Zionist Diplomacy and Israeli Foreign Policy

Aaron S. Klieman

By engaging in regularized, ongoing diplomacy every state with time will tend to develop certain basic modes of international conduct. Thirty years is an acceptable time-frame for the purpose of identifying and analyzing these behaviour patterns (also known as diplomatic ‘tradition’ or ‘style’). The more so if during those thirty years we should witness the most intense kinds of diplomatic activity by the particular state under consideration – activity which one usually associates exclusively with the critical issues of war and peace, and of national survival. Such is the case with Israel since 1948. Commemorating three decades of Jewish statehood thus affords an important perspective from which to evaluate Israel’s record in foreign affairs.

In attempting to cope simultaneously with the burdens of sovereignty and the imperatives of struggle for minimal security Israel perhaps enjoyed one not insignificant diplomatic advantage at the moment of independence. Unlike most of her contemporaries in the ‘third world’ of newly-emergent and developing countries, she embarked upon a course of independent foreign relations with prior experience in international politics dating back to Theodor Herzl and the founding of the Zionist movement at the close of the nineteenth century. Consequently, on May 14, 1948 there already existed an established set of national goals, along with certain prejudices, preferences and favoured operating procedures. Together these constituted a distinctive style of diplomacy even prior to for-

The author is senior lecturer in International Relations and chairman of the Political Science department at Tel Aviv University. An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the 30th State of Israel Anniversary Symposium on ‘Social Development in Israel’ sponsored by Tel Aviv University’s Faculty of Social Sciences, April 10-11, 1978.

(The Jerusalem Quarterly, Number 11, Spring 1979)
mal independence. What is so striking is the degree to which these earlier features of Zionist diplomacy have endured and been adopted by a later generation of Israeli statesmen to such an extent that they now represent the 'constants' of Israel's foreign policy.

In effect this paper addresses itself to the links between, on the one hand, 'state in the making' Zionist diplomacy and, on the other, this more recent era of post-independence statecraft by a sovereign State of Israel. We are raising the question, in short, of how and why Israeli foreign policy in 1979 differs in some ways from that of 1948, while resembling it in others.

Commentators upon Israeli conduct of foreign relations are in general agreement as to the basically reactive, unimaginative and defensive nature of that country's decision-making process and diplomacy. Much evidence is cited which indeed points to a reigning spirit of extreme caution and of conservatism.¹ This is reflected in, and to a considerable extent explained by, at least four procedural and substantive features retained from the pre-state period. These are: (1) personalism, (2) pragmatism, (3) the 'one Great Power' doctrine, and (4) avoidance of direct participation in Middle Eastern politics.

**Personalism**

Perhaps one reason why the initiative by President Sadat in November 1977, initially appealed to the government of Israel is because it fitted so perfectly with a preference by the country's leaders for direct diplomacy at the highest level. Subsequent complications only served to reconfirm this prejudice; Premier Begin himself attributed this slackening of the momentum to pettiness on the part of Egyptian officialdom. Core issues like peace are best dealt with by heads of state or of government, without being held back by bureaucratic considerations. It follows that through direct talks outstanding differences have a better chance of resolution in an atmosphere of personal trust and commitment. Thus when the process had stalled by the summer of 1978 again it was the direct approach (Defence Minister Ezer Weizmann's meetings in Austria with Sadat and General Gamassi) which proved effective, and, again, at Camp David.

This preference for summity has a long tradition behind it. Early

¹ Brecher, for example, describes Israeli diplomacy as lacking 'the innovative brilliance of the military in Israel'; nor has it even matched the progress made in other social areas. See Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 562; also his companion volume, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). A similar critical view is expressed in Lewis Brownstein, 'Decision Making in Israeli Foreign Policy: An Unplanned Process', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (Summer 1977), pp. 259–279. Yet for all their comprehensiveness, the studies by Professor Brecher are indicative of the tendency to overlook the diplomatic link to the pre-state period, especially the staying power and institutionalization of certain characteristics.
Zionist contacts with other states were also maintained through great leaders' personal diplomacy. Appreciation for the need to cut through red tape and to dispense at times with the niceties of diplomatic protocol, for going right to the top, finds a precedent in the efforts of Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism himself, who in Zangwill's phrase, was 'the first Jewish statesman since the destruction of Jerusalem'. Herzl's diaries reveal how with little or no backing he confronted the rulers, statesmen and financiers of Europe and the Near East.

