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THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP: MOUNTING MISPERCEPTIONS IN WASHINGTON

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Clashing Perceptions After the Gulf War

Certain new strains in the U.S.-Israel relationship are now coming to the fore, stemming in part from different views of the outcome of the Gulf War. After the war, the U.S. came to the conclusion that Israel's strategic environment had changed radically. Since the U.S. had apparently flattened a major military threat to Israel, Israel now lived with a much lower degree of risk.

Israel after the war asked the U.S. for $1 billion in compensation for war-related costs, and for absorbing 39 Scud missiles without retaliating. But though the administration supported a postwar aid package for Turkey and other countries, they had no intention of giving Israel a penny. In fact, the Americans believed that since they had destroyed Israel's major threat, if anything, Israel owed America something.

The United States often talks about a window of opportunity that presented itself after the Gulf War, but what exactly was that window of opportunity? Was it that Syria, which has normally been the heart of the Arab rejectionist bloc, was suddenly with a group of states considered pro-American? Were the strategic conditions changed in the Middle East in such a way as to require all the parties to recalculate their preferences and turn to the United States as the only major external power with whom one had to do business? It seems that the window of opportunity was really based on America's calculation of how Israel's calculations needed to change. America believed it had smashed Israel's greatest enemy and turned Iraq into a parking lot, so now Israel could take risks it had never been able to take before.

Another facet of this new American perspective is the common perception that Israel's territorial requirements could be eased in an age of missiles. President Bush, speaking right after the victory, on March 6, 1991, made reference to the fact that in the modern era geography is not a source of security. Later he adapted that and said "not the

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only source of security," in a subsequent speech to a Jewish organization in Los Angeles. But nonetheless, this helped feed certain expectations that a window of opportunity had arrived, one which required changes involving Israel, though not necessarily changes involving the Arab world.

The first indication that the U.S. believed Israel could be taking much greater risks than Israel itself was willing to take was seen even before the Gulf War actually broke out, during congressional hearings held in the fall of 1990 on the implications of a proposed massive $23 billion U.S. arms sale to Saudi Arabia. Many members of Congress at the time asked the administration how Israel would be compensated if $23 billion in advanced U.S. arms was to be sent to Saudi Arabia. At the time President Bush pledged to send two Patriot batteries to Israel. Were these two Patriot batteries compensation against billions in arms to a hostile neighbor? The administration answered that Israel did not necessarily have to be compensated for the growth of Saudi military power. The main threat to Israel came from Iraq, not Saudi Arabia, they claimed.

When Iraq Recovers

One major problem Israel has with the American analysis of its potential risks is that from its experience in numerous Arab-Israeli wars, Israel remembers that countries recover. When Israeli military planners discuss what is required to make the country defensible, they have to bear in mind a much longer range of time than the next two, three or four years. Egypt had a much larger proportion of fighter aircraft and main battle tanks destroyed by Israel in 1967 than the U.S. destroyed in Iraq in 1991, yet Egypt was able to recover, albeit with superpower backing, to launch the War of Attrition in 1969, only two years later, and the Yom Kippur War six years later. Therefore, since recovery is both possible and probable, Israel's calculations cannot be based on the immediate environment, but on what Iraq is going to look like a bit further on.

The Americans resorted to very different rules of logic when judging potential threats to Israel and Saudi Arabia. The U.S. wanted to sell all these arms to the Saudis to make Saudi Arabia defensible. These were to be part of a larger plan of American security arrangements that were to involve rotating brigades of American troops in Saudi Arabia and prepositioning equipment. This meant, of course, that American thinking could perceive a restored threat to Saudi Arabia from Iraq. But somehow Israel was considered to suddenly live in a different part of the world, immune from any future Iraqi or any other major threat. This different reading of the immediate implications of the war created different sets of expectations on both sides as to where they should be progressing and at what pace.

