

U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

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Reagan and Bush--Contrasting Styles / A Strongly Pro-Israel Bureaucracy / 21st Century Politics vs. 19th Century Politics / Declining Attention to the Middle East / The Image of Arabs in the U.S. / The Bush Strategy for the Peace Process / No Erosion for Israel in Congress / Redefining Strategic Cooperation / Are American Jews Turning Against Israel? / The Image of Israel Among the Foreign Policy Elite / Israel and the Future of American Politics / A Need for New Ideas

The world is moving into a new era in international relations in the wake of the apparent end of the forty-year Cold War. After viewing the first year of the Bush administration following eight years of the markedly pro-Israel Reagan administration, one may begin to assess the impact of this changing world on U.S.-Israeli relations.

Reagan and Bush--Contrasting Styles

In his style as president, Ronald Reagan provided an inspired leadership with a great emphasis on media--the Great Communicator. He was also a great romantic, whether in relations toward Israel, the Soviet Union, or any other area of the world. He never visited Israel, yet he had a great deal of faith in it. He started his term in office by declaring the Soviet Union to be an "evil empire," but after he came to know Gorbachev he became a champion of a closer relationship with Moscow.

The Reagan Doctrine attempted to place America on the offensive. Ronald Reagan, as his aides and cabinet members used to say, was a big picture man. He was not very concerned about details but was strongly committed to decision and direction. People around him always said they knew where he wanted to go. It was just a question of how to get there, and that was their job.

In his style, George Bush is in many ways the precise opposite of Ronald Reagan. He is an anti-media figure, often dull and even boring, yet he is knowledgeable in terms of the bureaucratic elements of leadership. He has frequent news conferences and is able to deal with a great number of issues. He has considerable experience in government in Washington, unlike his predecessor. He is a cautious bureaucrat who leads a can-do administration, offering pragmatism instead of vision.

There are important implications for substance in the Bush style, which attempts to divide issues into their components and does not divide the world into good guys and bad guys. We have seen many substantive implications of this style already, for example, in the administration's cautious approach to glasnost. Only when the Berlin wall crumbled and the Communist regimes literally came tumbling down did this administration begin to operationalize a new approach to Soviet-American relations. The new style may be seen in reverse form in the U.S. move into Panama, in which the attempt to avoid being labeled "wimp" in the wake of cautious moves after the October coup failure finally resulted in full-scale U.S. military intervention.

In terms of personnel, especially relating to the Middle East, the Bush administration is also very different. The Reagan administration, in keeping with the president himself, was an administration of great personalities, controversial, but figures who attracted followings, who attracted attention. We think of Reagan himself; Alexander Haig; George Shultz, who was a kind of charismatic anti-charismatic figure but who, especially in pro-Israeli circles, developed a considerable following; William Casey, the head of the CIA until his death; or Caspar Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense. As regards the Middle East, these were also people of extremes--extremely pro-Israeli or, in the case of Weinberger, particularly antagonistic.

The personnel of the Bush administration, as in its style, present an image of gray, not black and white. They are pragmatists and, for example, regard Israel with no particular opposition and no special sympathy. Israel is evaluated in terms of its perceived political and strategic importance, but without any grand romantic vision.

It is often forgotten that the Bush administration is a Ford administration retread. George Bush was Ford's CIA chief. Brent Scowcroft was in the same position as National Security Council advisor. Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger was an important aide to Kissinger. Secretary of State James Baker was the head of the Ford campaign in 1976. Richard Cheney, now Secretary of Defense, was the White House chief of staff. It is quite remarkable how many people are back in office again, and these are people who prefer to operate behind the scenes. They are "can-do" administrators rather than romantic showmen.

