

BOSOM OF ABRAHAM

America's Enduring Affection for Israel

STEVEN R. DAVID

Neither the end of the Cold War nor the involvement of most of the Arab world in the coalition against Iraq diminishes the strategic and moral importance of Israel to the United States. America and Israel enjoy a deep friendship based on shared democratic values and a common commitment to religious freedom. By virtue of this friendship and its military strength, Israel remains the only country in the Middle East with the power and willingness to consistently defend American interests in the region.

There has of course been a growing chorus of voices—from both the right and left—arguing that the United States should end or drastically reduce its support to Israel. And the Bush administration, out of a desire to protect the anti-Iraq coalition, has asked Israel to keep a “low profile” during the Persian Gulf crisis. Should a war with Iraq become necessary, however, America may come to depend on Israeli assistance. Israel's army and air force are among the world's best, and the U.S. may need their help if it becomes bogged down in a lengthy war over Kuwait. Israel also has the best intelligence in the region. In the event of a war in the Persian Gulf, Israeli information about Iraqi capabilities and facilities would be absolutely crucial to U.S. military targeting and planning.

Unique Dependability

If we look beyond the current crisis, Israel is the only state in the Middle East that is not a potential enemy of the United States. The interests of Israel and the United States are not identical, and disputes will arise between the two countries. But it is unthinkable that Israel would ever engage in anti-American terrorism, support countries that threaten the United States, or confront American forces directly, as have so many of America's Arab allies. In terms of fundamental interests—promoting stability in the Middle East, bolstering moderate Arab regimes, and countering terrorism—Israel and the U.S. are now and will remain in essential agreement.

The United States can depend on Israel for two fundamental reasons. First, Israel is not subject to the coups and rebellions that have bedeviled virtually every other Middle Eastern country. Groups that have seized power

have often turned against Washington, as has occurred in Egypt (1955), Syria (1955), Iraq (1958), Libya (1969), and Iran (1979). Second, Israel's pro-American orientation is rooted in the democratic values of its society. In no other Middle Eastern state are the roots of pro-American support so deep, widespread, and immutable.

The consistency and durability of Israel's pro-American commitment is especially important in light of the many shifts of allegiance of regimes in the Middle East and in neighboring Third World states. In the early 1970s, Egypt, Somalia, and the Sudan were strongly pro-Soviet, and Ethiopia was the closest friend of the United States in sub-Saharan Africa. Within 10 years, each of these countries had switched superpower patrons. Because the political orientation of these countries is determined by a narrow leadership elite—sometimes by one leader—a change of government or even a change of mind is enough to alter the country's allegiance.

Israeli support for U.S. interests is independent of the vagaries of inter-Arab politics. Even regimes friendly to the United States will go against American interests if there is strong Arab sentiment to do so. Following the 1973 War, Saudi Arabia, one of America's closest allies, embargoed critically needed oil to the United States. More recently, Jordan's King Hussein, responding in part to domestic pressure, has tilted toward Iraq in that country's confrontation with the United States. The Jordanian response demonstrates the fragility of Arab support for the U.S. in the Gulf and increases Washington's concern that the Arab coalition mounted against Iraq will evaporate over time as public resentment of an American presence builds. As critical as Arab backing has been for the American intervention, there is only one Middle Eastern country that Washington knows will not succumb to Saddam Hussein's pressure—Israel.

Israel as a Just Society

As important and reliable as Israel is to the United States strategically, it is the moral ties based on ideologi-

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Reuters/Bettmann

Jews were unable to worship at their holiest site, the Western Wall, when East Jerusalem was under Jordanian rule. By contrast, Israel assures freedom of worship to all religions.

cal and cultural affinity that best explain and justify the relationship between the two countries.

Even at the height of the Cold War, Americans were never driven by a narrow vision of *realpolitik*. Nevertheless, when the Soviet Union presented a direct and pressing threat to American security, other interests had to be subordinated to meeting that threat. This often resulted in U.S. support for countries whose values failed to meet the standards of the American people. Now, with the diminishment of the Soviet threat, the United States has the luxury of allowing moral and ideological concerns to play a major role in determining policy. So long as Israel continues to reflect American values to a far greater extent than any other country in the Middle East, close ties between the two countries will be maintained.

Israel is a society informed by a sense of justice that Americans recognize and rightfully admire. It is the only democracy in the Middle East. Israel is the only country in the region that provides (however imperfectly) the basic rights of freedom of speech, press, religion, and emigration that Americans hold so dear. It is a society in which dissent is not only allowed—it is a way of life. It is a society that fosters the formation of human rights commissions that scrutinize every aspect of governmental policy.