By far the most successful practitioner of personal diplomacy was Chaim Weizmann. A consummate diplomat and prolific correspondent, Weizmann was the only Zionist leader who could meet world statesmen like Jan Smuts and Leon Blum on an equal footing, making important friends for the Zionist cause. His close relationship with British Cabinet members, especially in the negotiations which preceded the Balfour Declaration but also throughout the mandate period, are well-known. But Weizmann's greatest achievement came later, in 1947–48, during the struggle to win American support. Official Zionist strategy sought to influence the Truman Administration indirectly: massive efforts were expended in pressuring state and congressional leaders, in mobilizing American Jewry, in cultivating public opinion. But this was to little avail. Truman himself records how such Zionist tactics proved counter-productive, almost alienating him.\(^2\) Weizmann, however, resorted to the direct, personal approach. With his flair for knowing where the real sources of political power lay, he gained entry to the office of the President of the United States. Without Weizmann's personal eleventh-hour appeals to Truman it is not at all certain that American support would have been forthcoming in the instances of UN partition, inclusion of the Negev within the Jewish state or, lastly, its early recognition.

This early stress upon the interpersonal side of foreign relations continued after the creation of Israel as well. Although David Ben-Gurion went abroad only once in the first twelve years of independence, he travelled extensively during the last phase of his tenure as premier. Most memorable were his historic meeting with Konrad Adenauer in 1960 and also with president-elect John F. Kennedy. The inclination to carry out policy in addition to making it has been evidenced by each of Ben-Gurion's successors as prime minister. The talks between Levi Eshkol and President Lyndon B. Johnson at the latter's Texas ranch in January 1968, resulted in the sale of valuable US arms to Israel, including Phantom and Skyhawk planes. Golda Meir's periodic visits to Washington were a vehicle for exercising her powers of persuasion over President

\(^2\) Recalled Truman: 'As the pressure mounted, I found it necessary to give instructions that I did not want to be approached by any more spokesmen for the extreme Zionist cause'. Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope* (Vol. II). 1946–1952 (New York: Signet Books, 1965), p. 188.

Personal diplomacy in the grand manner had come full circle in the thirtieth year of statehood and first year of the Likud government. The visit by Prime Minister Menahem Begin to Bucharest shortly after his election victory and the talks with President Nicolai Ceausescu were instrumental in paving the way for the Sadat initiative. Similarly, much effort has gone into cultivating personal ties with President Carter, and also with Britain's Prime Minister James Callaghan. In this connection we need only recall the decision by Premier Begin in December 1977 personally to deliver and argue his government's peace proposals before the Carter Administration. But if anything captures the problematic side of diplomacy at the top in addition to its advantages perhaps it is the two important yet private Begin-Sadat conversations in Jerusalem which have become the source for so much speculation and misunderstanding.

The personal approach owed its origins to the informal, structured and experimental nature of a state as yet in the making. For much of the time, after all, Chaim Weizmann, Moshe Sharett, Nahum Sokolov and Nahum Goldmann were themselves the foreign policy 'establishment', executing broad Zionist strategy at their own discretion between Zionist Congresses by moving from one capital to another, with few guidelines or restrictions. One might assume that statehood would have put an end to free wheeling, idiosyncratic diplomacy by placing it on an organizational rather than personal basis. Yet Israeli foreign policy making, instead of being structured along institutional lines, as we have noted, still emphasizes direct leader involvement in interpersonal statecraft. This is perhaps best reflected in the permanent downgrading of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although it can also be seen in the secondary role played in foreign policy by both the Cabinet and the Knesset through its Committee on Foreign Affairs and Security.

