



Israeli-American Relations and the Peace Process

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There is a general consensus that Israel, as a “client” of the United States, uniformly seeks to maximize its leverage over American policy. But, in fact, different Israeli governments have pursued conflicting approaches to the United States in the context of the peace process, some with more success than others, depending on how they interpreted both Israel's core strategic interests and the relative value of the United States to Israeli security.

“The people of Israel have lived for 3700 years without a strategic memorandum with America and will continue to live without it for another 3700 years.” - Menachem Begin

“For Rabin, the survival of Israel was inextricably linked to the United States.” - Joseph Sisco, former U.S. Undersecretary of State

Despite the many volumes of literature about Israel's relationship with the United States, there has been very little discussion of the place of the United States in Israel's policy toward the peace process.(1) The general assumption that Israel, as a “client” state, uniformly seeks to maximize its leverage over American policy irrespective of internal differences is false. (2) Indeed, internal Israeli differences provide the key to understanding Israeli policy. Contrasting interpretations of both Israel's core strategic interests and the relative value of the United States to Israeli security have led to conflicting Israeli approaches to the U.S. executive branch, Congress, the pro-Israel lobby, and the U.S. role in the peace process in general. These different strategies have important implications for the future of both Israel's peace policy and American-Israeli relations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After 1967, the relationship with the United States developed into an extremely important component of Israeli security. The United States became Israel's only major arms supplier, balancing Soviet backing of the Arab states and supplying the technology necessary to maintain Israel's “qualitative edge.” After the 1973 War, as Israel's military budget soared, it became increasingly dependent on U.S. aid. In the wake of the Arab oil embargo, Israel also became increasingly isolated and thus diplomatically reliant on the United States. In addition, its relationship with the United States served as a deterrent against direct attack from the USSR.

Recognizing the benefits of such close relations with the United States, most of the Israeli elite sought to protect and enhance them, though they were also aware of the dangers of over-reliance, which would limit Israel's room for diplomatic and military maneuver in instances when U.S. and Israeli interests diverged. Some were also wary of the possibility that Washington might attempt to gain favor with the Arab world at Israel's expense by seeking to impose an unfavorable peace deal on Israel.

On the other hand, the United States proved very useful in sounding out the Arab side on ideas for compromise that might be more acceptable coming from

Washington than Jerusalem. Yitzhak Rabin in the Sinai II agreement (1975) and Menahem Begin at Camp David (1979) both accepted American mediation in the peace process. Yet as the focus of the peace process moved away from the consensus issue of Egypt toward the more controversial question of the future of the West Bank and the Palestinians, major differences regarding the U.S. role in the peace process emerged.

RELATIONS WITH THE EXECUTIVE

Moving from right to left on the Israeli political spectrum, there are four identifiable approaches to relations with the U.S. executive regarding the peace process: Ultra-nationalism, Conservatism, Realism, and Progressivism. These approaches are distinguishable by their underlying attitudes toward two issues: the relative value of maintaining control over the territory captured by Israel in the Six Day War, and the relative value of the United States as a factor in Israeli security. Given consistent U.S. executive support for the "land for peace" formula as the basis for an Arab-Israeli rapprochement, the stronger Israel's attachment to the 1967 territories, the less likely there can be a coordinated Israeli-American policy toward the peace process.

In addition, the more the United States is seen as a central factor in Israeli security, the greater the likelihood that Israeli leaders will actively seek U.S. involvement in the peace process as a means of tying America into Israel's security network and the more prepared they will be to make concessions in peace negotiations, if deemed necessary to retain American support. The section below will identify the main supporters of each approach and their position regarding the two central issues outlined above. Building on this base, the "operational code" (3) of each approach will be constructed and each approach's practical policy will be explored.

ULTRA-NATIONALISM

Ultra-nationalism has been represented strongly on the right of the Likud Party, within the National Religious Party, and in the far-right parties: Techiya, Tzomet, Moledet, and Ha-Ichud Ha-Luemi. The most important ultra-nationalist policymakers were former prime ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, former minister of defense and foreign minister Ariel Sharon, and former army chief of staff and cabinet minister Rafael Eitan. This group was extremely influential in the 1980s, but it has since moved from the center to the periphery of Israeli politics, a fact reflected by its poor showing in the 1999 Israeli election.

UNDERLYING ATTITUDES

The most elevated value of ultra-nationalism and the focus of its idealism was the unity of the whole land of Israel. Such attitudes were diametrically opposed to the consistent American position, which advocates territorial compromise as the basis for peace. This clash was mitigated when the ultra-nationalists' accepted that territory captured by Israel in 1967 that lay outside the historic borders of the land of Israel was open to negotiation. (Thus, Begin returned the Sinai peninsula to Egypt in return for peace, while Shamir stated explicitly to a high-ranking Israeli official that he would be prepared to withdraw from the Golan in exchange for a peace treaty with Syria.) (4) In both cases, the ultra-nationalists offered territorial concessions in order to buy time for increased settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza, thereby tightening Israel's long-term hold on those territories.

For ultra-nationalists, military self-reliance coupled with strength of will and assertiveness, (5) represented the key to Israel's security. The ultra-nationalists were concerned that reliance on the United States would damage Israel's self-image of

being capable of defending itself, which would then weaken Israel's deterrence posture vis-a-vis the Arabs. They feared a "Vietnamization of Israel" whereby the Jewish state would be transformed into an American "protectorate." (6)

OPERATIONAL CODE: UNILATERALISM AND SETTLEMENTS

Ultra-nationalism tended to oppose American involvement in the peace process. Most ultra-nationalists favored a strategy based on self-reliance and defiant unilateralism. In the 1980s, they recognized the value of an American cover against any possible Soviet or Soviet client aggression, but not at the price of giving up Israel's freedom of maneuver. It had to be American insurance without American interference. In return for Israeli support on East-West questions, the ultra-nationalists expected the Americans not to interfere in Jerusalem's attempt to incorporate gradually the West Bank and Gaza into Israel.

