

## **U.S. – Israeli Relations 1947-2010: The View from Washington<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

For its first 150 years, the United States avoided international entanglements. Increasing competition for resources, defending democracies, and promoting freedom abroad ended America's isolationist predispositions. In the one hundred years after WWI, the US was involved in nearly every region of the world. Steadily, the US was lured into Europe, Africa, South America, the Middle East and Asia. America chose allies based on a mixture of US strategic needs, philosophical compatibilities, and regional leaders' political behavior. By 2011, the US had collected more foreign entanglements than it could properly manage.

As for the Middle East, the US became dramatically ensnared in the region following WWII. There were at least eight broad motivations for its involvement. The US aimed to: (1) insure stability in the region after Britain's withdrawal from South Asia and the Middle East, (2) respond to the Cold War and Soviet expansionism the world over, including to the strategic oil-rich Middle East and North Africa, (3) preserve the political stability of surrounding Moslem states, (4) define and apply a position on the Palestine question, (5) limit and then supply military assistance to most Middle Eastern states, (6) protect physical access to and thru Middle Eastern waterways; for commercial and trade purposes, (7) secure a flow of Middle Eastern oil at reasonable prices, and (8) eventually safeguard Israel's security and sovereignty. In addition, the US under, Republican and Democratic administrations, has: offered to spread human rights values to countries and leaders in the region, suggested to change regimes selectively, promoted democratic

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented as a conference paper at the Johannes Gutenberg Universität, Mainz, Germany, May 2010. Dr. Kenneth W. Stein is Professor of Contemporary Middle Eastern History, Political Science and Israel Studies and Director of the Institute for the Study of Modern Israel, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. It appeared in Alfred Wittstock (ed.) *The World Facing Israel – Israel Facing the World Images and Politics*, Berlin, Frank and Timme, 2011, pp. 159-175.

systems of governance, and requested expanded roles for women. Never consistent in implementing these values across the region, the US was often criticized for having double standards. Values were applied selectively and demands made with varying degrees of intensity. At mid century, America's geographic locus of activity was limited to regions near the eastern Mediterranean; by the end of the 20th century, America found itself actively extended from the Atlantic Ocean in North Africa through the Arabian/Persian Gulfs into Southwest Asia.

The most significant impetus for US engagement in the Middle East was competition with the Soviet Union. American fear of Communism's spread into Turkey, Greece and the eastern Mediterranean generated the Truman (1947) and Eisenhower Doctrines (1957). The fear of Soviet encroachment into the Persian Gulf and other regions of the world evoked the Nixon (1969) and Carter Doctrines (1980). The Kennedy (1961), Johnson (1965) and Reagan Doctrines (1981) were also intermittently applied to prevent Communism's spread or the Soviet Union's client growth. Fostering a strong American-Turkish relationship from the late 1940s forward was part of a broader US policy to contain Soviet southward expansion into Middle Eastern states. The US worked to limit and weaken Arab state associations with Moscow, and where possible, created alliance systems and/or bilateral relations with Arab leaders. Rebuke from Arab leaders, such as those made by Egyptian President Gamal Nasser toward the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations pushed the United States away from some Middle Eastern countries and into the arms of his adversaries. Nasser's alliance with Moscow, and his own heated Cold War with Arab states<sup>2</sup>, significantly added to the Eisenhower administration's decision (1957) to tighten relations with Israel. Increasingly, Washington saw Israel as a stalwart against Communism, and steadily gave Israel military support. Fear of a communist regime taking hold in Lebanon, caused the US to send a small number of US Marines to Beirut. Referring to the US sending marines to Lebanon, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles said, "if Israel [were the] victim of unprovoked aggression to

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<sup>2</sup> For the best book on the subject see, Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War 1958-1967 A Study of Ideology in Politics*, Oxford University Press, 1968.

