



CROSSROADS

THE FUTURE OF THE U.S.-ISRAEL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

HAIM MALKA

FOREWORD BY SAMUEL W. LEWIS

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CROSSROADS

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FOREWORD

Any serious effort to project the future course of U.S.-Israeli relations encounters daunting unknowns. The past provides numerous lessons, a roller coaster of highs and lows, of crises both real and manufactured for political purposes, of periods of seemingly smooth sailing, and of long-range societal trends tending in contradictory directions. The present appears fraught with incompatible leadership styles and cultural contrasts between Jerusalem and Washington, even while the broader Middle East region seems suddenly, after years of stasis, to be navigating a surging torrent of actual or impending political upheaval whose outcome cannot be foreseen from either capital. Military and intelligence cooperation between our two governments currently reaches historic highs, obscured to the public by statements from cool, sometimes provocative political leaders who talk past one another, sometimes seemingly deliberately. More and more the objective analyst is driven to underscore the clash between national and on occasion vital interests of two such different nation-states. Overlapping interests are indeed substantial, but their respective histories, sizes, locations, and threat perceptions offer such huge contrasts that maintaining close working relations between the governments of this unique but “unwritten alliance” will continue to exhaust and frustrate leaders in both capitals for as long as one can see into the future.

Therefore, the task of the author of this study seems on its face hopeless. That makes his effort all the more admirable. In surprisingly few pages he has delved below the surface of the platitudes and

pseudo-analyses that fill too many monographs and indeed volumes produced over the years about this elusive quarry. In particular, his description of diverging societal trends in both nations, and the ways in which those are reshaping public attitudes toward the political relationship, provides a provocative backdrop for the discussion of the strategic particulars.

The analysis in this study is as creative and thoughtful an effort as I have seen, worthy of careful reading and reflection, carrying a sobering message for anyone genuinely concerned about the future of Israel in a world with enduring enemies.

For most Americans, how we arrived at the current interweaving of Israeli and American politics, military establishments, joint intelligence operations, and diplomatic dilemmas has been mostly forgotten, if ever known. The chapter recounting that evolving story should be must reading for those who blithely assume that the unwritten alliance has always been with us and that Israel has, for all the more than six decades of its existence as a modern state, been dependent on the United States for survival, the largest U.S. foreign aid recipient, and also a mighty political force in Congress and the executive branch. In fact, after Harry Truman's dramatic decision for diplomatic recognition at the very moment of the birth of the new state, the relationship was usually cool and quite distant before the 1960s. The present very close ties have their origin in the mid-1960s, springing in part from unsuccessful efforts by both President Kennedy and President Johnson to head off David Ben-Gurion's search for nuclear weapons to provide ultimate security for the lonely Jewish state. But the relationship only began to ripen into a close if unwritten alliance well after the 1967 June War and its bloody offspring, the surprise of the Yom Kippur War in 1973.

President Nixon and Henry Kissinger introduced Israel into the role of potential Cold War ally; their concept of Israel as a strategic ally and sometime asset grew in the minds of most of their successors and members of Congress, with the notable exception of President Carter, during both Republican and Democratic administrations. Only in recent years has the long impasse over the Palestinian issue begun to undermine support for the unquestioning alliance relationship, especially among younger Americans who never knew the lonely "David," the isolated, courageous Israel of the early years, and who never saw the movie *Exodus*. Israelis long accustomed to being regarded as the

brave victims find themselves now too often depicted as brutal occupiers, thanks in part to the all-seeing cameras of the new media age. And, although most Israelis believe that the United States remains Israel's only reliable ally and friend, history has taught Jews bitter lessons about the constancy of even best friends.

Throughout those decades, diplomatic-political crises erupted periodically, often over Israel's stubborn determination to exert its sovereign right of self-defense, sometimes against the wishes of American administrations that deeply resented Israel's offhand disregard of potential damage to Washington's own interests in the broader Arab world. This study highlights a few examples of conflict stemming from our differences in geopolitical perspective. Today they are central in the debate over how to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. For Americans, behind wide oceans, the Iran threat is deadly serious, primarily however in its implications for the future of the whole region and for global nonproliferation policy; but for Israelis, the threat of nuclear missiles is seen as truly *existential* for them, which means that *in extremis* military force is the only answer. "Containment" of Iran could be a distasteful if dangerous ultimate fallback for the United States. Not for Israel. Such differences in priorities and perspective appear over and over again to bedevil the policymakers' vain efforts to achieve a lasting strategic understanding about the most important threats to the alliance. Almost never, however, are they frankly confronted by our senior leaders face-to-face.

An alliance of this unique nature rests on perceptions of shared political and religious values; on enduring historical memory of unspeakable brutality toward millions of Jews; on a common commitment to democracy, rule of law, and human rights; on the perception of common threats; on largely compatible, if not fully agreed, strategic doctrine; and on a web of Jewish family ties that span the oceans, all given protracted endurance by widespread American public admiration for Israel that stretches well beyond American Jewry and is expressed repeatedly by the U.S. Congress. But as this study amply demonstrates, none of these assets protect the alliance from stress or periodic crisis. What has made it work despite the many challenges over the years has been the political and diplomatic talents of Israeli prime ministers and American presidents. Only when their personal relations and their political skills have meshed has the alliance sailed through relatively calm waters. When one or both lack those qualities, inevitable stress

has slid into dangerous crisis. This can happen more in the future as the challenges posed by the region's upheavals grow more complex and seemingly insoluble.

This study contains rich analyses of both countries' changing demographic and sociological landscapes, which are already unfolding and promise to unfold more rapidly in the next decade. It points to the ways in which these changes will bring more and more stress to the unwritten alliance in the years immediately ahead. From his analysis, the author concludes that "Israel and the United States should restore a sense of partnership and common mission" if changing domestic environments are not to degrade the strategic alliance and Israel is not to be tempted to rely more and more on its own resources and judgments, a polite way of saying what other observers have described as "retreating behind the higher walls of Sparta." The author puts predictable emphasis on the need for Israel to lead the way to a two-state solution at the negotiating table, with the Palestinians as a crucial part of finding its way successfully through the thicket of dangers lying ahead for Israel and also for the United States. Alas, the excellent perceptiveness of the study's analytic sections is difficult to match in concrete recommendations as to how to achieve this elusive diplomatic breakthrough or the "sense of partnership and common mission" with the United States.

I admire this study for many reasons. It lays out the problem of the future of the unwritten alliance persuasively. However, history underscores my conviction that the relationship between our elected national leaders will play the crucial role in both potential success or potential failure in shepherding the alliance through the coming decade of rising challenge and increasing strain. Achieving a "common mission" may be a bridge too far. But two leaders who understand the difficult corridors our two peoples are passing through, have genuine empathy for the other partner's travails, and make a special effort to cultivate some personal rapport with each other will be able to keep the alliance on a moderately safe course in a very turbulent sea. Without such leaders committed to that end, the alliance is, I fear, likely to fade slowly into irrelevance.

—*Samuel W. Lewis*
Washington, D.C., July 6, 2011

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Many people in the United States and Israel contributed to shaping this study. In the course of researching and writing, I spoke with dozens of U.S. and Israeli government officials and former officials. Most agreed to speak frankly in private and provided valuable insights on sensitive topics.

The study also benefited tremendously from the guidance and feedback of an advisory board whose combined experience and expertise on U.S.-Israeli relations is hard to match. The board included Ambassador Martin Indyk, General James Jamerson, Ambassador Sam Lewis, John McLaughlin, and Dov Zakheim. Advisory board members gave generously of their time both in group meetings and individually. Special thanks to Martin Indyk for his early encouragement and support and to Sam Lewis for writing such a thoughtful and honest foreword.

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Many of the issues raised in chapter 5 of this study were discussed at a closed workshop with Israeli analysts and former government officials held at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv.

Others contributed in various ways. Justin Leites provided valuable feedback along the way and helped make the words flow smoothly. Richard Cincotta provided important lessons about demographics as well as feedback on chapters 2 and 3.

This study could not have been written without the ongoing guidance of Jon Alterman, director of the CSIS Middle East Program. It is a better study because of his many contributions throughout this process—from thinking through early arguments to the final copy. I am indebted to him for his sound advice, clarity of thought, and mentoring.

Finally, my family deserves deep gratitude for their support and patience throughout this study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Profound demographic, social, and political transformations are reshaping the U.S.-Israeli relationship. Changes under way in both the United States and Israel have eroded traditional pillars of the relationship, brought new elements to the fore, and contributed to debates in each country about how to defend that country's interests in a rapidly changing strategic environment. Uncertainty is growing about how the United States and Israel can and should cooperate to secure their interests and confront common challenges in a region undergoing dramatic shifts. Even more profoundly, Americans and Israelis increasingly see each other's policy choices as undermining their interests. The trend deepens U.S. doubts of Israel's strategic value and reinforces Israeli fears about U.S. commitments and guarantees to its security.

Many argue that rising tensions in the bilateral relationship are transient, the mere by-products of a left-leaning U.S. president and a right-leaning Israeli prime minister. Others suggest the tensions stem from short-term policy differences over confronting Iran and resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Yet the real issue is far more profound. The United States and Israel have changed and continue to change, but the two countries' relationship has not kept pace. For years, the growing differences have been papered over, but continuing to do so is both unsustainable and counterproductive. Denial of the differences risks undermining the national security of both the United States and Israel and deepens the spiral of mistrust that has intensified over the past several years. It is crucial to examine how and why the U.S.-Israeli

bilateral relationship is changing and to assess frameworks for cooperation that could strengthen the interests of both Israel and the United States.

More Israelis than Americans acknowledge that change is under way, but the ideas debated in both countries fall short. Some advocate a U.S.-Israeli defense pact, usually as part of a comprehensive regional agreement. Others argue for the United States to extend a nuclear deterrent to Israel in an effort to reassure Israelis and demonstrate the U.S. commitment to Israel's security. These options might provide short-term relief for Israeli security, but they ultimately reinforce Israel's deep dependency on the United States. That dependency fuels Israeli anxiety over the extent and sustainability of U.S. cooperation and assistance, generating more bilateral tension and misunderstanding.

What is needed, instead, is a relationship that treats Israel less as a dependent and that contains clearer commitments of what each side will do for the other—with an implicit understanding that there are limits to those commitments. U.S. military aid to Israel also needs to be rethought, emphasizing Israel's role as it grows from being a dependent to a more equal partner. Israel faces multiple challenges, yet it is no longer the weak and vulnerable state it was at its founding, and it is no longer the state it was 20 years ago. The United States and the key constituencies within it that are driving U.S.-Israeli ties are also different from what they were a generation ago. The bilateral relationship needs to reflect these realities.

Restoring true partnership in the bilateral relationship will be difficult but not impossible. To that end, Israel and the United States must work to rediscover the sense of common mission that bound the two allies in the past. That mission must transcend mutual threats and find a common strategy for advancing U.S. and Israeli interests in the region through promoting regional stability and Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Most important, Israelis and Americans must recognize that the future will be different from the past. Both should prepare for a time when the historic rationale for strong U.S.-Israeli ties may be less significant and when the politics in both countries may change the parameters of U.S.-Israeli cooperation. The U.S.-Israeli relationship is deep, but the challenges to it now are more profound than at any time in history. More honest assessments of the bilateral relationship are both urgent and vital.

INTRODUCTION

On November 9, 2009, nearly 3,000 U.S. and Israeli military personnel concluded a massive air defense exercise against simulated rocket and missile attacks. Code-named Juniper Cobra 10, the war game linked the most sophisticated air defense and radar systems in the arsenals of the two countries. The three-week military drill was the largest of its kind between the United States and Israel, demonstrating their joint war-fighting capabilities and marking yet another milestone in the remarkable story of U.S.-Israeli relations.¹

On the very same day more than five thousand miles away, a very different U.S.-Israeli dynamic was playing out in the White House. President Barack Obama received Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for an unusually low profile and tense meeting in the Oval Office. There were no public handshakes or smiles for the cameras—a rare slight for a visiting Israeli prime minister. There were none of the usual scripted comments about bonds of friendship and cooperation. Instead, the White House reportedly made the meeting conditional on Netanyahu's public support for negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.² Unlike in Juniper Cobra, the two sides seemed to be working at cross-purposes rather than together.

In the following months, tensions escalated between the two allies, with sharp disagreements over Obama's Iran policy and Israel's settlement construction. Many Israelis and American supporters of Israel blamed President Obama for the rift, arguing that he sought to rebuild ties with the Muslim world at Israel's expense.

Political disagreements intensified in March 2010, when the Israeli government announced its intention to build 1,600 new housing units for Jewish families in a predominantly Arab neighborhood of East Jerusalem during Vice President Joe Biden's visit.³

A few days later another bombshell hit, when then commander of the U.S. Army Central Command, General David Petraeus, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR [area of responsibility] and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. . . .⁴

Petraeus's comments echoed some of the points made a few years earlier, in an essay (later a book) by the prominent political scientists John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. They concluded that "instead of being a strategic asset, in fact, Israel has become a strategic liability for the United States."⁵ While the core argument of the Mearsheimer-Walt tracts—that the United States went to war in Iraq because of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States—was seriously flawed, the authors reignited an old debate over Israel's strategic value to the United States that had been largely dormant for decades.

Thus, in spring 2010, the U.S.-Israeli partnership faced its worst crisis in nearly 20 years. Despite publicly downplaying its severity, Israeli officials were deeply concerned. The prime minister appointed an informal advisory group to examine U.S.-Israeli relations,⁶ and U.S. lawmakers close to Israel struggled to defuse the crisis.

The public disputes between the Obama and Netanyahu administrations unleashed a new wave of criticism of the U.S.-Israeli partnership. Surprisingly, much of the criticism came from Americans generally sympathetic to Israel and the U.S.-Israeli partnership who believed that Israel's unwillingness to pursue a Palestinian agreement undermined the U.S. ability to manage a wide range of complex political and military missions in the Middle East, including Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.⁷ The criticisms deepened existing Israeli suspicions that Obama was hostile to Israel and seeking to fundamentally alter the relationship.

Eventually, both governments adjusted their tactics. In July 2010, President Obama warmly welcomed Prime Minister Netanyahu to the

White House. Rather than punish Israel, he highlighted his administration's support for Israel's security and requested additional military funding for Israeli antirocket systems.⁸ Netanyahu, in turn, called for direct talks with the Palestinian Authority and seemed to grudgingly accept the U.S. strategy for confronting Iran through United Nations Security Council sanctions. Moreover, speculation that Israel and the United States were working covertly to sabotage Iran's nuclear program suggested that there was growing cooperation on the issue.⁹

The new spirit of cooperation was short-lived however. Deep disagreements over the Obama administration's response to the Arab Spring at the outset of 2011 followed by a tense Netanyahu visit to Washington in May again soured the mood at the highest levels.

It would be convenient to dismiss the doubts and disagreements that unfolded between Obama and Netanyahu as part of the normal cycle of U.S.-Israeli relations. Likud prime ministers have often clashed with Democratic presidents, and given the mutual suspicion from the outset, the collision was hardly surprising. The history of the partnership (detailed in chapter 1) has been replete with strategic and political disagreements on a range of issues that strained political ties and threatened to rupture cooperation. In such a complicated partnership, even the closest friends are bound to disagree.

Still, the diplomatic crisis was deeper than past disagreements. The Obama-Netanyahu clash had complex roots that few acknowledged but that had grown quietly during the previous decade. These most recent troubles highlighted more fundamental problems, and they are a portent of challenges to come.

U.S.-Israeli relations are drifting. Both societies are changing in consequential ways that are reshaping Israeli and American politics as well as U.S.-Israeli relations more broadly. These social and political changes influence both countries' foreign and domestic policies at a time of dramatic geopolitical change. Political and strategic trends make it more difficult for Israelis and Americans to understand each other, and they deepen frustration and resentment on both sides. More Americans now question both Israel's political values and its strategic value, while more Israelis worry that U.S. policy in the Middle East is undermining Israeli interests and question U.S. commitments to its security. Although the U.S.-Israel alliance is stronger than ever in some respects, it can no longer be taken for granted.



The foundation of the U.S.-Israel alliance has been built on two mutually reinforcing assumptions—one political, one geopolitical—about the basis for the partnership: first, that the United States and Israel share an exceptionally deep and abiding commitment to the values of a Western-style democratic society and, second, that the United States and Israel share a common strategic outlook that is based on a shared understanding of regional threats and challenges.

Throughout the Cold War the two countries worked effectively together to contain Soviet expansion and fight Soviet client states. In the 1990s, both sides put the Arab-Israeli peace process at the center of efforts to establish regional stability and security. The collapse of the peace process was followed by the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the notion prevailed that the United States and Israel were fighting the same enemy in the global war on terrorism. The events renewed a sense of common purpose and shared values.

But going forward, the validity and relevance of these two assumptions—and, more generally, the political and geopolitical pillars of support for the relationship—will increasingly come into question.

For one, cultural and demographic dynamics are reshaping the politics and policies of both countries. The constituencies that traditionally drove the relationship in both countries are increasingly divided and shrinking, while groups with very different outlooks and aspirations are coming to the forefront. As a result, shared values are no longer a given.

Second, Israelis and Americans increasingly perceive their geostrategic environments differently. Their threat assessments have never been identical, but today it is even harder to conceive of a common mission, and many Israelis and Americans see serious threats to their own country's interests emerging from the policies of the other. The high stakes further amplify differences in strategy, reinforcing political tension. The result deepens doubts on both sides about the fundamental tenets of the partnership.

For nearly a half century, sustained U.S. political and military support has led many Israelis to believe that the United States is Israel's only true friend. Yet a growing number of Israelis question the long-term U.S. commitment to Israel's security. Within elite Israeli circles,

these questions have resurrected an old debate about Israeli dependency on the United States. Many current and former Israeli government and military officials across the political spectrum increasingly express the need to become more self-reliant and independent in order to prepare for a time when U.S. support might be less forthcoming. “Israel can only depend on itself” has become a regular refrain both inside and outside of government.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Americans are having their own debates about Israel’s strategic value. Many U.S. officials view the Israeli government as a source of unpredictability rather than stability, raising the question of whether Israel is furthering U.S. interests or complicating them. In particular, some U.S. national security officials argue that the persistence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict undermines U.S. interests by fueling radicalism and anti-Americanism in Muslim communities. An Israeli government that appears indifferent to progress on peace therefore also appears indifferent to U.S. interests.

When sharp strategic differences erupted in the past, high-level political understandings smoothed over tensions. When political differences boiled over, strategic cooperation helped cool tempers. The relationship had two main pillars—one political and one geopolitical; and the strength of one could compensate for the temporary weakness of the other. Today, both pillars are under pressure, and the foundations beneath them are shifting. The future is looking more uncertain, at a time when each country finds it more difficult to decipher both the politics and intentions of the other. The more the two sides drift apart, the more potential there is for frustration, tension, and uncertainty, making each side’s actions more unpredictable and potentially threatening.

With each partner evermore mistrustful, it is not difficult to see how this erosion of the partnership could itself become self-perpetuating. If the underlying dynamics are not addressed, the spiral of mistrust could continue downward while geopolitical forces continue to reshape the Middle East. The current trajectory is both counterproductive and dangerous.



This study begins with an overview of the political and geopolitical factors that have bound and shaped the U.S.-Israeli partnership

since 1948. It then traces the social and political dynamics in both the United States and Israel that are eroding historic bases for the relationship, and it analyzes how recent events reflect changing strategic environments. Finally, it identifies a set of key findings and recommends specific steps to steer the partnership toward a healthier and more resilient future.

It is a fundamental conclusion of this report that the U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership serves the interests of both countries. As uncertainty dominates the Middle East, Israel is a stable state and important ally. The United States has an interest in Israel's security and benefits from a range of Israeli military and scientific capabilities. The United States is in turn Israel's sole strategic ally and the cornerstone of its defense and foreign policy. Yet this partnership is also changing because Israel and the United States are changing. Ignoring the dynamics that are straining U.S.-Israeli ties, or hoping that they will be transient, is unrealistic. Doing so would allow the spiral of mistrust to continue downward at a moment when the stakes for both the United States and Israel are high. The time is ripe for restoring the partnership on grounds that reflect the political and strategic realities of today while preparing the United States and Israel to meet tomorrow's challenges and opportunities more effectively.

This objective has become more urgent following the wave of popular Arab uprisings sweeping the Middle East. The events from Tunisia to Egypt to the Gulf are a stark reminder that previously held truths about the Middle East can quickly evaporate. Too much is changing in the United States, Israel, and the Middle East to assume that the U.S.-Israeli partnership will look the same a decade or two from now. The challenge is to address the dynamics that are eroding the foundations of the partnership before a future crisis makes such a task more difficult.

NOTES

- 1 Juniper Cobra is a biennial joint exercise that has included a range of U.S. and Israeli defense and radar systems, including Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-2 and PAC-3) batteries, a Standard Missile (SM-3) equipped Aegis destroyer, the Thermal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, AN/TPY-2 Transportable Radar Surveillance system, and the Green Pine radar system. For an overview of the exercise, see Barbara Opall-Rome, "U.S., Israel Complete Joint Air Defense Drill," *Defense News*, November 16, 2009, www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4376847.

- 2 Charles Levinson and Jay Solomon, "Obama Hosts Netanyahu," *Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125773389900537653.html>.
- 3 The announcement was made by the Interior Ministry Jerusalem District Planning Committee.
- 4 "Statement of General David H. Petraeus, U.S. Army Commander, U.S. Central Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Posture of U.S. Central Command, March 16, 2010," Senate Armed Services Committee, <http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2010/03%20March/Petraeus%2003-16-10.pdf>.
- 5 John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), p. 50.
- 6 Prime Minister Netanyahu assembled the advisory group several months before Biden's visit.
- 7 See, for example, Martin Indyk, "When Your Best Friend Gets Angry," *New York Times*, April 19, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/04/20/opinion/20iht-edindyk.html; and comments by Martin Indyk to Israel's Army Radio that if Israel needs the United States "then you need to take into account America's interests." "Indyk: If Israel Manages Alone, It Can Decide Alone," *Haaretz.com*, April 21, 2010, www.haaretz.com/news/indyk-if-israel-manages-alone-it-can-decide-alone-1.284622.
- 8 See, for example, "The Obama Administration's Approach to U.S.-Israel Security Cooperation: Preserving Israel's Qualitative Military Edge; Remarks by Andrew J. Shapiro, Assistant Secretary, Political-Military Affairs; Remarks at the Brookings Saban Center for Middle East Policy, July 16, 2010," www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rm/144753.htm; and "The Democratic-Led Congress and President Obama Provide Unprecedented Support for Israel," memo publicized by House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Howard Berman (D-CA), n.d. (July 22, 2010), www.politico.com/static/PPM116_support.html.
- 9 Some commentators such as Martin Indyk argued that U.S. and Israeli positions on Iran were converging. See "Indyk: U.S. More Likely Than Israel to Bomb," *Atlantic.com*, August 16, 2010, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/08/indyk-us-more-likely-than-israel-to-bomb-iran/61508/. For examples of U.S.-Israeli cooperation to sabotage Iran's nuclear program, see William J. Broad, John Markoff, and David E. Sanger, "Israeli Test on Worm Called Crucial in Iran Nuclear Delay," *New York Times*, January 15, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/01/16/world/middleeast/16stuxnet.html.
- 10 Former Israeli minister of defense, private discussion with author, Tel Aviv, May 3, 2010.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE U.S.-ISRAEL PARTNERSHIP

Since its founding in 1948, Israel has been unique in the Middle East: it is a country with a democratic government committed to the rule of law, separation of powers, and civilian oversight of the military; with widespread individual freedoms; and with a dynamic and innovative scientific and business environment. As U.S. interests in the region evolved after World War II, Israel evolved in an increasingly pro-U.S. direction.

For many Israelis, the United States has been Israel's only strategic partner and true friend. U.S. presidents in turn have pledged their commitment to Israel's security for decades, which many defined as a national interest of the United States.¹ At the core of the U.S. commitment has been a robust aid relationship that has made Israel the largest recipient of U.S. foreign assistance and one of the world's most advanced military powers.

The level of military cooperation is extraordinarily deep. The United States now provides Israel with \$3 billion a year through the Foreign Military Financing program.² In addition to direct military aid, the United States provides funds for the joint development of antiballistic missile systems and has pre-positioned nearly \$1 billion worth of military equipment and ammunition in Israel for use by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in emergency contingencies.³ U.S. military aid represents roughly 1.5 percent of Israel's gross domestic product (GDP) and approximately 21 percent of its defense budget.⁴ Nearly three-quarters of that money is used to purchase U.S. military equipment, providing an

indirect subsidy to the U.S. defense industry and ensuring that Israel has access to the best U.S.-made military equipment available for foreign sales.

For decades, American and Israeli scientists have worked together to develop sophisticated military platforms like the jointly funded Arrow antimissile system and David's Sling.⁵ U.S. weapon systems deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan rely in part on Israeli technology, and ongoing joint research benefits both sides. Although much of the security cooperation remains classified, even the public record is extraordinary.

U.S. diplomatic support for Israel has also been crucial. The United States stands by and supports Israel in international forums, and it works to integrate Israel into international institutions and frameworks. U.S. diplomats, for example, were instrumental in lobbying a host of countries, including Turkey, to support Israel's membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Moreover, the United States has used its veto power to block anti-Israel resolutions in the United Nations Security Council and in a variety of international forums. The U.S. government also works quietly, usually in ways hidden from public view, to help protect Israeli interests on a range of diplomatic issues.⁶

On a local level, state governments have developed direct trade ties as well as law enforcement cooperation and training with Israel. Direct investment and business ties are robust and continue expanding. Equally important, Israelis and Americans have built deep social ties through tourism, education exchange programs, and people-to-people exchanges.

The combined effect of these bonds has been to create a confidence that it will always be so—that the depth and character of this partnership is unshakable. For several generations of Israelis and Americans, this robust partnership has been a reassuring constant.

But for those with longer memories, there is nothing inevitable about strong U.S.-Israeli ties.

