocent civilians. I insist that a cease-fire in place be reestablished

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<sup>619</sup> Wollack, K. and R. Straus (1982). "War in Lebanon." Middle East Policy Survey., 1.

<sup>620</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (1982). Letter to the Secretary of State: Phil Habib's Views at the End of the Day on 3 August 1982. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of State. **Virtual Reading Room Documents**., 1.

<sup>621</sup> Anonymous. (1982). Talking Points We Can Use at an Israeli Charge. U.S. Department of State. Washington, D.C., **Virtual Reading Room Documents**.,1.

<sup>622</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, J. (2014). The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council. Seabec Books.,195.

<sup>623</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 196.

and maintained until the PLO has left Beirut. The relationship between our two nations is at stake.<sup>624</sup>

This statement marked the low point of US-Israeli relations during Reagan's tenure in office. It marked the formal end of Sharon's siege on West Beirut. It was the first in a sequence of events that would end in a human rights tragedy that would mark the beginning of the end of the Begin Government's hold on power in Israel.

After engaging in subsequent rounds of shuttle diplomacy between the capitals in Israel, Lebanon, and Syria, Habib was able to strike an agreement between the parties on April 20, 1982. The agreement called for a ceasefire, the withdrawal of all PLO guerilla units from Lebanon, and the deployment of a Multi-National Force stationed in Beirut.<sup>625</sup> One of the preconditions that the PLO had sought to achieve upon their departure (via their Lebanese interlocutors) was for Palestinian civilians that resided in the refugee camps to be physically protected after PLO militia units protecting them had safely departed for their new home in Tunis. As early as August 3, 1982, Habib wrote of his worry that the Israeli forces in Lebanon would not be able to guarantee the security of the Palestinians living in the refugee camps outside of Beirut.<sup>626</sup> Shortly after Habib negotiated the PLO's terms of withdrawal, Christian Phalange militia units entered the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. Israeli forces failed to provide security in the area and looked on haplessly as hundreds of innocent Palestinian civilians were killed by Maronite forces that had long sought revenge for PLO actions in Lebanon.

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>625</sup> Reagan, R. (1982). President Reagan's Statement on Lebanon Plan for the PLO Evacuation from West Beirut on 20 August 1982. State Department. Washington, D.C.: 12.

<sup>626</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (1982). Letter to the Secretary of State: Phil Habib's Views at the End of the Day on 3 August 1982. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of State. **Virtual Reading Room Documents.**, 1.

The Lebanon War put a damper on Reagan's initial efforts to bring about a "strategic consensus" to solve the Arab-Israeli Conflict. With conflict raging in Lebanon, it was simply impossible for any regional strategic consensus to develop against the Soviet Union as an Israeli military operation in an Arab state negated any other cooperation against their common adversary. Neither the Saudis, Jordanians, or Egyptians were ready to side with Israel in any public way on security issues as long as the Palestinian question (which was now back at the top of the world's diplomatic agenda) remained unaddressed and Israel controlled Arab territories conquered in the Six Day War. An investigation of the massacres at Sabra and Shatila was commenced amid outrage from the Israeli public and the international community. The Commission of Inquiry (also known as the Kahan Commission) found that the IDF had allowed Christian Phalangists to enter the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps and was "indirectly responsible for the events that occurred in the camps" because Defense Minister Sharon failed "to take appropriate measures to prevent the bloodshed" while the attacks occurred in an area under Israeli military control.<sup>627</sup> By this time, the Lebanon War in general, and the Sabra and Shatila massacres in particular, had dealt a death blow to Ariel Sharon's political standing and he was ousted as Defense Minister.

The US-Israel relationship was negatively impacted from the Lebanon experience in two ways. First, the Lebanon War "had the effect of making Reagan more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause."<sup>628</sup> It led the Reagan Administration to adopt positions in the peace process that were at odds with those of the ruling Begin Government. A new belief about the urgency of developing a policy that would address the Palestinian question was forged from Reagan's experience overseeing American policy in Lebanon. This change was articulated when the Reagan Plan was

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<sup>627</sup> Medzini, M. (1983). Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the events at the refugee camps in Beirut, 8 February 1983. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **8: 1982-1984.**

<sup>628</sup> Dine, T. A. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

issued on September 1, 1982, despite Reagan's past misgivings with Camp David and the Middle East peace process.

Second, the Reagan Administration believed that Israel had gone too far by seeking the full destruction of the PLO in Lebanon.<sup>629</sup> A more limited operation to provide a security umbrella for Israel's northern border communities had initially led the Reagan Administration to have a sympathetic stance towards Israel's decision to invade Lebanon. Rather than a focused counter-terrorism operation to prevent PLO reprisals into Israel's northern border communities, Israeli actions against Syrian forces in Lebanon unnecessarily provoked Soviet ire in the process, as their weapons failed miserably to prevent Israel's onslaught against their Syrian proxies. The carnage in Lebanon damaged Israel's standing in the United States, as Israel's Arab adversaries used images of atrocities in Lebanon (even if they were not committed by Israeli troops) to intentionally undermine public support for Israel in the United States by foisting them on an audience that was not intimately aware of the multi-faceted nature of the conflict in Lebanon.<sup>630</sup>

### **Domestic Constraint - The AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia**

On March 6, 1981, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin criticized the Reagan Administration for its plans to sell F-15 enhancement equipment, AWACs, and 22 ground radar stations to the Saudis. Begin's decision to oppose the arms sale put Israel on a collision course with the Reagan Administration that supported the deal. The roots of the "AWACs controversy" were planted after the 1980 presidential election. Between Election Day and Inauguration Day, Secretary of State Ed Muskie and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown committed the United States to sell Saudi Arabia equipment that would improve the Royal Saudi Air Force's F-15

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<sup>629</sup> McFarlane and Smardz, *Special Trust*, 206.

<sup>630</sup> Gruen, G.E. (1984). "The United States and Israel: Impact of the Lebanon War." The American Jewish Year Book **84**: 73., 79-82.

fighter bombers.<sup>631</sup> The deal remained intact yet unfulfilled when Reagan took office and his administration became politically responsible for implementing a deal they did not initially negotiate. Sherwood Goldberg, who served as Secretary of State Alexander Haig's Chief of Staff, described the AWACS sale as a simple issue that spiraled out of control and caused President Reagan to spend unnecessary political capital in an effort to preserve the prospects of developing a strategic consensus in the Middle East.<sup>632</sup>

The F-15 and subsequent AWACS sale was a political minefield for Reagan because he had criticized Carter during the campaign for selling F-15s to Saudi Arabia.<sup>633</sup> Even though Reagan did not negotiate the sale, the Saudis expected the United States to abide by it. Assuaging the diverging interests of the Saudis and Israelis on the AWACS sale would be a task that the Reagan Administration had to confront in order to preserve its role as an even-handed broker in Arab-Israeli Conflict. The hopes of developing a regional strategic consensus to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict was contingent upon the United States coming away the political battle over the Saudi arms sale with both alliances in-tact. This challenge was complicated by the fact that Begin perceived the Saudis to be "one of the most fanatical countries, after Libya" and "a confrontation state."<sup>634</sup> Likewise, the Saudis argued that an Israeli air strike could occur at any point and that the AWACS planes were necessary on the grounds that Israeli jets had illegally passed over Saudi air space en route to attacking the Osirak Nuclear Facility in Iraq and could potentially repeat such a scenario in the future.

The Saudis needed AWACs to counter potential threats to their oil fields emanating from the Soviet Union and Iran. From the perspective of the Saudis, if the deal did not transpire

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<sup>631</sup> Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, 174.

<sup>632</sup> Goldberg, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>633</sup> Haig, *Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan before the B'Nai Brith Forum*, 11.

<sup>634</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Interview with Prime Minister Begin on Israel Television, 16 April 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

because of Israel's diplomatic veto then the Saudis would come to question the seriousness of American diplomatic assurances and their status as an American ally in the Persian Gulf. In 1981, Saudi Arabia was a strategic ally of the United States in the Cold War and a regional competitor of America's adversary, Iran. Riyadh's vast oil reserves in the Persian Gulf were sold to American companies at discounted prices and American ships were allowed to traverse the Persian Gulf unimpeded. The Arab Oil Embargo spear-headed by Saudi Arabia against the United States in 1973 and 1974 had been a harrowing experience for the United States both economically and politically. The Saudis were keenly aware that oil could be used as a weapon to gain additional leverage in negotiations with American officials in the Reagan Administration as well as skeptical members in Congress naturally more sympathetic to Israel on matters related to its national security. They also argued that the AWACS were necessary because Israel had illegally crossed into Saudi airspace when they bombed the Osirak Nuclear Facility in Iraq in June of 1981.<sup>635</sup>

Worries about a second oil embargo took on a new meaning for American policymakers when four former Saudi Ambassadors held a press conference stating that Riyadh's beneficial oil sales policy as well as Saudi military and economic relations would be compromised if the AWACS sale was voided.<sup>636</sup> The loss of the Saudis as a regional partner would compromise Reagan's plans to develop the strategic consensus necessary to advance the peace process and bring about an end to the Arab-Israeli Conflict. If the AWACS sale did not take place, there was a high likelihood that a major Arab state, safely in the American camp in the Cold War, would

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<sup>635</sup> Stephens, *US Policy Toward Israel: The Role of Political Culture in Defining the "Special Relationship"*, 170.

<sup>636</sup> Bard, M.G. (1988). "INTEREST GROUPS, THE PRESIDENT, AND FOREIGN POLICY: HOW REAGAN SNATCHED VICTORY FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT ON AWACS." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* **18**(3): 583-600, 590.

feel reluctant to participate in future Arab-Israeli peacemaking efforts under the auspices of the United States.

The looming crisis in US-Saudi relations was confronted within Reagan's first month in office. The Reagan Administration's National Security Council confronted the F-15 enhancement issue on February 18, 1981. Reagan did not want to start a domestic battle with pro-Israel groups over the sale.<sup>637</sup> Haig was optimistic that Israel would not publicly criticize the deal if it received additional squadron of F-15s and American promises to expedite sales of Kfir jets to Mexico and Guatemala.<sup>638</sup> Haig publicly supported the sale because he believed that the Reagan Administration had an obligation to abide by international agreements made under Carter because abrogating them would lead other nations to doubt the credibility of American commitments.<sup>639</sup> The Reagan Administration approved the F-15 enhancements to the Saudis with additional assistance to Israel on February 27, 1981, with the hopes that the compromise deal would improve dialogue with the Saudis without harming Israel's security interests.<sup>640</sup>

The next time the AWACS sale was discussed at the NSC on March 19th, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, who was a strong supporter of cultivating closer ties with the Saudis, suggested that the United States use the momentum from the F-15 decision to sell AWACS to Saudi Arabia.<sup>641</sup> Weinberger was perceived by Dennis Ross (who served on the Defense Department's Office of Net Assessment during the Reagan Administration) as holding anti-Israel views.<sup>642</sup> Weinberger's views on the need for closer relations with the Saudis at the expense of America's relations with Israel tilted NSC debates over the AWACS sale toward his

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<sup>637</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 13.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Goldberg, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>640</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 15-16.

<sup>641</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 17.

<sup>642</sup> Ross, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration (E-mail Correspondence). University of Georgia. L. Lukoff. Washington, D.C.

position. Weinberger argued at an NSC meeting on March 19, 1981 that: “our (America’s) primary objective in the Middle East is to defend its oil supplies.”<sup>643</sup> This made the AWACS sale an issue of vital importance as its rejection would ensure that America’s strategic plans to protect Saudi oilfields in the Middle East would be compromised. Weinberger’s views were buttressed by the fact that the Air Force supported his position that an adequate defense system as needed to deter the Saudi’s regional adversaries.<sup>644</sup>

Shortly thereafter on April 1, 1981, President Reagan was shot after leaving the Washington Hilton. With Reagan recovering in the hospital, and Haig scheduled to leave for his first trip to the Middle East on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, the NSC convened under the auspices of Vice President George H.W. Bush to discuss the impending AWACS sale. By this time, the AWACS sale had become a hot-button political issue in both the United States and Israel. National Security Adviser Richard V. Allen noted this state of affairs and told the NSC that “if this issue [AWACS sale] is not handled carefully it could result in a first-ever congressional veto of a U.S. arms transfer agreement.”<sup>645</sup>

Unbeknownst to Haig, the Defense Department had discussed with the Saudis a more detailed arms package worth \$8.5 billion that included conformal tanks, air-to-air missiles, five AWACS with 12 ground radars, and six KC-135 aircraft for in-flight refueling.<sup>646</sup> While Haig supported the AWACS sale in principle<sup>647</sup>, he opposed the closing of the deal before his April 3<sup>rd</sup> visit to the Middle East for three reasons:

- 1) The AWACS sale was being politicized in the ongoing Israeli election;

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<sup>643</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 17.

<sup>644</sup> Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel: The Power and Limits of Beliefs*, 73.

<sup>645</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 26.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid.

<sup>647</sup> Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, 178.



2) The timing of the sale would spoil Haig's chances of having a successful diplomatic trip to the Middle East on April 3<sup>rd</sup>;

3) The AWACS sale needed to be postponed until after the April 30 congressional recess so that congressional opposition that was building to derail the deal could be muted.<sup>648</sup>

At the April 1<sup>st</sup> NSC meeting, Haig became embroiled in a debate with Weinberger about the timing of the AWACS package. The debate subsequently morphed into a discussion about whose interests (the Israelis or the Saudis) the United States should consider first in its foreign policy in the Middle East. This debate would become a persistent theme in intra-administration debates about US Middle East policy between 1981 and 1982. An administration split on the direction of American policy in the region would impact discussions with both Israeli and Arab diplomats. Mixed signals were viewed as a sign of indecision by both Israeli and Arab officials. Perceptions of American indecision led both Israeli and Arab officials to question America's commitment to playing a constructive role in the peace process.

A lack of leadership within the NSC was compounded by the fact that Reagan had not made his formal position known on the arms deal prior to the April 1<sup>st</sup> meeting. As head of the NSC Meeting on April 1st, Vice President Bush noted that Reagan had not been fully briefed on the AWACS sale and that an issue as complicated as the AWACS sale needed his leadership.<sup>649</sup> During discussions about executing the AWACS sale, Weinberger was perturbed as to why Israel would oppose the sale given the fact that he did not think the sale posed any existential threat to Israel's national security. He pushed Haig to support the AWACS package without delay because he saw Israeli opposition as being nonsensical:

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<sup>648</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 27.

<sup>649</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 29.

Israel has increased its margin of military superiority over its Arab adversaries since the 1973 war. With or without AWACS and F-15 enhancements, the Saudi Air Force realistically poses no significant threat to the security of Israel. This is true even in the context of a general regional conflict. This assessment is supported by the U.S. intelligence community.<sup>650</sup>

Weinberger later made four arguments in favor of the arms sale at a Senate hearing on the AWACS sale. His views shed light as to why he saw executing the AWACS sale a vital concern that he believed could not be delayed:

- 1) The deal was vital to preserve Saudi Arabia and its oil fields;
- 2) The deal would be a good faith measure that would ensure Saudi cooperation in the peace process;
- 3) The deal would improve America's military position in the region by providing a potential staging ground for US forces in the Middle East in the event of a war;
- 4) The deal would improve the effectiveness of American military capabilities in the region in the event that American troops were required in the region.<sup>651</sup>

If the United States could not deliver on the AWACS sale, Weinberger argued that the Saudis would look elsewhere for arms and strategic support. By the time Reagan had recovered, he was convinced of Weinberger's argument and approved the deal on April 23, 1981.

Begin saw the AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia as part of a broader phenomenon that was taking place throughout the Middle East. Both the Soviet Union, and the major western powers (USA, France, and Great Britain), were selling advanced weaponry to their clients in the Middle

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<sup>650</sup> United States Senate. (1981). Arms Sales Package to Saudi Arabia: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Ninety-seventh Congress, first session, on the AWACS and F-15 enhancements arms sales package to Saudi Arabia, October 1, 5, 6, 14, and 15, 1981. Washington, D.C., U.S. G.P.O.

<sup>651</sup> Laham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia: the Reagan Administration and the Balancing of America's Competing Interests in the Middle East*, 158.

East. If Israel did not put a stop to American arms sales to the Arabs, then the balance of power in the region would eventually turn against Israel. Dan Meridor, who served as a Cabinet Secretary for Begin, noted that “it became a top priority for Israel to maintain a qualitative military edge over the Arab states in the region due to the larger size of the Arab League’s combined military arsenals.”<sup>652</sup> Practically speaking, this meant that any influx of advanced weaponry into the region via Saudi Arabia would deteriorate Israel’s security position in the region at-large. Prime Minister Begin was intimately attuned to the growing arsenal of weapons flowing into Arab states in the region:

You know as far as supply of weapons to Arab countries is concerned, it is a kind of avalanche, both through the east and through the west. May I give you the following figures: in Syria, there are now over 2,600 Soviet tanks, amongst them some of the best T-72s; planes, some of the best, MIG-25s. There are more than 2,050 tanks in Iraq. There is a deal between Britain and Jordan to sell a supply of Chieftain Tanks; also there are American tanks supplied. And then, Libya is a Soviet arsenal.<sup>653</sup>

Begin saw the AWACs and F-15 sale as giving Saudi Arabia (a country in a state of belligerency against Israel) the chance to “see everything in Israel, every airfield, and even every plane taking off.”<sup>654</sup> During his first visit to see President Reagan on September 10, 1981, Begin told Reagan that the deal constituted “a direct danger, a serious danger to Israel’s national security.”<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> Meridor, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>653</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Press Conference with Prime Minister Begin, 24 February 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

<sup>654</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Interview with Prime Minister Begin on Israel Television, 16 April 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

<sup>655</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Press Conference with Prime Minister Begin, 10 September 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

During Prime Minister Begin's first meeting with President Reagan, a deal was allegedly struck where Israel would not publicly lobby against the AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia.<sup>656</sup> Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir denied any such agreement and questioned the accuracy of a similar statement made by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY).<sup>657</sup> According to Reagan's CIA Director William Casey, the Israeli intelligence establishment had privately acceded to a *quid pro quo* offered, where Israel agreed to quietly mute criticism of America's request to sell AWACS to Saudi Arabia in exchange for intelligence cooperation regarding Israel's plans to attack the Osirak Nuclear facility in Iraq.<sup>658</sup> Whatever deal was or was not struck behind closed doors quickly unraveled. Begin met with a group of lobbyists from various pro-Israel groups in Washington and allegedly told them he opposed the AWACS sale. This infuriated Reagan as he felt he was deceived by Begin.

Subsequently, the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee and a slew of pro-Israel and Jewish interest groups launched a concerted lobbying campaign to kill the deal. Israel's supporters in the House far outnumbered those who opposed the AWACS sale. The AWACS sale was rejected in the House upon the passage of the Long-Lent Resolution. Despite the fact that the AWACS sale was rejected in the House, a concurrent resolution needed to be passed in the Senate in order for the sale to be voided.

Reagan and his Chief of Staff James Baker mobilized to prevent the passage of the Packwood Resolution (the Senate version of the Long-Lent Resolution). Walter Isaacson reported in *Time Magazine* on the intensity of Reagan's efforts to prevent the passage of the Packwood Resolution:

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<sup>656</sup> Stephens, *US Policy Towards Israel: The Role of Political Culture in Defining the 'Special Relationship'*, 170.

<sup>657</sup> Medzini, M. (1981). Interview with Foreign Minister Shamir on Israel Television, 12 March 1981. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1981-1982.**

<sup>658</sup> Persico, *Casey: The Lives and Secrets of William J. Casey from the OSS to the CIA*, 253-254.

Beginning in September, he (Reagan) held private chats on the AWACS sale with 22 Republican Senators, 14 of whom voted his way. There were 22 Democrats who also got the private treatment, and ten of them were convinced. In addition, last week alone Reagan placed 26 telephone calls in which AWACS was a subject of conversation.<sup>659</sup>

The Packwood Resolution constituted a direct threat to Reagan's credibility both domestically and internationally. Since the vote occurred early on in his presidency failure would have dire repercussions for an administration with sweeping ambitions in domestic affairs and foreign policy.

Domestically, if Reagan couldn't rally his own party to support the AWACS sale (let alone like-minded Democrats), he would undoubtedly be perceived by the political class in Washington as a weak and ineffective leader. Suffering the first-ever congressional rebuke of an agreed upon arms sale would potentially imperil the rest of Reagan's legislative agenda as it would likely embolden his political adversaries to challenge the president's leadership without worrying about the consequences. It would also dissuade fellow Republicans from taking controversial votes in his favor if the president could not muster enough votes to pass bills through both houses of congress. Reagan's credibility as America's top diplomat would be severely hampered if he could not deliver on his country's own promises because of domestic politics. In addition to damaging Reagan's credibility with the Saudis, failure of the AWACS sale would make it even harder for foreign leaders to take political risks for a president whose promises may not materialize into tangible benefits for their own states' national interests. For these reasons, the Reagan team linked up with its allies on K Street and Capitol Hill to push through the deal over the concerns of Israel and its supporters.

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<sup>659</sup> Isaacson, W., et al. (1981). "The Man with the Golden Arm." Time 118(19): 25.

Saudi Crown Prince Bandar bin Sultan organized a massive lobbying campaign to seal the deal. Prince Bandar had close relations with American officials. He was the tennis partner of soon-to-be Secretary of State George Shultz and had close personal relations with Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker (R-TN) (who afforded Prince Bandar the luxury of having office space inside the capitol building).<sup>660</sup> The Saudis paid one million dollars to a team of three lobbyists and even enrolled Presidents Carter, Nixon, and Ford to support the sale. They made the argument that Senators had to choose “Begin or Reagan.” This effectively pitted Israel’s supporters in Congress against their own president. The campaign was successful and ultimately the Packwood Resolution was rejected on a vote of 52-48.

### **Policy Outcome: The Failure of the Strategic Consensus Doctrine**

The Strategic Consensus Strategy was a new approach to solving the Arab-Israeli Conflict that differed from the Camp David process that Carter had started. The ideas that underpinned the strategy were more favorable to Israeli interests as the plan did not require territorial concessions. Even though the Americans, Israelis, Saudis, Egyptians, Jordanians, and Lebanese shared a common threat in the Soviet Union, this shared interest was incapable of serving as a bridge to narrow the divide that existed between Israel and the Arab world over the Palestinian question. Israel’s control over the territories captured in the Six Day War, and its opposition to Palestinian statehood, was cited by Nicholas Veliotis as a reason that “Egypt and the Saudis had no interest in Haig’s plans to create a “strategic consensus” in the region.”<sup>661</sup>

From the outset of the Reagan Administration, Israel made security decisions it deemed within its national interests that ran contrary to those of the Arab states with whom it sought to make peace. Israel’s attack on Iraq (a fellow Arab League state) and its subsequent annexation of

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<sup>660</sup> Bard, *INTEREST GROUPS, THE PRESIDENT, AND FOREIGN POLICY: HOW REAGAN SNATCHED VICTORY FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT ON AWACS*, 587.

<sup>661</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

the formerly Syrian controlled Golan Heights, had the effect of pushing Egypt further away from Israel because it estranged Egypt even further from the Arab fold. When Sadat was assassinated on October 6, 1981, a shadow of uncertainty cast itself over the future of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, which had yet to be implemented. Sadat's death at the hands of a gunman linked to the Muslim Brotherhood led his successor Hosni Mubarak to take a more conservative approach in his relationship with Israel. After October 1981, Mubarak would take fewer risks in the peace process that Sadat had started. He would seek to consolidate his gains made at Camp David rather than taking bold risks such as normalizing relations with Israel in all areas. Instead, he prioritized Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and adopted a "cold peace" policy toward Israel that effectively discouraged closer bilateral relations with the Jewish state while still abiding by all of the tenets of their peace agreement.

Plans to bring Saudi Arabia into the strategic consensus failed as Israeli opposition to the AWACS sale exacerbated the divide between the two warring states. If the Israelis opposed defensive weapons to the Saudis, how could the United States get both states to work in unison to thwart Soviet ambitions in the Middle East? According to Nicholas Veliotis, "both the Egyptians and the Saudis wanted nothing to do with Reagan's strategic consensus so long as Israel occupied the West Bank."<sup>662</sup> The Saudis interests lay in maintaining an American security guarantee in the Persian Gulf in the event of a conflagration with Iran or the Soviets rather than stirring up anti-regime sentiments that would undoubtedly occur if a conciliatory policy toward Israel was implemented. Riyadh's allies within the defense establishment in the United States saw little reason to include the Israelis in their regional contingencies, as they believed that the Israelis had little to offer in such the event of a war in the Persian Gulf. As a result, the strategic consensus the military establishment envisioned excluded Israeli participation.