Ultimately, the support of outside powers such as the United States was secondary to Israel's ability to act directly with force. Consequently, Begin did not view coordination with the United States regarding the peace process as especially important. As he declared after meeting President Carter for the first time in 1978: "We acted in accordance with a new strategy....We did not try and reach agreement with the U.S. on the critical issues of the peace negotiations." (7) Shamir also reasoned that so long as Israel did not cause too much commotion, the United States would not interfere with the business of Jewish settlement. Still, he recognized that Israel could not be seen as the factor holding up the peace process in American eyes. Shamir believed that Israel could maintain control of the territories without seriously damaging its relations with the United States because it had the support of powerful pro-Israel forces in

Washington and was the dominant power in the territories. (8)

POLICY

"If he [Begin] did something outrageous and we kept quiet, he would say 'obviously the Americans don't object or they would have said something.' If we did protest, he would throw a tantrum and complain loudly about interference in Israel's affairs... Begin was constantly breaking the outer limits of how far he could go in trying Washington patience...Sharon seems to believe that no matter what he does, the United States will have no choice other than to go along." (9) -A senior U.S. official

Ultranationalism reached the zenith of its power between 1981 and 1983, when Begin applied Israeli law to the Golan Heights without consulting the United States. Subsequently, Washington suspended the U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Strategic Cooperation, to which Begin responded, "the people of Israel have lived for 3700 years without a strategic memorandum with America and will continue to live without it for another 3700 years." (10) Similarly, having allegedly obtained tacit support for Israel's June 1982 invasion of Lebanon from U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Begin and Sharon (11) were indignant when, following Haig's replacement by George Shultz, the United States began to contradict Israel's strategy for dealing with Lebanon, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the broader peace process. From the ultra-nationalist perspective, the invasion was not simply aimed at preventing PLO terrorist attacks from Lebanon, it was expected to severely weaken the organization and facilitate the emergence of a Palestinian leadership that would accept Israeli supremacy in the

West Bank. (12) Subsequently, Begin's response to the Reagan Peace Plan of September 1, 1982, which called for territorial concessions by Israel, was to inform the Knesset: "We have no reason to get on our knees." Further, on September 5, the cabinet approved the immediate establishment of three new settlements in the territories, in defiance of the Reagan Plan's call for a settlement freeze.

Shamir preferred to quietly build settlements in order to prevent the possibility of territorial compromise by denying the Palestinians territorial contiguity and instead creating islands of autonomy as in the Sharon Plan. In order to help prevent the build-up of U.S. pressure for a settlement freeze, Shamir always tried to appear open to the American executive's strategy for peace. Consequently, although he had originally opposed the Camp David Accords, he accepted them once they were adopted as a pragmatic Likud negotiating stance. He maintained such a stance throughout most of the 1980s in order to keep Israel on reasonable terms with the United States without the threat of real concessions, since no Arab party appeared willing to negotiate anyway. Similarly, Shamir attended the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, despite his obvious reluctance, in order to please the Americans. But, as he explained just after he left office: "I would have carried on autonomy talks for ten years. Meanwhile we would have reached half a million Jews in Judea and Samaria." (13) However, his sustained opposition to the Bush administration's demand for a settlement freeze, which cost his government's obtaining \$10 billion worth of loan guarantees during its term, demonstrated his unwillingness to compromise on any issue that threatened ultra-nationalism's core Eretz Israel ideology.

Since 1992, the ultra-nationalists have never regained full control over Israeli policy. In response to the Oslo

peace process, they have continued to preach settlement expansion and were highly critical of Benjamin Netanyahu's territorial concessions. Nonetheless, as foreign minister, Sharon supported the U.S.-brokered Wye Accord, which demanded a further 13 percent Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. But Sharon's acquiescence did not signal a real change in the ultra-nationalist approach. Just days after leaving the Wye plantation, he publicly encouraged settlers to "grab hills" in the West Bank. (14) Such defiance ran counter to his own government's official policy and the spirit of Wye Agreement, as well as Israel's verbal pledges at the Wye summit not to expand settlement activity in this manner. (15) Sharon subsequently asked the Russians, rather than the Americans, to mediate between Israel and Syria, without even informing Washington. This move was a blatant appeal to Israel's Russian immigrant electorate, but also typical of the ultra-nationalist tendency to act independently of the United States. (16)

CONSERVATIVISM

The conservative approach has traditionally been represented by Likud's pragmatic wing, though during Netanyahu's tenure as party leader the conservative bloc splintered and individual conservatives joined different parties, primarily because of personal conflicts with Netanyahu rather than ideological reasons. Leading conservative figures include former foreign and defense minister Moshe Arens, former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former ambassador to the United States Zalman Shoval, mayor of Jerusalem Ehud Olmert, and former Likud finance minister and current member of the Center party Dan Meridor. Former Likud MKs Roni Milo and David Levy have been loosely associated with this group.

UNDERLYING ATTITUDES

The conservatives have been united by a commitment to keeping the whole land of Israel, civic values, and a predominantly realpolitik approach to foreign policy. Until the intifada, they opposed territorial compromise in the West Bank and Gaza, favoring autonomy for the Palestinians and continued Jewish settlement in those territories. However, after the intifada, the conservatives began to think beyond the traditional model of autonomy, both as a democratic-moral necessity and as a necessity dictated by realpolitik. As Arens put it: "Israel must maintain a reasonable correlation between concrete objectives and resources. As a nation dedicated to Western values and ideals, we must live by them not only in Israel itself, but also in our dealings with the Palestinian population." (17) Subsequently, Arens and Milo favored a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. (18) Arens also argued that Israeli settlements in the West Bank should be limited to blocks, making possible territorial compromise. (19) But it was Netanyahu who publicly abandoned the Likud's long-time support for autonomy by embracing the concept of territorial compromise. His plan envisaged a withdrawal from roughly half of the West Bank, which would effectively mean abandoning some Jewish settlements. Netanyahu also talked about accepting a demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with limited sovereignty, (20) a position that allowed conservatives to cooperate with the United States in a manner that the ultra-nationalists could not really contemplate.