As one historian has noted, the "U.S.-Israel alliance as we know it today is the cumulative product of individual decisions that could have gone another way."⁷

IN THE BEGINNING

There was nothing strategic about President Harry S. Truman's recognition of Israel in May 1948. Israel was a fledgling state fighting for its independence and had little to offer the world's most formidable power. Truman's advisers made compelling arguments both for and against recognition. Secretary of State George C. Marshall in particular vehemently opposed recognizing Israel, arguing that it was a purely political calculation that could become a liability for the United States.⁸ Over and above political considerations, Truman made his own decision, largely based on religious conviction and his sense of moral obligation toward a persecuted minority.⁹ Although it took years to bear fruit, Truman's decision helped set the stage for what would become one of the most special and complicated U.S. partnerships of the modern era.

Truman also based his decision on the abstract notion that Israelis and Americans shared basic beliefs rooted in liberty, democracy, and Judeo-Christian values. His strong religious impulse resonated with many Christian Americans who saw Israel's rebirth as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. For many Christian Americans, supporting Israel has deepened their physical connection to the Holy Land. Early U.S. support for Israel was also built on the idea of a small democracy struggling for survival against the odds, all while trying to absorb hundreds of thousands of immigrants. Many Americans glimpsed themselves and the American pioneer spirit in Israel's struggle for independence and survival. Israeli interlocutors tended to speak English well, were highly educated, and espoused a commitment to Western liberal and democratic ideals.

The U.S. tendency to identify with Israel was based in part on shared perceptions of exceptionalism, the belief that both countries were destined to play a unique role in history.¹⁰ Against the historical backdrop of World War II, Americans were also moved by a moral duty to support Israel, which was fighting for its survival after the extermination of six million European Jews.

Truman's recognition of Israel was a historic moment, but the first decade of U.S.-Israel ties tends to evoke bitter memories for many Israelis. After recognizing Israel, the United States remained aloof. The U.S. instinct was to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict rather than take sides. Under the Tripartite Agreement of 1950, the United States, France, and Britain agreed to limit arms sales to all countries in the

region so as to prevent an arms race from breaking out.¹¹ Washington's leading strategic thinkers successfully argued that a close relationship with Israel endangered U.S. relations with oil-rich Arab states and could strengthen the Soviet foothold in the region.

BUILDING THE POLITICAL FOUNDATION

Although strategic ties were slow to take root, the 1950s and early 1960s were crucial years when it came to building cultural ties and the political pillar of U.S.-Israeli relations. The discourses that developed during this time shaped the prevailing U.S. view of Israel for the coming decades and gave the partnership a deep political-cultural foundation. On the most basic level, anti-Semitism, which was a common feature of pre-World War II U.S. society and politics, declined dramatically after the war. As one scholar has noted, the decline of anti-Semitism in the United States helped transform Jews from "outsiders" to "insiders," which encouraged political acceptance of Israel.¹² This shift in attitudes and images of Israel "permeated popular as well as political culture, constructing a story of Israeli similarity to Americans."¹³ Changing perceptions about Jews and Israel were mutually reinforcing and fostered a stronger sense of U.S. solidarity with Israel.

While much of the idealized U.S. view of Israel was grounded in reality, it also had its share of convenient myths. Israeli leaders desperately needed U.S. political and financial support, and they developed an image of Israel that would help them achieve their goal. Israel's emissaries to the United States were highly educated representatives of Israel's dominant Ashkenazi culture, which espoused a strong Western ethos of equality and secular liberal ideas. Through them, Israeli leaders emphasized Israel's similarities with Americans and the U.S. experience. At the same time, American Jewry projected its own values onto Israel. Through a narrow understanding of Israeli society, the American Jewish community came to see Israel largely in its own image as a liberal and Western society. As the American Jewish community tended toward liberal politics, it found a soul mate in early Israeli politics that also trended leftward.

Winning broad American Jewish support for Israel was not a foregone conclusion however. Many American Jews initially hesitated to embrace political Zionism openly, as they felt threatened that Israel would try to position itself as the representative of world Jewry. Many

were trying to assimilate into American society, which seemed at odds with the goal of Israel's founders to ingather world Jewry.¹⁴

Leading U.S. Jewish organizations withheld their full-fledged support for Israel during its first two years of statehood.¹⁵ Eventually Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion reversed his repeated calls for American Jewish youth to emigrate and issued a statement asserting that “the Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals have only one political attachment and that is to the United States of America. They owe no political allegiance to Israel. . . .”¹⁶ Resolving this early dispute removed a significant barrier to building a deeper connection between American Jewry and Israel.

It was not only American Jews who would contribute to a growing U.S. appreciation of Israel, but also the resurgence of Christianity in U.S. public life that had a dramatic effect on the relationship. Religion, mainly Protestant Christianity, was reshaping a new post-World War II political outlook, characterized in part by a strong opposition to communism and a new universalism that found common cause with Israel. For many Christians, Israel's rebirth not only fulfilled biblical prophecy, but Israel's Western alignment made it a natural ally in the fight against communism.

Growing Christian affinity eventually helped nurture greater bipartisan political support for Israel. Although Democrats had largely been the champions of strong U.S.-Israeli ties during the first two decades, Republicans slowly began embracing the bilateral partnership as well. By the 1980 elections, both the Democratic and Republican platforms were highlighting Israel's importance to the United States. With anti-communism and the Cold War at the center of his worldview, President Ronald Reagan viewed Israel as a vital ally and helped consolidate national bipartisan support for a strong U.S.-Israeli partnership. Even more, President Reagan helped accelerate a process whereby Americans increasingly defined support for Israel as a “moral obligation” for the United States. Although the early concept of moral support for Israel had been confined to American popular discourse, Reagan appropriated it as a political tool and elevated it to the level of national political responsibility.

The American Christian embrace of Israel corresponded with the rise of evangelical Protestant churches and the decline in membership in the mainline Protestant denominations, which historically have been openly critical of Israel and its policies.¹⁷ Over time evangelical

Christian support grew and was based on the theological notion that a Jewish return to the Land of Israel was necessary for the Second Coming. Spiritual ties complemented the notion that Israel and the United States share common enemies, from communism during the Cold War to Islamic radicalism after September 11, 2001, which further deepened the strong affinity that many Christian Zionists feel for Israel.

The Israeli government seized the opportunity, and Likud politicians in particular sought to nurture ties with the emerging Christian Zionist movement. Not only did Christian Zionists strengthen bipartisan support, but they helped resettle Soviet Jews in Israel, dispensed funding for Holocaust survivors, and provided a steady stream of tourism. More controversially, some but not all Christian Zionists were strong supporters of Israel's settlements in the West Bank.¹⁸ Over time the evangelical influence in the Republican Party has helped make unconditional support for Israel a largely unquestioned tenet of mainstream conservative ideology in U.S. politics.¹⁹

The affections were not all growing one way. While U.S. culture and politics were developing affinities for Israel, Israel was taking on its own American tint. Many of Israel's elite had embraced U.S. ideas of progress from the state's early days, and as time progressed the U.S. way of doing things became the gold standard. In time U.S. models would influence Israel's military, educational structure, health care system, high court, media, and economy.

Much of Israel's exposure to U.S. culture came as its economy developed in the 1970s and 1980s. As Israeli imports rose and television ownership increased, U.S. movies and television shows became more accessible and were a key factor in shaping Israeli popular perceptions of the United States.²⁰ For many Israelis, the American dream they saw on television and elsewhere became the Israeli dream. Israelis had coped with the economic policies of austerity during the first two decades of statehood, and they longed for the "good life" or the material benefits that America represented. More important, for some the United States also represented the carefree environment to which many Israelis aspired—a life far away from terrorism and violence. As one Israeli author remarked, many Israelis "perceive America as a refuge, permanent or temporary, from the sweaty, arduous task of being Israeli."²¹

By the 1980s, Israel's middle class had grown and began enjoying a higher standard of living, fueling a consumer society mirroring that of

the United States. U.S.-made products were the most prized. Israelis adopted the phrase *Amerika ze po*, literally “America is here,” meaning that, unlike before, Israelis didn’t need to physically travel to the United States to enjoy the material benefits that the United States symbolized. The U.S. way of life and abundant consumer products had arrived in Israel. Growing Israeli consumerism also reflected the desire for normalcy and the fact that Israel was finally catching up with the rest of the industrialized world and transitioning from its socialist origins to free-market capitalism.²²

U.S. culture and values were crucial to this economic transformation, but the U.S. government also played a proactive role. In the mid-1980s U.S. officials such as George Shultz and other U.S. economists such as Stanley Fischer (who would later become governor of the Bank of Israel) infused \$1.5 billion into Israel’s economy as part of an economic liberalization drive. The U.S. effort helped tame Israel’s annual inflation from higher than 400 percent in 1984 to 19 percent by 1986.²³ The U.S.-led reforms assisted in stabilizing Israel’s economy, but they also moved Israel further away from its founding principles of social welfare economics toward a U.S. economic model.

SEEDS OF STRATEGIC COOPERATION

In Israel’s early years, the United States gave Israel only a relatively small amount of economic assistance, always carefully calibrated with similar U.S. support to Israel’s Arab neighbors. Although Israel managed to obtain some surplus military equipment from the United States in the early 1950s, France was its primary strategic partner and military supplier. The Israeli Kfir fighter aircraft was based on the French Mirage, and France assisted in developing Israel’s nascent nuclear program.

Although France was Israel’s first strategic ally, most Israeli leaders longed for closer ties with the United States. Even while U.S. leaders were initially reluctant to throw their weight behind Israel, Israeli leaders set their sights on deeper strategic ties and went to great lengths to make Israel strategically beneficial to the United States. Israeli immigrants, for example, came from a wide range of countries behind the iron curtain, providing opportunities for espionage that were invaluable during the Cold War. In 1956, Israel demonstrated its intelligence capability by obtaining Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech,” which it slipped to U.S. officials. Israel also demonstrated its regional military power by performing well against the Egyptian army that same year. As the Cold

War intensified and a growing number of Arab governments deepened their ties with the Soviet Union, Israel increasingly emerged as a strategic partner of the United States.

Perhaps partially in recognition of these shows of Israeli strength and usefulness, President John F. Kennedy introduced an element of warmth and commitment that had been lacking in high-level U.S.-Israeli relations. Until Kennedy, the U.S. government valued stability in the Middle East above all else. It feared that military aid to Israel would spark a regional arms race that could give the Soviet Union more regional leverage. The United States repeatedly turned down Israeli requests for more sophisticated weapons in the name of parity between Israel and its Arab enemies. That all changed in 1962, when Kennedy made a pivotal decision to sell Israel Hawk antiaircraft missiles, which became a crucial component of Israel's defense structure.

As Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman interpret the policy shift, Kennedy had figured out that "it was easier to live with an Israel that was getting the resources it needed to defend itself. Then Israel would not have to commit wild or unacceptable acts."²⁴ Thus, Kennedy steered the U.S.-Israeli partnership to a new level of cooperation and changed the way the United States thought about regional stability, Israeli security, and U.S.-Israeli relations.

President Lyndon B. Johnson took Kennedy's Hawk sale one step further with his historic decision to sell Israel 210 M-48 Patton tanks in 1965, marking the beginning of the U.S. policy of providing Israel with offensive weapons. A year later, in 1966, the United States sold Israel the A-4 Skyhawk attack aircraft.²⁵ The new weapons ensured that Israel had not only defensive capabilities on par with Arab armies but offensive capabilities as well. The rationale was that a strong Israel equipped with the best military technology would deter Arab armies and prevent state-to-state wars in the region. During the next decade, this concept would evolve into a long-standing U.S. commitment to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge (QME).²⁶

These offensive weapons sales contributed to Israel's swift and stunning victory over the Arab armies in 1967, and U.S.-Israeli relations grew stronger still.²⁷ Israel was a winner in the region, having defeated Soviet clients on the battlefield. Moreover, Israel's capture of Soviet military hardware was a gold mine for U.S. military intelligence.²⁸ From that point, U.S. military aid to Israel took off: from 1967 until the conclusion of the Cold War in 1991, the United States provided

Israel with nearly \$30 billion in military loans and grants.²⁹ In a short time, Israel's army was largely equipped by the United States, fulfilling a long-standing goal of Israel's leadership.

The 1970s set off a series of processes in which U.S.-Israeli ties on multiple strategic levels became mutually reinforcing and beneficial. The United States began to view a militarily strong Israel "as an asset for U.S. policy objectives in the Middle East, especially after successful U.S.-Israeli cooperation during the Syrian invasion of Jordan (in 1970) saved the Hashemite monarchy and led to the withdrawal of Syrian forces."³⁰ Soon after, the United States institutionalized its commitment to Israel's security both politically and in practice.³¹ Though the delay in resupplying Israeli armaments during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War tested this newfound commitment, every U.S. president since Johnson has expressed his commitment to Israel's security and military edge.³²

Support for Israel had another rationale as well. U.S. officials adopted the idea that U.S. military support for Israel was crucial to securing a comprehensive Arab-Israeli political agreement—a notion that prevails to this day. The argument was that a strong Israel, confident in its security, would be more amenable to making concessions necessary for securing Arab-Israeli peace. "The degree of Israel's confidence depended upon two factors: military strength relative to its adversaries and perceptions of the credibility of American commitments to its security."³³ Another component was that "Washington would compensate Jerusalem for taking risks, and part of this compensation was an agreement to coordinate positions and tactics."³⁴

It was during this period that the United States launched an unprecedented, decades-long peacemaking effort between Israel and its neighbors, which secured Israeli-Egyptian peace in 1978. The Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt were a strategic coup for the United States, not only building a closer relationship with Israel but also consolidating Egypt's shift away from the Soviet orbit and demonstrating to skeptical Arab observers that only the United States could secure Israeli withdrawals from Arab territory.

Strategic ties continued expanding. A 1981 memorandum of understanding (MOU) of strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel fell short of creating a formal U.S.-Israeli alliance, but the document pledged military cooperation against Soviet forces, called for joint military exercises, and established mechanisms for cooperation on research and development of weapon systems.³⁵ As intelligence

sharing became routine, Israel began receiving satellite intelligence from the United States on hostile Arab countries. Military cooperation also grew, and another MOU in 1983 established two important bureaucratic institutions to discuss weapon sales and Israeli defense needs: the Joint Political-Military Group and the Joint Security Assistance Planning Group.

In 1987, the United States designated Israel a major non-NATO ally, a step that allowed Israel to compete for military contracts and purchase advanced weapon systems. Simultaneously, Israel became the single largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid. The United States began stockpiling arms in Israel,³⁶ and Haifa became the U.S. Navy's port of call in the eastern Mediterranean. As a result, the IDF became thoroughly Americanized, using almost exclusively U.S. weapon systems. IDF officers trained in the United States, and through U.S. assistance and joint production Israel's defense industry grew. Strong U.S.-Israeli ties had become institutionalized across the U.S. government, and it was difficult for many supporters of the partnership to imagine that it could get any better. Still, during the following decades, the relationship continued to expand under President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush.

SCRUTINY AND DEPENDENCE

Despite deep cooperation, the relationship has not been without its challenges. For one, the intimacy of the partnership has opened it up to unprecedented scrutiny. There is no U.S. ally or country that factors so much into domestic U.S. politics, and no country whose politics and actions are so closely monitored in the U.S. press. According to one media-monitoring group, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the second most covered story of the decade (2000–2010)—after the war in Iraq—by the three major U.S. television networks.³⁷ Moreover, in some ways, the principle of shared values has held Israeli actions to a higher moral standard than those of other countries, which makes Israel vulnerable to greater criticism. This has been a source of frustration for Israelis and supporters of Israel in the United States as well as ammunition to attack Israel in the media. The Israeli media are equally fixated on U.S. politics and Israelis often scrutinize U.S. developments in stark and simplistic terms, asking: Is it good or bad for Israel?

Deeper ties with the United States have also come with a price for a young nation-state that forged itself on an ethos of national self-

reliance. Generous amounts of military aid from the United States ensured Israel's QME and helped it to expand its own defense industrial base. The political and symbolic value of the assistance has also been crucial, signaling to the world that the United States stands behind Israel; but as U.S. military and diplomatic assistance grew, so did Israel's dependence on the United States. This dependence at times created friction over U.S. weapons sales to Arab states and, more often, Israeli weapons sales to third countries, most importantly China.³⁸ Israel's penchant for unilateral use of force has also been a persistent sore point.³⁹ Each of these issues periodically raised questions about the strategic convergence between the United States and Israel.

Israelis have always prided themselves on being strong enough to defend themselves and never asking the United States to fight on their behalf.⁴⁰ But many Israelis also acknowledge that without U.S. military support their ability to fight would look much different. U.S. military aid has ensured Israel's QME, but it has also constrained Israel's defense industry, giving the United States essential oversight over Israeli defense production and exports.⁴¹

From the U.S. perspective, Israel's dependence gives the United States leverage over its actions and policies in direct and indirect ways. According to one military historian, "The American strategy for peace centered on an Israel strong enough militarily to deter Arab attack yet sufficiently dependent in the short run on American arms supplies so that leverage could affect Israeli concessions."⁴² This strategy was one of former secretary of state Henry Kissinger's many contributions to the bilateral relationship, and U.S. presidents have occasionally used this leverage by delaying and suspending arms deliveries as a way to coerce or punish the Israeli government.⁴³ The result has been persistent Israeli anxiety that military cooperation could be downgraded at any point because of political disagreements.⁴⁴

Dependence on the United States has also fueled a bitterness among Israelis, which is at times subtle and at times overt. Although many Israeli leaders have acknowledged that Israel needs the United States, they have also resented their lack of freedom in certain areas of decisionmaking, most importantly the unilateral use of force, weapons sales to third countries, and, at times, independent Israeli diplomatic initiatives that diverge from U.S. policies.

In his memoirs, Yitzhak Rabin recalled that President Johnson linked the sale of offensive weapons to Israel to a long list of conditions,

including dropping Israeli opposition to a pending arms deal with Jordan. Rabin, as IDF chief of staff and then ambassador to Washington during that formative period, noted that “the subsequent negotiations were very tough, since we were being asked to give in on fundamental strategic issues concerning our right to self-defense.”⁴⁵

Rabin concluded bitterly that “in the end of course we compromised and agreed to hold back our opposition to the Jordan deal.”⁴⁶ Rabin’s position reflected the Israeli acceptance that Israel was the junior partner in the relationship, and, although Israelis could protest U.S. weapons sales to Arab states, in the end the United States would do what it deemed in its own best interest.

The first Persian Gulf War was another bitter episode that reminded Israelis that their security interests were at times subservient to broader U.S. regional goals. Besides being unable to join the coalition fighting Saddam Hussein, Israel was forced to show restraint in not responding to 39 Scud missiles that Iraq fired into Israel.⁴⁷ It was a psychological blow and one that many Israelis believe undermined Israel’s military deterrence.

Looking at events like these, Israel’s leaders, even the most hawkish and uncompromising among them, have been unable to deny Israeli dependence on the United States. In his memoirs, Israel’s former defense minister Moshe Arens recalls Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir’s assessment of the United States during that period: “The Americans are a very important political and military factor. . . . In every move of ours we have to take this into consideration.”⁴⁸

Israel’s deep dependency on the United States meant that it had few options but to cooperate in situations when U.S. interests were at stake. The diplomatic history of U.S.-Israeli relations is full of similar episodes, in which Israel was forced to compromise on its positions and interests in exchange for U.S. support. Former Mossad chief Efraim Halevy put it this way: “After all had been said and done, Israel was heavily reliant on U.S. support and aid both economically and militarily and it was unthinkable that it could act independently on a matter of vital U.S. global interest.”⁴⁹

Despite close ties to the United States, Israel remained allergic to entrusting its security to any single power. In his memoirs, Yitzhak Rabin reflected on Israel’s strategic dependence on France in the 1950s and 1960s and on Israel’s ongoing effort to break into the U.S. arms market. “Dependence on a single source for our arms supplies was too

risky, since any change in that country's policy could endanger our security," he wrote.⁵⁰ But instead of diversifying its sources of support, Israel traded its dependence on France for an even deeper dependence on the United States. Still, despite the massive amounts of U.S. aid and goodwill, Israelis continue to worry that the future of their relationship with the United States may bring Rabin's words to bear in a very painful way.

There is nothing inevitable about how the U.S.-Israeli partnership unfolded in its first decades. Led largely by a keen Israeli reading of U.S. realities and an American sympathy for Israel, the two sides expanded cooperation and deepened their ties. But even as the United States and Israel were moving closer together, social and demographic shifts were slowly reshaping both societies. These social transformations would later have a dramatic impact on the political and strategic crises that emerged in 2009–2010 and deepen the uncertainty about the future.

NOTES

- 1 *National Security Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: White House, May 2010), www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf.
- 2 The Barack Obama administration requested \$3 billion for Israel in fiscal year 2011 in accordance with the 2007 memorandum of understanding on U.S. military assistance, which raised the level of U.S. military aid to Israel. In addition, the administration requested an additional \$122 million in defense budget appropriations for U.S.-Israeli development of missile defense projects such as the Arrow II and III and David's Sling. The administration also requested and Congress approved \$205 million for the purchase of the Iron Dome anti-short-range rocket system. See Jeremy M. Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*, report no. RL33222 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, September 16, 2010), p. 4, www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf.
- 3 Barbara Opall-Rome, "U.S. to Boost War Stocks in Israel to Record Levels," *Defense News*, November 8, 2010, www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4999620.
- 4 Israel's estimated GDP in 2010 was \$201 billion. Israel's defense budget in 2010 was estimated at 53.2 billion new Israeli shekels (NIS) or approximately \$14 billion, which represents approximately 15.6 percent of the state budget. Israel's real defense budget is difficult to ascertain because the publicly available figures do not include the budgets of the Mossad, Shin Bet, and other defense agencies. Some analysts have suggested that the actual defense budget is NIS 10 billion higher than reported. See Moti

- Bassok, "Secrets of Defense Budget Revealed," *Haaretz.com*, October 21, 2010, www.haaretz.com/print-edition/business/secrets-of-the-defense-budget-revealed-1.320356.
- 5 In 1986 the Reagan administration included Israel in the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), the so-called Star Wars research and development program. For details on the Arrow system, see Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*.
 - 6 In January 2010, for example, the Obama administration worked behind the scenes to dampen the fallout from Israel's alleged assassination of a Hamas arms merchant in Dubai and again after the IDF's botched raid on a Turkish ship trying to break the Gaza embargo, which left nine Turkish citizens dead. According to media reports, the United States watered down the UN statement on the Gaza flotilla incident so that it did not call for an independent investigation, did not place a time limit on the investigation, and did not directly condemn Israel. After the UN statement was released, Mark Regev, an Israeli government spokesman, said, "We'd like to express our thanks to the United States that worked behind the scenes to water down the [statement] at the United Nations." See Josh Rogin, "U.S., Israeli Officials Scramble to Contain Blowback from Flotilla Raid," *The Cable, Foreign Policy.com*, June 1, 2010. http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/06/01/us_israeli_officials_scramble_to_contain_blowback_from_flotilla_raid.
 - 7 Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2003), p. 6.
 - 8 Marshall's official biography gives a full account of his position on the partition of the Palestine Mandate and later recognition of the state of Israel. See Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman* (New York: Viking, 1987), pp. 340–375.
 - 9 Michael T. Benson, "The View from the White House: An Interview with George M. Elsey," in *Israel and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Michael J. Devine et al. (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2008), pp. 84–86.
 - 10 See, for example, Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz, *The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel, and the Ordeals of Divine Election* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).
 - 11 Despite the arms embargo, Arab states were supplied through third parties such as Turkey.
 - 12 See Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 22; and Michelle Mart, "The Cultural Foundations of the U.S.-Israel Alliance," *Tikkun*, November 19, 2006, www.spme.net/cgi-bin/articles.cgi?ID=1452.
 - 13 Mart, "The Cultural Foundations of the U.S.-Israel Alliance."