It is fair to say that overall the Foreign Ministry has been reduced to an auxiliary agency with little voice and even less influence in the actual formulation of policy. It is involved almost exclusively with the technical aspects of policy and its implementation. The status of the Ministry is largely the function of two relationships: (1) between the minister and the premier, and (2) between itself and the other ministries, its principal rival, of course, being the Defence Ministry. It is perhaps too soon to weigh the impact upon policy of personal relations between Begin and Moshe Dayan. Nevertheless, there is much evidence to suggest that personality differences (between Ben-Gurion and Sharett; Golda Meir and Abba Eban; Rabin and Peres with Foreign Minister Yigal Allon) more than formal lines of jurisdiction have worked in the past to diminish the role of those professionally expert in foreign affairs.
Lack of political power or acumen is compounded, at the organizational level, by the position of weakness from which the Foreign Ministry participates in the interdepartmental contest for influence. The argument of national security - and the failure in Israel to see diplomacy as a main component in the security effort - has led to subordination of diplomatic and public relations to military considerations. The Ministry has been no match for the powerful and respected defence establishment, and morale within the Ministry has suffered as a result. The effects upon policy are clear. Two of these are: poor co-ordination and pooling of resources by the Foreign and Defence Ministries; and the fact that the Foreign Ministry has not claimed for itself any major role in the planning of policy, leaving this key function almost exclusively to defence personnel. The third effect, surely, of an unassertive Ministry for Foreign Affairs is to further encourage the undertaking of personal diplomacy.

Pragmatism

The external relations of a nationalist movement are one matter; those of a sovereign state, another. In the case of Israel this transition has been softened by a second feature of continuity: pragmatism. In his classic study of policymaking in a pragmatic society Henry Kissinger draws examples from practices in the United States; yet many of his observations are no less appropriate for Israel.¹

The tendency is for bureaucratic-pragmatic societies to await developments. Problems are dealt with only as they arise and only as the pressure of events imposes the need for resolving them. Similarly, there is a preference for dealing with actual rather than hypothetical cases; and a premium is put on short-term goals. Domestic pressures likewise contribute to turning decision-making into a series of adjustments among special interests and conflicting pressures. In pragmatic cultures, Kissinger noted, policy emerges from a compromise 'which often produces the least common denominator, and it is implemented by individuals whose reputation is made by administering the status quo'.² Moreover, in Israel there does generally exist a great reluctance to develop a negotiating position or a statement of objectives - or a map - except in the most general terms. All of which helps explain 'the peculiar alternation of rigidity and spasms of flexibility'³ in the foreign policy of Israel (witness blanket acceptance of Egyptian sovereignty over Sinai together with steadfastness over the Rafah salient) just as in the United States. But

² Ibid., p. 273.
³ Ibid., p. 268.
there is one major difference between American and Israeli pragmatism. Pragmatism in the former, Kissinger and others would argue, is the product of an environment in which most recognized problems have proved soluble. In contrast, Israel’s national experience revolves around an intractable environment and the immediate pressures of the struggle for survival. Hence, whether in the yishuv period, in the shadow of the Holocaust or in the Arab-Israel conflict the approach to policy has for the most part been ad hoc (designed to cope with exigencies as they arise), pragmatic (making a virtue of necessity) and even somewhat mechanical (done dutifully according to pre-existing formulae).

Flexibility and pragmatism were the hallmark of Zionist activity during the forty years of pre-state diplomacy. Weizmann and his colleagues were not above playing off the respective belligerents, Germany and England, against each other during the First World War. There was concern in London lest England be pre-empted by a unilateral German pledge of support for Zionist aspirations in Palestine. By reinforcing this British insecurity the Zionist leaders helped insure issuance of the Balfour Declaration. In 1921–22 appreciation for political realities led the leadership to consent, albeit grudgingly and without prejudice to the ultimate claim, in Churchill’s conversion of Trans-Jordan into an exclusively Arab province within the Palestine mandate. Practical Zionists preferred to concentrate their energies instead upon developing and expanding the Jewish settlement, or yishuv, west of the Jordan.

