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REASSESSING THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP:
HOW THE UNITED STATES CAN RECLAIM ITS INFLUENCE
WITH ISRAEL

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I.) Introduction

Israeli policymakers will be the first to admit that American support is Israel's most important strategic asset in the international arena, and "an inseparable part of Israeli deterrence."[1] Indeed, unparalleled economic, diplomatic, and military support from the U.S. is vital to Israel's security and economic prosperity. Israel's relationship with other world powers is acknowledged as mediocre at best, with no other nation committed to protecting the Jewish state from the security challenges it faces.[2] Nevertheless, American support for Israel is regularly taken for granted in both countries. Rarely are Israeli policies called into question or subjected to scrutiny in the United States, even when they undermine clear American foreign policy prerogatives in the region—namely a diplomatic approach to the Iran nuclear issue and a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In Israel, it is becoming increasingly common for policymakers at the highest levels to openly criticize and undermine U.S. efforts in the region, a phenomenon that has become more prevalent in the past year in particular.[3] Disagreements between friendly nations are natural as each pursues its own interests, and the interests of no two nations ever perfectly align. Yet, given Israel's dependence on U.S. assistance over the course of the decades-long partnership, Washington's inability to influence Israeli policy in a way that is more supportive of U.S. goals in the region is particularly striking.

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[1] Livni, Tzipi. "Israel and the US: Shared values and interests." *The Jerusalem Post*. 09 May 2012. Web. 26 Apr. 2014. <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Israel-and-the-US-Shared-values-and-interests>

[2] Authors' interview with Dov Weisglass (March 10, 2014).

[3] Kershner, Isabel. "Netanyahu Criticizes Kerry Over Boycott Remarks." *The New York Times*. 02 Feb. 2014. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/03/world/middleeast/netanyahu-criticizes-kerry-over-boycott-remarks.html?_r=0>.; Aronson, Geoffrey. "Ya'alon Jab Spurs White House Support for Kerry Peace Effort - Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East." *Al-Monitor*. 25 Jan. 2014. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fa/originals/2014/01/peace-process-kerry.html?v=1362363401000%3f>.; Keinon, Herb. "Netanyahu Says Iran Nuclear Deal Is 'historic Mistake.'" *The Jerusalem Post*. 24 Nov. 2013. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://www.jpost.com/Iranian-Threat/News/Israel-denounces-Iranian-nuclear-deal-says-it-will-review-options-332800>.; Rachman, Gideon. "Obama Needs to Take on the Israel Lobby over Iran." *The Financial Times*. 25 Nov. 2013. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/df0d49e8-55dd-11e3-96f5-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2zNmX4mJ9>.

Our study aims to uncover the reasons underlying Washington's historical difficulties in influencing Israeli policy, and to propose a strategy for reshaping the partnership in a way that better suits American goals and interests in the region. Maintaining a close relationship with Israel has long been a cornerstone of the United States' foreign policy, and we are working under the assumption that it will remain so. To be fair, the so-called 'special relationship' has been criticized as incompatible with American interests and as a strategic liability for the United States. Critics of U.S. policy toward Israel note that the U.S. gets little in return for its unconditional support, and argue that the informal alliance undermines other American interests in the region by sowing instability and discontent in the Arab and Muslim world. Others charge that American policies in the Middle East are shaped by the pro-Israeli lobby in the U.S., whose goals are often damaging to both American and Israeli futures.[4]

This essay, however, does not put forth a value judgment as to the merits of the special relationship between the two nations. Rather, it critically assesses U.S. successes and failures in terms of influencing Israeli policy, and offers a refined approach to the relationship that would enable Washington to increase its leverage vis-à-vis its Israeli partners. Ultimately, we set out to prove that a new way is possible, and that the partnership can better serve U.S. goals, interests, and values.

American policy toward Israel does not operate within a vacuum. Indeed, a confluence of factors impacts the United States' ability to influence Israel and shapes the contours of that influence.

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[4] See, for example: Mansour, Camille. *Beyond Alliance: Israel in U.S. Foreign Policy.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 35-40; Mearsheimer, John, and Stephen Walt. *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

For starters, policymakers on both sides are constrained by domestic politics and demographic trends. Whether in a presidential or parliamentary system, leaders are constantly preoccupied with maintaining and increasing their political power, and often allow these considerations to shape foreign policy decisions. As both countries undergo demographic changes, such as the growth of the ultra-orthodox community in Israel, politicians are also pressured to adjust their policies to appease these growing constituencies.

Additionally, there is the matter of diverging interests between the two allies, as well as the gap between what the U.S. and Israel each see as endangering or detrimental to Israel's security. While Israel and the U.S. share an exceptionally strong bilateral relationship in the world of international politics, each country is ultimately guided by what it perceives as its own strategic interests. Moreover, though the two countries share many common goals in the region, such as fighting Islamic extremism or containing rogue states, each has a fundamentally different outlook concerning the most effective and proper measures for achieving those goals. As American and Israeli perspectives diverge, each increasingly perceives the other's strategy as a threat to its own national interests.[5] This constitutes an uneasy starting point for Washington in its quest to influence Israeli policies.

Moreover, it is challenging to define a clear set of U.S. interests in the Middle East independently of its relationship with Israel. Domestic sources of national interest formation, such as the especially powerful Israeli lobby in the United States and the politically salient pro-Israeli public, blur the line between U.S. and Israeli interests.[6] Indeed, measuring the influence of

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[5] See: Waxman, Dov. "The Real Problem in U.S.-Israeli Relations." *The Washington Quarterly* 35.2 (2012): 71-87.

pro-Israeli interest groups would itself be a fascinating topic of study, and many important contributions have been made to that effect. On the other hand, instances of the U.S. taking actions that run contrary to Israeli positions bring into view the limits of domestic interest groups on foreign policy shaping and show that it is indeed possible for Washington to act in spite of objections from the Israeli government and pro-Israeli constituencies in the U.S.

Washington's failure to use its levers of influence over Israel is also indicative of its failure to define its own vision and dictate an independent policy in pursuit of that vision. As a result, while many of the ways in which the U.S. could gain more leverage over Israeli policy are manifestly straightforward—such as decreasing economic assistance or ceasing to use its veto power in the UN Security Council to defend Israel—they are largely decried as unrealistic. For instance, when President Obama called for a settlement freeze early in his tenure, there was never even a discussion of reducing aid to Israel if it did not comply. Such instances underscore the enormous complexity of the relationship.

Nonetheless, while domestic constraints and geopolitical realities do make it difficult for the U.S. to increase its leverage in the relationship, they do not make it impossible. Many of the problems Washington faces are rooted in the fact that it lacks a clear and consistent policy that sets out expectations from its Israeli partner. The U.S.-Israeli alliance, after all, is not based on a formal contract stating the commitments and duties of the parties, but rather on an informal arrangement that leaves those commitments ambiguous. The exceptional nature of the relationship makes the need for clear articulation of expectations even more critical.

II.) Methodology and Structure

Over the course of our research, the question we sought to answer changed considerably. We began by asking whether Israel's behavior vis-à-vis the United States could be understood through a theoretical prism, or, conversely, whether it defies existing theories of international relations. However, as we became less convinced of the applicability of conventional academic theories to the relationship between the U.S. and Israel, we grew more interested in understanding why and how the U.S. has faced such challenges in garnering Israel's support for its goals in the region. Accordingly, we modified our research method. Insight gained from oral interviews and the vast body of literature on the subject of U.S.-Israeli relations thus assumes a leading role in our research, while international relations and foreign policy theories serve as a supplement and a litmus test for our conclusions.

Between December 2013 and February 2014, we set out to build an understanding of how the U.S.-Israeli special relationship was perceived in the United States. Memoirs and scholarly accounts of the relationship informed our initial understanding, while five interviews in Washington, DC broadened our perspective on the topic. In these interviews, we discussed the history and current state of the alliance with three scholars, one journalist, and a former U.S. Ambassador to Israel. Several of our interviewees were members of U.S. negotiating teams at various stages of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

The goal of our fieldwork in Israel was to gain insights from across the political spectrum into Israeli perceptions of the relationship with the United States. During a week-long trip to Israel in March 2014, we attended a Knesset meeting titled "Fruits of Peace and International Pressure on Israel," and conducted nine semi-structured interviews with former high-level Israeli government

officials and scholars, which helped solidify and reshape the goal of our project. In April, one of us had the privilege to interview a former U.S. National Security Advisor, which provided additional insight in formulating our U.S. policy recommendation.

During our interviews, it became clear that Israelis accord existential value to U.S. support. Indeed, many interviewees wondered themselves why Washington does not apply more pressure on Israel given the unbalanced nature of the relationship. Above all, we became keenly aware that any assessment of how the U.S. can better influence Israeli policy must be founded on a thorough and nuanced understanding of Israeli domestic politics and how those dynamics impact foreign policy making.

The first section of this paper frames our research in a historical context by tracing U.S.-Israeli relations since 1948, albeit in very broad strokes. We focus on the core ongoing issue that divides the U.S. and Israel today—the peace process—a topic which we could not escape in our interviews, and a recurring theme in our study. Additionally, we address the U.S.-Israeli dynamic in the period leading up to and following the signing of the Iranian nuclear interim agreement. Although the U.S.-Israeli relationship encompasses much more than these two issues, they are the most pertinent points in the current context. The scope of this research mainly encompasses the peace process, given the enormous attention assigned to it by interviewees, who repeatedly addressed it as a main point of contention in the relationship and an area where American influence could be significantly improved. The Iranian issue is treated mainly as a comparative case, illustrating the two distinct approaches Washington has taken to pursue its goals in the face of Israeli resistance.

The existing literature on the topic of U.S.-Israeli relations is voluminous and diverse. Scholarly work, journalistic accounts, memoirs, and policy-oriented analysis abound—especially with regards to the Arab-Israeli peace process. The second section attempts to review this vast body of literature with a sharp focus on the many instances in which the U.S. has attempted to influence Israel. After laying out the theoretical foundations of influence in the U.S.-Israeli context, we ask: "what worked, what didn't, and why?"

We then move on to offer general recommendations, where we supplement the literature with analysis from our interviews. This section draws out the most resonant lessons from the past and lays the foundational principles that should guide U.S. policy toward Israel moving forward.

With these principles in mind, we examine the current state of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, which is at a critical juncture as the U.S.-led Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have collapsed as of April 29, 2014. We explore U.S. options moving forward, using our research findings to prescribe policy recommendations for the U.S. in light of the collapse of the latest efforts to bring about a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

III.) Background

On the face of it, the special relationship between Israel and the United States is quite an anomaly. The two nations have never had a formal alliance. Both sides have generally preferred ambiguity and have feared that a formal treaty would constrain their ability to pursue an independent policy, or in the case of the U.S., potentially drag it into military intervention on Israel's behalf. Yet, since Israel's founding in 1948—and especially after the October War of

1973—U.S. policy in the Middle East has been intimately bound to Israel's security and dominance in the region.