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<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

Shortly after Haig's strategic consensus strategy fell apart, he was fired by Reagan. Haig was widely panned for allegedly giving Israel a "green light" to invade Lebanon and thus providing tacit American support for Ariel Sharon's grandiose plans in Lebanon.<sup>663</sup> Haig's firing was partly personal and partly based on his inability to move the peace process forward. Haig failed to establish good relations with Reagan's inner circle of white house advisors (Baker, Clark, Meese, and Weinberger) because they saw him "as a potential political threat given his military background."<sup>664</sup> Haig's pro-Israel sentiments were neither shared in the Pentagon nor among Reagan's inner-circle of advisors in the White House (Clark, Meese, Baker) and contributed to his downfall as a cabinet member.<sup>665</sup> The Arabs rejected his efforts to bring Israel into a regional alliance against the Soviets in the Middle East out of hand. For the Arab League, extricating Israel from Lebanon and ensuring the orderly withdrawal of all Israeli from Arab controlled territories conquered during the Six Day War took precedence over joining an alliance with a country that was still in a state of active belligerency with each of its member nations save Egypt. Haig was thus a casualty of both domestic and international forces that questioned the value of his advice and the feasibility of his regional plans.

The failure of the strategic consensus strategy marked the formal end of any plan to bring Israel and the Arab states together in an alliance absent progress on the Palestinian question. To bring both the Israelis and the Arabs toward a common position in the American-led peace process, Reagan's Middle East advisors would adopt a new and comprehensive approach that sought to address the Arab-Israeli Conflict in all of its areas.

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<sup>663</sup> Schiff, Z. (1983). "Green Light, Lebanon." *Foreign Policy* 50(50): 73-85., 80-81.

<sup>664</sup> Goldberg, S. (2017). *US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration*. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>665</sup> Midgley, J. (1984). "What Took Mr. Reagan to Beirut and Back." *Political Quarterly* 55: 391-401.



## **International Diplomatic Support for Israeli Foreign Policy in the Middle East Peace Process**

### **The Peace Process 2.0: The Reagan Plan and Palestinian National Aspirations**

#### **A Deviant Case**

#### **Introduction**

This section examines the political events that confronted the Reagan Administration in its efforts to bring about a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli Conflict between 1982 and 1989. Ronald Reagan became the first American president to issue an Arab-Israeli peace proposal bearing his name. In the wake of the Lebanon War, Reagan immersed himself into the waters of Arab-Israeli peacemaking. The atrocities Reagan witnessed during the Lebanon War hastened his administration's efforts to pursue the creation of a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation and a separate peace treaty between Israel and Lebanon. Reagan's staunch opposition to negotiating with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat subsided in the wake of Jordanian disengagement from the West Bank in 1987. This decision was a significant shift in American foreign policy that displeased the Israeli government and had a long-lasting impact on the future of the Middle East peace process.

## **Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about the Middle East Peace Process Change**

President Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs about the Arab-Israeli Conflict had evolved by the time he issued the Reagan Plan before a national audience on September 1, 1982. The events and policy disagreements that took place in US-Israel relations during Reagan's first year-and-a-half in office had changed both his own mode of thinking as well as the policies that he was to implement in the peace process. Prior to coming to Washington, Reagan had articulated views on the Arab-Israeli Conflict that denied the historical grievances and aspirations of the Palestinian national movement.<sup>666</sup> Reagan's natural inclinations to support Israel were formed from his interactions with "his Jewish friends in Hollywood".<sup>667</sup> While Reagan maintained the position that the PLO was a Soviet-backed terrorist organization (rather than the legitimate political representatives of the Palestinians) that ought to be formally sidelined in the peace process, he nonetheless continued to pursue an approach that sought to moderate the PLO's positions on Israel, with hopes that Palestinian leaders could be brought into the peace process. By September 1982, Reagan developed a newfound interest in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. His public statements thereafter reflected a wholesale shift in his beliefs about the Palestinian narrative and their political grievances. Reagan's renewed focus on Arab-Israeli peacemaking ran contrary to his initial campaign promises. During the 1980 presidential campaign, Reagan was highly critical of President Carter because he viewed American behavior at Camp David as being insufficiently supportive of Israel's interests."<sup>668</sup> Subsequently, Reagan proposed a Middle East peace initiative that was viewed positively in the Arab world.<sup>669</sup> A distancing from the

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<sup>666</sup> Reagan et al., *Reagan in His Own Hand*, 217-218.

<sup>667</sup> Dine, T.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>668</sup> Cannon, L. (1980). Reagan: Carter Imperils Israel. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company.

<sup>669</sup> Ross, J. (1982). Jordan, Arab Press Seem to Warm to Reagan Plan. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company.

Israeli position in peace negotiations, which Reagan had promised that he would not pursue, had taken place.

Reagan's newfound interest in the Palestinian cause and a general change in his approach to the Arab-Israeli Conflict was noted by his Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger:

I was particularly pleased that his (Reagan's) plan recognized that one of the root causes of disorder and instability in the Middle East was the plight of the Palestinians on the West Bank and in various refugee camps in Beirut, the Gaza Strip and elsewhere.<sup>670</sup>

What factors had led Reagan to adopt an approach that was trumpeted as a success by his predecessor, whose policies in the peace process he sought to diverge from? The September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative is a unique event because it was, as its name bared, Ronald Reagan's personal initiative and it was commenced because Reagan had developed new beliefs about the Arab-Israeli Conflict from his lived experience as the President of the United States.

Historians of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, such as William Quandt, have long argued that President Reagan was not intimately familiar with the nuances of his Middle East policy during his time as president and that he was overly reliant on his advisers.<sup>671</sup> However, this viewpoint largely neglects the fact that Reagan's September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative was designed and articulated into policy with a significant amount of effort on the president's part. Throughout the president's first two years in office, the Arab-Israeli Conflict had been a staple on his agenda even though the Middle East peace process was not a top priority in his overall foreign policy agenda as it had been for President Carter. Prior to publication of the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative, Reagan spent a considerable amount of time navigating the turbulent waters of Arab-Israeli diplomacy in an

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<sup>670</sup> Weinberger, C.W. (1990). *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon*, New York, NY: Warner Books, [1990]., 145.

<sup>671</sup> Quandt, W.B. (2005). *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press; Berkeley: University of California Press, ©2005., 336.

array of political situations, both foreign and domestic. He expended significant political capital personally lobbying wayward members congress (against the wishes of Prime Minister Begin and AIPAC) to ensure that the AWACSs sale to Saudi Arabia went through because he deemed the sale to be in the national security interests of the United States.<sup>672</sup> He hosted Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin for a State Dinner, inked a strategic cooperation agreement with Israel (which was later suspended after Israel annexed the Golan Heights), and became enmeshed in intra-administration disputes where his cabinet members squabbled over the importance of maintaining close ties to Israel after Jerusalem used force Iraq and waged war against PLO guerillas and Syrian military units in Lebanon. These collective experiences exposed Reagan to the complexities of Arab-Israeli peacemaking and the difficulties American presidents faced balancing support for Israel with its role as third-party mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

### **Domestic Catalyst – Reagan’s New Middle East Advisors**

Ronald Reagan’s September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative of 1982 was the first formal proposal put forth by an American president that presented American positions on the core final-status issues of the Arab-Israeli Conflict (Jerusalem, borders, Palestinian refugees, and Israeli security). The initiative was proposed at a unique moment in the Middle East and in US-Israel Relations. The United States, by means of Philip Habib’s shuttle diplomacy, had successfully negotiated an accord between Lebanon, the PLO, Syria, and Israel outlining the terms of their future withdrawals from Lebanon. The Reagan Administration had recently experienced the failure of its strategic consensus strategy designed to bring about peace between Israel and the Arab states. The author of the strategic consensus strategy, Secretary of State Alexander Haig, fell out of the good graces of President Reagan and his closest advisors. Haig would resign as Secretary of

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<sup>672</sup> Laham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia: The Reagan Administration and the Balancing of America’s Competing Interests in the Middle East*, 41-43.

State on July 5, 1982. Personnel changes in the Reagan Administration would bring about a new approach to the region. Haig was replaced by George Shultz who had previously served as an executive at the Bechtel Corporation. Reagan's Middle East Envoy Phil Habib was nominated for a Nobel Prize for his efforts negotiating a ceasefire but retired shortly thereafter due to ill-health.<sup>673</sup> Habib was replaced by Robert McFarlane, who had previously served as Counselor at the State Department. Robert Ames from the CIA, who had close personal ties with members of the PLO from decades of service in the Middle East, became a trusted confidant of Secretary Shultz and DCI Casey and would join Reagan's inner circle of advisors on Middle East affairs. Judge Richard Clark would replace Richard V. Allen as National Security Advisor. Judge Clark would assume a greater role in national security planning than his predecessor had. Allen (whose office had been situated in the basement of the White House) was forced to communicate "through the notoriously inefficient" White House Counselor Ed Meese, who distrusted him.<sup>674</sup> Without a proper communication channel to the oval office, Allen's influence waned in the administration. A strong supporter of Israel, he left his post less than a year into Reagan's first term.

As new actors ascended to positions of influence within Reagan's inner circle, they brought with them fresh perspectives on how to approach the region in general, and the Arab Israeli-Conflict in particular. More importantly, however, was the fact that Reagan's views on the Arab-Israeli Conflict were changing and "he began to see a more nuanced picture of the region and the plight of the Palestinians."<sup>675</sup> Advisors critical of Israeli policy undoubtedly altered Reagan's policy positions as he became more deeply ensconced in the minutiae of Middle East peacemaking.

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<sup>673</sup> Habib was later recalled from retirement to negotiate the Israeli-Lebanese Peace Treaty in 1983.

<sup>674</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, 337.

<sup>675</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

A change in Reagan's initial approach to Arab-Israeli peacemaking was documented when he convened a meeting at Camp David in the week prior to his first and only national address on the Arab-Israeli Conflict. In attendance were Reagan's closest Middle East advisors (George Shultz, Robert McFarlane, Lawrence Eagleburger, Paul Wolfowitz, Charles Hill, William Kirby, Alan Kreczko, and Nicholas Veliotos).<sup>676</sup> Nicholas Veliotos noted that:

During this meeting, George Shultz, the world's best briefer, went over the proposed plan in detail in an effort to be certain that the President understood what he was taking on. Reagan interrupted Shultz several times, reassuring all concerned, that he was indeed aware of and fully supportive of this proposal. Reagan wished to proceed to the early announcement of the Plan.<sup>677</sup>

The Reagan Administration sought to use the September 1st initiative as an opportunity to make its unique footprint in the region and to set forth a straight forward policy on the Arab-Israeli Conflict. A decision to advance the Reagan Plan was made even though Secretary of State Shultz knew that the initiative would face significant hurdles from all stakeholders in the region:

Some people in the region wanted peace with their neighbors; some did not. But whether for or against, active or passive, all seemed endlessly inventive about blocking progress toward peace. So be it. But leadership from the United States might be able to break through the endless intransigence.<sup>678</sup>

The Reagan Plan was designed as part of an effort to re-establish American leadership in the Middle East region and, most importantly, in the broader Cold War. A perceived decline of American influence in the Middle East vis-à-vis the Soviet Union had taken form inside the Reagan Administration after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon had morphed into a regional affair.

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<sup>676</sup> Bird, *The Good Spy: The Life and Death of Robert Ames*, 270.

<sup>677</sup> Veliotos, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>678</sup> Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, 95.

America's Arab allies were leaning on the United States to prevent Israeli advances in Lebanon. Simultaneously, the United States had to ensure that its actions did not prompt Soviet intervention or further bolster the positions of the Syrians and their allies in the PLO.

### **International Catalyst – The War in Lebanon**

By September 1982, the Soviet Union was attempting to re-establish its presence in the region by lending increased levels of military aid to its regional proxies and challenging American leadership in the Middle East. Moscow sought to torpedo any American-led regional peace initiative because successful mediation of the Arab-Israeli Conflict would bolster the diplomatic position of the United States. Key to accomplishing this goal for the Soviets was to increase support for both the Syrian military occupation in Lebanon and PLO guerilla units stationed in Beirut.

The PLO was effectively a “state within a state,” as its armed presence in Beirut and in Southern Lebanon made it a formidable political and military threat to the regime of Bashir Gemayel and his Christian Phalange Party. Israel's northern border communities were also endangered by a PLO presence in Southern Lebanon. Lebanon was a fertile ground for PLO recruitment, as its sizable Palestinian population had languished in refugee camps inside the country since the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. The refugee camps in the south were used as both a safe haven and staging ground for cross-border attacks by PLO guerilla units into Israeli territory. Arafat's efforts to wage strife inside Lebanon, and Israel, became a lever for the Soviets to push to wage discord in the heart of America's regional allies. The Soviets also benefitted from the fact that the Syrian Army occupied the Bekaa Valley and Shiite militia groups linked to Syria, such as Hezbollah, were actively engaged in terrorist activities against American diplomatic and military personnel inside Lebanon.

In June of 1982, Israel invaded southern Lebanon. Throughout the summer of 1982, the Israeli Defense Forces waged an extensive military campaign against PLO and Syrian targets inside Lebanon. On June 10, 1982, Reagan wrote to Prime Minister Begin informing him that the Soviet Union had “elevated the readiness of its airborne forces” and was “readying them for deployment” in the conflict in Lebanon.<sup>679</sup> During this time, Israeli military actions in Lebanon against PLO and Syrian forces were perceived by Reagan as policies that were directly aiding the Soviets in their quest to obtain regional hegemony. For the United States to reclaim leadership of the region, the administration had to show it could create a diplomatic solution that would push the Soviets and their proxies out of the region while simultaneously buttressing the position of America’s regional allies. Key to accomplishing this goal were the diplomatic efforts of Phil Habib, who was sent to Lebanon by President Reagan to broker an accord that would lead to a ceasefire between the parties waging war in Lebanon.

America’s Arab allies such as Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia saw the inability of the United States to bring about a ceasefire as a sign of American weakness in the region. King Hussein of Jordan was so concerned about the Israeli invasion of Lebanon that he sent his cousin Zaid bin Shaker on a secret trip to see Secretary Shultz in order to reaffirm America’s military support for Jordan in the event that Sharon turned his army on Jordan (in an effort to overthrow his regime and install a Palestinian state) after making peace with Lebanon.<sup>680</sup> A seeming inability on behalf of Phil Habib, to rein in the Israeli military, was likely viewed by America’s Arab allies as a signal that the Reagan Administration would be unsuccessful in any future effort to remove Israel from Arab territories conquered in the Six Day War.

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<sup>679</sup> Reagan, R. (1982). Letter to Prime Minister Begin on 10 June 1982. M. Begin. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

<sup>680</sup> Shlaim, A. (2008). *Lion of Jordan: the life of King Hussein in War and Peace*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. ed., 422.



It became consequential for the Reagan Administration to find a way to show both the Soviet Union and America's moderate Arab allies that it had not relinquished its leadership as the third-party peace mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict, capable of delivering Israeli concessions. President Reagan and his Middle East team concluded that a window of opportunity had opened that would allow the United States to increase its since lost geopolitical stature in the Middle East. These views were referenced by Judge Clark in a National Security Council meeting on Lebanon on June 14, 1982:

The war in Lebanon represents a major setback for U.S. diplomacy, which requires a fundamental and immediate review of our Middle East policy. Although it is too early to judge the fallout from Israel's military activities, it is possible that we can use this occasion to set in motion a dynamic process designed to reshape the political map of the Middle East.<sup>681</sup>

Thereafter, a brand-new initiative to bring about a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli Conflict, that would deter the Soviets, using American soft power resources, became a top priority for the Reagan Administration.<sup>682</sup>

As the Lebanon War progressed, President Reagan began seeing a more nuanced picture of the region and the US-Israel relationship. According to Nicholas Veliotis, four events had occurred prior to the publication of Reagan's September 1st initiative that had led Reagan to alter his perceptions of Israeli policy in the Middle East during his time:

- 1) Reagan's initial encounters with Sadat had a moderating influence on his perceptions of the Arab world. He came around to seeing a close Egyptian-American relationship as a necessity in his Middle East policy;

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<sup>681</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 184.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

- 2) The Reagan White House believed that Begin had promised not to lobby against the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia and was upset when Begin did just this when he visited the US in early 1981;
- 3) Ariel Sharon's deception in violating the cease fire in Lebanon between Syrian and Israeli forces bothered Reagan, especially after Habib had brokered the agreements in Reagan's name;
- 4) TV images of civilian casualties from Israeli attacks on Beirut deeply affected Reagan.<sup>683</sup>

While Reagan's views on the Arab-Israeli Conflict were changing because of the Lebanon War, so were those of Israel's top leaders and its citizens. Shimon Peres and the left-wing Labor Party became ascendant in Israeli politics after six years in the opposition. When the Kahan Commission identified Begin and Sharon as bystanders to the atrocities that occurred at the hands of the Christian Phalangist militias in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut, the public soured on the policies of the Begin Government. The standing of the Labor Party increased among the Israeli electorate. Shimon Peres (who would receive the most seats in the 1984 Israeli elections surpassing the Likud Party led by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir) took on the mantle of the Israeli peace camp on the international stage. Yossi Beilin, who served as Shimon Peres's Cabinet Secretary, noted that "Peres and the Labor Party were initially supportive of the Reagan Plan."<sup>684</sup> It appeared that Reagan had not only a renewed interest in peacemaking, but also a potential partner in Israel in Shimon Peres.

The Reagan Administration took the events in Lebanon and the ongoing political changes in Israel and used them to start the peace process anew, even though the war in Lebanon

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<sup>683</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>684</sup> Beilin, Y. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff. E-mail Correspondence.

remained hot and Begin remained in office. Assuming leadership in the Middle East peace process would become the preferred strategy of President Reagan, even though it meant that the policy solutions he espoused in his September 1st initiative would be heavily criticized. Shultz explained the necessity of American leadership in the peace process during this time in his memoirs:

Some people in the region wanted peace with their neighbors; some did not. But whether for or against, active or passive, all seemed endlessly inventive about blocking progress toward peace. So be it. But leadership from the United States might be able to break through the endless intransigence. And the absence of any credible peace process would mean regression from what had been achieved, most especially between Egypt and Israel.<sup>685</sup>

Thereafter, President Reagan took the unprecedented step of composing and publishing a regional peace initiative that envisioned an outcome for the Arab-Israeli Conflict, even though he knew that it would receive significant pushback from the actors in the region. In jumpstarting the peace process, the Reagan Administration also saw an opportunity to positively impact America's regional interests. The successful implementation of the Reagan Plan would simultaneously bolster Israel's regional security position, improve its relations with its moderate Arab neighbors, and sideline the Soviets and their regional allies from influencing the outcomes of the negotiations. Thereafter, the Reagan Plan became the vehicle that American negotiators would seek to use to both advance the peace process and actualize America's regional aims in the Middle East.

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<sup>685</sup> Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, 95.

### **International Constraint – The Arab Interlocutors**

When the Reagan Plan was issued, the Camp David framework that had guided Arab-Israeli peace negotiations since 1978 was fraught with structural flaws that negated its usefulness as a roadmap to future peace agreements between Israel and the Arabs. While the Begin government was supportive of the Camp David framework, and was open to negotiating on behalf of the terms identified in the agreement, differences within the Arab world about who would maintain the role as interlocutor for the Palestinians negated any further agreements from materializing. Egypt's usefulness as an Arab interlocutor had been severely damaged after 1981. President Sadat was roundly condemned throughout the Arab world for concessions he made to Israel and was later assassinated by an Islamic extremist linked to the Muslim Brotherhood for his peacemaking efforts. His successor Hosni Mubarak was publicly supportive of the peace process but was politically constrained from negotiating further on behalf of the Palestinians for two reasons. First, Egypt had been banished from the Arab fold after making peace with Israel. Cairo became a pariah in the Arab world for selling out the Palestinian cause by signing a bilateral treaty with Israel without stipulating the creation of an independent Palestinian state as part of the agreement. Thereafter, Cairo lacked the political capital necessary within both the broader Arab world, especially in the occupied territories, to negotiate further behalf of the Palestinians. Palestinian leaders in the West Bank severely resented Sadat for failing to ensure that an independent Palestinian state came about from the talks at Camp David.<sup>686</sup> Second, absent movement on the Palestinian issue with Israel and the United States, the focus for Egypt shifted towards ensuring that the terms of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty were implemented. Israel's military withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, the dismantling of its settlements, and arbitration of a dispute over the ownership of the resort village of Taba were Egypt's concerns in

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<sup>686</sup> Laquer, W., et al. (2001). *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict.*, 235.

peace negotiations with Israel. Since PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat had vociferously opposed Camp David, the Egyptian leadership saw little need to consider the PLO as a partner in the peace process.<sup>687</sup> Since Egypt lacked political legitimacy in the Arab world to negotiate an accord on behalf of the Palestinians (the 1974 Rabat Conference of the Arab League had afforded that role to the PLO), the Arab world remained steadfast in its opposition to Egypt negotiating an accord on behalf of the Palestinians.

The Camp David framework was also structurally flawed because its terms had been categorically rejected by King Hussein of Jordan. Hussein had “deeply resented the fact that Sadat had made an agreement with Carter that assumed his participation in future negotiations.”<sup>688</sup> By September of 1982, it became a fait accompli that King Hussein would be brought into the peace process because he had yet to jettison his claims over the West Bank and Jerusalem. Three specific reasons underpinned his position to hold on to lands that the Palestinians wanted for their future state. First, King Hussein had long maintained the position “that after the 1973 War that he wanted to re-establish his leadership in the occupied West Bank.”<sup>689</sup> Controlling the West Bank would allow Hussein to maximize economic gains in his resource-poor kingdom. This could only be accomplished by cultivating close ties with local Palestinian leaders and winning the hearts and minds of Palestinian residents in the territories as well as in Jordan. Second, his military failure in the Six Day War had compromised his role as guardian-representative of Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem. The loss of Hashemite sovereignty over Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem “became a tender subject for him (Hussein) as an Arab

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<sup>687</sup> White House Situation Room. (1981). Leak of Sadat/Ben-Elissar Conversation Arouses Official Anger. State Department. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. **Israel Folder.**

<sup>688</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>689</sup> Murphy, R.W. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

leader.”<sup>690</sup> Hussein’s prestige in the Islamic world was predicated on his ability to act as guardian representative of the al-Aqsa mosque and other Muslim holy sites situated in Jerusalem. With the military option against Israel being a non-starter for both military and political reasons, Hussein came around to seeing the peace process as his best chance of reclaiming his lost territories in the West Bank and Jerusalem. To do this, Hussein would have to cultivate closer ties with both the United States and Israel. Standing in the rejectionist camp of the Arab world, as he had chosen during Camp David, could not bring about closer relations with either party or achieve the territorial concessions he hoped to obtain from Israel.

Third, for Hussein, maintaining a position in the rejectionist camp of the Arab world was simply not an option given his own need to receive backing from the United States and to ensure stability on its western border with Israel. Without obtaining a leadership role in the peace process, Hussein risked being supplanted by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat as the dominant Arab leader within his own kingdom and in the American-led peace process. Jordan had legitimate security interests that could only be preserved by cultivating ties with Israel and the United States. In 1970, Israel bailed out King Hussein in what became known as “Black September” when the Nixon Administration asked Israel to prevent a Syrian military raid into Jordan that sought to aid a PLO insurgency intended to bring down the Hashemite monarchy.<sup>691</sup> Since that time, “Israel maintained clandestine ties with King Hussein due to a common interest in preventing Syrian and PLO advances in Jordan and the West Bank.”<sup>692</sup> As far as his relationship with the Americans were concerned, Hussein was a staunch ally of the United States in the Cold War whose fragile regime could not survive domestic threats from the PLO, and external threats from Syria and Iraq, without American backing. Hussein’s need for American foreign assistance,

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<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Zakheim, D.S. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>692</sup> Murphy, R.W. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

both military and economic, compelled him to enter the peace process. Stronger American-Jordanian ties were challenged by the fact that Israel's allies in Congress had raised opposition to Jordanian military assistance.<sup>693</sup> The opposition of Israel's supporters in Congress was premised on the belief that Hussein could not be trusted with American weapons so long as his regime remained in a state of hostilities against Israel. The Reagan administration came to look favorably on idea of a "Jordanian option" to solve the Arab-Israeli Conflict as Jordan's renewed influence in the West Bank and Jerusalem would negate further gains by the PLO in the occupied territories. This situation would re-establish American leadership in the region that had been badly damaged due to the events that transpired in Lebanon prior to September 1, 1982.