The conservatives' Realism led them to recognize Washington's importance in enhancing Israeli deterrence. To this end they greatly valued the two Memoranda of Strategic Cooperation (MoU) signed by Israel and the United States in the 1980s. They also recognized Washington's pivotal role in encouraging the moderation in the Middle East that

helped engender the Madrid Conference in 1991 and subsequent peace negotiations. However, conservatives have not viewed the United States as the long-term cornerstone of either Israeli strategy or the peace process. They have expressed doubts as to the continued American commitment in the face of isolationist tendencies in Congress and public opinion, which could mean a decreased American political and financial commitment to peace. (21) Indeed, conservatives calculated after the Cold War that by the early twenty-first century that the balance of power would have shifted, American hegemony would have waned, and Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would change all the regional power equation leading to peace agreements signed under tremendous pressure. (22) To the conservatives then, the U.S. regional role did not provide the basis for Israeli security in the long-run. However, American diplomatic and strategic support for Israel was of great importance in the short-run.

OPERATIONAL CODE:
CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

In place of the ultra-nationalists' unilateralism, the conservatives have preferred "constructive engagement." The conservatives' less rigid approach to the land of Israel and their higher evaluation of cooperation with the United States as a security asset have allowed them to show a greater willingness than the ultra-nationalists to take the American position into account. In this vein, they recognized the importance of maintaining credibility with the administration by engaging seriously in the peace process. (23) In order to minimize conflict, the conservatives argued that the U.S. role in the peace process should be confined to that of facilitator—bringing the parties together to negotiate bilaterally—rather than mediator. (24) They recognized that divergent interests in the case of American mediation would probably lead to conflict

and pressure on Israel for concessions. Nonetheless, they understood that Israel could not simply ignore U.S. policy preferences. In the event of U.S. involvement, they assessed that a tough, but not implacable, negotiating stance combined with a forceful presentation of their position in strategic (rather than ideological) terms that the Americans could sympathize with, could help prevent the continual erosion of the Israeli stance through Arab "salami tactics." (25) Nonetheless, because the conservatives continued to attach great significance to holding on to large chunks of the territories, they had to be prepared for on-going conflict with any administration over the peace process, which they sought to neutralize through supporters in the pro-Israel lobby and Congress, as will be discussed later.

POLICY

The difference between the conservatives and the ultra-nationalists became apparent during the March 1990 crisis over whether to accept the American conditions for meeting Palestinian representatives in Cairo. After extended negotiations, Foreign Minister Arens, supported by Meridor, Olmert, and Milo, hammered out a compromise with Secretary of State James Baker that was blocked by Shamir and the ultra-nationalists. As prime minister, Netanyahu was prepared to make some compromises on ideological issues such as settlements in order to retain credibility with the American administration, much to the chagrin of ultra-nationalists like Shamir. (26) Thus, even as Netanyahu announced the building of a new settlement in Jerusalem, Har Homa, he postponed construction as a result of a secret promise to President Clinton whereby Israel agreed to limit settlement activity, a promise reaffirmed at Wye Plantation in October 1998. (27)

Upon entering office, Netanyahu

initially sought to minimize the U.S. role in negotiations with both the Syrians and with the Palestinians. While he continued this policy on the Syrian track, (28) he reversed his position regarding the Palestinians after armed clashes between Israeli and Palestinian forces on the Temple Mount in September 1996 nearly led to the collapse of the peace process. Subsequently, Netanyahu came to see U.S. involvement in negotiations as crucial to preventing the collapse of the peace process, which he feared would result in Israel's isolation and alienation from the United States. (29) This did not mean that he was willing to simply tow the Clinton line regarding the peace process. Indeed, he worked very closely with supporters in Congress to limit administration pressure on Israel. But after nearly a year of reluctance, Netanyahu agreed at Wye Plantation in October 1998 to withdraw from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank, as the administration had originally requested. From the conservative perspective, if territorial concessions had to be made, then it was better to make them to the American mediator and enhance Israel's credibility in Washington, than to make them to Yasir Arafat. Indeed, Netanyahu accepted the Wye Agreement only after it became apparent that his virtual alliance with the Republican-led Congress provoked the administration's retaliation by subtly weakening strategic cooperation between Israel and the United States. (30) In contrast, once Netanyahu signed the Wye Agreement, Israel received a new Memorandum of Strategic Understanding with the United States. The message was clear.

But Netanyahu's willingness to make ideological compromises in order to maintain a close strategic relationship with the United States was weakened by the influence of domestic politics. Indeed, Netanyahu's relations with the American administration were permeated by the requirements of domestic politics to a

greater degree than any previous prime minister. Keeping one eye on the next election, he feared that if he made too many concessions, he would face not only a challenger from the left for prime minister but one from the right as well, which would severely damage his chances of winning the election. The impact of this reality was most apparent after the Wye Agreement when an early Israeli election became virtually inevitable. Subsequently, Netanyahu not only froze the implementation of the agreement but also broke pledges to the United States by dramatically increasing government support for settlement activity. (31)

REALISM

Realism has been rooted in the political culture of state-building promoted by David Ben Gurion and the Labor party in the early years of the state. (32) As a result of the Realists' security emphasis, an elite group of army officers have high positions in the Labor party after leaving the military. The most important Realist was late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, a former ambassador to the United States and army chief of staff. Other important Realists include current Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Minister of Tourism and former chief of staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Minister of Education, Culture, and Sport and former deputy chief of staff Matan Vilnai, and former civil governor of the territories and current Deputy Defense Minister Efraim Sneh. (33) Though a relatively small group, the influence of the Realists is magnified greatly both by their power base in the military and by the fact that the Labor party feels it cannot get elected on its dovish platform without the presence of high-ranking army officers to give the party credibility.