1948-1973

In the wake of WWII and the Holocaust, America conceived of its relationship with Israel mostly in moral terms, and partly in order to please a growing domestic audience that supported solidarity with Israel. There was a sense of moral obligation to Israel based on the great tragedy that had befallen the Jewish people during the war; but at the time Israel was not a strategic asset for the U.S. Rather, U.S. concerns during this era revolved around keeping the alliance with Israel from jeopardizing its other regional and international interests. This outlook toward Israel prevailed for the next two decades, and even drove several failed U.S. attempts to broker peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors.[7]

During the Cold War period, Israel's strategic value to the U.S. gradually became more apparent, particularly against the backdrop of the U.S.-Soviet competition for influence in the Middle East. In the 1967 War, Israel launched a preemptive attack against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, seizing East Jerusalem, the West Bank of the Jordan River, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula in a matter of six days. Thereafter, the U.S. saw Israel as its most valuable strategic partner in the Middle East. Intelligence sharing, a vital naval base at Haifa, technological cooperation, and joint training exercises made Israel an important front line against a Soviet-leaning, pan-Arab alliance and the spread of Soviet influence in the region. As one U.S. Air

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[7] Authors' interview with William Quandt (February 14, 2014).

Force commander asserted, Israeli intelligence services were a strategic asset to the U.S. that was better than "five CIA's."[8]

Nonetheless, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the 1967 War produced a major moral and strategic dilemma for United States. Rather than serving as a guardian of American interests in the region, Israel, through its policy of occupation, emerged as a destabilizing force. Since the early days of the occupation, the U.S. has officially opposed Israeli annexation and settlement in the Occupied Territories, even if at times American policy on the matter was vague and contradictory. Still, the United States has been unwilling at times, and forever unable to take meaningful steps to reverse it.

1973 as a turning point

After the October War of 1973, American involvement in the project of brokering peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors grew substantially. By breaching the 1967 Armistice Lines in the Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights and launching a coordinated surprise attack on Israel, Egypt and Syria ignited the second major war in six years and produced a crisis with far-reaching implications. Although Israel ultimately repelled the Arab Coalition after 18 days and thousands of casualties, the war shattered existing notions of regional power. Israel would no longer be seen as invincible, nor could it be considered a stabilizing force in the area. On the contrary, the war shook Israel to its core, triggered a near nuclear confrontation between the U.S. and Soviet Union, and led Saudi Arabia to impose a painful oil embargo which triggered a global energy crisis. These events had a major impact on American psyche, driving home the implications of

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[8] Authors' interview with "a well-connected Israeli academic" (March 13, 2014); See: Grose, Peter. "Better than 5 C.I.A.'S." *The New York Times*. 8 Mar. 1986. Web. 20 Apr. 2014.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1986/03/09/books/better-than-5-cia-s.html>.

the absence of regional peace, as well as Israel's dependence on U.S. support. Thereafter, Washington took greater interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict,[9] as illustrated by the constructive American involvement in the signing of an Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement in 1979.

Recent years

Today, Israel's value as a surrogate for U.S. interests in the Middle East is less clear. As the U.S. emerged as the world's only superpower following the end of the Cold War, containing Soviet influence was replaced with the goal of regional stability. Consequently, the strategic imperative underlying the U.S. alliance with Israel has increasingly become harder to justify. Washington has been only partially successful in exerting its leverage over Israel, and the absence of peace in the region persists. Nevertheless, Israel remains both the most powerful nation and the most steadfast ally for the U.S. in the Middle East—a predictable friend in a decidedly unpredictable environment.

The Peace Process

The term *peace process* was born in 1973 and has since encapsulated U.S. efforts to broker a territorial arrangement that would enable Israel and its Arab neighbors to peacefully coexist. Washington's involvement in the peace process has rested on the same three principles since its inception, termed the 'Iron Triangle' by Aaron David Miller.[10] The first is that reaching a comprehensive, or 'final status,' agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors is a core U.S. interest. Second is that only a negotiating process wherein Israel exchanges land for peace could

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[9] Authors' interview with William Quandt (February 14, 2014).

[10] Miller, Aaron D. "The False Religion of Mideast Peace: And Why I Am No Longer a Believer." Foreign Policy, 19 Apr. 2010. Web. 20 Apr. 2014.
<http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/19/the_false_religion_of_mideast_peace>.

bring about that comprehensive agreement; and third, that U.S. mediation is vital to attaining Arab-Israeli peace. The peace process doctrine holds that only the United States is capable of delivering the parties to the negotiating table; only the United States could build a bridge long and sturdy enough for the Israelis and the Arabs to traverse their irreconcilable gaps and sell a deal to their people; and only the United States could provide the vehicle to transform diplomatic progress into the assurance of a final agreement. Absent U.S. mediation, Israelis and Arabs would have neither the will, nor the resources, nor the credibility to forge a consensus on the major issues that divide them.

Arab-Israeli peace has constituted a core U.S. foreign policy priority for the better part of a half-century, spanning seven successive U.S. administrations. The 1973 War produced a diplomatic opportunity which the United States—under President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger—was quick to exploit. In doing so, the U.S. established its role as the key mediator in the Arab-Israeli arena. Over the next seven years, U.S. officials engineered two diplomatic breakthroughs. Kissinger brokered disengagement agreements between Israel, Syria, and Egypt to bring an end to the hostilities of the 1973 War. His accomplishment laid the foundations for the second diplomatic breakthrough—the Camp David Accords and the ensuing Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979. The major achievements of the 1970's solidified Washington's centrality and its interest in brokering Arab-Israeli peace.

Nevertheless, the U.S. has categorically failed to recreate the type of breakthrough that took place at Camp David. On the contrary, despite thirty years of mostly active engagement, Israelis and Arabs remain locked in conflict and mistrust. Round after round of negotiations have ended in disappointment and renewed violence; and peace between Israel and its neighbors appears

more elusive today than ever. Since the Camp David II negotiations broke down, the Oslo paradigm of direct negotiations that once seemed so promising has broken down considerably.

Iran

Prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran was an important ally of the United States, as well as of Israel, though in more limited manner. Israel and Iran had a relatively stable relationship of behind-the-scenes cooperation in the Middle East. However, when the Shah of Iran was overthrown and the Islamic Republic of Iran was established, it served as a major blow to the ties between these three countries and resulted in a dramatic shift in the regional balance of power. The central component of America's Twin Pillars policy was gone, and Iran was no longer considered a source of stability in the region. Instead, it turned from being what Jimmy Carter called 'an island of stability,'[11] to a source of extremism and a threat to American and Israeli interests. This transformation began immediately following the 1979 revolution, with the hostage crisis at the American Embassy in Tehran, and the issuing of strong threats to Israel's existence. Ever since, Iran has continuously sponsored terrorist activity, namely through its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, which has launched attacks on Israeli and American targets, and used its influence and popularity in the Arab world to derail the peace process. Iran has also offered aid and support to other terrorist groups targeting Israeli and American interests, namely Hamas, and more recently Shi'ite militias in Iraq.

After over thirty years of hostile relations, the U.S. and Iran are slowly restarting diplomatic relations through the recent P5+1 nuclear negotiations. However, the nuclear negotiations are

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[11] Peters, Gerhard and Woolley, John T. "Jimmy Carter: Tehran, Iran Toasts of the President and the Shah at a State Dinner." *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7080>.

followed with great anxiety in Israel, where the outcome is anticipated to have significant consequences for the country's national security. Considering statements made in the past by Iranian officials threatening to 'wipe Israel off the face of the map,'[12] Israel views the issue of Iranian nuclear capabilities as an existential threat and is extremely skeptical concerning the viability of a diplomatic solution. Today, the nuclear negotiations continue, but not without resistance from Israel. The public confrontation between the United States and Israel over the proper approach toward this issue, as manifested in the exchanges between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu in November 2013, has undermined their ability to present a strong and united front, not only on the Iranian issue, but on other regional matters as well.

IV.) Literature Review

The writings of two international relations scholars, K.J. Holsti and Abraham Ben-Zvi, are particularly useful in analyzing the U.S. Israeli relationship. Holsti's work provides a general outline of how countries use instruments of policy to influence their alliance partners. Ben-Zvi's analysis, on the other hand, specifically concentrates on the U.S.-Israeli relationship, as he lays out a theoretical framework for analysis.

Alliance Theory

According to K.J. Holsti, social scientists do not understand all of the reasons why some states wield influence successfully while others do not; however, there are certain variables which generally lead to the successful exercise of influence. These variables are: quality and quantity of capabilities, such as economic growth, education levels, raw materials production, and transportation systems at a state's disposal; ability to mobilize these capabilities in support of

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[12] Fathi, Nazila. "Wipe Israel 'off the map' Iranian says." *The New York Times*. 27 Oct. 2005. Web. 20 Apr. 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/26/world/africa/26iht-iran.html>.

state goals; credibility of threats and rewards; degree of dependence on other states; degree of responsiveness among policy makers in the target country; costs and commitments each state associated with pursuing its own objectives; and the extent to which the two states' interests are compatible.[13]

Furthermore, there are six different tactics states use to influence other states, which are: persuasion, described as simple initiation or discussion of a proposal with another to elicit a favorable response; the offer of rewards; the granting of rewards; the threat of punishment; the infliction of non-violent punishment; and the employment of force and violence.[14] The tactic each state uses to influence other states depends on the general nature of relationships between the two given governments, the depth of their involvement with each other, and the degree of their mutual responsiveness. Relationships between states can be relations of consensus, relations of overt manipulation, relations of coercion, and relations of force.

According to Holsti, states with relations of overt manipulation have some disagreements or conflicts over foreign policy objectives, and a modest degree of involvement with each other, which gives the perception that A and B are in some kind of relationship of interdependence.[15] Despite their high level of mutual responsiveness, ongoing tensions in the Middle East and U.S. foreign policy objectives of maintaining relations with other regional states often result in disagreements between the U.S. and Israel over foreign policy matters. Accordingly, these two interdependent states and their 'special relationship' fall under the category of "states with relations of overt manipulation."

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[13] Holsti, K. J. *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, Preston Hall, 1977, p. 176.
[14] Ibid. p. 177-178.
[15] Ibid. p. 180.

The techniques that states with relations of overt manipulation use to influence each other when normal persuasion fails include: offers of rewards; granting of rewards; threats to withhold rewards, such as withholding foreign aid in the future; or threats of nonviolent punishment.[16] Holsti argues that when both sides are committed to their respective positions with regard to a particular objective, and those objectives are incompatible, the problem of influencing behavior through diplomatic bargaining becomes complex. Here, one party must get the other to *want* an agreement of some sort, by convincing the other party that any agreement or settlement is preferable to the status quo, or conversely, that the consequences of non-agreement are more unfavorable to them than the consequences of agreement.[17]

Holsti argues that the effectiveness of influencing a state's behavior by threatening certain actions depends, above all, on the credibility that those actions will in fact be carried out should the target state fails to meet the stated demands.[18] However, the problem with making threats in diplomatic negotiations is that even if they are reasonably credible, the other state might test them. Thus, the state making the threat will need to act, and perhaps damage its own interests by doing so, in order to establish credibility.[19] This point is particularly important in the U.S.-Israeli alliance in terms of domestic politics and lobbying, which will be addressed below. Overall, each bargaining situation is unique, and it is impossible to predict with certainty which methods of inducement will work. Therefore, the above rules should be treated as a set of general principles that are to be used as a basic guide. Due to the nature of the 'special relationship,' a closer

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[16] Ibid. p. 179.
[17] Ibid. p. 203.
[18] Ibid. p. 204.
[19] Ibid. p. 206.

review of this particular alliance is necessary.

