

A Brief History of Quagmire

Six Decades of Passionate Attachment

by Doug Bandow

The United States is the world's sole superpower, a globe-spanning "hyperpower" with professed interests everywhere. Israel is a small nation of minimal resources, far from America. Under normal circumstances, such a country would not loom large in U.S. policy. Yet, in the post-September 11 world, Israel sits at the center of American strategy.

Israel's importance stems from both religion and propinquity. As the geographic refuge of the Jewish people and the culmination of Zionist ambitions, Israel embodies a unique transnational status; other nations exert a special ideological or ethnic draw internationally (America and China, respectively, for instance), but no other state so self-consciously offers a similar spiritual magnet. Thus, Israel has attracted support in America from most Jews and many Christians. Even many nonreligious people see Israel as a necessary response to the holocaust. That country's advocates are apt to cast Washington's relationship with Israel in moral, or even spiritual, terms. They point to Israel's status as a democracy surrounded by tyranny and cultural affinities with the West.

Moreover, Israel sits near the Middle East's great oil fields, creating her image as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" for Washington, countering such Arab states as Egypt and Syria, which forged close links with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Today, Israel also lies in the midst of raging ethnic and religious conflicts that have brought terrorism to the American homeland and threatened the stability of the Gulf countries that supply the oil upon which Western economies run. As a result, Israel has won significant support from the American people, providing an hospitable environment within which Israel's friends make her political case.

Foreign policy, even more than domestic concerns, is rarely set by mass sentiments. Rather, government behavior generally is driven by interest groups that harness the intensity of even small numbers of activists. In this instance, American Jews, from religious to secular, have organized campaigns of, contributed to, and voted for politicians based on their support for Israel, generating significant backing for Israel among Democrats. And evangelical Christians have increasingly encouraged conservative Republicans to take a similar stand.

Energy and geostrategic concerns tend to have less salience in electoral politics, but they have caused business and policy elites to focus on the Middle East. Among them, perspectives on Israel differ: She sits close to the Persian Gulf oil fields, but her friendly relationship with America generates corresponding U.S.-Arab tensions. In the end, intellectuals provide a strategic framework; businessmen offer political backing; and officials implement federal policy supporting Israel. A combi-

nation of interests and interest groups thus ensures continuing U.S. intervention in the Middle East, largely on Israel's behalf. Although there is often disagreement on specific policies, such as military action against Iraq, there is wide support for expansive American involvement.

Britain, France, and Germany all preceded Washington as they struggled for economic influence in what was, before World War I, part of the Ottoman Empire. London emerged from that war with the dominant position, but the possibility of petroleum production in the Gulf attracted American intervention in the 1920's; aided by U.S.-government pressure, American firms soon won their first concessions. World War II enabled Washington to make further gains at the expense of Britain and France.

In a kind of rerun of Britain's involvement in the region, the United States sought to defend her regional positions by strengthening compliant ruling elites, such as the shah and the Saudi monarchy. The 1957 Eisenhower Doctrine offered U.S. aid to Middle Eastern nations threatened by "international communism." Richard Nixon's subsequent support for Israel provided a counterpoint to Soviet assistance to Israel's foes. To deter Moscow, in the late 1970's, President Jimmy Carter created a rapid-deployment force. In the ensuing decade, the Reagan administration aided Iraq in her bloody and lengthy war against Iran. In 1990, George H.W. Bush went to war with Baghdad, more to preserve the House of Saud than to liberate Kuwait, the formal public goal. Washington easily defeated Iraq but left Saddam Hussein in power. A desultory decade of U.N. weapons inspections, economic embargo, "no-fly zones," and frequent U.S. bombing followed. America backed her military units in Turkey and carrier forces in the Persian Gulf with Air Force units in Saudi Arabia. Our presence had acquired a permanent feel.

In the 1990's, the United States was involved in a policy of dual containment, attempting to restrain the geopolitical ambitions of both Iran and Iraq. It was, in the view of analyst Barbara Conry, "a virtual reorganization of the gulf region's politics and customary balance of power." The Clinton administration explicitly criticized the first Bush administration for not attempting to upend the *status quo* by restructuring the Middle East. Such restructuring became an explicit goal of the second Bush administration.