destroy it, our response would be just as good as in [the] case of Lebanon.”<sup>3</sup> Arab leaders’ political decisions to assert control over their neighbors further alienated American support. In 1963, Nassar’s bold soirees into Yemen, upset America; the Kennedy administration clarified its moral and political commitment to the integrity and wellbeing of Israel, and said it “would come to Israel’s assistance if Israel were the victim of aggression.”<sup>4</sup> A decade later in September 1970, when Syria and the PLO chose to threaten the viability of King Hussein’s regime in Jordan, the Nixon administration rewarded Israel with increased foreign and military aid for helping Washington protect the viability and sustenance of the Hashemite Kingdom. In the aftermath of the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars, Syria embraced Moscow while Israel further improved its security relationship with the US. In the Cold War competition for allies, the US scored perhaps its greatest success against the USSR (outside of the fall of the Berlin Wall) when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and then his successor Husni Mubarak left Moscow’s orbit and embraced the United States. Saddam Hussein’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait caused Saudi Arabia, otherwise emphatically reluctant to have foreign troops on its territory, to invite a coalition of forces to defend the Kingdom’s territorial integrity and restore Kuwait’s sovereignty. With Arab state support against Saddam Hussein, the US led that effort to secure oil access for itself and for the rest of the world. The aftermath of the 1991 war saw historically reluctant Arab states endorse an American sponsored Madrid Middle East Peace Conference with Israel; it was accompanied by increased US basing privileges in the Persian Gulf. The attack on America on 9/11 prompted President Bush to topple the Taliban and Saddam Hussein regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq; it was difficult for Israel to further aligned itself as reliable strategic US asset. Arab states reluctance to assist in ending the sectarian violence in Iraq did nothing to deepen US-Arab relations. Syria’s persistent domination of Lebanon, supply of arms to Hizballah and Hamas, as well as allowing militants to use Syrian territory to undermine American nation-building initiatives in Iraq all inflamed US-

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<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Douglas Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-1968,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 25 No. 4 (November 1993), pp. 564.

<sup>4</sup> Little, “The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-1968,” pp. 572 and 583.

Syrian relations; that helped delayed the unfolding of a Syrian-Israeli negotiating track. By 2011, Iran's regional aggressiveness drove many Middle Eastern states to bolster their security and strategic relations with the US. It is easy to see why that since World War II, the political choices made by Middle Eastern leaders to aggressively impose their will over neighbors, or align with Moscow, have repeatedly defined strategic US decisions, which included bolstering friendships, sustaining alliances, and keeping Israel close.

After the June 1967 war, the US plunged into active Arab-Israeli conflict mediation, taking over for botched and ineffective United Nations efforts at peace-seeking, peace-making, and peace-keeping. Could any decision have been more detrimental or catastrophic for maintaining peace in the Middle East, than that made by United Nations Secretary General U Thant to precipitously withdraw the UN peace keeping forces that separated Egyptian and Israeli troops between 1957 and May 1967? In response to this move, Nasser immediately loaded Sinai with troops ratcheting up the unavoidable prospects for an Arab-Israeli confrontation. U Thant provided Nasser no "ladder" from which to climb down from what was an inevitable war with Israel. Interestingly, Israeli diplomats pleaded with the UN Secretary General to do just that, and by the time U Thant considered it, Nasser was inevitably sliding toward the June war.<sup>5</sup> In a June 19, 1967 speech following the war, President Lyndon Johnson outlined the framework for a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The contents of his speech were woven into United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (November 1967). Johnson's five points evolved into: 1) land for peace, 2) the withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories taken in the conflict, 3) a solution to the refugee problem, 4) insuring the territorial integrity and political independence of all states in the region, and 5) freedom of navigation through international waterways.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the UN appointed Gunnar

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<sup>5</sup> Author interview with Gideon Rafael, March 25, 1992, Jerusalem, Israel,

<sup>6</sup>President Lyndon Johnson, National Foreign Policy Conference of Educators, Washington, DC, 19 June 1967, as quoted in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson*, Office of the Federal Residence, Washington, DC, June 1967. For the most comprehensive review of UNSC 242's textual development,

Jarring as Arab-Israeli conflict mediator. He floundered miserably in his role, leaving the door open for United States Arab-Israeli conflict management.