On the Middle East, there are only two individuals in the Bush Administration who can be considered to be particularly partisan. One is the vice president, who is edging out a more pro-Israeli position than he had in the Senate. He is currently on a campaign to reverse the "Zionism is racism" resolution. On the other hand, there is White House chief of staff John Sununu, the highest ranking Arab-American executive branch official in American history, a man who is closer to the president in terms of time spent with him than perhaps any other senior aide, and who is clearly not sympathetic. Indeed, so gray is this administration and so lacking in personalities that its most photogenic and quotable figure is Dan Quayle.

A Strongly Pro-Israel Bureaucracy

What is quite unique and interesting about the Bush administration is the make-up of the second tier of foreign policy officials. There is a remarkable coterie of figures who are known for their ability and which includes a significant number of identified Jews. They are sympathetic to Israel and yet many of them have been entrusted with conducting American policy. This group includes: Dennis Ross, the Policy Planning Chief, in many fields the closest foreign policy advisor to the Secretary of State (he has certainly elevated the Policy Planning staff to a new role of importance in this administration); Aaron David Miller, Middle East advisor on the Policy Planning staff; Daniel Kurtzer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs, dealing with Arab-Israeli negotiations; Richard Haas, the National Security Council advisor on the Middle East; Paul Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy; and Harvey Slickman, a favorite Baker speechwriter. They are joined by several non-Jews: Lawrence Eagleburger, Deputy Secretary of State; John Kelly, Assistant Secretary of State; Richard Clarke, Assistant Secretary of State for Political and Military Affairs; and Henry Rowen, who has similar duties in the Pentagon at the International Security Affairs agency. This is the most pro-Israel coterie of second tier officials in American history, and this list does not even include kindred figures such as Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of States for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs; Abraham Sofaer, the State Department legal counsel; or Richard Burt, the chief arms control negotiator. So the gray top level is matched by a dynamic and more pro-Israeli second level in this administration.

21st Century Politics vs. 19th Century Politics

There are many significant changes in the world arena which began in the late Reagan period and have accelerated during the first year of the Bush administration. As we move into a new era, those countries that are able to adjust to what may be called twenty-first century politics will benefit more than those which remain wedded to nineteenth century political conceptions.

Twenty-first century politics is the politics of microchips, communications satellites, advanced technology, of emphasis on economic rather than military power. This is the arena in which the United States, Japan and Western Europe are moving. The Soviets and Eastern Europeans say very clearly that this is what their present revolutions are about, that they want to be part of that world. The nineteenth century world is a world of nationalism, a world distinctive in its emphasis on military force and of pleas for national self-determination. This emphasis is most prominent today in the Middle East, in other areas of the Third World, and in various parts of the Soviet Empire, where nineteenth century politics is competing with twenty-first century politics. Interestingly enough, Israel is in an unusual position because it aspires to and is in many ways close to being a twenty-first century politics country in a nineteenth century region.

Declining Attention to the Middle East

The impact of these new developments on American foreign policy are to diffuse and diversify American perspectives. America's numerous and varied concerns today include the four E's--El Salvador, economics, environment, and Eastern Europe; the two A's -- abortion and AIDS; and the two D's--death and drugs. There is a further focus on the questions of a united Europe, Japan, China, Gorbachev, Nicaragua and Panama. Many people are beginning to argue that in the post-Cold War period matters such as drugs and the environment are the key foreign policy and security issues and not the traditional problems of nuclear deterrence and conventional military power.

There is a sense in America that the Cold War is over and we won. But it is not 1919 and it is not 1945. There is no confidence that America can withdraw from the world back into safety. People have a host of new worries and concerns. There is a recognition of the necessity to adjust to the new era, not a sense that America can retreat. There is a sense that there will be different kinds of troubles. Also, one should not underestimate the impact of Tiananmen Square on the American psyche, the sense that it is all reversible, that Gorbachev could be gone tomorrow and that someone terrible could rise to power in the USSR.