### **Domestic Catalyst – The Diplomacy of George Shultz**

When George Shultz replaced Alexander Haig in June of 1982 as Secretary of State, he was immediately thrust into the thicket of Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Haig had been viewed as a staunch supporter of Israel and Shultz was nominated under a cloud of skepticism about his pro-Israel leanings. The appointment raised alarm bells among pro-Israel advocates in Washington and among some Israeli leaders such as Begin's Cabinet Secretary Dan Meridor.<sup>694</sup> Three reasons undergirded the skepticism of Shultz's critics. First, Shultz had recently served as the President of the Bechtel Corporation, which had extensive business interests in Saudi Arabia and the broader Arab world. It was naturally assumed that Shultz had maintained cozy relationships with Arab leaders and was both intimately familiar and sympathetic towards their political interests in regional affairs. Second, Shultz talked about "the legitimate political aspirations of the Palestinian people" in his confirmation hearings and promised to serve as an "even-handed"

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<sup>693</sup> Goshko, J. (1984). Arms Sale to Jordan Imperiled. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company.

<sup>694</sup> Meridor, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

arbiter between the Arabs and the Israelis in the peace process.<sup>695</sup> These statements were perceived by Israel and its supporters in the US as code language for policies that would place unprecedented political pressure on the Israeli government to make territorial concessions to the Arabs. For Israel's domestic supporters, there was a major worry that Shultz would resurrect the diplomatic pressure tactics that Carter implemented during his presidency. Third, during his confirmation hearings, Shultz had opposed Israeli policy during Lebanon War and spoke with a sense of urgency when discussing the need to address the Palestinian question at the same time Israeli troops were engaged in combat operations against the PLO.<sup>696</sup> For these reasons, supporters of Israel saw Shultz as having anti-Israeli inclinations and being more prone to side with the Arabs over Israel in the peace process and other regional disputes.

Ultimately, concerns about George Shultz being anti-Israel were assuaged after Shultz's first meeting with Begin shortly after his confirmation hearings. Shultz was cognizant of the fact that he was perceived by the Israelis as being inherently biased towards their position in regional affairs.<sup>697</sup> One attendee at this initial meeting, Begin's Cabinet Secretary Dan Meridor, noted that:

When Shultz was announced to be the replacement of Haig, I remember not knowing much about him and being concerned. Shultz was a man that worked with Bechtel and had Saudi connections. I remember the first meeting between Shultz and Begin. We went to his office at the State Department and I was very impressed. There was a lecture and a presentation by our people and Shultz sat there with a coffee mug, pen, and a notepad.

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<sup>695</sup> Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel: The Power and Limits of Beliefs*, 67.

<sup>696</sup> Shultz, G.P. (1982). Statement at Senate confirmation hearings: July 13, 1982/ Secretary-Designate Shultz, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1982.

<sup>697</sup> Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, 16.



This to me was very significant. I remember saying to Begin that Shultz came prepared.

He's intellectual and open-minded and he can learn [to see Israel's perspective].<sup>698</sup>

Throughout the duration of his tenure as Secretary of State, George Shultz came to be perceived as being sympathetic towards Israel in a manner akin to Reagan.<sup>699</sup>

When Shultz took office and confronted the legal commitments made by the United States at Camp David, his pro-Israel sympathies would not stop him from developing a peace plan that was at odds with the official position of the Israeli government. It was only natural that upon inheriting the policies of his predecessor, that Shultz would be forced to reckon with the flaws of the Camp David framework and the myriad of new challenges that had developed in the region since 1978. These political challenges led Shultz to work towards the implementation of a new policy approach that would allow him to make his own unique contribution to Arab-Israeli peace diplomacy on behalf of President Reagan. Reagan's second approach addressing the Arab-Israeli Conflict was marketed as a "fresh-start" in the peace process.<sup>700</sup> The Reagan Plan's fate became intimately connected to Shultz's ability to bring Israel and the Arabs together at the negotiating table.

### **International Catalyst – Jordanian Foreign Policy under King Hussein**

The Reagan Plan was premised on the notion that the Reagan Administration could wield its influence and prestige to create a political dialogue where Israel could agree to strike a deal with Jordan and the Palestinians that would ensure the fulfillment of Palestinian national aspirations without compromising Israel's sovereignty and security interests. Key to accomplishing these goals would be positive buy-in from the moderate Arab regimes aligned

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<sup>698</sup> Meridor, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>699</sup> Christison, *The Arab-Israeli Policy of George Shultz*, 30.

<sup>700</sup> Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, 97.

with the United States. It also became vital for the Reagan Administration to ensure that the Soviet Union and the Arab rejectionists (Syria, Libya, and Iraq) stayed on the sidelines.

The Reagan Administration used its influence with King Hussein to bring him into the peace process. Having lost his biggest regional ally (the Shah of Iran) three years earlier, Hussein could ill-afford to estrange himself from the United States. The most glaring difference from Camp David was the fact that Reagan identified Jordan as being the lynchpin for any future settlement of the Palestinian problem. Dubbed the “Jordanian option”, the notion that Jordan was the vehicle for a settlement of the Palestinian issue had its roots in the 1970s. The United States and Israel saw Jordan as the Arab state with the most leverage over the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza as well as the state with the most at stake in the event of a Palestinian uprising or breakout of another Arab-Israeli war. In 1982, over 50% of Jordan’s population was Palestinian and it was the only Arab country that adopted conciliatory policies towards Palestinian refugees after they were expelled or fled from their homes during the 1948 War of Israeli Independence. Hussein had long been intimately aware of their political and economic needs as a people without a state. Both his political and economic positions were buttressed by their acquiescence, and overall success, under his rule. To achieve Palestinian support for his authority in the West Bank, Hussein would fund economic development projects, cultivate relationships with grassroots (non-PLO) Palestinian leaders, and provide Palestinian refugees residing in the West Bank and Jordan with citizenship and a passport.

### **International Constraint – The PLO’s Non-recognition of Israel and Stance on Terrorism**

Hussein’s very existence as a non-Palestinian leader with territorial claims and influence in the West Bank and Jerusalem put him at odds with the PLO and its Chairman Yasser Arafat. Hussein’s Hashemite regime was directly threatened by the PLO and Arafat. Arafat had long

sought to supplant Hussein as the dominant Arab leader between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Hussein was deeply skeptical of Arafat as he had previously tried to overthrow him in Black September of 1970 when PLO guerillas waged an insurgency against his regime. Arafat also had a trump card on Hussein that led Hussein to adopt a policy of conciliation towards his arch-enemy. The PLO had been identified by the Arab League as the only legitimate governing body that could represent Palestinian national aspirations. The vast majority of Palestinians and Arab leaders looked to Arafat rather than Hussein when discussing Palestinian affairs.

However, the PLO lacked political legitimacy in the United States, as Arafat had decided to cast his lot with the Soviet Union in the Cold War and had flatly rejected the terms of the American-led Camp David Accords. Perceptions about the intentions of Arafat as a peace partner were complicated by the fact that the PLO had orchestrated a series of spectacular terrorist attacks throughout the 1970s, such as the hijacking of Sabena Flight 571, the assassination of U.S. Ambassador to Sudan Cleo Noel, Jr., and the murder of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Summer Olympics. These actions led many in both Israel and the United States to question the PLO's commitment to the peace process during the 1980s. Shimon Peres noted this in his autobiography:

The PLO's "Palestine Covenant," the binding charter of the organization, called expressly or implicitly for the elimination of Israel in all but six of its thirty-three paragraphs. The PLO made rejectionism into its political dogma. It attacked Israelis and Jews at home and abroad, making itself thoroughly hated by the entire Israeli nation.<sup>701</sup>

Since the PLO was deemed to be a terrorist organization by the United States, formal communications with PLO leaders was outlawed. A formal role for the PLO in any Arab-Israeli

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<sup>701</sup> Peres, S. (1995). *Battling for Peace: Memoirs*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995., 262.

peace process in September 1982 was out of the question as Arafat had yet to accede to American demands to recognize Israel, renounce violence, and support UNSCRs 242 and 338. Once Arafat made public proclamations that satiated President Reagan, he would be granted recognition and a chance to participate in peace negotiations as a leader of the Palestinian national movement. It would seem logical that renouncing violence in exchange for international political legitimacy would be an easy transaction for Arafat the PLO to make. In reality, it was much more complicated. If Arafat renounced violence and recognized Israel, he would lose a tool that allowed him to raise international awareness and political support for the Palestinian cause. For every terrorist attack that the PLO carried out, a harsh reprisal of force would come from Israel. This would lead to additional sympathy from the international community and place greater pressure on Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians. The Lebanon War had proved this hypothesis valid. Connie De Boer observed the change in American sympathies for Israel at this time:

According to another Gallup survey, the favorable opinion of Israel appears to have declined before the massacres (at Sabra and Shatila) in the Palestinian camps. In 1981, 75 percent of Americans had a favorable opinion of Israel, but by mid-August 1982 this percentage had dropped to 56, lower than it had been during the preceding 20 years.<sup>702</sup>

Recognizing Israel's right to exist would also effectively undermine Arafat's interests in a manner commensurate with renouncing violence. It remained a strategic priority for the PLO, at the time when the Reagan Plan was issued, to establish a nation-state on the totality of the lands between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. By recognizing Israel's existence as a nation-state, Arafat would be making a major territorial concession as Israel's borders prior to

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<sup>702</sup> de Boer, C. (1983). "The Polls: Attitudes Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47(1): 121., 121.

the Six Day War had been recognized by the United Nations and the rest of the international community. These two prerequisites to enter the peace process were complicated by the fact that the PLO was a heterogeneous political entity with multiple factions. Arafat's Fatah Party faced significant opposition from extremists within the PLO that rejected the peace process and saw violence as necessary and justified in the struggle to liberate Palestine. Factions such as the Abu Nidal Organization and the Popular Liberation Front for Palestine led by George Habash challenged Arafat's claim to lead the Palestinians internally and placed significant constraints on his ability to make concessions to enter the peace process. Extreme elements within the PLO not only challenged Arafat's popular appeal to the Palestinian community but also his very life. This ever-present fear of losing power would lead Arafat to adopt a conservative approach to peace overtures from the United States and Jordan on the terms and expectations outlined for the Palestinians in the Reagan Plan.

Despite formally banning diplomatic communications with PLO, the United States had long been intimately familiar with the organization and its top leaders. Communications with PLO members took place both directly through intelligence channels and indirectly through non-PLO Palestinian intermediaries familiar with Arafat and other PLO leaders. Intelligence talks took place through CIA Agent Robert Ames. According to his biographer Kai Bird, Ames had cultivated close ties with PLO intelligence chief Ali Hassan Salameh over the course of his decades long career in the CIA.<sup>703</sup> Ames was a controversial figure in the CIA because "he befriended his sources" as opposed to recruiting them through traditional methods practiced by CIA case officers at the time.<sup>704</sup> Ames played a major role in ensuring that ties between the Americans and Palestinians developed. American diplomats in Lebanon were even protected by,

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<sup>703</sup> Bird, *The Good Spy: The Life and Death of Robert Ames*, 3.

<sup>704</sup> Veliotis, N. A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

“hiring members of the PLO to serve as members of the security detail protecting the American embassy in Beirut”.<sup>705</sup> These early efforts to reach out to the PLO through the CIA were initiated with hopes that clandestine talks could lead to a moderation in their policies vis a vis Israel.

Indirect channels to the PLO were cultivated through prominent State Department officials and their contacts in the field. In 1981, Reagan had authorized his Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Nicholas Veliotis to reach out to the PLO to see if he could “expand the circle of actors in peace process.”<sup>706</sup> These efforts failed to bring about a change in the PLO’s rejectionist positions early on. It became the focus of the Reagan team to bolster the position of King Hussein and diminish that of Arafat. Reagan’s Middle East Envoy Robert McFarlane recalled Reagan’s mistrust of Arafat:

There was never a time when the president (Reagan) viewed Arafat as anything but a bad leader. Someone who didn’t warrant the position that he enjoyed. His mantra was a denial of Israel’s existence and an assertion of false charges against Israel’s aggression. He called for his flock to remain determined and committed to hostility toward Israel. All and all, an unworthy interlocutor for any rational peace process.<sup>707</sup>

Arafat would remain a key player in the peace process because the United States and Jordan wanted to coax him into moderating his positions. His status and political influence in Jordan, the Palestinian territories, and throughout the broader Arab world allowed him to impact Hussein’s positions in the peace talks. His close ties with the Soviets and the Arab rejectionists allowed him to curry favor and political support from the same actors that sought to torpedo the Reagan Plan. Arafat became an actor in the peace process that could be neither ignored nor

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<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

<sup>706</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration (Email Correspondence). L. Lukoff. Washington, D.C.

<sup>707</sup> McFarlane, R. (2018). US-Israel Relations Under Reagan. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

embraced in public because of his support for terrorism, non-recognition of Israel, and reluctance to make bold concessions that would show his true intentions to move forward in peace negotiations outlined in the Reagan Plan.

### **Domestic Catalyst - Reagan's September 1<sup>st</sup> Speech on the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

President Reagan delivered his first (and only) public address on the Arab-Israeli Conflict when he delivered a speech from the white house outlining the terms of his September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative. Reagan and his team of Middle East experts believed that a clear policy needed to be advanced to re-establish American leadership in the region to guide future peace talks. Foreseeing Israeli rejection, the Reagan team did not consult their Israeli counterparts prior to the declaration of the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative. This state of affairs was endemic of the state of the US-Israel relationship in September of 1982. Reagan had lost confidence in the Begin Government and felt compelled by the arguments of those in cabinet who felt that Israel needed to be brought into negotiations to address the fate of the Palestinians.

Prior releasing the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative, a meeting was convened at Camp David with members of Reagan's Middle East team. Each participant in the meeting was aware that the Reagan Plan would face significant challenges in winning support from Jordan, the PLO, and the broader Arab world. According to Nicholas Veliotis, an attendant at the meeting, Reagan was intimately aware of the implications that his initiative would have on the broader Arab-Israeli Conflict:

During a group briefing at Camp David a few days before the plan was announced in the Sept. 1 speech by Reagan, George Shultz, the world's best briefer, went over the proposed plan in detail in an effort to be certain that the President understood what he was taking on. Reagan interrupted Shultz several times, reassuring all concerned that he

was indeed aware of and fully supportive of this proposal and wished to proceed to the early announcement of the plan.<sup>708</sup>

The Reagan team was intimately aware of the deleterious impact the Lebanon War was having on American interests in the region. The Reagan Administration acted as if they could take advantage of a recent flurry of diplomacy by Habib and Shultz in the region to rejuvenate the peace process. Since Syria and the PLO were weakened in the recent fighting, the Reagan team acted as if a unique window of opportunity had opened that would allow them to address the future of the peace process on a positive note.

The September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative was designed to solve the Arab-Israeli Conflict in all areas. It had a clear end goal: Palestinian governance in association with Jordan in the occupied territories. King Hussein would replace Sadat as the primary Arab interlocutor and Palestinian representation in the talks would be allowed. A formal role for the PLO would be prohibited so long as the organization failed to renounce violence, recognize Israel, and agree to the terms of UNSCRs 242 and 338. The Arabs were hopeful that American leverage could be exerted over Israel in order to convince its leaders to make concessions to the Palestinians. The September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative speech was well received in both the Arab world and the United States. The moderate Arab states saw the plan as a step in the right direction as it identified “legitimate Palestinian rights” and a freeze on Israeli settlement building.<sup>709</sup> The Arab League would convene a summit in Fez, Morocco on September 14, 1982, shortly after the Reagan Plan’s publication. At the summit, a unified Arab position on the peace process was agreed upon. The Fez Summit was significant because it was the first time that the Arab League formally acknowledged the legitimacy of the peace process and the idea of coexistence with an Israeli state within the 1967

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<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

<sup>709</sup> Ottoway, D.B. (1982). PLO, Jordanian Officials: Plan has Positive Points. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company, 1.



borders.<sup>710</sup> Since the language of what became known as “The Fahd Plan” fit within the parameters of the framework outlined in Reagan’s initiative, the administration felt encouraged that the Arabs would eventually agree to come to the bargaining table and negotiate peace. Even Arafat, who had rejected the Camp David Accords, agreed to begin discussions on an accord with King Hussein.<sup>711</sup> Reagan’s national address on the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and the reception the proposal received in the region thereafter, led the administration, congressional leadership, and even major American Jewish organizations to view the plan positively.<sup>712</sup> These factors led observers in the United States to become hopeful that a breakout in Arab-Israeli peace diplomacy was on the horizon.

### **International Constraint – Prime Minister Begin’s Categorical**

#### **Rejection of the September 1<sup>st</sup> Initiative**

Menachem Begin was emphatically supportive of the same Camp David framework opposed by the Arab League, Jordan, and the PLO. He had driven a hard bargain at Camp David and had secured a treaty. He negotiated in a manner that led President Carter to lean on President Sadat to make additional concessions to move the negotiations forward.<sup>713</sup> Begin’s Cabinet Secretary Dan Meridor noted that Begin was compelled to join the peace process despite his ideological predispositions and skepticism of ceding territory to the Arabs:

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<sup>710</sup> Anonymous. (1982). Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence and Deputy Director of Central Intelligence: The Fez Summit. National Intelligence Council. Langley, VA, Central Intelligence Agency. **General CIA Records**. 1-2.

<sup>711</sup> Riedman, T.L. (1982). Arafat Now Sees Positive Aspects in Reagan Plan. The New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company: 2.

<sup>712</sup> Ross, J. (1982). Jordan, Arab Press Seem to Warm to Reagan Plan. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company.

<sup>713</sup> Telhami, *Evaluating Bargaining Performance: The Case of Camp David*, 629.

Begin had an ideological predisposition that saw the land between the Jordan and the Sea as Jewish land belonging to Israel. However, he was also a democrat and did not want full annexation of the land because he knew it was impossible to do.<sup>714</sup>

Begin supported the idea of Palestinian autonomy and had “even drafted plans to implement Palestinian autonomy after Camp David.”<sup>715</sup> However, the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza was a non-starter for Begin. The autonomy talks Begin initiated stalled over differences between the parties over the size of the Palestinian autonomy government. The size of the autonomy government (which the Egyptians and the US sought to expand) was perceived by Begin as an indicator of Palestinian sovereignty (an idea he opposed).<sup>716</sup> The Palestinian autonomy talks were later dealt a mortal blow when Sadat was assassinated, and Israel shifted its efforts toward securing a new peace treaty with Lebanon.

Even though the initial Palestinian autonomy talks had failed, the Camp David framework set precedents that would underlie the proposal set forth in the Reagan Plan. The Camp David Accords set precedents for Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories conquered by Israel during the Six Day War, a settlement freeze, and the idea that Palestinians in the West Bank had the right to have autonomy over their own political affairs. The problems posed by the Camp David framework and the political turmoil that had engulfed US-Israeli relations between January 1981 and August 1982 had not stopped the inevitable certainty of the legal responsibilities that the Reagan Administration was obligated to bear. The United States (and Egypt) did not see Camp David as a “one-off” and both believed that the peace process would

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<sup>714</sup> Meridor, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>715</sup> Rubinstein, E. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>716</sup> Veliotes, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration (Email Correspondence). L. Lukoff. Washington, D.C.

continue until the outstanding issues in the Arab-Israeli Conflict were resolved.<sup>717</sup> In light of the events that had transpired in the Middle East during Haig's tenure as Secretary of State, Reagan's new Middle East team, with Shultz in command, concluded that a "fresh start initiative" in the peace process was in order.<sup>718</sup>

The September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative was a far more detailed document than the Camp David Accords. It outlined a series of concessions that went beyond the agreements Begin had signed at Camp David. Most notably, the Reagan Plan called for Israel to make the following concessions:

- 1) Reconciling its legitimate security claims with the legitimate rights of the Palestinians
- 2) Acceding to greater Jordanian and Palestinian involvement in the peace process
- 3) Adhering to a five-year period of transition, which would begin after free elections for a self-governing Palestinian authority
- 4) An American prohibition for the use of any additional land for the purpose of settlements during the transition period
- 5) The withdrawal provision of UNSCR 242 would apply to all fronts, including the West Bank and Gaza.
- 6) The final status of Jerusalem would be decided through negotiations.

The September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative was flatly rejected by the Government of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Begin's Cabinet Secretary Dan Meridor recalled the day he informed Prime Minister Begin about the publication of the Reagan Plan:

On 31 August 1982 I met Begin at his vacation home in Nahariya. Sam Lewis (the US Ambassador to Israel) delivered a letter from President Reagan. Begin didn't like it a bit. He cut short his vacation and called me to make a response to Reagan. It was a strong and

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<sup>717</sup> Ibid.

<sup>718</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, 343.

polite response delivered in his letter to Reagan. Begin didn't agree with the basic tenets of the Reagan plan. There was a tension but not an emotional tension.<sup>719</sup>

Begin was explicit in his disagreements with the Reagan Plan. He would later describe 31 August 1982 as "the saddest day of my life."<sup>720</sup> Begin had spent a tremendous amount of time and effort over the course of his five-year premiership negotiating and implementing the terms of the Camp David Accords in concert with the United States. From Begin's perspective, the Reagan Plan was an abrogation of the Camp David Accords whose terms he had meticulously negotiated at Camp David and was in the process of implementing. The Reagan Plan that Begin opposed differed from Camp David by specifying a role for Jordan in the peace process and clearly delineating American positions on the outstanding issues of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in direct and explicit fashion. Begin saw the Reagan Plan as rife with legal flaws. In his response to the Reagan Plan, Begin described the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative as "consisting of legal terms and conditions that were either partially quoted from Camp David, mentioned nowhere in the agreement, or contradicting it altogether."<sup>721</sup> Begin's criticisms of the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative stemmed from disagreements with the United States over the following issues:

1. The idea of East Jerusalem Palestinians voting in the West Bank-Gaza authority (as it would effectively divide Jerusalem);
2. Effective Palestinian control over both the external and internal security of the territories;
3. An unprecedented settlement freeze;
4. A new operational definition on Palestinian autonomy;
5. Linking the Palestinian territories with Jordan;

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<sup>719</sup> Meridor, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>720</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Statement by President Reagan (The Reagan Plan), 1 September 1982. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7: 1982-1984.**

<sup>721</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Cabinet Resolution on the Reagan Plan, 2 September 1982. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **8:1982-1984.**

6. Unaddressed security concerns regarding potential PLO strongholds aligned with Jordan;
7. An overall package that would lead to the creation of a Palestinian state Reagan promised Israel he would oppose.<sup>722</sup>

Begin's ideology and conservative predispositions necessitated that any Israeli government under his leadership maintain control over its own sovereign destiny in all of the territories of its historical homeland. At a time when Israel was engaged in hostilities with the PLO and Syria in Lebanon, and faced open hostility from all over the region's governments save Egypt, the Reagan Plan confirmed Begin's worst fears that Israel, surrounded by enemies, was being asked by its strongest ally to sign away its sovereignty, and the fate of Zionism, in exchange for a peace treaty rife with legal and political flaws.

However, the Reagan Plan was not uniformly rejected within the Israeli political sphere. Yossi Beilin, who served as Director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry from 1986-1988 and later as Cabinet Secretary for Shimon Peres, noted that the Reagan Administration failed to take advantage of the fact that the Israeli Labor Party supported the September 1<sup>st</sup> Initiative:

The Reagan Plan was a total failure. It didn't have any impact on reality, and there wasn't any serious American effort to convince the parties to adopt it. The fact that the Israeli Labor Party supported it, wasn't even encouraged by the administration.<sup>723</sup>

As the International Secretary of the Young Guard of The Labor Party, Beilin worked towards cultivating relationships with non-PLO Palestinian leaders (such as Faisal Husseini and Hanan Ashrawi), with hopes that these individuals could become leaders in a future Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation as initially envisioned in the Reagan Plan.<sup>724</sup> These back-channel talks

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Beilin, Y. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff. E-mail Correspondence.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid.

would grow to include King Hussein and the Jordanians as well as other indigenous Palestinian leaders in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza even while the Likud Party maintained the Israeli premiership. These clandestine meetings would continue throughout the 1980s and angered leaders of the Likud Party, whose members remained opposed to the idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation on the terms outlined in the September 1<sup>st</sup> Initiative.