In the early 1970s, after US President Richard Nixon assigned US State Department officials the task of delving into the conflict's mediation, and found the USSR unwilling to fully participate.<sup>7</sup> Since then, almost three dozen special envoys and Secretaries of State have tried their hands in the on-again/off-again efforts to resolve aspects of the conflict. American dominance of Arab-Israeli mediation witnessed its highest levels of presidential engagement during the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations (1968-1981), and firm presidential support for rejuvenating the negotiation process during the George Bush Sr. administration (1988-1992). America persevered in the 1970s, mediating Egyptian-Israeli and Syria-Israeli Disengagement Agreements, the Camp David Accords, and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty.<sup>8</sup> The US succeeded in bringing Arab states and Israel together at the Geneva (December 1973), Madrid (October 1991), Annapolis (November 2007) and Washington Peace Conferences (September 2010). In 2000, President Bill Clinton tried restoring both the Syrian-Israeli and the Palestinian-Israeli tracks; President Barak Obama did the same in 2009-2010 with the assignment of another special negotiating envoy. These were serious efforts, but Middle Eastern leaders were not ready to specifically define borders and end the conflict between them. While the first substantive American support for Israel's military requests came in the late 1950s,<sup>9</sup> massive provision of American military assistance to the Jewish state started after the October 1973 War. As the Egyptian-Israeli negotiating process unfolded, Nixon, Ford, Carter, and subsequent presidents provided enormous sums of financial and military

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see The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *UN Security Council Resolution 242 Building Block of Peacemaking*, Washington, D.C. 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Author interview with Joseph Sisco, Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs at the time, February 25, 1992, Washington, DC.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat Kissinger Carter Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace*, Routledge, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> See Douglas Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-1968.

support to Jerusalem and Cairo to maintain the peace between them. Thirty years later, US presidential engagement in Arab-Israeli diplomacy is expected, and even demanded, by leaders throughout the region.

In the 1980s, the US plunged into broader Middle Eastern politics. Washington took Iraq's side in its war with Iran (1980-1988), helped push the Soviets out of Afghanistan (late 1980s), restrained Khomeynism and Iranian hegemonic policies, protected shipping to and through the Persian Gulf with the reflagging of Kuwait tankers (1988); cobbled together a broad coalition of military forces from more than two dozen nations leading to the military ejection of Saddam Hussein's takeover of Kuwait (1991); tossed the Taliban out of Afghanistan (2001-2002), and overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq (2003). Today the US continues to search for and destroy Al-Qaeda networks. The US has pulled back from actively supporting selective regime change but remains swamped by yet inconclusive nation-building forays in Afghanistan and Iraq. On January 11, 2011, Vice President Biden told Afghani leaders that the US was prepared to stay in Afghanistan beyond the proposed 2014 withdrawal date, if the Afghani leaders so wished.<sup>10</sup> At no time previously has the US been so broadly and physically ensconced with a myriad of bilateral relationships from Pakistan to Morocco, including the presence of a huge number of American military personnel, expenditure of hundreds of billions of dollars aimed at stabilizing the region, diplomatic forays, covert military action, coalition building to thwart international terrorism, limiting the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and curbing Iranian hegemonic intentions. In 2011, matters pertaining to Israel, the Palestinians, and Arab-Israeli conflict mediation have become only a small part of a vast array of complicated issues on America's Middle Eastern foreign policy plate, most of them totally unrelated to whether there is or is not a negotiated solution to the conflict. For the previous six decades, choices by Arab leaders to shun US overtures and support have given Israel every opportunity to bolster, deepen, and broaden its relationship with Washington.

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<sup>10</sup> Remarks by Vice-President Joe Biden, January 11, 2011, "Its Afghans who must build their Nation," <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/01/11/vice-president-biden-afghanistan-it-s-afghans-who-must-build-their-nation>

### **Longevity, depth and difficulties in the US-Israeli relationship<sup>11</sup>**

From the American vantage point, at least three components tightly tie the US-Israeli relationship: mutual strategic interests, shared values, and American public opinion. A fourth and often understated core bond is the attitude of American officials, Republican or Democrat, who have positive feelings toward Jews, Judaism or Israel, often shaped by their upbringings. Mutual strategic interests evolved slowly and unevenly from the 1950s onward, with the second Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations being the first to tag US relations with Israel as “strategic.” From an Israeli viewpoint these three elements are augmented by two other critically important additives: a century long Zionist desire (and now the Israeli imperative) to secure protection and diplomatic recognition. Israel acted to preserve alliances with key rulers and great powers. Israel built security relationships with Britain, France, the United States and later, ventured out to develop their own military industries. Sustaining security also meant developing economic strength. Israel’s desires to be secure and obtain recognition were achieved despite Arab states’ efforts to economically boycott and politically delegitimize Israel. From an American Jewish viewpoint, Israel became a focal point for Jewish identity, building pride that there was a Jewish state that could protect Jewish interests both within and beyond Israel’s borders and, save Jews from peril. The immigration and absorption of Holocaust survivors, 800,000 Jews from Arab lands in the late 1940s and 1950s, the