We are not in a world like the 1970s in which American policy was concentrated on the Middle East and the energy crisis. Fear of a Soviet-American confrontation and of economic dislocations symbolized by gaslines made the Middle East the most important region in the world in terms of the amount of time that American officials were prepared to spend on the issue. Jimmy Carter's presidency was a Middle East presidency, with the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, the fall of the Shah, the Iranian hostage crisis, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. President Carter said after 18 months in office that he had spent more time on the Arab-Israeli issue alone than on any other single issue, domestic or foreign.

That is certainly not true of this administration. The president is bombarded with a wide variety of problems, domestic and foreign, of which the Middle East is only one. Indeed, it is surprising that the Secretary of State has found the kind of time that he has to attempt to move the peace process forward.

What has changed is that the Arab-Israeli issue and the Palestinian question in particular has resurfaced as the major problem for American foreign policy-makers in the Middle East. In the Reagan era there had been a conscious decision to diffuse concerns because of a sense of overconcentration on Arab-Israeli matters by the Carter administration. Thus, the United States intervened twice in the area during the Reagan era, in Lebanon and the Persian Gulf, two issues which were not central to the Arab-Israeli confrontation.

Today in the United States there is a growing respect and prestige for the struggle of the Palestinians, abetted and deepened by adverse media coverage of Israel. On the other hand, there is some disillusionment with the PLO compared to the end of the Reagan administration. There is a growing belief that Arafat has not delivered on what he promised in December 1988. This attitude is certainly very strong in Congress and is growing in intensity. There is a belief that the PLO must begin to address the Israeli people directly with promises of peace and examples of moderation instead of talking to everyone but Israelis.

There also seems to be a good deal of evidence that the American audience is not listening to what is happening in the territories, except for the Jewish audience. There are so many countervailing world developments that to an increasing degree the intifada is beginning to be compared to the conflicts in Northern Ireland or Sri Lanka, issues to be mentioned on the back pages of the newspaper and forgotten. Many Israelis may be relieved at this development, but the reverse side is a certain contemptuous attitude that both parties are crazy and there is nothing much that America can do about them and their unending hostility.

The Image of Arabs in the U.S.

The image of the Arab in America is very controversial and it is also extremely inconsistent. In the 1970s, when Americans first began to pay attention to this area and to the Arabs in particular, there was both respect for the power of growing Arab oil wealth and resentment of it. In the 1980s, the spate of terrorist incidents reached a point where airplane passengers would become nervous if they saw someone who looked Arab. There was a real anti-Arab attitude, in racial terms, that seemed to sweep the country.

Now this has been balanced off by several factors. First, the intifada and the image of the struggling Palestinian has replaced the image of the Arab terrorist in stereotypical terms. The Palestinian David versus the Israeli Goliath image has been promoted by the media. Second, Arab Americans are beginning to come into their own. Many of them say very explicitly that they see what the Jews have accomplished and want the same thing, so there is a proliferation of Arab American organizations. There is no question that Jesse Jackson has had a major impact in organizing Arab Americans as part of the Rainbow Coalition. This was most apparent in the Michigan Democratic caucuses in 1988 where the support of Arab Americans helped Jackson to defeat Dukakis. But Arab Americans are highly dispersed, they are not organized the way Jewish Americans are, and at the present time, while they are certainly stronger than they were fifteen years ago, they do not compare in strength and influence to Jewish Americans.

With the spread of democracy in Eastern Europe, some have suggested that Israel's commitment to democracy should be emphasized to gain support for it vis-a-vis the Arabs in the American public mind. However, the truth of the matter, which is really the

reverse side of a racial attitude against Arabs, is that people do not expect Arabs to be democrats. No one is particularly interested when Arabs kill Arabs because this is what people expect of Arabs. So the very factors that lead people to be pro-Israeli and antagonistic to Arabs also make it hard to use the idea of democracy against Arabs. People would just think Arab democracy is hopeless, especially after the collapse of Lebanon.