Begin's views about the Reagan Plan weakening Israel were rejected by Reagan, who saw the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative as a "fresh start in the Camp David process" and the chance to ensure a "secure Israel in the future."<sup>725</sup> Even as Israel rejected the Reagan Plan, the Begin government did not cease in its efforts to negotiate peace with the United States acting as a third-party mediator. To the contrary, Israel now urged the Reagan administration to use its newfound influence in Lebanon to broker an accord between Israel and Lebanon. Israel's Ambassador to the United States Moshe Arens came to Washington on December 29, 1982 and told officials in the State Department that the Reagan Administration needed to be more involved in brokering a peace treaty between Israel and Lebanon.<sup>726</sup> Reagan's September 1<sup>st</sup> speech had discussed Lebanon as a springboard for future peace efforts. Even though the Reagan Plan served as a vehicle to facilitate broader Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, the idea of an Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty was not seen by Reagan as being incompatible with his broader regional plans. These views were reflected in Reagan's September 1<sup>st</sup> national address:

The evacuation of the PLO from Beirut is now complete. And we can now help the Lebanese to rebuild their war-torn country. We owe it to ourselves, and to posterity, to move quickly to build upon this achievement. A stable and revived Lebanon is essential

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<sup>725</sup> Reagan, R. (1982). Presidential Letter to Prime Minister Begin. M. Begin. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

<sup>726</sup> Anonymous. (1982). Wednesday December 29, 1982. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Washington, D.C., Department of State.

to all our hopes for peace in the region. The people of Lebanon deserve the best efforts of the international community to turn the nightmares of the past several years into a new dawn of hope.<sup>727</sup>

Thereafter, Lebanon became the focus of both American and Israeli efforts in the peace process. Both Begin and Sharon hoped that a treaty with Bashir Gemayel's government would bring peace with a second Arab state and secure Israel's northern border. This initiative, they hoped, would then put Israel on better strategic standing in the Middle East when it re-entered autonomy talks for the future of the West Bank and Gaza.

### **International Catalyst- The May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement Negotiations**

Shortly after Begin rejected the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative, he sent his Ambassador to the U.S., Moshe Arens, to discuss future steps in Lebanon with Secretary of State George Shultz. Arens told Shultz that the United States was insufficiently using its diplomatic leverage to pressure the Lebanese to normalize relations with Israel.<sup>728</sup> For Israel, a primary objective of the Lebanon War had been to sign a peace treaty with the Maronite Christian regime led by Bashir Gemayel. A peace treaty with Lebanon would erase threats to Israel's northern border and cement its second accord with an Arab state. With the PLO gone from Lebanon, Begin and Sharon believed there was a real chance to solidify a treaty with their northern neighbor. Subsequently, Begin exerted extreme pressure on Lebanon to sign a peace treaty with Israel in order to show that Israel had obtained an accomplishment in the war.<sup>729</sup> Subsequently, Bashir Gemayel was assassinated by a terrorist linked to the Syrian government on September 14, 1982.

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<sup>727</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Statement by President Reagan (The Reagan Plan), 1 September 1982. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7:1982-1984.**

<sup>728</sup> Anonymous. (1982). Wednesday December 29, 1982. Bureau of Near East Affairs. Washington, D.C., Department of State.

<sup>729</sup> Quandt. *Reagan's Lebanon Policy: Trial and Error*, 241.

He was replaced by his brother Amin Gemayel, who was less willing to take the political risks necessary to cement a peace treaty with Israel.

According to Robert McFarlane, “Amin Gemayel was well-intentioned but lacked the charisma and political skills of his brother Bashir to bring about peace between Israel and Lebanon.”<sup>730</sup> This inhibited his ability to unite the disparate factions that composed Lebanon’s body politic. Aside from his timidity as a leader, Amin Gemayel had two specific problems that constrained his ability to implement a peace treaty that would culminate in normalized relations with Israel. First, Israel’s political standing in Lebanon was badly damaged by the war. Upon entering southern Lebanon in June of 1982, the IDF were greeted as liberators for their willingness to take on PLO guerillas situated in southern Lebanon. Second, Syria, backed by the Soviets, Iranians, and Shiite terrorist groups (Amal and Hezbollah) remained an ever-present force in Lebanese politics that Amin Gemayel could not ignore. Gemayel had a greater incentive to consider their interests given the fact that Syrian troops remained in his country with an intention towards maintaining a permanent presence, whereas Israel was facing mounting domestic pressures to withdraw its troops from Lebanon altogether.

Nonetheless, Israel and Lebanon entered direct peace talks. Sensing the potential for a breakthrough in the peace process, the United States became directly involved in brokering an accord. George Shultz would visit the region to seal the accord. By making Israeli-Lebanese negotiations a priority, Shultz put both his own prestige and that of President Reagan on the line. By banking on the success of an Israeli-Lebanese Peace Treaty as a means to expedite broader Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, the rejectionists who sought to defeat the Reagan Plan focused their efforts on blunting American momentum by turning the Lebanon War into as costly an endeavor as was humanly possible for the Americans and Israelis.

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<sup>730</sup> McFarlane, R. (2018). US-Israel Relations Under Reagan. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.



### **International Constraint - The Soviet-Syrian-Shiite Axis in Lebanon**

The Syrians had shown their wherewithal in Lebanon by maintaining an occupying presence in the country despite incurring attacks from Israeli forces since the outset of the conflict. Syria's continued presence in Lebanon made Syrian concerns far more important to Amin Gemayel than those of Israel or the United States. Both Israel and the United States were likely perceived by Gemayel as uninterested in maintaining a continued presence in the country's sectarian politics over the long haul. The Israelis were experiencing a domestic debate over the necessity of waging a continued war in Lebanon. A major peace movement was growing inside Israel as the fighting intensified. When the initial invasion extended beyond counter-terror operations against PLO guerillas in southern Lebanon, support for the war went south. The advent of Ariel Sharon's siege on Beirut and the subsequent massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps destroyed what little goodwill Israel had earned from the Lebanese for taking out the PLO when they invaded. To cut their losses, a tactical withdrawal of Israeli troops to a 25km buffer zone (that was just big enough to prevent PLO attacks on the communities on Israel's northern border) was on the horizon. A loss of interest in maintaining a continued presence in Lebanon had the effect of bolstering the military and political position of the Syrian Army and their supporters in Moscow and Tehran.

Initially, Israel had hoped to show the United States that their fighting capabilities in Lebanon would display American military superiority over the Soviet Union. Throughout the Cold War, Israeli-Arab wars had served as a testing ground for American arms against Soviet weapons systems used by its Arab adversaries. When Israel invaded Lebanon in June of 1982, Operation Peace for Galilee became a de-facto proxy fight between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviet-backed Syrian Army and Air Force were decimated by the American-

backed Israeli Defense Forces during Operation Peace for Galilee initially. Israel touted its destruction of Assad's Soviet SS-21 anti-aircraft systems and MiG-21 fighter jets as benefitting American national interests in the Middle East.<sup>731</sup> At this time, Israel assumed that the Reagan Administration would see any Israeli strike against Syria and the PLO as beneficial to American aims in the region as both were Soviet proxies. Initially, President Reagan gave a speech that was supportive of Israeli aims in Lebanon which led the Israeli government to see its military actions in Lebanon as being justified.<sup>732</sup> After fighting had persisted for three months, Sharon felt Israel's success against PLO guerillas and its destruction of 23 Syrian MIGs and 19 Syrian SAM sites in the Bekaa Valley had proven Israel's worth as an ally capable of advancing American interests in the Middle East.<sup>733</sup> Despite early support from Reagan, Israel's subsequent gains on the battlefield in Lebanon were not seen in the same light by the Reagan Administration, who quickly began to question the heavy-handed nature of Sharon's siege on Beirut. At a National Security Council Meeting, Reagan mentioned that "images of a burned baby" had significantly impacted him.<sup>734</sup> After seeing the image, President Reagan famously told Prime Minister Begin that the fighting in Lebanon was "a holocaust" and that "the future of Israeli-American relations was threatened if the bombings did not stop."<sup>735</sup>

In a letter to President Reagan on September 5, 1982, Begin lamented the fact that Reagan did not mention Israel's help against the Soviets in his September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative national speech.<sup>736</sup> Begin's criticism of Reagan stemmed from his belief that Israeli victories against

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<sup>731</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Interview with Israeli Ambassador to the United States Moshe Arens. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7:1982-1984.**, 182.

<sup>732</sup> Meridor, D. (2017). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>733</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Excerpts from Press Conference with Defense Minister Ariel Sharon on 9 June. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **7:1982-1984.**, 30.

<sup>734</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 195.

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>736</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Letter from Prime Minister Begin to President Reagan on 5 September 1982. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **8:1982-1984.**, 186.

Soviet weapons systems should have aligned with his previous statements stressing Israel's importance as a strategic ally against the Soviets in the Middle East. Despite the IDF's tactical successes against Syrian and PLO forces in Lebanon using American arms, the Reagan Administration now saw Israel's actions in Lebanon against the PLO and Syrians as constituting a threat to regional stability. Instead of abiding by the terms of a ceasefire offered by Reagan through his emissary Phil Habib, Sharon had decided to provoke the ire of the Soviets by waging further attacks on Syrian forces in Lebanon.

Thus, the Reagan Administration came to see the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative as an opportunity to wield American influence in the US-Israel relationship to re-establish stability in the region. An American-led peace process with the regional actors on board would showcase American soft power in the region. America's ability to jump-start the peace process from the ceasefire agreement in Lebanon quickly became a barometer for America's resolve to act as a third-party mediator in the Arab-Israeli Conflict.

When the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative was published, Syria was at a point of maximum weakness because its Air Force and missile defense systems in the Bekaa Valley had been destroyed by Israeli attacks. In light of their losses, Syrian troops remained present in Lebanon where they had maintained an occupying presence since the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War. When the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative was published, Syria had been a party to ceasefire negotiations brokered by Phil Habib. It was likely assumed by the Reagan Administration that a weakened Assad would withdraw from Lebanon rather than risk the chance of further damage. With Syria out of Lebanon, Moscow and Damascus would be effectively sidelined from influencing peace talks between Israel and Lebanon that were in their formative stages. After an Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty was signed, the Reagan Administration assumed that talks between Israel and Jordan

and a Palestinian delegation would commence with the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative serving as the guiding document for the negotiations. It was even hoped that the umbrella of actors participating could be broadened. The Saudi-led Fahd Plan of 1982, issued shortly after the Reagan Plan, showed signs to the Reagan Administration that the Arab League was ready to jettison the rejectionist policies it had maintained since the Khartoum Summit of 1967 in favor of a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli Conflict.

America's grand plans for Arab-Israeli peace stemming from an Israeli-Lebanese Accord in Lebanon were complicated by the fact that the Soviet Union, who had been boxed out of the American-led peace process, decided to double down on its support for the PLO, Syria, and Shiite militant groups such as Amal and Hezbollah. After the September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative was published, the Soviets began to re-arm their Syrian allies and continued political support despite their embarrassing losses to Israeli military units. Using American weapons. For Moscow, American leadership of the Middle East peace process, made at the expense of the political interests of Moscow's clients, would undo Soviet gains made in the Middle East during the late 1970s. Increased Soviet military and political support gave Assad political cover that he could use to stay the course in Lebanon. With additional Soviet arms, all Syria had to do was weather the flurry of political pressure that came from Habib and Shultz's shuttle diplomacy in the region. This led to a hardening in Syria's position and shaped Assad's calculus when confronting the decision as to whether he should withdraw his troops from Lebanon. Reagan recognized the roadblock Syria posed in Lebanon in letter to Prime Minister Begin sent on December 12, 1982:

We have just concluded extensive discussions with President Gemayel of Lebanon and his principal associates. Our focus throughout has been to explore all possible ways to break the impasse which thus far prevented implementation of the agreement our three

governments hammered out in May. Obviously, the roadblock is Syrian unwillingness to enter serious discussions with the government of Lebanon about the withdrawal of its own forces.<sup>737</sup>

Moscow's continued intervention on behalf of its clients in Lebanon would ensure that a regime sympathetic to American and Israeli aims would cease to come into fruition in Lebanon and that the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement signed between Israel, Lebanon, and the United States would collapse. By weathering the flurry of American interest in Lebanon long enough, the Soviet Union would supplant American soft power in the Middle East, stunt the Reagan Plan, preserve the power of its primary regional ally Hafez al-Assad, and cripple a pro-western non-communist regime in Lebanon.

Soviet plans for Lebanon would benefit Moscow and Damascus concurrently. With Israeli troops in place in Lebanon, Jordan and the moderate Arabs would lose confidence in an American-led peace process as Washington's failure to hasten Israeli withdrawal from an Arab state would be glaring.<sup>738</sup> Syria would maintain its presence in Lebanon as its occupation of the country would allow Assad to influence the politics of a country that had once been identified on western maps as part of "Greater Syria". Syria's ability to torpedo a Lebanese-Israeli Peace Treaty backed by the United States would also allow Syria to maintain its status as the leader of the rejectionist bloc of the Arab world and solidify its position as the Arab state most capable of thwarting Israel's hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East.

To accomplish their shared objectives in Lebanon, the Soviets and Syrians would enlist the support of Shiite terror organizations backed by Iran. They were used as proxies to directly fight the United States, Israel, and the Multi-National Force stationed in Lebanon. By supporting

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<sup>737</sup> Reagan, R. (1983). Message from President Reagan to Prime Minister Begin on December 12, 1983. M. Begin. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

<sup>738</sup> Quandt, *Reagan's Lebanon Policy: Trial and Error*, 242.

terror attacks and low-intensity warfare, the Soviets and Syrians hoped that they could ensure the failure of an impending Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty and Reagan's September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative. The Soviet Union and their allies would work towards the goal of making American and Israeli intervention in Lebanon as costly as possible. This was done by supporting and hastening acts of terrorism against American diplomatic and military facilities as well as those of the Multi-National Forces in Beirut. Repeated calls by radical Shiite clerics in Tehran to wage jihad against the United States, Israel, and the Gemayel regime in Lebanon bore fruit as Hezbollah would carry out a myriad of terrorist attacks against western interests in Lebanon. In 1983, the U.S. Marine Barracks in Beirut as well as the American embassy were bombed by terrorists linked to Hezbollah. The attack on the U.S. Embassy killed Reagan's top Middle East advisor CIA agent Robert Ames. The subsequent attack on the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut killed 241 Marines. The Marine Barracks bombing was the single largest single massacre of U.S. soldiers abroad in decades. These actions

led the Reagan Administration to reconsider its commitment to Lebanon. An intense debate within the administration emerged between McFarlane, Shultz and Weinberger over the role of US troops in the country. Weinberger sought to decrease America's military footprint in Lebanon and McFarlane and Shultz were opposed to his stance.<sup>739</sup> During this time, the United States became

actively engaged in hostilities with Syrian troops in Lebanon and even urged Israeli forces to reconsider their decision to withdraw their forces from the Beirut area so that the United States could cooperate with the IDF in an effort to push the Syrians out of Lebanon. This stance, which was advocated by Shultz and McFarlane, would fail to come to fruition:

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<sup>739</sup> McFarlane, R. (2018). US-Israel Relations Under Reagan. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

He (Weinberger) convinced Reagan to withdraw from Lebanon during a midnight call to the White House the night before American Marines disembarked from Lebanon. Weinberger did this before I could reach the president to voice my opposition to Weinberger's preferred strategy.<sup>740</sup>

American Marines were no longer situated on the ground in Lebanon after the Multi-National Force (made up of American, French, and Italian peacekeepers) disembarked off-shore. This gave the Syrian Army a tactical advantage on the ground. After weathering a barrage of American artillery, and receiving additional arms from the Soviet Union, the Syrians reneged on their promise to withdraw from the country.

### **International Constraint – The Failure of the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement**

On May 17, 1983, the Israeli-Lebanese Peace Treaty was signed. In a letter to American Ambassador Maurice Draper, Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs David Kimche called on the United States to ensure the withdrawal of all PLO and Syrian forces from Lebanon.<sup>741</sup> The inability of the United States to bolster the weak leadership of Lebanese Prime Minister Amin Gemayel and remove the presence of the Syrian troops in the country prevented the implementation of the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement. Shortly after the agreement was signed, Amin Gemayel met with Hafez al-Assad and established a renewed dialogue with Syria. On March 5, 1984, under intense pressure from Syria, Lebanon formally abrogated the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement and nullified what was then Israel's second peace treaty with an Arab state. This event ensured that Israel and Lebanon would remain adversaries as Israeli troops settled into a defensive a 25km "security zone" in southern Lebanon as opposed to withdrawing from the country entirely as initially envisioned in the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement.

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<sup>740</sup> Ibid.

<sup>741</sup> Kimche, D. (1983). Letter to Ambassador Draper on the Implementation of the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel. Israel State Archives.

The failure of the May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement dealt a significant blow to the influence of American soft power in the Middle East peace process. It also threw a wrench into plans to commence Israeli-Arab peace negotiations on the terms identified in the Reagan Plan. Instead of a “fresh start” culminating a new round of peace talks, the United States found itself extricating itself from the Middle East rather than diving back into the peace process, as Reagan and Shultz had initially envisioned. In an interview with the *Washington Post* on December 2, 1983, King Hussein reflected the dominant Arab view of America’s diplomatic efforts in Lebanon when he urged the United States to ensure Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon so that the Arab states could feel confident that the Reagan Administration could be trusted to deliver future Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.<sup>742</sup>

The May 17<sup>th</sup> Agreement notwithstanding, the abrogation of the accord did not mark the formal end of the Reagan Plan even though the experience in Lebanon blunted the momentum that Shultz believed could propel Arab-Israeli negotiations to negotiate the fate of the occupied Palestinian territories moving forward. For the Reagan Administration, the events in Lebanon turned the Middle East peace process from a top-tier concern of the United States to a lower-level priority in the context of Reagan’s broader foreign policy agenda. After the Lebanon experience, the United States would conduct Arab-Israeli negotiations via “quiet diplomacy” rather than through bold initiatives that put the prestige of President Reagan directly on the line.

### **International Constraint - The Arafat-Hussein Discord Prevents Negotiations**

Yasser Arafat and King Hussein had a long history of animosity towards each other that posed a near insurmountable roadblock to reconciliation talks between Jordan and the PLO in order to commence negotiations on the parameters of the Reagan Plan. With different

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<sup>742</sup> Walsh, E. (1983). Israel Accord Hurts U.S. Hussein Says. *The Washington Post*. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company:2.



constituencies and great power supporters, it was only natural that the two leaders who claimed the same territories would become rivals for power, prestige, and influence in the peace process. Arafat had long sought to cement his presence as the Arab ruler of the Palestinian population in Jordan and the West Bank. Arafat was uniquely positioned to accomplish this goal, as over 50% of Jordan's population were Palestinians. Prior to 1970, Arafat pursued this goal from inside the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, where he operated a PLO "state-within-a-state" with guerilla units loyal to his command recruited from the native Palestinian population. Numerous attempts were made on King Hussein's life by Arafat as he sought to usurp his rule. The Dawson Field Hijackings during "Black September" of 1970 led Hussein to unleash his security services on the PLO and their Palestinian sympathizers in Jordan. Subsequently, Arafat and his PLO guerillas were expelled from Jordan.

Arafat and Hussein also had different loyalties in the Cold War. Arafat was supported by the Soviet Union and received both arms and political training from Moscow. Many of the PLO's leaders were educated in Moscow and adhered to the Kremlin's Marxist-Leninist ideals and anti-American sentiments. For Moscow, the PLO was the quintessential left-wing national liberation movement capable of committing spectacular terrorist attacks and fomenting domestic unrest from inside the borders of American allies in Europe and the Middle East. The PLO was routinely pressured by the Soviet Union to adopt rejectionist policies in the American-led peace process, whether through armed conflict or diplomatic initiatives that undermined America's regional aims. Arafat would come under constant pressure from his Soviet supporters to shy away from the negotiations he had nominally committed the PLO to commence with Hussein in 1983.

Unlike Arafat, King Hussein had sided with the United States in the Cold War. The Hashemite Dynasty was installed as the rulers of Transjordan by Great Britain after World War I. As a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, Hussein held the titular title as guardian-representative of the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The Temple Mount was of significant personal importance to Hussein. His grandfather was buried on the site and his father was assassinated on it in 1951. In the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, Hussein captured Jerusalem and occupied the West Bank in what became a major accomplishment for the Hashemite leader. Hussein then signed an armistice with Israel and gradually eased towards consolidating his power on both the East and West Banks. To his chagrin, Hussein lost sovereignty over the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem in June of 1967 when his forces were expelled from the Old City of Jerusalem during the Six Day War. Hussein's loss of Jerusalem would become a sore subject for the king in future years and he would never again touch foot in Jerusalem during his lifetime.<sup>743</sup> It would become a personal mission for Hussein to regain control over the West Bank and Jerusalem. After failing to achieve his territorial aspirations through military means, Hussein began covert talks with the Israelis. These covert talks continued throughout the 1970s even though Hussein had formally opposed the Camp David Accords and did not recognize Israel.

Hussein was called to formally join the peace process when Reagan published his September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative. However, Arafat was left out in the cold even as the Palestinian cause shot back to the top of the world's political agenda after the PLO's evacuation from Beirut. Despite the PLO's retreat from Lebanon, Arafat and his closest supporters in the PLO proved their diplomatic mettle by negotiating the terms of their withdrawal under international auspices. The Lebanon War solidified the standing of the PLO in the Arab world even as its militia units were decimated. This was confirmed at the 1982 Fez Summit when the PLO maintained its status

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<sup>743</sup> Veliotis, N.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

as the legitimate representative body of the Palestinian national movement in the Arab world. Since the 1974 Rabat conference of the Arab League, the PLO had been designated as the legitimate political representative body of the Palestinian national movement. With his position bolstered by the Arab League, Arafat became a political actor that Hussein could not ignore in future talks mediated by the United States, without antagonizing his Arab brethren (something Hussein was unwilling to do). Even in exile, Arafat remained a political threat to Hussein due to his popularity among Palestinians in Jordan and the West Bank. This, coupled with the fact that Hussein felt vulnerable from a security standpoint in 1982, made it impossible for Hussein to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinian cause without Arafat's assent even though both the United States and Israel wanted Hussein to block Arafat out of peace talks altogether.<sup>744</sup>

The PLO was a toxic entity in the United States. Reagan believed that the PLO was “nothing but an international terrorist organization working under the guise of representing the Palestinian people.”<sup>745</sup> The PLO had carried out spectacular terrorist attacks on multiple occasions throughout the 1970s and 1980s. PLO operatives were even linked to the assassination of American diplomat Cleo Noel Jr. in 1973.<sup>746</sup> Arafat and the PLO saw terrorism as a legitimate means of resistance to Israeli occupation. This position prevented Arafat from entering formal talks with American diplomats, as the United States stipulated that PLO participation in the American-led peace process was premised on a public declaration from the organization renouncing terrorism, recognizing Israel, and supporting UNSCRs 242 and 338. For Arafat, these preconditions were non-starters when the Reagan Plan was announced. UNSCR 242 and 338

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<sup>744</sup> Hussein would make numerous requests to the Reagan Administration for arms. However, his requests were bottled up by congress who made military aid contingent on recognizing Israel's right to exist.

<sup>745</sup> American Israel Public Affairs Committee. (1985). Memorandum: The Reagan Administration and the PLO. Simi Valley, CA, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Israel Folder. Box 19, PLO 2, PLO 2(1), 41

<sup>746</sup> Livingstone, N.C. and T.E. Arnold (1985). U.S. Law Can Prosecute Terrorists and Squelch Terrorism. Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles, CA, Ross Levinsohn., 1-2.

failed to promise an independent state to the Palestinians. Terrorism was seen by Arafat as a legitimate response to Israeli occupation and a means to achieve statehood for his people. However, if Arafat wanted to gain international legitimacy for the PLO, he would have to find a way to become part of the American-led peace process. Otherwise, Arafat would be sidelined by the United States and left with no other option than to latch onto King Hussein's coattails as the junior partner in a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation. Since Arafat lay exiled in Tunis, he ran the risk of losing his political influence over Palestinian affairs in the West Bank and Gaza. These circumstances prevented Arafat from rejecting reconciliation talks with Hussein out of hand.

Reagan promised during the 1980 presidential campaign that he would "brand the PLO as a terrorist organization unfit to take part in the peace process."<sup>747</sup> However, multiple actors within the Reagan Administration pursued disparate approaches to dealing with the PLO between 1981 and 1982. Reagan's UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick took the harshest stance against enabling the PLO diplomatically. Kirkpatrick vigorously opposed the PLO's efforts to turn UN bodies into a second front in the Arab-Israeli Conflict.

I believed the treatment of Israel in the UN was in special need of greater public airing. In 1981 the way had been prepared for denying Israel participation in UN bodies much as South Africa had been denied participation in 1974. There was very little public understanding of the campaign of delegitimization that had already led to Israel's being declared an "international outlaw" and "not a peace-loving state."<sup>748</sup>

Kirkpatrick sought to actualize Reagan's anti-PLO positions by incrementally decreasing the size and scope of anti-Israel resolutions in the General Assembly and Security Council.