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<sup>11</sup> The number of articles, books, commentaries, and blog entries written about the US-Israeli relationship are in the hundreds. Some are found as notes in this article. The most comprehensive are Steven L. Spiegel’s *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict Making America’s Middle East Policy From Truman to Reagan*, University of Chicago Press, 1985; and Steven L. Spiegel’s “The American-Israeli Relationship,” Robert Lieber’s “US-Israeli Relations Since 1948,” MERIA Journal, Vo. 2 No 3 (1998), <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1998/issue3/jv2n3a2.html>; and Steven L. Spiegel’s “The American-Israeli Relationship: Past and Future,” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol 2 No 3 (2008), pp. 15-27.

rescuing of hijacked Jews from Entebbe in July 1976, the absorption of more than a million Russian and Ethiopian Jews in the 1980s and 1990s, all engendered self-esteem, self-confidence in being Jewish, and secular as well as religious reverence for Israel. For any Israeli government, its security and political relationship with the US is the most important foreign policy priority. Over the years that has meant its relationship with Washington is often more important than its relationships with Arab neighbors and/or progress in Arab-Israeli negotiations. It is for these reasons that Israeli prime ministers, either directly or through their ambassadors in Washington, personally manage relations between Jerusalem and Washington, rarely giving foreign ministers or other Israeli officials control of the vital US relationship.

In the last four decades, while the US has been actively engaged in Arab-Israeli mediation, it often disagreed with Israel over Israel's management of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Jerusalem (the three major bones of contention were over continued building of settlements in all the territories, erecting housing units in Jerusalem, and in managing the lives of the Palestinian population). Friction from these differences remain constants in the US-Israeli relationship. However, their common interests and shared values trump the regular differences and disagreements that regularly arise in an otherwise firm US-Israeli relationship. US-Israeli commonalities are structured on the defense of liberty, protecting individual rights, self-determination, freedom of worship, democratic principles, a common Judeo-Christian biblical past, the promotion of free trade, commerce and support of a meritocracy. For three centuries, Americans have had a passionate interest in Judaism, the Holy Land and Israel. Philanthropic, educational, and missionary links have connected Americans with the Middle East. Other links between Israel and Americans include basic common philosophical grounding in Judeo-Christian origins and ethics, and an affinity for the Old Testament and the prophets.<sup>12</sup> Among Christians who founded the United States, philo-Semitism was a core concept. Puritans, for example, saw themselves as a new chosen

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<sup>12</sup>There are a number of excellent books and articles dealing with the US and the Middle East. For the most readable and magisterial overview of US involvement in the Middle East, see Michael Oren's *Power, Faith and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present*, W.W. Norton and Company, 2007.



people in a new Promised Land. The Liberty Bell at Independence Hall in Philadelphia quotes the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 25:10), “Proclaim liberty throughout the land, to all the inhabitants thereof.” John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1600s, and President Abraham Lincoln, as Jews did, saw themselves as Puritans and as a “covenantal” people.<sup>13</sup>

There have been many strategic elements in the broader US-Israeli relationship. Much of it has to do with containing or limiting instability and preserving individual rights. It has included containment of anti-Soviet influence in the region and now restraining militant and nefarious Islamic ideologies, opposing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, collaborating against international terrorism, limiting the aggressive and hegemonic interests of Iran, supporting the political stability and sovereignty of moderate Arab states, sharing of strategic intelligence, and finding equitable ways to solve aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. American public opinion has continuously shown its pro-Israeli sympathies to be more than fifty per cent, sometimes spiking to seventy per cent.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to these factors, the personal attitudes of foreign and American leaders have entrenched many close relationships with Zionism and Israel. Most of these have been positive, some though have not. Over time, the vast majority of American politicians have accepted, endorsed, and supported Israel’s right to exist, and protect itself. For more than six decades, key politicians and decision makers have warmly acknowledged their identity with Jews, Judaism, Zionism, and Israel. Among them were Harry S. Truman, Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, George W. Bush, Barak Obama, and Joe Biden. Truman, who recognized Israel within moments of its declaration as a state in May 1948.