- 14 See Charles S. Liebman, "Diaspora Influence on Israel: The Ben-Gurion-Blaustein Exchange and Its Aftermath, *Jewish Social Studies* 36, no. 3-4 (July-October 1974): p. 273.
- 15 Ibid., pp. 273-274.
- 16 Herbert Druks, *The Uncertain Friendship: The U.S. and Israel from Roosevelt to Kennedy* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 142.
- 17 One study found that between 2000 and 2004, nearly one-third of official statements on human rights abuses made by mainline Protestant churches focused on Israel. See Walter Russell Mead, "God's Country?" *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2006.
- 18 For a recent account of evangelical Christian support for Jewish settlement in the West Bank, see Jim Rutenberg, Mike McIntire, and Ethan Bronner, "Tax-Exempt Funds Aid Settlements in West Bank," *New York Times*, July 5, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/07/06/world/middleeast/06settle.html?_r=1.
- 19 There have always been exceptions to this support, especially from the more independent or libertarian-influenced parts of the conservative movement.
- 20 The television series *Dallas* was one of the most popular shows in Israel during the 1980s.
- 21 Tom Segev, *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), p. 66. According to one account, by the late 1960s, tens of thousands of Israelis had moved to the United States in search of economic opportunities and education. By the next decade, most Israelis had family members who had moved to the United States, many of them permanently. Others were studying at America's best universities and returning to Israel with new American ideas and perspectives. See Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Friends in Deed* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), p. 269.
- 22 For decades high tariffs made imported consumer goods prohibitively expensive for most Israelis. The combination of reduced tariffs and growing access to consumer credit spurred greater consumption beginning in the 1980s.
- 23 See David Rosenberg, ed., "Facets of the Israeli Economy—Inflation—The Rise and Fall," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 1, 2001, www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2001/1/Facets%20of%20the%20Israeli%20Economy-%20Inflation%20-%20The%20Ris.
- 24 Raviv and Melman, *Friends in Deed*, pp. 94-95.
- 25 In 1968 the United States sold Israel the Phantom aircraft, which was far superior to any airplane in Arab arsenals.
- 26 For a history of Israel's QME, see William Wunderle and Andre Briere, "U.S. Foreign Policy and Israel's Qualitative Military Edge: The Need for a Common Vision," Policy Focus no. 80, Washington Institute for

- Near East Policy, January 2008, www.washingtoninstitute.org/pubPDFs/PolicyFocus80Final.pdf.
- 27 President Johnson did temporarily embargo weapons sales to the Middle East after the 1967 war.
 - 28 In 1969, for example, Israel captured from Egyptian territory a P-12 Soviet radar station, which it dismantled and later turned over to the U.S. military.
 - 29 Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*, pp. 25–26.
 - 30 Thomas R. Wheelock, “Arms for Israel: The Limit of Leverage,” *International Security* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1978): p. 125.
 - 31 The United States agreed to a process for multiyear arms programs rather than the year-by-year deals that had previously dominated, and the quantity and quality of arms transferred were unprecedented. Moreover, the U.S. defense establishment began to accept strategic cooperation and intelligence sharing with Israel, deepening ties beyond the mere sale of arms.
 - 32 Israeli forces suffered heavy losses early in the war, and the U.S. government rebuffed Israel’s early requests for resupply. Only after it appeared that Israel could suffer defeat did the United States airlift 20,000 tons of arms and ammunition. The episode still serves as a bitter reminder to many Israelis of their vulnerability.
 - 33 Wheelock, “Arms for Israel,” p. 126.
 - 34 Harvey Sicherman, “The United States and Israel: A Strategic Divide?” *Orbis*, Summer 1980, p. 381.
 - 35 For a full text of the MOU, see Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States and the Government of Israel on Strategic Cooperation, November 30, 1981, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Guide+to+the+Peace+Process/US-Israel+Memorandum+of+Understanding.htm.
 - 36 In 2011 the United States is expected to raise the level of pre-positioned arms and ammunition in Israel to \$1 billion. The U.S.-owned equipment can be used by Israel in emergency situations. See Barbara Opall-Rome, “U.S. to Boost War Stocks in Israel to Record Levels,” *Defense News*, November 8, 2010, www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4999620.
 - 37 According to the Tyndall Report, a media-monitoring organization, ABC, CBS, and NBC covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for a total of 2,424 minutes between 2000 and 2010, slightly more than the war in Afghanistan and the September 11, 2001, attacks. See “Top Thirty Stories of Decade 2000s,” Tyndall Decade in Review, <http://tyndallreport.com/decadeinreview/>.
 - 38 A U.S. proposal to sell Saudi Arabia AWACS surveillance planes in 1981 led to a bitter political battle between the Reagan administration and Is-

- rael, which argued that the planes threatened its security by limiting the capabilities of its air force. The sale was finally approved by Congress.
- 39 In June 1981, the Reagan administration officially chided Israel for bombing Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor. Although many Americans quietly applauded the Israeli action, officially it was seen as an unprovoked attack. In December of that same year, tensions flared again after the Menachem Begin government annexed the Golan Heights, an act that was interpreted as altering the territorial status quo and hampering U.S. efforts to broker comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.
 - 40 Ehud Barak (speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., February 26, 2010), www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/EhudBarak.pdf.
 - 41 In 2007 Israel passed an expanded defense export control law to strengthen oversight of its military exports after the eruption of several crises related to Israeli military sales to China. See Ministry of Defense (Israel), "Defense Export Control Law, 5766-2007," October 2007, www.exportctrl.mod.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/7B53DDE6-AEE8-47BC-AEFA-1AF325FB96D0/0/Defense_Export_Control_Law.pdf.
 - 42 Wheelock, "Arms for Israel."
 - 43 Following the June 1967 War, for example, the United States stopped the flow of weapons and spare parts to Israel in an attempt to prevent another regional arms buildup. The flow of arms was again slowed during the first two years of the Richard M. Nixon administration, which "sought to retain good relations with friendly Arab regimes and to seek tacit superpower restraint on arms transfers to the region." In 1975 for example, President Gerald R. Ford called for a "reassessment" of military ties after Israeli refusals to withdraw from Egyptian territory in the Sinai. In June 1981 President Reagan temporarily suspended the delivery of four F-16s and the 1981 MOU on strategic cooperation after Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights. Reagan lifted the suspension in July 1981 but reinstated it several days later after Israel's bombing of the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Beirut. The suspension was cancelled on August 17, 1981. Throughout the episode, the delivery of 10 planes had been delayed. See Mordechai Gazit, "Israeli Military Procurement from the United States," in *Dynamics of Dependence: U.S.-Israel Relations*, ed. Gabriel Sheffer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), p. 117; Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 158–159; and Wheelock, "Arms for Israel," pp. 123–137.
 - 44 Israeli Ministry of Defense official, private discussion, May 4, 2010. The Israeli defense official expressed fears that political tension between the Netanyahu government and President Barack Obama could lead to a downgrading of defense ties and hurt Israeli military procurement efforts.

- 45 Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 65.
- 46 According to Rabin, the agreement also included a pledge by King Hussein of Jordan that the U.S.-supplied tanks to Jordan would not cross into Israeli territory, but that pledge was broken during the June 1967 War. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.
- 47 The United States deployed two Patriot missile battalions in Israel. The Patriot deployment was more a symbolic show of U.S. support than a serious defense against the Scud missiles. In fact the Patriots failed to intercept any Scud missiles although they caused secondary damage. See Efraim Inbar, “Israel and the Gulf War,” in *The Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered*, ed. Andrew J. Bacevich and Efraim Inbar (Portland: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 81.
- 48 Moshe Arens, *Broken Covenant: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis between the U.S. and Israel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 191.
- 49 Efraim Halevy, *Man in the Shadows: Inside the Middle East Crisis with a Man Who Led the Mossad* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2006), p. 58.
- 50 Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, p. 54.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND POLITICS IN ISRAEL

As the U.S.-Israeli relationship evolved during the past 60 years, Israeli society was changing as well. Today Israel's Jewish population is more nationalistic, religiously conservative, and hawkish on foreign policy and security affairs than that of even a generation ago, and it would be unrecognizable to Israel's founders. These values and the growing demographic weight of Orthodox, Mizrahi,¹ and Russian-speaking communities are reshaping Israeli politics and policies in dramatic ways. At the same time, the Israeli Arab population is increasingly estranged from mainstream Israel. The sociopolitical environment is more polarized than ever and its resemblance to traditional understandings of Israel more faint.

The shift manifests itself in increasingly consequential ways. Israel's secular liberal elite dominated the country's security and politics for the first three decades of statehood. The Labor Zionists—almost exclusively secular Jews from eastern Europe—monopolized the country's bureaucracy and shaped not only its strategic direction but also its secular and democratic orientation. The vanguard of this movement emerged largely from the kibbutz movement, which supplied much of Israel's military leadership and sought to create a Western state based on individual rights. As discussed in chapter 1, their outlook and liberal values resonated with U.S. values and formed a crucial pillar of U.S.-Israeli relations.

But the Labor Zionists were not alone, even in the early years of the state. In part, opposition to their national plans came from Israelis of

similar ethnic backgrounds. The more militant Revisionists, for example, sought to create a Jewish state on the entire Palestine Mandate (including Transjordan) rather than on only the fraction that the United Nations granted to the Jews in 1947. Still, the Labor Zionists consolidated their political control and pushed Revisionists like Menachem Begin to the margins of Israel's political and social institutions for the first two decades of statehood.

Opposition to Labor Zionism also came from the orthodox Jewish communities that existed in pre-state Israel, a generally poor, conservative, and religious population who had little use for the secular socialists who were streaming in from central and eastern Europe. These traditional groups stressed communal rights over the individual, and they struggled to maintain the role of Jewish law in Israeli public life. The Western liberal ethos of Israel's elite was also alien to the hundreds of thousands of Mizrahi Jews who brought with them a different worldview. For decades these groups remained on the margins of Israeli society and politics.

Menachem Begin's electoral victory in 1977 changed everything. His victory shattered the secular-liberal monopoly of Israel's founding fathers, planted Revisionist Zionist ideology in the Israeli mainstream, and set in motion a gradual erosion of liberal politics in Israel. It also sparked a dramatic social transformation that harnessed the power of historically marginalized forces, most importantly Mizrahim and Orthodox Jews.

Since Begin's victory, demographic trends have reshaped Israeli society in ways that few of Israel's founders could have imagined. In the two generations between 1970 and 2010, Israel's population has more than doubled and now stands at approximately 7.6 million Israelis, 5.8 million of whom are Jewish.² High birth rates among Israel's ultra-Orthodox (known as Haredim) and Arab communities combined with the influx of nearly one million Russian-speaking immigrants in the 1990s helped make up for the slow population growth of Israel's traditional Ashkenazi elite. Together the ultra-Orthodox, the Arabs, and the Russians now make up more than 40 percent of Israel's population; adding in those who feel affinity to Mizrahi culture drives that number even higher.³

Among younger Israelis, the numbers are even starker. In 2008, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics reported that 48 percent of primary school students (between the ages of 5 and 12) were enrolled in ultra-

Orthodox or Arab schools compared with only 15 percent in 1960.⁴ Israeli statisticians estimate that by 2020 a majority of primary school students will be either Haredi or Arab.

Richard Cincotta and Eric Kaufmann, two political demographers, have described this phenomenon as a “demographic squeeze.”⁵ They further predict that the growth in the numbers of ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arabs “will ultimately relegate to minority status the very citizens whose political sympathies remain most consistent with Israel’s founders and with the political leadership that governed the Jewish state during the second half of the 20th century.”⁶ Those are also the very citizens who were instrumental in forming the deep political and social bonds between the United States and Israel and who fostered the notion of shared values that has guided the U.S.-Israeli partnership for more than a half century.

THE HAREDIM

The struggle between conservative and liberal forces and secular and religious ideas has been a constant theme throughout Israel’s short modern history. The religious-secular divide in modern Israel is the continuation of an older ideological conflict that had its roots in the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment that brought Jews out of European ghettos and into public life. Deep debates about what it means to be Jewish turned into debates about what it is to be a Jewish state. Among many of the most religiously observant in Israel, the belief is that Israel’s founders got it all wrong.

In the early years of statehood Israel’s secular founders doubted that the Haredim—the ultra-Orthodox communities—had much of a future in a modern state.⁷ They were a tiny community, less than 1.5 percent of the population, and they were both poor and insular. The leading ultra-Orthodox rabbis opposed the creation of a secular state, and they viewed the rugged individualism of Israel’s founders as a foreign contamination. For decades, they built walls to protect their communities. They lived apart, and they won exemptions from military conscription. They saw their principal contribution to the state as studying Torah and praying for the redemption of the people of Israel.

Those walls still exist. Yet, segments of the ultra-Orthodox community, driven largely by economic necessity, are now seeking economic opportunities in mainstream Israeli institutions. In addition, demographic expansion is driving thousands of ultra-Orthodox families to

seek housing in West Bank settlements. The trend draws these communities more deeply into Israeli politics and strengthens ultra-Orthodox support for more nationalistic and right-wing politics.

Ultra-Orthodox demographic growth is not merely a consequence of high birth rates. Haredim have attracted tens of thousands of new adherents through a wave of religious revival that peaked in the 1990s.⁸ Today, Israel's ultra-Orthodox population is estimated at approximately 750,000 to 800,000, or roughly 10 percent of the population. The ultra-Orthodox fertility rate, at 6.74 children per family, is nearly three times higher than Israel's national average.⁹ Israel's child allowance policy, which pays families a monthly payment per child, has created incentives for the perpetuation of these high fertility rates.¹⁰ As many ultra-Orthodox men study in seminaries rather than work for wages, these government payments are an important source of income for many ultra-Orthodox families.

The employment rates of working-age ultra-Orthodox men (between the ages of 35 and 54) are among the lowest in the developed world, and unemployment in the Haredi sector is nearly five times higher than the average for developed countries in the same age group.¹¹ Moreover, the independent ultra-Orthodox education system, which focuses on religious texts, does not prepare its adherents for the competitive Israeli job market, which is increasingly geared toward services and high-technology exports. Economic realities and growing rates of poverty are forcing greater Haredi integration into Israeli life¹² and forcing more ultra-Orthodox men and women to seek jobs and education outside of their closed communities, with some even enlisting in the military.¹³

According to data compiled by the Bank of Israel in 2005, only 370 Haredi students were enrolled in state-funded institutions of higher learning. By 2009 the number jumped to nearly 2,000.¹⁴ In the last several years a number of private colleges serving the ultra-Orthodox community have opened with the aim of training Haredim for the job market in both public and private academic institutions.¹⁵ Their increasing interaction with Israeli society, combined with their sharply growing numbers, will make Haredim a growing factor in Israeli life.

RUSSIAN-SPEAKING ISRAELIS

Like the ultra-Orthodox, Israel's immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) have struggled to balance efforts to integrate into Israeli

society while maintaining their distinctive ethnic and cultural identity. For decades Israel and Diaspora Jewry campaigned for the release of Soviet Jews. Once the floodgates opened in the early 1990s, nearly one million people immigrated to Israel. Today immigrants from the FSU—broadly referred to in Israel as “Russian”—and their families number approximately 892,000, almost 12 percent of Israel’s population.¹⁶

The social and political impact on Israeli society has been dramatic, but immigrants from the FSU have struggled to fully integrate. Many have felt alienated and ostracized, and they continue to broadly identify as Russian. They maintain strong connections to Russian language and culture, and they have spurred the creation of a robust Russian-language broadcast and print media in Israel. One poll in 2009 showed that 56 percent of FSU immigrants still get their news from Israeli publications in Russian or from Russian-language sources available on cable television and the Internet.¹⁷

Russian-speaking Israelis have strong personal and business ties with Russia, and many are inspired by the values and experiences of the Soviet and Russian systems, not the liberal democratic values of Israel’s founders. Trade and bilateral exchanges with Russia have increased dramatically in the last decade, jumping from approximately \$50 million in 1990 to nearly \$1.8 billion in 2008, including the sale of \$49 million worth of Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles to Russia in 2009.¹⁸

At the same time, unemployment and underemployment remain a challenge for many immigrants from the FSU, and a report by the Israel Democracy Institute in 2009 concluded that they have still not been fully integrated in Israel’s economy. The report noted that a majority of FSU immigrants claim that their socioeconomic status decreased after immigration, and even 15 or 20 years later FSU immigrants receive lower salaries than those of “old-time” Israelis in identical positions. Moreover, because the skills of many Russian immigrants have not matched the needs of the Israeli economy, they have been forced to downshift from jobs in a professional or technical sector to jobs in service sectors or to sectors involving skilled or unskilled manual labor. Also, because the Israeli economy is relatively small, upward mobility is difficult for individuals who do not have strong social networks within the country. Although the younger generation of Russian-speaking Israelis—that is, those who were raised and educated in Israel—may not confront these difficulties to the same degree, the economic challenges

faced by older generations of immigrants will have lasting implications for their children, who often inherit the economic status of their parents.¹⁹

Politically speaking, immigrants from the FSU tend to be more hawkish and nationalist on foreign policy and security issues though liberal on social issues such as the separation of religion and state. The most prominent among them in politics, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, is notably popular, and many point to him as a future prime minister of Israel. On the national stage, Lieberman and his political party Yisrael Beiteinu have made headlines by advocating a separation of Jews and Arabs and by calling for Israel to voluntarily cede major Israeli Arab population centers to a future Palestinian state in exchange for annexing large Israeli-populated areas of the West Bank. The idea resonates with many Israelis, including Russian Israelis who see a growing threat from Israel's Arab citizens.

The waves of suicide bombings that struck Israel during the 1990s, during the first decade of immigration from the FSU, helped shape Russians' hawkish orientation, and their growing political participation has helped strengthen Israel's right-leaning political bloc. While recent polling data illustrate that the vast majority of Russian-speaking Israelis value individual rights and have negative views of the ultra-Orthodox, data also show a higher degree of acceptance for political violence and a greater eagerness to expel Israeli Arabs. In opinion polls, Russian speakers tend to oppose territorial compromises at much higher rates than broader Jewish Israeli society, and one study showed that 77 percent favored encouraging Arab citizens to leave the state.²⁰

Some have questioned whether Russian immigrants' political views are as ultranationalist as usually portrayed. An August 2010 report and poll by the Geneva Initiative, for example, noted that nearly two-thirds of Russian immigrants have never visited a settlement, and more than half admit they do not know the exact location of the Green Line.²¹ But knowledge of the settlements is not a sufficient marker of political views. The poll also demonstrated that, although only 37 percent of Russian immigrants oppose negotiations with President Mahmoud Abbas, 78 percent do not believe peace with the Palestinians is achievable; in both cases, these numbers tend to be higher than average polling numbers for Israel's Jewish population.²²

The appeal of Russian-led political parties is by no means limited to Russian voters, and support for Lieberman has been noticeably high among young Israelis. In mock elections held in 10 Israeli high schools in 2009 Lieberman received the most votes of any candidate.²³ The same year, Yisrael Beiteinu became the country's third-largest political party, and many Israeli analysts see Lieberman expanding his power base and positioning himself as the leader of a right-wing political constellation. His ambitions may be stunted by a possible indictment on charges of fraud, money laundering, and breach of trust,²⁴ but at least for the moment Lieberman remains a popular politician who has wider ambitions of unifying and leading Israel's nationalist political forces. Although not all Russian speakers vote for Yisrael Beiteinu, the party's combination of hawkish policies and focus on social issues that speak to Russians, such as civil marriage and conversion, have made it a powerful political force.

ISRAELI ARABS

While Israel's Orthodox and Russian-speaking communities are moving toward greater political integration, Israel's Arab citizens are increasingly marginalized and withdrawing from national politics. According to Israeli government statistics, approximately 156,000 Arabs lived within Israel's borders at the time of independence in 1948, roughly 19 percent of the state's total population. Today they number roughly 1.5 million, or more than 20 percent of the total population.²⁵ More than half of the Arab population is under the age of 19. High birth rates among the Arab population have led Israeli demographers to predict that by 2030 the Arab population will represent nearly one-quarter of all Israel's citizens.²⁶

A combination of factors has alienated Israel's Arab communities during the past decade. The prospect of peace between Israelis and Palestinians in the 1990s gave Israel's Arab citizens an important opportunity to play a role as a bridge between Israel and the Palestinians. The breakdown of the peace process and the ensuing violence between Arab citizens and Israeli police forces in October 2000 deepened the chasm between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Social and political trends within the Arab community have also shaped this growing estrangement. The Israeli Arab population, which is nearly 85 percent Muslim, increasingly identifies with Palestinian nationalism while Islam plays a growing role in politics. The dominance of the Islamic Movement, a

movement with roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, in the municipal governments in Arab-populated areas illustrates the growing trend.

Some Israeli Arab citizens have even been implicated in terrorist cells and spying for Hezbollah. In 2007 the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) released a report claiming that 40 percent of Israeli Arabs implicated in terrorist plots have been Palestinians who have married Israeli Arab citizens and were granted residence in Israel through the family reunification law.²⁷

Jewish Israeli leaders with right-wing agendas have manipulated and reinforced the alienation of Israeli Arabs by calling on them to swear oaths of allegiance to the state and proposing plans for redrawing Israel's borders so as to exclude large Arab populations currently within those borders. Nationalist parties have also attempted to disqualify Arab political parties that don't recognize Israel's Jewish character and prevent them from participating in Knesset elections. All of this speeds the Arab community's retreat into local and communal politics and contributes to deeper polarization and alienation between the Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel. Voter turnout in the Arab community in the 18th Knesset election, for example, was only 53 percent compared with 64 percent of the broader population. In municipal elections Arab voter turnout is close to 80 percent.

For many Jewish Israelis, Arab citizens' participation in activities that commemorate Israel's independence as a *nakba*, or catastrophe, is especially worrying. Kadima leader Tzipi Livni, a centrist force in Israeli politics, remarked that "Israeli Arabs must know they cannot live here and call the day of Israel's establishment the day of disaster."²⁸ As Israel's leadership emphasizes the state's unique Jewish character, the place of Israel's Arab population will remain precarious and Israel's commitment to democratic principles will remain in question.

CHANGING POLITICAL CULTURE

Israel's changing demographics are transforming Israeli politics. For decades, Israel's politics were defined by a struggle between right and left. During the last decade, however, this historic political dichotomy broke down as a center-right political bloc emerged that now dominates Israeli politics. Although demography played a major role in this change, two other institutional developments drove this shift: the formation of the Shas party in the early 1990s, and the formation of the Kadima party a decade later.

Shas is a religious party that represents Jews who immigrated from parts of the former Ottoman Empire and Middle Eastern countries. In some ways, Shas is a bridge between the ultra-Orthodox and secular mainstream Israeli society, and its ability to mobilize both its religious and nonobservant ethnic bases gives the party a significant electoral advantage over most other religious parties. Shas simultaneously works to strengthen the role of religion and Torah observance in Israeli society as well as to provide education and other services to underprivileged Mizrahim and the ultra-Orthodox. While the movement's leadership and core supporters largely define themselves as Haredi, many of its followers and voters are more traditional yet not necessarily observant Mizrahi Jews.²⁹

Shas's ability to weave together ultra-Orthodox and Zionist ideologies distinguishes it from the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox, who continue to struggle with supporting Zionism.³⁰ Although Shas leaders claim they do not want to drive foreign and security policy, they are playing a more active role in internal policy debates on strategic issues and participating in parliamentary committees such as the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.³¹

Shas has sought to strengthen its nationalist credentials by building its ties with mainstream Zionist organizations. The party increasingly addresses national security issues, including the Palestinian issue and settlement construction in the West Bank. Moreover, in 2010, Shas joined the World Zionist Organization, which was considered a radical step within the ultra-Orthodox establishment. According to Shas's official representative to the organization, "Shas wants to be part of the building of Israel, of education in the Diaspora and the ingathering of the exiles. Those are the reasons it wants in these important times to join."³²

Despite its support for settlement construction policy, Shas has generally displayed a practical and flexible attitude on national security issues. Its positions have reflected a balance between pragmatism and the increasingly hawkish views of its constituents, many of whom are potential Likud voters or are ultra-Orthodox Mizrahim who live east of the Green Line or June 1967 border. During the Oslo process, the former chief Sephardic rabbi of Israel and Shas spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, ruled that withdrawal from West Bank territory, including parts of the biblical Land of Israel, is permissible according to Jewish law in order to save Jewish lives. Shas supported Israel's

2008 prisoner swap with Hezbollah and has argued for negotiating with Hamas over the release of the IDF corporal, Gilad Shalit, held in captivity in Gaza since the summer of 2006. In April 2008, Eliyahu Yishai, the head of the party, was the only Israeli cabinet minister to meet with former U.S. president Jimmy Carter before his meeting with Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal in Damascus. While Shas's own future is fluid and its internal succession battle is already under way, it will likely play an important role in legitimizing any future steps toward an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.³³

The second blow to Israel's traditional politics was former Likud leader Ariel Sharon's formation of the Kadima party in 2005. Whereas the Labor party was the political counterweight to right-wing politics for decades in Israel, the Kadima party has become that counterweight, but with less of an attachment to the founding principles of Israel's liberal founders. In this way, Israeli politics have essentially evolved into a struggle between the right and the center-right. In the 18th Knesset elections in 2009, for example, non-right-wing or religious parties won only 30 out of 120 seats,³⁴ compared with the 1999 Knesset elections when they won close to half.³⁵

Kadima's formation not only contributed to the dominance of the center-right bloc, but, by drawing away the centrist members of Likud and Labor, it helped radicalize the left and right. In the Likud party, for example, Benjamin Netanyahu has had to contend with the Jewish Leadership faction, a religious-nationalist wing of the party, which increased its membership in the Likud central committee over the last decade and promotes more nationalistic and religiously inspired policies. Labor's core pool of support remained primarily Ashkenazi, liberal, and middle and upper class, yet that demographic is shrinking in Israel. And Labor's views are changing as well. According to one Israeli analyst, Labor's younger leaders gradually distanced themselves from the Jewish-Zionist tradition and "flirted with cosmopolitan culture and individualistic values, stressing human rights."³⁶ The ideological differences between former Labor leaders and the Labor party became so great that former Labor leader, Defense Minister Ehud Barak resigned from the party in January 2011 and several months later formed a new political party, Atzmaut (Independence). Barak's split with Labor will likely further strengthen the center-right constellation of political forces.

As the center-right bloc in Israeli politics grows, the traditional leftist Jewish-Zionist political parties represented by the Labor and Meretz parties continue shrinking. Labor won 26 seats in 1999, and it now holds only 8 seats. Meretz, the dominant leftist Zionist party of the last several decades, went from 12 seats in 1999 to 3 today. What remains of the liberal-Zionist camp is shifting further to the left and abandoning Zionist political parties for alternatives such as the Jewish-Arab Hadash party.³⁷ In response, the Israeli government and the Knesset, in particular, have intensified charges of anti-Zionism against liberal Israeli critics of the state and launched investigations into funding sources for organizations not deemed sufficiently Zionist.

Outside events also play a role. Israeli anxiety over the country's security and a growing sense of international isolation fueled by efforts to delegitimize Israel's right to exist helped push Israeli politics rightward. The collapse of the peace process in 2000 and Israel's experiences during the second intifada that erupted in the same year also hardened Israeli attitudes.

EMERGING POLITICAL FORCES AND THE IMPACT ON ISRAELI POLICIES

In addition to the rise of Shas and Kadima, the rising political role of Israel's ultra-Orthodox and Russian-speaking communities has also driven Israel's shift to the right. Whereas in the past the political leaders of these groups focused on narrowly defined communal issues, their engagement on national issues leaves a prominent mark on Israeli politics.