U.S.-Israeli Alliance Theory

In *The United States and Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship*, Abraham Ben-Zvi highlights the inherent structural constraints within which the United States has for decades attempted to influence Israel's priorities, values, and risk calculations.[20] Similar to Holsti's argument, Ben Zvi describes three strategies which can be employed in influencing Israel's behavior within the special relationship: persuasion, deterrence, and coercive diplomacy.[21] He argues that influence in the US-Israeli relationship "can be exercised not only by techniques of accommodation and persuasion, or through the subtle offerings of rewards, but also by more assertive and forceful strategies."[22] He further states that coercive diplomacy "needs to be distinguished from pure coercion; it includes the possibility of bargains, negotiations and compromises as well as coercive threats. What the stick cannot achieve in itself…can possibly be achieved by combining a carrot with a stick."[23]

Successful coercive diplomacy, or deterrence, requires that the coercing or deterring power convince its adversary that it has both the will and the ability "to inflict considerable damage upon something which [the adversary] values more than the subject of the dispute."[24] Therefore, to effectively change an ally's behavior through deterrence or coercion, the initiating state must convince the target state of the high cost of persisting in its behavior. The success of the deterrence effort depends largely on the target state's perception of an asymmetrical 'balance of

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[20] Ben-Zvi, Abraham. *The United States and Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 1.
[21] Ibid. p. 3.
[22] Ibid. p. 2.
[23] Ibid. p. 5.
[24] Ibid. p. 3-4.

interests,' favoring the initiator of the strategy. Thus, if the target of coercive diplomacy is convinced that it has everything to lose and that compliance may endanger certain basic principles of its foreign or defense policy, it will likely react in a defiant and recalcitrant manner, even in the face of strong and comprehensive pressures.[25] Under these circumstances, the target country will be prepared to take greater risks and make bigger sacrifices. It will fiercely resist the pressures exerted—particularly if its opponents lack domestic cohesion and a broad level of support—and may ultimately prevail in this confrontation despite its inferiority in terms of relative power. Therefore, in such instances, coercive diplomacy will *not* induce the target state to comply.

Additionally, it is essential for the coercing side to be backed by sufficient domestic support that would provide the necessary legitimacy for the adopted course of action. Coercive diplomacy is never implemented in a political and social vacuum and must take into consideration the task of creating a favorable 'balance of legitimacy' within one's society regarding the causes involved.[26] "A president can achieve legitimacy for his policy," Ben-Zvi concludes, "only if he succeeds in convincing enough members of his administration, Congress, and the public that he indeed does have a policy and that it is soundly conceived…[and] consistent with fundamental national values and contributes to their enhancement."[27]

The outcome of foreign policy decisions in the American-Israeli context can be analyzed through the interaction of two sometimes incompatible paradigms. The first is the 'special relationship' paradigm, which highlights domestic constraints to act in favor of Israel's interests, based on

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[25] Ibid. p. 4.
[26] Ibid. p. 10-11.
[27] Idem.

shared values and a strong commitment to Israel's continued existence and security. The second

is the 'American national interest' paradigm, which focuses solely on geo-strategic perceptions

of American interests in the Middle East.[28] In attempts to exert pressure on Israel, American

policymakers have at times been significantly constrained by the United States Congress and its

posture towards the 'special relationship.' Thus, various U.S. administrations have been

compelled to scale down, or sometimes altogether halt, certain courses of action due to powerful

constraints associated with the special relationship paradigm.[29] Ben-Zvi argues that only when

the American national interest orientation dominated policy discourse, was the U.S. able to

effectively implement coercive diplomacy towards Israel.[30]

One historic example of the United States effectively implementing coercive diplomacy towards

Israel was demanding that Israel stay out of the Gulf War, even though Iraqi forces were

attacking Israel with SCUD missiles after the war had started. With each Iraqi SCUD attack on

Israel, American policy makers feared that Israel might retaliate, thereby interfering with U.S.

interests by increasing Arab support for Iraq and potentially causing some Arab states, such as

Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, to defect from the international coalition against Iraq. In the end,

Israel did not retaliate, much due to Washington's carefully crafted policy which was based on

positive and negative inducements. The American strategy included a secure communications

line between the U.S. and Israel, high-level U.S. visits to Israel to ensure solidarity, U.S.

shipment of military supplies, increased financial aid of several hundred million dollars to Israel

to compensate for damages sustained, and most importantly U.S.-led coalition forces which led

SCUD hunting missions over western Iraq to ensure Israeli safety. The negative inducement

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[28] Ibid. p. 14-15.
[29] Ibid. p. 19.
[30] Idem.

consisted of U.S. withholding of key operational intelligence information which the Israelis needed to carry out retaliatory attacks. Overall, U.S. coercive policy was effective because, as Scott Lasensky puts it, "The benefits of international aid, as well as the coalition's systematic campaign to neutralize Iraq's ability to threaten its neighbors were too good for Shamir to jeopardize with an Israeli retaliatory strike."[31]

The policy angle: What worked and what didn't

Over four decades of U.S. involvement in attempts to broker Arab-Israeli peace agreements have yielded an abundance of literature written by former key American figures in the peace process, particularly ones involved in the Israeli-Palestinian track in the past two decades. These works include both personal memoirs and academic studies, often mixing both genres, and offering the authors' evaluation of their own performance, as well as comparison to previous American peace teams. A review of key works in the field reveals some recurring themes in the lessons offered by American peace veterans concerning the ability of the United States to constructively influence Israeli policy.

The first prevailing theme in these studies is that Arab-Israeli peace can only be achieved through active and skillful U.S. mediation. Yet, by most assessments, Washington's approach to the conflict over the years has been deeply flawed. William Quandt, a veteran of the Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations, argues that by shifting the emphasis to the process of achieving peace rather than the substance of the peace itself, the U.S. has consigned itself to failure in the peace

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[31] Lasensky, Scott B. "Friendly Restraint: U.S.-Israel Relations During the Gulf War Crisis of 1990-1991." *Council on Foreign Relations.* 1 June 1999. Web. 10 May 2014. < http://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/friendly-restraint-us-israel-relations-during-gulf-war-crisis-1990-199/p4870>.

process.[32] Quandt's main proposition is that the step-by-step, incremental approach to American diplomacy in the peace process should be discarded and replaced with a much stronger focus on articulating a reasonable solution to the core elements of the peace itself. The U.S. has only been successful in efforts to mediate Arab-Israeli peace when "there was a joining of substance and procedure, [when the U.S.] provided both a sense of direction and a mechanism for getting there," and the U.S. has lost sight of the substance.[33]

A focus on substance, however, requires a clear policy. Indeed, Quandt's second lesson is that a strategy that lays out a clear and compelling vision for the shape of a two-state solution and offers a mechanism for the conflicting parties to reach a consensus must replace the process-based approach. Quandt emphasizes the difference between positions and policies, explaining that positions are often predictable and stand the test of time. Policies, on the other hand, are the product of tactical judgments that are made in the moment. What is lacking in the U.S. approach is a clear and coherent policy that translates American positions to a powerful and convincing vision.[34] Only by designing and articulating a solution to the major issues at the heart of the impasse will the U.S. have a chance to succeed.[35]

Quandt is not alone in pointing to the imperative of a coherent and compelling vision if the U.S. wishes to push Israelis in the right way. Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer and scholar Scott Lasensky attribute part of President George H. W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker's success in forcing Israel to attend the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference to the formulation of a determined,

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[32] Quandt, William B. *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1993, p.7.
[33] Ibid. p.1.
[34] Ibid. p.7
[35] Ibid. p. 428.

independent and clear American policy that took into account consultations with the parties involved, but was nonetheless ultimately based on U.S. interests.[36] Nonetheless, Bush and Baker's failure to reach any political breakthrough during the conference is attributed by Kurtzer, Lasensky, Quandt, Shibley Telhami, and Steven Spiegel, the authors of *The Peace Puzzle*, to the absence of a constructive American vision. After engineering a breakthrough by getting the parties to come to the negotiating table, the U.S. offered little by way of substance that would compel the parties to overcome their irreconcilable positions.[37]

The authors of *The Peace Puzzle* further argue that a clear vision implies being direct and forthcoming with the parties to negotiations. Advance consultation with both parties is of utmost importance when it concerns issues vital to their national interest. The positions advanced by President Barack Obama in his May 19, 2011 Cairo speech were discussed many times prior to the speech in consultations between the Americans, Israelis and Palestinians. The President's decision, however, to announce them without warning the parties was a major shock which eroded trust and elicited more resistance than consent. "The United States can still own its policy even if it consults with the parties in advance," the authors conclude. "Surprises do not work."[38]

Failing to articulate a convincing policy also opens up the possibility for Israel to define the circumstances and limits of negotiations, as observed by the current U.S. Special Envoy for Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations and former U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk. Recalling the failure of Syrian-Israeli negotiations in Shepherdstown in 2000, Indyk charges that President

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[36] Kurtzer Daniel, and Scott Lasensky. *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: American Leadership in the Middle East*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2008, p. 30-31.
[37] Kurtzer, Daniel et al. *The Peace Puzzle: America's Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace, 1989-2011*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2013, 275.
[38] Idem.

Bill Clinton simply accepted Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's interpretation of the domestic political situation in Israel as an excuse for backing out of a peace deal. According to Indyk, Clinton was more than able to offer his own vision of how a deal could work and how, with U.S. support, Barak was capable of selling this deal to his public.[39]

Indeed, another lesson Indyk offers with regards to U.S.-Israeli relations in the context of peace negotiations is the need for American leaders to better understand and engage domestic politics in Israel. In the Shepherdstown context, Indyk argues that Clinton was too quick to accept Barak's analysis of his domestic situation rather than challenge the implications of Israeli domestic politics for his ability to conclude a deal with Syria. The President could have also used his own popularity in Israel, which at the time was higher than that of Barak, and suggest coming to Israel and helping Barak promote the deal.[40] With regards to the Israeli-Palestinian track, Quandt too observes that most of the Israeli and Palestinian public is "quite close" to accepting the major points that have long been known to comprise the broad contours of a resolution on the major issues—and that an international initiative would help bolster the influence of these publics.[41] In other words, not engaging and empowering this local constituency is a missed opportunity on the part of the United States.