Only after ousting Saddam Hussein in early 2003 did Washington finally feel comfortable in announcing the planned withdrawal of most of its forces from Saudi Arabia. Indeed, in the wake of the failure to discover the alleged stockpiles of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz revealed that another goal of the war was to pave the way for pulling the U.S. military out of Saudi Arabia. However, that did not mean that Washington was prepared

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to leave the region: A long-term occupation of Iraq loomed, and the United States pressured Iran and Syria to cooperate on U.S. terms, as well as to change regimes. Access to oil remained central to U.S. policy, but Washington's goals had become much more ambitious.

Iraq began as a Western ally, but a 1958 coup moved her on an independent course. In 1978, Saddam made a shift: He moved against communists domestically and shifted the country's trade westward. In the 1980's, the United States was Iraq's *de facto* ally in her war against Iran. America shared intelligence, provided financial credits, and facilitated exports of Iraqi oil. All that, along with U.S. ambassador April Glaspie's profession of Washington's disinterest in Iraq's dispute with Kuwait, helped convince Saddam that he need not fear U.S. reaction after he invaded Kuwait in 1990. Saddam bet wrong, however: Between 1990 and 2003, Baghdad and Washington were in a constant state of war.

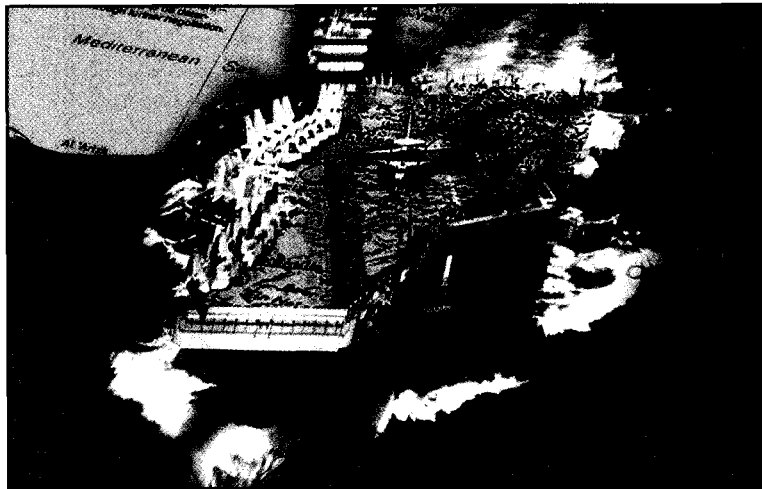
During the 1958 Lebanon crisis, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles compared Arab nationalism to a flood that necessitated putting "sand bags around positions we must protect—the first being Israel and Lebanon and the second being the oil positions around the Persian Gulf." Such concern was well founded: In the 1950's, Egypt and Iraq shifted out of the Western orbit. Two decades later, Islamic fundamentalists helped overthrow the shah and displaced their moderate co-revolutionaries. Only with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 did Moscow appear poised to threaten Western access to petroleum, causing President Carter to warn that "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States" and to create the Rapid Deployment Force for use in such an emergency.

Over the years, Washington took a number of steps to bolster friendly Arab states, including military intervention in Lebanon in 1958, aid and fleet movements in 1957 to back Jordan's King Hussein, and threats against a Syria perceived to be moving leftward. In those years, U.S. policy did not obviously center on any one nation. In 1982, the United States again placed troops in Lebanon. Although formally aimed at aiding the beleaguered Christian-dominated administration, this effort also assisted Israel in her invasion of Lebanon. Washington found itself entangled in a bitter civil war, leading to destructive suicide bombings in 1983 against its embassy and Marine Corps barracks, and subsequently withdrew its forces.

Israel's creation goes back to the famed Balfour Declaration of 1917, an attempt by Great Britain to exploit Zionism in her war against the Ottoman Empire, an ally of Germany. A combination of violence, including terrorism against British officials by Israeli independence forces, and belief that the holocaust's horrors justified creating a Jewish homeland, led Britain to turn the issue over to the recently created United Nations. The United Nations recommended a partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish sections.