UNDERLYING ATTITUDES

For Realists, the territories captured in 1967 were assigned significant strategic value as a means for defending

the state within its 1967 borders, providing strategic depth and early warning facilities. Subsequently, Rabin viewed some settlements as having security value and others as "political" and, hence, of negligible value. Realists, lacking conservatives' nationalistic concern for the territories, had a more flexible position on surrendering land for peace to enhance Israel's security. As Rabin explained: "I am unwilling to give up a single inch of Israeli security, but I am willing to give up many inches of settlements and territory, as well as 1,700,000 Arab inhabitants, for the sake of peace. We seek a territorial compromise that will bring peace and security; a lot of security." (34)

From the Realist perspective, the balance of power in the Middle East cast the United States in a central role such that according to Joseph Sisco, former U.S. undersecretary of state: "For Rabin, the survival of Israel was inextricably linked to the United States." (35) Indeed, Rabin stated that U.S. policy on the Palestinian question was at least as important as Israel's military deployment in the West Bank. (36) In contrast to the conservatives, in the post-Cold War environment, Rabin continued to see the United States as a cornerstone of Israeli strategy toward the peace process. A deal with the Palestinians would serve to ease Israel's position in the region, which, it was hoped, would facilitate Israel's entrance into the American-led grouping of moderate Arab states. This group would weaken the influence of the Iran and other radicals in the Middle East, reducing their strategic threat to Israel. Realists believed that the U.S. created in the region the necessary environment for the peace process. However, Rabin always argued against a defense pact with the United States for fear that it would restrain Israel's tactical room for maneuver and, by putting American lives at risk for Israel, possibly undermine American support for Israel in the long-run.

OPERATIONAL
COORDINATION

CODE:

“The central line of Rabin's foreign policy is coordination with Washington and acceptance of the American position on every issue that does not affect the security of Israel directly.” (37)

Rabin actively sought diplomatic coordination with Washington in order to strengthen Israel's bargaining position in negotiations and, more generally, to integrate the United States into Israel's security structure. The primary American interest in the region had switched from containing the Soviet Union to maintaining peace and stability in general, including the containment of rogue states and promoting the peace process. Rabin strongly believed that in order to retain U.S. support, the United States had to be convinced that Israel was sincere in its search for peace. (38) Some Realists even went so far as to suggest that the actual peace negotiations were of little value unless U.S.-Israeli coordination was in place. (39) Yet the Realists preferred to distance the United States from the detailed bargaining, at least until the latter stages, due to the American tendency to “split the difference” between the parties, a sort of mediation that could not only erode Israel's negotiating position but also lead to unnecessary friction between Israel and its most important ally. (40)

POLICY

The Realist approach was most apparent during the Clinton-Rabin years, from 1992 to 1995. To begin with, Rabin and the administration agreed on a “Syria first” strategy, and coordinated regarding the Palestinian track prior to Oslo. Thus, Rabin was able to amend the U.S. bridging proposal for a Declaration of Principles (DoP) at the end of the ninth round of the Washington talks in May 1993, having been shown the draft 36 hours in advance of its presentation to the parties. (41)

Rabin did not want deep U.S. involvement in the Oslo track, which paralleled the Washington talks, for fear that the U.S.-Israel relationship would suffer should Oslo fall through. (42) Even after Foreign Minister Shimon Peres initialed the DoP in Oslo, Rabin only agreed to adopt it on condition that the Americans supported it. (43) Indeed, Rabin only attended the Washington ceremony with Arafat at Clinton's personal request. (44) Subsequently, Rabin was able to translate Israel's willingness to advance peace into an argument for strengthening U.S. military backing for Israel. Following Oslo, Rabin convinced Clinton to compensate Israel for its risk-taking by supplying Israel with F-15 advanced bombers and a supercomputer whose transfer had been previously blocked by the Pentagon. (45)

Similarly, Rabin was prepared to withdraw from the whole of the Golan in return for a basket of security measures, including the stationing of American troops on the Golan Heights, as part of a peace deal with Syria. This idea seemingly contradicted the long held Realist objection to risking American for Israel's security, yet the actual role envisaged for American troops was to be quite limited, similar to the Multi-National Force in the Sinai after Camp David. (46)

Still, Rabin only allowed the American peace team to become involved in the bilateral negotiations in the final, decisive stages of the Oslo II talks. (47) Similarly, Rabin only permitted U.S. direct involvement in the later stages of peace negotiations with Jordan following secret direct meetings. (48) However, Rabin was prepared to allow intensive U.S. mediation in the Syrian track, given the importance placed by Hafez al-Asad on the American role, though he remained extremely wary of allowing the Americans to represent the Israeli position. (49) Indeed, despite the United States' centrality in his strategy for peace, Rabin was prepared to confront the

administration on the tactical level. Even when Rabin agreed with the administration on a Syria first strategy, he was not prepared to acquiesce to U.S. demands to put the Syrian track first at all costs. Following a disappointing response to his proposal for direct talks in August 1993, Rabin became skeptical of Asad's commitment to reach an agreement. Subsequently, he argued that the Palestinian track should be given priority and after a Rabin-Clinton meeting, the Washington accepted Rabin's position. (50)

Upon becoming prime minister, Ehud Barak signaled in numerous in-depth meetings with Clinton, his desire to prioritize strategic cooperation on the peace process. These meetings not only restored the intimacy of U.S.-Israeli relations after the frosty Clinton-Netanyahu period, but also resulted in Clinton's agreement to a lower profile in Israel-Palestinian negotiations, just as Barak preferred. (51) Barak was also keen to limit the role of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in judging whether or not the Palestinians were fulfilling their security commitments under the 1998 Wye Agreement.

PROGRESSIVISM

The progressive worldview is closely linked to the outlook and values of European social-democracy and is represented in the Meretz party and within the Labor party. Former prime minister Shimon Peres was the leading progressive decisionmaker, supported by a group of aides known collectively as "the Blazers," which included the Oslo architect Yossi Beilin, Israel's Oslo chief negotiator in 1993 and current Center party MK Uri Savir, minister of internal security Shlomo Ben-Ami, and minister of Jerusalem affairs Haim Ramon. Since the end of the 1980s, the progressives have gained growing influence within the Labor party and support for Meretz among the general

public has also grown. However, their electoral reliance on Realist generals such as Barak weakens their influence over foreign policy.