While encouragement and incentives are one way of engaging the Israeli public in a way that is constructive for the peace process, pressure can serve an equally constructive purpose when applied at the right time. Aaron David Miller, a veteran of Middle East peace negotiations teams,

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[39] Indyk, Martin. *Innocent abroad: an intimate account of American peace diplomacy in the Middle East*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009, p.285-286.
[40] Idem.
[41] Quandt. *Peace Process.* p. 428.

reflects on an instance when U.S. pressure empowered an Israeli Prime Minister in the eyes of his people. During the mid-1970's the confrontation between Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin over the conclusion of a second Sinai disengagement deal bolstered Rabin's domestic popularity by portraying him as tough on national security. This, in turn, eventually allowed Rabin to look tough vis-à-vis the U.S. and sell his public the Sinai II agreement, which before he was politically too weak to gain support for.[42]

On other occasions, a tough position is needed not in order to empower a weak Israeli prime minister, but to overpass him. This is exactly what Bush and Baker did in 1991. They read Israeli public sentiment correctly—even better than Prime Minister Shamir himself—and understood that there was a significant constituency for peace. As noted in the *Peace Puzzle,* "In Israel...public opinion polls indicated that 91 percent of Israelis supported Israel's decision to go to Madrid and 74 percent expressed readiness to yield territory in the West Bank and Gaza for peace."[43] They understood the specific value Israelis assigned to the peace negotiations, rather than simply accepting the Israeli government's position on the matter. Kurtzer and Lasensky add that Bush and Baker read domestic politics correctly, both in the United States and Israel. When they conditioned a loan guarantee of $10 billion on a complete settlement building freeze, they knew they were targeting an issue that was political, not an issue critical to Israel's security. This distinction was understood, even if at times reluctantly, both in Jerusalem and Washington, even among supporters of Israel in Congress.[44] The fallout over the public dispute and U.S. freezing of the loan guarantees ultimately contributed to Shamir's defeat in the 1992 presidential elections.

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[42] Miller, Aaron D. *The much too promised land: America's elusive search for Arab-Israeli peace*. New York: Bantam Books, 2008, p. 152.
[43] Kurtzer et al. *The Peace Puzzle.* p.28.
[44] Kurtzer and Lasensky. *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace.* p. 57-58.

Shamir was replaced by Labor's Yitzhak Rabin who proved to be much more favorable to U.S. interests.[45]

Correctly reading and constructively engaging domestic politics is even more important with regards to the American domestic arena. Quandt asserts that domestic support for American policy in the region must be continuously developed. "Presidents must work with Congress and must explain their purposes to the American public, especially if the costs of the policy are likely to be substantial.[46] The authors of *The Peace Puzzle* agree that it is crucial for administrations to "keep congress and the American public informed regarding strategy and tactics."[47]

Nevertheless, successful U.S. policymakers understand that though American domestic politics matter, they do not determine U.S. policy. As Kurtzer and Lasensky argue, at the end of the day, "[w]hen presidents lead in Arab-Israeli diplomacy, Congress and public opinion follow."[48] American policymakers should avoid reflexively thinking their policies will be obstructed by U.S. domestic politics. They should also not "overlook Israel's own domestic sensibility to preventing a rift in relations with U.S.," which can often be played to US advantage.[49] In that regard, Quandt adds that policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot simply reflect the pro-Israeli tone of domestic politics without losing credibility with the Arab parties to the conflict, suggesting that "the president should seek a domestically sustainable policy of evenhandedness."[50]

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[45] Kurtzer et al. *The Peace Puzzle.* p. 15-58
[46] Quandt. *Peace Process.* p. 419.
[47] Kurtzer et al. *The Peace Puzzle.* p. 276.
[48] Kurtzer and Lasensky. *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace.* p. 56.
[49] Ibid. p. 57.
[50] Quandt. *Peace Process.* p. 418.

Another major weakness of U.S. policy over the years, according to all authors, has been the ability to maintain American credibility and demand accountability. As Kurtzer and Lasensky note, it is imperative that the United States hold the parties to the peace process accountable for their commitments and agreements, both to each other and to the United States itself. The American failure to monitor performance and clarify its expectations, as well as define the parties' obligations, has often resulted in deep gaps between the ways the parties interpreted their commitments. With this reluctance by the U.S. to hold the parties accountable to their commitments, and thereby demonstrate the United States' positions and expectations, it is no wonder that the policies pursued by the parties were often to the dismay of the U.S.[51]

Miller adds that not only should the U.S. be tough and consistent, but it must project its willingness and ability to walk away and impose costs on the sides for saying no.[52] He gives as an example Kissinger's success in forcing Rabin to sign a second Sinai disengagement agreement in 1975, by voicing a need for a "reassessment" of U.S. Middle East policy, as well as postponing proposals for future economic aid, freezing an Israeli F-15 request, and delaying the delivery of promised Lance missiles. Despite Israeli resistance and attempts to use the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington, the administration would not budge and eventually Israel surrendered to U.S. demands.[53] Similarly, as noted in *The Peace Puzzle*, Bush and Baker's withholding of the loan guarantees effectively signaled to Israel the consequences of saying no to the President of the United States.[54]

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[51] Kurtzer and Lasensky. *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace.* p. 43-36.
[52] Miller. *The much too promised land.* p. 309.
[53] Ibid. p. 145-148.
[54] Kurtzer et al. *The Peace Puzzle.* p. 22-28

On the other hand, American conduct in the context of the Oslo process, according to Miller, represents a failure of the U.S. to demand accountability. The U.S. cannot ignore bad behavior and breaching of commitments and of good faith. Political, moral, and financial costs, Miller argues, must be imposed.[55] According to Indyk, threatening to walk away is also something the U.S. could have, and failed to do, during the breakdown of Syrian-Israeli negotiations in Shepherdstown.[56] As Quandt suggests, "part of the conventional wisdom about U.S.-Israeli relations is that pressure on Israeli governments is bound to backfire," but "the record suggests a much more complex reality...At one time or another, each president has tried to persuade Israel to take some action by implying that refusal would be costly. In a surprising number of instances, such efforts have succeeded, often laced with the sweetener of rewards for compliance."[57]

Finally, an important part of maintaining credibility is being consistent. Beyond holding the parties accountable for their commitments, this implies maintaining a consistent policy. The authors of *The Peace Puzzle* highlight the problematic approach taken by U.S. presidents during transition periods from one administration to the next. The attitude of "anything but my predecessor" causes a loss of momentum and fails to capture meaningful progress made by the previous administration. Policies that are working and ongoing should not be abandoned just because an administration changes.[58]

V.) Research Findings

Drawing insight from interviews with members of the Israeli political elite, as well as former

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[55] Miller. *The much too promised land.* p. 374-375.
[56] Indyk. *Innocent abroad.* p. 285-286.
[57] Quandt. *Peace Process.* p. 419
[58] Kurtzer et al. *The Peace Puzzle.* p. 274.

American diplomats, scholars and practitioners, this section identifies key areas where American policy toward Israel can be strengthened, and situates them in the current context. As will be demonstrated, the interviews largely corroborated the lessons offered by the literature reviewed above.

Credibility

The first component of adopting and pursuing an effective American policy is restoring and maintaining American credibility by ensuring consistency and demanding accountability. Indeed, the lack or difficulty of matching U.S. actions to words has been a recurring theme while conducting the research for this paper. The first prerequisite of consistency is having a clear policy, which sets expectations and allows the administration to demand of Israel compliance with certain standards. Simultaneously, if a stated policy exists, but Israel is allowed to breach and ignore it with impunity, this in turns deems the policy irrelevant and noncommittal, and severely tarnishes U.S. credibility and undermines its ability to make future demands. In particular, with regard to the peace process, both academic studies and several interviewees noted the lack of consistency in U.S. policies, whether between administrations or within the same administration. The U.S. fails to hold Israel to its commitments to the U.S. itself, or to third parties, or to credibly communicate to the Israelis the American willingness to walk away or impose costs should Israelis insist on refusing U.S. demands.

Though in the past decade U.S. leverage no longer carries as much weight as it used to, the significance of the strategic alliance and the ability of the U.S. to pressure Israel have not completely been lost on Israelis. As former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's bureau chief, Dov Weisglass, noted, in Israeli politics only the Israeli Prime Minister fully understands the extent to

which Israel relies on the U.S. and the consequent significance of maintaining the alliance for Israeli national security. Upon assuming office Sharon realized that "no matter what the issue, you do not confront the U.S., because Israel's capabilities could not exist for a minute without U.S. support." Sharon's subsequent policies, including the disengagement from Gaza, were largely informed by this understanding. Weisglass attributed the difference in Prime Minister Netanyahu's conduct to his personality and concern over party politics, but more so to the weakness projected by President Obama.[59]

Similarly, a prevalent attitude among Israel's security elite is that even if Israel and the U.S. do not see eye to eye on issues, such as the nuclear deal with Iran, Israel should avoid confronting the U.S. since the strength of the alliance is more important. Amos Yadlin, former head of IDF intelligence, was often mentioned by our interlocutors in that sense. Yadlin has often expressed doubts that the deal would work, but nonetheless emphasized the importance of giving the deal a chance in order to maintain good relations with the American administration and avoid Israel being blamed for the failure of the deal.[60] Nonetheless, it seems that the resonance of such logic in Israeli policy calculations has often been limited to very specific policy issues. In fact, one could argue that they have been limited to issues on which the U.S., time and again, has articulated and expressed in actions its resolve to pursue a specific policy.

The settlements are an obvious case in point. On one hand, American administrations have officially all held the same position on Israeli settlements in the occupied territories being illegitimate or illegal, as well as a central obstacle to the constructive progress of peace

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[59] Authors' interview with Dov Weisglass (March 10, 2014).
[60] Authors' interview with Daniel Kurtzer (January 31, 2014).

negotiations. However, not only has there been an inconsistency in the enforcement of this position, but the position itself has not been as clear and consistent as is often claimed. As William Quandt noted, there is no clear U.S. position on what constitutes unacceptable settlement building. Does it include 'natural growth'? East Jerusalem? This confusion is further exacerbated by the U.S. decision to describe settlements as 'illegitimate,' rather than 'illegal,' the difference, Quandt noted, is not particularly clear.[61]

One particular expression of this lack of clarity and consistency with regards to the settlements can be found in the direct relations between the U.S. government and the settlers' Yesha Council. While in the past the Council was treated by foreign governments as a pariah, the Council's Chief Foreign Envoy Dani Dayan attests that a major change took place over the last few years. These days the American Embassy in Tel Aviv and Consulate General in Jerusalem regularly court the settler movement, often engaging in turf wars with each other over the right to communicate with the Yesha Council and its representatives. Dayan himself was the first Yesha official to be invited to the White House, and argues that the settlement movement is constantly gaining more access to the U.S. government and administration. From the settlers' perspective, this constitutes a complete policy turnaround for an administration that in its first two years, according to Dayan himself, was more aggressive on settlements than any former American president. While Dayan acknowledges that he has heard alternative explanations to this shift in policy, he nonetheless attributes it to a growing realization in the U.S. that a two state solution is unachievable and that the settlements, though they may cause some tension, do not cause strategic damage.[62] Clearly, Dayan's misinterpretation could be attributed to an American failure

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[61] Authors' interview with William Quandt (February 14, 2014).
[62] Authors' interview with Dani Dayan (March 12, 2014).

to put forth a consistent policy regarding the settlements. Regardless of what actual U.S. motives are behind this shift toward engaging with the Yesha Council, it is important to acknowledge how policy is read on the other side and what that means for how Jerusalem may misinterpret the intention and seriousness of U.S. words and actions.