Although U.S. Defense and State Department officials worried about the impact of an Israeli state on relations with Arab governments as well as Soviet expansion in the area, President Harry S. Truman, who had favored the Zionist cause before World War II, was sympathetic to the plight of European Jews who had survived Nazi mass murder. In hindsight, many Americans felt they could have done, or should have tried to do, more to help Jews escape Nazi-occupied Europe. More-

over, the image of British soldiers forcibly rebuffing holocaust survivors seeking refuge in Palestine generated public support for a Jewish homeland. Allied with these sentiments in practice, if not in spirit, were politicians who saw Israel's creation as a means of avoiding the relaxation of American immigration quotas. Zionists organized a powerful lobby. Truman worried about Jewish defections from the Democratic Party, which faced the resurgent Republicans. The United States not only voted for partition; she pressured friendly states to do so.



Melanie Anderson

The process was chaotic and violent. The majority of the British Mandate property was turned over to the minority Jewish population. Proposals for a U.N. trusteeship were rejected by the Jewish settlers, who proclaimed the state of Israel on May 14, 1948, upon the departure of the last British officials. Truman quickly granted *de facto* recognition to Israel, setting the course for a half-century of relations with the Middle East. Evan Wilson, who served in the Division of Near Eastern Affairs of the State Department, wrote that "our relations with the entire Arab world have never recovered from the events of 1947-48 when we sided with the Jews against the Arabs and advocated a solution in Palestine which went contrary to self-determination as far as the majority population of the country was concerned."

Despite America's support for Israel's creation, relations were not always close, notably during the Suez crisis in 1956. In those years, Washington viewed a close relationship with Israel as an impediment to improved relations with Arab countries and access to oil. But the Cold War spawned another important interest group behind Israel: anticommunist hawks. As Egypt and Iraq shifted away from the West, and other states looked internally vulnerable, Israel appeared to be the better bet. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson treated Israel accordingly and sold her offensive weapons. Washington seems to have signaled that it had no objection to Israeli action before the Six Day War in June 1967.

The more strongly Washington supported Israel as an anti-Soviet bastion in the Middle East, the more such a bastion seemed necessary. After the Six Day War, Nasser reportedly said that, while Washington wanted "us to minimize our dealings with the Soviet Union, it will drive us in the opposite direction altogether. The United States leaves us no choice." After that war, Moscow rearmed and trained the defeated Arabs. That, in turn, increased Washington's concerns about Soviet influence over the West's oil lifeline and induced America to draw even closer to Israel. The Arab attack in the 1973 Yom

Kippur War made surprising initial gains, but Washington played a critical role in sustaining Israel with a multibillion-dollar weapons airlift; it was, in fact, the first time that the United States had provided arms as an outright gift. Washington also issued a worldwide military alert, including its nuclear forces, to discourage Moscow from intervening on behalf of the Egyptians.

The Carter administration was more measured in its backing of Israel and helped produce the Camp David accords, but the Reagan administration formalized an alliance with her that had gradually emerged as a major element in U.S. diplomacy and strategy well before the 1980's. President George H.W. Bush was prepared to push Israel for concessions in the peace process, but pro-Israel activists effectively used Congress to counteract his administration. His two successors, especially his son, have been more accommodating of Israel, and the Republican Congress has become, if anything, even more pro-Israeli. It approved measures recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and warning the Bush administration against its perceived softness in backing the "Road Map for Peace."

Today, America's financial backing of her tiny ally, at some three billion dollars annually, is as much part of the federal budget as funding for the Washington Monument. And successive U.S. administrations underwrote the 1976 partial Sinai withdrawal, the 1978 Camp David Accord, détente with Jordan, and even the Palestinian Authority, once it entered into a dialogue with Israel. Money continues to flow to Egypt, despite her self-defeating economic policies, as well as to Jordan, for having made peace with Israel. (An attempt was made to buy peace with Syria in the same way.) At least some assistance to Turkey and even Central Asia arguably is related to Israeli security. It has been estimated that Israel received, in current dollars, about \$240 billion between 1973 and 2002; Egypt and Jordan collected another \$139 billion over the same period.