None of this is meant to suggest that Israel is without

faults. Its continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has resulted in abuses of power that have been well documented. Moreover, as the recent killing of some 17 Palestinians on the Temple Mount, or Haram al-Sharif, has shown, Israeli security forces at times act irresponsibly to suppress unrest.

Without excusing Israeli excesses, however, it must be remembered that the Israeli occupation results from a war of aggression launched by Jordan in 1967. If King Hussein had responded to Israeli requests not to attack during Israel's war with Egypt and Syria, the West Bank would have remained in Arab hands and a Palestinian state could have been established there.

Disputes Among Friends

As for other Israeli transgressions, at least Israel makes an effort to determine when it has behaved wrongly and punishes those responsible. Following the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres (in which Christian militiamen slaughtered Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps under Israeli control) and the recent Temple Mount shootings, it is noteworthy that Israel established commissions of inquiry. These commissions found some Israeli fault in both episodes. Many in the world community complained that Israel did not go far enough in admitting blame and punishing the wrong-doers, but

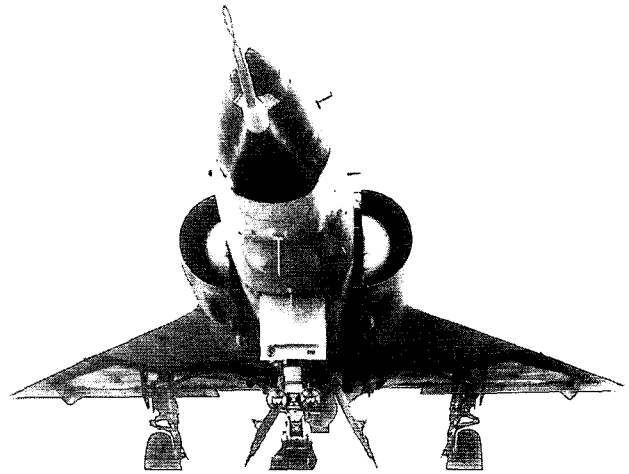
where else in the Middle East would remotely similar assessments of conduct have taken place?

Americans also feel a special affinity with Israel as the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity. While the support of American Jews for Israel is well documented and understandable, far too little attention has been given to American Christian, especially Evangelical Protestant, support of Israel. Some of this support stems from religious beliefs that Israel has a major role in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. More generally, religious Americans, Christian as well as Jewish, have an emotional attachment to the land of Israel and the cities of Scripture—Nazareth, Beersheba, Jerusalem. Christian backing also arises from a recognition that freedom of access to the holy sites in Israel—Moslem, Christian, and Jewish—has been assured only by the Israeli state. Along with American Jews, these Christians remember that under King Hussein's rule, access to the Western Wall (the holiest place in Judaism) was denied to the Jewish people. Concerns for justice, fears that one prohibition could spawn others, and the recognition that the demise of Israel would end any hopes of Jews, Moslems, and Christians living together peacefully, explain much of this Christian support for Israel.

These common values linking the United States to Israel have helped keep Israeli-American relations strong even when our strategic interests have diverged. Examples of intense disagreements between the U.S. and Israel are many. In the 1956 War the United States condemned Israel's attack on Egypt and forced an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai. In the early 1970s the United States criticized Israel for not being forthcoming enough in establishing peace negotiations. Following the 1973 War, Henry Kissinger's "shuttle diplomacy" included many bitter exchanges with Israel over its alleged intransigence. In 1982 the United States strongly condemned the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. At present it is clear that the Bush administration would prefer more flexibility from Israel on the issues of the occupied territories and negotiations with the Palestinians. And most recently America has condemned Israel for the killing of the Palestinians on the Temple Mount. What is remarkable is not that we have had so many problems with Israel, but that in spite of these disputes American ties with Israel have remained fundamentally close.

Virtues of a Double Standard

America's admiration for Israel does not prevent it from frequently criticizing Jerusalem, leading many to charge that Washington is employing a double standard. Such complaints miss the point. Of course, the United States holds Israel to a much higher level of accountability than it does Syria, Iraq, or even Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Of course, Israeli transgressions have never approached the massacre of tens of thousands of Syrians by Hafez al-Assad, the killing of hundreds of Moslems during the pilgrimage to Mecca this year, or Saddam Hussein's gassing of thousands of Kurds and ongoing commitment of atrocities against the Kuwaitis. And American criticism of Israel often fails to take into account the neighborhood in which Israel lives and the




Israel Aircraft Industries

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often unsavory actions it must undertake in order to survive.

It is to Israel's benefit, however, that it is subject to tougher U.S. moral standards than its neighbors. Precisely because Israel is seen as morally superior to its neighbors, it receives more American political, economic, and military assistance than they do. The price Israel must pay for this largesse is an intense American scrutiny of its behavior and the need to justify its actions to an extent far greater than its neighbors. It is a high price to pay, but so long as Israel expects U.S. backing, it is a price that must be met.