One of the most visible examples of this shift has been support for settlement construction in both Jerusalem and the West Bank. The combination of poverty and large families has pushed the ultra-Orthodox to move to subsidized Jewish settlements in the West Bank, particularly those close to the 1967 Green Line. As some observers have noted, the settlements and neighborhoods of the West Bank were a perfect fit for the ultra-Orthodox, "who preferred to live in homogeneous communities, needed access to cheap housing to accommodate their high birth rate, and wanted proximity to Israel's main population centers."³⁸

Some estimates claim that approximately one-third of the total settler population in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) is now ultra-Orthodox,³⁹ and roughly 70 percent of children born in the

West Bank today are ultra-Orthodox.⁴⁰ Most of the ultra-Orthodox settlement has been in communities close to the Green Line, such as Modi'in Illit, Beitar Illit, and Ma'ale Adumim, which made up half of the population growth in the settlements in 2009.⁴¹ Beitar Illit is only 400 meters from the Green Line, and Modi'in Illit is 600 meters away.

The political ramifications of this migration are profound. As ultra-Orthodox have been pushed to seek housing opportunities in the West Bank, they have formed new informal alliances with the national religious settlers and even secular nationalist political forces, and the settlement movement sees them as an important ally in the expansion of Jewish settlement in the West Bank.⁴²

As this process has evolved, it has led to a more hawkish outlook on security and settlements by many ultra-Orthodox. Shas in particular has been vilified for promoting aggressive settlement construction in Jerusalem and the West Bank. After the Interior Ministry's Jerusalem Planning Committee announced, during Vice President Joe Biden's April 2010 visit to Israel, a plan to build 1,600 housing units in Jerusalem's Ramat Shlomo neighborhood, Shas party leader and interior minister Eli Yishai became the scapegoat.

Although the political vitriol is perhaps misdirected, Shas under Yishai's political leadership has indeed staked out a hawkish position on settlement construction and, most important, construction in all parts of Jerusalem.⁴³ While Yishai acknowledged it was a mistake to announce the Ramat Shlomo project during Biden's visit, he has continued to voice his commitment to Jewish settlement construction, which he claimed was essential for Israel's existence. In an interview given to the Shas newspaper *Yom L'yom*, Yishai claimed that he would continue building "in every place in the Land of Israel, and most importantly in Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people."⁴⁴

A combination of religious and practical factors drives this strong commitment to settlement construction. On the religious level, Shas sees a mission in settling and building in the Land of Israel. On the practical level, Shas's constituents, like other ultra-Orthodox, seek housing opportunities in neighborhoods and settlements east of the 1967 borders where housing is generally less expensive than in the overcrowded ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. This combination of practical and ideological motives ensures that Shas will likely continue playing a role in shaping Israeli settlement and construction policy.

Another important factor pushing Israeli politics rightward is the greater prominence of religious nationalists in Israeli public life. The national religious camp, which is made up largely of modern Orthodox, holds that Zionism and the creation of the modern state of Israel are part of a divine plan.⁴⁵ Unlike the majority of ultra-Orthodox, who shun Zionism, the national religious camp embraces it.⁴⁶ An important indicator of the central role this group plays can be seen in patterns of military service.

Rising rates of military exemptions among the secular population, combined with a decrease in motivation to volunteer for combat units in the aftermath of the 1982 Lebanon war and first intifada, forced the IDF to expand its reach for officers and elite soldiers beyond the traditional leftist Ashkenazi core. Starting in the 1990s, religious Zionists filled an increasing number of prominent positions, motivated as they were by a powerful combination of Zionist ideology, religious connection, and desire for social mobility.⁴⁷

The crises of the past decade, and in particular the Gaza disengagement, seemed to strengthen the motivation of national religious youth to serve in the IDF and overwhelmingly volunteer for combat units. According to the IDF journal *Ma'arachot*, in 1990 only 2.5 percent of infantry officer training graduates identified themselves as religious nationalist, but by 2008 that number had jumped to 26 percent although religious nationalist soldiers make up only 13.7 percent of the IDF overall.⁴⁸ Another IDF publication, *B'machane*, recently reported that 13 percent of all active duty combat company commanders in the IDF live in West Bank settlements, five times higher than their proportion of the Israeli population. Of the members of the Golani infantry brigade officer corps, 20 percent live in the West Bank.⁴⁹

Casualty statistics also illustrate the trend. In the 2006 war in Lebanon, for example, only 3 out of 117 of the IDF's casualties came from the Tel Aviv area, bastion of Israel's secular elite. Meanwhile, 12 casualties were Orthodox and another 12 were immigrants from the FSU.⁵⁰

Some see the shift in combat service reflecting a shift in Israeli understandings of Zionism itself. According to some Israelis, the Labor Zionist ethos of sacrifice and service for the common good has been adopted by the religious Zionist movement and combined with a more militaristic Judaism, or what Anita Shapira has called the "offensive ethos."⁵¹ This manifests itself partly through service in elite military and combat units.

The IDF has sought to facilitate this shift as well, accommodating the national religious community by making military service more convenient to religious soldiers.⁵² Through the Hesder Yeshivot program, the IDF recruits young Orthodox men who are eager to serve the country to enlist in a four-year program that combines military service with seminary study. The result has been that many have embraced full military service in combat and elite units as well as advancing to the officer corps.

The rise of Orthodox soldiers in the IDF officer corps raises several issues for military planners and the broader population. On one level, some worry whether Orthodox soldiers are torn between loyalties to the chain of command and loyalties to the rulings of prominent rabbis. In the wake of the Gaza disengagement, which some rabbis opposed on religious grounds, government officials and analysts questioned whether religious units of the IDF or a military influenced by national religious officers would refuse to evacuate settlements as part of an Israeli-Palestinian political agreement. Signals from IDF soldiers and several high-profile incidents indicating soldiers would refuse orders to evacuate settlements have heightened these concerns.⁵³ Moreover, many of the Hesder Yeshivot were located in West Bank settlements, which gave charismatic rabbis, some with militant views, significant influence over soldiers studying in their communities. The rabbi of Har Bracha settlement, for example, declared that “an order to evacuate Jews is an illegal order.”⁵⁴

Beyond refusing orders, some fear a creeping messianism in the ranks of the IDF officer corps. During the Gaza disengagement, which included four small settlements in the northern West Bank, the army elected not to have religious units participate in the evacuation. Still, the issue remains of concern, and in late 2009 the IDF suspended the Hesder program at several militant settlements.⁵⁵

For the moment, these fears seem unfounded. The vast majority of Israelis who identify with the national religious movement, including West Bank settlers, are law-abiding citizens. Their shift toward more hawkish policies and commitment to IDF service reflects a broader trend within Jewish Israeli society as well as their strong belief that they are the true defenders of the state and Land of Israel. Many of them simply see military service as the best means at their disposal to fulfill this political and spiritual mission.

While the modern Orthodox of the national religious communities increasingly populate the IDF's officer corps and combat units, the IDF is also actively recruiting among the ultra-Orthodox and Haredim. During his tenure, former IDF chief of staff Gabi Ashkenazi repeatedly called for recruiting more ultra-Orthodox men into the military, and others within the general staff have set a broad goal of drafting more Haredim.⁵⁶ Manpower needs drive part of this. With declining service rates in the IDF, the military is seeking to train ultra-Orthodox men for computer and logistics jobs in the air force and military intelligence branches. The objective is not only to bolster the army's ranks but to prepare Haredi recruits for the competitive job market once they leave the army. The finance ministry has facilitated this by paying higher wages to ultra-Orthodox men, many of whom already have families, while serving in the IDF.⁵⁷

IMPACT ON U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS

While Israel's secular elite has an intimate knowledge of America, Israel's newer political actors have had much less interaction with the United States.⁵⁸ These groups, most importantly Russian-speaking Israelis and ultra-Orthodox, tend to be unfamiliar with U.S. values, and they lack an intimate knowledge of the U.S.-Israeli partnership. As a result, they tend to undervalue the importance and centrality of the partnership to Israeli interests. More generally, since September 11, 2001, U.S. immigration policies have made it more difficult for Israelis from all backgrounds to receive visas, thus limiting their opportunities for interacting with Americans and for gaining firsthand experiences about life in the United States.⁵⁹

One important disconnect is the question of whether Israel can remain a Jewish and democratic state, a state with a Jewish majority that protects individual freedoms and minority rights. U.S. supporters of Israel see urgency in this question. Some American supporters, including U.S. government officials, argue, for instance, that in order to remain a Jewish and democratic state in the long term, Israel will have to reach a political agreement with the Palestinians.⁶⁰ Although this view tends to fit with U.S. policy, there is little urgency or meaning in this dilemma for the majority of Israelis.

One of the results of this debate has been to strengthen Israelis' tendencies to emphasize Israel's Jewish character, which unintentionally downplays its democratic character. Prime Minister Netanyahu,

for example, has demanded that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state as a basic condition of negotiations. He has reiterated this position and claimed that “the reason there is no peace is that the Palestinians refuse to recognize the State of Israel as the Jewish people’s nation state.”⁶¹ In another step in October 2010 Israel’s government required new citizens to pledge their allegiance to Israel as a Jewish state.

Many Israelis who support individual freedoms take their democratic system for granted. Most consider the importance of maintaining a Jewish majority in Israel far more important than pursuing the liberal democratic ideals that have formed the foundation of shared values between the United States and Israel.

Some Israelis, concerned with the drift between Israel and the United States, believe that Israel needs to restore and rebuild the concept of shared values in order to preserve the partnership over the long term. They fear that if shared values continue eroding, then the broader strategic partnership and cooperation will eventually suffer.⁶²

But reassessing common values is a painful process. For the most part, Israelis may be asking themselves difficult questions about the nature of their democracy and the values of the state, but they are avoiding answering those questions. This is, in part, because of the difficulty of doing so in such a socially and politically fractured state.

NOTES

- 1 Mizrahi literally means eastern, and the word refers to Jews who emigrated from Middle Eastern countries. The term has become synonymous with Sephardi, which more accurately refers to those who trace their heritage to Spain prior to the expulsion of Jews (and Muslims) in 1492. Mizrahi or *edot hamizrach* (eastern communities) is broader in scope and includes Jews from Iran, Yemen, and Central Asia, areas that had no direct link with Judeo-Spanish culture.
- 2 See “Population by Population Group,” *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2010*, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/shnatone_new.htm?CYear=2010&Vol=61&CSubject=2.
- 3 Ultra-Orthodox Israelis account for approximately 800,000 or a little over 10.5 percent; Arabs number approximately 1.57 million, roughly 20 percent; and Russians approximately 892,000 or 11.7 percent of the total population.
- 4 “A Demographic Look Ahead at Israel,” Taub Center e-Bulletin, May 27, 2010, <http://taubcenter.org.il/index.php/e-bulletin/a-demographic-look-ahead-at-israel/lang/en/>.

- 5 Richard Cincotta and Eric Kaufmann, "Unpromising Demography in a Promised Land: Yisrael Beytenu and the Escalation of Demographic Politics in Israel," <http://paa2010.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=100015>.
- 6 Richard Cincotta and Eric Kaufmann, "Unpromising Demography in a Promised Land: The Growth of Dissonant Minorities and the Escalation of Demographic Politics in Israel," National Intelligence Council, July 2010.
- 7 In 1948 Israel's population was approximately 806,000, and the ultra-Orthodox population was estimated at approximately 10,000. See Kenneth D. Wald, "The Religious Dimension of Israeli Political Life," in *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, The Few and the Many*, ed. Ted G. Jelen and Clyde Wilcox (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 107.
- 8 This process is referred to in Hebrew as *chazara b'tshuva*, meaning a return to Orthodox Judaism or repentance. There is also a rate of attrition from the ultra-Orthodox community, a process known in Hebrew as *chazara b'sheayla*, or returning to uncertainty; yet figures for this phenomenon are difficult to verify.
- 9 Dan Ben-David, ed., *State of the Nation Report: Society, Economy and Policy 2009* (Jerusalem: Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel, April 13, 2010), <http://taubcenter.org.il/index.php/featured-publication/state-of-the-nation-report-society-economy-and-policy-2009/lang/en/>.
- 10 Child allowances are monthly payments determined by the number of children in the family, their birth dates, and whether the family receives a subsistence benefit from the National Insurance Institute. Families receive 169 NIS (about \$50) per child for the first child, 195 NIS for the second, 252 NIS for the third, with the amount dropping back to 169 NIS per child for the fifth and subsequent children. For example, a family with six children born after May 2003 receives a total monthly allowance of NIS 1,263. For a detailed list, see "Children: Child Allowance Rates," National Insurance Institute of Israel, 2011, www.btl.gov.il/English%20Homepage/Benefits/Children/Pages/Rates%20of%20child%20allowance.aspx.
- 11 Ben-David, ed., *State of the Nation Report*, pp. 218–219.
- 12 According to the National Insurance Institute of Israel, poverty rates vary widely among ultra-Orthodox families with a working head of household. The rate is much lower for families with two or three children (52 percent) than for those with four or more children (71 percent). See "Annual Survey 2008" (Jerusalem: National Insurance Institute of Israel, 2009), pp. 78–79, www.btl.gov.il/English%20Homepage/Publications/Annual%20Surveys%5CPages/AnnualSurvey2008.aspx. The poverty line in Israel is defined as half the median disposable income, weighted by household size. A household with a disposable income that is lower than the poverty line is considered poor. See "The Poverty Line in Israel."

- Reut Institute, May 29, 2007, <http://reut-institute.org/en/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=2815>.
- 13 Within the ultra-Orthodox community there is still a stigma attached to service in the IDF. Those young men who join are generally those deemed unfit for seminary studies and who live on the margins of Haredi society. Most ultra-Orthodox who choose to join the IDF enlist in the Nahal Haredi battalion, an infantry force comprising approximately 1,000 soldiers that was established in 1999.
 - 14 Lior Dattel and Nati Tucker, "A Quiet Revolution," *Haaretz.com*, December 31, 2010, www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/a-quiet-revolution-1.334478.
 - 15 The campuses have designated days and classes for men and women in order to maintain gender separation. Ono Academic College, one of these private institutions, reportedly has 2,000 Haredi students enrolled for the 2010–2011 academic year, and it offers bachelor's and master's degrees in business administration and law. A Lander College administrator, in a private discussion with the author in Jerusalem, on October 17, 2010, noted that Lander College, another private institution, has opened in Jerusalem with the goal of enrolling 2,000 students.
 - 16 For population statistics, see *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2010*, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, table 2.24, p. 156, http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st02_24x&CYear=2010. Unlike Israel's ultra-Orthodox and Arab communities, the Russian-speaking population is not growing faster than average Israeli growth rates. In fact, data from the last decade show that between 1999 and 2004 the total fertility rate among former Jewish immigrants from the FSU was 1.7–1.8, double the post-Soviet level of Jewish fertility in the FSU of about 0.9, but still below Israel's national average. See Vladimir (Z'ev) Khanin, "Aliyah from the Former Soviet Union: Contribution to the National Security Balance" (position paper presented on behalf of the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorptions to the 10th Annual Herzliya Conference, Jerusalem, February 2010), p. 15, www.herzliyaconference.org/_Uploads/3046Aliyah.pdf.
 - 17 Asher Arian, Michael Philippov, and Anna Knafelman, *The 2009 Israeli Democracy Index: Auditing Israeli Democracy: Twenty Years of Immigration from the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Guttman Center of The Israel Democracy Institute, August 2009), www.idi.org.il/sites/english/PublicationsCatalog/Documents/Democracy_Index%2009.pdf.
 - 18 "Imports by Country of Purchase and Exports, by Country of Destination," *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2009*, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, table 16.3, p. 682, http://www1.cbs.gov.il/shnaton60/st16_03x.pdf.
 - 19 Arian, Philippov, and Knafelman, *Auditing Israeli Democracy*.
 - 20 In a 2007 poll 75 percent of Russian-speaking Israelis were against relinquishing any part of the West Bank, compared with 48 percent of the

broader Jewish population. See Arian, Philippov, and Knafelman, *The 2009 Israeli Democracy Index*.

- 21 According to some assessments from 2005, immigrants from the FSU make up approximately 10 percent of the population of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, mostly in larger, urban-type settlements such as Ariel, where they are believed to account for nearly half of the population. See “‘The Russians,’ in the West Bank Settlements,” *Settlements in Focus* (Americans for Peace Now) 1, no. 16 (December 23, 2005), <http://peacenow.org/entries/archive1936>.
- 22 “Geneva Initiative Poll Shows Russian Public in Israel Less Right-Wing Than You Thought [in Hebrew],” Geneva Initiative, August 9–15, 2010, www.heskem.org.il/sources-view.asp?id=2434&meid=43.
- 23 Yisrael Beiteinu came in first with 19.76 percent of the vote, followed closely by Likud with 19.5 percent, Labor with 15.85 percent, Kadima with 14.11 percent, and Yisrael Hazaka (Strong Israel) with 9.12 percent. Meretz got the lowest percentage of votes, just 2.9 percent, and not a single vote was cast for an Arab party. See Yotam Feldman, “Lieberman’s Anti-Arab Ideology Wins Over Israel’s Teens,” *Haaretz.com*, February 5, 2009, www.haaretz.com/news/elections/lieberman-s-anti-arab-ideology-wins-over-israel-s-teens-1.269489.
- 24 Tomer Zarchin, “Lieberman Told He May Face Fraud Charges Pending Hearing,” *Haaretz.com*, April 13, 2011, www.haaretz.com/news/national/lieberman-told-he-may-face-fraud-charges-pending-hearing-1.355784.
- 25 Approximately 85 percent of Israel’s Arab population is Sunni Muslim.
- 26 The 2009 Israel Central Bureau of Statistics Abstract gives high-, medium-, and low-variant estimates for the population of Israel. See “Projections of Population(1) in Israel for 2010–2030, By Population Group, Sex, and Age,” *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2009*, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st02_26&CYear=2009.
- 27 Ofer Aderet, “Wikileaks Exclusive: Shin Bet Chief an Unlikely Advocate for Israel’s Arabs,” *Haaretz*, April 4, 2011, www.haaretz.com/weekend/haaretz-wikileaks-exclusive-shin-bet-chief-an-unlikely-advocate-for-israel-s-arabs-1.354802.
- 28 “Livni: Netanyahu Is Too Weak to Prevent Unilateral Declaration of Palestinian State,” *Haaretz.com*, June 16, 2011, www.haaretz.com/news/national/livni-netanyahu-is-too-weak-to-prevent-unilateral-declaration-of-palestinian-state-1.362151.
- 29 One estimate claims that during Shas’s political peak in 1998, only 25 percent of its supporters were ultra-Orthodox. See Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 165.
- 30 Ibid.

- 31 Member of Knesset from Shas party, private discussion with author, Jerusalem, October 2010.
- 32 “Shas Breaks Old Taboo: Joins Zionists,” *The Forward*, February 24, 2010, www.forward.com/articles/126325/.
- 33 The announced return of former Shas political leader Aryeh Deri to national politics will have a significant impact on Shas’s future as a unified political party. See Gil Hoffman, “Aryeh Deri Announces Return to Politics in Next Election,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 22, 2011, www.jpost.com/Headlines/Article.aspx?id=226111.
- 34 See Knesset Election Results: Eighteenth Knesset, www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res18.htm.
- 35 The 1999 elections also included a separate ballot for the direct election of the prime minister; see Knesset Election Results: Fifteenth Knesset, www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/eng_mimshal_res15.htm.
- 36 Efraim Inbar, “The Decline of the Labour Party,” *Israel Affairs* 16, no. 1 (January 2010).
- 37 Hadash is a Hebrew acronym for the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality and is a mixed Jewish and Arab political party.
- 38 Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, “The Ultra-Orthodox Jews in the West Bank,” *Settlements in Focus*, October 2005, <http://80.70.129.201/site/en/peace.asp?pi=62&docid=1515>.
- 39 According to Peace Now, in 2005 the number of ultra-Orthodox in the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) was approximately 70,000. Newer figures suggest the number may have climbed to approximately 90,000.
- 40 Etkes and Friedman, “The Ultra-Orthodox Jews in the West Bank.”
- 41 Tovah Lazaroff, “Settler Population Rose 4.9% in 2009,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 10, 2010, www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=170595.
- 42 The growing interaction between the ultra-Orthodox and the national religious movement during the last decade has fostered the emergence of new movement known as Hardal, a combination of the words Haredi and *dati leumi*, or national religious. Followers of Hardal fuse ultranationalist and messianic politics with ultra-Orthodox-style religious observance. While many ultra-Orthodox are moving toward closer interaction with the state, many Hardal are increasingly sealing themselves off from the state, primarily in the more isolated and militant settlements of the West Bank. Unlike religious Zionists who view the state as a holy vehicle, Hardal adherents believe the Land of Israel is more important than the State of Israel. Many Hardal felt betrayed not only by the state but by the Jewish settler leadership embodied in the Yesha Council for failing to prevent the Gaza disengagement.
- 43 Shas reportedly pressured the then prime minister, Ehud Olmert, to continue expanding Jerusalem neighborhoods such as Givat Ze'ev.

- 44 Haim Yisraeli, "Exclusive: Interior Minister Rabbi Eli Yishai in Holiday Interview [in Hebrew]," *Yom L'Yom*, September 24, 2010.
- 45 Since 1967, the national religious camp has moved toward a stricter orthodoxy in matters of religion, and the vast majority of early Jewish settlers in the West Bank emerged from the religious Zionist movement. Although they overlap, not all who are religious Zionists support West Bank settlements, and a growing movement has sought to build new, close-knit Jewish communities West of the Green Line.
- 46 After a leadership transition and failure to stop the Gaza disengagement, Mafdal or the National Religious Party (NRP), which represented religious Zionist political aspirations for decades, disintegrated and merged into the Bayit Hayehudi (Jewish Home) party in 2008, a coalition of ultranationalist groups.
- 47 Na'ama Peri, "The War of the Social Periphery Groups," *B'Machane*, June 26, 2007, http://dover.idf.il/IDF/News_Channels/bamahana/07/issue29/2912.htm.
- 48 "The Place of Kippa Wearers [religious Jews] in the IDF's Tactical Command [in Hebrew]," *Ma'arachot* 450 (September 2010), p. 53. For an English news summary of the report, see Amos Harel, "Sharp Rise in Number of Religious IDF Officers," *Haaretz.com*, September 15, 2010, www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/sharp-rise-in-number-of-religious-idf-officers-1.313861.
- 49 For a short English news summary, see Amos Harel, "Army Publication: Settlers Heavily Represented among IDF Commanders," *Haaretz.com*, September 29, 2010, www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/army-publication-settlers-heavily-overrepresented-among-idf-commanders-1.316271.
- 50 Yair Sheleg, "The Grief Map Has Changed," *Haaretz*, August 27, 2006, www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/the-bereavement-map-has-changed-1.195918.
- 51 Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881–1948* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 368.
- 52 "The Place of Kippa Wearers [religious Jews] in the IDF's Tactical Command [in Hebrew]," pp. 55–57.
- 53 In October 2009, at a ceremony, two soldiers from the Shimshon battalion of the Kfir brigade unfurled a banner that read "Shimshon does not evacuate Homesh," referring to one of the four settlements evacuated in the northern West Bank as part of the Gaza disengagement plan. Less than a month later, another battalion in the same brigade held up similar protest signs. The IDF took the incidents very seriously and in both cases sentenced the soldiers involved to military prison sentences. See "In the IDF They're Worried [in Hebrew]," *Maariv*, November 17, 2009, <http://style.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/967/523.html>.

- 54 For a more detailed account of this debate, see Benjamin Spier and Yaakov Katz, “Hesder Heads Urge Har Bracha Order Reversal,” *Jerusalem Post*, December 21, 2009, www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=163793.
- 55 Hanan Greenberg, “IDF Officers Laud Decision to Sever Ties with Yeshiva,” *Ynetnews.com*, December 14, 2009, www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3819455,00.html.
- 56 Nehamia Shtrasler, “Treasury vs. the IDF in Battle over Ultra-Orthodox,” *Haaretz.com*, October 7, 2010, www.haaretz.com/print-edition/business/treasury-vs-the-idf-in-battle-over-ultra-orthodox-1.317605.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 The Israeli cabinet in the 32nd government of 2009, for example, includes five Shas ministers, only two of whom can communicate in English, and a foreign minister who is generally unwelcome in Washington and many other Western capitals.
- 59 According to Israeli reports, appeals for waivers are often rebuffed. See Aluf Benn, “Vizot L’Artzot Habrit: Michshol B’Yachasim Hamiyuchadim” [Visas to the U.S.: A Failure in the Strategic Relationship], *Haaretz.com*, August 26, 2009, www.news1.co.il/Archive/003-D-29707-00.html?tag=22-02-32.
- 60 See, for example, Hillary Rodham Clinton (remarks at the 2010 AIPAC Policy Conference, March 22, 2010), www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/03/138722.htm.
- 61 Ethan Bronner, “Before Meeting Obama, Netanyahu Outlines Stance,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/05/17/world/middleeast/17mideast.html?hp.
- 62 In the 1980s Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the then defense minister, Ariel Sharon, understood this connection well. They feared that Israel’s Palestinian policies would erode U.S. political support and the notion of “shared” values. To compensate for potential political trouble, they sought to cement the partnership through greater strategic cooperation. See Shai Feldman, *The Future of U.S.-Israel Strategic Cooperation* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1996), pp. 15–16.

U.S. POLITICAL DYNAMICS

Early advocates of Israel in the United States could not have dreamed of how support for Israel would become so ingrained in U.S. political life. The evolution of U.S. support from the narrow preserve of north-eastern Democrats to a bipartisan foundation of U.S. Middle East foreign policy is remarkable. A Gallup poll released in February 2010 after the Gaza war showed that 63 percent of Americans polled said their sympathies in the Middle East conflict lie more with Israelis than with Palestinians.¹ Bipartisan support for Israel in Congress remains strong, and cooperation has been institutionalized throughout the U.S. government. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's warm reception during his speech before a joint session of Congress in May 2011 was a display of Congress's close affinity with Israel.

But the future is uncertain. The politics of support for Israel are changing because the key constituencies driving the partnership are changing in dramatic and in some cases unforeseen ways. Changes in the Jewish community in the United States, evolving conservative politics, and the growing politicization of U.S. support for Israel may all take their toll. In such a fluid political environment there are few certainties.