As for the enforcement of U.S. positions, especially when it rests on past Israeli commitments to freeze building, like most administrations before it, the Obama administration has demonstrated an inability to consistently pursue this policy. It indeed managed to hold to its tough position against settlement building for a while, but by the third year in office it had given up.[63] This in fact created a worse predicament than not pursuing the settlement issue at all, since not only did it further derail American credibility, but it forced an uncompromising position on the Palestinians.[64] The question remains, nonetheless, how could the U.S. pursue its settlement policy more effectively? While some reference the Bush-Baker approach of withholding the loan guarantees, there is disagreement regarding the effectiveness of that policy. Oded Eran, a veteran of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former negotiator with the Palestinians, argues that Israel did not get out of a single settlement because of the Bush sanctions.[65] American scholars, on the other hand, look to that policy as a success. Even if it did not manage to alter the Shamir government's settlement policy, this policy restored American credibility and the pressure and tension it created are often attributed to the favorable results of the 1992 Israeli elections, in which Labor's Yitzhak Rabin was elected Prime Minister instead of Shamir.[66]

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[63] Authors' interview with William Quandt (February 14, 2014).
[64] Authors' interview with Dani Dayan (March 12, 2014).
[65] Authors' interview with Oded Eran (March 9, 2014).
[66] See, for example: Miller. *The much too promised land;* Kurtzer et al. *The Peace Puzzle.*

The question of how to effectively enforce commitments and impose costs for breaching them, or for going against declared U.S. interests, is of great significance. It seems inconceivable today that the U.S. would withhold aid to Israel for any reason, including settlement building. But as Eran highlighted, the U.S. has more tools at its disposal. Specifically, he mentioned the constructive use the U.S. could make of its United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat.[67] While several interviewees mentioned, favorably or less favorably, the ability of the US to avoid casting a veto as a way of sending Israel a message,[68] Eran suggested using the Security Council as an accountability mechanism for future peace deals, in the form of a UNSC resolution. He voiced his opinion that simply forcing a comprehensive agreement through the UN would be ineffective and Israel will not feel a need to comply. Presenting the sides with a framework of principles that they "can live with," on the other hand, and making it binding through a UN resolution, with benchmarks for compliance, could provide the required guarantees and accountability mechanism missing from negotiations.[69]

Weisglass suggested a similar approach, though with less emphasis on the Security Council. He too suggested presenting Israel with a plan, based on previously agreed upon principles, namely the deals reached by Prime Ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert. According to Weisglass, the logic in this case is that a current Israeli prime minister cannot convincingly and legitimately reject a deal that previous Israeli prime ministers were willing to accept. The President, he argues, should simply tell the Israeli prime minister that since Israel has previously agreed to the deal, he expects the prime minister to accept it. While framing this demand within the context of

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[67] Authors' interview with Oded Eran (March 9, 2014).
[68] Authors' interview with Dov Weisglass (March 10, 2014); Authors' interview with Yossi Beilin (March 11, 2014).
[69] Authors' interview with Oded Eran (March 9, 2014).

the United States' unshaken commitment to Israel's security, the President should clarify that the consequences of not complying with this proposal would entail a reassessment of the relationship. If Prime Minister Netanyahu rejected it, Weisglass argues, he would be done as a politician.[70]

Domestic Politics

A pivotal issue that arises with regard to foreign policy making in the context of U.S.-Israeli relations is the role of domestic politics. American and Israeli leaders constantly seek to maintain their parties' domestic popularity and power, both while in office and in upcoming elections; therefore, domestic support is an important factor in the formulation of major foreign policy decisions. If American public opinion and Congress are strongly opposed to certain policies, then it is unlikely that the President will be able to go through with them. Moreover, domestic politics have also been used as a tool in advancing or deterring specific policy objectives in the other country. For example, one may recall incidents such as the May 2011 Oval Office confrontation in which Netanyahu rebuked President Obama for calling for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to be based on the 1967 lines. The Prime Minister's public criticism of the President was understood as an attempt to weaken domestic support for the President's position in the U.S., at a time when the Administration's interests and objectives diverged from Israeli goals.[71]

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[70] Authors' interview with Dov Weisglass (March 10, 2014).

[71] On this 20 May, 2011, visit to the White house, Prime Minister Netanyahu rebuked President Obama regarding how far the US can deviate on Israel's position of the Arab-Israeli peace. Presidential candidate Mitt Romney and the Republican party tried to use this confrontation to their advantage before the 2012 US Presidential elections by raising doubts with Jewish-American voters about Obama's commitment to Israel's security. Ultimately, this campaign did not succeed as President Obama was re-elected. See: Wilson, Scott. "In meeting with Obama, Netanyahu rules out Israeli withdrawal to 1967 boundaries." *The Washington Post*. 20 May 2011. Web. 7 May 2014. < http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/in-meeting-with-obama-netanyahu-rules-out-israeli-withdrawal-to-1967-borders/2011/05/20/AFSWQx7G_story.html> ; Wallsten, Peter. "Democrats join Republicans in questioning Obama's policy on Israel." *The Washington Post*. 24 May 2011. Web. 7 May 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/democrats-join-republicans-in-questioning-obamas-policy-on-israel/2011/05/24/AFkEJpAH_story.html

Due to the traditionally sympathetic American attitude towards Israel, the threat of coercive or deterring measures taken by various U.S. administrations has generally lacked U.S. domestic support. Thus, as Ben-Zvi expected, domestic constraints have often prevented administrations from carrying out coercive or deterrent measures with any sense of credibility, rendering the U.S. unable to effectively influence Israel's behavior. However, domestic politics, both in Israel and in the U.S., are not determinant and the key for American Administrations in pursuing policy objective in the Middle East is to change how they understand and interact with domestic actors and publics in both countries.

U.S. Domestic Politics

The pro-Israeli lobby is known for its considerable influence in Congress. However, Dov Weisglass believes that President Obama attributes to the American-Jewish community ten times more power than it actually has. He argues that American Jews "are more American than Jewish. They care more about U.S. domestic issues." According to a 2007 poll, shifting sentiments in the U.S. indicate that less than twenty percent of American Jews under age 35 years are supportive of Israel, which is significantly less than those over the age of 65.[72] Also indicative of this trend is the expansion of American Israeli Public Affairs Committee's (AIPAC) outreach to non-Jewish communities which has increasingly expanded since the bipartisan issues regarding the Iran sanctions have arisen.[73] This does not necessarily mean that Americans will not support Israel in the future, but rather that Israel's *policies* are becoming more difficult for liberal leaning

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[72] See: Cohen, Steven M. and Kelman, Ari Y. *Beyond Distancing: Young Adult American Jews and Their Alienation from Israel* (The Jewish Identity Project of Reboot, 2007), Web. 20 April 2014 <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=326>.

[73] Kampeas, Ron. "After Bruising Iran Sanctions Battle, AIPAC Conference is All About Comity." The Global Jewish News Source. 4 March 2014 Web. 20 April 2014. <http://www.jta.org/2014/03/04/news-opinion/politics/after-bruising-iran-sanctions-battle-aipac-conference-is-all-about-comity>.

Americans to support. This change in sentiment is a sign that there *may* be less domestic political constraints in the future. However, the President will need to engage the American public if he is to keep the 'special relationship' strong and pursue U.S. policy objectives in the Middle East.

Although congressional support for Israel is generally very strong, there are, of course, certain limits to Congress's power, even with bipartisan support. According to Camille Mansour, Congress participates in foreign policy making by "using its prerogatives in the areas of treaties, arms sales, supervising the conduct of covert operations, war powers and approval of the budget… It is above all via the budget and the vote on funds for foreign aid that Congress under the impetus of the lobby takes part in determining American Middle East policy."[74] Furthermore, when the Administration considers that American interests are clearly at stake, it manages to overpass the lobby and its preferences, even if with some difficulty.[75]

According to Shibley Telhami, former advisor to the U.S. Mission to the U.N., Israel will always prevail on policy objectives when the issues involved are *not* vital to U.S. interests.[76] However, when the issues are considered by a majority of Americans to be a vital U.S. interest, then Israel will fail to shape U.S. policy.[77] If an issue is considered vital by the American public, Israel only succeeds in shaping U.S. policy when it manages to harmonize U.S. and Israeli interests.

A recent example of this dynamic is the tension surrounding the Iranian nuclear negotiations. Until recently, this issue has been a central source of tension between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu, each leader viewing the other as obstructing his own political

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[74] Mansour, Camille. *Beyond Alliance: Israel in U.S. Foreign Policy.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 254.
[75] Mansour. *Beyond Alliance: Israel in U.S. Foreign Policy.* p. 256.
[76] Authors' interview with Shibley Telhami (February 18, 2014).
[77] Idem.

objectives. Due to its location within the range of Iranian ballistic missiles, Israel's major concern over the Iranian nuclear issue is one of security. Israel sees it as an imperative of its national security to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The U.S. also views a nuclear Iran as a strategic threat, but although President Obama has left the military option on the table in case of a breakdown in talks, there is wide acknowledgement in Washington that the country is tired of war. Consequently, the Obama administration is determined to pursue a diplomatic solution and is a lot more averse to military action than Israel.

Thanks to domestic support for the negotiations, Netanyahu's attempts to lobby support in Congress for legislation that would have both advanced further sanctions, and possibly impose limits on what the president could have agreed to in a permanent deal, have ultimately failed. The proposed bill only garnered 59 co-sponsors in the Senate, eight short of a 67 veto-proof majority. As arms control specialist Ed Levine stated, "S.1881, the 'Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act of 2013,' will undercut President Obama's efforts to obtain a comprehensive solution to Iran's nuclear activities. To the extent that it removes the diplomatic option, moreover, it will leave the United States closer to a Hobson's choice between going to war with Iran and accepting Iran as an eventual nuclear weapons state."[78] Therefore, this bill was clearly against U.S. vital interests and, as such, Israeli lobbying efforts did not prevail. Additionally, not only is the pro-Israeli lobby receiving more criticism now than it has in the past as a result of its aggressive push and failure for S.1881, but it is receiving "more criticism from the very wing of American politics that, once upon a time, formed its natural basis of support," the liberal

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[78] Levine, Ed. "Analysis of Faults in the Menendez-Kirk Iran Sanctions Bill (S. 1881)." The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation.
<http://armscontrolcenter.org/issues/iran/articles/analysis_of_faults_in_the_menendez-kirk_iran_sanctions_bill_s_1881/>.

democrats.[79]

Fortunately, the tides have calmed and Israel and the U.S. have reached an understanding on the nuclear negotiations. Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has been quoted saying, "I think [the Israelis] are satisfied that we have the capability to use a military option if the Iranians choose to stray off the diplomatic path… I think they believe we will use it."[80] This understanding would not have even been possible if President Obama had not been firm and clear in emphasizing his policy on Iran's nuclear program: to continue diplomatic negotiations.

Returning to Dov Weisglass' point one must ask: how much does the U.S. overestimate Israel's lobbying power? How much does the pro-Israel lobby make a difference? Of course there is no clear and definite answer, but the Iranian nuclear negotiations' case certainly provides some useful insight. This issue directly concerns Israel's security and yet, much to Netanyahu's dismay, Congress was unable to shake President's Obama's determination to continue negotiations without air strikes or increasing sanctions.