The Bush Strategy for the Peace Process

The Bush administration today is employing a great number of people to promote the peace process. They are attempting a very cautious, careful approach to pursue confidence-building measures. Indeed, the Bush philosophy and its style toward foreign affairs meshes well with what most American specialists believe is possible at the present time. It is not accidental that the Bush administration has embraced the Shamir plan perhaps more strongly than the Israeli administration itself because it sees the plan as a gradual, step-by-step, confidence-building process that will lead to some amelioration of the Palestinian question.

The administration is prepared to wait because, in part, it has no other choice. The parties are not yet ready and there are too many other claims on its time and energy elsewhere in the world. Yet Israel should understand that this administration is prepared to demonstrate very clearly that wimps can become tigers, and if there were to be a major Arab peace initiative that would be seen as credible in Washington, it is quite possible that this administration, cautious and careful though it may be, would make a move. If it were ever to appear that the Israeli government was the major obstacle to the Shamir plan there would be a crisis in American-Israeli relations.

No Erosion for Israel in Congress

Fortunately for Israel, the Congress also plays a role in foreign policy. Congress is still controlled by the Democratic party, which means that Bush is well aware that he can be criticized for his Middle East policy. Because of its South African ties, because of the intifada, because of Israel's declining economy, because of Israel's apparent problems with absorption of Soviet Jews, there is no question that its reputation has declined. There has been a great deal of talk over the past year of an erosion on Capitol Hill. However, by every quantitative index, Israel is stronger than ever in terms of congressional support for its policies. Indeed, many Congressmen seem to be clamoring for particular efforts to improve the American relationship with Israel.

Yet beneath the surface there lurks nagging doubts that public statements may not be matched by private commitment. Many Congressional analysts are predicting that as early as 1990 there will be a reduction in aid for Israel, not in criticism of Israel but

because of the Gramm-Rudman law and the budget deficit process. It is fair to add that the same analysts were predicting that 1989 would be the year of erosion and that has not occurred, but, nevertheless, the predictions continue. Certainly, if the adverse media coverage of Israel continues unabated, then gradually an erosion will occur.

Redefining Strategic Cooperation

In the early 1980s there was a great deal of rhetoric in favor of strategic cooperation with Israel, particularly in the light of the fall of the Shah, but the actual institutionalization of this cooperation was very weak. Then in the mid-1980s, due to a great deal of pressure from the President and the Secretary of State (certainly not from the Secretary of Defense), there was the beginning of the institutional process. A number of people in the American bureaucracy became involved with this program and liked what they saw, so that in a very quiet way strategic cooperation did become institutionalized.

Today the notion has grown, in part fanned by those who were always opposed to strategic cooperation, that with the end of the Cold War there is no longer any need for American-Israeli collaboration. The opponents of Israel have unleashed a barrage of articles, newspaper reports and leaks that propound this argument. There has been no significant response by supporters of strategic cooperation.

I think that the strategic relationship between Washington and Jerusalem was mis-sold. I never saw it as strictly anti-Soviet, though it was very easy to sell in this way to conservatives. There is another concept of strategic cooperation which is a partnership between the United States and Israel on a wide variety of common issues. Indeed, one can argue that in the 1990s, logically, the American relationship with Israel should become stronger, not weaker, because the United States will still be active in the world but will face problems, such as Panama, which are not classic superpower-type problems. For example, an Israeli-style commando raid to capture Noriega might have made a great deal more sense than a full-scale invasion.

Second, America may require more of the kind of expertise represented by Israel's upgrading of outdated military hardware because in the post-Cold War period the United States is not going to order as many advanced, expensive weapons such as planes or tanks. Washington will opt to upgrade old material as Israel has always done and the U.S. military may therefore begin to welcome the value of Israel's methods.

Third, I do not think the Mediterranean will become less significant in the new era. Instead, its vast oil supplies and inherent instability mean that the region may become more important as an area of conflict outside Europe, especially because there will not be as much attention paid to the military theater in Central Europe.

Fourth, Israel as a democracy will be in a position to help fledgling kindred democracies in East Europe and elsewhere.