AMERICAN JEWISH SUPPORT

American Jewish affinity has always been the foundation of U.S. support for Israel. For centuries, the Jewish communities of the Land of Israel, first under the Ottomans and later under the British Mandate,

depended on support from Diaspora Jewry. It was only logical that the founders of the new state would turn to the world's most prosperous and well established Jewish community for critical support. That aid was forthcoming and later transformed into a deeper and broader U.S. commitment to Israel.

In the early days of Israeli statehood, American Jewry was divided in its support for Israel, as described in chapter 1. Some, as Jews, had deep misgivings about restoring the Jewish homeland before messianic times; others, as Americans, had misgivings about supporting a foreign state. The ambivalence was relatively short-lived, however, and in the late 1950s and early 1960s Jewish support for Israel surged as Israel became largely intertwined with American Jewish identity.

Yet, by the 1980s, cracks began to appear. U.S. Jewish supporters began to show signs of discomfort with Israeli policies. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and its response to the Palestinian intifada that erupted in December 1987 showed an Israel different from the vulnerable and peace-seeking state with which most Jews in the United States identified. Even as support deepened in many ways, liberal American Jews grew more uncomfortable with Israeli policies and more distant. Today, polls and counterpolls suggest that Jewish support for Israel is waning, especially among the younger generation of American Jews.²

The result is that many American Jews are changing the way they think about Israel and what it means to be pro-Israel. To a degree, the debate over whether one can be a strong supporter of Israel and still publicly criticize its actions echoes the early debate between David Ben-Gurion and the American Jewish community over whether one could be a Zionist and live in the Diaspora. Yet this is no static debate. The American Jewish community is changing, and attitudes toward Israel are changing with it.

Demographic shifts within the American Jewish community are one factor changing support for Israel. Rates of assimilation and intermarriage soared in the 1970s and 1980s, making Jewish identity less central to many American Jews. By the late 1990s, only about one-quarter of American Jews under the age of 45 told pollsters they "felt very close to the Israeli people."³

This younger generation of American Jews generally feels more secure with its place in U.S. society than its parents or grandparents, diminishing the importance of Israel as a safe haven for Jews. And although an older generation could easily imagine a world without Israel

(many had, in fact, experienced it firsthand), younger generations cannot. Another factor is the persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the twists and turns of which have exhausted some American Jews while energizing others.⁴ For many American Jews, the Israel they (and their parents) fell in love with no longer exists. The underdog seeking peace has become perceived as the aggressor. Israel's tactics against civilian Palestinian populations during the intifada alienated some habitual supporters of Israel in the United States and introduced doubt in the minds of many more.⁵

Israel's domestic policies are also taking a toll. The Israeli religious establishment is challenging the validity of non-Orthodox conversions to Judaism, for example, thereby casting doubts on the Jewish status of large numbers of Americans who identify themselves (and their families) as Jewish and alienating the largest denominations of American Jewry. Debates in Israel over women's public prayer and the role of religion in public space are also disconcerting to many Reform and Conservative Jews, as are requirements that all new Israeli citizens affirm the religious identity of the state as well as what some perceive as a witch hunt against liberal Israeli organizations.⁶ For many American Jews, Israel's commitment to the values of a liberal democratic state is increasingly in doubt. Some American Jewish commentators are now wondering whether Israel's nature and character have fundamentally changed.⁷

These trends especially affect support for Israel among liberal-leaning Jews, who represent a majority of the American Jewish community. According to the 2008 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion, conducted by the American Jewish Committee, 56 percent of adult American Jews polled identified themselves as Democrats, while only 17 percent self-identified as Republicans.⁸ More illustrative, 78 percent of Jewish voters voted for Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential elections, higher than the percentage who voted for John Kerry in 2004.⁹

Moreover, progressive Jews' support for Israel is increasingly crowded out by other causes. Synagogues within the Conservative movement, for example, have supported Save Darfur campaigns and other humanitarian initiatives. It does not mean they support Israel any less, but it does mean that their support is no longer exclusive.

One political implication of these growing divides in Jewish society is that the established pro-Israel advocacy and lobbying organizations

have a harder time claiming they represent the consensus views of American Jewry. As Peter Beinart recently put it:

Among American Jews today, there are a great many Zionists, especially in the Orthodox world, people deeply devoted to the State of Israel. And there are a great many liberals, especially in the secular Jewish world, people deeply devoted to human rights for all people, Palestinians included. But the two groups are increasingly distinct. Particularly in the younger generations, fewer and fewer American Jewish liberals are Zionists; fewer and fewer American Jewish Zionists are liberal. One reason is that the leading institutions of American Jewry have refused to foster—indeed, have actively opposed—a Zionism that challenges Israel’s behavior in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and toward its own Arab citizens. For several decades, the Jewish establishment has asked American Jews to check their liberalism at Zionism’s door, and now, to their horror, they are finding that many young Jews have checked their Zionism instead.¹⁰

Beinart’s critique of the American Jewish establishment contributed to a better understanding of American Jewish politics, capturing the frustrations of many young and liberal American Jews who want to maintain a connection with Israel. Polling has further demonstrated the shift in attitudes of many younger American Jews. According to surveys conducted by Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman, American Jews under 35 years of age are significantly less supportive of Israel than those over 65. Although about 50 percent of those over 65 are always proud of Israel, fewer than 20 percent of those under 35 are.¹¹ On the scale of overall Israeli attachment, more than 40 percent of elderly American Jews are rated as “high,” but the same proportion of younger Jews have “low” attachment.¹²

One analyst has called these young, skeptical Jews the “Jon Stewart” generation.¹³ Stewart, the American Jewish host of Comedy Central’s *Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, has won eight consecutive Emmy awards and in the summer has an average of 1.8 million viewers each night.¹⁴ Stewart has shown a willingness to criticize Israeli policies and the politics surrounding support for Israel. In June 2010 Stewart weighed in on the controversy surrounding Helen Thomas’s resignation after her call for Jews in Israel to “get the hell out of Palestine” and “go home to Poland, Germany, and America.”¹⁵ Although Stewart first showed the error of Thomas’s statements,¹⁶ he also criticized the mainstream

media for focusing only on who would replace Thomas in the press briefing room of the White House. Specifically, he questioned why the media was not asking “When does America’s unwavering defense of Israel begin to compromise our unwavering defense of free speech? Does our media demonstrate a casual bias against the Arab world and the suffering of the Palestinians?”¹⁷ Stewart’s comments resonate with many young, liberal American Jews who feel increasingly alienated from Israel.

While Stewart represents the growing discomfort many liberals feel toward Israel, Beinart takes his critique much farther. Beinart argues that “saving liberal Zionism in the United States—so that American Jews can help save liberal Zionism in Israel—is the great American Jewish challenge of our age.”¹⁸ This aspiration drives liberal advocacy groups such as J Street, which is funded by major contributors to the Democratic Party and seeks to provide an alternative to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

J Street’s positions on Israel, however, have crossed some red lines for an organization that considers itself pro-Israel. In particular, its call for the Obama administration not to veto an anti-Israel resolution in the UN Security Council in February 2011 has more of the hallmarks of advocacy groups that work against Israeli interests. Moreover, the organization’s effort to create a wide tent of support has given voice to a range of fringe viewpoints and organizations with agendas that may be very different from those of J Street’s leadership.

Part of the liberal disaffection flows from an image of Israel that was never based solely on reality. Israel has always been more diverse and complex than the mythology surrounding it, and the real Israel of today is very different from the mythical Israel of the youth group summer visit, which many American Jews experience. As detailed in chapters 1 and 2, the liberal characterization of Israel has been convenient for Israeli policymakers and American supporters, but it has denied those parts of Israel’s social and national makeup that espouse an eastern Mediterranean and religious culture rather than a Western liberal ethos. Further, staunchly pro-Israel U.S. organizations have sustained an image of Israel as a peace-seeking victim, which is increasingly difficult for many liberals to reconcile with some Israeli government policies.

In this way, the mythologies of the last six decades have left many Americans in love with an Israel very different from the Israel that was

evolving. Many Americans acknowledge that Israel faces significant and unprecedented threats but also see it as a powerful and technologically advanced state with a strong economy and a military superior to all of its enemies. They have a hard time understanding Israeli ambivalence and skepticism that a peace agreement will strengthen their security or improve their lives significantly. The peace process resonates throughout U.S. politics, and for Israelis to see peace as secondary to other concerns is out of step with the way many Americans have come to view the Middle East.

Although many liberal Jews are growing increasingly alienated from Israel, the modern Orthodox American Jewish community has increasingly taken up the mantle of unconditional support for Israel. The Orthodox Union (OU), considered the face of the American Orthodox community, issued a strong statement rebutting Peter Beinart's conclusions but in an important sense agreed with his analysis. Mirroring the cultural changes and conflicts taking place in Israel itself, the OU strikingly rejected the notion that support for Israel should in any way be predicated on Israel's political character:

From a Religious Zionist perspective, premising support for Israel on whether the Jewish State is living up to being a "liberal democracy" is a recipe for trouble.¹⁹

This dichotomy between those Americans who believe that Israel's liberal democratic character is an important rationale for support and those who downplay its importance will likely intensify in the years ahead and further divide American Jewish support.

None of these trends are necessarily new. In 1998 Israeli author Abraham Ben-Zvi wrote that the American Jewish community had been gradually fragmented and fractured, which would have profound implications for Israel.²⁰ In 1987, another author, Gabriel Sheffer, noted that "social, demographic, and ideological processes have weakened the traditional ties between the organized American Jewish community and the State of Israel."²¹ Yet the trends have intensified to the point where many American Jews question not only whether they are similar to Israelis, but whether they even share the same goals and values for Israel.

CHRISTIAN AND CONSERVATIVE SUPPORT

The diminution of Jewish liberal support has coincided with a rise of conservative Christian support for Israel. This has been strongest within the evangelical churches. To some degree, evangelical support for Israel has competed with Jewish support to the point where politicians attempting to appeal to evangelicals have made it a cause célèbre. The Southern Baptist minister (and former Arkansas governor) Mike Huckabee, for example, claimed that “generally Evangelicals are so much more supportive of Israel than the American Jewish community.”²² The Reverend John Hagee’s Christians United for Israel (CUFI) has championed support for Israel, and CUFI claims to be the “largest pro-Israel organization in the United States.”²³

Evangelical support has ranged from lobbying Congress and campus letter-writing campaigns in support of specific policies to raising funds for a range of Israeli social and welfare organizations. During the 2006 Lebanon war, for example, Hagee met with White House officials to deliver the message that the U.S. government should “let Israel do their job” of destroying Hezbollah.²⁴ During the war, another group, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ), raised millions of dollars during a television advertising campaign calling on people to “help stand against Israel’s enemies.”²⁵ According to the IFCJ, during 12 months in 2009–2010, evangelical donations to charitable organizations in Israel amounted to approximately \$100 million.²⁶

But American Christian support for Israel, which remains strong, is not monolithic. Some authors have noted the emergence of an evangelical Christian left, distinct from groups such as CUFI and mainline Protestant churches. A cover article in *Christianity Today*, one of the most important evangelical publications, articulated a different evangelical approach and stressed a religious imperative for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. The article stated that “Christians must hope in God’s covenant faithfulness. Meanwhile, we should keep reminding those involved in direct negotiations that we long for a solution that provides a secure Jewish homeland and self-determination and prosperity for Palestinians. In God’s eyes, the peace of Jerusalem is to bless all peoples.”²⁷ In a similar vein, the more liberal evangelical magazine, *Sojourners*, wrote that it “rejected the belief that God has a vested interest in the amount of real estate controlled by the state of Israel.”²⁸

Although it is commonly believed that evangelical Christians support Israel primarily for theological reasons, a poll by Stand for Israel, a pro-Israel group, noted that only 35 percent of evangelical respondents cited the Rapture as the most important reason for supporting Israel, while 56 percent cited political reasons.²⁹

Mainstream American Jewish organizations have largely been uncomfortable with Christian Zionists' warm embrace of Israel. For one, many American Jews saw ulterior theological motives behind that support, both in terms of the role Israel and Jews play in the Rapture and in terms of efforts to proselytize. Also, evangelical Christian support tended to align with Israel's nationalistic right wing and clash with the Democratic political tendencies of the majority of the American Jewish community on social issues such as abortion and gay rights.

Pro-Israel evangelical leaders have tried to dispel Jewish suspicions. In one opinion piece in the Jewish daily, *The Forward*, Hagee sums up his movement's rationale for supporting Israel: "Christian support for Israel starts with the Bible, is strengthened by an understanding of history and endures because of the Judeo-Christian commitment to democratic values. Everything that forms the Christian understanding of the world leads to the same conclusion: Christians support Israel because it is simply the right thing to do."³⁰

THE TEA PARTY

Evangelicals are not the only ones in the modern U.S. conservative movement trumpeting their support for Israel. For now, at least, the rhetoric is equally enthusiastic from many of those affiliated with the Tea Party. Sarah Palin, for example, as a candidate for vice president, bragged that "the only flag at my office is an Israeli flag."³¹ More generally, unconditional support for Israel has become a largely unquestioned tenet of conservative ideology in U.S. politics, in much the same way as opposition to the "ground zero mosque" became a prominent campaign talking point for Republican candidates in 2010.

Although there is no doubt that many Christians and conservatives support Israel for sincere moral and theological reasons, the manipulation of Israel as a political tool by some within the broader conservative movement raises questions about their future commitments to Israel. If conservative support is based primarily on political motives rather than religious and theological ones, then future support is anything but certain. And, whereas evangelical political activists played

a leading role in shaping Republican politics in the last two decades, Tea Party–affiliated candidates espousing more independent and libertarian ideas are mounting a new challenge to the party’s established intellectual leadership.

The Tea Party and evangelical Christians draw from overlapping constituencies, but there are clear differences, especially on humanitarian aid and foreign aid. Evangelical churches have tended to support foreign aid and see U.S. foreign policy as an important tool of U.S. power, while the Tea Party generally opposes foreign aid of any kind.

So far, Tea Party–affiliated members of Congress have generally offered rhetorical support for U.S. aid to Israel despite the movement’s emphasis on fiscal conservatism and spending cuts. The most notable exception has been Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), who called for more than \$500 billion in spending cuts in 2011. Among his proposals were dramatic cuts to foreign aid, including aid to Israel. In a CNN appearance, Senator Paul explained his position:

I also have a lot of sympathy and respect for Israel as a democratic nation, as a fountain of peace and a fountain of democracy within the Middle East. But at the same time, I don’t think funding both sides of an arms race, particularly when we’ve got to borrow the money from China to send it to someone else. We just can’t do it anymore. The debt is all consuming and it threatens our well-being as a country.³²

Senator Paul has explained that he is not singling out Israel. In another interview with ABC, Paul expanded his thinking:

I’m not singling out Israel. I am a supporter of Israel. I want to be known as a friend of Israel. . . . but you can’t give money you don’t have. We can’t just borrow from our kids’ future and give it to countries, even if they are our friends. . . . But I also think their [the Israelis’] per capita income is greater than probably three-fourths of the rest of the world. Should we be giving money, free money, or welfare, to a rich nation? I don’t think so.³³

Senator Paul makes no excuses about his position and has resisted pressure campaigns, most importantly from conservative and evangelical organizations such as CUFU to reverse his position. The organization posted a banner on its web page calling on its followers to urge Paul to abandon his call to end aid to Israel. Although Paul’s

position on aid to Israel may not be widely embraced on Capitol Hill, his broader message that the current spending habits of the United States undermine the U.S. economic future will likely resonate with many Americans on both sides of the political divide.

AN EMERGING PARTISAN DIVIDE

In the United States during the past several years, U.S.-Israeli political clashes have provided ample opportunity to manipulate support for Israel as a partisan tool. Elements within the Republican Party in particular seek not only to draw Jewish political supporters but to use unconditional support for Israel to undermine Democrats and the president. By staking out hard-line positions on controversial issues through congressional letters and nonbinding resolutions, some Republicans have tried to paint many stalwart Democratic supporters of Israel as not pro-Israel enough.

Leading up to midterm congressional elections in 2010, for example, House Republicans unveiled House Resolution 1553, a resolution that supported Israel's use of "all means necessary to confront and eliminate nuclear threats posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the use of military force."³⁴

Some Republicans, such as House Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Virginia, have suggested that aid to Israel be removed from the annual foreign operations appropriations bills and passed separately or as part of the Defense Department's budget.³⁵ As some commentators have highlighted, however, this raises additional problems for both the United States and Israel by singling out Israel as a special case and potentially complicating relations with other aid recipients such as Jordan and Egypt.³⁶

Republican support for Israel has largely become unconditional, but many Democratic supporters of Israel find it increasingly difficult to condone Israeli policies, especially in regard to the Palestinians. They believe, for instance, that settlement construction makes a two-state solution less viable. From this perspective, the stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations is becoming an increasingly difficult obstacle to improved U.S.-Israeli relations. More broadly, some Democrats worry that Israel's shift away from the liberal democratic principles Americans prize and its ambivalence toward making peace ultimately undermines Israel's long-term interests and security.³⁷

Democrats' wariness also stems from shifts on the Palestinian side. In the past, Democratic supporters of Israel could blame failures in the peace process on the Palestinians. Even during Prime Minister Netanyahu's first term in office, Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat always seemed to be supporting terrorism while negotiating peace. Today, however, Israel faces a Palestinian leadership in the West Bank that is closely aligned with the United States and—at least until the recent reconciliation accord with Hamas—has had little connection to the armed struggle of the Palestinian national movement. Looking at these developments, many Democrats see a fleeting opportunity for Israel to reach an agreement with a moderate Palestinian leadership that opposes violence and has a vision for statehood that overlaps with U.S. interests. They see Israeli government actions consistently undermining that moderate Palestinian leadership—thus making U.S. policy on Israel and the peace process much less coherent.

The partisan wedge is likely to deepen, posing considerable challenges to Israel and the U.S.-Israeli partnership. After the 2010 elections, the Democratic Party caucus in the House of Representatives became more liberal, and so Democratic Party support for Israel will likely become more conditional on specific issues like Israeli settlement policy. If Israeli policies do not signal greater progress toward a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians, the result could be further erosion of bipartisan support.

At the same time, too tight an embrace by Republicans could well become a liability for Israel if it erodes the notion of bipartisan support. Growing partisanship in the United States not only alienates Democratic Party supporters but also does little to guarantee consistent Republican Party support. The Republican Party is consumed with its own ideological battles, most importantly from politicians identified with the Tea Party. The long-term impact of the Tea Party remains to be seen, but the neoisolationist approach of politicians like Senator Rand Paul and the focus on slashing spending could influence the scale of U.S. support in the future.

NEW FISCAL CONSTRAINTS

There is little organized opposition to foreign aid for Israel within Congress, and no effective pro-Arab lobby opposes such aid, but many lawmakers have their sights on cutting earmarks and foreign aid in general. As the largest recipient of U.S. assistance, Israel is an easy

target, and it will be difficult for Israel to escape across-the-board cuts in the foreign aid appropriations. Debates over the U.S. debt may also signal a shift in Republican attitudes, as some Republican lawmakers have signaled a willingness to consider cutting the defense budget as part of a compromise deal to lower the debt.³⁸ Republican member of Congress Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, an Air National Guardsman with combat experience in Iraq, highlighted the difficult choices Republicans face, explaining that defense spending is “a pillar of Republican strength. It’s a pillar of national strength. Look, I know there are sacred cows . . . but we cannot afford them anymore.”³⁹ Some commentators reject the notion that military spending is the source of America’s budget woes.⁴⁰ What is clear however, is that once untouchable budget items are no longer sacred in a new fiscal environment.

Military aid to Israel, in particular, will likely be at risk if the austerity plans of more fiscally conservative elements within the Republican Party gain traction. Although the U.S. conservative movement in general supports aid to Israel, it will become increasingly difficult to protect the \$3 billion annual aid in an era of defense cuts and budget deficits. Justifications for such a high level of aid are also increasingly difficult to make to a broader U.S. audience, as Israel has seen comparatively higher rates of economic growth than the United States during the past several years and has become a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Although much of that aid is used to purchase U.S.-produced military hardware that indirectly subsidizes the U.S. defense industry, such aid is also highly symbolic at a time of economic distress in the United States. Now more than ever, all congressionally funded items will be scrutinized—and, unlike before, aid to Israel may not be exempt from scrutiny.

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4

STRATEGIC DYNAMICS AND DEBATES

U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation has a long history. It began during the Cold War as Israel fought the Soviet client states of Syria and Egypt. More recently the United States and Israel have cooperated to combat terrorism and check Iranian expansionism. The two allies also have mutual interests in maintaining regional stability, supporting pro-Western regimes, and countering the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction.

Although the United States and Israel continue to share broad security goals,¹ diverging priorities and conflicting strategies toward common threats are generating tension and uncertainty about the future of the partnership. Strategist Edward Luttwak has argued that “alliances do not derive their content from consensual threat perceptions but only from consensual responses to perceived threats.”² Increasingly U.S. and Israeli responses to their common challenges and threats differ significantly.

New crises are afoot. A United Nations debate on Palestinian statehood in September 2011 could be the first, though certainly not the only one. Iran’s potential procurement of a nuclear weapon is another. Such developments are likely to make Israel more dependent on U.S. military support and diplomatic cooperation at precisely the time that Israel’s disposition would be toward unilateral steps and military action that diverge from U.S. policies. Neither will provoke a rupture, but each could further complicate the fabric of cooperation that the two sides have been weaving for decades.

In the past, political understandings helped bridge strategic differences between the United States and Israel.³ There were many such occasions. One was after Israel bombed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 using U.S.-supplied aircraft; another was in 2004 when the United States pressured Israel against upgrading unmanned aerial vehicles it had sold to China that incorporated U.S. technology. In each case, the differences erupted but passed.

Now dramatic political change is unfolding across the Middle East, Israel's legitimacy is being challenged, and the potential Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons threatens regional nuclear proliferation. The United States is seeking both exit strategies from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and coherent regional policies that advance U.S. interests. Uncertain of how the Middle East is changing, the United States has found it increasingly difficult to articulate the roles that it sees itself and Israel playing in relation to each other. But the core issue is an even more fundamental one: a growing number of Americans see Israel's most important contribution to regional stability to be promoting an Israeli-Palestinian political agreement, and a growing number of Israelis deny that such an agreement is a core problem in the region or will significantly improve regional dynamics. Even more profoundly, ever-larger numbers of Americans argue that Israel's policies are shortsighted and detrimental to the interests of both countries, and Israelis are increasingly outspoken about their doubts of America's strategic judgment. That is to say, increasingly vocal—and increasingly centrist—groups on each side believe that the actions of the other jeopardize its core national security interests. This shift is not only a reflection of greater uncertainty in the relationship but a driver of that uncertainty as well.

At the start of 2011, Israel was thriving in many respects. The economy was healthy, growing at an annual rate of 4 percent at a time when most of the world was struggling out of recession.⁴ Inflation was minuscule, only 1–3 percent.⁵ Terrorism had been tamed. The plague of suicide bombings had passed,⁶ and, according to the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), Israeli casualties from terror attacks dropped to historic lows in 2010.⁷ Although Israelis in northern and southern areas suffered rocket barrages from Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2008, Israelis felt they had restored their military deterrent. A *Forbes* poll in 155 countries that measured residents' happiness ranked Israel the eighth-happiest country in the world, tied with Canada, Australia, and Switzerland.⁸

And yet Israel's strategic environment is rapidly deteriorating. The Iranian threat looms, Israel faces growing international isolation and diplomatic challenges, and the Arab uprisings of 2011 raise new uncertainties. With each, Israel's ability to respond is constrained, both because the security threats are mostly nonconventional and because military force has little ability to shape political outcomes in these cases. Some Israeli security officials conclude that Israel's threats are more daunting than at any time since the 1970s.⁹

THE IRANIAN THREAT

Even after the recent political upheavals in the region, there is no issue that consumes Israeli security thinking more than Iran. The Islamic Republic's pursuit of nuclear weapons combined with its calls for Israel's destruction pose a threat that many Israelis consider existential. According to Israeli assessments, Iran already has enough highly enriched uranium to build a nuclear weapon device although it does not have a delivery mechanism.¹⁰

Most Israeli security assessments conclude that a nuclear-armed Iran would radically alter the regional balance of power by eroding Israel's military hegemony and constraining its freedom of action to use conventional military force.¹¹ The two wars Israel fought in the last decade were against Iranian allies Hezbollah and Hamas; Iran provides these allies with funding, weapons, special training, and political support. Under a nuclear umbrella Iran's aggressive policies could escalate and its allies could operate more boldly.

Although Israeli leaders have different opinions as to the rationality or predictability of Iranian decisionmaking, most do not believe the Iranians would rush to make use of their nuclear arsenal through a direct military strike against Israel. Defense Minister Ehud Barak notes, "I don't think that the Iranians, even if they got the bomb, are going to drop it immediately on some neighbor."¹² What is more likely, many Israelis conclude, is that a nuclear-capable Iran would set off a regional nuclear arms race, eliminating Israel's uniqueness in the region and raising the risk of nuclear accidents or terrorism. Some Israeli and other security experts have pointed out that "while the Iranian leadership is not seen as suicidal or particularly prone to high stakes risk taking, there are likely to be many misperceptions regarding Israeli intentions and redlines."¹³ Under such conditions, miscommunication

or misinterpretation of intentions can trigger an unintended military confrontation.¹⁴

The psychological ramifications of a nuclear-armed Iran are equally important in shaping Israeli perceptions. As one Israeli commentator explains, a nuclear Iran denies Israelis the sense of “collective relief that Jews no longer live—and die—at the whim of others.” It is a deep insecurity dating back to the pre-Israel Jewish experience of defenselessness.¹⁵ The other concern for many of Israel’s leaders is that the fear of living with a nuclear-armed Iran could fuel Israeli emigration and brain drain, leading to a range of negative social and economic consequences.