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<sup>747</sup> Haig, A. (1980). Reagan-Bush Presidential Campaign: Tenets of Middle East Policy. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress. **Personal Papers.**, 10.

<sup>748</sup> Kirkpatrick, J.J. (1988). Legitimacy and Force. New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books, ©1998., xxii.

While Kirkpatrick was actively involved fighting the PLO at the UN, back channel talks with the PLO took place directly through the CIA and through non-PLO Palestinian intermediaries closely affiliated with members of the PLO. These back-channel efforts were initiated to see if Arafat could be brought out from the Arab rejectionist camp and into reconciliation talks with Jordan.

As the Arab leader with the most influence and leverage over Arafat, King Hussein became the interlocutor the United States tasked with moderating Arafat and the PLO. Since the PLO had the backing of the Arab League as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians, Hussein and Arafat were forced into negotiations over the Reagan Plan. Hussein would not proceed to negotiate on the terms of the Reagan Plan without Arab League backing. Arafat could not proceed into negotiations without support from Hussein due to his pariah status in the United States. Thereafter, a joint Jordanian-PLO accord became a top-priority for negotiations to commence on the terms identified in the Reagan Plan.

The Reagan Plan did not offer Arafat and Hussein a great degree of leeway in their negotiations, as the plan explicitly prohibited the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state. The very nature of the Reagan Plan put Hussein and Arafat on a collision course as it neither promised the Palestinians the state they wanted<sup>749</sup> nor afforded Jordan permanent control over the lands it lost to Israel during the Six Day War that Hussein had sought to reclaim since they were lost. The September 1<sup>st</sup> initiative stated that:

Peace cannot be achieved by the formation of an independent Palestinian state in those territories. Nor is it achievable on the basis of Israeli sovereignty or permanent control over the West Bank and Gaza. It is the view of the United States that self-government by

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<sup>749</sup> Ottoway, D.B. (1982). PLO, Jordanian Officials: Plan has Positive Points. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company:1., A20.

the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan offers the best chance for a durable, just and lasting peace.<sup>750</sup>

Under parameters that were to create a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation, Hussein entered into talks to broker an accord with Arafat in order to create a joint front for negotiations with Israel and the United States. Unlike the Camp David Accords, Jordan did not reject Reagan's September 1<sup>st</sup> Initiative outright. On February 22, 1983, the Palestinian National Council endorsed a series of resolutions on the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The PLO issued a mixed response to the Reagan Plan. On one hand, the PNC resolution on Jordanian relations endorsed the idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation. On the other, its resolution on the Reagan Plan rejected the terms of the document wholeheartedly:

The Reagan plan, in form and content, does not fulfill the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people because it denies the right of return, self-determination, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and it contradicts international law. For these reasons, the PNC declares its refusal to consider the plan as a proper basis for a lasting and just solution to the Palestinian cause and the Zionist-Arab conflict.<sup>751</sup>

At this time, the PLO was not in a strong position to negotiate with Hussein as Arafat lay in exile. On December 14, 1982, Arafat and Hussein had signed a Communique stressing their commitment to reconciliation talks on the terms outlined in the Fez Summit resolutions.<sup>752</sup> This allowed Arafat and Hussein to keep dialogue open and for reconciliation talks to continue even though there was a healthy degree of skepticism prevalent among Palestinians about the Reagan

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<sup>750</sup> Medzini, M. (1982). Statement by President Reagan on the Reagan Peace Plan. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **8:1982-1984.**, 173.

<sup>751</sup> Palestinian National Council. (1983). Political Statement on 22 February. PLO Headquarters Tunis.

<sup>752</sup> The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. (1982). Joint Jordanian-Palestinian Political Committee Communique on 14 December 1982. Amman, Jordan.

Plan. Many Palestinians did not trust American foreign policy aims in the Middle East and saw the American peace initiative as a ploy to weaken the PLO.<sup>753</sup> The militant wing of the PLO, the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, rejected the plan outright.<sup>754</sup> These threats from radicals within the PLO had the effect of making Arafat unwilling to make the concessions necessary to be given status as a formal actor in peace talks with the United States under the Reagan Plan.

### **International Constraint - The Failure of the Arafat-Hussein Reconciliation Efforts**

On April 10, 1983, King Hussein expressed his willingness to negotiate with the PLO to establish a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation. However, he expressed remorse about failing to come to an agreement with Arafat to move forward in the peace process at that time. Hussein expressed his willingness to move forward in negotiations on the terms outlined in the Reagan Plan and stressed his initial positive disposition towards the initiative:

Jordan as well as other Arab and friendly countries, found that the Reagan Plan lacked some of the principles of the Fez peace plan but at the same time, it contained a number of positive elements. Given the realities of the international situation, on the other hand, the Arab peace plan lacked the mechanism that would enable it to make effective progress. The Reagan peace plan presented the vehicle that could propel the Fez peace plan forward, and Jordan proceeded to explore this possibility.<sup>755</sup>

A failure to forge a joint agreement to negotiate on the Reagan Plan did not stop Hussein from pushing continuing his negotiations with Arafat.

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<sup>753</sup> Nuseibeh, S. (1982). Palestinian Hope and Caution. New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company:1.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

<sup>755</sup> Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. (1983). Jordanian Statement on the End of Negotiations with the PLO, 10 April 1983. Amman, Jordan.

To buttress his political position at home and abroad, Hussein would move to shore up economic and political support from the United States and widen the circle of peace players in the Arab world. In the economic sphere, Jordan sought to revitalize the moribund West Bank economy by creating an economic development program with tacit Israeli and American support.<sup>756</sup> American officials and their Israeli and Jordanian counterparts would seek to improve the “quality of life” for the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza to further the peace process.<sup>757</sup> Without better economic conditions in the West Bank, a future Palestinian confederal arrangement with Jordan would become an economic and political liability for both nations as Palestinian suffering would undoubtedly beget violence and undermine the peace process. These efforts were widely supported by the American Jewish community and Secretary of State Shultz and led to a series of secret meetings between Israeli leaders and their counterparts in Jordan, Morocco, and Qatar.<sup>758</sup>

In the political sphere, Hussein would also seek to expand his circle of allies. He resumed covert talks with Shimon Peres and the Labor Party that had started in the 1970s, although he refrained from publicly embracing Peres due to Israel’s unpopularity in the Arab world. Shamir was opposed to negotiations on the terms of the Reagan Plan. As a result of his stances on the outstanding issues in the peace process, Peres was to become the sole Israeli interlocutor that Hussein would negotiate with. An open-channel with Israel would allow Hussein to soften efforts by Israel and its allies in Congress who sought to make American military support contingent on a statement of non-belligerence from the Jordanian government.<sup>759</sup>

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<sup>756</sup> Green, G.S. (1987). Draft NSSD/NSDD on the Middle East Peace Process. National Security Council. Washington, D.C., 5-6.

<sup>757</sup> Shultz, G.P. (1986). Memo for the Vice President: Your visit to Israel, Jordan, and Egypt from July 25<sup>th</sup> to August 25<sup>th</sup>. Office of the Secretary of State. Washington, D.C. Department of State.

<sup>758</sup> Murphy, R.W. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>759</sup> Medzini, M. (1985). Statement by Israeli Prime Minister Peres on Negotiations with Jordan. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **9-10: 1984-1988.**, 206-212.



To express his interest in furthering the circle of peace actors in the Arab world, On September 25, 1984, Hussein reconciled with Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak, who had been disavowed by Hussein after Sadat signed the Camp David Accords and made peace with Israel. Hussein also sought out support from moderate Arab leaders and non-PLO Palestinian leaders in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. Their collective support was a necessity for Hussein because he remained under intense pressure on multiple fronts. Syria remained a strategic adversary of Jordan, the Iran-Iraq War had destabilized his northwestern border, the PLO remained a direct competitor in the West Bank, and the loss of the Shah in Iran had significantly altered his economic and military position in the Persian Gulf. Complicating matters for Hussein was his discouragement with the Reagan Administration's foreign policy in the Middle East, which he perceived as being overly pro-Israel.<sup>760</sup> Hussein believed that an "Israel lobby" controlled American foreign policy and adversely impacted his kingdom's interests in the United States.<sup>761</sup> He lashed out at Reagan for failing to rein in Israeli settlement building activity and his negotiating strategy vis-à-vis the PLO.<sup>762</sup> Hussein appeared to the Americans to be overly cautious in starting peace talks and prone to making excuses not to negotiate directly with the Israelis.<sup>763</sup> This led Reagan to pursue a more caustic approach to his involvement in peace talks. He would only get involved if both the Israelis and Arabs became serious about starting direct negotiations.

If Hussein was to achieve his dream of retaining his dominance in the territories he lost to Israel during the Six Day War, and to receive the American military and economic aid he

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<sup>760</sup> Walsh, E. (1983). Israel Accord Hurts U.S. Hussein Says. The Washington Post. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company:2.

<sup>761</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. (1983). JLP and Eagleburger Talks in Israel. American Embassy in Amman, Jordan. Langley, VA:3, 2.

<sup>762</sup> Miller, J. (1984). King Hussein's Delicate Balance. New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid.

desperately needed, he would need to show the United States that he was willing to negotiate peace with Israel. Seriously engaging in negotiations with Israel would end staunch opposition to arms agreements with Jordan that had gained steam in Washington. Hussein had shown his willingness to work behind the scenes to build closer relations with Israel, as his economic fate was inextricably linked to Israel's. With administrative and legal connections to the West Bank, Jordan was directly impacted by upticks of violence in the occupied territories that disrupted commerce. Hussein's efforts to bridge the gap behind the scenes was mentioned by Shimon Peres in an interview he held with *Maariv* on September 26, 1984:

My informal contacts with Hussein have borne fruit perhaps less dramatic, but no less important. In actuality, we have peaceful or at least calm relations with him. There is no border trespassing. The Jordanians don't allow infiltrators into Israel, the bridges are open, there are local water and transportation arrangements which work quite well. When we signed the peace agreement with Egypt, we said: The main thing is normalization. We have a certain level of normalization with Jordan; now it must be formalized, signed.<sup>764</sup>

To achieve American support, and Israeli concessions he desired, Hussein would also need to show an ability to deliver the Palestinians to the negotiating table so that he could pacify the rejectionists in the Arab world who opposed any peace process which excluded the PLO. Thereafter, it became a strategic priority for Hussein to bring Arafat to the negotiating table. To do this, he would need to negotiate terms of cooperation with the exiled Palestinian leader that moderated his rejectionist positions that were unacceptable to both Israel and the United States. If Hussein could reconcile his differences with Arafat, he would develop the political capital

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<sup>764</sup> Medzini, M. (1984). Excerpts from an Interview with Prime Minister Peres in *Maariv* on 26 September 1984. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, Israel, Israel State Archives. **9-10: 1984-1988.**

both in his own kingdom, and throughout the broader Arab world, to carry out negotiations with Israel under the auspices of American mediation.

On February 11, 1985, Arafat and Hussein signed an Accord to move forward on negotiations to create a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation. However, this short-lived rapprochement would end on February 22, 1986 after the two leaders failed to come to an agreement over the governance structure of a future Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation. Arafat saw no interest in being a permanent junior partner to Hussein. Hussein also saw no interest in voluntarily handing political power to his long-time rival who had plotted an assassination attempt against him less than two decades before. Yossi Beilin recalled the events that prompted the failure of the rapprochement between Hussein and Arafat:

Between March 1985 and March 1986 Hussein and Arafat negotiated intensively over the creation of a confederal arrangement between Jordan and a future Palestinian state. Later on, he (Arafat) told me that he asked King Hussein for an independent Palestinian state for five minutes, before the creation of the confederation. The King refused. The King told me that Arafat demanded a rotation in the leadership of the Confederation, and that he couldn't agree to it.<sup>765</sup>

In the wake of the failure of the accord, Hussein would go on to negotiate with the Israelis without Arafat in direct negotiations. Hussein had avoided taking this path throughout the first six years of the Reagan Administration. Hussein would meet Peres in London in 1987 to discuss terms to end the Arab-Israeli Conflict on UNSCRs 242 and 338. An agreement was reached between Hussein and Peres (then serving as Foreign Minister in Israel's national-unity

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<sup>765</sup> Beilin, Y. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff. E-mail Correspondence.

government), wherein an international conference would be convened as cover for direct negotiations between Jordan and Israel.

### **Domestic Constraint – The Failure of the London Agreement**

Foreign Minister Peres and his deputy Yossi Beilin then flew directly to Helsinki to meet with Secretary of State George Shultz and to inform him of the accord after it was signed in London. Peres then asked Shultz to put the London Agreement forward as an American sponsored initiative. Hussein agreed with this position and promised both parties that he would accept the London Agreement and proceed to negotiations with Israel. However, Shultz was hesitant to move forward, as Peres was not negotiating as Israel's Prime Minister. Israel's Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, was vehemently opposed to the arrangement, as were all members of the Likud Party in his cabinet. They were skeptical of an international conference. The Likud Party saw an international conference as a trap that would ensure that Israel would be cornered by the Soviets and Arabs to make concessions against its own interests. If Shultz were to put forward the London Agreement, and side with Peres, he would have waded into Israeli domestic politics to support a policy opposed by the ruling Prime Minister and his party. Shultz avoided putting forth the agreement as an American initiative. This political roadblock ensured that Peres could not bring the London Agreement to a vote before the cabinet in order sway its members to overrule Prime Minister Shamir's opposition to the accord.

### **Policy Outcome – Jordanian Disengagement from the West Bank**

Without American backing, the London Agreement died. Direct negotiations between Israel and Jordan, on the terms envisioned in the Reagan Plan, would fail to come to fruition by the time the Reagan Administration ended in January of 1989. Hussein soured on Peres as a future interlocutor, as he realized that he was brought into negotiations with an Israeli leader that

could not deliver his own country to the bargaining table.<sup>766</sup> Hussein then made a stunning decision that neutralized the notion that a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation could become a reality. He jettisoned his historical claims over the West Bank and withdrew his future claims over the territory. After pursuing a consistent policy since 1967 to reclaim his lands and influence in the West Bank, Hussein was deeply impacted by the events of the First Intifada because of the harsh criticism he received from local Palestinian leaders. For Hussein, approbation from the Palestinians living in the West Bank constituted a major breach of trust and was “a horrible sign of ingratitude” for the programs and policies he put in place to help the Palestinians during his reign.<sup>767</sup> This decision surprised Israeli diplomats who did not see it coming after years of maintaining direct communication with Hussein in peace negotiations.<sup>768</sup>

Shortly after Hussein renounced his claims to the West Bank, the United States recognized that the PLO had to be negotiated with directly rather than through intermediaries and CIA operatives. Arafat’s position was strengthened when Hussein relinquished his claim to the West Bank. The Reagan Administration then gave Arafat an ultimatum. If he formally declared that he supported Israel’s right to exist, and support for UNSCRs 242 and 338, the United States would recognize the PLO. President Reagan formally made the decision to recognize the PLO in his waning days in office. The decision was in many ways a contradiction of his previous stances on the Arab-Israeli Conflict. At first, Reagan saw no place for Arafat and the PLO in the peace process and actively tried to bolster Hussein and local leaders in the West Bank as his Arab interlocutors. He distrusted Arafat and his intentions.

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<sup>766</sup> Ashton, N.J. (2008). *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, ©2008., 248.

<sup>767</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace*, 250.

<sup>768</sup> Beilin, Y. (2018). US-Israel Relations during the Reagan Administration. *University of Georgia*. L. Lukoff. E-mail Correspondence.

During this time, Reagan ignored Israeli entreaties to reconsider his position. The Israelis believed that Arafat had not actually changed his beliefs about recognizing Israel and that he did not actually forswear terrorism in practice.<sup>769</sup> Throughout the 1980s, Reagan had incrementally changed his views about the Palestinians and the necessity of engaging the PLO as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people. Prior to his presidency, Reagan's stated policy positions questioned the mere existence of a Palestinian people and the idea that they were deserving of self-governance.<sup>770</sup> With the publication of the Reagan Plan, Reagan continued the Camp David process and immersed himself in the same Middle East peace process that he had criticized Carter for doggedly pursuing. After failing to gain political support for the Reagan Plan from both the Israelis and the Arabs, Reagan sought a more direct approach to dealing with the problem by opening diplomatic talks with the PLO in Tunisia under the aegis of Richard W. Murphy in the waning months of his presidency.<sup>771</sup>

Despite his recognition of the PLO, Reagan was still perceived by Israel as a trusted friend and a dependable ally. He earned the trust of Prime Minister Shamir, who described his actions in the following manner in his memoirs:

Almost all the Presidents of the contemporary United States have backed, advised and assisted Israel, but none more than Reagan. Of his eight years in the White House, I was Israel's Foreign Minister for three and a half and Prime Minister for nearly four, so I feel competent to testify to his significant contribution to the deepening and expanding of the bonds between Israel and the United States.<sup>772</sup>

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<sup>769</sup> Meridor, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L.Lukoff

<sup>770</sup> Reagan et al., *Reagan In His Own Hand*, 215-218.

<sup>771</sup> Murphy, R.W. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>772</sup> Shamir, I. (1994). *Summing Up: An Autobiography*, Boston: Little, Brown, ©1994. 1<sup>st</sup> American ed., 117.

The actions that Reagan did not take in the peace process may have played a role in their overall belief that he was strongly in Israel's corner. Reagan explicitly stated and held true to the position that he did not believe in an independent Palestinian state. After the Lebanon War, his criticisms of Israeli policies were muted and took place largely behind closed doors outside of the public limelight. He saw Arab intransigence as a key obstacle to the actualization of the Reagan Plan and, as a result, became preoccupied with a range of foreign and domestic policy initiatives in other areas while delegating tasks in the Arab-Israeli arena to Secretary of State Shultz and his deputy Richard W. Murphy. Sallai Meridor observed that the Israelis believed that Reagan's recognition of the PLO recognition was a political favor done for newly elected president George H.W. Bush and his future Secretary of State James Baker.<sup>773</sup> The incoming Bush Administration saw the merits of implementing an approach in the peace process that differed from Reagan's pro-Israel policy stances. Bush sought to be more balanced, and attuned to the interests of the Arabs, than President Reagan had been.<sup>774</sup>

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<sup>773</sup> Meridor, S. (2017). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L.Lukoff

<sup>774</sup> Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S. -Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama*, 217-218.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **US-Israeli Trade Relations Under the Reagan Administration**

#### **Introduction**

Today, Israel is a member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and has the world's 37<sup>th</sup> largest economy. However, in the early 1980s Israel was a country suffering from record levels of hyper-inflation and teetering on the brink of economic collapse. Since the Reagan Administration considered Israel to be a strategic partner in the Middle East, efforts to keep the Israeli economy afloat became a de-facto priority for American policymakers. As Israel's economy sputtered, the United States urged Israel to reform its economic and fiscal policies to stave off hyper-inflation. American pressures hastened significant domestic reforms in the Israeli economy. Israel's National-Unity government subsequently passed an economic stabilization program. Shortly thereafter, the United States inked its first ever free trade agreement with Israel on April 19, 1985. The signing of the US-Israel Free Trade Area Agreement of 1985 (FTA) was a key political event in the history of US-Israel relations. This chapter will examine the driving forces that led to the implementation of the FTA, the economic utility of the agreement for Israel, and the impact the FTA had on US-Israeli economic relations.

I will describe the Reagan Administration's approach to Israeli trade relations in three parts. First, I explore the origins of the US-Israel Free Trade Area and the political circumstances that predated its passage. Second, I explain how Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs



led him to pursue free trade policies for which no previous American president had publicly advocated. Third, I describe the role of the two constraints and how they shaped the legislative process that culminated in the FTA's passage. Fourth, I will describe the policy outcomes that materialized in the US-Israeli trade relationship during the Reagan Administration.

### **The Origins of the US-Israel Free Trade Agreement prior to Reagan**

Previous studies examining the political motivations of President Reagan in signing the FTA have focused on two major explanations. The first school of thinking argues that domestic political and policy considerations were at the root cause of Reagan's decision to sign a free trade agreement with Israel. These studies have focused on voting considerations and domestic budgetary concerns as primary factors behind the pursuit of a trade deal with Israel. The second school of thinking focuses more on international policy considerations and the trajectory of the Reagan Administration's foreign policy on trade related issues. Scholars arguing in favor of this approach look at the Reagan Administration's issue stances on trade policy in general, and its approach to dealing with America's obligations as a signatory to the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs in particular.

Scholars that argue that domestic political considerations were the causal mechanism that led the US to sign the FTA with Israel, such as Franks<sup>775</sup>, Cooper<sup>776</sup>, and Baranes<sup>777</sup>, state that the Reagan Administration was drawn into supporting the FTA because it sought a closer bilateral relationship with Israel in order to assuage the concerns of American Jewish voters. This argument came about after polls showed that President Reagan's support from American

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<sup>775</sup> Franks, D. (1985). "U.S.-Israeli Free Trade Agreement: Aid to Israel Takes New Form." Journal of Palestine Studies (3): 190.

<sup>776</sup> Cooper, R. N. (1989). "An Appraisal of Trade Policy during the Reagan Administration." Harvard International Review (3): 90.

<sup>777</sup> Baranes, Y. (1997). "The motivations and the models: a comparison of the Israel-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement." New York Law School Journal of International and Comparative Law (1): 145.

Jews at the ballot box dipped from a high watermark of 39% (more than any previous GOP candidate) in the 1981 presidential election, to 31% in the 1984 campaign.<sup>778</sup> However, this explanation negates the fact that the free-trade agreement was signed after Reagan was no longer beholden to voters as he was constitutionally ineligible to run for a third term. Thus, it is unlikely that Reagan would have signed a free trade agreement for purely political reasons after he no longer had a need to pursue votes in the American Jewish community.

Citing domestic policy concerns, Ira Nikelsberg argues that the United States was seeking to wean Israel from dependence on foreign aid in favor of an economy premised on trade.<sup>779</sup> This argument is supported by the Reagan Administration's legislative agenda that favored cutting economic aid to Israel in 1982 and his proposed budget for FY 1984 that was \$125 million below the economic aid levels later authorized by congress. Even after additional economic aid was added by congress in FY 1984, trade deal negotiations that had started in 1983 continued unabated. Furthermore, economic aid to Israel was higher at the end of the Reagan Administration in 1989 than it was in 1984 by \$450 million dollars.<sup>780</sup> These factors make it unlikely that domestic policy funding concerns were the primary reason for negotiating the FTA.

Those scholars that argue in favor of international policy concerns (Weinraub<sup>781</sup>; Aminoff<sup>782</sup>; Anonymous<sup>783</sup>). state that the Reagan Administration was testing the waters in

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<sup>778</sup> Bard, M.G. (2018). "U.S. Presidential Elections: Jewish Voting Record (1916-Present)." The Jewish Virtual Library. from <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/jewvote.html>

<sup>779</sup> Nikelsberg, I. (1990). "Ability to Use Israel's Preferential Trade Status with Both the United States and the European Community to Overcome Potential Trade Barriers." George Washington Journal of International Law and Economics **24**(2): 371-414.

<sup>780</sup> Bard, M.G. (2018). "US Aid to Israel." The Jewish Virtual Library. from [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/U.S.\\_Assistance\\_to\\_Israel1.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/U.S._Assistance_to_Israel1.html)

<sup>781</sup> Weinraub, B. (1985). A U.S.-Israel Free Trade Area. Challenge Magazine. Philadelphia, PA, Taylor & Francis, Inc.: 4.

<sup>782</sup> Aminoff, N. A. (1991). The United States-Israel Free Trade Area Agreement of 1985: in theory and practice, Aspen Publishers, Inc.: 5.

<sup>783</sup> Anonymous (1986). Israel Free Trade Pact. CQ Almanac 1985. Washington, D.C., United States, Congressional Quarterly. **41**., 260.