In the 1930s, although personally identified with a pro-British policy, Weizmann conducted negotiations with Mussolini. Several years later, in August 1937, the proposal by Great Britain to partition Palestine involved the Zionists in a major internal crisis. Yet a majority followed Weizmann and Ben-Gurion in endorsing the principle of an independent though truncated Jewish state in but a small part of Palestine. Sharett (then called Shertok) argued the ‘historical necessity’ of accepting partition; Zionism’s ultimate success lay in ‘the maximum exploitation of historic opportunities’ which present themselves at any given moment. In the next instance of strategic pragmatism Ben-Gurion defined Zionist policy during the Second World War towards the British as mandatory Power: ‘We shall fight the war [against Nazi Germany] as if there were no [1939] White Paper’, he declared, ‘and we shall fight the White Paper as if there were no war’. Then, towards the climax of the struggle for statehood, Weizmann especially showed himself capable of making the requisite political shift dictated by circumstances. His orientation and energies moved from England to the ascendant world power, the United States.

After 1948 diplomatic flexibility in the pursuit always of the fixed goal of national security continued to be reflected in Israeli foreign policy generally. It is most readily apparent, however, in a series of specific moves. Pragmatism led the Israeli Government in
1951–52 to take hard decisions which resulted in direct negotiations with the Federal German Republic ending in the 1953 reparations agreements. It also led to the conclusion of arms deals with West Germany in the late 1950s. During the Knesset debate on one such transaction it was Ben-Gurion who expressed the very essence of the pragmatic approach when he said:

In my profound conviction, the injunction bequeathed to us by the martyrs of the Holocaust is the rebuilding, the strengthening, the progress and the security of Israel. For that purpose we need friends...especially friends who are able and willing to ensure our survival... But if we regard Germany, or any other country, as Satan, we shall not receive arms.⁶

The same reasoning governed Israel's position in further broadening Israel–West German bilateral economic and cultural ties, including the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1955.

Realpolitik explains as well Ben-Gurion's advocacy in the mid-1950s of guaranteeing the security of Israel by a mutual defence pact with the United States. This despite his image of, and lifelong commitment to, Jewish self-reliance; and despite his having consistently opposed such proposals, even as late as 1954. Yet in the face of renewed Arab hostility Ben-Gurion gave his consent to a new initiative towards Washington in the summer of 1955. His biographer offers Ben-Gurion's rationale: were the United States to sign a mutual defence treaty the Arabs would have to accept the impossibility of destroying the Jewish state and would be compelled to move in time towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.⁷

When this overture met resistance by the Eisenhower Administration, Israel proceeded to look elsewhere for potential allies and to other - namely military - means. Flexibility resulted in Ben-Gurion's collaboration with Britain and France during the Suez campaign; in the same way that pragmatism necessitated his ordering the withdrawal from Sinai at the close of that campaign, in March 1957.

Thus pragmatism in Israeli foreign policy has helped to compensate for what might otherwise have proved a fatal overemphasis, and reliance, upon great leader or 'lone wolf' diplomacy. Sensitivity to the limits of the possible largely balances the accident of personality by moderating the impulsive, affective, side of individual leaders along with their selective perceptions of the world.

On at least two major issues, however, we find a significant shift towards inflexibility. The first is in the global context of Israel's position vis-à-vis the superpower rivalry. The second involves the

Middle East regional context; in particular, opposition to a political status for the Palestinians. In the larger time-frame of this paper, both can only be viewed as aberrations in, or departures from, the tradition of diplomatic flexibility.

The 'One Great Power' Doctrine

Nonalignment and the desire to pursue an independent course in world politics are established principles in Israel's diplomatic tradition, as they are for most other countries. George Washington, in his farewell address in 1796, counselled his American countrymen: 'nothing is more essential than that permanent, inveterate antipathies against particular nations and passionate attachments for others, should be excluded'. Similarly, Lord Palmerston in 1848 offered the classic statement of British priorities: 'it is a narrow policy to suppose that this country or that is to be marked out as the eternal ally or the perpetual enemy. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and these interests it is our duty to follow.'