The moral aspect of the occupation and the gradual adoption of undemocratic laws in Israel is another matter which has been eroding American public support for Israel, challenging those same shared values the relationship between the two countries are said to be founded on. As Haim Malka states:

> 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

[79] Judis, John B. "Zionist Movement: How AIPAC is Severing its Historical Roots — and Weakening its Influence." Foreign Policy. February 27, 2014. <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/02/27/zionist_movement_aipac>.
[80] Michaels, Jim. "Dempsey: U.S. and Israel agree on Iran threat." USA Today. April 1, 2014. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/04/01/israel-us-agreement-iran/7156715/>.

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.[81]

When asked about the potential influence on the relationship of the growing moral opposition in the U.S. to the occupation and to an anti-democratic Israel, a well-connected Israeli academic agreed, following a hesitant pause, that "It could affect the relationship, and we have to make sure that we address those concerns. By the way, it's not just the U.S. that feels that way. The people of Israel don't like the feeling of oppressing a people under military control either."[82]

Interestingly, while objection in the U.S. to Israeli settlements becomes more prominent, the settlement movement's access to U.S. politics seems to be growing. "When I go to Washington and speak with politicians there, I don't talk about Israel, I talk about U.S. interests. I say that Secretary Kerry's efforts are damaging to American interests, and this will be an additional blow to U.S. prestige, which is already hurting right now… In respect to the conflict and its resolution, Israelis and Palestinians mindsets are totally different. They cannot find peace. If there is no doubt that Kerry will fail, then the conversation changes."[83]

According to Kurtzer, one important reason that a peace agreement is not being agreed on is an issue of domestic politics on both sides. Perhaps Israel does not understand the current situation in American domestic politics, because after all, not only was President Obama re-elected for a second term despite the perceived Obama-Netanyahu souring of relations, but he has also been able to push through with the Iranian nuclear negotiations without Congress increasing sanctions,

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[81] Malka. *Crossroads*, p.50.
[82] Authors' interview with a 'well-connected Israeli academic' (March 13, 2014).
[83] Authors' interview with Dani Dayan (March 12, 2014).

despite pro-Israeli lobbying efforts.[84]

Israeli Domestic Politics

The affinity of Jewish Americans with Israel has always been a core element of U.S. support for the Jewish country. However, American policymakers' instinct to back Israeli positions and policies reflexively, aimed at appeasing this Jewish constituency, has often led to a lack of consistency in American policy. Furthermore, some observers argue that it is better to press Israel, in order to keep Israeli domestic expectations for U.S. support realistic and manageable. According to Kurtzer, all prime ministers except for Begin, Shamir, and Netanyahu have wanted the U.S. to press them beyond their formal, stated positions so that they could overcome domestic opposition within their own country by citing the need to accommodate U.S. demands.[85] In other words, firm U.S. positions can help Israeli leaders gather support from their public, support they might not be able to gather on their own. Israeli leaders must, however, actually be willing to support American goals and strategies.

Dov Weisglass argues that there has been a recent shift in the Israeli leadership's strategy. Prime Minister Netanyahu has been more daring in creating confrontations with President Obama because he gives his internal affairs—especially within his political party, Likud—more weight than Sharon did. Sharon understood that within two years of taking office he would have to leave the Likud and create a new political platform. Netanyahu, on the other hand, is more careful not to upset his party, a fact which positions him in confrontation with the U.S. Nonetheless, he is standing on shaky political grounds right now because no Israeli Prime Minister wants to be 'the

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[84] Authors' interview with Daniel Kurtzer (January 31, 2014).
[85] Authors' interview with Daniel Kurtzer (January 31, 2014).

one who destroyed U.S.-Israeli relations.' His recent 'hysterical reaction' to the interim Iran nuclear deal, for example, received severe domestic criticism.[86] As, Meir Javendanfar, an Iranian politics lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya states, "We have a very strong case against the Iranian regime, but Netanyahu misusing the Iran question has hurt our legitimacy. It is also because of this issue that he clashes with your country [the USA]."[87] Yitzhak Herzog, the elected leader of Labor, Israel's main opposition party, said, "Netanyahu must do everything in order to fix the damage that was caused from the public clash with the U.S. and return to an intimate relationship with President Obama and other world leaders."[88] Even with continued criticism against him in Israel, Weisglass expressed considerable reservations about Netanyahu's desire to make sacrifices for the sake of a peace deal.[89]

As the demographics in Israel continue to shift, Israeli politics evolve into "a struggle between the right and the center-right," bringing with it a more hawkish outlook to security and settlement policies.[90] The growing numbers of Orthodox Jews, Russians, and Arabs in Israel are such that 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," will soon be reduced to a minority status.[91] Based on this notion, it is more important now than ever to keep the lines of communication

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[86] Authors' interview with Dov Weisglass (March 10, 2014).

[87] Authors' interview with Meir Javedanfar (March 10, 2014).

[88] Booth, William. "Israel's Netanyahu Calls Iran Deal 'historic Mistake'." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 24 Nov. 2013. Web. 20 Apr. 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/israel-says-iran-deal-makes-world-more-dangerous/2013/11/24/e0e347de-54f9-11e3-bdbf-097ab2a3dc2b_story.html>.

[89] Authors' interview with Dov Weisglass (March 10, 2014).

[90] Malka, Haim. *Crossroads: The Future of the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2011, p. 28-33.

[91] Cincotta, Richard and Kaufmann, Eric. "Unpromising Demography in a Promised Land: Yisrael Beytenu and the Escalation of Demographic Politics in Israel." Web. 5 May 2014. <http://paa2010.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=100015>.

open both with the Israeli public and Israeli politicians because the likelihood of diverging objectives is higher. By committing to the general recommendation of communicating clearly and consistently, the U.S. will be able to avoid misunderstanding and find common ground despite the changing demographics in Israel. William Quandt noted that "the U.S. is not great at reading Israeli politics in general."[92] This should be a key indicator that American foreign policy makers need to make stronger efforts to engage not only with the Israeli government, but more importantly, with the Israeli public.

One particular issue the Administration needs to take into account is Israeli public perceptions of the regional changes and the opportunities and risks entailed in them. Even though tensions have been growing in the region, particularly with respect to the Syrian civil war, some argue that Israel is *more secure* than it has been in recent history. This is because Israel's neighbors are no longer posing classical military threats, since they are currently engaged with domestic turmoil, as sectarian violence in the region escalates. According to Uzi Rabi, the Director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle East Studies at Tel Aviv University, "Because everyone in the region is broken up due to sectarian differences, now is a golden opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to reach a peace deal."[93] In other words, the instability in neighboring countries places Israel in a position of strength, since its traditional rivals, particularly Hezbollah, are indisposed at this time. Therefore, it seems that the Israeli public should feel more comfortable in reaching a peace deal. On the other hand, although Israel is arguably in a position of comfort at the moment, it is unclear what the region will look like five years from today; therefore, such uncertainty can galvanize domestic support for the status quo.

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[92] Authors' interview with William Quandt (February 14, 2014).
[93] Authors' interview with Uzi Rabi (March 9, 2014).

Although there have been shifts in the demographics of both Israel and the U.S., the emphasis here is not on how to create foreign policy in spite of public opinion. Instead, the emphasis must be on improving U.S. efforts to correctly read public moods and to clearly and consistently communicate and engage with both publics in order to articulate and promote American national interests, as well as shared U.S.-Israeli ones.

An Independent American Policy

A final element this study has identified as often missing from American relations with Israel is independence and initiative. While consultations with the Israelis are important on certain matters of shared interests, Israel should not be allowed to dictate U.S. positions. American-Israeli interactions over the interim agreement on Iran's nuclear agreement offer a valuable example of how the United States should approach issues which both countries perceive as pivotal to their national interest. As previously observed, despite strong Israeli reservations, the U.S. formed its own independent policy on the matter and pushed forward, successfully reaching an agreement and defeating an attempt to pass additional sanctions in Congress.

Unfortunately, this same approach has not been a characteristic of American involvement in the peace process in the last decades. Indeed, the peace process is a central arena where the United States has repeatedly failed to formulate and hold on to its own positions and policy, based on American interests and assessments, rather than on Israeli dictations.

Nonetheless, while many observers criticize the lack of independence and resolve in American involvement in the peace process, they nonetheless argue that the U.S. must be a party to

negotiations. Indeed, both Daniel Kurtzer and William Quandt noted the importance of American involvement in the negotiations, but added that the U.S. needs to take a more active and independent role in this sense. Quandt emphasized the need to act as a forceful mediator, as the U.S. did in the 1970's, and dismissed the Clinton administration's "facilitating" approach to negotiations.[94] Similarly, Kurtzer criticized the tendency to formulate and adjust policies based solely on the reservations of the parties. "Whenever the U.S sneezes," he observed, "both sides think that it is directed to them." The U.S. simply needs to adopt a clear policy and push on it.[95] This need for a more independent and forceful American approach was further supported by several Israeli interlocutors. The analyses given by Dov Weisglass and Oded Eran, as well as their recommendations concerning the peace process, indeed emphasized the lack of resolve and initiative in American policy.[96]

Nonetheless, certain interviewees were in disagreement over the constructive role of the United States as a forceful mediator. Prof. Gil Troy warned against pressuring Israelis too much or using threats and punishments to coerce Israel's policies. When Israel is attacked, he noted, physically or discursively, it shuts down. And since Israel holds the cards in the negotiations− i.e. the territory - its cooperation is essential.[97] A distinct observation, though nonetheless critical of U.S. involvement in negotiations, was offered by former Israeli deputy foreign minister, Yossi Beilin. Beilin expressed doubts toward the usefulness of an American seat in the negotiations' table, arguing that generally, third party mediations are not constructive because they allow the parties to harden their positions and play the U.S. This is particularly true, Beilin noted, when both

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[94] Authors' interview with William Quandt (February 14, 2014).
[95] Authors' interview with Daniel Kurtzer (January 31, 2014).
[96] Authors' interview with Oded Eran (March 9, 2014); Authors' interview with Dov Weisglass (March 10, 2014).
[97] Authors' interview with Gil Troy, March 14, 2014.

parties are eager participants in negotiations, as was the case under the Rabin, Peres and Barak governments.[98]

Nonetheless, Beilin acknowledged that when dealing with unwilling parties, there is no choice but for the U.S. to get involved as a broker.[99] When the U.S. assumes this role, however, it is important to keep in mind Beilin's warnings about the downfalls of third party mediation. These become especially important when taking into account Kurtzer and Quandt's assessment of the severely unbalanced weight given to Israeli objections by U.S. policymakers. Martin Indyk's recollection of the events in Shepherdstown 2000, mentioned earlier in this paper, is especially telling. While both parties voiced loud reservations and displeasure with the proposal President Clinton was planning on presenting them, the Israelis were completely stunned when they realized Clinton had taken their objection too seriously and pulled back the proposal altogether. Thus, even when Israelis want the Americans to be more tough and resolved with them, the administration often fails to do so.[100] As already mentioned in this paper, most Israeli prime ministers wanted the United States to press them. When Israeli negotiators express objections to certain concessions they are often doing it both for the sake of the other side, as part of their negotiations tactic, and for the sake of preserving their strong image at home, not wanting to be portrayed as "suckers."[101]

A similar conundrum surrounds the concept of 'no surprises.' This commitment by both parties to avoid taking steps that influence the other country's strategic interests, without prior

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[98] Authors' interview with Yossi Beilin (March 11, 2014).
[99] Idem.
[100] Indyk. *Innocent abroad.* p. 285-286.
[101] Authors' interview with Daniel Kurtzer (January 31, 2014).

consultation, has been a core element of the unofficial alliance between the U.S. and Israel. In the context of the peace process, however, it has often been a blessing which turned into a curse. Beilin argues that this principle has become so fundamental, that the U.S. has no choice but to come to the Israelis first, before presenting a proposal to the other side. Tragically, even when Israeli prime ministers do not want the United States to do so, understanding the detrimental effect this will have on negotiations, they are unable to come out and say they are relinquishing this prerogative.[102] Furthermore, as has been established in previous studies, while a more resolved American policy is required, Israel should be kept informed at all stages and surprises should be avoided. One way of doing so, in the context of negotiations, would be to present both sides with a proposal in advance of negotiations session, allowing them to voice their reservations or alternative idea to the United States.