The strategic cooperation argument should not be oversold, but at the same time it should be presented in proper perspective.

Are American Jews Turning Against Israel?

There has been a great deal of incorrect and inaccurate talk that recently American Jews are less interested in Israel or are turning against Israel. The actual situation is far more complex. American Jews are as involved in Israel as ever, but there is a growing difference over tactics and the old unity has been shattered. In a way, American Jews are doing what they have always done, which is to imitate Israelis, and the Likud-Labor competition has been exported to the United States. This competition has made divisions acceptable. Indeed, Israelis themselves have intensified this process in their frequent trips to the United States, in their criticism of the other side both on the right and on the left. The result is a growing bifurcation among the American Jewish leadership.

The majority are still Washington-oriented, following the classic agenda of maintaining Israel's public relations and public image, promoting foreign aid, and opposing arms sales to Arabs. There is a growing number, however, who argue that support for Israel in the United States is now very strongly entrenched, as a result of the strategic cooperation agreement, the experience of the 1980s, and the nature of the Bush administration. They do not fear a return of Carter administration policies and instead focus their attention more on Jerusalem than on Washington. They feel there are problems with Israeli policies--who is a Jew, the Israeli economy, civil liberties, electoral reform, and the Soviet Jewish question are issues often cited. Soviet Jews must be absorbed in Israel, they say, but Israelis do not appear to be able to handle it so we have to help. People are beginning to make offers, they are beginning to pay more attention to getting involved in Israel.

The American Jewish establishment was furious with Israel a year or two ago because they felt that Soviet Jews should have the right to go anywhere in the world they wanted to go. Then two things happened. First, they discovered that it was not so easy to absorb Soviet Jews in huge numbers. They realized that this was going to destroy the American Jewish community because there would be little or no funds left over for anything else. Second, a great crisis developed when people started to say: why should Soviet Jews who can go to Israel come to America and take the place of a poor Vietnamese or an El Salvadorian, people who really have nowhere else to go and who are really victims of oppression? Individuals who were anti-Israel suddenly became Zionists in this sense, and it was an argument that particularly swept the left of the American Jewish spectrum overnight. Now American Jews are extremely interested in this route, as are others, and there are a variety of proposals in Congress and in the

community for helping Soviet Jews settle in Israel. Of course, if Soviet Jews are settled in large numbers on the West Bank, that is going to cause very serious problems, including a crisis with the Bush administration. But outside of that, the image of Soviet Jews settling in Israel is today a very strong and positive image in America.

Lurking behind all of this is the Palestinian question. People who take the Jerusalem-oriented approach are more likely to disagree with Israeli policy, particularly with Likud policy, on the Palestinian question. While there is still an overall reluctance to become involved in Israeli security questions on the part of most American Jews, there is a growing willingness among some to speak out.

Jews have thus come full circle from 1967. Then Israel could do no wrong. Now it sometimes seems that Israel can do no right, and in a sense this is still a black and white view of Israel. There is no question that Israel now is not seen, even by many of its supporters, as a country that is a miracle worker. The Entebbe vision of Israel is gone. Now it is seen as a country that gets into trouble. The kibbutzim are bankrupt; the country is riddled with mismanagement; it has a leadership crisis. There is contempt for the Labor party and fear of the Likud.

Then how is there so much incredible support for Israel if this is the attitude? Because among both Christians and Jews in America there is this fascination with Israel, that Israel is part of our team, that Israel will get its act together and will somehow solve the intifada. Israel is still the best act in the Middle East. It is still a vibrant democracy enduring enormous problems. There is a kind of loving criticism. It is "in" to criticize Israel but most critics do stop at the water's edge.