So, too, Israel's wish for non-identification. Again it was Ben-Gurion who presented unalignment as axiomatic in light of the Jewish state's special problems and foreign policy goals. As late as 1952, in an important essay, 'Israel Among the Nations', he could still maintain that Israel's most earnest wish was

\[\text{to establish normal relations with all countries, their Governments and their people, without enquiring meticulously into their internal forms, and to lend a hand in every experiment and every step designed to lessen the tension between the great Powers and to support peace in the world.}^8\]

In the same essay, he added:

\[\text{No external force, be it the strongest, most vehement and wealthy imaginable, is going to decide Israel's needs and values. The foreign policy of Israel is settled according to the fundamental values and the fundamental needs of the Jewish nation, and by no other determinant.}^9\]

Yet even at the time Ben-Gurion wrote these words such protestations of non-dependence were threatening to become obsolete. In July 1950, the Government had aligned itself with the West through support of UN resolutions and actions at the time of the Korean War, in effect abandoning the basic policy of non-identification.

Why this contradiction between theory and practice, as well as between Israel and the brand of neutralism followed by others during the Cold War?

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9 Ibid., p. 23.
Among the possible explanations an immediate one is also the most obvious. Quite unlike the United States and England in earlier periods and even some peripheral countries today, splendid isolation is an alternative never really open before Israel. Force of circumstance on the two tiers of superpower rivalry and the Arab conflict precludes rigid adherence by Israel to a policy of detachment from the contemporary international political setting.

A second factor behind Israel’s association with the West is ideology. In the above essay, Ben-Gurion admitted,

Israel is not indifferent to the ideological conflict which is being waged simultaneously with the political and military rivalry of nations... Totalitarian government, of whatever brand, is deadly poison to the survival of Jews in their dispersion, and international totalitarian ambitions endanger the survival of its Jewish State.

Whereas, in the democratic countries alone ‘have we uninhibited access to their Jews, and only there can we explain to public opinion at large the position of Israel, its needs, its undertakings and its aspirations.’ These two things, Ben-Gurion concluded, had an overriding value for the basic needs of Israel — immigration, development and security. Implicit in this argument is a third explanation. Israeli leaders came to feel that global political configurations left them no real alternative. It is the fundamental divergence of interests perceived to exist between Israel and the Soviet Union (Russian Jewry’s right to emigrate, the advantages the Arab states offer, the Soviet role as a destabilizing force in the region) to which Israeli policymakers refer in justifying their tilt to the West.

To this list I would add a fourth aspect, one which is rooted in the pre-state assumptions of Zionist diplomacy and which, moreover, does not see identification with a particular Great Power as necessarily detrimental. On the contrary, Zionist leaders from Herzl to Weizmann appreciated how important the support, moral and political, of a leading world Power could be for their cause. Patronage of such a major actor might prove decisive in three ways: (a) in giving Zionism legitimacy; (b) in protecting the national home in Palestine and encouraging its economic growth; and (c) in making the Arabs realize that opposition, especially violent opposition, to Zionism was no longer an option worth pursuing.

With this in mind Weizmann and the others sought to foster a ‘British connection’ during those formative years which coincided with the British mandate period in Palestine proper. The intention boldly was to make Zionism an ally of Great Britain by linking the fate of the nationalist movement with that of empire and equilibrium. In those years much effort went into reminding British officials in London of the original Balfour commitment and in attempts to see it honoured in the only way possible: through