UNDERLYING ATTITUDES

For the Progressives the whole Land of Israel is neither a core value nor a great security value. In fact, Jewish settlements were generally considered a security burden because they inhibited the possibility of reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians. In addition, progressives argued that Israel must make territorial concessions for idealistic reasons, because continued rule over another people and ensuing human rights abuses threaten the Jewish and democratic character of the state.

Whereas conservatives and Realists viewed peace as dependent on military security, progressives saw no security without peace. Ultimately, neither military power nor a strategic association with the United States could provide security, because the underlying reasons for conflict would remain. In essence, peace was dependent on satisfying Palestinian demands for self-determination and on the "creation of a regional community of nations, with a common market and elected centralised bodies, modeled on the European community." (52) Without adopting this course, progressives argued that the level of poverty and political frustration in the region would rise, increasing support for Islamic fundamentalism. In turn, fundamentalist regimes with non-conventional weapons would seriously threaten both Israel and the whole Middle East. (53) Within this vision the United States might play the role of peace facilitator, but relations with Washington were not as central to Israeli security as in the Realist perception.

OPERATIONAL CODE: UNDERWRITER OF PEACE

The progressives' position on

territorial compromise opened up clear possibilities for close cooperation with the United States, though this was not nearly as important as in the Realist vision. The progressives wanted the Americans to use their political, economic, and strategic power to underwrite their vision of multilateral peace. Paradoxically, while the Progressive approach placed less strategic emphasis on the United States than did Realism, the progressives favored a defense pact (54) with the Americans. Peres saw the United States as “the glue” that would hold together a multi-lateral security pact that would serve not as a defense against a common enemy but rather as an intra-regional security system. (55)

POLICY

After Oslo, Peres obtained American agreement to help create a Marshall Plan for the Middle East. Subsequently, Washington promoted the 1994 Middle East-North Africa (MENA) Economic Summit in Casablanca and co-sponsored the follow up Amman conference in 1995. On a tactical level, the progressives recognized that the United States was being courted by almost every country in the region that could attract economic investment and American political involvement only through supporting peace. According to Peres, Jordan was encouraged to sign the 1994 peace treaty with Israel by America’s decision to forgive Jordan’s foreign debt. (56)

Progressives valued the United States as an external mediator and actually argued for American pressure on both sides (57) in order to advance the peace process. In this vein, in 1987 Peres secretly reached the London agreement with Jordan, after significant American mediation. His problem, as foreign minister in a national unity government headed by Shamir, was that he lacked the ability to move forward due to the Likud’s

veto power in the cabinet. Thus, the London agreement had to be presented as an American paper. (58) With U.S. support for any breakthrough, it was thought that the Likud would either have to acquiesce or allow Peres to break up the government and go to the people on the issue of peace with Jordan which was thought to be popular. However, despite support in the U.S. State Department, Shultz refused to go along with the scheme and the agreement collapsed. Peres also wanted the Oslo Accords to be presented as an American proposal to help sell the agreement in Israel, but the United States refused to comply with his request. (59)

Clearly, for the progressives, the U.S. role in the peace process was not crucial. Hence, when they felt that the U.S. sponsored talks were not going to produce results, they did not hesitate to use other countries as mediators. After the London agreement fiasco, Peres and Beilin turned to Europe (60) to help facilitate an accord with the Palestinians. In fact, because they blamed the Americans for the London agreement’s failure, (61) they feared U.S. involvement in the Oslo talks might torpedo progress. Consequently, they deliberately distanced the United States from those negotiations. (62)

CONGRESS AND THE PRO-ISRAEL LOBBY: THE ROLE OF CONGRESS AND THE LOBBY IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Although foreign policy is primarily the preserve of the executive, Congress plays an important secondary role. Without Congress there is no money to implement foreign policy. Congress also has the ability to propose legislation that can impact on foreign policy or pass amendments of significance such as the Jackson-Vanik amendment which linked detente to Soviet Jewish emigration. Ultimately, it is the president who signs the checks to pay for policy and it is he that usually directs policy. Nonetheless,

the president will always be keeping a close watch on congressional opinion regarding foreign policy. The pro-Israel lobby has proven very influential in affecting congressional activity regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict over the last 20 years. In this way they have had an indirect impact over the American executive's policy. Moreover, given that the American Jewish community represents an important source of funding during elections as well as an important voting group in presidential elections, the President also tends to pay consistent attention to the opinions of the pro-Israel lobby.

ISRAEL, CONGRESS, AND THE PRO-ISRAEL LOBBY

There are two significant Israeli approaches toward the role of Congress and the pro-Israel lobby in the peace process: Likud and Labor. Each party's approach is dictated by the compatibility of its attitude toward the peace process with that of the U.S. executive. Thus, Labor's support for "land for peace" has generally made it easier for it to work with the U.S. executive on the peace process, while since the early 1980s, Likud leaders have recognized that their hawkish positions tend to find greater support in Congress and the pro-Israel lobby.

THE LIKUD

During the 1980s, the Likud attained American support not only for Israel but also for Likud positions among conservative politicians, Christian fundamentalist groups, key figures in the media and important groups within the American Jewish community. (63) More generally, the Likud strategy benefited from the increased power of the pro-Israel lobby organization, the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Thus, in 1982, AIPAC was able to prevent the Reagan administration from linking the level of aid to Israel to the Likud government's acceptance of the Reagan

Plan. In fact, in December 1982, Congress approved an increase in aid to Israel.

But it was not until the Bush administration that Likud was forced to emphasize this congressional strategy. Bush, unlike his predecessor, lacked a special affinity with Israel and with the end of the Cold War, Israel's usefulness as a "strategic asset" seemed to decline. Worse for Likud, the intifada turned Israel from David into Goliath in the American media and after the Gulf War, when the Arabs agreed to take part in the Madrid peace conference, it became much harder to blame the Arab side for lack of progress toward peace. This led to new U.S. pressure on Israel to make concessions. For example, when the Likud government asked Washington for \$10 billion in loan guarantees to help absorb Russian immigrants in 1991, the administration demanded a settlement freeze in order to comply. Shamir was confident that he had the congressional support to overcome this obstacle, but President Bush appealed straight to the American people. As a result, Israel's support in Congress crumbled, the pro-Israel lobby turned against Shamir's confrontational approach, and the Likud government never received the guarantees.

