

Special Relationship

A one-sided U.S. policy toward Israel endangers both countries' interests.

By Leon Hadar

DISCUSSING THE U.S.-ISRAELI relationship on a radio talk show recently, I discovered that Americans are misinformed about their country's ties to the Jewish state. One listener, taking it for granted that Israel maintains a formal military alliance with Washington, speculated that since "the Americans established Israel after the Holocaust, maybe we can set it up now in Florida." But contrary to this misconception, the relationship between the two countries has never been grounded in strong geostrategic roots; it reflects the sentiments and interests of powerful American groups.

Israeli politicians, unlike their counterparts in Washington, recognize this reality. They will never romanticize the U.S.-Israel connection unless they are discussing it with American visitors. Similarly, much of the analysis of the relationship in the Israeli media is concerned almost exclusively with its utilitarian aspects: Will Washington back Israeli policy? Will the U.S. Congress increase aid to Israel? Is the new American president "pro-Israeli?" *Ha'aretz* recently convened a panel of experts to follow the 2008 U.S. presidential race and issue occasional reports on "who is the best presidential candidate for Israel." (The winner in the last poll was Rudy Giuliani.)

In short, Israelis are the ultimate realpolitik buffs when it comes to their relationship with Washington. The notion that the U.S. and Israel are allied together in the cause of spreading democracy in the Middle East and worldwide would be scoffed at by Israeli

pundits. After all, their government has been strengthening its military ties with China despite U.S. opposition. Israelis are not "pro-American" because of their commitment to Jeffersonian values—the Jewish state has yet to adopt a constitution—but because they concluded that their interests and those of the U.S. are compatible now. But they see this "special relationship" not as marriage but as an affair. And like any affair, it could end.

Indeed, there was a time when Israelis were pro-Soviet and pro-French. In 1948, Stalin's Soviet Union was the most enthusiastic supporter of establishing Israel, which it hoped would be a leading anti-imperialist post in the Middle East, while Secretary of State George Marshall pressed Harry Truman not to recognize the new state, warning that it could harm America's position in the region. Hence Moscow recognized Israel immediately after the state was proclaimed and provided it with arms, while it took the Americans more than a year to grant *de jure* recognition to Israel, on which they imposed an arms embargo. At the height of the In-Russia-With-Love mood in Israel, the expectation was that the new state would remain neutral in the evolving Cold War.

Then Israel had its French kiss. It was France that served as Israel's main source of arms in the 1950s and early 1960s and helped it develop its nuclear arsenal. Israel was embracing then a European orientation and forming close ties with an emerging Franco-German bloc to help resist U.S. pressure to end its nuclear program. The Israeli alliance

with France reached a peak in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez campaign during which the two conspired (with Britain and against U.S. wishes) to oust Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. Their interests were seen to be compatible as the French tried to suppress the Nasser-backed struggle for independence in Algeria. But after Charles de Gaulle's decision to grant independence to Algeria, the relationship between Israel and France cooled; they soured after Israel rejected the aging French leader's advice not to attack Egypt in 1967.

It was only after Israel's 1967 victory over Egypt, a Soviet ally, that the intellectual predecessors of today's neoconservatives started popularizing the idea of Israel as an American "strategic asset" in the Middle East. Similarly, neoconservatives in the Reagan administration argued that Israel should become America's leading ally in the region during the renewed Cold War tensions, while depicting the Palestine Liberation Organization as a Soviet stooge. But even as Israel and the U.S. were strengthening their ties, there was recognition in both governments of the strategic constraints on their relationship. America could not maintain its position in the Middle East without establishing a presence in the Arab world, while Israel's friendship with America could not substitute for the acceptance of Israel by its Arab neighbors. Washington's efforts to bring about Middle East peace were part of a strategy to advance U.S. and Israeli interests.