The Limits of American Guarantees

One of the basic differences of perception between Israel and the U.S. involves the whole notion of American guarantees or an American presence. For many people, watching the deployment of Patriot batteries in Israel during the war was a ground-breaking event. For the first time the U.S. was putting American soldiers in Israel to defend Israel against an external threat. True, French pilots helped defend Israeli airspace during the Suez Campaign in 1956, but this time a new precedent seemed to be established in the U.S.-Israel relationship: U.S. forces defending Israel. This began to set the stage for speculation that in the future an American presence might be useful in certain peace-making scenarios such as on the Golan Heights. The significance of this thinking is its substitution of American assurances for Israeli capabilities.

This was really based on a misreading of what Israel had done when it accepted the Patriot batteries. The Patriot batteries involved a very specific, limited type of threat under very unique conditions, and one in which the Scud missiles Israel faced did not threaten its very existence. The missiles caused tragedy for those who lost their homes and created a certain amount of havoc in the society, but they did not bring Israel to its knees. The 39 Scud missiles were not one or two thousand Syrian tanks threatening to overrun the Golan Heights, but rather a much more limited order of magnitude. For Israel to accept some kind of protection against a limited threat is different from Israel's relying on outside protection against a massive threat.

During the Gulf War Israel was also accepting an American presence tied to a technical capability which it did not possess. Having no anti-missile missiles of its own, Israel accepted the limited, specific American presence of the missile battery crews. Israel was willing to incorporate an American input into its security when it involved aspects of security that Israel could not provide for itself, but to consider an American presence instead of an Israeli presence in different Israeli border areas, in place of a capability which Israel can provide for itself, is, again, a different order of magnitude.

Can Israel accept any security structure in the

Middle East based on external American involvement? If Israel agreed to an arms control system, for example, it might agree to take risks, but only if the U.S. would agree to prevent any power in the Middle East from getting nuclear weapons. This would be a security structure dependent on U.S. action, to invade and bomb and do Osirak raids all the time to make sure no one got nuclear weapons, a scenario quite hard to picture. Ultimately, Israel finds itself required to create a security structure where it alone is ultimately responsible for deterring external threats. It is this Israeli deterrent that must protect the country and not any external structures.

Translating the Military Victory into a Political Achievement

The Gulf War began essentially as an inter-Arab war — a war between exile-Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and Iraq, on the other — which first became regionalized and then globalized. The central axis of that conflict was 1,000 kilometers from Israel. If anything, the major changes resulting from the conflict should be among the parties who were directly involved, not necessarily Israel who was a side player in the fighting. Yet while the center of focus of the military struggle was far from Israel, the conversion of the military victory into a political achievement occurred in the beginning of peace talks between Israel and its Arab neighbors. In part this was due to the administration's lack of success in achieving its goals in the Persian Gulf, and therefore it used the leverage it had to achieve things where it could.

The U.S. had at the time a sense of the diplomacy of opportunity. They felt that the intifada was like the 1973 war where the war was ultimately converted into some kind of tangible political achievement. They sensed that after what they felt was a breakthrough in opening the dialogue with the PLO that a new opportunity existed. Bush's preferred area of operation is foreign policy and he felt that Israel got away with too much under the Reagan administration and wanted to correct it. Every new administration comes into office with the need to define itself as different from its predecessor, and this was one of the areas where they could define themselves very differently.

American officials recognize that everyone responded to Secretary Baker's call to come to Madrid out of consideration for their future relations with the United States. They also recognize that Madrid represented essentially a procedural breakthrough, though not necessarily a breakthrough in substance, in the basic positions of the parties.

One of the fascinating things that happened as a result of the Madrid Conference was its impact on the approval rating of the president. George Bush came to Madrid, sat next to Gorbachev, and was the architect of the biggest foreign policy sensation of recent years. Usually a president who comes back from that would be expected to enjoy a boost of 20 points in his approval rating. Bush came back from Madrid and was criticized for being overseas. Part of the new post-Cold War situation is the reduced importance of foreign policy in domestic politics.