The United States is also deeply concerned with the challenge of a nuclear-armed Iran. Not only could such an eventuality provoke regional proliferation, but it would endanger U.S. allies, including both Israel and the oil-rich states of the Gulf. High-level U.S.-Israeli consultation over the Iranian threat has become regular and intense. Media reports also suggest that the United States and Israel have coordinated covert activities to sabotage Iran’s nuclear weapons program.¹⁶

Yet, for all of the concern with Iran’s actions, the United States does not always appear to share Israel’s sense of urgency. Israeli diplomats for years have been warning that Iran is about to reach a “point of no return” on its nuclear weapons development program; U.S. officials have been careful to point out that they believe the Iranian government is holding open the option to develop a nuclear weapon without deciding to develop such a weapon. The Israeli instinct appears to be toward preemption while the U.S. fear is that preemption could push the Iranians to make a decision that all would regret later. In the language of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, a U.S. strike on Iran would be “very, very destabilizing” with unintended consequences. In Israelis’ view, such statements signal to the Iranians that the United States has no intention of using force to stop Iran’s nuclear weapons program.¹⁷

Instead, the United States has largely sought to contain Iran through a combination of diplomacy, sanctions, and conventional arms sales to Iran’s neighbors, which is intended at once to deter Iran, limit Iran’s military capabilities, and constrain the country’s regional influence. The strategy served the United States in its containment of Soviet expansion, and many U.S. analysts argue that the Cold War model applies equally to containing Iran, whether it has known nuclear capabilities

or not.¹⁸ Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak bluntly acknowledged these different approaches during a Washington address, claiming “there is, of course, a certain difference in perspective and difference in judgment, difference in the internal clocks and difference in capabilities . . . we do not need to coordinate every step. . . .”¹⁹

Part of the disparity in responses is due to distance. Iran does not directly threaten U.S. cities or civilians. Compared with the threat posed by the Soviet Union, which targeted hundreds of U.S. cities with nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles, the actual threat from a nuclear Iran to the U.S. mainland is limited. Israel, finding itself seconds or minutes away from a potential Iranian strike, feels no such luxury. Part of the disparity, as well, is that the United States retains a wide array of options to use overwhelming force against Iran while Israel’s options are more limited. But the fact is that the disparity between U.S. and Israeli approaches appears to be growing, and such approaches might not ever align in the event of an Iranian nuclear breakout.

The United States has consistently tried to address this fear. Successive U.S. presidents have declared that a nuclear Iran is “unacceptable.”²⁰ Yet to Israelis the language is tepid and vague and belies a fundamental weakness in U.S. strategy. While many Israeli foreign policy and defense professionals acknowledge that the United States, as a superpower, has a wider set of issues to manage in the Middle East and globally, they argue that U.S. efforts to stop Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons are feeble, unfocused, and lack both benchmarks and consequences for Iranian noncompliance. To their mind, the United States is distracted, overburdened, and unwilling to act decisively. Rhetorical reassurances do little. Reports of a 2010 memo from Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to White House officials that argued that the United States lacks an effective long-term strategy to address Iran’s pursuit of nuclear capabilities reinforce Israeli fears.²¹

What is especially frustrating for many Israelis is that they believe the United States has the military capability to stop Iran’s nuclear weapons program but is reluctant to use it or even threaten to use it. They believe cautious language by U.S. officials projects weakness instead of instilling fear in Iran. They point to President George W. Bush’s threatening language in 2003 and Iranian fears of U.S. military action in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion as important examples of how the threat of force can influence Iranian decisionmaking.²² While Israelis believe

that the U.S. approach toward Iran imposes costs on the Iranians, they also believe that those costs are acceptable to the regime in Tehran. Rather than recommend words of caution, Israelis openly call for U.S. language threatening enough to change Iranian behavior decisively, and they are continually disappointed when it is not forthcoming.

Some hawkish Israelis speculate that, at a certain point, Israel might have to choose between its commitment to the U.S.-Israeli partnership and striking Iran.²³ If U.S. support is in doubt, they argue, then Israel will have to rely even more on its own military strength and assets to protect its interests, regardless of whether those capabilities are sufficient to confront Iran. The fact that other important European and Gulf Arab states—not to mention Turkey, Russia, and China—lack the resolve to contain Iran merely compounds Israel's concern.

DETERRENCE AND DELEGITIMIZATION

Deterrence has been at the core of Israeli security strategy for decades. Many Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officials complain that Israel's deterrent began to erode after its unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000. They are still haunted by Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah's declaration that "Israel is weaker than a spider web,"²⁴ and they worry that the mystique of Israel's military capability has diminished. At the same time, IDF casualty rates have emerged as a key barometer of Israel's military success, leading the IDF to rely on overwhelming force, which raises the risk of civilian casualties on the other side.²⁵

The need to demonstrate overwhelming strength to preserve its deterrent pushes the IDF into punishing assaults such as the campaign against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in 2006 and Operation Cast Lead against Hamas in Gaza in 2008–2009, which are ultimately exploited by its enemies. The IDF believes that future conflicts will pose even greater dangers. According to Israel's former head of military intelligence, the next war "will be much bigger, much wider in scope, and with many more casualties."²⁶ Challenges previously tamed might also return to the fore. Syria's military, for example, is pursuing advanced weapon systems primarily from Russia, and Israeli defense officials worry not only about Syria's missile arsenal but also its anti-aircraft capabilities.²⁷

To maintain its deterrent in the future, Israel will likely rely on massive force, on a scale far surpassing what was seen in 2006 and

2008–2009. The IDF's revised military doctrine, which grew out of the lessons learned of the 2006 war with Hezbollah, seeks to use overwhelming airpower to force a swift international cease-fire by inflicting heavy damage on Hezbollah assets and Lebanese infrastructure. Israeli military planners consider such a cease-fire the most effective way of protecting their home front from sustained rocket attacks and preventing Hezbollah from declaring victory.

But Israel's tactics for defending itself may create more problems than they solve. Israel's limited wars against Hamas and Hezbollah temporarily restored Israel's deterrent, but they also demonstrated Israel's persistent failure to shape its strategic environment and influence trends in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories; indeed, those they fought—Hamas and Hezbollah—are politically stronger now than they were at the time of the Israeli assault.²⁸

Moreover, Israel's recent military campaigns have exposed it to greater criticism and scrutiny, including in the United States. In America, this scrutiny comes from both the left, which criticizes Israeli military tactics and civilian casualties, and the right, which criticizes Israel's failure to decisively defeat its enemies and shape new political realities.²⁹

Each time Israel acts unilaterally, the United States feels compelled to come to its defense. Even during the Bush administration, officials sometimes strained at the costs of limiting the diplomatic damage of Israel's actions. More recently, following the assassination of Hamas arms merchant Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai in January 2010, the United States reportedly refused to cooperate with requests to provide information on suspected Israeli connections to the operations. The Barack Obama administration also worked hard to prevent an international commission of inquiry following Israel's seizure of the *Mavi Marmara* that left nine Turkish citizens dead.³⁰ Some U.S. officials regard these kinds of Israeli actions as ultimately self-defeating for Israel and harmful to the United States.³¹ As one prominent commentator argued after a particularly nasty disagreement over Israel's Jerusalem construction policy, "the depth of America's moral commitment does not justify or excuse actions by an Israeli government that unnecessarily makes Israel a strategic liability when it should remain an asset."³²

The costs have extended into the diplomatic arena as international condemnation of Israel's military tactics has grown. The Gaza war in

particular drove a major wedge in already weakening Turkish-Israeli ties and led to the scathing UN-commissioned *Goldstone Report*.

Israel's leaders, and its foreign policy elite more generally, regard such diplomatic responses to their country's policies as prime examples of a broader process, which they now describe as the delegitimization campaign against Israel's existence.³³ For decades, Israel struggled against a hostile international environment and an Arab economic boycott that sought to limit its economic and diplomatic relationships. The Oslo process in the 1990s reversed that trend and presented Israel with new diplomatic opportunities. Israel's willingness to negotiate peace with the Palestinians raised its international standing, and a process of "normalization" deepened its official and unofficial diplomatic interaction with a number of Arab states in North Africa and the Gulf.³⁴

Although some of these relationships still exist, Israel is increasingly isolated in the region. Moreover, a loose coalition of international organizations is seeking to sway opinion against Israel, condemn it in international arenas, and bring legal action in Europe against former and serving Israeli military and government officials. Israel's very legitimacy is in question in a way it has not been for decades. The *Goldstone Report*, the Gaza flotilla raid, and the Mabhough assassination have provided ammunition for the diplomatic assault on Israel. Some Israeli strategists argue the threat of delegitimization is as serious as the threat posed by Hamas and Hezbollah.³⁵

The tactics in the campaign against Israel vary. Under public pressure, several pension funds in Norway, Sweden, and Belgium have divested funds from Israeli corporations associated with settlements and the separation barrier. Norway's \$500 billion Government Pension Fund, for example, divested \$6 million from the Israeli defense company, Elbit Systems Ltd., which provides surveillance equipment to the IDF. It also sold a \$1.2 million share in Africa Israel Investments, a large Israeli conglomerate.³⁶

The economic impact on Israel and the companies targeted for divestment has been negligible. But the symbolic impact has been profound. The campaign has also spread to the United States, where grassroots efforts primarily on the West Coast have targeted Israel.³⁷

The delegitimization campaign has been directed at Israel's diplomatic standing as well. The use of universal jurisdiction has prevented Israeli political and military officials from traveling to Europe.

Universal jurisdiction enables a national court to try a person for crimes committed outside that state.³⁸ In the United Kingdom, anti-Israel activists have used the law to force the courts to issue arrest warrants for Kadima leader Tzipi Livni and other Israeli officials. The head of the spokesman's office of the IDF reportedly traveled incognito to England for fear of being prosecuted.³⁹ Although the law is currently under review in Parliament, it has prevented many Israeli officials from traveling to England.⁴⁰

More worrisome for Israeli officials is a belief that these movements to isolate Israel are working in concert with Hamas and are thus part of a broader campaign to threaten Israel's very existence. Hamas has coordinated with a range of organizations, including international human rights organizations, attempting to break the maritime blockade of Gaza by sea and land (through Egyptian territory). In the Israeli view, both the human rights groups and Hamas benefit from such coordination, and the high-profile incidents sully Israel's image with unprecedented vehemence and scope. The 2010 Gaza flotilla incident was the most infamous incident but not the only one.

At the same time, the Israeli military establishment sees few options for responding to regional threats other than a continued use of overwhelming force when necessary. Militarily, this may be effective in countering Israel's security threats, but politically it will likely deepen international condemnation of Israel and fuel delegitimization efforts.

UNILATERALISM AND MULTILATERALISM

At the same time that Israel increasingly feels compelled to use unilateral military action to address its security threats, it is alarmed by an increasing U.S. practice of acting multilaterally. Israelis rely on the United States to protect their interests in international forums. At the same time, they worry that U.S. participation in these forums is insufficiently directive. They argue, for example, that the Obama administration caved in to Egyptian diplomatic pressure at the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference to promote an agenda that called on Israel to sign the NPT but omitted any mention of Iran. They also interpret President Obama's sympathy for the idea that all states should be treated equally on the nuclear issue, combined with Arab pressure, as leading to a slow shift in U.S. nuclear policy.⁴¹ Israelis fear this shift will lead to greater scrutiny of Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity and pressure to sign the NPT.

More recently, the Obama administration's emphasis on multilateral military action when imposing the no-fly zone in Libya in March 2011 is another worrisome sign of diminished U.S. leadership. U.S. insistence on winning international support before acting—in a world in which Israel believes its own international support is dwindling—is a daunting trend.

At core, many Israelis fear that the United States is losing its ability to command diplomatic primacy. They point to Turkey's vote against UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions on Iran in June 2010 as a sign that regional powers are pursuing independent agendas with little fear of retribution from the United States.⁴²

Israel is at a natural disadvantage in an international system where the United States is less dominant diplomatically and willing or able to shield it. If the United States is less capable or willing to exercise political capital in the international arena on Israel's behalf, then Israel is left to use its own diplomatic assets, which are limited and constrained. It deepens Israelis' sense of isolation and fuels a fear that they have no one to depend on but themselves.

FRUSTRATION OVER THE PEACE PROCESS

As the United States attempts to manage the combustible mix of challenges it faces in the region, some U.S. officials increasingly see the Israeli government as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. At the center of the friction is Israel's apparent reluctance to make far-reaching compromises toward an Israeli-Palestinian agreement. The U.S. government has defined such an agreement not only as a U.S. interest but also as essential both to Israel's security and to the broader U.S. efforts in the Middle East.⁴³ President Obama has argued that "the absence of peace between Palestinians and Israelis is an impediment to a whole host of other areas of increased cooperation and more stable security for people in the region, as well as the United States."⁴⁴

Obama came into office in the aftermath of the 2008 Gaza war with an ambitious agenda to push Israelis and Palestinians toward a political agreement. He named former senator George Mitchell as his Arab-Israeli peace envoy on his first full day in office and called regional leaders to tell them of his commitment to work for Arab-Israeli peace. His early insistence on a full settlement freeze in the West Bank and East Jerusalem backfired, and the unity government efforts between Hamas and the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, in

May 2011 further undermined prospects for restarting negotiations. Particularly when it comes to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's settlement policy, the Obama administration sees the prime minister's approach as an attempt to publicly undermine President Obama, with the unintentional effect of weakening the credibility of the United States, on which Israel relies for so much of its diplomatic and military support.

Moreover, there is a growing frustration with Israeli policy toward Gaza, which has punished the people living there but failed to dislodge or weaken Hamas. On his second day in office President Obama spoke about Gaza to State Department employees: "As part of a lasting cease-fire, Gaza's border crossings should be open to allow the flow of aid and commerce, with an appropriate monitoring regime. . . ." ⁴⁵ In June 2010 Obama reiterated the point:

We agree that Israelis have the right to prevent arms from entering into Gaza that can be used to launch attacks into Israeli territory. But we also think that it is important for us to explore new mechanisms so that we can have goods and services, and economic development, and the ability of people to start their own businesses, and to grow the economy and provide opportunity within Gaza. ⁴⁶

The Israeli government has sought to deflect U.S. pressure by declaring its acceptance of the idea of a Palestinian state and promoting a bottom-up approach to strengthening Palestinian institutions. The IDF's deployment and security policies in the West Bank have eased restrictions on the movement of goods and people to spur economic growth. Yet the lack of a practical strategy to convert economic and security improvements into a viable agreement limits the impact of Israeli steps.

Nearly every U.S. president has made some link between resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and broader U.S. interests in the Middle East. But never have the stakes of a failure to execute the policy been so high for the United States. As it manages multiple crises and military operations in the region, the U.S. national security establishment increasingly sees the Arab-Israeli conflict as a source of regional instability and fuel for the fire of anti-Americanism in the broader Middle East. For hundreds of millions of Arabs, solving the Palestinian issue is the test of U.S. power and sincerity.

While most allied Arab regimes, especially in the Gulf, are preoccupied with the Iranian threat and their own domestic political challenges, the popular uprisings throughout the Arab world could create pressure on the United States to be more responsive to Arab public opinion. More important, U.S. officials are concerned that, by allowing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to fester, the diplomatic costs for the United States and Israel will grow and become more complicated. President Obama recently warned:

There's a reason why the Palestinians are pursuing their interests at the United Nations. They recognize that there is an impatience with the peace process, or the absence of one, not just in the Arab World—in Latin America, in Asia, and in Europe. And that impatience is growing, and it's already manifesting itself in capitals around the world.⁴⁷

Increasingly, many administration and U.S. military officials are expressing these worries openly. As previously noted, General Petraeus's Senate Armed Services Committee testimony in March 2010 caused considerable controversy. Petraeus argued that:

the conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support. . . .⁴⁸

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates backed Petraeus's assessment during a press conference with Minister of Defense Ehud Barak at the Pentagon in April 2010, claiming that:

the lack of progress in the peace process has provided political ammunition to our adversaries in the Middle East and in the region, and that progress in this arena will enable us not only to perhaps get others to support the peace process, but also support us in our efforts to try and impose effective sanctions against Iran.⁴⁹

The Gates-Barak meeting was intended to smooth over U.S.-Israeli disagreements. Instead, it clarified just how differently the United States and Israel saw their threats and the Middle East strategic environment and how deeply the divergence actually runs. The waves of

popular uprisings in the Middle East in early 2011 have deepened the divergence even further.

When Israelis hear President Obama on the dangers of a stalled peace process, many are dismissive. Yet when they hear Gates, Petraeus, and other U.S. officials remark on the dangers of a failed peace process for U.S. interests in the Middle East, Israelis worry that the Pentagon's leadership sees Israel as a strategic liability in the region and could change the nature of U.S.-Israeli cooperation.⁵⁰ Increasingly, Israelis fear that Obama has become complicit in this process by weighing in on matters of strategic cooperation that past presidents left to the professional military level.⁵¹

In the months and years ahead the diplomatic challenges will likely intensify and spark additional U.S.-Israeli friction. Having lost faith in the ability of the United States to secure Palestinian statehood, the Palestinian leadership seeks to leverage growing international sympathy to force a showdown in the United Nations and through international recognition of an independent state. The United States may well continue to use its veto in the UNSC, as it did in February 2011, to block resolutions against Israel. Doing so, however, will increase the international diplomatic costs in terms of U.S. credibility at a time when the United States is moving to rely more on multilateral support on a range of international and regional efforts. The U.S. government could also condition future vetoes on specific Israeli actions, further straining U.S.-Israeli ties and deepening frustration on both sides.

Harsh statements by senior U.S. diplomats should be seen as a warning. In March 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton rebuked Prime Minister Netanyahu for announcing new housing construction in East Jerusalem; in a telephone call she characterized this as "an insult to the United States." Following the U.S. veto of the UNSC resolution condemning Israeli settlement activity, Susan Rice, U.S. ambassador to the UN, clarified the Obama administration's position: "We reject in the strongest possible terms the legitimacy of continued settlement activity. . . . For more than four decades, [Israeli settlement activity] has undermined security . . . corroded hopes for peace and security . . . it violates international commitments and threatens prospects for peace."⁵² The statement shows the administration clearly agreed with the spirit of the resolution although it was not prepared to incur the costs of allowing the resolution to pass.

The message of Ambassador Rice's statement and of Secretary Clinton's phone call to Netanyahu was unambiguous. The U.S. government is losing patience with Israel's settlement construction policies. Israel may assert a right to build anywhere in Jerusalem that it chooses, but those political choices have implications. An assertion of Israeli sovereignty does not always strengthen Israel, especially when it comes at the expense of U.S.-Israel ties.

As the Palestinians pursue international recognition of statehood, the United States will continue to find itself in a dilemma between protecting Israel in the UN Security Council and maintaining a diplomatic position at odds with many of its allies. The Palestinian plan will put diplomatic pressure on the United States while enlarging the gaps between Israeli and U.S. positions on settlements and Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. U.S. diplomats have long argued that UNSC resolutions condemning Israel undermine prospects for a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian settlement. But if Israel is unable to demonstrate its commitment to resolving the conflict, or if the U.S. government blames Israel for undermining prospects for progress, then the United States may be less willing to block such resolutions in the future; Israel, which is already facing international isolation and has been left with few true allies, would pay a high political price.

THE SECURITY DISCONNECT

The gaps between the United States and Israel threaten to undermine the very core of each country's strategy toward the other. The U.S. strategy toward Israel is based on a belief that U.S. military assistance and political support can alleviate Israel's deep security concerns and make Israel's leadership more willing to accept the inherent risks of an Arab-Israeli peace deal. A growing number of Americans openly worry, however, that U.S. support insulates Israel from the growing consequences of the lack of an Arab-Israeli agreement. From the other side, a growing number of Israelis argue that the U.S. push toward peacemaking is fundamentally misguided and that U.S. guarantees are faint comfort to a country facing existential threats. By this logic, some Israelis worry that reliance on a receding power threatens Israel in a far more profound way than U.S. weapon systems might protect it. Put another way, there is a growing U.S. belief that it is increasingly difficult to protect Israel from itself as well as a growing Israeli belief that the United States cannot protect Israel from its true threats.

It is undeniable that the United States has worked mightily to fund Israel's defense, going to great lengths to publicly reassure Israelis of the U.S. commitment to Israel's security and qualitative military edge. President Obama reaffirmed the 2007 U.S. commitment to provide Israel with \$30 billion in security assistance during the next 10 years as well as an additional \$205 million in funding for the Iron Dome anti-rocket system.⁵³ Moreover, the president approved Israel's acquisition of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which the Bush administration had reportedly opposed until October 2008.⁵⁴ Under President Obama, the United States has also strengthened Israel's offensive military capabilities through the transfer of GBU-39 "bunker busters," precision-guided bombs capable of penetrating six feet of reinforced concrete, and the GBU-28, a bunker buster capable of penetrating 20 feet of concrete.⁵⁵

Most Israelis across the political spectrum, even among the ultra-Orthodox, recognize that this military support is invaluable for Israel.⁵⁶ Yet Israelis are increasingly concerned about unconventional threats. Not only do U.S. weapon systems not protect them from those threats, but Israelis fear that the diplomatic concessions demanded as part of a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian agreement multiply those threats significantly.

The public controversy over a proposed U.S. incentive package, including 20 F-35s in exchange for a 90-day construction freeze in the settlements, is a prime example.⁵⁷ The failed deal worth more than \$3 billion—called a "bribe" by *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman—shows just how wide this disconnect has become.⁵⁸ Even the promise of a tangible increase in Israel's physical security was deemed insufficient to compensate for the intangible costs of briefly freezing settlement construction.

Although a majority of Israelis believe a Palestinian state is inevitable, most remain skeptical that a solution is possible in the foreseeable future.⁵⁹ More profoundly, however, they believe that an elaborate negotiation with Palestinians would be a distraction from Israel's core threats—Iran and Iran's nonstate allies of Hamas and Hezbollah.

As Israel faces these threats, its leaders worry that the United States projects weakness. As one senior security official lamented, "When the United States acts weak and not like a superpower, it worries Israel."⁶⁰ Many Israelis are quick to blame the Obama administration for failing to orchestrate events and shape trends. They point to policy failures promoting U.S. allies in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Egypt,

and beyond. Many Israelis saw worrying signs early in Obama's presidency. The president's talk of engagement with U.S. adversaries and outreach to the Muslim world contrasted sharply with the language of preemptive force and unilateralism put forth by President George W. Bush. Israelis could more easily identify with the worldview expressed in President Bush's rhetoric and had taken comfort in his unflinching public support and projection of U.S. strength.

Some Israelis, however, such as former Mossad chief Efraim Halvy, later recognized that many of Bush's specific policies had actually undermined their country's interests.⁶¹ His democratization policy helped bring Hamas to power in 2006, and the Iraq War removed what most Israelis had come to acknowledge as a buffer against Iran. The release of the National Intelligence Estimate in November 2007, which concluded that Iran had halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003, was another blow to Israeli confidence that the Bush administration was taking the Iranian threat seriously.⁶²

Nevertheless, many Israelis now miss not only the warmth of Bush's embrace but also the sense that the U.S. president is dedicated to the strategic aims that Israel shares. They fear that the shifts are not just innovations by a new, young American president but are, instead, the signs of a deeper, more permanent change in how the United States commits itself in the Middle East and to Israel's security. As much as the forces driving this shift are outside the control of either side, Israelis fear the trend itself may be irreversible.

This particular fear stems in part from how Israel sees the United States adapting its other commitments in the Middle East. Israelis across the political spectrum see the United States facing significant military budgetary constraints, a \$1.3 trillion deficit, and fatigue from a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Israelis are watching nervously as new regional powers such as Turkey and China emerge, and they fear that U.S. actions will be increasingly constrained as the United States slowly withdraws from Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving Israel to face its threats alone.

DEBATING ISRAEL'S VALUE TO THE UNITED STATES

By all accounts, a majority of Americans still strongly identify with the Israeli narrative but question the wisdom of Israel's recent policies not only for Israeli interests but for their impact on U.S. interests as well.⁶³ This questioning has been shaped in part by nearly a decade of war,

which has left many Americans frustrated with the Middle East. As the United States adjusts its regional strategy amid increasing budgetary burdens, the drawdowns in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the need to adapt strategies for engaging with rapidly changing Arab politics, the benefits that Israel provides are not always self-evident. Even among many of Israel's U.S. supporters there is a growing sense that Israel's strategic value has diminished significantly and not just because of the lack of progress on the Palestinian issue.

While many Israelis see this as a turn away from Israel, many Americans consider it a turn toward a more realistic understanding of how the needs for U.S. engagement in the Middle East are evolving. Although most in the U.S. government continue to see Israel as an asset, their concern over the potential of an Israeli military strike against Iran and Israel's predilection for initiating limited wars makes them see Israel as a driver of uncertainty rather than stability.

Criticism of Israel in U.S. intellectual circles has become more mainstream than at any time in the last six decades. This shift is indicated in large measure by the debate over the essay (and later book) by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt on the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. The two academics argued that "the United States has a terrorism problem in good part because it has long been so supportive of Israel." While the core argument of the book—that the United States went to war in Iraq because of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States—is seriously flawed, the book was an unprecedented challenge to the pro-Israel consensus that had governed politics in the United States for decades, concluding that "instead of being a strategic asset, in fact, Israel has become a strategic liability for the United States."⁶⁴

As this debate continues to rage in the United States, many Israeli professionals in the foreign affairs and security establishment are alarmed. They are especially concerned that, more than any time in the past, many Americans measure Israel's value as a strategic asset on the sole basis of its commitment to reaching a political agreement with the Palestinians. In particular, Israelis have become fixated on the linkage, articulated by Obama and his national security team, between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the broader interests of the United States in the Middle East.⁶⁵ They note that if the president believed that settlement activity and Israeli policy were the primary impediments to an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, then Israel could be blamed for undermining U.S. interests.