The polls show that support for Israel among American Jews remains very strong. There are certain weak spots. For example, there is a falling off of support for Israel among Jewish youth, and there is a bit of a Babylonian complex among a small minority who identify Jewishly but are not interested in Israel. These weaknesses should not be overemphasized because there is contradictory evidence. Participation by American Jewish students in certain Israel-based programs has increased. In an odd way the conflict between Jewish and minority students on many campuses today is making committed Jews out of otherwise indifferent Jewish students because of a need to defend themselves against blatant anti-Semitism.

While it is true that evidence of disillusionment with Israeli policy may be seen in the attitudes of some American Jews, particularly among liberals, intellectuals and youth, it is too simplistic to say that people therefore are simply turned off. There is also the intensification of the attitude that Israel is too important to be left to Israelis, which is different than totally turning off to Israel. As suggested by the growth of such programs as the New Israel Fund, people are searching for ways in which they can become more--not less--involved in specific efforts in Israel. On the reverse side, if one looks at the rank and file, especially among older American Jews, there continues to be a willingness to follow whoever is prime minister and an attitude that if it is Israeli, it is right.

The Image of Israel Among the Foreign Policy Elite

There has certainly been an erosion in the communications elites and the intellectual establishment--the Eastern establishment was never particularly favorable anyway. But among the "Council of Foreign Relations crowd" there has not been as much of an erosion in support of Israel as might have been expected. Here we find the strength of a major segment of the neo-conservative movement. The students of the late Senator Henry Jackson, some Jewish, some not Jewish, are prepared to say very strongly that Israel is part of their worldview of America's global position. They played a very strong role in the Reagan administration and they still play a role in the Bush administration, as suggested by many individuals in the administration who are part of this school of thought about American foreign policy. But there has been an erosion in the academic and intellectual world that could affect the cadre in any future Democratic administration.

Israel and the Future of American Politics

To understand the balance of intellectual and political forces vis-a-vis Israel in the United States, we must go back to the mid-1970s. In 1976 there were two groups in the Democratic party. One group, led by people like Henry Jackson and Hubert Humphrey, were very sympathetic to Israel. There was another group that believed strongly that Israel was a troublemaker and that the answer to America's problems in the Middle East and regarding the energy crisis was to pressure Israel into a settlement. (It is worth recalling that there was a Labor government in Israel at this time.) Jimmy Carter came into office and sided with the second group. If Hubert Humphrey or Henry Jackson would have been elected, that Democratic administration would have taken an entirely different attitude vis-a-vis the Middle East.

In 1988, if Jack Kemp or Alexander Haig had been elected president, we would have a closer relationship between Washington and Jerusalem than we have under George Bush. On the other hand, if Robert Dole had been elected president, we probably would have had more crises in U.S.-Israeli relations. A great deal depends on the particular individual elected to the presidency and the people he selects for key posts.

The Democratic party still has a great number of very strong pro-Israeli political figures left inside it. However, it has an absence of foreign policy expertise because it has been out of power so long. Here the weakness of pro-Israel circles in the academic environment would likely have an impact unless the American Jewish community becomes more sensitive to the necessity of identifying potentially favorable officials in any future Democratic administration.

A Need for New Ideas

Many American Jews have become enamored with the political process and with political power. They believe that the combination of PACs (political action committees), contributions to candidates, and contacts with individuals has worked a miracle in terms of influencing American support for Israel. Yet while these have been important factors, the arena of ideas is often forgotten in these analyses. Powerful ideas that could be supported by both liberals and conservatives helped to strengthen the American Jewish role and the Israeli-American relationship over the last fifteen years. Support for Soviet Jewry, for example, was an idea that could be lauded by both the left and the right in American politics from the 1970s onward. The concept of Israel as a strategic asset has been interpreted differently by liberals and conservatives. Conservatives saw it as an anti-Soviet move, whereas liberals saw it more in terms of strengthening the overall relationship, but it certainly had a magic impact on American policy and American relations with Israel in the 1980s. Supporters of Israel are going to have to produce new ideas to adapt to the political world of the 1990s or they are likely to find themselves victims of events and of a pragmatic administration that has no patience with people who are out of date.

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