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<sup>13</sup> For an excellent popular as well as scholarly assessment Jews and Judaism in the minds and behavior of non-Jews see Adam Garfinkle, *Jewcentricity why the jews are prasied, blamed, and used to explain just about everything*, Wiley, 2009, especially, pp. 93-146. The discussion here about Christian familiarity, association, and identity with Judaism and modern Israel is barely a small fraction of the literature written on these topics. An excellent overview is David Brog’s *Standing with Israel Why Christians Support the Jewish State*, Front Line, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> “Support for Israel in U.S. at 63%, Near Record High,” Gallup Poll, February 24, 2010, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/126155/support-israel-near-record-high.aspx>

Previously as Senator, Vice-President, and President, he advocated for the assistance of Jews suffering in Europe. His core understanding of Jews and Judaism went back to his Baptist upbringing in Missouri, where he read the bible and developed “a sense of appropriateness about the Jewish return to Palestine.”<sup>15</sup> Yet, Truman understood that his State Department vigorously favored the desire of Arab leaders to prevent Jewish immigration to post-war Palestine, prevent Zionism’s reality in a state. Truman struggled against the State Department which believed it, not the President, should make policy about the Arab world and the Palestine issue.<sup>16</sup> Lyndon Johnson, who in June 1967, philosophically outlined United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 had a Baptist grandfather who told young Lyndon to, “Take care of the Jews, G-d’s chosen people.”<sup>17</sup> Johnson, like many presidents, distinguished between support of Israel and support of Israeli policies. Johnson said in January 1968, “We can’t support an Israel that sits tight [vis a vis the territories] The Israelis should be avoiding permanent moves in [the] occupied lands foreswearing “nuclear weapons and missiles.. [Israeli Prime Minister] Eshkol could have the Skyhawks, but unless Israel endorses UN Resolution 242 and renews its pledge not to go nuclear, there will be no phantoms.”<sup>18</sup> President Jimmy Carter’s character and personality were shaped by his Baptist roots and deep knowledge of the bible. In March 1983, Carter remarked while on one of our three lengthy trips to the Middle East, while viewing Christian holy sites in Damascus, and comparing Judaism and Christianity, “G-d looked out for the Jewish people.”<sup>19</sup> Despite Carter’s tough

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<sup>15</sup> Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis, The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948*, New York, 1977, p. 386.

<sup>16</sup> See Allis Radosh and Ronald Radosh, *A Safe Haven Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, Harper, 2009, pp. 47-60; For a review of American anti-Zionist attitudes as seen from a Jewish Agency professional see Eliyahu Elath, *Struggle for Statehood*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1979, (Hebrew), Vol. 1, pp. 448-450.

<sup>17</sup> Garfinkle, *Jewcentricity*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Little, “The United States and Israel, 1957-1968, pp. 579.

<sup>19</sup> From 1983-2006, I served as Middle East Fellow of the Carter Center in Atlanta where President Carter articulated his views on a variety of issues in his post-presidency. For the first ten of those years, I was his primary adviser on Middle Eastern affairs and had

policies toward Israel in the 1970s and his thoroughly anti-Israel attitudes later in life, he was driven to appreciate Jews if not always embrace them, an indication of which was his willingness to surround himself with a myriad of advisers with Jewish backgrounds as president and in his post-presidency. President Carter was willing to offer innovative suggestions for Israel's future security. He said in March 1977, "The Arab nations, the Israeli nation, have to agree on permanent and recognized borders, where sovereignty is legal as mutually agreed. Defense lines may or may not conform in the foreseeable future to those legal borders. There may be extensions of Israeli defense capability beyond the permanent and recognized borders..."<sup>20</sup> However, less than a year later, Carter sought to punish Israel because of its behavior vis a vis settlement expansion. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Adviser, Carter, "increasingly frustrated by Begin's provocations on the settlements, decided to increase the number of [air] planes to Egypt."<sup>21</sup> Brzezinski also noted, "the package deal of selling aircraft simultaneously to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Israel, was a strategy to paralyze the powerful Israel lobby on the Hill."<sup>22</sup> George W. Bush, at the end of his second term as president, on the occasion of speaking at the Israeli parliament intoned, "The alliance between our governments is unbreakable, yet the source of our friendship runs deeper than any treaty. It is grounded in the shared spirit of our people, the bonds of the Book, the ties of the soul." Bush continued, "when William Bradford stepped off the Mayflower in 1620, he quoted the words of Jeremiah: 'Come let us declare in Zion the word of God'. The founders of my country saw a new promised land and bestowed upon their towns names like Bethlehem and New Canaan. And in time, many Americans became passionate

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hundreds of hours of conversations with him about the region, the negotiating process, and American foreign policy options in the Middle East.