Despite this failure, the Likud continued its efforts to mobilize Congress against both the Clinton administration and the Labor government in Israel, even when it was out of power between 1992 and 1996. Israeli Likud activists worked with American Jewish groups and key congressional Republicans to stop the flow of American aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA). (64) Likud's return to power in 1996 highlighted the strategy of working with Congress. In response to administration pressure over the extent of the second redeployment from the West Bank during the spring of 1998, the Likud and AIPAC mobilized the pro-Israel lobby and obtained a letter signed by 81 Senators opposing U.S. "pressure" on Israel.

Congressional support was enhanced because the Republican dominated Congress used the issue to attack the Democratic president. Indeed, the Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, allegedly promised Netanyahu that Congress would “back him to the hilt” against Clinton. (65) Ultimately however, Netanyahu did agree to the 13 percent withdrawal requested by the administration at Wye.

LABOR

On its return to power in 1992, Labor regarded the pro-Israel lobby as superfluous. Some key progressives even went so far as to label AIPAC an “extreme right-wing” group with a negative impact both on the peace process and Israeli security. (66) As former deputy foreign minister Yossi Beilin explained: “Labor’s coming to power pulls the rug from under AIPAC. We want U.S. involvement in the peace process; their agenda was to keep the Americans out. We want peace based on compromise, and their agenda was to explain why compromise was impossible.” (67) As a result of this attitude and the growing sense that Israel was no longer a poor country in need of financial support from the diaspora, the Labor government downgraded its relationship with AIPAC.

In fact, Labor viewed the pro-Israel lobby as an irritant to its peace policies. Rabin thought that aggressive lobbying such as that over AWACS in 1981 and loan guarantees in 1991, undermined the most important element in U.S.-Israeli relations, namely the inter-governmental strategic basis of the relationship. (68) Indeed, in 1992, despite AIPAC’s enthusiasm, Rabin agreed not to challenge the sale of 72 F-15 fighters to Saudi Arabia in return for Apache helicopters and the pre-positioning of American equipment in Israel. (69) This approach had the advantage of enhancing Israel’s qualitative edge without threatening its closeness with the U.S. executive.

Indeed, in order to protect the

peace process and close relations with the administration, Labor occasionally tried to restrain the lobby. Following the 1995 Hebron massacre, a UN resolution condemning the act referred to Jerusalem as occupied territory. AIPAC wanted the administration to veto the bill but the unofficial Israeli line was that AIPAC should not do so because the implications of a U.S. veto might prevent the PLO from returning to the peace negotiations. As Peres put it at the time: “Too big a victory for Israel is not in the interests of the peace process.” (70) Indeed, it was only following congressional and AIPAC initiatives to limit aid to the PA and to question the viability of U.S. troops on the Golan that Labor took Congress’s role in the peace process seriously.

CONCLUSION: ASSESSMENT OF PAST AND FUTURE

Despite the fact that Labor has been able to pursue its peace strategy with the support of various American administrations while Likud has been increasingly driven to using Congress and the pro-Israel lobby, Labor’s relationship with the United States regarding the peace process has not been as smooth as one might have expected. In the mid-1980s, the progressives relied too heavily on the United States to resolve tactical aspects of the peace process, despite the fact that Washington was less important strategically than it was for either the conservatives or the Realists. Nonetheless, the progressives seemingly believed that the United States has a singular interest in a peace accord and should therefore be strongly and unreservedly behind any attempt to forge a compromise. They ignored the complex way that American foreign policy is formulated and the tendency of the United States not to impose itself in negotiations between the parties. Even after the Oslo Accords, the tendency remained for the progressives to call for more vigorous U.S. intervention to

get the talks back on track. (71)

While the progressives overestimated the American executive's role in the peace process, Labor tended to underplay the role of Congress and the pro-Israel lobby. As a result, the Labor government from 1992 to 1996 had significant problems in promoting policies that needed congressional support. However, since coming to power in 1999, the Barak government has been far more involved in galvanizing support for its peace policies in AIPAC and other pro-Israel groups and worked especially hard with AIPAC to counter opposition to funding the Wye Agreement from Republicans and right-wing American Jewish groups. (72)

In contrast, Likud under Shamir in the 1980s was able to greatly mitigate its fundamental clash with the American executive over the future of the territories. Then, the terms under which American aid was granted to Israel actually improved and two Memoranda of Strategic Understanding were signed, in spite of differences over the peace process. However, the two factors that created that reality—common Cold War strategic interests and a united pro-Israel lobby—have ceased to pertain such Likud has increasingly looked to Congress to mitigate administration pressure since the Bush presidency, albeit without much substantial success.

Part of the reason why Likud's strategy failed lies with Israel's supporters in the United States. Since the intifada, the pro-Israel lobby and its supporters in Congress became increasingly disunited over the peace process. (73) They also split with Israel's government-sponsored religious establishment over the sensitive issue of religious identity and the "Who is a Jew?" controversy. (74) The split was enough to erode unconditional American-Jewish support for the Israeli government in Washington.

But by far the most important

reason for Likud's failure is that ultimately, it is the executive, and not Congress, that is the main player regarding foreign policy. Congress does not conduct American diplomacy nor is it directly responsible for the strategic aspects of U.S.-Israel relations. Using Congress to counter-balance the administration can be a useful tactic for Israeli governments but it can never be a strategy in and of itself for maintaining close American-Israeli relations. Indeed, in the long run, using party based congressional opposition to the president is counter-productive. By taking advantage of Republican opposition to Clinton in Congress, Netanyahu risked eroding the essentially bipartisan nature of American support for Israel. More specifically, part of the reason for Republican support for Netanyahu on issues such as opposing the positioning of U.S. troops on the Golan and the extension of foreign aid to the PA, stems from isolationist sentiments. In the long run, encouraging such forces in American politics damages Israel's position, as Israel is a major recipient of American aid and greatly benefits from the major American role in regional and world affairs.