Israeli government officials tend to offer only cursory responses, however, because they believe that Israel's other strategic benefits to the United States are obvious. They note that Israel is a stable and solidly pro-U.S. ally in a region of growing anti-Americanism and that it provides strategic benefits ranging from counterterrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing to high-tech cooperative research. In this view, Israel is a security producer, like the United States, and an indispensable ally. Many Israelis seem convinced that, just as the United States is Israel's only true friend in the world, Israel is the only reliable and true ally of the United States in the Middle East.⁶⁶

From this Israeli perspective, the more security focused U.S. engagement remains in the Middle East, the more likely it will rely on Israel. It follows, however, that should the United States shift to rely more on diplomacy, consensus building, and multilateral cooperation to advance its interests, then the importance of the kinds of support Israel provides could diminish.

The notion that Israel might have diminishing strategic value to the United States has taken hold within some elements of the Israeli security and foreign policy establishments. In August 2009, a firestorm erupted when Israel's Boston-based consul general, Nadav Tamir, circulated an internal Foreign Ministry memo that was leaked to the press. Tamir's three-page memo, entitled "Melancholy Thoughts on Israel-U.S. Relations," argued that the U.S.-Israeli relationship is suffering as a result of Israeli hostility toward President Obama's efforts to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end.⁶⁷ Tamir was temporarily recalled to Jerusalem and later reassigned within the Foreign Ministry. In a similar vein, then Mossad director, Meir Dagan, reportedly told a closed Knesset committee that Israel's strategic value to the United States was eroding.⁶⁸

In response to these debates, some Israeli strategists, including those affiliated with the nationalist right, argue that Israel must constantly work to reinforce common strategic interests and demonstrate that Israel is a strategic asset for the United States. They argue that Israel needs to help the United States in any way it can, even if it occasionally undermines its own interests.⁶⁹ In this view, Israel can never take its relationship with the United States for granted. However, this is a lesson that many Israelis and U.S. supporters of Israel often forget.

It is also a lesson that is especially important going forward. Although the United States will remain engaged in the Middle East for

the foreseeable future, primarily because the global economy still depends on Middle East energy sources and a host of global threats emerge from the region, the costs—both economic and political—of U.S. engagement will likely rise. The cooperation of U.S. allies will become even more important at a time when U.S. allies have grown weary of U.S. strategy and question U.S. long-term commitments. Both the 2010 *National Security Strategy* and 2010 *Quadrennial Defense Review* emphasized the need for the United States to work with its partners and allies.⁷⁰ Now more than ever the United States needs its regional allies and partners to shoulder greater responsibilities and help the United States secure the region. In Israel's case, one of its most important contributions is working toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

NOTES

- 1 Of course, as a superpower, the United States has a wide set of interests and considerations to manage—from securing the flow of oil to global markets to Chinese currency policy. As a small power, Israel admittedly views its challenges through a much narrower prism of threats.
- 2 Edward Luttwak, "Strategic Aspects of U.S.-Israeli Relations," in *U.S.-Israeli Relations at the Crossroads*, ed. Gabriel Sheffer (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997), p. 209.
- 3 Examples include Israel's 1991 understanding with the United States not to respond to Iraq's firing of Scud missiles during the first Gulf War and its decision, under intense U.S. pressure, to cancel the sale of Phalcon airborne early warning systems to China in 2000, followed by a decision in 2005 to end defense exports to China. The decision complicated U.S.-Chinese relations and cost Israeli defense exporters millions of dollars in lost revenue.
- 4 For economic growth data, see "The Bank of Israel's Real Macroeconomic Forecasts for 2010–11 Update," Bank of Israel, September 28, 2010.
- 5 "Bank of Israel Inflation Report 2010," Bank of Israel, July–September 2010.
- 6 In the last decade Israeli fatalities from suicide attacks dropped from a peak of 53 in 2002 to one each in 2007 and 2008. There were no recorded suicide attacks in 2009 and 2010. See Israel Security Agency (Shabak), "Analysis of Attacks in the Last Decade: Suicide Attacks," 2010, www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/TerrorInfo/decade/SuicideAttacks.pdf.
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- December 30, 2010, www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4007030,00.html. For a detailed breakdown of attacks and casualties by month and year, see Terror Data and Trends, Israel Security Agency, various dates, www.shabak.gov.il/english/enterrordata/reports/pages/default.aspx.
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 - 9 See, for example, a report on the testimony of outgoing IDF head of military intelligence, Amos Yadlin, to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in November 2010; Jonathan Lis, "IDF Intelligence Chief: Israel's Next War Will See Heavy Casualties," *Haaretz.com*, November 2, 2010, www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/idf-intelligence-chief-israel-s-next-war-will-see-heavy-casualties-1.322484.
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 - 11 Israeli cabinet minister and former senior military officer, off-the-record discussion with author, Washington, D.C., October 21, 2009.
 - 12 Ehud Barak (address at Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., February 26, 2010), www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/EhudBarak.pdf.
 - 13 Gerald Steinberg, "Walking the Tightrope: Israeli Options in Response to Iranian Nuclear Developments," in *Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear Iran*, ed. Judith S. Yaphe and Charles D. Lutes (Washington D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, August 2005), p. 80.
 - 14 The Lebanon war of 2006 was sparked by Hezbollah's miscalculation of Israel's response to its cross-border attack and kidnapping of three soldiers. Following the war, Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah admitted that had he predicted the Israeli response he would not have launched the operation. Whether that revealed his true position or was intended for domestic Lebanese consumption remains unclear.
 - 15 Daniel Gordis, "The Other Existential Threat: Iran's Bomb, Israel's Soul, and the Future of the Jews," *Commentary*, October 2010, www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/the-other-existential-threat-15530.
 - 16 William J. Broad, John Markoff, and David E. Sanger, "Israeli Test on Worm Called Crucial in Iran Nuclear Delay," *New York Times*, January 15, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/01/16/world/middleeast/16stuxnet.html.
 - 17 Admiral Mullen used the same language to describe a nuclear Iran and a strike against Iran. See Admiral Mike Mullen (speech at Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 7, 2010), www.jcs.mil/speech.aspx?ID=1309.

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- 22 In making this argument, Israelis cite the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate although they were critical of its conclusion when first released.
- 23 Former senior IDF officer, private discussion with author, Jerusalem, October 17, 2010.
- 24 Hassan Nasrallah first used the concept of a spider web to describe Israel following Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000. See Hassan Nasrallah, "Speech during the Divine Victory Celebration," August 3, 2010, <http://english.moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=11970&cid=231>.
- 25 Youth leaders from the Hashomer Hatsair (Labor Zionist) movement, in a conversation with the author in Tel Aviv on May 6, 2010, quoted Hassan Nasrallah's spider web theory and worried that Israel was becoming weaker because the ethos of self-sacrifice for the greater good was disappearing from Israeli culture and values. These officials also pointed to the overemphasis on low Israeli military casualties, primarily in the Gaza war, as a public and IDF barometer of success in that campaign. This trend was also noted in the Israeli media.
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- 35 Amos Regev and Hemi Shalev, "De-legitimization, That's Our Problem," *Yisrael Hayom*, October 15, 2010, www.israelhayom.co.il/site/newsletter_article.php?id=8484.
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5

DEBATES OVER MODELS FOR COOPERATION

For nearly a half century, U.S. political and military support has led many Israelis to believe that the United States is Israel's only true friend and strategic ally in the world.¹ Now, as they contemplate their own options, many Israelis fear that America's commitment and friendship is eroding when their country needs it most. Political tension and the shifting U.S. strategic posture in the Middle East are already raising Israeli doubts about whether the United States would stand behind Israel at a moment of truth in a potential Israeli-Iranian confrontation.² The United States, in turn, wonders how best to calibrate its support for Israel in light of increasingly divergent strategic priorities and assessments of the Middle East.

With uncertainty and mistrust straining the partnership, Israeli and U.S. policymakers must think carefully and creatively about steps they can take to reassure each other of their mutual interests and commitments.

An Israeli-Palestinian agreement would of course help reduce tension. Although such an agreement would neither solve the Iranian threat nor address all of the endemic problems facing the Middle East, it would ease Israel's international isolation and delegitimization that is a growing strategic challenge to Israel and that extracts diplomatic costs for the United States. Conversely, neutralizing the Iranian threat could ease Israeli security concerns and pave the way for an agreement with the Palestinians. But both are unlikely scenarios for the foreseeable future: prospects are slim for a diplomatic breakthrough

in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations or for a conclusive resolution of the Iranian threat. And even if both happened, they would not by themselves completely heal the deeper ailments in the U.S.-Israeli partnership, including Israel's dependency and deep anxiety about the future of U.S. commitments.

At this critical juncture, the U.S.-Israeli alliance needs a clearer set of common objectives in the region. Policymakers on both sides should start exploring ways to prevent a further deterioration that will be difficult to repair, and to create a partnership more responsive to the interests of both allies.

FORMAL SECURITY GUARANTEES

Most Israelis and Americans tend to take U.S. security guarantees for granted. But the unprecedented threats to Israel's security, coupled with political dynamics that increasingly create tension between the two countries, raise uncomfortable questions about the precise meaning of the U.S. commitment to Israel's security. It is clear that U.S. security guarantees in 10 years may look different than they do now, but both sides have a responsibility to ensure the difference is constructive rather than a driver of more fear and uncertainty.

Part of the problem is ambiguity. The U.S. commitment to Israel's security has become a mantra in Washington. Most American politicians repeat the mantra without considering its meaning, imply that the United States would intervene militarily if Israel were under attack. More broadly, the United States has committed to meeting Israeli security requirements by supporting Israel's qualitative military edge (QME)—the commitment to Israel's "ability to counter and defeat credible military threats from any individual state, coalition of states or non-state actors, while sustaining minimal damage or casualties."³

Israeli strategists tend to agree that the U.S. commitment guarantees an ongoing effort to strengthen Israel's military capabilities so that it can defend itself. This hinges on QME and understandings over Israel's ambiguous nuclear capabilities.⁴ Yet, defining U.S. security guarantees around the concept of QME, which focuses on conventional weapons, when Israel faces a combination of conventional, asymmetric, and political challenges is increasingly insufficient.

Given the shifting political and strategic environments and strains on the U.S.-Israeli partnership, now is the time to ask hard questions about U.S. security guarantees. Could formalizing the U.S.-Israeli

defense relationship through explicit guarantees ease Israel's security concerns and ensure a more viable long-term partnership, more resilient to political and strategic shifts? Could such guarantees ease Israeli fears of Iran and persuade Israelis to reach an agreement with the Palestinians?

The idea of a formal alliance goes back to the early 1950s, when Israel's founders sought a defense alliance with a great power. The former editor of *Foreign Policy*, Richard H. Ullman, floated the idea seriously in the 1970s, suggesting that security guarantees would "give the Israelis the assurances they will need to withdraw from the occupied territory, and to persuade the Palestinians that the cause of Palestinian irredentism is forever beyond reach."⁵ Ullman emphasized the important psychological and deterrent components, writing that those assurances would not make the United States responsible for Israel's security, but rather "would be to signal to Israel's neighbors that the forces behind Israel's defense would be, in effect, inexhaustible."⁶ The idea has been raised every few years since—in the waning days of the Clinton administration, during President Clinton's last-ditch effort to broker Israeli agreements with Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization,⁷ and through internal Israeli government discussions in 2007 and 2010.⁸ Right now, in Washington, there is little visible interest in pursuing it.

There is more interest in Israel. A minority of Israelis prefer that the United States clarify and formalize its security guarantees, arguing that a clearer U.S. commitment is crucial to addressing Israel's multiple threats. Some centrist Israelis, however, argue that current verbal U.S. security guarantees and declarations are sufficient. They favor ambiguous guarantees over explicit ones and argue that there is no doubt that the United States would intervene to save Israel from an existential threat. Even those who accept the importance of the current ambiguous guarantees acknowledge that the nature of those guarantees can change over time depending on political and strategic circumstances. There is clearly an appetite within Israel for a debate over how U.S. guarantees could change, even if fear of the outcome of such a shift continues to dominate.

Israeli proponents from across the political spectrum see a formal guarantee or pact not only as a tool to strengthen Israel's deterrent but as a political tool to cement future U.S.-Israeli ties and strategic cooperation. As former Israeli national security adviser Uzi Arad has noted,

a treaty would also guarantee that political changes in the United States would not influence the U.S. commitment to Israel's defense.⁹ Israeli analyst Yair Evron cites a similar political rationale, arguing that a bilateral defense pact with the United States is crucial "in order to assure the continuity of the special strategic relationship between Israel and the United States."¹⁰ Evron adds that the absence of a formal framework for high-level consultations and the lack of a legal commitment to intervene militarily for Israel's defense can make political differences seem like U.S.-Israeli relations are shaky.¹¹

For Israel a defense pact would strengthen its deterrence against Iran and future enemies. It could also cement U.S.-Israeli relations in preparation for a time when the United States might be less engaged in the Middle East or if political winds in the United States were to change so dramatically that U.S. support for Israel was less forthcoming. Although there is no guarantee that such an agreement would not be dissolved at some future time, it would be a strong signal of the permanence of the bilateral relationship and a strong signal to each side that its fears about the other's actions need not be overwhelming.

For the United States, formal security commitments could help seal a comprehensive Arab-Israeli agreement, an elusive foreign policy objective of nearly every U.S. president since 1967. A defense agreement could also restrain Israel from taking any unilateral military operations against Iran. An added yet overlooked benefit would be to seal a long-term U.S. relationship with a strong regional power at a time of growing doubt regarding U.S. power and global commitments. Looking forward, the United States will need to rely even more on its allies to help promote U.S. interests, and solidifying partnerships will be an important aspect of this strategy.

These potential benefits are important, but the drawbacks are significant. A defense pact with Israel could further complicate broader U.S. policy in the Middle East and strain U.S. relations with a number of allies, particularly in the Gulf. More important perhaps, a defense pact could also draw the United States into a military confrontation with Iran or another party. Any treaty also requires Senate ratification and could well entail a political debate that many Israelis and Americans would rather avoid. A formal pact also requires building a force structure to back up security commitments, which could be a contested and sensitive process.

Israeli opponents of formal security guarantees argue that they would constrain Israel's freedom of action while making Israel even more dependent on the United States. Some Israelis also doubt whether a legally binding security commitment would be honored at the moment of truth. They point out that even the execution of a legal obligation is dependent on presidential and congressional political will. Former Israeli ambassador to the United States and retired air force general David Ivri has argued that as long as the United States values the partnership, it will help Israel, and, if it doesn't, not even a written agreement will be binding.¹² In other words, the uncertainty of the relationship's trajectory means that a written agreement could ultimately be unenforceable.

Indeed, beyond concerns over form and execution, the overarching question for Israelis and Americans is whether a security pact or formal guarantee could actually solve the key problems facing Israel and the United States. U.S. advocates have largely seen a security guarantee as an incentive and solution to Israel's vulnerability and security challenges, which could cement an Arab-Israeli agreement. Israelis tend to see it instead as a tool to bolster their deterrence and as an insurance policy for preserving long-term U.S.-Israeli ties. It is questionable whether the offer of a security guarantee would actually change either side's calculations or make each more amenable to the interests and aims of the other.

The record of Israeli public opinion shows that such concerns are not unfounded. During U.S.-Israeli discussions around the 2000 Camp David talks, Prime Minister Ehud Barak argued that a U.S.-Israeli defense agreement could strengthen Israeli public support for a peace agreement. Yet polls at the time illustrated that the majority of Israeli respondents believed that Barak had offered too many concessions during the negotiations.¹³ Less than a decade later a public opinion poll taken in 2008 asked a sample of Israeli respondents whether "Israel should return to the 1967 borders in exchange for a defense pact with the United States, which includes a guarantee of Israel's security." According to the poll, 60 percent of respondents were against the idea, and 23 percent were in favor.¹⁴

EXTENDED U.S. NUCLEAR DETERRENT

Another related idea, which has gained traction in recent years, is extending a U.S. nuclear deterrent over Israel.¹⁵ As Iran moves closer to

mastering the nuclear enrichment cycle and develops methods of delivering a nuclear warhead, an extended nuclear deterrent could serve to clarify U.S. commitments and U.S. and Israeli military contingencies vis-à-vis Iran. The United States has extended nuclear guarantees to a number of allies through NATO and bilateral defense agreements, and many observers see its already strong commitment to Israel's deterrent capabilities as providing an optimal foundation for a nuclear guarantee.

The essence of a U.S. nuclear deterrent would be an unequivocal message to Iran or any other state that a nuclear attack against Israel would be met with a similar U.S. attack against Iran. This could be purely declaratory in the form of a strong presidential statement or could be formalized in writing as part of a defense agreement. Both Israeli and U.S. officials have raised the idea in the past,¹⁶ and some analysts argue that it could be a mutually beneficial step, strengthening Israel's deterrent and preventing Israel from taking unilateral military action against Iran that would jeopardize U.S. interests.¹⁷

Bruce Riedel articulates the idea well: "if Israel were confident that a formal U.S. assurance that a nuclear attack on Israel would be met by a U.S. nuclear attack on Iran, Jerusalem might be more inclined to calculate that the risks of living with a nuclear-capable Iran were manageable."¹⁸ He continues that a "guarantee of U.S. retaliation against Iran would provide important psychological and political reassurance to the Israeli public and strengthen deterrence against Iran."¹⁹

According to Riedel, the United States should enhance "Israel's deterrence posture," including its second-strike capability, in order to persuade Israel not to attack Iran.²⁰ Israeli analyst Efraim Kam agrees, arguing that for deterrence to work the United States would have to help strengthen Israel's deterrent capabilities, "not least as an important way of persuading Israel not to engage in an independent military operation."²¹

U.S. proponents see extended deterrence primarily as a political and psychological tool that can reassure Israelis and send a clear message to Iran. But Israelis, across the political spectrum both inside and outside of government, overwhelmingly reject the notion that a U.S. nuclear umbrella is a solution to the Iranian threat. They believe the core of Israel's deterrence must rely solely on their own capabilities, and many believe Israel's own undeclared nuclear capability is sufficient to deter Iran. For some Israeli analysts, the umbrella idea raises the question

of why a reportedly nuclear-armed state requires a nuclear guarantee from another state. This question could lead to a broader debate on Israel's nuclear capabilities, which most Israeli and U.S. government officials would rather avoid.

But an even more fundamental difference is at work. While Israel remains focused on preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons, the United States seems to be growing more comfortable with the idea of simply deterring and containing Iran from using nuclear weapons should they build them. For instance, the second layer of Riedel's argument essentially sets out the basic framework for a U.S.-led deterrence and containment strategy once Iran presumably achieves nuclear capabilities.

In this sense Americans and Israelis are having two separate conversations, and neither side accepts the merits of the other's argument. Israelis see any discussion of extended deterrence as counterproductive and as a sign that the United States has come to terms with a nuclear Iran. The United States, in contrast, argues that it has not exhausted all of its practical means for stopping Iran's nuclear program.

U.S. efforts to assuage Israeli fears along these lines have been largely unsuccessful. In mid-2009, for example, when Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton raised the idea of a nuclear umbrella for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Israeli officials reacted sharply.²² Dan Meridor, a staunch pragmatist and minister of intelligence and atomic energy, responded that "it was as if they [the United States] were saying that they have come to terms with such a possibility, and this is a mistake. Right now, we must deal with preventing such an eventuality, not coming to terms with it."²³

Responding to these concerns, Riedel argues that "Israel's own nuclear arsenal should be sufficient to deter Iran, but an American nuclear guarantee would add an extra measure of assurance to Israelis."²⁴ Indeed, Riedel's argument is largely about the psychological effects a U.S. nuclear umbrella would have in Israel by signaling that the United States remains engaged in and committed to the region.

A few Israeli analysts also believe that an extended U.S. deterrent could enhance Israel's own deterrence posture. But they are adamant that extended U.S. deterrence "should be considered solely as an addition to Israel's independent deterrent, not as a substitute for it"²⁵—and many Israelis still tend to question the credibility of an extended U.S. nuclear deterrent, however noble its aims. In the words of one Israeli

official, “it is difficult for Israel to be reassured by words when it comes to Iran.”²⁶

More important, Israelis find little actual comfort in the prospect of a U.S. response to an Iranian attack against Israel. For the majority of Israelis, a U.S. counterstrike, whether as part of a formal nuclear umbrella or not, would be too late.

An extended U.S. deterrent also would not address the deep psychological effect of a potentially nuclear Iran previously noted in chapter 4. As one conservative Israeli scholar has argued, “Even if Israel does possess a second strike capability, and even if the United States could be counted on to punish a nuclear attack on the Jewish state, the existential condition of the Jews would still have reverted to that experienced in pre-state Europe.”²⁷ These fears run deep in the Israeli psyche. Israelis believe dealing with them is a process that only Israel can undertake, much as deterring Iran must stem from Israel’s own military capabilities.

Beyond these doubts it is also unclear whether an extended nuclear deterrent against Iran could function optimally without a more robust force structure throughout the entire Middle East. From that and other perspectives, extended deterrence could be most useful if it were extended to U.S. Gulf allies as well as Israel. This could prevent or limit broader regional proliferation, which many analysts believe would occur should Iran cross the nuclear threshold. At the same time, though, it is unlikely to have a significant impact on the threat of nuclear terrorism, where deterrence theory does not necessarily apply.²⁸

DEBATING ISRAEL'S DEPENDENCE

Bilateral U.S.-Israeli tension during the past several years has resurrected an old debate in elite circles about Israel’s dependency on the United States. Many current and former Israeli officials across the political spectrum express the need to become more self-reliant and independent in order to prepare for a time when U.S. support might be less forthcoming. The debate over Israeli dependency on the United States is growing louder, both inside and outside of government.

The debate has led some Israeli officials and strategic thinkers to conclude that Israel needs to strengthen its “networks of common interests” with other regional powers in preparation for a future multipolar world order, where the United States is less influential and willing to manage global affairs.²⁹ China, India, and Europe are the

most attractive candidates, and many Israelis, especially those of Russian origin, view Russia as an important partner as well.

In a 2009 visit to Moscow, Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman chaired the first session of the Russia-Israel strategic dialogue. At the time one analyst argued that Lieberman sought to build a strategic partnership with Russia in part to balance Israel's overreliance on U.S. diplomatic, financial, and military support.³⁰

Israel has also built ties with China, but those relations are complicated, and most Israelis largely conclude that China is not a viable or reliable strategic partner. For one, China is increasingly dependent on Middle Eastern oil to fuel its economy, and it gets nearly half of its total imports from the region.³¹ Chinese dependency on Middle Eastern oil creates distance between Israel and China and limits cooperation. More important, China has no moral or political connection to Israel, which has been such a strong factor in the development of the U.S.-Israeli partnership.

In the past many of Israel's friends in Europe have advocated a closer Israel-NATO partnership. Although Israelis, including those in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's inner circle, have been open to the idea, Israel's complicated ties with Europe and uncertainty over NATO's future as an effective institution make it an unlikely match.

In other words, while Israelis see potential benefits in strengthening ties with other powers, they also understand that no country besides the United States offers the same level of political commitment and strategic affinity. Indeed, Israelis are keenly aware that a decline in U.S. political support would be devastating—it would fuel the international campaign to delegitimize Israel and leave Israel alone to cope with what it understands to be a harsh and biased international system.

But, while Israelis overwhelmingly understand there is no practical alternative to the diplomatic support and the other diverse aspects of the partnership with the United States, some of them do argue that Israel should adapt to less U.S. military aid.

Many Israelis from across the political spectrum, including those within the national security and foreign policy establishment, see a fundamental weakness in Israel's dependence, which contradicts Israel's core defense principle of self-reliance. While Israelis pride themselves on being strong enough to defend themselves and never asking the United States to fight on their behalf,³² many acknowledge that the reality is much different. Israel's air force is dependent on U.S. spare

parts, and its military production line relies heavily on U.S. components. U.S. military aid has ensured Israel's QME, but it has also constrained Israel's defense industry, giving the United States essential oversight over Israeli defense production and exports.³³

Former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) chief of staff Dan Haloutz argues that, although Israel's unique relationship with the United States is an unrivaled strategic asset, its dependence on U.S. military aid is a strategic burden.³⁴ Haloutz and others have argued that U.S. military aid to Israel justifies U.S. support to other Arab armies, and that equation may have negative long-term consequences for Israel. Many other Israeli government and military officials echo that sentiment and question whether the current level of assistance is sustainable in the long term.³⁵

This debate centers around several key arguments. One, associated with the nationalistic right, is that if Israel were less dependent on U.S. military assistance, the U.S. government would have less leverage to pressure Israel into compromising on the Palestinian issue.³⁶

Some Israelis also believe that being dependent on foreign aid "chips away at Israel's sovereignty."³⁷ This particular argument also remains somewhat limited to nationalistic circles, but it does signify how deeply the notion of self-reliance runs.

The third argument is that Israel's dependency restricts the growth of Israel's domestic defense industrial base. This is the one heard more widely among the professional cadres of the foreign affairs and defense establishment.

At the center of this last discussion is the question of whether U.S. military aid is vital to Israel's long-term security, or whether Israel would be better served by gradually phasing out its dependence on annual U.S. aid. Could a more independent Israel, which is less dependent on U.S. military assistance, create a healthier and more viable long-term U.S.-Israeli partnership?

It is not an easy debate to have. For one, there is a fundamental disconnect between Israeli and U.S. perspectives on military aid and cooperation. The United States tends to see the components of aid and military cooperation as a solution to Israel's strategic threats and a strategy to make Israel secure enough to take risks for peace. Moreover, military aid has become a deeply political issue and symbol of U.S. commitment. Israel, meanwhile, believes its threats will never go

away; military assistance does not solve these problems, but merely helps manage them.

Some Israeli national security officials and former senior military officials suggest gradually reducing U.S. military aid in exchange for expanding U.S.-Israeli military cooperation in other fields.³⁸ Some strong American supporters of Israel agree. As former U.S. undersecretary of defense Dov Zakheim has argued, “the more Israel can reduce its dependence on U.S. aid, the better.”³⁹

Interconnected with the issue of aid and dependency is the question of whether the concept of QME is outdated, as it is geared toward conventional threats at a time when Israel’s primary threats are nonconventional. As one veteran congressional staff member framed it, the marginal return on military assistance in terms of security for Israel has diminished significantly in the wake of the July 2006 war against Hezbollah. Conventional weapon systems are not obsolete, but their impact on Israel’s primary threats is limited.