<sup>20</sup> Remarks by Jimmy Carter, March 9, 1977, The President's News Conference, The American Presidency Project, [www.americanpresidency.org](http://www.americanpresidency.org) On borders, President George Bush (II) in 2004, made a similar suggestion to Israeli Prime Minister Sharon, in fact endorsing a change from the precarious pre-June 1967 war borders.

<sup>21</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981*, New York, Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1983, p. 247-249.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

advocates for a Jewish state.”<sup>23</sup> And in his June 2009 presentation at Cairo University, President Barak Obama noted, “America’s strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties.”<sup>24</sup> Later in the same speech, Obama said, “The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements... It is time for these settlements to stop.”<sup>25</sup> Vice President Biden, in his March 2010 speech in Israel where he noted that Israel had no greater friend than himself, went on to chide their settlement policies. He noted his long term identification with Israel, “it started at my dinner table with my father, who you would refer to as a righteous Christian. ...My father’s support for Israel... generated a feeling for Israel that began in my gut and went to my heart, and the older I got matured in my mind...my mother and my father often spoke about the special connection between the Jewish people and this land.”<sup>26</sup> Regardless of which party controls the Oval Office, there is an almost unbreakable continuity in presidential attitudes towards Jews and Israel: a deep and unwavering commitment to Israeli security and well-being, an acknowledgement that Israel is in the US national interest; all this despite the fact that there is frequent and sharp disagreement between the US and Israel over territorial issues, and the pace, and content of the Arab-Israeli negotiating process.

### **Sustaining, Shaping and Managing the US-Israel relationship**

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<sup>23</sup> Prepared Text of President George W. Bush speech before the Israeli parliament, May 15m 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121083798995894943.html>

<sup>24</sup> Remarks by President Barak Obama, Cairo University, June 4, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Remarks by Vice-President Joseph Biden, “The Enduring Partnership Between the United States and Israel,” Tel Aviv University, March 11, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-vice-president-biden-enduring-partnership-between-united-states-and-israel>

Public support for insuring Israeli security has always been high among both Democrats and Republicans.<sup>27</sup> Some policy makers have emphatically stated however, that lobbying for Israel was and is a direct and dangerous impingement upon their professional prerogative to make policies free of influence and pressure from significantly vocal, legal, and effective pro-Israel groups. Since the late 1940s, some policy-makers have taken the view that any positive policies toward Israel could endanger relations with Moslem and Arab states. In January 1948, Moshe Shertok, Head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, engaged Loy Henderson and other American officials at one of numerous a high level meetings at the State Department. Shertok sensed that Henderson was opposed to all of the requests that he and Major Aubry Eban made for military assistance and political support from the United Nations and US. Shertok believed that Henderson, previously the American ambassador to Iraq and a close adviser to George Kennan the head of the Policy Staff at the Department, had given he and Eban a "frigid" welcome.<sup>28</sup> The assessment was an understatement. Henderson, by his own admission in an interview in later years, acknowledged that as a State Department official he was "rabidly anti-Zionist."<sup>29</sup> Henderson and Kennan were unalterably opposed to the creation of the Jewish state even after the US voted in favor of the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states.<sup>30</sup> Thirty years later, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser acknowledged that he intentionally devised a "strategy to

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<sup>27</sup> "See Amnon Cavari, "Courting the American Public: An Elite View to American Public Support of Israel," Association for Israel Studies 25<sup>th</sup> Conference, June 3, 2009, Beersheba, Israel and Amnon Cavari, "The Determinants of American Public Support for Israel," Association for Israel Studies, 26<sup>th</sup> Conference, May 10, 2010, Toronto, Canada.

<sup>28</sup> David Horowitz, *State in the Making*, New York 1953, p. 127.

<sup>29</sup> Oral History Interview with Loy Henderson, June 14, 1973, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri, paragraph 100.