Washington with a non-controversial trade deal that had little impact on American manufacturing in order to pursue bilateral trade initiatives that ran contrary to the Most Favored Nation (MFN) principle of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) with other nations. Clyde H. Farnsworth suggests that the United States was interested in a bilateral accord with Canada and that the Reagan Administration was simultaneously testing the waters in Congress to see if there was an appetite for such an agreement.<sup>784</sup> However, Israel had approached the United States as early as 1981 to gauge the administration's interest in a free trade agreement.<sup>785</sup> Therefore, it's unlikely that the Canadian deal was the sole motivating factor behind the signing of the agreement with Israel. Orit Frenkel argues that the FTA was seen by the United States Trade Representative William Brock as a way to push countries towards a new round of multilateral trade discussions in the wake of the failed GATT Ministerial.<sup>786</sup> In support of his position, he cites evidence that shows that the U.S.-Israel FTA was of markedly little importance to the economic interests of the United States as Israeli exports entering the United States accounted for only 0.5% of total U.S. imports (of which 93% were already coming into the United States duty-free).<sup>787</sup> This argument is refuted by Ira Nikelsberg, who argues that the United States signed the deal because it was interested in making American goods competitive with European goods that were coming into Israel duty free-under a free trade agreement Israel signed with the European Community (EC) in 1975.<sup>788</sup> This argument seems unlikely as at the time of the signing of the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement, Israel was still a developing country with a GNI per capita of \$5,890 per year according to the World Bank Country Indicators

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<sup>784</sup> Farnsworth, C. (1984). Washington Watch: US-Israeli Trade Issue. The New York Times. New York, NY, The New York Times Company.

<sup>785</sup> Frenkel, O. (1988). Constraints and Compromises: Trade Policy in a Democracy: The Case of the US-Israel Free Trade Area., 114.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>788</sup> Nikelsberg, *Ability to Use Israel's Preferential Trade Status with Both the United States and the European Community to Overcome Potential Trade Barriers*, 371-414.

Dataset and home to an unstable domestic market that was heavily dependent on foreign aid and loans during the years immediately preceding the signing of the FTA.

Previous studies assessing the motivations of American foreign policy on the U.S.-Israel FTA have largely focused on international and domestic considerations in order to explain the driving forces behind the Reagan Administration's trade policy towards Israel. These studies have not yet considered the importance elite decision-making and the role that political psychology plays in crafting foreign policy. In the United States, the president holds more sway over policymaking than any official in the federal government and plays a decisive role in agenda setting and policy formulation. To understand the origins of American foreign policy towards Israel on trade policy during the Reagan years, and the key causal mechanism that catalyzed the political process that culminated in the passage of the FTA, it is necessary to examine the beliefs that President Reagan had on trade policy before his presidency. This will give us a clearer understanding of the causal mechanisms that set-in motion the political process that culminated in the passage of the US-Israel FTA.

### **President Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about Free Trade**

Prior to his presidency, Ronald Reagan had already made public statements supporting free trade and was a staunch critic of protectionism. Reagan visited Japan in 1978 and came away from his experience highly critical of American trade policy and the inability of the United States to take advantage of open markets in Japan. He observed the notable trade imbalance between the United States and Japan and blamed it on the implementation of protectionist measures that created barriers to increased trade between the two nations. For Reagan, protectionist measures such as tariffs were not only a hindrance to economic growth but a signal to other countries that the United States was not interested in engaging in free enterprise abroad:

I met with Japanese business leaders who are also concerned about the trade imbalance even though it is in their favor. They are worried about the voices demanding protectionism and not from the selfish view that it will be directed against them alone.<sup>789</sup>

Reagan lamented that “Japanese industrialists believe in free trade” and that “we [the United States] ought to understand the Japanese and their way of doing things?”<sup>790</sup> Reagan’s trade mission to Japan led him to see free trade as smart business and diplomacy. A core component of the Reagan foreign policy was to seek out and cement alliances to counter Soviet interests abroad. Key to accomplishing this strategic objective would be highlighting the differences of the American capitalist system from the Communist system practiced by the Soviet Union. Reagan’s beliefs about free market capitalism stood in stark contrast to his views on Communism and state-centered economic development. Reagan’s black-and-white beliefs about the utility of free trade as a means to distinguish the United States from the Soviet Union were apparent as early as August 16, 1979:

We should properly be looking at the contrast between a free mkt. system where individuals have the right to live like kings if they ~~can~~ *have the ability* to earn that right and govt. control of the mkt. system such as we find today in socialist nations.<sup>791</sup>

When Reagan was elected in 1980, he immediately was confronted with a number of major decisions on American trade policy that would lead his administration to support bilateral free trade agreements. While previous presidents had joined the General Agreement on Trade and

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<sup>789</sup> Reagan et.al, *Reagan: In His Own Hand*, 287.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid., 287-288.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid., 228.

Tariffs (GATT), and supported the economic rule of Most-Favored Nation Status, Ronald Reagan was the first president to openly and publicly support free trade.<sup>792</sup>

Historically, the Republican Party had supported protectionist trade measures as early as the late 1800s. Reagan's open support for free trade was a new departure from the policies of previous Republican administrations. On November 20, 1982, Reagan delivered a Radio Address to the American public on the topic of international free trade that would outline his administration's stance on the issue.

We are reminding our trading partners that preserving individual freedom and restoring prosperity also requires free and fair trade in the marketplace. The United States took the lead after World War II in creating an international trading and financial system that limited governments' ability to disrupt free trade across borders. We did this because history had taught us an important lesson: Free trade serves the cause of economic progress, and it serves the cause of world peace.<sup>793</sup>

Shortly after this speech, President Reagan would declare the week of May 16, 1982 as World Trade Week.<sup>794</sup> While Reagan reaffirmed in his proclamation American support for the principle of reciprocal trade concessions and commitments as underlined in the GATT,<sup>795</sup> his administration would soon chart a policy course that eschewed multilateral initiatives in favor of bilateralism.

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<sup>792</sup> Cooper, R.N. (1989). "An Appraisal of Trade Policy During the Reagan Administration." Harvard International Review (3): 90., 90.

<sup>793</sup> Reagan, R. (1982). Radio Address to the Nation on International Free Trade. G. Peters and J.T. Woolley. Santa Barbara, CA, The American Presidency Project.

<sup>794</sup> Reagan, R. (1982). Proclamation 4924 – World Trade Week, 1982. G. Peters and J.T. Woolley. Santa Barbara, CA, The American Presidency Project.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid.

Initially, President Reagan was opposed to bilateral trade initiatives, deeming them to be “a serious threat to U.S. commerce and to the international trading system as a whole.”<sup>796</sup> However, his support for the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act showed that his administration was departing from his promise to oppose bilateral trade initiatives.<sup>797</sup> Provisions in the treaty stipulated that Caribbean Basin Countries that wanted to be part of the free trade agreement had to remain non-communist, sign an extradition treaty with the US, support American drug trafficking efforts and protect the property rights of American citizens and corporations.<sup>798</sup> The agreement was calibrated to not only improve American economic interests, but also to cement American alliances in region where communist allied nations such as Cuba threatened American national interests outside the confines of the GATT.

President Reagan’s beliefs about free trade show that he saw free trade as good economics and politics. It is within this political and economic context that the impetus for a bilateral agreement free trade agreement with Israel was born. As early as 1981, Israeli policymakers had attempted to reach out to the Reagan administration to gauge their interest in a free trade agreement.<sup>799</sup> However, diplomatic relations between the states soured after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 estranged Reagan from Israel and the Begin Government.<sup>800</sup> A year later after tensions subsided, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and President Reagan agreed

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<sup>796</sup> Reagan, R. (1982). Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program- 1980-1981. White House. Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office. **Public Papers of the President of the United States**:199.

<sup>797</sup> Behm, R.J. “International Trade – Free Trade Areas – Agreement on the Establishment of a Free Trade Area between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Israel [legislation].” Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law **16**(1)., 176.

<sup>798</sup> 98<sup>th</sup> Congress. (1983). Public Law 98-67: An Act To Promote Economic Revitalization and Facilitate Expansion of Economic Opportunities in the Caribbean Basin Region, to Provide for Backup Withholding of Tax From Interest and Dividends, and For Other Purposes. [Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O.: Supt of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., Distributor, 1983]., 97 stat 385.

<sup>799</sup> Frenkel, *Constraints and Compromises: Trade Policy in a Democracy. The Case of the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Area*, 114.

<sup>800</sup> Anonymous. (1984). Israel Ties Boosted. Washington, D.C., United States, Congressional Quarterly., 132-134.

to commence negotiations with Israel on a bilateral free trade agreement.<sup>801</sup> However, domestic political constraints in both Israel and the United States had to be considered before an agreement could be reached that would be mutually beneficial for the economic interests of both countries.

### **International Constraint - Israeli Economic Policy from 1967 to 1984**

The state of the economy in Israel was a cause of concern for American policymakers since the country's founding as the United States had regularly provided Israel with economic assistance. Israel has endured multiple wars against state and non-state actors since its founding in 1948. Subsequent wars led to mass casualties, increased defense spending, and general economic uncertainty in the country. Cold War tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors further complicated Israel's economic maladies.

A major change occurred in June of 1967. Israel's victory in the Six Day War fundamentally altered the nature of Israel's economy. The economic policies that ensued thereafter had a negative impact on Israel's growth as a nation. According to Shafir and Peled, the Six Day War "fundamentally altered key elements of Israel's political-economic regime,"<sup>802</sup> and the state tripled the size of land under its control from 8,000 to 26,000 square miles.<sup>803</sup> In the wake of the Six Day War, the Israeli state took on a more prominent role in subsidizing its defense and high-tech industries.<sup>804</sup> In the years between 1967 and 1984, the state took on a significant management role in the Israeli economy.

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<sup>801</sup> Baranes, *The Motivations and the Models: A Comparison of the Israel-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement*, 146.

<sup>802</sup> Shafir and Peled, *The New Israel: Peacemaking and Liberalization*, 133.

<sup>803</sup> Bard, M.G. (2018). "The Six Day War: Background & Overview." The Jewish Virtual Library. Retrieved November 1, 2018, 2018, from [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/67\\_War.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/67_War.html).

<sup>804</sup> Rivlin, *The Israeli Economy from the Foundation of the State Through the 21st Century*, 4.



The Israeli defense industry was among the biggest beneficiaries of post-1967 War political climate. A robust defense industry premised on the development of state-of-the-art technology and experience against battle tested Soviet weaponry allowed Israel to become a weapon exporting country at the height of the Cold War and secure new strategic allies such as Iran, Ethiopia, and South Africa. A bolstered strategic position was done at a significant price. Between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s, total military spending in Israel ballooned to 23% of Israel's GDP.<sup>805</sup>

During this time, Israel's labor and capital markets were highly subsidized and financed through a combination of foreign aid and debt from abroad.<sup>806</sup> Energy prices also became a major concern as Israel ceded its oil fields in the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in 1975 and was plagued with high costs of petrol during the Energy Crisis in the mid-1970s. Inflation also set in at record levels. Between 1970 and 1977, the rate of inflation of the average quarterly CPI between successive fourth quarters went from 10.2% in 1970 to a high of 40.2% in 1977.<sup>807</sup> In the fourth quarter of 1979, Israel's rate of inflation hit 163% in annual terms and by the first quarter of 1984 it had skyrocketed to 710.9%. The pre-1985 economic crisis in Israel was so severe that observers noted that the economic crisis posed "an existential threat to the legitimacy of the state."<sup>808</sup> Israel's \$28 billion-dollar debt burden was higher than its GNP in 1983.<sup>809</sup> This

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<sup>805</sup> Nitzan, J. and S. Bichler. (2002). *The Global Political Economy of Israel*, London; Sterling, VA.: Pluto Press, 2002., 128.

<sup>806</sup> Rivlin, P. (2011). *The Israeli Economy from the Foundation of the State Through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011., 46.

<sup>807</sup> Plessner, Y. (1994). *The Political Economy of Israel: From Ideology to Stagnation*. Albany, State University of New York Press., 228.

<sup>808</sup> Shafir & Peled, *The New Israel: Peacemaking and Liberalization*, 133.

<sup>809</sup> House of Representatives 98<sup>th</sup> Congress. (1984). Proposed United States-Israel Free Trade Area: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, Ninety-Eighth Congress, second session, May 22; and June 13, 14, 1984. Statement by Thomas A. Dine, Executive Director of American Israel Public Affairs Committee and Ester Kurz, Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs. Washington, D.C., U.S. G.P.O., 47-48.

state of affairs would end shortly after Israel began negotiations with the United States on a trade deal.

### **International Catalyst – The Peres-Shamir Economic Stabilization Program**

The terms and conditions of American support for Israel's floundering economy were established in a meeting between Prime Minister Shamir and President Reagan in Washington in 1983. Even though talks about a free trade area between the United States and Israel were first mentioned in 1981, they were effectively tabled after US-Israeli ties soured under the Begin Government. The attack on Iraq's nuclear facility, the annexation of the Golan Heights, and the Lebanon War estranged Israel from the United States at a time when the economic foundations of the Israeli economy were collapsing. When Yitzhak Shamir became Prime Minister in 1983, his first visit to Washington was intended to strengthen the bilateral relationship and secure American economic and military assistance for Israel's fragile economy.<sup>810</sup>

In 1984, Shimon Peres assumed the position of Prime Minister in the National Unity Government. Upon election, Peres sought to implement policies that would decrease inflation and boost economic growth. Israel's harrowing experiences in Lebanon led the National Unity Government to focus on domestic policy priorities that had been unaddressed under previous governments. Peres painted grim picture of the Israeli economy he inherited in a speech before the Knesset made on October 22, 1984:

But the brunt of the problems are still before us, not behind us. When this government was established, the economy was already at the height of an economic spiral. It was afflicted with a series of ills whose cure requires contradictory measures. The evident inflation had already reached more than 400% and had brought in its wake a latent

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<sup>810</sup> Reagan, R. and Y. Shamir (1983). Remarks of the President and Prime Minister Shamir of Israel Following Their Meetings about US-Israel Cooperation on 29 November. Simi Valley, CA, The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum.

inflation of hundreds more percentage points. The deficit in the balance of payments had reached \$5 billion, and our external debt came to \$23 billion. Repayment of principal and interest was already consuming half the national budget. Our foreign currency reserves had dwindled to a danger point. Unemployment had begun to spread, the service sector had grown, growth had halted, and consumption had risen.<sup>811</sup>

Unlike the Middle East peace process where Shamir and Peres were at loggerheads throughout the duration of the National Unity Government, both leaders worked in conjunction with one another in their efforts to secure American support for Israel's Economic Stabilization Plan. Shamir was neither an expert in economics nor particularly inclined to challenge an economic plan that was supported by the Finance Minister and the Bank of Israel.<sup>812</sup> Both leaders knew that American aid and financial assistance could not be taken for granted and that Reagan and Shultz's support would only continue so long as Israel made legitimate attempts to solve its own economic problems. In his diary on August 31, 1984, Reagan made the following observation about Israel's economy:

George S., Bud & I met on Israel's ec. problems. They are horrendous due to their extended mil deployment. We want to help but they'll have to demonstrate some willingness to help themselves.<sup>813</sup>

As an Economist and former corporate executive, Shultz was intimately familiar with the nuts and bolts of economic policy and the extent to which Israel would need to make domestic reforms in order to meet Reagan's standards for additional American aid. He was given a large degree of authority over ensuring that the Israeli stabilization package made the sort of reforms

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<sup>811</sup> Peres, S. (1984). Address in the Knesset on 22 October 1984. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jerusalem, Israel, State of Israel.

<sup>812</sup> Shamir, *Summing Up: An Autobiography*, 149.

<sup>813</sup> Reagan and Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, 263.

necessary to ensure that Israel's economy could modernize and move forward. To accomplish this objective, Shultz took on a more direct role in overseeing the specific policies Israel put into place. In his autobiography, Shultz noted his role as "enforcer" of the Israeli economic stabilization plan:

I was able to bring needed pressure to bear because Israel's friends in the United States, including those in our Congress, well knew that drastic and difficult change was critically important and Israel's leaders themselves realized that as well. In those circumstances, I could play the "heavy" and be supported, even thanked, for forcing necessary if difficult decisions.<sup>814</sup>

It became a strategic priority for Peres to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for the Israeli economy that would put Israel on a path to future economic sustainability. Such a plan effectively became both an international and domestic necessity for Peres and his political future. Peres would convene a 24-hour cabinet meeting on June 30, 1985 where he touted the benefits of the Economic Stabilization Plan and even threatened to resign unless skeptical members of the Likud Party voted in-favor of his plan.<sup>815</sup> The Economic Stabilization Plan would pass in the cabinet on a vote of fifteen to seven with three abstentions. Shimon Peres would describe the importance of the Economic Stabilization Plan in ensuring continued financial support from the United States:

Secretary of State George Shultz had insisted on sweeping economic reforms as a precondition for the emergency economic aid we had requested. The ESP fit the bill.

Washington approved \$1.5 billion aid package, spread over two years, on top of the

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<sup>814</sup> Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, 42.

<sup>815</sup> Peres, *Battling for Peace: Memoirs*, 207.

annual \$3 billion in military and civilian aid and credits that we had been receiving and would continue to receive.<sup>816</sup>

The ESP was eventually implemented with broad-based public support from the Israeli electorate.<sup>817</sup> The stabilization program saw the implementation of policies that led to currency devaluation, defense spending cuts, the end of the Lebanon War, and the reduction of food and transportation subsidies.<sup>818</sup> Collectively, these policies reduced inflation “from an annual rate of approaching 500 percent in the first half of 1985 to 20 percent in the second half.”<sup>819</sup> They also increased government budgets by slashing the domestic deficit from 12% of GDP to between 0 and 2%.<sup>820</sup> A new currency was issued, the New Israeli Shekel (NIS), and temporary price controls were put in place.<sup>821</sup> The 1985 economic stabilization program achieved its designed purpose as trade relations with the United States were normalized after its passage. With economic relations between the two states normalized, Israel and the United States resumed negotiations on a free trade agreement that had started in 1981 but had been stopped during Israel’s economic crisis.<sup>822</sup>

### **Domestic Catalyst – AIPAC’s Lobbying Efforts in Favor of the Free Trade with Israel**

A bevy of interest groups tried to influence the legislative process in discussions about creating a US-Israel FTA. The most prominent interest group supporting the FTA was AIPAC. AIPAC supported the bill claiming it would improve the U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship and

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<sup>816</sup> Peres, *Battling for Peace: Memoirs*, 209.

<sup>817</sup> House of Representatives 98<sup>th</sup> Congress Proposed United States-Israel Free Trade Area: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means, *Statement of Thomas A. Dine, Executive Director of American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Accompanied by Ester Kurz, Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs*, 126.

<sup>818</sup> Razin, A. and E. Sadka (1993). *The Economy of Modern Israel: Malaise and Promise*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c1993., 31-32.

<sup>819</sup> Rivlin, *The Israeli Economy from the Foundation of the State Through the 21st Century*, 5.

<sup>820</sup> Razin and Sadka, *The Economy of Modern Israel: Malaise and Promise*, 32.

<sup>821</sup> Plessner, *The Political Economy of Israel: From Ideology to Stagnation*, 270.

<sup>822</sup> Frenkel, *Constraints and Compromises: Trade Policy in a Democracy. The Case of the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Area*, 115.

play a major role in weening Israel off of American foreign aid.<sup>823</sup> Support for the US-Israel FTA became a top priority for AIPAC and its leadership in 1984. No previous country had yet to sign a free trade agreement with the United States and the norm of negotiating bilateral free trade agreements with the United States had yet to emerge. This led congressional observers to watch the congressional debate over the free trade agreement with careful eyes. In general, the idea of establishing closer economic relations with Israel was hardly a controversial policy debate in Congress. The United States had provided Israel with economic aid dating back to the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. It was the future political implications of an American tilt towards negotiating bilateral free trade agreements that worried both domestic and international stakeholders. Economist Sidney Weintraub noted that opponents of the US-Israel FTA believed that its passage could set a precedent that would lead the United States on a newfound approach to international trade. Their logic was premised on the idea that a bilateral free trade agreement with Israel would lead the United States to “abandon the two pillars of the international trade structure devised at the end of World War II: the unconditional most-favored nation (MFN) clause (nondiscrimination) and multilateralism.”<sup>824</sup>

Ensuring that the US-Israel FTA passed Congress was no sure deal even though President Reagan supported the initiative. As President of AIPAC in 1984, Tom Dine spent a considerable amount of time lobbying congress to ensure the passage of the US-Israel FTA over the objections of a myriad of regional corporate interests and their allies in congress. Opposition to the US-Israel FTA emerged from actors that historically cared little about lobbying Congress on issues related to Israel:

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<sup>823</sup> Blair, P. (1984). A U.S. - Israel Free Trade Area: How Both Sides Gain. American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Washington, D.C., **9**, 2.

<sup>824</sup> Weintraub, S. (1985). A U.S.-Israel Free Trade Area. Challenge Magazine. New York, NY, Routledge. July-August: 3, 47.

When you talk about trade, *it is* a domestic issue and a foreign issue too. On the scale, it's 51 domestic, or even more, and 49 foreign. That was really the first time that I dealt with the Ways and Means Committee and the Finance Committee. It was basically the Ways and Means Committee and former Senator William Brock. He turned out to be a real friend and an ally, and I tried as best I could to help him. He helped us [AIPAC] in dealing with different issues because economic domestic pressures arose; gold jewelry, bromide industry in Arkansas, fruits and nuts in California, shoes in Maine and Rhode Island, and gold in the same place. I mean who would have thought! Being a student of politics, you had to come to grips with this. And we spent a lot of time dealing with constituent groups. I came to understand why trade agreements are so difficult because you're dealing with every seamstress and textile maker et cetera.<sup>825</sup>

The political clout of various special interest groups effected by the US-Israel FTA turned an otherwise uncontroversial subject (trade with Israel) into a complicated set of negotiations between multiple stakeholders from disparate regions of the United States.

### **Domestic Constraint – Interest Group Opposition**

On the other side, labor unions and trade organizations opposed the deal. The American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) opposed the agreement. Their opposition was rooted in the fact that the US-Israel FTA was against the spirit of Most-Favored Nation Treatment under the GATT and a general belief that free trade would add an additional burden to American workers.<sup>826</sup> The Reagan Administration saw the US-Israel FTA in another light and assumed a policy that ran contrary to their stated positions on trade.

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<sup>825</sup> Dine, T.A. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. University of Georgia. L. Lukoff.

<sup>826</sup> House of Representatives 98<sup>th</sup> Congress Proposed United States-Israel Free Trade Area: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means, *Statement of Stephen Koplan, Legislative*

The Reagan Administration saw the FTA as advancing American economic interests and reducing barriers to the Israeli market. Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Robert E. Lighthizer testified to the House Committee on Financial Services, where he stressed the damaging impact trade barriers to the Israeli market were having on American exports:

In 1983, we imported \$1.3 billion in products from Israel. About 90 percent of these imports entered duty-free either because the MFN tariff rate was zero or the product was under GSP. In contrast, 40 to 45 percent of our exports to Israel, \$1.7 billion last year, excluding military shipments, were charged to duty. In 1982, that duty averaged 10.3 percent. Our objective is to negotiate elimination of these relatively high Israeli tariff and nontariff barriers to our exports.<sup>827</sup>

The Reagan Administration tried to frame the agreement as a net gain for the American business community as well. However, the idea of a free exchange of goods and services between Israel and the United States was controversial for some, as it would ensure that some industries in the United States would lose their competitive advantage over Israeli corporations seeking to sell their goods in the United States. Agriculture and industry interests in Congress lined up against the deal. Rep. Pete Wilson (R-CA) and Rep. William Thomas (R-CA) opposed the deal on the grounds that Israel unfairly subsidized its agricultural products, making American goods less competitive in their domestic market.<sup>828</sup> Likewise, Beryl Anthony (D-AR) testified against the

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*Representative, Department of Legislation, American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations*, 109.

<sup>827</sup> House of Representatives 98<sup>th</sup> Congress Proposed United States-Israel Free Trade Area: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means, *Statement of Hon. Robert E. Lighthizer, Deputy U.S. Trade Representative*, 4-22.

<sup>828</sup> Frenkel, *Constraints and Compromises: Trade Policy in a Democracy. The Case of the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Area*, 126



bill on grounds that its passage would hurt his Arkansas-based district's bromine industry.<sup>829</sup> Being the first free trade agreement in American history, a number of domestic industries such as textiles, footwear, and jewelry, sought to carve out protective measures for their products, as worries set in that the agreement would hurt their bottom line.<sup>830</sup> Ultimately a compromise was reached between Israel and the United States on tariffs for vulnerable American industries. Interest group opposition was pacified after Israel agreed to allow 20% of American export tariffs to continue unabated until 1995.<sup>831</sup> Likewise, congressional opposition to the agreement subsided once President Reagan and United States Trade Representative William Brock made passage of the agreement an executive priority for the administration.<sup>832</sup>

### **Policy Outcomes: The US-Israel Free Trade Area Agreement**

The US-Israel Free Trade Area Agreement passed 422-0 on May 7, 1984 and the US Senate passed the bill 96-0 on 23 May that same year.<sup>833</sup> At this time, the US-Israel FTA was merely a piece of paper signed between the two countries. For the FTA to be implemented, both governments saw the need to develop a permanent institution that could ensure that the aspirations of the US-Israel FTA were implemented in practice. The idea of creating a bilateral formal institution linking American and Israeli economic policymakers, business leaders, and academic experts became a focus for both governments. The development of such an initiative

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<sup>829</sup> House of Representatives 98<sup>th</sup> Congress Proposed United States-Israel Free Trade Area: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means, *Hon. Beryl Anthony Jr's Letter to the U.S. Trade Representative William E. Brock on March 7, 1984*, 427-430.