Still many Israelis, including Defense Minister Ehud Barak, oppose any possible reduction in military assistance. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* in March 2011, Barak argued that “the issue of qualitative military edge for Israel becomes more essential for us, and I believe also more essential for you [the United States]. . . . It might be wise to invest another \$20 billion to upgrade the security of Israel for the next generation or so. . . . A strong, responsible Israel can become a stabilizer in such a turbulent region.”⁴⁰

Although the Israeli defense establishment is the direct recipient of U.S. aid, the debate over that aid is most intense within it. This internal debate in part centers on the question of whether Israel is best served by agreeing to limit its defense exports in return for aid and access to U.S. weapon systems or whether it should forgo that assistance in favor of selling its products in international markets. Israel’s past weapons sales to China have been the most obvious example of the latter alternative, but there are others.⁴¹

Prior to the signing of the 2007 memorandum of understanding on U.S. foreign aid to Israel, the Israeli Ministry of Defense held internal debates on whether to initiate a reduction in U.S. military aid.⁴² Proponents of the upgrade argued that Israel’s economy could not shoulder the long-term burdens of its military requirements. Israel’s military budget already consumes approximately 15 percent of the state budget, if not more.⁴³ Many defense officials also argued that a reduction in

aid would have a direct and significant impact on the IDF's operational level performance.

Nevertheless, it is an ongoing debate, and the opposite view still appears prominently. In July 2009, after tension escalated between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government, the Defense Ministry asked itself the question of how Israel would cope without U.S. aid. The answer, according to media reports that quoted a senior IDF source, was that "Israel can cope without U.S. aid."⁴⁴ The same official acknowledged that the short-term ramifications of a cut in aid would be a blow, but in the long term Israel could widen its income from global cooperation and sales that are currently limited because of U.S.-Israeli understandings.⁴⁵

Given the symbolic and political nature of U.S. aid, the initiative for this kind of shift would likely have to come from Israel.⁴⁶ Despite the broad bureaucratic opposition to critically examining the logic and structure of U.S. aid,⁴⁷ there is certainly a precedent for such a move. In his first term as prime minister in 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu called for a reduction in U.S. economic support funds, arguing that Israel sought "economic independence" from the United States.⁴⁸ Although he also secured increased foreign military financing at the time, Netanyahu's move demonstrates an Israeli willingness to evaluate the partnership in a way that is uncomfortable for many American supporters of Israel.

To Israelis, military cooperation with the United States is vital, but it is not viewed as a solution to a specific security problem, nor is it a sufficient incentive to make concessions to the Palestinians. It is a dependency that Israelis see as too beneficial to sacrifice, yet too out of step with their own security concerns to be beneficial in precisely the way they want. The inability to escape this paradox only reinforces Israel's dependency and deepens its anxiety, resentment, and fear of abandonment.

The United States, for its part, has a much more straightforward interest in maintaining security cooperation. U.S. aid is a tool of leverage and serves to restrain Israeli policies. Some critics of Israel and U.S. support for Israel argue that decades of aid and support have not successfully convinced Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territory or sign a comprehensive peace agreement. Still, maintaining Israel's QME has helped preserve the regional balance of power and prevented the outbreak of state-to-state conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors for four decades. Moreover, a large portion of Israel's aid is used

to purchase U.S.-made defense products, a significant benefit to U.S. defense companies. If aid were to decrease, there are no guarantees that Israel would purchase as much from the United States as it currently does.

At the moment, Israel coordinates nearly all aspects of its military with the United States, from IDF deployments in the West Bank to Iran strategy. This stems in part because Israel uses U.S. weapon systems for these operations. The understanding was set in 1981 following Israel's attack on Iraq's Osirak reactor using U.S. aircraft. The attack led to a delay in transferring F-16s to Israel and eventually a public statement by Prime Minister Menachem Begin that Israel would "take into consideration American interests, those of our friend and ally" in future military operations.⁴⁹ Without large amounts of U.S. military aid, Israel might feel less compelled to coordinate its actions so closely with the United States and might be less inhibited than usual in making unilateral and overwhelming shows of force.

Although these concerns and domestic political considerations create reluctance in U.S. circles to alter the aid relationship, the U.S. fiscal situation (as discussed in chapter 3) prompts concerns about the sustainability of foreign aid more broadly. Knowing this, Israelis are already asking themselves how sustainable the current level of aid will remain over time, particularly since the current aid agreement expires in 2017.

The paradox of Israel's dependency has been manageable until now, but the future is uncertain, especially as many Israelis question the future of U.S. commitments and influence in the Middle East. Amid all of these debates, concerns, and anxieties, Americans and Israelis cannot forever avoid finding answers to their most difficult questions. If anything, now is the most opportune time to address them: cracks in the bilateral relationship are significant, but key institutions and motivation for maintaining the deep partnership are still very strong on both sides. There will be difficult choices ahead, but Americans and Israelis should use these opportunities, while they can, to have a serious and actionable bilateral conversation about the future.

NOTES

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KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has sought to understand how and why the U.S.-Israeli partnership is drifting. In the process it addresses difficult issues that many in both countries would rather leave unspoken. The importance of the partnership to U.S. interests in the Middle East and Israel's security, however, requires a critical assessment of why the partnership is changing and what lies ahead. Popular revolts in the Middle East signal an era of heightened instability for the foreseeable future and make addressing U.S.-Israeli differences more urgent. Those events have served as a reminder that change is inevitable and what may seem like given certainties today can quickly erode tomorrow.

KEY FINDINGS

ISRAELI AND U.S. SOCIETIES AND POLITICS ARE CHANGING

It would be convenient to dismiss the crisis in U.S.-Israeli relations that unfolded in 2009–2010 as the inevitable clash between a progressive U.S. administration and nationalist Israeli government. Many supporters on both sides prefer to interpret the current differences as mere turbulence in the midst of a fundamentally durable relationship.

But the differences are deeper than personalities and chemistry between Israeli and U.S. leaders. Social and political trends in the United States and Israel are reshaping the politics of both societies. What is especially alarming is the erosion of the intangible elements of support,

most importantly the ideal of shared values that had been the glue of the partnership long before the strategic alliance took shape.

Israeli society today is very different from the Israel most Americans think they know. The rightward shift in Israeli politics, influenced in part by the expansion of ultra-Orthodox and Russian Israelis into public life and the retreat of Israel's secular liberal elite, is changing the values and priorities of Israeli society. These social and demographic shifts are, in turn, driving and shaping Israeli politics that are increasingly at odds with the politics of many U.S. supporters of Israel as well as long-standing U.S. policies. Israel's politics, which have been driven in part by leaders trying to survive rather than charting a long-term course that addresses the country's deeper challenges, have reinforced these political trends.

In the United States, meanwhile, Israel has become a complicated domestic political issue. Unconditional support for Israel is becoming manipulated as a political tool in Washington's growing partisan divide, threatening to undermine the bipartisan support that has been a core element of the partnership. At the same time, liberal segments of the American Jewish community, especially among the younger generations, are feeling increasingly estranged from Israel. These dynamics amplify political disagreements and raise doubts about the values and reliability of each ally. Demographic and social trends in both countries suggest these political dynamics will continue in the years ahead.

On a strategic level those changes create greater uncertainty about how the United States and Israel cooperate to secure their interests and confront common challenges. More often than in the past, Israelis and Americans see both the politics and policies of the other undermining their strategic interests. These trends erode mutual trust, deepening America's doubts of Israel's strategic value while reinforcing Israeli fears about U.S. commitments to its security. Distrust creates uncertainty, causing each side to act more unpredictably in order to secure its own interests. The depth of strategic challenges facing both allies raises the stakes, further highlighting the diverging ways in which most Americans and Israelis see the world amid the tectonic changes occurring in the Middle East. Ignoring these perceptions only creates more friction and unpredictability, pointing to more turbulent times ahead.

ISRAELIS AND AMERICANS SEEK DIFFERENT OUTCOMES AND SOLUTIONS TO THEIR CHALLENGES

More than in the past, Israeli and U.S. threat assessments, understandings of the Middle East, and strategies for addressing threats diverge. Full convergence has never existed, and no two allies share identical perceptions and strategies. Yet these sharp divergences emerge during a period of significant regional change that will affect the interests of both allies in different ways. Whereas the United States sees a historic opportunity to fundamentally change the authoritarian foundation of Arab governance, Israel sees a direct threat to stability that could be exploited by radical forces.

These differences reflect more concrete threats as well. Historically, Israel has mostly aimed to manage its security challenges in the absence of any promising means to more permanently resolve them; yet now, in the face of a perceived existential threat from Iran, it searches for an enduring solution. It sees Iran behind its most pressing security challenges—from a nuclear challenge to support for Hamas and Hezbollah. The United States, in contrast, has continued managing the Iranian threat as it seeks to resolve the Palestinian issue in the belief that an Israeli-Palestinian agreement could fundamentally improve the regional political and security landscape. Israelis argue that attempting to resolve the Palestinian issue while Hamas remains the dominant Palestinian political actor is not only untenable but dangerous. The differences reflect different assessments and priorities as well as different policies for addressing the challenges.

Israel believes urgent action against Iran is necessary and wants the United States to use force or at least the threat of force to persuade Iran to stop its nuclear weapons program. While Israel might have the military capability to delay Iran's nuclear enrichment program through military action for a limited period, Israelis widely believe that only the United States has the combined political and military assets to mount a broader military campaign against Iran's nuclear program. To Israelis, stopping Iran's development of nuclear weapons is the test of U.S. power and commitment in the region. Israelis fear that the United States will fail the test, leaving Israel to face its threats alone.

Instead of threatening military force to stop Iran's nuclear program, Israelis hear talk of engagement, deterrence, and containment. For Israel the message is clear: the United States seeks to manage the Iranian

threat, not resolve it conclusively. Many Israelis interpret the U.S. unwillingness to threaten Iran with military force as not only strengthening Iran's resolve but making a nuclear-armed Iran inevitable.

Meanwhile the U.S. government has declared resolving the Palestinian issue as a national security interest. After raising the Palestinian issue so high on its agenda, the Obama administration remains committed to seeking a diplomatic breakthrough. The administration believes that the Israeli government continues undermining opportunities for progress, which ultimately hurts both Israeli and U.S. interests.

In the years ahead the diplomatic challenges will likely intensify and spark additional U.S.-Israeli friction. Having lost faith in the ability of the United States to secure statehood, the Palestinian leadership seeks to leverage growing international sympathy to force a showdown in the United Nations and through international recognition of an independent state. The United States may well continue to use its veto in the UN Security Council, as it did in February 2011, to prevent resolutions condemning Israel or deemed to threaten Israeli interests. Doing so, however, will increase the international diplomatic costs in terms of U.S. credibility at a time when the United States is moving to rely more on multilateral support on a range of international and regional efforts, and will further strain U.S.-Israeli ties.

If U.S.-Israeli relations continue to hinge on progress toward an Israeli-Palestinian agreement or decisive resolution of the Iranian nuclear threat, both sides will remain frustrated and U.S.-Israeli ties will undoubtedly suffer.

Much of the frustration will come as political and strategic shifts fuel Israeli uncertainty about U.S. power. Israelis believe the United States is projecting weakness in a region that has no mercy for the weak. The Israeli elite do not doubt U.S. power and military capabilities, but they do question the ways in which the United States will use its power in the Middle East to help promote stability and secure Israeli interests. Many Israelis across the political spectrum fear that Israel can no longer take America's projection of power for granted in an increasingly multipolar world. They see regional powers like China, Russia, and Turkey increasingly challenging U.S. policy and constraining its ability to protect Israeli security.

FAILURE TO ADDRESS POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC SHIFTS
WILL ERODE THE QUALITY OF U.S.-ISRAELI TIES

The threat is that political and strategic tension will gradually erode the quality of U.S.-Israeli cooperation and, at some point in the future, either by design or as a consequence of unforeseen circumstances, will lead to a deeper rift that will be difficult to repair. The need to rebuild trust between the United States and Israel is urgent because the lack of trust makes addressing common challenges more complicated and difficult. Ignoring these troubling dynamics threatens to undermine the national security of both Israel and the United States and risks deepening the spiral of mistrust at a moment when the United States needs the full cooperation of its allies and Israel faces serious challenges to its international standing and security.

For Israelis the stakes are high: as they see U.S. power and commitment declining, they foresee a parallel decline in their own power. For decades, Israel's partnership with the United States has been a force multiplier for its own deterrent. Yet, if the United States fails to shape the Middle East strategic environment, then Israel is more vulnerable. Those fears create deep uncertainty for Israeli policymakers, making decisive action to protect Israeli security and interests more urgent. If Israel perceives that the United States is passive or indecisive as Iran approaches nuclear breakout, Israel's impulse to take unilateral action will increase, making Israeli decisionmaking less predictable and posing significant challenges for U.S. management of the Middle East.

Whatever Israel's unease about U.S. strategy, however, there is simply no substitute for U.S. leadership in the Middle East in the foreseeable future. Israel has few options for steering a different course. It will continue trying to influence the shape of U.S. Middle East policies, but its ability will remain limited especially if Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy stays frozen. Rather than expect that the United States will neutralize the Iranian threat, Israel will have to adapt and work within a broader U.S. containment security architecture, regardless of the drawbacks of such a framework. Even though many Israelis and Israel's supporters would like to believe that U.S. military power can solve Israel's most pressing problems if properly applied, ultimately the United States can only help Israel manage its threats and challenges; it cannot provide solutions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES SHOULD RESTORE A SENSE OF PARTNERSHIP AND COMMON MISSION

It is unrealistic to expect U.S. and Israeli interests to be completely aligned. As a small country in a constant state of war, Israel's perceptions, threat assessments, and strategies for pursuing its interests naturally differ from those of a global superpower. Yet, common cause and understandings on key issues are vital for a healthy alliance. Without a common mission and purpose to guide the U.S.-Israeli partnership, the relationship will continue drifting, and disagreements on key strategic challenges will threaten the interests of both allies. Today not only is there no common vision and strategy, but Israeli and U.S. policies seem to be working at cross-purposes on key issues. Israeli and U.S. policymakers at the highest levels should outline a common vision to ensure a lasting partnership that effectively addresses their most important challenges. This has to start with a commitment by leaders on both sides.

Formulating a common mission is a shared project. Yet the burden is largely on Israel to adapt to new strategic and political realities because Israel has the most at stake in the partnership as well as the most to lose from its deterioration. As former Mossad chief Efraim Halevy has written, "in order to become a valuable ally, Israel has had to seek and nurture assets and capabilities of its own, of such caliber as to impress upon Washington that not only was the State of Israel here to stay, but that its activities and influence would stand the U.S. in good stead."¹ To 11 successive U.S. presidents, Israel's leadership has successfully articulated a strategy and vision that both complemented broader U.S. goals and made Israel a vital component of pursuing those objectives. Israel's leadership needs to urgently restore that vital link and connection.

The goal is all the more important because the United States has been struggling to articulate a coherent set of policies to address the tectonic shifts under way in the Middle East since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in early 2011. To preserve the vitality of the U.S.-Israeli partnership, Israel should adapt and make itself indispensable in helping pursue U.S. objectives in an evolving Middle East strategic environment. Without a clearer Israeli strategy of how Israel fits into the

U.S. vision of the Middle East, the partnership will continue to drift, with unforeseen consequences for both the United States and Israel.

Of utmost importance for strengthening the sense of U.S.-Israeli partnership is a practical strategy to address the Palestinian issue. It is difficult to see how U.S.-Israeli ties can improve without fundamental Israeli commitments toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Reaching an agreement with the Palestinians will neither transform the Middle East nor solve a host of challenges facing the United States and Israel, including extremism, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. An Israeli-Palestinian agreement would, however, relieve one set of grievances out of many in the region. It would also remove a key issue of contention that has complicated U.S. management of the Middle East, which will only become more complicated as populations in the region demand greater representation and an end to authoritarian rule.

The problem is that the prospect of reaching an agreement under the current circumstances is low. This poses a significant dilemma for both the United States and Israel, because without resolving the problem or at least making some progress, U.S.-Israeli ties will likely suffer and the international drive to delegitimize Israel will intensify.

Although the Palestinian issue remains a source of bilateral tension with few signs of progress, an Israeli-Syrian political agreement could significantly alter the current course of U.S.-Israeli dynamics and strengthen strategic cooperation. Past discussions of an Israeli-Syrian agreement included concrete U.S. security guarantees, which would likely be required for any future agreement. Many obstacles remain to such an agreement, including domestic upheaval against the Assad regime in Syria and Israeli opposition, but an Israeli-Syrian agreement could have a dramatic impact on the Middle East strategic environment, giving the U.S.-Israeli partnership a new sense of purpose.

As Middle Eastern regimes adjust to demands for greater representation, maintaining regional stability will become more challenging. Israel's place in these broader regional changes is important, not because it is at the center of Arab public discourse, but because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue plaguing U.S. efforts to manage a range of tasks in the Middle East. Future Arab governments will be more attuned to public perceptions, and Arab pressure groups are unlikely to remain as accommodating of Israel as they have been, as Egypt's decision to broker a fragile Hamas-Fatah agreement and open the Gaza border after a nearly five-year closure clearly demonstrates.

ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES SHOULD CLARIFY
COMMITMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PARTNERSHIP

As part of a broader effort to rebuild trust, the United States and Israel should use the U.S.-Israel Strategic Dialogue to discuss frankly each ally's commitments and responsibilities in order to address the deep uncertainties on both sides. Today the depth of U.S.-Israeli military-to-military cooperation is unprecedented. Yet in the current political and strategic climate, vague verbal declarations about America's "commitment to Israel's security" have become slogans rather than a formula for practical security arrangements. U.S. politicians and government officials will continue using such mottoes for political gain, but overusing them may exacerbate Israeli anxiety because their vagueness is subject to such wide interpretation. Clarifying contingencies that may require U.S. intervention or coordinated military action, most importantly regarding Iran, is highly sensitive but could add an important element of certainty to the relationship.

Some Americans have argued that extending a U.S. nuclear deterrent to Israel would relieve Israeli anxiety of a nuclear Iran. Others have suggested a bilateral defense treaty. Neither, however, provides solutions to Israel's strategic challenges, which are a daunting mixture of hard security threats from states and nonstate actors combined with the psychological and diplomatic threat of growing international isolation.

The U.S. government can address Israeli anxiety and uncertainty, to at least some extent, by clarifying the meaning of existing U.S. security guarantees, including a deeper discussion about how Israel's conventional capabilities match its threats.

Israel's responsibilities as an ally require clarification as well. For the sake of the United States and its own interests, the Israeli government should identify and articulate how its policies and actions contribute to U.S. interests in the Middle East and globally, beyond military and counterterrorism cooperation. Those elements of cooperation remain important, but Israel should demonstrate to the United States that it is a net asset in other ways as well. Most important, it should seek to ensure that it is a force for stability in the region by working toward an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, calibrating its use of force, and striving to improve its ties with other U.S. allies such as Turkey and Gulf Arab states.

Progress toward these aims requires not only internal deliberations in Israel and the United States but a frank bilateral dialogue. For all of the high-level interactions, visiting official delegations, and close consultation on key issues, the quality of dialogue on sensitive issues affecting the partnership has deteriorated significantly. Most politically sensitive issues are either deferred or addressed only superficially. As close partners, Israel and the United States should strengthen the current U.S.-Israel Strategic Dialogue framework to address both the immediate and the long-range issues that confront the partnership. A more transparent and honest discussion of future constraints and commitments could ease some doubt and rebuild trust.

ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES SHOULD PREPARE FOR A DIFFERENT FUTURE

Changes under way in Israel, the United States, and the Middle East ensure that the future will be different from the past. U.S. assistance and support for Israel over the decades have helped transform Israel into a powerful regional force and helped the United States promote regional stability for decades. Yet looking forward there is no guarantee that the United States will be able or willing to maintain the current level of support indefinitely. In the overall U.S. budget picture and U.S. expenditures in the Middle East, the amount of aid Israel receives seems inconsequential. Yet, in a fiscal environment where the U.S. government is debating cutting \$4 trillion in spending over the next decade, and even the U.S. military is not immune to budget cuts, it is shortsighted for Israel to expect current aid levels to remain untouched over the long term.

Although U.S. military aid is reassuring, especially given the unprecedented threats Israel faces, many Israelis, inside and outside of government, question whether the current level of assistance is sustainable in the long term. U.S. aid was crucial for transforming Israel several decades ago, yet today it has become a symbol of Israeli dependence.

Some level of interdependency is unavoidable and even mutually beneficial. U.S. military aid strengthens Israel's deterrence against regional armies. Strong military ties and aid also lower the risk that the Israel Defense Forces will take unilateral actions that undermine U.S. interests. Yet under shifting political and geopolitical circumstances, U.S. military and political assistance ultimately undermines Israel's

long-term autonomy and ability to manage its own defense needs. The challenge is to maintain a degree of interdependence that is mutually beneficial rather than a partnership that reinforces Israel's dependence on the United States.

There is an important opportunity to have the sensitive conversation over rethinking aid at a time when the foundation of the partnership remains solid and cooperation robust. The U.S. and Israeli governments should begin discussing gradually phasing out aid after the expiration of the current aid agreement, in exchange for greater cooperation in joint research and development as well as providing Israel access to a wider range of military technology. Such a trade-off could benefit both countries. More important is that Israel could advance to a new, more mature strategic partnership with the United States on a level with other U.S. allies such as Australia or Great Britain. A gradual process of phasing out U.S. aid could also provide Israel an opportunity to strengthen its military and economic base and breathe new life into its founding principles of self-sufficiency. These discussions should focus on maintaining Israel's QME, while relying more on its own procurement abilities.

Overall, this process should include frank, high-level discussions through the U.S.-Israel Strategic Dialogue and the Joint Political-Military Group but must also include congressional leaders and pro-Israel lobbying organizations that promote U.S. military aid to Israel. The objective should be to identify areas to enhance cooperation that will help ease that gradual transition and over time create more durable ties and a secure Israel. A special working group within the Joint Political-Military Group, comprising defense officials and industry representatives on both sides, could identify appropriate defense technologies for joint research and development as well as specific U.S. and Israeli companies to undertake such projects. This would include a monitoring and oversight mechanism to ensure compliance with U.S. defense export regulations and prevent unauthorized technology transfer. More broadly, the United States and Israel should continue close military-to-military cooperation that emphasizes interoperability, missile defense, and deterrence, yet relies more on joint funding.

On another level, the United States could help Israel expand its global emergency and humanitarian response capabilities, which were on display after the Haiti earthquake in 2010 and the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. Israel could also revive its efforts to promote tech-

nological innovation and progress in the developing world; this was a strong component of Israel's foreign relations in the 1950s and 1960s, and it generated tremendous goodwill and strategic benefit for Israel. A more strategic approach to harnessing Israeli humanitarian relief and emergency response capabilities could help Israel combat its international isolation and rebuild its credibility as a force for stability.

Strengthening Israel's self-sufficiency and easing its dependency will not solve the Iranian threat nor its other challenges. But relying more on its own capabilities and assets instead of on the United States is the best long-term guarantee of Israel's security. Moreover, a more transparent and honest discussion of future constraints and commitments could ease long-term tension and doubts. It is in the mutual interest of the United States and Israel to ensure that the partnership evolves to meet the needs of the future. Both should begin preparing for a time when unforeseen constraints will affect the nature and extent of U.S. support for Israel.

LOOKING FORWARD

During the last six decades, the U.S.-Israeli relationship has overcome many obstacles. In the months and years ahead, managing U.S.-Israeli relations will become more complex. The governments of both countries have made an effort to move beyond their differences and cooperate. But the mistrust runs deep. To overcome the current challenges and ensure more durable ties, the U.S.-Israeli partnership needs to adapt to changing strategic and political environments. The relationship should continue to strengthen Israel's long-term viability and security through its QME and U.S. political support. In return, Israel should help the United States promote regional stability by working more closely within America's broader Middle East policies, which must include Israeli efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The challenges of addressing these changes are historic. Most Israelis are keenly aware that their relationship with the United States is changing in unforeseen ways. Many understand that Israel needs a strategic vision to help repair ties with the United States. Yet Israel's deep political divisions and complicated governing system make articulating such a vital strategic vision a monumental task. Israelis see change ahead and are contemplating how strategic and political shifts under way in the United States and in their own country may transform the partnership down the road. Yet they are unsure about the

contours of a future relationship or how they might help shape that future.

The strength and durability of the U.S.-Israeli partnership throughout the last six decades has been the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The foresight to adapt was driven by bold leaders taking difficult decisions. The danger ahead is that leaders on both sides will choose ambivalence over decisiveness. Neither path is preordained. Whatever the future holds, the role of creative and courageous leaders will shape the contours of the U.S.-Israeli partnership that will emerge in the decades ahead.

NOTE

- 1 Efraim Halevy, "General Jones' Message: Lessons in the Conduct of American-Israeli Relations," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 4, no. 2 (2010), <http://israelcfr.com/documents/4-2-3-EfraimHalevy.pdf>.

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Crossroads: The Future of the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership

Haim Malka

Foreword by Samuel W. Lewis

The U.S.-Israel partnership is under unprecedented strain. The relationship is deep and cooperation remains robust, but the challenges to it now are more profound than ever. Growing differences could undermine the national security of both the United States and Israel, making strong cooperation uncertain in an increasingly volatile and unpredictable Middle East. This volume explores the partnership between the United States and Israel and analyzes how political and strategic dynamics are reshaping the relationship. Drawing on original research and dozens of interviews with U.S. and Israeli officials and former officials, the study traces the development of the U.S.-Israel relationship, analyzes the sources of current tension, and suggests ways forward for policymakers in both countries. The author weaves together historical accounts with current analysis and debates to provide insight into this important yet changing relationship. It is a sobering and keen analysis for anyone concerned with the future of the U.S.-Israel partnership and the broader Middle East.

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