<sup>30</sup> Report by the Policy Planning Staff on Position of the United States With Respect to Palestine, January 19, 1948, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Volume V (1948), pp. 546-554.

paralyze the powerful Israeli lobby on the Hill.”<sup>31</sup> Each Israeli Prime Minister has rejected and pushed back American efforts to impose limitations on Israel’s independent decision-making. In 1969 when the US Secretary of State Rogers announced his outline for a negotiated settlement to the conflict which included Israel’s withdrawal to the 1967 lines, the Israeli Government immediately rejected it. Israel had not been consulted. When Jimmy Carter publicly suggested that Israel might have to negotiate with the PLO, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin was “livid”<sup>32</sup> that Carter was telling the Israelis what to do and doing so in public and without prior consultation. From September 1978 forward, Menachem Begin publically disagreed with Jimmy Carter’s incorrect assertion that Israel had promised the night before the Camp David negotiations ended to a full moratorium on all settlement construction until the end of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. After the Reagan administration scolded Israeli Prime Minister Begin for destroying the Iraqi reactor in 1981, Begin delivered a scathing reply that Israel was not a “banana republic” suggesting that the US would not tell Israel what to do when it came to security. In 1982, when President Reagan announced his plan for the future of the West Bank without consulting Israel, Prime Minister Begin rejected the idea out of hand. In mediating the Arab-Israeli conflict, American officials often heard Israeli leaders claim, as Israeli Prime Minister Shamir did in 1991, that “the US is determined to force Israel from the territories,” to which American Secretary of State James Baker replied, “that [the Israelis] aren’t serious about negotiating peace.”<sup>33</sup>

Finally, American officials have explicitly stated that American interests in the Middle East are far greater than only a relationship with Israel. Each President has sought some equilibrium between often competing regional interests. In 1969, Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Joe Sisco succinctly summed up this attitude to Yitzhak Rabin,

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<sup>31</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle Memoirs of the National Security Adviser*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983, pp. 247-249.

<sup>32</sup> Author Interview with Hanan Bar-On, Deputy Chief of Mission Israeli Embassy in Washington, November 12, 1992, Jerusalem, Israel.

<sup>33</sup> James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992*, 1995, p. 493.

Israel's Ambassador to the United States, "our interests in the Middle East do not center on Israel alone. Our moral and practical commitment to Israel is by no means toward everything Israel wants or does. Let me tell you frankly: If our friendship with Israel is the only thing the United States is left with in the Middle East, that will be a catastrophic setback for American policy. We must work for a political solution [to the Arab-Israeli conflict] because it is the only thing that will safeguard our own array of [national] interests in the region."<sup>34</sup> In December 1975, in a private meeting with the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger characterized American policy toward Israel, "We don't need Israel for influence in the Arab world. On the contrary, Israel does us more harm than good in the Arab world. We can't negotiate about the existence of Israel, but we can reduce its size to historical proportions. If the issue is the existence of Israel, we can't cooperate. But if the issue is more normal borders, we can cooperate.... We want the survival of Israel but not dominating the area. What they want is what you predict—that they be the only friend. We want other friends, to reduce that argument."<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusions

The US-Israeli relationship is important to both countries. While the US has special foreign relationships with Britain, Canada, Mexico, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Israel and a host of other states,<sup>36</sup> US Ambassador to Israel Samuel W. Lewis said it exactly, "The relationship [with Israel] is deeper and wider than government to government, it is unique

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<sup>34</sup> Remarks by Joseph Sisco, Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, US Department of State to Israel Ambassador to the US., Yitzhak Rabin, circa June 1969, as quoted in Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, Boston: Little Brown and Co, 1979, p.149.

<sup>35</sup> US Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State to Saddun Hammadi, Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, December 17, 1975 as quoted in Kenneth W. Stein, "Henry Kissinger to Iraq in 1975: 'We Can Reduce Israel's Size,'" *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol 13, No 4, Fall 2006, pp. 71-78.