Keeping the Process Alive

The United States has set for itself the goal of keeping the peace process going. The process has become an end in itself. U.S. officials believe the process will lead to the eventual closing of gaps between the Arabs and Israel. There is a very strong American belief that process changes opinion. Americans often mention Moshe Dayan who said he would rather have Sharm el-Sheikh without peace than peace without Sharm el-Sheikh; once into the process, he stopped saying things like this.

This strong American belief in process often worries Israelis who look at every American position for its ultimate impact on step 10 of the process, when what is basically affecting American calculations is moving from step 2 to step 3 and not considering the end of the road at all. It is hard for Israelis to believe, but the U.S. State Department probably does not have a map of exactly where they want to bring Israel. Nonetheless, the U.S. will try and manage this conflict in a way to keep the process alive and moving forward. It will even break agreements and make the U.S.-Israel relationship very tense at times to keep the process from falling apart.

At some points the U.S. will be very tempted to wiggle out of understandings with Israel. For example, in the invitation to the first round of talks in Washington were questions about positions of substance that no one had asked for. Israel had an understanding with the U.S. that they would become involved in the bilateral negotiations only when invited in by both sides, but here we saw the U.S. already putting forward elements of substance before it was invited. The Americans were motivated by the idea of helping to keep the process alive. Israel protested, delayed its arrival by a few days, and basically got the U.S. to back off. The U.S. also backed off when the next crisis occurred over Palestinian representation.

The Talks May Take Years

We must all understand that we are at the beginning of a very long process. We ought to view these talks as something similar to the arms control negotiations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. They began formally at the Glassboro, N.J. summit meeting in 1967, led to the SALT I agreement five years later, and paved the way for the first arms reduction agreements many more years down the road. We are now basically in an initial stage where the parties are still feeling each other out.

One source of hope for the future of the talks is that the media is totally bored by this event, since media interest is inversely proportional to practical diplomacy. The Madrid Conference was an event consisting of 95 percent media and 5 percent diplomacy. At the first round of the Washington talks there was 80 percent media and 20 percent diplomacy. By Washington II it was down to 60 percent media and the rest diplomacy. As the media lost interest, there was less opportunity to play to the media. Once Israel gets into a routine dialogue with its neighbors and that dialogue becomes more or less accepted, then hopefully we will see a more regularized diplomacy. Israel and the Arabs can then begin to move forward in very small steps from questions of procedure to setting up the agenda for discussion, and then moving to small points of substance where agreement may be found. Everybody recognizes that the gaps are very wide, so the negotiations may be expected to take time.

The U.S. will be cautious about intervening on points of substance, especially after the episode with the invitations. The Americans will be more ready to intervene on points of procedure because they do not want to lose a peace process over some issue that looks to Washington like haggling over the shape of the table. At a later stage the U.S. might begin taking positions on substance, but not immediately.

Foreign Aid and Loan Guarantees

The U.S. foreign aid program started in 1947 as part of the Truman Doctrine to contain the Soviet Union. When the Truman administration was having difficulty generating public support for a program of foreign aid for Greece and Turkey, Senator Vandenberg told Secretary of State Dean Acheson that the administration would first have to scare the American public. The Soviet threat was portrayed as affecting the personal security of every American, who had to be concerned with the notion of nuclear weapons flying over the North Pole to destroy whole American cities. Putting resources into faraway places that were part of the struggle of the Cold War between East and West was something that people could justify. The natural tendency of the United States will now be to move in the direction of withdrawal and of less engagement overseas, with the U.S. remaining involved primarily in those areas of the world with which it has the greatest amount of economic interaction. Yet even if America becomes more domestically oriented, however, it will not delink with Israel. Long-standing strategic and moral relationships between the U.S. and Israel have led Israel to become almost a domestic political issue in the U.S.

There are two nearly opposing signals coming out of Washington over the loan guarantee issue. One is that the U.S. wants to come to an understanding with Israel in a way that neither side has to sacrifice its fundamental principles. The second has to do with the terms of the proposed agreement, which keep appearing in the press and keep getting harsher and harsher.