Indeed, Washington's ability to play the role of an honest broker between

Israel and Egypt (and Syria) after the 1973 Middle East War was only made possible when Richard Nixon re-established diplomatic ties with Cairo, co-opting it into the pro-American camp. It was the even-handed U.S. role that made it possible for Jimmy Carter to mediate the historic peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1979 and for George H.W. Bush to launch a round of Israeli-Arab negotiations after the Gulf War in 1991 that resulted in the peace accords between Israel and the PLO and Jordan. Hence, from an Israeli perspective that regards peace with the Arabs as a top national interest, the pressure by Nixon, Carter, and Bush to withdraw from occupied Arab territories in exchange for peace reflected a genuinely pro-Israeli direction of U.S. policy since the agreements with Egypt, the Palestinians, and Jordan advanced the Jewish state's long-term strategic interests. But if you were listening to the proponents of Greater Israel in Jerusalem and Washington, Nixon, Carter, and Bush were the enemies of Jewish people.

At the same time, a realist analysis of Israeli interests would have concluded that there was nothing pro-Israeli in the willingness of the Reagan administration to treat with benign neglect Israel's creeping annexation of the West Bank, creating the conditions for the outbreak of the first Intifada, or in giving Israel a yellow light to invade Lebanon in 1982. Those U.S. policies reflected the agenda of Likud and its neoconservative partners, with their emphasis on propping up the "strategic asset" by placing the Palestinian issue on the backburner and punishing the "pro-Soviet" PLO. They resulted in the rise of Palestinian and Shi'ite terrorism aimed against both the Jewish state and the U.S. and damaged core Israeli and American interests.

The same kind of geostrategic paradox—an American administration that

It pays to Google. The Shura Council, the co-ordinating body for Iraqi Sunni insurgents, and al-Qaeda in Iraq, comprised mainly of foreign Sunni Islamic militants, have been working together using the Google map feature to plan their sector-by-sector ethnic cleansing of Shi'a Muslims in central Iraq. The cleansing has removed Shi'a from many areas, but the discovery that the Sunni insurgents are using the Google map has allowed analysts to predict where the next wave of killings will take place, though not necessarily to stop them. Shi'a death squads, apparently less Google proficient, are reacting to every instance of Sunni cleansing by killing Sunnis at random in areas they control. U.S. patrols, working aggressively to prevent the religious murders, have become a prominent target for both sides and are caught squarely in the middle of the internecine violence, making October one of the worst months ever for American casualties.



In spite of the billions of dollars spent on air security over the past five years, very little air cargo is checked or x-rayed either in the United States or in Europe.

According to sources in the airline industry, more than 70 percent of air cargo is categorized as "known shipper," which means that it is not considered to be suspect and is normally not inspected. Such known shippers include major companies like UPS and FedEx, but smaller, private freight agencies are also in the same category even though their security procedures are not known and are not monitored. In Europe most air cargo goes on passenger aircraft down in the hold, not on specially designed cargo planes, which are more common in the U.S. This means that a terrorist in Europe could target a civilian airliner using a bomb with a timer in an airfreight package and be reasonably certain that it will not be inspected and will wind up in the hold of a plane carrying passengers. Other reports suggest that the specialized cargo planes also continue to be highly vulnerable to hijacking or bombing due to poor security at cargo terminals. European and American air-security experts are aware of the problems associated with air cargo but both government and the airline industry claim that inspection of each package is not feasible because of lack of resources and because it would bring the airfreight system to a halt. This response is, of course, nonsensical. A small fraction of the money and manpower being wasted in Iraq would make American air cargo completely safe.



According to Israeli sources involved with the post-mortem on the summer war in Lebanon, Hezbollah routinely listened to Israeli cellphone conversations,

including those of officers, as part of its extensive intelligence-gathering efforts and was also able to eavesdrop electronically on messages sent to pagers, including some that were transmitted through military-satellite uplinks. Exploiting its intercepts, Hezbollah successfully collected critical information on Israeli army units and their movements, both inside and outside Lebanon. The Israelis, who had been contemptuous of Hezbollah's intelligence-gathering abilities, are now reported to be astonished at the sophistication of the operation.

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