This danger to Israel could become particularly acute regarding final status agreements with the Palestinians and Syria. In these cases, Israel and its Arab partners will likely demand very large sums of money both to underwrite and implement the agreements. In the past American financial support was seen by all concerned as a fundamental component of all peace agreements. Indeed, most of the increases in American military aid to Israel since 1975 have been granted as compensation for the strategic risks Israel has taken by withdrawing from territory in return for peace agreements.

However, given the growing reluctance to spend money internationally in the post-Cold War era, it could be very difficult for Israel to get Congress to agree to underwrite such an expensive peace this

time. At the very least, Barak will have to pay more attention to cultivating Congress and will also have to consider encouraging American allies such as Japan and the European Union to help shoulder the burden of any deal.

Finally, in the post-Cold War era when Israel's status as a U.S. strategic asset is more open to debate and Congress is increasingly hostile to foreign aid, two points are worth stressing. First, the overall quality of American-Israeli relations is increasingly linked to the degree to which Israeli policy dovetails with the American executive's overall strategy for peace. Second, Congress is likely to play an increasingly important role in the peace process as its financial underwriter. This reality might tempt right-wing forces in Israel and the pro-Israel lobby to adopt a congressional strategy. But, apart from frustrating the Israeli left's peace policy, in the long run, such a strategy carries the potential to severely damage the American-Israeli relationship.

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1) Even in Hebrew there has been no systematic analysis of Israeli policy in this regard, despite the fact that many opinion pieces are constantly being written in newspapers and journals. Only one Hebrew book has addressed itself to the question, Ezra Zohar, *Pilegsh BeMizrach Ha Tichon [Mistress in the Middle East]* (Tel Aviv: 1994) but this effort is more rhetorical than analytical in style.

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Moshe Efrat and Jacob Bercovitch Eds., *Superpowers and Client States in the Middle East: The Imbalance of Influence* (London: Routledge 1991).

3) Alexander George, 'The Operational Code', *International Studies Quarterly* 13/1 (1989).

4) Interview with a former senior Israeli official; see also Itamar Rabinovitch, *The Brink of Peace: Israel and Syria 1992-6* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Achronot 1998) [Hebrew] pp. 63-4.

5) Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Israel's Fateful Hour* (NY: Harper and Row, 1988) p. 72.

6) *Jerusalem Report*, August 7, 1997 p.19; see also Ariel Sharon & David Chanoff, *Warrior: The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1989) p. 345.

7) Sasson Sofer, *Begin: An Anatomy of Leadership* (NY: Blackwell, 1988) p. 121.

8) Interview with Yitzhak Shamir, November 1995.

9) John Goshko, "Events Test Strength Of Us-Israeli Ties," *Washington Post*, January 7, 1986.

10) Yossi Melman & Dan Raviv, *Friends in Deed: Inside the US-Israel Alliance* (NY: Hyperion 1994) p. 209.

11) Alexander Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy* (NY: MacMillan 1984) pp. 326-32.

12) Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (London: Allen & Unwin 1985) pp. 43, 260-8, 300.

13) Clyde Haberman, "Shamir Admits Plan to Stall Talks For 10 Years," *New York Times*, June 27, 1992.

14) Margot Dudkevitch, "Sharon Tells Settlers to 'Run, Grab Hills,'" *Jerusalem Post*, November 16, 1998.

15) *Jerusalem Report*, November 23, 1998, p. 10.

16) David Makovsky, "Indyk Attacks Sharon," *Ha'aretz*, April 12, 1999.

17) Moshe Arens, *Broken Covenant* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 278.

18) *Ibid.* pp. 209, 268.