Israel first thought it had American agreement to complete construction that had already been started, and would finish those homes over five years. Since the loan guarantees would be for a limited five year period, Israel would not have to give up the principle of building settlements. It would simply restrict itself for a five year period to what was left of the building starts. But then the U.S. disputed the number of building starts, claiming that Israel had a lot less. And then the U.S. said it would deduct from the loan guarantees for any of the building starts that Israel completed.

While the American opening position sounded reasonable — not wanting either side to have to sacrifice its principles — there has been, in practice, a hardening in the negotiation. Perhaps the administration felt it succeeded in neutralizing the American Jewish organizations over the loan guarantees, creating the expectation that the matter would be handled in a business-like way, and that if they went behind the back of the president to Congress, Bush would get mad and that would be counterproductive. Now the hardening of the approach is perhaps a way to draw Israel into maximal concessions. Once Israel entered into negotiations with the U.S. and said it was willing to work out some kind of deal, then the U.S. hardened its position to get maximal concessions on limiting West Bank construction.

The administration claimed that in demanding a halt in settlement activity it was just applying traditional U.S. policy. But Bush went much further than his predecessors. He could have limited himself to opposing new settlements alone, claiming that every new settle-

ment precluded the return of a given piece of land. But ultimately Bush demanded a total freeze in *building starts* after current starts are completed. A freeze on building starts implies that for Washington it makes a difference if Ariel has 10,000, 15,000, or 25,000 residents. Israelis implicitly fear that the attempt to arrest growth of *already existing* settlements is derived from an intention to have them removed in a future peace arrangement (a city of 10,000 is easier to evacuate than a city of 20,000). The struggle over settlements is a kind of shadow-boxing over the nature of the territories at final status: a West Bank and Gaza with Palestinian self-government linked to Jordan *without* an Israeli presence, or Palestinian self-government linked to Jordan with an Israeli presence linked to Israel.

There was evidence from the beginning that this U.S. administration was going to push Israel hard. Back in February 1989, in his first interview as Secretary of State, James Baker explained to *Time* magazine that diplomacy was like a turkey hunt. Paraphrasing: "You have got to fatten up the turkeys. I have this assistant who puts out the feed, he fattens up the turkeys, you get them good and fat, and then you shoot them." When asked what country he had in mind, he answered "Israel!"

The impact of the loan guarantees on the Israeli elections can work both ways. On the one hand, withholding the loan guarantees is said to send a signal to the Israeli electorate that the Likud has damaged the U.S.-Israel relationship and that they should vote for Labor if they want to get money. But the issue might also work to stiffen Israeli opinion, reminding people of the days of Eisenhower and Dulles, and sending them looking for a strong leader, which could work in favor of figures that are even more hard-line than the current leadership. The U.S. administration has been burned before trying to manipulate the Israeli elections and they realize that being closer to one party and alienating the other makes it more difficult to work later on with the alienated side.

Picturing the New World Order

The entire shape of our present-day world order has been revolutionized and everybody is speculating about the nature of the new world order. The old notion of two superpowers is gone. Russia at this point will do whatever the U.S. tells it to and does not have an independent opinion that is going to express itself.

Appearing before a congressional committee in February 1992, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker noted that U.S. foreign policy will no longer be guided by the concept of containment, but rather by that of "collective engagement." This new term is not simply multilateralism, based on increasing use of the United Nations. Collective engagement basically refers to the United States forming *ad hoc* coalitions for particular problems, such as Kuwait or saving the Commonwealth of Independent States. The new multilateralism can be based on existing forums as well, whether the G-7 industrialized group, NATO, CSCE, or the Arab League. This will be the future pattern of American diplomacy, where the United States wants to lead but does not have the resources to do it by itself. It rests on a combination of Japanese, Saudi and European resources, along with American direction and leadership.

Previously we had always anticipated superpower cosponsorship in any international conference or regional conference, or in what started at Madrid. What will replace the concept of superpower sponsorship will be this American conception of collective engagement involving wider coalitions of countries. Part of the tensions in the U.S.-Israel relationship comes from a general shift in U.S. policy from a stress on bilateral ties to these multilateral arrangements. The U.S.-Israel relationship thrived when Washington worked largely through its bilateral alliances.