The return on our investment has been scant. Despite the routine incantation of Israel's alleged security value to America, at no time during the Cold War did this "unsinkable aircraft carrier" actually act as one. To the contrary, both countries have found that their relationship has restricted their ability to respond to a variety of international challenges. Indeed, American success in Gulf War I required dissuading Israel from joining in the attack on Iraq, even after the latter had launched Scud missiles at Tel Aviv. "Unleashing" Israel would have threatened Arab support in America's war against Iraq, and, for the same reason, Washington plotted to ensure that Israel played no role in Gulf War II. An asset that can never be used is not much of an asset. Yet Israel's backers still advocate a vigorous partnership to deter regional aggression and aid the projection of American power in the Gulf.

With the end of the Cold War and the concomitant collapse of the traditional arguments for American micromanagement of the Middle East, advocates of expansive American involvement have offered other goals, ranging from containing Islamic fundamentalism to "making the Middle East safe for democracy." After September 11, stronger backing for Israel and war on Iraq were advanced as a means of defunding terrorist organizations and preventing the transfer of weapons of mass destruction to such forces. Such arguments were dubious, however: If the United States made every terrorist group her enemy, she would be taking on largely local forces around the globe.

Despite fevered attempts to find alternate justifications for

old policies, U.S. attempts to micromanage Mideast politics, and particularly Washington's decision to attack Iraq, remain centered on Israel and Saudi Arabia. The alacrity with which the administration announced that it was withdrawing forces from Saudi Arabia after Saddam's fall demonstrated that Washington saw the elimination of his regime as a means of allowing the United States to pull out troops without endangering the pro-Western Saudi monarchy.

The world has moved on since the Cold War. There is no struggle for global dominance; regional powers provide no comparable threat to Western energy and economic interests; Israel is threatened by unconventional, not conventional, warfare; persistent U.S. support for Israel inflames, rather than discourages, terrorism against America. In such a world, the United States and Israel would be better off as friends than as allies.

Most obviously, Washington should phase out financial assistance. It could start by cutting aid by the amount (up to a billion dollars per year) used to support settlements in, and occupation of, the West Bank. Nor should bribes to Egypt and Jordan be necessary, since they are equal, if not greater, beneficiaries of peace. Israel could determine her own security policies, unhindered by Washington's hectoring. Her actions may seem counterproductive at times, yet she is a sovereign state entitled to tell Washington "no"—except that America guarantees Israel's security and underwrites her decisions, which entitles the United States to meddle constantly.

Localizing the conflict also would necessitate greater regional cooperation. Political solutions still would not come easily, but the absence of outside subsidies—less assistance for Israel, as well as reduced funding for Islamic terrorism against Israel resulting from the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and tougher U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia—would put increased pressure on the parties to reach agreement. With no one else to blame, responsibility would finally begin and end in Israel, the West Bank, and surrounding states.

More so than in most areas of U.S. foreign policy, American involvement in the Middle East, though sprung from a kernel of U.S. national interest, has been transformed and misshapen through the interplay of varying interest groups. Naturally, the interests differ dramatically in their assessments of the problems and solutions, but all desire Washington to micromanage international problems to suit their own preferences. But with the end of the Cold War, the strongest justification for U.S. micromanagement of Middle Eastern affairs has disappeared.

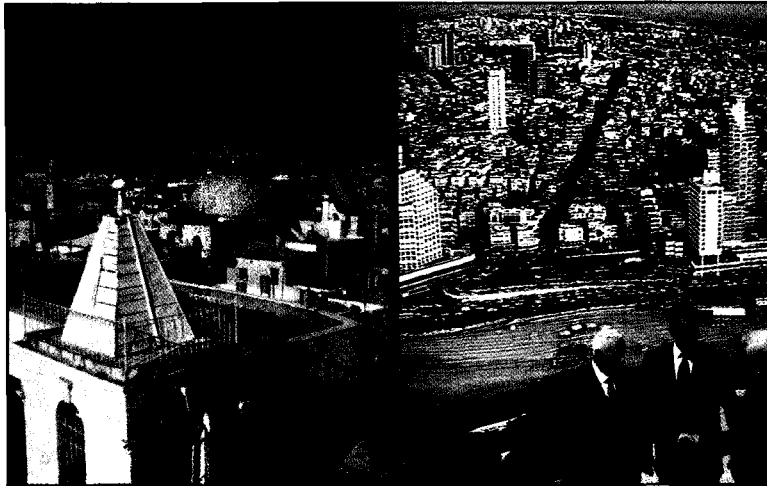
In the future, Washington should concentrate on American interests, not on those of even friendly states, or on their interest-group allies in the United States. That means treating Israel like any other country that shares many, but not all, of America's values and interests. In the case of Arab states, that means encouraging stable energy supplies and dampening the hostility that helps spawn terrorism.