19) Arens Interview; Zalman Shoval,

- “Security Zones in Judea, Samaria and Gaza,” *Nativ* 8 (July 1995) [Hebrew].
- 20) Makovsky, “Bar Ilan: We May Accept a Limited Palestinian State,” *Jerusalem Post*, December 20, 1996; Makovsky, “Netanyahu presents Allon-Plus plan for final Settlement to Security Cabinet,” *Ha’aretz*, June 5, 1997; Schiff, “Netanyahu’s Map,” *Ha’aretz*, August 19, 1997; Nadav Shragai, “Shahak: Settlements will be Evacuated,” *Ha’aretz*, November 4, 1998.
- 21) Dore Gold, “Handle this Package with Care,” *Jerusalem Post*, April 22, 1994.
- 22) Ari Shavit, “The Prime Minister Would Like a Few Minutes of Your Time,” *Ha’aretz Weekend Supplement*, November 22, 1996, pp. 18-24,54.
- 23) Chemi Shalev, “One Of Their Own,” *Ma’ariv Weekend Supplement*, July 12, 1996, p. 5.
- 24) See for example Dan Meridor, *Annual Conference Proceedings* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy 1991); Hillel Kutter, “Shoval Supports Low Key US Role,” *Jerusalem Post*, July 28, 1998.
- 25) Arens quoted in *Washington Jewish Week*, February 10, 1989, p. 10.
- 26) Chaim Misgav, *Conversations with Yitzhak Shamir* [Hebrew](Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim 1997), pp. 181-4.
- 27) Shragai, “Har Homa Building Secretly Frozen by Netanyahu,” *Ha’aretz*, December 10, 1997; *Jerusalem Report*, November 23, 1998, pp. 26-30.
- 28) Schiff, “Netanyahu’s Failed Historic Opportunity,” *Ha’aretz*, July 7, 1999; “Syria Agreed to Foreign Troops on Hermon,” *Ha’aretz*, May 28, 1999.
- 29) Makovsky, “Netanyahu’s Road to Oslo,” *Jerusalem Post*, December 31, 1996: “US meets ‘New Age’ Likud leader,” *Jerusalem Post*, February 17, 1997.
- 30) Melman, “US kept Israel in Dark on Iranian Missile,” *Ha’aretz*, August 19, 1998.
- 31) Makovsky, “US says Netanyahu Broke Secret Promise to Stop Settlements,” *Ha’aretz*, April 29, 1999; Kuttler, “US: Israel Misleading us on Settlements,” *Jerusalem Post*, April 18, 1999.
- 32) On Realism see Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1983).
- 33) Yitzhak Mordechai, leader of the Center Party, current Minister for Transport, and Minister of Defense in the Netanyahu government, can also be included in this group. His roots lie in the army officer corps and he was the most moderate member of the Netanyahu Cabinet regarding the peace process.
- 34) Yitzhak Rabin, “Pragmatism and Compromise,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 1, 1992.
- 35) David Horowitz (ed.), *Rabin, Soldier of Peace* (London: Peter Halban 1996), p. 47.
- 36) *Foreign Broadcast Information Service: Near East*, March 13, 1989, p. 30.
- 37) *Mideast Mirror*, January 26, 1995.
- 38) Efraim Inbar, “Rabin and Israeli National Security,” *BESA Security and Policy Study no. 25* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University).
- 39) Makovsky, “Rabin Hoping To Work With US Administration on Autonomy,” *Jerusalem Post*, July 8, 1992; Efraim Sneh, “Rabin Can See the Whole Picture,” *Jerusalem Post*, February 5, 1993.
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- 41) Makovsky, “Rabin Opposes US Proposal,” *Jerusalem Post*, May 20, 1993.
- 42) Makovsky, *Making Peace Between Israel and the PLO* (Boulder CO: Westview, 1995), p. 65.
- 43) Rabinovitch (note 4), p. 44.
- 44) Makovsky, *Making Peace*, p. 65.
- 45) *Ibid*, p. 121.
- 46) Steve Rodan, “PA Not Doing Enough Against Hamas,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 5, 1994; Elaine Sciolino, “Christopher sees Arafat at PLO Headquarters,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1994.
- 47) Uri Savir, *The Process* (NY: Random

- House, 1998), p. 205.
- 48) Thomas Friedman and Elaine Sciolino, "Crossing the River: The Israel-Jordan Pact," *New York Times*, July 31, 1994.
- 49) Thus, in 1995 Rabin refused to acquiesce to the U.S. request to send Asad a letter from President Clinton stating that Israel had "deposited" with the U.S. a commitment to withdraw from the Golan Heights to June 4, 1967 lines; though he did not object to Christopher raising the issue verbally as an American question to Asad. See Schiff, "Did Clinton and Assad Conspire Against Rabin?" *Ha'aretz*, November 30, 1999.
- 50) Rabinovitch (note 4), pp. 173, 209, 225-6.
- 51) Aluf Benn, "US to lower its profile in talks with PA," *Ha'aretz*, July 13, 1999; Akiva Eldar, "People and Politics," *Ha'aretz*, July 15, 1999; Benn, "Barak Multi-Stage Plan Presented to US," *Ha'aretz*, July 18, 1999.
- 52) Shimon Peres & Aryeh Naor, *The New Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), p. 62.
- 53) *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 76.
- 54) See for example, Meretz MK Amnon Rubenstein, "Inching toward Pax Americana," *Ha'aretz*, October 15, 1998.
- 55) Shimon Peres, *Special Policy Forum Report* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 30, 1996) p. 3; Yossi Beilin, *Touching Peace* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Achronot, 1997), p. 25 [Hebrew].
- 56) Savir (note 48), p. 285.
- 57) See for example, Colin Shindler, *Ploughshares into Swords* (NY: I.B. Tauris, 1991), p. 106.
- 58) George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: Memoirs* (NY: MacMillan, 1993), p. 939.
- 59) Makovsky, *Making Peace*, pp. 49, 75.
- 60) Beilin (note 55), pp. 38, 53.
- 61) Interview with a Progressive decision-maker.
- 62) Beilin (note 55), pp. 104, 113, 138.
- 63) Jonathan Rynhold, "Labor, Likud, the 'Special Relationship' and the Peace Process 1988-96," *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 3 and 4 (Spring/Summer 1997), pp. 239-64.
- 64) *Ibid.*
- 65) William Drozdiak, "Netanyahu's Backers on Capitol Hill Foment Split With White House," *Washington Post*, May 23, 1998.
- 66) Nitzan Horowitz, "Labor Accuses AIPAC of Being 'Extreme Right-Wing' Group," *Ha'aretz*, August 4, 1998.
- 67) David Horowitz (note 35), p. 159.
- 68) Melman & Raviv (note 10), pp. 103, 192-3.
- 69) Marvin Feuerwenger, "Israeli-American Relations in the Second Rabin Era," in Robert O. Freedman, *Israel Under Rabin*, (Boulder: Westview 1995), p. 55.
- 70) David Horowitz (note 35), p. 155.
- 71) Makovsky, "US Urges Israel to Make Concessions," *Jerusalem Post*, March 1, 1994.
- 72) Nitzan Horowitz, "The Jewish Lobby: Left Face," *Ha'aretz*, August 11, 1999; "What Will Happen to the Wye Money," October 20, 1999; "Lobbying Pays Off," *Ha'aretz*, November 21, 1999.
- 73) Rynhold (note 63).
- 74) Eldar, "People and Politics," *Ha'aretz*, January 15, 1998. In 1988, when it looked as though the Likud might agree to amend the Law of Return, to explicitly exclude non-Orthodox converts to Judaism, American Jewry (the vast majority of whom are non-Orthodox) responded by refusing to help the Israeli government fight against the recently opened US-PLO dialogue, until the Likud decided not to go through with the amendment. While, in 1996 AIPAC warned the Netanyahu government that American Jewish support could not be guaranteed if the Law of Return was amended along the lines demanded by the religious parties in Israel. On neither occasion did the Likud actually amend the Law of Return, but the threat of such a change was enough to erode unconditional American-Jewish support.