America's double standard toward Israel thus has a different origin than does the double standard of the world community. The disproportionate censure and vilification that Israel receives from the United Nations and other international organizations is hypocritical, particularly when many of the same countries that seek to delegitimize Israel on moral grounds are themselves among the worst abusers of human rights. This constant and one-sided condemnation of Israel serves only to create a siege mentality that encourages the Israelis to ignore even justified international criticisms. By usually refusing to join this disgraceful bandwagon the United States shows its respect to the international community by holding it to a high standard of fairness.

The central role of shared values in determining the American-Israeli friendship carries an important warning. The most likely way the United States' relationship with Israel will be undermined is not through demonstrating that the Arab states are more important strategically than Israel, or that American support for Israel hurts other, more significant American interests. Rather, if the relationship is undermined it will be through the perception that Israel is no longer committed to the values that drew American support in the first place. Despite the many problems of Israeli society, events have not yet reached that level. But if they should, no demonstration of Israeli strategic worth would be enough to stave off an American abandonment of the Jewish state. 

“POISONING OF THE SOUL”

New Leaders of Russia and Central Europe Talk About the Evil Empire

COMPILED BY KEVIN ACKER

One of the unintended consequences of Bolshevism was the awe-inspiring emergence of a literature of liberty. The works of Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak, Mandelstam, Sakharov, Sharansky, and many others plumbed the depths of totalitarian horror and gave testimony to the power of human reason and the human soul in the face of tyranny. To their great works must now be added the speeches and essays of the new leaders of Russia and what is rightly called again Central Europe—President Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, President-elect Lech Walesa of Poland, Mayors Anatoly Sobchak and Gavriil Popov of Leningrad and Moscow, President Boris Yeltsin of Russia—as well as some of the reformist intellectuals of the Soviet “glasnost” movement, among them Yuri Afanasyev, Alexander Yakovlev, and Tatyana Zaslavskaya. Some of their more eloquent statements about their totalitarian legacy and their dreams of the future have been compiled by Kevin Acker, a senior at Dartmouth College.

“Our Conscience Is Sick”

[Prague Spring] was the first perestroika in the socialist countries, and we crushed and slandered that perestroika. It was collective murder. How many lives and fates have been destroyed, and how much disillusion, anger, and grievance have accumulated over the years toward your own dogmatic, triumphant Stalinists, and toward us, their sponsors and protectors.

Our conscience is sick: the Berlin Wall, the war in Afghanistan, Prague.

—Daniil Granin, Soviet novelist, in open letter to Czechoslovaks, *Moscow News*, November 19, 1989

In the 10 years of that [Afghanistan] war, we not only lost in some degree the prestige that the Soviet Union and its Armed Forces enjoyed after the victorious Great Patriotic War, but also in some degree inflicted terrible pain on the families and friends, our own Soviet people. With hindsight, we are obliged to offer apologies once again and regret that it happened.

—Dmitri Yazov, Soviet Defense Minister, June 1, 1990

The decision to send Soviet troops into Afghanistan merits moral and political condemnation....By this action we set ourselves against the majority of the world community and against the norms of conduct, which should be accepted and observed in international relations.

—Alexander Dzasokhov, reporting the conclusions of the USSR Supreme Soviet Committee on International Affairs, December 24, 1989

Having embarked upon the path of dividing the loot with the [Nazi] predators, Stalin began to speak with the neighboring, especially small, countries in the language of ultimatums and threats. He did not consider it shameful to resort to force. This happened in the argument with Finland. With great power arrogance he brought Bessarabia back within the borders of the union, and restored Soviet power in the Baltic republics. All this deformed Soviet policy and state morality....The whole truth, even the bitterest, must be told some time.

The [Hitler–Stalin] secret protocol of 23 August 1939 reflected precisely the inner essence of Stalinism. This is not the only one, but one of the most dangerous delayed-action mines from the minefield we have inherited, and which we are now trying to clear with such difficulty and complexity. It is necessary to do this. The public mines do not simply fade away on their own.

—Alexander Yakovlev, member of Soviet Politburo, December 23, 1989

“The System Invites Lies”

When people are compelled to look only one way, when they are deprived of information and the possibility to compare things, they stop thinking. Well-informed people, ones who have access to versatile information, inevitably begin to think.

The very system invites lies.

—Oleg Kalugin, former KGB major-general and USSR People’s Deputy, *Moscow News*, July 1, 1990

In Afghanistan, I discovered for myself that what appeared in our newspapers was the complete opposite of the truth. We really were fighting. Thousands of