In short, America should develop policy toward the Middle East, including Israel, based on her own goals and moral ideals. This has not been the case for at least the last three decades, when influential interest groups rather than fundamental interests have driven U.S. policy in this region. The price of turning foreign policy into another form of domestic politics has been high: two wars in little more than a decade; persistent military occupation of the Middle East; participation in an ever-worsening guerrilla conflict; and suicidal terrorism reaching America's shores. The United States cannot afford another three decades of such a policy.

A Tale of Two Cities

Different Visions of Israel's Future

by Leon T. Hadar



Many American Jews suffer culture shock when they first visit Tel Aviv. Having grown up watching reruns of the movie *Exodus*, they imagine Israelis as yarmulke-wearing cowboys valiantly defending their land against attacks from vicious tribes of Arab terrorists. Arriving in Tel Aviv, they find a bustling city full of secular, middle-class Israelis practicing their new religion of consumerism, planning their next trip to America or Europe as their Reebok-shod children dance to the latest rap tune. Instead of engaging in more heroic pursuits, they while away their evening hours in traditional Mediterranean pastimes: eating, drinking, gossiping, flirting, and engaging in passionate and noisy political debate.

Israel was supposed to be different—an original masterpiece, not a distant echo of ideas and trends produced in New York and London, which is what Tel Aviv, the first modern Hebrew city, turned out to be. It has become a symbol of a Western-oriented, “post-Zionist” Israel, to use a term coined by writers and artists who frequent the coffeehouses and bookstores in fashionable Shenkin Street. It describes an ascending ideological trend that is now affecting members of the intellectual class around the country, not unlike the way original Zionism itself—an ideology inspired by the notions of European “organic nationalism”—shaped the political debate among the Jewish intelligentsia in Vienna and Warsaw a century ago.

In Tel Aviv, the Oslo peace process gave rise to dreams of a new Arab-Israeli golden age. Young Israeli entrepreneurs were quick to devise schemes for potential business ventures with colleagues from Beirut and Amman. Tel Aviv's elites imagined Israel integrated in an E.U.-like New Middle East. With her sophisticated high-tech industries located in the “Silicon

Wadi,” her dynamic entrepreneurs, and her multilingual culture, Israel would become a global commercial center linking Europe to the Middle East. There were plans to draw up a constitution that would separate synagogue and state and provide full civil rights to the Arab citizens of Israel. The main focus at that time was on devising ways to bring about independence for the Palestinians that would involve the withdrawal of the Israeli military from the West Bank, the dismantlement of most Jewish settlements there, and the recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of the new Palestinian state.

A decade later, despite the destruction and death brought about by the continuing Israeli-Palestinian violence during the Second Intifada, the spirit of Tel Aviv continues to be pragmatic and reformist. Most Westernized Israelis are not dreaming but searching for practical short-term arrangements that would lead to separation between over five million Jews who regard the land of Israel as their homeland and more than four million Arabs who desire independent Palestinian statehood. They seek a political-territorial divorce along the lines of the current division between Greeks and Turks on the neighboring island of Cyprus. This trend among Westernized Israelis is reflected in the growing support for the “wall of separation” straddling the West Bank.

That does not mean that the spirit of Tel Aviv has been crushed. It still wants Israel to become modern, to cut the messianic roots of Zionism and turn into a “normal” nation-state. That state would still have strong cultural and religious ties to Judaism and the Jewish world; it would be Jewish in the same way that Poland or Ireland are Catholic, but not in the same way that Pakistan or Iran are Muslim. In essence, post-Zionists want Israel to resolve some of the contradictions that Zionism and the term *Jewish state* have introduced, including in the relationship between synagogue and state, between statist economics and the free market, between national ethos and civil-

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