<sup>830</sup> Frenkel, *Constraints and Compromises: Trade Policy in a Democracy. The Case of the U.S. Israel Free Trade Area*, 146-148.

<sup>831</sup> Anonymous. (1986). Israel Free Trade Pact. *CQ Almanac 1985*. Washington, D.C., United States, Congressional Quarterly. **41.**, 260.

<sup>832</sup> Auerbach, S. (1984). Senate Passes Wide-Ranging Trade Measure. *The Washington Post*. Washington, D.C., The Washington Post Company., D 10.

<sup>833</sup> Anonymous, *Israel Free Trade Pact*, 260.

would ensure that trade relations between both countries would be cultivated and maintained under America's watch as Israel implemented its Economic Stabilization Plan.

### **The Creation of the Joint Economic Development Group**

When the United States signed the FTA with Israel, economic cooperation between the two governments continued at the ministerial level afterwards. The aspirations of the US-Israel FTA were developed into a formal bilateral institution called the Joint Economic Development Group (JEDG). This bilateral formal institution was created in NSDD 111 when the United States made the decision to heighten strategic cooperation with Israel in the wake of the Lebanon War. The JEDG was created as a forum where both Israeli and American diplomats, and economic experts, could meet to discuss issues Israel's economic stabilization program, bilateral trade disputes, and the terms and conditions of American economic support for Israel. The JEDG also allowed policymakers in both countries to assess previous policy decisions and to monitor the FTA and enact changes to it when necessary. By creating an institutional setting where American policymakers and their Israeli counterparts could meet to discuss trade and economic relations, the Reagan Administration was able to ensure that its trade relationship with Israel would become institutionalized, sustained, and enhanced in the years to come.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **Human Rights: The Soviet Jewish Emigration Dispute**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine the extent to which Reagan's pre-presidential beliefs impacted the number of exit permits that were granted to Soviet Jews during his presidency. I will account for five confounding factors that may have played a role in impacting Jewish emigration rates from the Soviet Union: Reagan's State Department, Congress, Soviet foreign policy, Israeli foreign policy, and the role of Jewish emigration interest groups. I will then discuss the policy outcomes and institutions that resulted from the Reagan Administration's efforts to secure exit permits for Soviet Jews. This chapter will also discuss the political dynamics that led to the end of the Soviet Jewish emigration dispute during the Reagan Administration. A better understanding of President Reagan's approach to the dispute will shed light on the factors that led to the resolution of a human rights dispute between the United States and the Soviet Union that had spanned six previous administrations and spawned a wave of migration to Israel that had a formative impact on the Jewish state's future economic prosperity.<sup>834</sup>

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<sup>834</sup> Plessner, *The Political Economy of Israel: From Ideology to Stagnation*, 274.

### **The Soviet Jewish Emigration Dispute Prior to the Reagan Administration**

The fate of over a million Jews living under systematic oppression in the Soviet Union was a major human rights concern for the United States during the Cold War. A key feature of the Reagan Administration's human rights policy was the management of bilateral negotiations with the Soviet Union to secure exit permits for Jewish political dissidents. On Thursday, April 9, 1989, the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law held a hearing on the Emergency Refugee Act of 1989. In his opening statement, Chairman Bruce Morrison (D-CT) noted that the United States had scored a major bipartisan foreign policy success with record levels of exit permits now being granted to Soviet Jews after a decade-and-a-half of emphasis on pushing for increased levels of Soviet Jewish emigration.<sup>835</sup> By the end of 1989, the Soviet Union relaxed its emigration policies and gave over 1.5 million Soviet Jews the right to secure citizenship in Israel or other western nations.<sup>836</sup> It appeared that after eight years of diplomacy, there was a general sense in Washington that American foreign policy had succeeded in achieving its desired goal of seeing increased levels of Soviet Jewish emigration. Between 1985 and 1989, the number of exit permits granted to Soviet Jews increased from 1,140 to 72,528.<sup>837</sup>

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<sup>835</sup> House of Representatives 101<sup>st</sup> Congress. (1989). Soviet Refugees Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundred First Congress, first session, on H.R. 1605 and H. Con. Res. 73, Emergency Refugee Act of 1989, April 6, 1989. Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office., 1.

<sup>836</sup> Mark, C. (1995). Soviet Jewish Emigration. Foreign and National Defense Division. Washington, D.C., Congressional Research Service, 3.

<sup>837</sup> Nichol, J.P. (1991). The Soviet Emigration and Travel Law. [Electronic Resource] Assessments and Implications for U.S. interests, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 3.

By 1995, it had been estimated that the exodus of roughly one million Jews from the Soviet Union had been one of the largest emigrations of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>838</sup>

Solving the Soviet Jewish emigration dispute was a priority for numerous stakeholders. The Reagan Administration, Congress, a bevy of interest groups and human rights activists, and the state of Israel were all pursuing their own respective strategies to bring about changes in Soviet emigration policy. Previous scholarship has been split on the causal mechanisms that led to the end of the Soviet Jewish emigration dispute. David H. Goldberg and Paul Marantz argue that the Soviets changed policy because of foreign policy considerations related to arms control, trade, and the burgeoning threat of a Sino-American alliance.<sup>839</sup> Furthermore, Christian Peterson cites congressional and public opinion as the key explanatory variables that forced the Reagan Administration to pursue human rights as part of its foreign policy agenda.<sup>840</sup> Previous studies attempting to explain why the Soviets changed their policies on Jewish emigration have placed too much emphasis on systemic level conditions while neglecting the importance of elite decision-makers and the role that political psychology plays in shaping foreign policy choices.

A closer look at the writings of Richard Schifter (Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs from 1985-1992) and Anatoly Adamishin (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union from 1986-1990) show us that Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union became a top priority for President Reagan and his Secretary of State George Shultz because they prioritized human rights policy in their meetings with Soviet diplomats.<sup>841</sup>

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<sup>838</sup> Friedman, M. and A.D. Chernin (1999). *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews*, Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press: Published by University Press of New England, ©1999., 121.

<sup>839</sup> Goldberg, D. H. and P. Marantz (1994). *The decline of the Soviet Union and the transformation of the Middle East*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994., 53.

<sup>840</sup> Peterson, C. (2012). *Globalizing human rights: private citizens, the Soviet Union, and the West*, New York: Routledge, 2012., 121.

<sup>841</sup> Adamishin, A. L, and R. Schifter (2009). *Human Rights, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009., 138.

Such first-hand accounts about the importance of elite decision-makers suggest that previous studies explaining the end of the Soviet Jewish emigration crisis may have been focused on factors that were not the actual causal mechanism that led to the end of the decades-long dispute between the two superpowers.

The Soviet Jewish emigration was solved during the Reagan Administration because President Reagan's policy choices were driven by his beliefs about the importance of resolving the dispute. The historical record shows that President Reagan raised the issue of Soviet Jewish emigration during National Security Council meetings, public speeches, press conferences, discussions with human rights activists, letters to constituents, and in face-to-face meetings with Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev. Likewise, Reagan's direct orders to his subordinates in the executive branch to address Jewish emigration in bilateral negotiations with Soviet diplomats show that his beliefs were institutionalized in bilateral negotiations carried out by his subordinates with their Soviet counterparts. Seeing how this process developed and the impact it had on changing Soviet emigration policy is best done by unveiling the causal mechanisms that ended a dispute that lasted six presidential administrations.

In 1952, the Soviet Union carried out a state-sponsored pogrom which became known as "The Doctors' Plot." The "doctors' plot" commenced when Josef Stalin warned Soviet citizens to avoid seeing Jewish physicians because they were intentionally murdering their patients. The pogrom ushered in the suppression of Jewish religious, cultural, and political life in the Soviet Union. Thereafter, the Soviets punished public and private displays of Judaism and barred Jews from returning to their ancestral homeland in Israel without first receiving an exit permit from the state.

The first American leader to speak out against the Soviet Union's repression of its Jewish minority was President-elect Dwight Eisenhower.<sup>842</sup> Each subsequent president would speak out on the issue and the cause of Soviet Jewry effectively became a key source of contention between the United States and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. Even though the cause of Soviet Jewry was salient in American domestic political debates on human rights policy throughout the Cold War, it was during the Reagan Administration when the events and formal policies that led to a resolution of the emigration dispute occurred. An assessment of the policies of Reagan's predecessors will shed light on the political history of the decades-long dispute.

### **American Foreign Policy Towards Soviet Jewish Emigration Prior to 1981**

During the 1970s, nearly a quarter million Jews left the Soviet Union intermittently.<sup>843</sup> Emigration rates ebbed and flowed in accordance with the state of U.S.-Soviet relations and the general rapport between American and Soviet leaders. During the Nixon Administration, emigration rates skyrocketed from 230 per year in 1968 to 34,733 by 1973.<sup>844</sup> The spike in emigration was perceived in the United States as being linked to Nixon Administration's policy of détente and a general warming in US-Soviet relations. Nixon made diplomatic overtures to the Soviet Union to end the dispute but was unable to convince Congress, Jewish emigration interest groups, and former dissidents to support his strategies of "quiet diplomacy" and unilateral trade concessions to increase Jewish emigration.<sup>845</sup> In 1974, Congress became a more active player in the emigration dispute when the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the 1974 Trade Act was passed. Nixon's inability to persuade Congress and Jewish emigration interest groups to support unilateral trade concessions to the Soviets effectively tied the hands of Gerald Ford when he

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<sup>842</sup> Friedman & Chernin, *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews*, 20.

<sup>843</sup> Freedman, R.O. (1989). *Soviet Jewry in the 1980s: The Politics of Anti-Semitism and Emigration and the Dynamics of Resettlement*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989, 3.

<sup>844</sup> Gilbert, M. (1986). *Shcharansky: Hero of Our Time*, New York: Viking, 1986., Appendix III.

<sup>845</sup> Freedman & Chernin, *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews*, 102.

became president upon Nixon's resignation. Ford became legally prohibited from making unilateral concessions on trade to the Soviets, as the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the 1974 Trade Act barred Soviet trade with the United States as long as the Soviets failed to resolve the issue of Jewish emigration.<sup>846</sup>

Between 1974 and 1977, emigration rates declined as ties soured as a result of the passage of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment (which linked most-favored nation trading status with the United States to Soviet adherence to human rights).<sup>847</sup> Jackson-Vanik was initially opposed by the Nixon Administration due to its belief that détente was contingent on allowing the Soviets to receive most-favored trading status with the United States.<sup>848</sup> Opponents of Jackson-Vanik, such as Henry Kissinger, saw it as an obstacle to closer diplomatic relations with the Soviets.<sup>849</sup> This state of affairs was later confirmed by Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin, who wrote in his memoirs that the issue of exit permits for Soviet Jews was ready to be solved in 1972 had Senator Jackson not linked trade to Soviet human rights policy.<sup>850</sup> The Jackson-Vanik amendment was seen by Soviet Jewish emigration interest groups and their allies in Congress to be the primary source of leverage the United States had in altering Soviet behavior on human rights.

During the subsequent Carter Administration, emigration rates of Soviet Jews peaked at 51,320 in 1979 during the SALT II talks, before plummeting to 9,475 in 1981.<sup>851</sup> The precipitous drop in emigration rates occurred as the prospects of détente went up in smoke after the Soviet

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<sup>846</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>847</sup> Nichol, Jim. *Soviet Emigration and Travel Law: Assessments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, 1.

<sup>848</sup> Friedman & Chernin, *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free the Soviet Jews*, 102.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>850</sup> Dobrynin, A.F. (1995). In *Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to American's Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)*. New York, NY. United States, Times Books, Random House., 251-263.

<sup>851</sup> Gilbert, *Hero of Our Time*, Appendix III.



invasion of Afghanistan and the political crisis over the Solidarity movement in Poland.<sup>852</sup> Furthermore, the *Congressional Research Service* noted that other factors such as the U.S. grain embargo, boycott of the Moscow Olympics, downing of the Korean Air Liner, and Soviet human rights policies were instrumental in bringing the two superpowers further apart diplomatically.<sup>853</sup>

Jimmy Carter was a supporter of Soviet human rights and was even commended by refusenik advocate Ida Milgrom for standing up for her imprisoned son Anatoly Shcharansky.<sup>854</sup> However, Carter's broader employment of human rights as a core component of his foreign policy irked Soviet leaders and further estranged the two nations. The Soviets came to view Carter's emphasis on human rights in American foreign policy as being primarily "used as an ideological and propagandistic weapon."<sup>855</sup> As Soviet decision-makers saw American criticism of their human rights practices as an effort to damage the Soviet Union in the court of public opinion, they felt less inclined to address American concerns over Soviet Jewish emigration.

Despite standing up for the human rights of Soviet Jews, Carter was unable to keep up the good rapport that he had established with his Soviet counterparts early on in his administration. His beliefs did not translate into a change in Soviet emigration policy. To the contrary, Carter was loathed by Soviet diplomats on a personal level and was incapable of fostering the spirit of détente that Nixon had created in the early 1970s.<sup>856</sup> During the Carter Administration, the total number of exit permits granted to Soviet Jews decreased from 51,320 in 1979 to 9,447 in 1981 and the laws and policies that prevented emigration remained in place.<sup>857</sup>

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<sup>852</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>853</sup> Nichol, *The Soviet Emigration and Travel Law: Assessments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, CRS-1.

<sup>854</sup> Peterson, *Globalizing Human Rights: Private Citizens, the Soviet Union, and the West*, 71.

<sup>855</sup> Adamishin and Schifter, *Human Rights, Perestroika and the end of the Cold War*, 82.

<sup>856</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to American's Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)*, 417.

<sup>857</sup> See Appendix 1.

In 1990, the Soviet Union was issued a waiver to Jackson-Vanik that allowed them to receive Most-Favored Nation status in trade with the United States. The events that culminated in this event were brought about only after Reagan was successful convincing Congress and Jewish emigration activists that emigration rates were increasing, and the Soviet Union was altering its human rights policies.<sup>858</sup> A change in Soviet policy was evidenced by increasing emigration rates. In 1988, emigration was nearly triple the 1987 figure and higher than the sum of all emigration from 1982-1987.<sup>859</sup>

### **Reagan's Pre-Presidential Beliefs about Soviet Jewish Emigration**

Reagan's beliefs about human rights in the Soviet Union were articulated in speeches, writings and radio broadcasts *before* he was elected. The question of Soviet Jewish emigration was perhaps the most consequential human rights issue of the 1970s and 1980s. Early writings of President Reagan show that he believed that Soviet human rights policy might be susceptible to change, and imprisoned political dissidents released, if negative public opinion and heavy public pressure were brought to bear on Soviet leaders.<sup>860</sup> During the 1976 presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan criticized incumbent president Gerald Ford for signing of the Helsinki Pact. Reagan's criticisms were rooted in his belief that the Soviet Union had failed live up to the standards of the Helsinki Agreement by failing to provide exit permits for Soviet Jews and other dissidents.<sup>861</sup> During the 1980 presidential campaign, Reagan openly criticized Jimmy Carter's State Department on his radio program "for pushing détente with the Soviets while political dissidents suffered in Soviet gulags."<sup>862</sup> Publicly criticizing the policies of previous presidents on

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<sup>858</sup> Levin, G.P. (2015). "Before Soviet Jewry's Happy Ending: The Cold War and America's Longest Debate over Jackson-Vanik, 1976-1989." *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 33(3): 63-85., 77.

<sup>859</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>860</sup> Reagan, Ronald, et al. *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 374.

<sup>861</sup> Reagan et al., *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 144.

<sup>862</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

Soviet Jewish emigration showed that Reagan had well-defined beliefs about the subject before his presidency and an interest in changing Soviet human rights policy.

Reagan even advocated for the release of individual Soviet political dissidents, known as *refuseniks*.<sup>863</sup> On November 30, 1976 Reagan came out in support of freeing Ida Nudel on his radio program. Nudel had openly criticized the Soviet government and was summarily refused an exit permit. Reagan committed himself to rallying public opinion to advance her cause during his radio commentaries<sup>864</sup> and urged listeners to write letters to the Soviet Ambassador in Washington D.C. on her behalf.<sup>865</sup> Reagan's interest in Nudel's plight continued during his time as president and he would eventually call her personally upon her release from the Soviet Union.<sup>866</sup>

Another example of the consistency of Reagan's beliefs about the importance of the cause of Jewish emigration before and during his presidency was his advocacy for refusenik Anatoly Shcharansky.<sup>867</sup> In 1978, Reagan spoke out against the cruel treatment of Anatoly Shcharansky on his radio program and questioned the idea of participating in the Olympics in Moscow in 1980 "while he lay rotting in a Soviet Gulag".<sup>868</sup> Reagan took a personal interest in Shcharansky's plight after he was elected. It was noted by the *New York Times* Moscow Bureau Correspondent, David Shipler, that Shcharansky's case was mentioned "at every bilateral meeting between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Reagan Administration before he was released."<sup>869</sup> Several months after he was elected, Reagan wrote a letter to his

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<sup>863</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>864</sup> Reagan et al., *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 374.

<sup>865</sup> Reagan et al. *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, 144-145.

<sup>866</sup> Landau, D. (1987). Nudel Phones Reagan. Jewish Telegraph Agency. New York, NY. 65.

<sup>867</sup> Anatoly Shcharansky later changed his name to Natan Sharansky after he became an Israeli citizen. Both spellings are used in this chapter.

<sup>868</sup> Reagan et al., *Reagan in His Own Hand*, 148.

<sup>869</sup> The Jerusalem Post. *Anatoly and Avital Shcharansky: The Journey Home*, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, ©1986., 215.

Soviet counterpart Leonid Brezhnev asking him to free Shchransky.<sup>870</sup> Subsequently, Reagan then invited Anatoly's wife, Avital, to a meeting at the white house to discuss his case in 1981.<sup>871</sup> After meeting with Avital, and learning about Anatoly's declining health, Reagan wrote in his diary:

D—n those inhuman monsters. He is said to be down to 100lbs & very ill. I promised I'd do everything I could to obtain his release & I will.<sup>872</sup>

Eventually, when Anatoly was released in 1986, he was welcomed as a guest of honor at the white house. Shcharansky would later become an unofficial titular leader of the Soviet Jewry advocacy movement in the United States and a big supporter of Reagan's human rights agenda.

Reagan had established beliefs about human rights abuses of Soviet Jews before he was elected and that he made a commitment to address the issue when he assumed office. Did his pre-presidential beliefs about the plight of Soviet Jews serve as the primary causal mechanism that led to one of the largest mass emigrations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century? A further analysis of the actions Reagan and other actors who impacted American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union on Jewish emigration during the Reagan Administration is needed to determine the answer to this puzzle.

### **American Foreign Policy on Human Rights under Reagan**

The Reagan Administration's foreign policy on human rights was designed to address the moral and power struggle against the Soviet Union.<sup>873</sup> In the 1981 State Department Country Reports for Human Rights, the administration argued that it would be a victory for human rights

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<sup>870</sup> Reagan and Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, 15.

<sup>871</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>872</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>873</sup> Forsythe, D.P. (1991). *The Internationalization of Human Rights*, Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, ©1991., 130.

if a country was prevented from turning into a communist regime.<sup>874</sup> Douglas P. Forsythe noted that the Reagan Administration collapsed the concept of human rights into its broader foreign policy objective of spreading democracy.<sup>875</sup> A new conceptualization of human rights that differed from previous administrations was coupled with a change in rhetoric from the president. Forsythe noted that the Reagan Administration raised human rights concerns “loudly and clearly” towards the Soviet Union and its clients but not towards its noncommunist allies.<sup>876</sup> This policy became known as the *Kirkpatrick Thesis on Dictatorships and Double Standards*. The Kirkpatrick thesis posited that dictatorships aligned with the United States against the Soviet Union would be held to double standards in their adherence to human rights when compared to Communist countries.<sup>877</sup> Over the next eight years, human rights became a core feature of bilateral discussions between the United States and the Communist regime of the Soviet Union at all levels. Initially, political observers were not so sure that the Reagan Administration would address human rights concerns. He initially nominated a Human Rights Bureau Chief, Ernest Lefever, a former policy analyst who “had called for the abolishment of all congressionally mandated human rights laws.”<sup>878</sup> An overall policy of selectively choosing which human rights causes to support and others to ignore could lead one to conclude that human rights were at best an afterthought and at worst a political tool used by Reagan to embarrass Communist regimes. However, Reagan’s beliefs about the cause of the Soviet Jews were unique. They were born out of a genuine concern for the plight of individuals living behind the Iron Curtain whose physical integrity rights had been compromised under Soviet repression.

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<sup>874</sup> Mower, A.G. (1987). *Human Rights and American Foreign Policy: The Carter and Reagan Experiences*, New York: Greenwood Press, c1987., 20.

<sup>875</sup> Forsythe, D.P. (1988). *Human rights and U.S. foreign policy: Congress reconsidered*, Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, University of Florida Press, ©1988., 19.

<sup>876</sup> Forsythe, *The Internationalization of Human Rights*, 126.

<sup>877</sup> Forsythe, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 54.

<sup>878</sup> Peterson, *Globalizing Human Rights: Private Citizens, the Soviet Union, and the West*, 108-109.

### **Domestic Catalyst: The State Department under George Shultz**

The most influential official handling the Soviet Jewish emigration portfolio in the Reagan Administration was Secretary of State George Shultz and his deputies at the State Department. George Shultz was given the portfolio that handled Soviet Jewish emigration from President Reagan and had the support of the President, and a great amount of discretion, in his diplomatic efforts to bring about changes to Soviet human rights practices. Shultz took up the subject of human rights at each of his meetings with Secretary Gorbachev and with most visitors from the Soviet Union in the Oval Office.<sup>879</sup> He had prepared lists with the names of all of the Jews denied to emigrate from the Soviet Union for his meetings with his Soviet counterparts.<sup>880</sup> Shultz noted in his autobiography that early in his tenure as Secretary of State, he had a meeting with Avital Shcharansky. He reiterated the Reagan Administration's support for Soviet Jews and told her that: "The president and I will never give up on pressing the cause of human rights and the case of your husband's release."<sup>881</sup> This state of affairs made Secretary Shultz a key actor who played an important role in the Reagan Administration's efforts to increase Soviet Jewish emigration because he shared beliefs that were a catalyzing factor in increasing exit permits for Soviet Jews.

Below Shultz, two State Department appointees played a meaningful role in addressing the cause of Soviet Jewry. U.S. Ambassador to the Helsinki Review Conference Max Kampelman and Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Richard Schifter. Ambassador

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<sup>879</sup> Lazin, F.A. (2005). The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics: Israel versus the American Jewish Establishment. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, ©2005., 213.

<sup>880</sup> Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, 121.

<sup>881</sup> Ibid.

Kampelman was considered to be a steady outspoken critic of Soviet human rights abuses and an advocate for the refuseniks. Richard Schifter developed a strong personal relationship with his Soviet counterpart Anatoly Adamishin that would ultimately end the bureaucratic roadblocks that prevented the issuance of exit permits from the Soviet Union.<sup>882</sup> Collectively, they both played a meaningful role in executing the policies that Reagan and Shultz had agreed to with their counterparts. They were both trusted to turn Reagan's policy guidance, and political assurances he had secured on Jewish emigration from Gorbachev, into tangible outcomes that would lead to an increase in the number of exit permits for Soviet Jews.

### **Domestic Constraint: Congress**

During the late 1980s, Congress played a larger role in making foreign policy than at any time since the interwar years of 1919 and 1939.<sup>883</sup> The implementation of the Helsinki Accords via the Conference Security Cooperation Europe (CSCE) were of key interest to members of Congress from both parties. The Helsinki Accords, of which the United States, the major powers in Europe, and the Soviet Union were signatories, incorporated human rights provisions into its founding Declaration of Principles. CSCE oversight hearings on Soviet human rights concerns were held each year addressing the cause of Soviet Jewry. A bevy of resolutions advocating for the release of Soviet refuseniks were passed in both chambers of Congress frequently. The notable human rights provisions relevant to Soviet Jewish emigration in the Helsinki Accords included "Basket III" provisions in the Declaration of Principles. Basket III provisions included:

1. To deal in a positive and humanitarian spirit with the applications of persons who wish to be reunited with members of their family;
2. To deal with applications in this field as expeditiously as possible;

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<sup>882</sup> Adamishin and Schifter, *Human Rights, Perestroika, and the end of the Cold War*, 2.