Europe Awakens to a Southern Threat

While no one expects Libya to obtain an intercontinental ballistic missile that could hit an American city, a revolution in thinking may be underway in Europe, which only now is coming out from under the American umbrella and is facing a situation where countries to its south, where it has been selling weaponry and trading irresponsibly for years, are now posing potential threats to European security. Algeria has a nuclear reactor and even large populations within France itself who might be mobilized for internal disruption. The threat scenarios that existed in the past that faced eastward are now being replaced by scenarios that deal with the south. This is creating all kinds of drastic changes in European policy.

The stakes are totally different than they were before. Now the European countries must reassess previous policies of appeasing and buying off countries to their south that will soon have the strategic capabilities to threaten European cities. Therefore, policy will be made from now on through very different eyes. There is also an historical fear in Europe of Islam and the Arab world, the traditional fear in Christian societies of the Muslim hoard from the south. European history is replete with the battle of Tours, Charles Martel in

France, the Ottoman siege of Vienna. The Islamic assault on Europe was basically stopped in the seventeenth century and rolled back. In fact, Europe rolled into the Middle East. But now for the first time in centuries the Middle East is in a position where it is acquiring the capability to threaten Europe, and that is a whole new world. This recognition began to surface two or three years ago at conferences in Europe on military questions and it will now become even more prominent.

This is very likely to lead to a lot of politics of hypocrisy: countries that will look to Israel for cooperation, yet come down hard against Israel in public diplomacy. France is the number one candidate because while they have this concern with Algeria, they have had a pro-Arab policy since De Gaulle.

The Nature of Peace

In the 1970s, Henry Kissinger complained to Yigal Allon that while Israel thirsted for peace, it had a millennial sense of peace in which peace is the absence of any possible war, but for most nations of the world, peace is a precarious condition. Kissinger chided Israel for seeking absolute security protected by territorial margins that the other side regards as its own.

When the peace negotiations reach a meaningful stage, Israel is going to be asking about the exact nature of the peace it is being offered. Some people may say that the peace that is possible justifies doing things that most countries would regard as insane if they were in Israel's position. Others may say that for a peace like Israel has with Egypt, the territorial risks on the Golan and West Bank fronts are not worth it. Israelis do tend to aspire for absolute security or absolute peace, but Israel's approach to borders must take into account that it cannot achieve either. Middle Eastern peace will not be a Western European peace (Arab-Israeli peace cannot be more stable than inter-Arab peace) and Israel will have to assume certain risks. The Israeli debate about withdrawal oftentimes presupposes a state of regional peace that might take decades to develop. Any Israeli government — Likud or Labor — is maneuvering within both international and domestic constraints and considerations on these issues. If Syria came and said it accepted Camp David, this would be a breakthrough to which Israelis, and not only the U.S., would respond.

The danger is that the talks with the Syrians will probably take a long time. It may be a five-year or a fifteen-year negotiation. America's conventional arms control talks with the Soviets began in 1973, yet agreement was only reached in 1990. Every process has its own natural timing. But the Bush administration does not have five or fifteen years. Because of its own political calendar, the U.S. may ask Israel to make concessions that are far too dangerous to make considering the hostile intentions of the other side.

Israeli society, and every society at war, is driven by an impulse for *peace* and an impulse for *security*. The extent to which the international situation seems reasonable, fair and stable, people will move in the direction of greater risk toward a model of order based on peace. To the extent to which the international or regional situation looks dangerous, wild and anarchical, people will cling to models of order based on pure security. That is the essence of every conservative-liberal debate in societies at war. Middle East peace will be an imperfect mix of security and diplomacy. The content of that mix will depend on the extent of regional stability that is created around Israel in years ahead. But what is thoroughly untenable is to ask Israel to increase its vulnerability without reducing the threat that it faces in its wider regional environs.

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