<sup>36</sup> For an excellent discussion of the US-Israel Special relationship, See Mitchell G Bard and Daniel Pipes, "How Special is the US-Israeli Relationship," *Middle East Quarterly*, June 1997, Vol 4 No.2, pp. 41-48; Gil Ehrenkranz, "How the United States Has Benefited from Its Alliance with Israel," *MERIA*, (on line journal), June 2010.

among all our relationships in the world.”<sup>37</sup> Lewis went on to describe the US-Israeli relationship exists like a Catholic marriage of old: you can love each other, yell at each other, disagree with each other, even leave each other for a period of time, but you do not get a divorce. Jimmy Carter (1977), Yitzhak Rabin (1992), and George W. Bush (2000) have all described the relationship as “special”. Israel is among more than a dozen countries that have a free trade agreement with the United States. Since World War II, Israel has received by far the most foreign aid of any country, outside of the expenditure to topple Saddam Hussein and rebuild Iraq. Unlike the strong US treaty relationship with NATO, the US has no formal treaty with Israel. However a spider web of interconnections tie the two countries inextricably together. They consist in the form of verbal stipulations of support that exist in US law, memoranda of understandings, congressional statements, presidential and bureaucratic assurances, and official alliances. The most forthright example covering military matters is the US-Israeli Strategic Cooperation Agreement (November 1981), signed by Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon and US Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger.<sup>38</sup> It was aimed at curbing Soviet controlled forces in the Middle East and became operational with the pre-positioning of US military material in Israel, additional military supply for Israel, and official strategic collaboration between the two countries. On most matters affecting Israel’s security there has rarely been a US deviation from support for the Israel needs to defend itself. For fiscal year 2011, the Obama Administration requested \$3 billion in foreign military financing to Israel. According to the State Department’s budget, justification for foreign operations, “U.S. assistance will help ensure that Israel maintains its qualitative military edge over potential threats, and prevent a shift in the security balance of the region. U.S. assistance is also aimed at ensuring for Israel the security it requires to make concessions

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<sup>37</sup> Remarks by Samuel W. Lewis, Conference on the US-Israeli relationship, Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, Miami, Florida, January 17, 2011. Lewis was US ambassador to Israel from 1977-1986.

<sup>38</sup> The SCA was drafted and signed between Israel’s June 1981 attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor and Israel’s June 1982 invasion of Lebanon. On both accounts, President Reagan scolded Israel in public and private, but the SCA was not suspended.



necessary for comprehensive regional peace.”<sup>39</sup> Differences on military assistance have historically occurred over what Israel perceives as necessary to maintain its qualitative military edge and pace in acquiring weapons systems. The most famous difference of opinion about Israel’s desire to receive military equipment and the US readiness to provide it, occurred during the first week of the October 1973 War when, the US temporarily delayed military equipment to Israel.<sup>40</sup> Describing the discrepancies on assessing military and diplomatic needs of both countries, David Korn, a career US State Department noted that “for the United States it is a policy matter, for the Israelis these [decisions] are life and death issues.”<sup>41</sup> The May 2010 National Security Strategy outlined general US interests abroad and stipulated a suggested outline for Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. It called for “a Jewish state of Israel, with true security, acceptance, and rights for all Israelis; and a viable, independent Palestine with contiguous territory that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and realizes the potential of the Palestinian people.”<sup>42</sup> For religious, moral, historical, and strategic reasons, Americans overwhelming support Israel’s right to exist as a state. American evangelicals, other Christians, and most American Jews find enormous philosophical and identity nourishment in supporting Israel. Increased political instability within Arab states, the lack of unanimity between them, and intrusive Iranian influence throughout the region, suggest that for at least the intermediate future, support for the US-Israeli alliance will not diminish despite Washington’s multiple interests in the region and its continued engagement in Arab-Israeli diplomacy which often stir tension in the relationship. The

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<sup>39</sup>Jeremy Sharp, “US Foreign Aid to Israel,” *US Congressional Research Service*, September 2010, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> For a full discussion of the resupply issue during the October 1973 War, see Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>41</sup> Author Interview with David Korn, October 29, 1992, Washington, DC. Korn served in numerous State Department posts dealing the Middle East including Political Officer, US Embassy Israel, 1967-1971, a stint on the Policy Planning Staff, as staff on various diplomatic visits to the region, at high level conferences, and finally as Office Director for Arab-Israel Affairs, 1979-1981.

<sup>42</sup> For full text of the National Security Strategy, May 2010 is at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf)

factors that initially unfolded the US-Israeli relationship, made it grow, stumble, and navigate successfully through tough times, remain, with some modifications, essentially the same today as they did in 1948.