<sup>883</sup> Forsythe, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Congress Reconsidered*, 137.

3. To lower where necessary the fees charged in connection with these applications to ensure that they are at a moderate level;
4. That an application concerning family-unification [would] not modify the rights or obligations of the applicant or of members of his family.<sup>884</sup>

Another law that concerned members of Congress was the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the 1974 Trade Act. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment linked most-favored nation trading status and access to U.S. government credits, and credit guarantees, to countries that restricted emigration.<sup>885</sup> First proposed by Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson (D-MS) in 1973, Jackson-Vanik received strong support from the American Jewish community and human rights advocates. The movement to pass Jackson-Vanik was described as “the result of a temporary alliance between conservatives and liberals who for different reasons were determined to challenge the imperial presidency.”<sup>886</sup> This state of affairs made Jackson-Vanik a source of contention in domestic politics and in relations with the Soviet Union. Its effectiveness in altering Soviet Jewish emigration rates would be hotly debated by Congress and the Reagan Administration.

### **International Constraint: Israeli Foreign Policy**

Under its Law of Return, Israel offered citizenship to anyone that could prove that they were Jewish regardless of their country of origin. After the Six Day War in 1967, Israel ceased to have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. This state of affairs inhibited the ability of the Israeli government to use formal diplomatic channels to directly negotiate with the Soviets on the issue of Jewish emigration. As a result, diaspora Jews in the United States and American

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<sup>884</sup> Buwalda, P. (1997). *They Did Not Dwell Alone: Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union, 1967-1990*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, ©1997., 118.

<sup>885</sup> Nichol, *Soviet Emigration and Travel Law: Assessments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, 1.

<sup>886</sup> Hill, D.M. (1989). *Human Rights and Foreign Policy: Principles and Practice*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989., 184.



diplomats took the lead role in pushing for changes in Soviet policy that would allow Jews to leave the Soviet Union and move to Israel if they so desired.

Unofficially, Israeli officials found themselves at loggerheads with many in the American Jewish community due to the insistence of some American Jewish organizations that the Soviet Jews be afforded asylum in the United States or Europe. There were over 3,000,000 Jews living in the Soviet Union during the 1980s and many Israeli officials believed that the presence of thousands of their fellow Russians already living in Israel (many serving in government) would make Israel a natural destination for Soviet Jews.<sup>887</sup> Israeli diplomats were also formally bound by law to seek the release of Prisoners of Zion (those arrested for attempting to move to Israel). Declassified documents show that in 1984 Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres wrote a personal letter to President Reagan to express his concerns about the issue.<sup>888</sup>

Further complicating matters, Israel actively lobbied the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to cease giving economic incentives to Soviet Jews intent on moving to the United States instead of Israel.<sup>889</sup> Without financial support, many Soviet Jews simply could not afford to resettle in the United States. Israel's diplomatic rift with the Soviet Union and tense relations with certain factions of the American Jewish community made Israeli foreign policy a potential confounding factor impacting the Reagan Administration's pursuit of expediting Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union.

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<sup>887</sup> Freedman, *Soviet Jewry in the 1980s: The Politics of Anti-Semitism and Emigration and the Dynamics of Resettlement*, 61.

<sup>888</sup> Peres, S. (1984). Transmitted letter from Shimon Peres to President Reagan on 31 December 1984. Washington, D.C., Ronald Reagan Presidential Library:3. 1-3.

<sup>889</sup> Freedman, *Soviet Jewry in the 1980s: The Politics of Anti-Semitism and Emigration and the Dynamics of Resettlement*, 80.

### **International Constraint: Soviet Foreign and Domestic Policy**

When Ronald Reagan entered office in 1981, diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union were at an all-time low. Tensions ran high between Moscow and the United States after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 1980 American boycott of the Olympics, the grain embargo, and U.S. restrictions on technology sales from the Soviet Union.<sup>890</sup> Under the leadership of Yuri Andropov from 1982 to 1984, the Soviet government organized a state-sponsored anti-Semitic campaign which equated Zionism with Nazism.<sup>891</sup> The political climate in the Soviet Union was one of hostility towards the United States, Israel, and the Soviet Jews. This state of affairs stymied diplomatic dialogue on the issue of Soviet Jewish emigration and saw some of the lowest emigration rates during the Cold War.<sup>892</sup>

When General Secretary Andropov died in office in 1984, the Reagan Administration was hopeful that a new Soviet premier would bring about an end to the chilly relations between the two superpowers. Upon Mikhail Gorbachev's ascendancy to General Secretary on March 11, 1985, the Reagan Administration found itself facing a leader seeking improved diplomatic relations with the United States. Gorbachev implemented the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* with the intention of opening up the Soviet Union to the western world and restructuring the Soviet economy from a top-down command and control system to a market economy. Initially, there was little hope that Gorbachev would allow more Soviet Jews to emigrate. During his first two years in office, Gorbachev implemented a crackdown on Jewish culture and emigration rates

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<sup>890</sup> Mark, *Soviet Jewish Emigration*, 2.

<sup>891</sup> Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics: Israel Versus the American Jewish Establishment*, 180.

<sup>892</sup> See Figure 2.

remained low.<sup>893</sup> Still, the Soviets had an added incentive to negotiate with the United States given their interests in arms control and improved economic relations. This made Soviet Jewry advocates in the United States hopeful that warming ties with Moscow would give American policymakers a bargaining chip to use in negotiations over emigration rates of Soviet Jews.

Such negotiations were contingent on good personal relations between Soviet and American diplomats. On the ministerial level, the United States found itself a partner in Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze: they could negotiate with in good faith. Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs from 1985 to 1992, spoke highly of his former Soviet counterpart:

In Eduard Shevardnadze, we had a Soviet foreign minister who had shaken off the Bolshevik shell and whose core as a decent, honorable human being was now in evidence. He responded to our appeals and thus set a new tone for the Soviet Foreign Ministry.<sup>894</sup>

Soviet foreign policy was a key factor that impacted Soviet Jewish emigration rates. Without the stamp of the Soviet foreign ministry, Jews could not leave the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet foreign ministry was not the sole arbiter in the Soviet Jewish emigration dispute. Domestic political agencies in the Soviet Union also constrained Soviet foreign policy. As Soviet diplomat Anatoly Adamishin noted:

In short, to be involved in Soviet human rights issues meant, almost automatically, to be involved in constant disputes with other Soviet government agencies, with little or no capability to influence them.<sup>895</sup>

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<sup>893</sup> Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics: Israel versus the American Jewish Establishment*, 211.

<sup>894</sup> Freedman and Chernin, *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews*, 157.

<sup>895</sup> Adamishin and Schifter, *Human Rights, Perestroika and the End of the Cold War*, 94.

These factors impacted the number of exit permits that were issued by the Soviet foreign ministry. Assurances to issue exit permits to Soviet Jews were worthless unless the Soviet bureaucracy was made to comply with orders from senior officials in the Soviet foreign ministry.

### **Domestic Catalyst: Soviet Jewish Emigration Interest Groups**

Lobbying efforts in favor of Soviet Jewish emigration were carried out by the organized American Jewish community as well as by individual Soviet refuseniks. The most prominent Soviet refuseniks that played a role in lobbying efforts during the 1980s were Anatoly Shcharansky, Ida Nudel, and Vladimir Slepak.<sup>896</sup> These ex-prisoners played a major role in shaping the views of President Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz, and members of congress. Refuseniks carried enormous political clout on human rights issues in Congress and served as de-facto figureheads of the movement to liberate Soviet Jewry during congressional hearings on human rights abuses in the Soviet Union. They also played a very public role in efforts to shame Soviet officials into making concessions on human rights. According to David Shipler, Moscow Bureau Correspondent for the *New York Times*, “The Shcharansky affair was simply a thorn in everybody’s side.”<sup>897</sup> A general school of thinking emerged among activists that shaming the political leadership of the Soviet Union could bring about increased rates of Soviet Jewish emigration.

Jewish interest groups were the most important actors that impacted domestic political debates in the United States on Soviet Jewish emigration. There was a general feeling within the American Jewish community in the 1980s that American Jews had not done enough to help their

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<sup>896</sup> Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics: Israel versus the American Jewish Establishment*, 212.

<sup>897</sup> The Jerusalem Post. (1986). *Anatoly and Avital Shcharansky: The Journey Home*, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, ©1986., 214-215.

co-religionists in the years preceding the Holocaust.<sup>898</sup> Organizations that worked to secure the release of Soviet Jews included the Hebrew International Aid Society, International Conference on Soviet Jewry, Anti-Defamation League, International Council of B'nai B'rith, and the American Jewish Congress. Officials from these organizations testified on numerous occasions before Congress throughout the 1980s. Their testimony led to a number of major policy studies on Soviet Jewish emigration carried out by the Congressional Research Service. Soviet Jewry activists also submitted letters into the congressional record, lobbied Congress to increase aid levels to refugees, and managed a sophisticated public relations strategy that saw letter-writing campaigns in major newspapers, and the organization of a large rally in Washington D.C. on the eve of Mikhail Gorbachev's first visit to the United States.

### **Policy Outcome**

#### **Soviet Jewish Emigration Rates Increase**

When Reagan came into office in 1981, he had been skeptical of Soviet political promises to address human rights concerns.<sup>899</sup> Reagan's beliefs about Soviet Jewish emigration, and the strategies he pursued during his time in office, were consequential in ushering in new policies on the issue of Soviet Jewish emigration. He appointed new personnel devoted to tackling the issue. In turn, these officials developed new strategies and bureaucratic arrangements that successfully hastened the proliferation of additional exit permits for Soviet Jews. A clean break from the policies of past presidents on human rights and Jewish emigration would take place under Reagan's watch. Addressing the cause of the Soviet Jews took on a newfound precedence under the Reagan Administration. Jewish emigration became a top-tier

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<sup>898</sup> Freedman and Chernin, *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews*, 225-226.

<sup>899</sup> Reagan et al., *Reagan in His Own Hand*, 152.

issue that the administration negotiated alongside other hot button issues, such as arms control and international trade, with their Soviet counterparts.

Reagan's early attempts to address the plight of the Soviet Jews did not bear immediate results. After writing to Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev in April of 1981 to address the plight of Anatoly Shcharansky, Reagan was unable to secure his release. Brezhnev was in no condition to establish a personal rapport with Reagan that would lead to a settlement of the Soviet Jewish emigration dispute. Brezhnev was severely ill and was little more than a figurehead of the Soviet regime. He never met face-to-face with Reagan. He later died on November 21, 1982. The Reagan Administration continued its efforts to secure the release of Soviet Jews throughout 1981. At a National Security Council meeting on October 13, 1981, Reagan brought up the plight of Shcharansky and Soviet Jews during an unrelated discussion on nuclear weapons policy. Having made personal efforts to secure Shcharansky's release, Reagan ordered his Secretary of State Alexander Haig to address the issue with the Soviets in bilateral talks.

*Reagan:* I know what the agenda items are for today, but I want to touch upon another matter first in the area of Soviet human rights. What is the status of Professor McClellan's Russian wife, who is not being allowed to emigrate? What about the Soviet religious groups in the basement of our embassy in Moscow? What about Anatoly Scharansky? Would some quiet diplomacy help? These should not be part of our TNF negotiations, but is there a way we could indicate to the Soviets that we would be happier in any negotiations if there were progress on these cases?

*Haig*: I raised each of these cases with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, both in one-on-ones with him and in the larger planning group. He did not budge.<sup>900</sup>

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, Reagan would meet with Avital Shcharansky in the White House. Avital Shcharansky was not only the husband of one of the most notable refuseniks of the Cold War, but also one of the most visible activists involved in the movement to free the Soviet Jews. Reagan recorded the meeting in his diary:

I almost forgot to mention the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the day. Mrs. Scharansky & a young Jewish refugee from the Gulag (10 yrs. In prison) came to see me. Mrs. S. married her husband 10 yrs. ago. She had a visa to leave Russia for Israel the day after the wedding. She left- the authorities told her the Groom would be allowed to leave very soon to join her. He is in the Gulag- was never allowed to leave is said to have been an American spy which he never was.<sup>901</sup>

Providing time to meet with human rights activists like Avital Shcharansky and the leaders of Soviet Jewry interest groups were but one way that Reagan was able to communicate and coordinate his policy efforts with a key constituency that could either help or hinder his diplomatic outreach to the Soviet Union. In subsequent years, these meetings would continue and increase in frequency as the issue became a regular item on the agenda of US-Soviet diplomatic relations.

Upon entering the White House in 1981, President Reagan translated his previously formed beliefs about the cause of Soviet Jews into concrete policy actions to his subordinates. In 1981, Reagan directly addressed the issue with Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev and ordered his Secretary of State Alexander Haig to broach the issue with his counterpart in the Soviet foreign

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<sup>900</sup> Saltoun-Ebin, *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council*, 77.

<sup>901</sup> Reagan and Brinkley. *The Reagan Diaries*, 21.

ministry. His meeting with Avital Shcharansky in the White House was but one of many future meetings he would hold with Soviet Jewish emigration activists and interest groups. While these efforts did not immediately lead to a substantial increase in exit permits for Soviet Jews, they set a foundation for political discussions in future years that would ultimately yield such a result.

There are two main reasons why previous policies put in place during Reagan's three immediate predecessors (Nixon, Ford and Carter) were not successful in ending the Soviet Jewish emigration dispute. First, prior to Reagan's election, the Soviet Union was more likely to allow Soviet Jews to emigrate during times of good relations (*détente*) between the two superpower rivals and the issue of exit permits was neither stalled nor entirely solved. Reagan was influential in permanently changing the tone of US-Soviet relations by establishing a friendly relationship with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev that culminated in resolving the political differences between the two superpowers.<sup>902</sup> According to Elliot Abrams, Reagan's focus "on the moral aspects" of the Soviet Jewish emigration dispute was crucial towards changing the policies that he had inherited.<sup>903</sup> It was under Reagan that bureaucratic working committees were set up between the United States and the Soviet Union that were specifically designed to hasten the process of issuing exit permits for Soviet Jews.<sup>904</sup>

Second, the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the 1974 Trade Act restrained the ability of previous American presidents to make trade concessions, which was a prerequisite to achieving *détente* with the Soviet Union.<sup>905</sup> In the late 1980s, the Soviet economy was faltering, and the

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<sup>902</sup> Levin, *Before Soviet Jewry's Happy Ending: The Cold War and America's Long Debate Over Jackson-Vanik, 1976-1989*, 75.

<sup>903</sup> Abrams, E. (2018). US-Israel Relations During the Reagan Administration. *University of Georgia*. L. Lukoff.

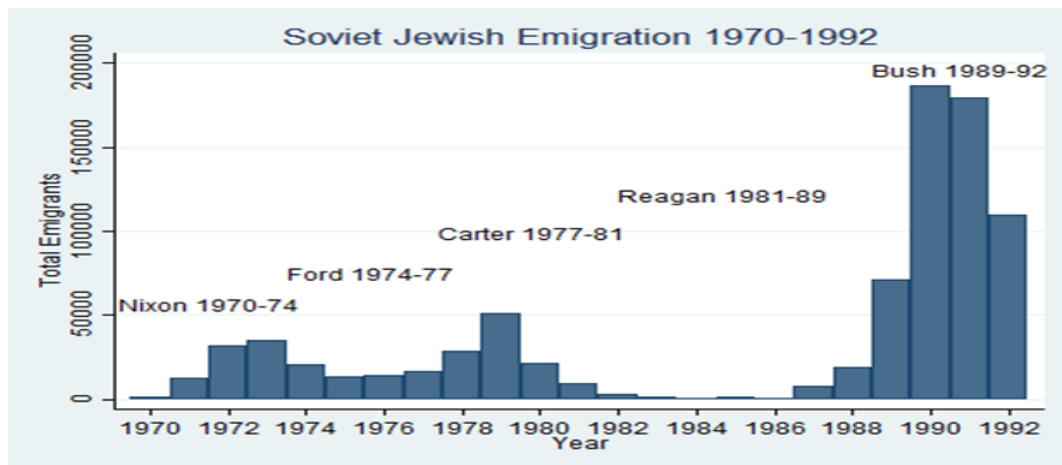
<sup>904</sup> Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone: Jewish Emigration from the Soviet Union, 1967-1990*, 153.

<sup>905</sup> Saikowski, C. (1988). Tying US-Soviet Trade to Human Rights: Lawmakers push link, but White House mulls waiving restrictions. *The Christian Science Monitor*. Boston, MA, The First Church of Christ., 25.



Soviet state had become incapable of providing economic welfare to its citizens. The Reagan Administration pushed for and received a waiver to Jackson-Vanik from Congress to allow the Soviets to receive Most-Favored Nation status and an end to the grain embargo. It was Reagan who was able to create the political climate that led Congress and Jewish emigration interest groups and political activists to support a policy change to Jackson-Vanik they had not supported in previous years. Figure 2 describes the total number of exit permits granted to Soviet Jews between 1970 and 1992. The uptick that was later realized under President George H.W. Bush had resulted because of the policies and negotiations that took place in the immediate years that preceded the rise.

**Figure 2**



**Sources:**

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## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Conclusion and Afterword**

The US-Israel relationship underwent significant changes during the 1980s. In the late 1970s, the United States had shifted its regional focus to the Middle East peace process and the actualization of Carter's human rights agenda. President Carter saw the Begin government in Israel as an impediment to his foreign policy aims and desire to see the creation of a Palestinian national homeland. An overall sense of skepticism about Israel's foreign policy aims negatively impacted the development of bilateral ties despite Israel's status as a staunch ally of the United States during the Cold War. As a result of policy disagreements between Israel and the United States, a strategic dialogue on par with America's special relationship with Great Britain failed to materialize under Carter.

Ronald Reagan came into office in 1981 after a campaign in which he criticized Carter's handling of US-Israel relations. Shortly after he took office, Reagan sought to undo the hesitance in the national security establishment in the United States of leveraging Israel's ability to advance American interests in the Middle East. Reagan's justification for turning Israel into a strategic asset of the United States was premised on foreign policy beliefs he had formulated in the years prior to his election. Reagan's belief system was hard-wired from his collective life experiences. When Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, he was staunchly conservative in his political inclinations. He was anti-communist, devoutly religious, and sympathetic towards the idea of laissez-faire free-market capitalism. Reagan's beliefs about US-Israeli relations were

formed within this framework. As a pro-western democracy, in a region with many Soviet-backed Arab dictatorships, Reagan came to sympathize with Israeli political objectives in the Middle East.

Reagan's pro-Israel inclinations impacted his decision-making tendencies. At times, Reagan inserted himself directly into the policymaking process. He involved himself directly in disputes over issues such as military cooperation and Soviet Jewish emigration. When he wasn't intimately involved in the policymaking process, he would task his trusted subordinates with direct orders (commensurate with his beliefs) to craft policies in a pro-Israel direction. This order limited the degree to which his advisors could make autonomous policy decisions against Reagan's pro-Israel inclinations. This dynamic was at play in bilateral trade negotiations and in his administration's efforts to secure international diplomatic support for Israeli positions at the United Nations. When Israeli and American policy interests clashed, Reagan inserted himself into discussions as a mediator. This tactic mitigated further damage from occurring in the bilateral relationship. Reagan's decisions to renew strategic cooperation and military aid after brief suspensions are textbook examples of this phenomenon.

When President Reagan left office in January of 1989, the tenor of the US-Israel relationship, and the nature of the cooperation between the two governments, had changed markedly from the previous administration. The US-Israel special relationship was not merely an idea or a concept as some scholars have described it. It was a unique alliance that had evolved into a special relationship that was qualitatively different from other alliances the United States maintained. The special relationship was forged from the creation of formal institutions and informal institutional understandings between the two governments. These institutions were intentionally created by both governments to cement closer ties. Formal institutions created

forums where high-ranking officials in both countries could collaborate on an array of topics relating to military, intelligence, economic, and human rights policy. Informal institutional understandings, such as the preservation of Israel's qualitative military edge, nuclear ambiguity policy, coordination in the Middle East peace process, and voting support at the United Nations, were vital to the development of the special relationship. The policy changes that materialized in US-Israel relations during the Reagan Administration effectively turned a bilateral relationship into a special relationship on par with America's other special relationships with countries such as Great Britain.

Despite implementing policy positions that favored closer ties with Israel, the policies that Reagan Administration implemented were shaped in a political context where numerous stakeholders, both domestic and foreign, sought to sway the trajectory of the policies away from a markedly pro-Israeli position. This study has shown that many of Reagan's advisors sought to implement policies that distanced the United States from Israel. The arguments made by top decision-makers in the administration against closer ties with Israel were justified from a viewpoint that saw closer ties with the Arab world, rather than Israel, as key to accomplishing America's strategic goals in the Middle East. The United States was always skeptical of harming its moderate Arab allies as Egyptian, Jordanian, and Saudi leaders maintained warm ties with President Reagan and his administration. The moderate Arab regimes in the Middle East were considered vital allies in Washington's quest to prevent Soviet incursions into the Middle East. Any Israeli military or political action that weakened America's moderate Arab allies immediately ran afoul of the pro-Israel sensibilities of President Reagan and his advisors.

The Israeli government also sought a degree of autonomy in its bilateral relationship with the United States. The Israeli government did not always align its policy preferences with those

of the Reagan Administration. Despite Jerusalem's interest in cultivating a special relationship, Israel did not want to become a vassal state beholden to American interests. At numerous points between 1981 and 1989, Israel could have taken a more pro-American stance in a number of areas but chose not to out of concern for its own national interests. In military affairs, the United States opposed Israeli military strikes on Iraq's nuclear facilities as well as Ariel Sharon's bombardment of PLO guerilla units in Beirut during the Lebanon War. Israel's decision to annex the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, as well as its settlement building policies in the territories conquered during the Six Day War, ran afoul of positions the United States had maintained since 1967. Even in the area of human rights, Israel sought to stymie American efforts to repatriate Soviet Jews in the United States out of a fear that the refugees would choose a life in the United States over one in Israel. These policy decisions, for better or for worse, were made because Israeli policymakers deemed them to be in their national interests. If Israeli policies ran afoul of American sensibilities, which they often did, close personal relationships cultivated with Reagan and his team of advisors were used to smooth tensions between the two governments. There is no better example of this dynamic than Prime Minister Shimon Peres's quiet conversations with Secretary of State George Shultz to allay American concerns after naval intelligence analyst Jonathan Pollard was arrested on charges of spying for Israel. After the Israeli espionage operation against the United States was unveiled, the Peres-Shultz relationship ensured that strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel continued unabated.

The Middle East peace process was a major source of contention between Israel and the United States throughout the Reagan years. Both governments took positions the other opposed. The Begin government categorically rejected the Reagan peace plan in 1982 and was skeptical of American aims to bring about a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation that included Arafat and the

PLO. In 1982, Israel waged a war in Lebanon to eliminate the PLO from the peace process, investing significant blood, treasure, and political capital in the process. To the chagrin of Israeli decision-makers both on the left and right, the Reagan team broke with roughly 25 years of American policy by recognizing the PLO at the tail-end of Reagan's tenure in office. This was done despite warnings from Israeli officials that Arafat's recognition of UNSCR 242 was little more than a hollow proclamation against the use of violence to achieve Palestinian national aims.

Many presidential observers have sought to portray Reagan as more of a visionary leader than an administrator that immersed himself in the details of policy. This study definitively shows that the development of the US-Israel special relationship took place because President Reagan had defined beliefs in each of the major policy areas of the special relationship. This study confirms the viewpoint that President Reagan's policy beliefs acted as a catalyzing factor in the development of the US-Israel special relationship. The policies that were implemented under Reagan's leadership were qualitatively different from those that had existed under previous administrations. This finding confirms the importance of the presidency in determining the trajectory of American foreign policy. It also reinforces decades of scholarship in the field of political psychology that has argued that the behavioral traits of elite decision-makers matter in understanding how foreign policy decisions (and the outcomes that arise from them) are determined in the international system.

In comparison to other time periods of US-Israel relations, the Reagan years have been vastly understudied. There is still much work to be done in future studies on this time period. A paucity of internal documents on Israeli foreign policy decision-making exists in the public domain. This state of affairs has resulted because Israeli law prohibits the dispersion of classified material on sensitive issues of foreign policy and national security. The amount of material not

yet available in American archives on US-Israel relations in the 1980s is still significant. For example, there is little or no information relating to the nature of Israel's nuclear program during the 1980s. The full breadth and extent of Israel's intelligence sharing relationship with the United States during the 1980s has yet to fully come to light. As new information from archival sources comes to light in the public domain, the breadth and extent of the study of US-Israel relations in the 1980s will continue to improve in the years to come.

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