The U.S. must understand these issues and must act as a more resolved and determined mediator. While consulting with the Israelis, as well as the Arabs, is advised, as a way of understanding and addressing both sides' concerns, the U.S. needs to formulate and put forth compelling proposals and insist on their implementation. As argued by Kurtzer, it will not be possible to pre-negotiate agreed terms of reference for negotiations, and thus the United States, after consulting with the parties, should put forth its own terms of reference. If there is any chance of gaining the agreement of the parties to negotiate on serious terms of reference, this will result only from the Americans having tableds their own draft..[103]

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[102] Authors' interview with Yossi Beilin (March 11, 2014).
[103] Authors' interview with Daniel Kurtzer (January 31, 2014).

VI.) Recommendations for American Policy

Our interviews in Israel confirm and corroborate the lessons offered by the existing literature reviewed earlier in this paper. Based on these findings, three general policy recommendations become necessary and apparent. First, the U.S. needs to formulate and articulate a clear vision of its objectives so that it can present these views to the Israeli and American public to build domestic support in both countries. Second, the U.S. must restore and maintain credibility, through consistency and accountability. Finally, the U.S. needs to reclaim its leading role and independence when addressing the issue of Israeli-Palestinian peace. We believe that these general policy recommendations can help the U.S. pursue its interests, while simultaneously significantly strengthening the U.S.-Israeli relationship.

Formulate and Articulate a Clear Vision

One thing that became apparent during our research was the lack, and thus the need, for a clearly articulated U.S. vision on matters of shared interest, communicated to the Israeli government and public, as well as to the American public and Congress. Possessing and successfully marketing a clear vision should be the basic building block of U.S. relations with Israel. This issue has been raised or implied to repeatedly by our interlocutors, specifically with regards to the peace process. By comparison, on the Iranian issue, for example, the U.S. has been significantly more successful in pushing its policy, despite Israeli objections, partly because the administration successfully articulated to the American public the significance of the issue to American national security and the viability of its plan. In the case of the peace process, however, the U.S. has failed to articulate to Israelis and Americans how and why peace is possible. Despite the existence of a wide notion that the parameters of a future peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians are clear, the U.S. has failed to convincingly articulate to Israelis why this deal is

achievable at the moment, and why it is likely to be respected by the signing parties. The same goes for American public and Congress. Even if the Administration enjoys passive support for promoting a deal or for pushing back on certain unacceptable Israeli policies, it cannot activate that support if Americans are not convinced about why this is a major interest of theirs and what makes the administration's plan realistic.

This may seem a trivial issue but, in fact, U.S. administrations have repeatedly failed to make the case for why peace is possible and why a specific plan is likely to work. This is of particular significance with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, where the bargaining game is more complicated and intentions and balance of power issues are less clear. Nonetheless, the U.S. has also failed in the past in articulating its vision to the Israelis when it may have been easier to make a convincing argument, such as the Syrian peace track. In that case, the U.S. could have played the role it did during the Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations, but instead allowed Israel to lead and failed to step in and articulate to both governments and publics a realistic and attainable vision. Indeed, in some cases it may not be a problem of articulation but a matter of the administration simply not having a convincing vision to sell to Israelis and Americans. In that case, however, when the administration does not see a clear path toward its goals, it should avoid employing its limited resources and efforts.

With domestic politics playing such a major role in both countries, speaking directly to public opinion is an imperative. Israeli public may not support settlements, for example, but if it does not believe peace is attainable, it lacks the incentive to push its government on the issue. This may hold true for American public opinion as well. Similarly, there is broad support in both American and Israeli publics for a two state solution, but as long as the vision remains vague and

how to reach and sustain it is unclear, publics will not see the point in taking risks for peace and will not make this issue a priority in using their limited political influence to pressure their elected representatives.

Restoring and Maintaining Credibility,

The second major issue challenging U.S. ability to effectively influence Israel is the continuous erosion of American credibility. This erosion is a result of the inconsistency of the United States' conduct in the context of Arab-Israeli negotiations, and more broadly its diminishing reputation on the international stage. An American 'red line' has lost its power, and the price of saying 'no' to the U.S. is no longer clear in Israel. In fact, it may be perceived as virtually nonexistent. This study recognizes the limits on American power and legitimacy to exact costs for breaching commitments or going against U.S. policy. It further recognizes the special sensitivities involved in U.S.-Israeli relations and the limits posed by public opinion on American ability to pressure or punish Israel. Furthermore, many interviewees emphasized their perception that U.S. words lack consistency and credibility.

More than once, our interlocutors compared Israel to a child testing its parent, and the U.S. to a parent failing miserably in setting boundaries. As mentioned earlier, there are limits to U.S. ability to punish Israel for perceived bad behavior. Nevertheless, one thing the U.S. can do, as Secretary of State Kerry has done in his recent April 2014 appearance before Senate,[104] is call out cheaters. This is one role the U.S. should have assumed a long time ago, but has failed to do so – publicly calling out parties who breach their commitments. In the context of peace

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[104] Landler, Mark. "Mideast Frustration, the Sequel." *The New York Times*. 08 Apr. 2014. Web. 20 Apr. 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/09/world/middleeast/israeli-settlement-plan-derailed-peace-talks-kerry-says.html?_r=1&assetType=nyt_now>.

negotiations, committing to not publicly blame the parties for failure has often been a perquisite of getting them to the negotiations table. We see no problem with this strategy. We do, however, believe that when a commitment has been made, to the opposite party or to the U.S., it is the administration's essential duty to publicly hold the breaching party accountable.

Another way the U.S. could regain its credibility, especially in cases where Israel refuses to comply with a clear U.S. demand, is to simply threaten to walk away from an issue. If, for example, Israel repeatedly fails to even partly respect U.S. red lines concerning settlement building, Washington ought to let the Israelis know that on resolutions that specifically concern settlement building, the U.S. would abstain in the U.N. Security Council. This could challenge the worldwide image of the unbreakable nature of the U.S.-Israeli alliance, something Israel would feel highly uncomfortable with due to its political and military dependence on the U.S.

Assuming a Leading Role

The final part of this triangle of principles, which this study identifies as key to improving the United States' ability to constructively influence Israel in a way that is favorable to American interests, is an American willingness and determination to play an active leading role on issues where both countries' interests are involved. On issues which challenge both vital American and Israeli interest to a relatively similar degree, the U.S. should insist on determining the course of action, even if it is done despite Israeli objection. Nonetheless, the Administration would be wise to maintain a high level of communications with Israel, allowing Israel to voice its concerns, and keeping it informed of U.S. objectives and policies. The Iranian issue is a case in point, where the U.S. identified the American interests involved as sufficiently vital to justify American leadership on the issue and the prioritization of U.S. interests over Israeli ones.

As for matters in which Israeli interests are significantly more fundamental than American ones, such as those where Israel's sovereignty and national security are severely jeopardized, the U.S. should work with Israel but nonetheless pursue an active role. The U.S. must recognize the need for a third party to come up with independent initiatives, and at times use coercive diplomacy or the promise of rewards to convince the parties to accept and comply with them. This is especially true when dealing with unwilling or politically weak leaders who need to be pressured and incentivized to change their policies.

Playing a leading role means reclaiming the United States' natural role as the most powerful and influential state in the world and in the Middle East in particular. It does not, however, suggest the U.S. should act unilaterally and without partners. Quite the contrary. Too often the United States has failed to recognize its ability to utilize partnerships with other world and regional powers, as well as its position in international forums, to constructively build a coalition that could support Israel and the Palestinians as they take tough risks and make painful sacrifices.

Epilogue

The three general policy recommendations detailed above are intended to improve the overall U.S.-Israeli relationship moving forward. However, the impact that the breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks will have on the U.S.-Israeli relationship compel us to take those recommendations even further—with some trepidation—to address the issue. In the following section, we harness the principles detailed above to provide a specific policy recommendation relevant to the current circumstances. We put forward the following recommendation as a model for how the Obama administration could define and shape the endgame of the peace process.

Now that Washington's latest effort to get the Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table

through the old approach has failed, there is no doubt that the Obama administration is carefully considering its next moves. As the White House explores the prospects for success and weighs the consequences of failure, it must also be struggling to make sense of the massive grey area in between. To be sure, what follows will reverberate beyond the peace process and have a major impact on Israel's relations with the United States and the world.

By all accounts, the prognosis seems grim.[105] As the story goes, the parties achieved very little by way of substantive issues. The confidence-building measures that provided the basis for direct negotiations to restart have all but obliterated any trust that did exist, as neither party has followed through with their commitments. By bringing a discussion about the release of Jonathan Pollard to the table, Secretary Kerry seemed to be resorting to utter desperation.[106] Exasperated, he has called it "reality check time."[107] Many seasoned observers in the U.S. have already pronounced the peace process dead, disturbed by the lack of progress and persuaded that Secretary Kerry is being driven by a personal desire to "win his ticket into the Secretary of State Hall of Fame."[108] It appears as if for nine months now, U.S. diplomacy has been hard at work building a bridge that neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians seem particularly interested in crossing.

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[105] See: Judis, John B. "John Kerry's Peace Talks Are Almost Dead. A Preemptive Obituary." *New Republic*. 1 Apr. 2013. Web. 20 Apr. 2014. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117228/john-kerrys-peace-negotiations-are-almost-dead-preemptive-obituary>.

[106] "Bad Move on Jonathan Pollard." The Editorial Board. *The New York Times*. 1 Apr. 2014. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/opinion/bad-move-on-jonathan-pollard.html>.

[107] Wroughton, Lesley. "Kerry Warns U.S. Is Evaluating Role in Middle East Peace Talks." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, 04 Apr. 2014. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/04/us-israel-palestinian-kerry-idUSBREA330N920140404>.

[108] Miller, Aaron D. "I Wish I Knew How to Quit You." Foreign Policy, 17 Apr. 2014. Web. 20 Apr. 2014. <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/17/israel_palestine_peace_process_why_cant_kerry_quit>.; See also: "In the Middle East, Time to Move On." Ed. The Editorial Board. *The New York Times*. 14 Apr. 2014. Web. 20 Apr. 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/15/opinion/in-the-middle-east-time-to-move-on.html?_r=0>.

Israeli domestic politics have moved decidedly away from two states. Indeed, it may be the case

that Benjamin Netanyahu has a personal aversion to it. While he in principle stated his support

for 'two states for two peoples' in his famous 2009 Bar Ilan address, PM Netanyahu's actions

raise serious doubts about his belief in the idea.[109] Considering that he has spoken out against

every peace deal ever, and refuses to utter the words '1967 lines,' it is difficult to envision the

extraordinary circumstances it would take for him to risk supporting a deal. Doing so could

jeopardize his premiership. Netanyahu is captive to a far-right coalition, many of whom

passionately oppose the principle of two states under any circumstances. To illustrate just how

suffocating the current situation is in the Knesset, take Naftali Bennett, Minister of Economy and

Trade and Chairman of HaBayit HaYehudi (Jewish Home), the coalition's third largest party and

one of its most influential members. On April 10, Bennett warned that his party was prepared to

withdraw from Netanyahu's government if the third installation of Arab Israeli prisoners were

released as part of the negotiating framework, signaling to the prime minister that if negotiations

were salvaged, the current government would not be.[110]

Israeli society, too, is less than convinced that peace is possible. A majority supports two states

on principle, but few have any faith that the conditions to reach a deal are there. While the

current situation is not viewed as ideal, Israelis have generally adapted to it. Far enough removed

from the violent Second Intifada, they now feel relatively secure and view the present state of

affairs as manageable, if not satisfying. An observation by an Israeli professor at a Jerusalem

cafe encapsulates the feeling:

[109] Netanyahu, Benjamin. "Text of Netanyahu's Foreign Policy Speech at Bar Ilan - News." *Haaretz*. 14 June 2009. Web. 23 Apr. 2014. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/full-text-of-netanyahu-s-foreign-policy-speech-at-bar-ilan-1.277922>.

[110] Caspit, Ben. "Netanyahu Needs Obama More than Ever If Talks Fail - Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East." *Al-Monitor*. 11 Apr. 2014. Web. 20 Apr. 2014. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/ron-dermer-netanyahu-obama-republican-party-bennett.html>.

> If we were sitting here in 2001, there would be a security guard at each entrance. We'd feel very unsafe and brave for being here. So how are things worse than ever? It's 2014—it's calm… If you jump 10 years forward, if there is agreement, it's possible that we'll look at 2014 as the calm needed to make it happen, rather than the time when the window closed.[111]

This assertion assumes, however, that there is an unchanging status quo. Yet, with every day that passes, the likelihood of a viable Palestinian state diminishes. The magnitude of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the massive imbalance of power that they represent have convinced many that the conditions for two states has long since passed.[112] On the Palestinian side, desperation is growing and patience is running out. When Palestinians no longer believe that a diplomatic solution will lead them to independence, the last of Chairman Abbas' political power will be lost. There will no longer be a Palestinian partner to negotiate with, to unite Palestinians around a diplomatic solution, or to cooperate with on security matters. It is anyone's guess when violence will return again and knock on Israeli, as well as Palestinian, doors. And while there is a significant constituency that supports peace in Israel, their voices at the moment appear to be muted.

Given the magnitude of the challenges that current circumstances pose for a negotiated two-state solution, the notion that Secretary Kerry should abandon his peace mission has been a popular one. Many observers, citing the axiom that the United States cannot want peace more than the Israelis and Palestinians themselves, are persuaded that it is time for the U.S. step back from the peace process.

Yet, in order for a future negotiating process to yield any tangible progress, something major has

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[111] Authors' interview with Gil Troy (March 14, 2014).
[112] Authors' interview with Shibley Telhami (February 18, 2014).

to be done to change the political calculations on the ground. Instead of abandoning the peace process, putting forward an independent U.S. proposal represents a viable alternative that could impact and shape the process in ways that better suit Washington's goal of achieving a two-state solution to the conflict.

Putting forward an independent U.S. proposal

Nine months of shuttle diplomacy and countless hundreds of hours at the negotiating table have brought Secretary Kerry and his team an exhaustive understanding of each side's positions, and probably a sense for what gaps are narrow enough that the sides could likely be nudged to agreement. The U.S. team knows intimately what sweeteners are important to both sides, and what the most pressing political concerns are for PM Netanyahu and President Abbas. Such a granular understanding is an extremely valuable basis for progress, and should not be overlooked. "Sustained dialogue with the parties to the conflict," as William Quandt observes, "is the best way to develop the necessary sensitivity to the real political constraints...As with medicine, correct diagnosis is the key to effective prescription."[113]

Seen in this light, the current breakdown in talks presents an opportunity for the U.S. to drive a solution forward and mitigate the strategic damage of failure. As one Israeli observer argues, "Kerry must stop lamenting the sides' failure to drink from his trough and exchange it for another one."[114] While the current state of the peace process is hardly ideal, the categorical failure by Israelis and Palestinians to reach an agreement demonstrates the need for the U.S. to

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[113] Quandt, William B. *Peace Process,* p. 417.

[114] Eldar, Akiva. "Kerry Has No Excuse for Failure in Peace Talks - Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East." *Al-Monitor*. 7 Apr. 2014. Web. 20 Apr. 2014. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/originals/2014/04/israel-peace-process-united-nations-member-state-palestine.html>.

play the role of leader, not facilitator, and work with the international community to shape and support a viable two-state peace.

Drawing from the lessons put forth previously in this essay, the Obama administration should articulate a clear and compelling vision of what two states would look like, and how that solution would work. This includes taking a position on all of the major issues (borders, security, Jerusalem, settlements, and refugees) and defining workable, narrow parameters within which it believes solutions can be found. The White House should not stop after stating its positions, but also articulate how it is going to move those positions forward to meaningful changes on the ground, why it believes that peace is possible, and why it is in the interest of Israelis and Americans alike. The message should be communicated directly to the American and especially to the Israeli public, where it should be clearly stated that the U.S. unconditionally supports Israel and will ensure its security along every step of the way.

The Obama Proposal should spell out the terms of a final agreement on two levels. First, it should set the parameters on those issues where the Kerry team believes an understanding could be reached, while also providing an accelerated timeline for reaching the agreement. For instance, on the issue of borders, it is widely understood that a Palestinian state would be based on the 1967 lines with land swaps. It is both reasonable to believe the two sides could find a consensus on the issue and unreasonable to think the U.S. should impose its own vision on the issue of territorial sovereignty.

On other issues, however, it is unreasonable to believe that Israelis and Palestinians could negotiate a consensus on their own. While each side may be in principle willing to accept the

other's demands, domestic political realities make it exceedingly difficult for leaders on both sides to take such risks. This is the case especially with the concept of recognition of Israel as 'the state of the Jewish people,' the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and an Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley. On these issues, each side holds manifestly incompatible positions, which cannot be reconciled through a negotiating process. On incompatible points, the U.S. should declare a position on each issue and clearly define the steps that each side must take to get what they want—framed as positive incentives. For instance, the proposal could call for Israel to be defined as the state of the Jewish people and ensured that any Palestinian right of return to Israel would be subject to Israeli laws,[115] provided that it evacuates all settlements within a certain distance from East Jerusalem over a five-year period. The Palestinians, for their part, will be granted an accelerated timetable for statehood, and be allowed full right of return to the West Bank once the state of Palestine is recognized—the final step in the process. By providing positive incentives on crucial issues for both sides, the United States can help bridge irreconcilable gaps and provide compelling reasons for compromise.

After articulating its blueprint for two states and its vision for getting there, the White House should follow up with an earnest effort to build international support around it, in addition to support in the United States and on the Israeli and Palestinian sides. It is reasonable to believe that the proposal would be embraced by the international community—including the Arab states—assuming it were perceived to have met the minimum terms of fairness for the

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[115] The *1950 Absentee Property Law* permits the state to confiscate all lands and property whose owners were not present to claim it when the law was legislated. The property was put under the guardianship of a state custodian which could use, rent and sell it. The profits are to be saved and used to compensate the original owners when the time comes. Thus, by subjecting the right of return to Israeli law, refugees would be entitled to financial compensation, but not to their property. As for physical return to Israel, the *1952 Entry into Israel Law* and *2003 Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law* provide the state with the legal mechanisms to deny entrance of the refugees.

Palestinians. An international coalition would build legitimacy around the plan and add an enormous amount of resources that could be mobilized in support of it.

With international support, Washington should present its blueprint to the U.N. Security Council as a substitute for Resolution 242 and 338—one which takes the vital step of providing a timetable for full-fledged Palestinian statehood if the Palestinians abide by their commitments. Replacing 242 and 338 with a resolution that provides for Palestinian statehood would represent a major victory for the Palestinian Authority, instill hope in the Palestinian public, and lay the foundations for both to accept the difficult concessions that will have to be made to get there. Perhaps with the potential for a state laid before them, Palestinians will rally around the more moderate leaders that are on the path to delivering their state.

The United Nations would serve as a key mechanism for moving the plan from the abstract to the concrete. It also provides an avenue for the White House to move forward with its plan without the impediment of Congress. A U.N. Security Council resolution would set expectations for both sides, offer a way for Israelis and Palestinians to meet those expectations, and impose costs on the sides for breaching their commitments. Additionally, it provides both the resources and a measure of neutrality that would be crucial for Israelis and Palestinians to reach agreements on the issues they are negotiating within the parameters of the new Security Council resolution. Representatives from neutral states could observe the negotiations and report back to the Security Council, ensuring that the Israelis and Palestinians remain accountable to the standards set forth by the resolution.

To be sure, putting forward a meaningful proposal to move the two-state solution forward would

be a historic risk, coming at an enormous political cost for the Obama administration. However, the president has options to overcome domestic constraints, including by mobilizing domestic constituencies and skillfully engaging Congress. His greatest asset is the large constituency of Americans (and not only Jewish Americans) that supports a two-state solution. Empowering the American Jewish constituency for peace, more broadly but also through organizations like J Street, President Obama could soften the blow he is sure to get from the Congress. Presidential leadership will be key in defining the issue as a core U.S. national interest. He can do that by standing firm before his critics and bringing the debate to the public sphere, where those opposed to his peace plan will have to publicly reconcile their opposition to a two-state solution with their support for a democratic Israel. By clearly communicating and elaborating its plan and intentions, the U.S. could force the issue into the public agenda and force policymakers in both countries to confront it and offer their public a way forward.

However risky this plan may be, the risks of foreclosing peace are equally historic. With a sound strategy, underpinned by a firm commitment from the president, it is possible for Washington to define and shape the endgame of the peace process. The president should firmly communicate the reasons that peace is both necessary and possible to American and Israeli publics, and link the outcome to the U.S.-Israeli alliance. Indeed, there are many ways that the partnership and Israel's position in the world will be strengthened if it makes the difficult sacrifices needed to live in peace with its Arab neighbors.

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11. (Private). Personal interview with Ayelet Hanfling and Greg McGowan. March 12, 2014. *U.S. diplomat.*

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15. Samuel "Sandy" Berger. Personal interview with Greg McGowan. April 18, 2014. *U.S. National Security Advisor 1997-2001.*

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