10 Ibid., pp. 19, 21.
greater support and closer association with the Zionist enterprise. Even when Britain sought to renege, to dissociate herself from Zionism, Weizmann, architect of the Anglo-Zionist ‘one Great Power’ strategy, persisted. In an atmosphere of appeasement, and knowing that the White Paper about to be published meant crystallization of the Jewish national home and its abandonment by England, he could still remark in 1939: ‘For us Jews loyalty to Great Britain is almost an unconditional thing’. That Weizmann was condemned for this unswerving pro-British policy by his critics within the movement is amply documented. Less appreciated, however, is the political fact that in the interwar period no other candidate for the ‘one Great Power’ role presented herself – not France, not Russia, not Hitler’s Germany and not America, then in the throes of isolationism. Indeed, if anything Ze’ev Jabotinsky, otherwise opposed to Weizmann’s gradualist diplomacy, tended to go even further in his enthusiasm for Great Britain, at one point stating that ‘It would be a blessing for any land to become a partner in the British Commonwealth of Free People’. Any such hopes, of course, proved misplaced. The ‘British connection’ was frayed and about to be severed completely by 1945–47. Still intent upon operationalizing the ‘one Great Power’ doctrine, the Zionist leadership next turned its full attention to the United States as a replacement for Great Britain.

It must be reiterated that the idea behind all this maneuvering was the realization that to succeed Zionism required external reinforcement. Thus it is true that in the first years of statehood Israeli policymakers did experiment with alternative frameworks other than the ‘one Great Power’ doctrine. Many sought to carry out the goals of foreign policy through multilateral means, chiefly at the United Nations, only to be confronted by the weaknesses inherent in that organization. For a while considerable emphasis was placed on strengthening Israel internationally and numerically through a diplomatic initiative towards the Afro-Asian and Latin American states which involved an ambitious technical assistance programme of foreign aid. Others, recalling the rare occasion when American and Soviet interests converged in endorsing the 1947 UN partition scheme, and remembering what it had been like to pin Zionist hopes entirely on Britain and then be left completely exposed and friendless, advocated steering a middle course in world affairs. Non-identification, however, was soon discarded, invalidated by mounting Israeli insecurity, by the Soviet diplomatic offensive towards the Arabs signalled in the 1955 Czech arms deal, and by the unreliability of either Britain or France as substitutes for American support.

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11 In Aaron S. Kleinman, Divide or Rule, manuscript in preparation. Weizmann’s remark came at the time of the London Conferences immediately preceding Britain’s adoption of the 1939 White Paper (FO 371/23223, file E 1058).

When this became clear to Weizmann’s successors, starting with Ben-Gurion and continuing through Eshkol, Meir and Rabin, they reverted to the older practice of concentrating upon relations with one Great Power. This is readily apparent from Israeli efforts towards the United States since 1967.

There had been earlier disappointments in Israeli-American relations. Ben-Gurion’s initiative in seeking a mutual defence treaty had been rebuffed by Washington in 1955; so, too, requests for formal security guarantees in 1957. There was the failure of the United States to honour previous informal commitments to the freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal during the 1967 crisis. Nevertheless, appreciating the value of American assistance, subsequent governments (including the present one) have given top priority to strengthening ties with the US. And this for precisely the same three reasons that had motivated Zionist diplomacy earlier: legitimacy, protection, deterrence.

More on the defensive now than in 1948 Israel finds herself isolated and practically alone on the diplomatic front. Victim of her own ineptitude in the contest for world public opinion, as well as of bloc politics and voting in the various organs of the United Nations, Israel takes comfort in American expressions of support. This support, including use of the veto in the Security Council to prevent passage of distorted, anti-Israel resolutions, has manifested itself on occasions and issues important to Jerusalem. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg’s role in thwarting the move by the USSR and the Arab states to charge Israel with aggression during the 1967 Council debates; Patrick Moynihan’s stinging criticism of the anti-Zionist resolution; US abstention in October 1977, on a resolution condemning Israeli settlements on territory occupied since the 1967 war, despite its being endorsed by 131 other UN members, including all those of the European Economic Community; and the agreement of successive administrations in Washington to Israel’s interpretation of Resolution 242 – these are but a few cases in point to show the moral support Israel derives from America’s seeming willingness to rally to her side in international forums.

The second benefit is more tangible. Just as England accepted responsibility for the security of the yishuv, so has the United States contributed to Israel’s security, although only indirectly and without any formal undertaking. The American contribution is twofold: insuring Israel’s defensive capability, and sustaining her economic viability. The US airlift of military supplies was of critical importance during the Yom-Kippur War of 1973, and the flow of sophisticated weapons since 1973 is vital if Israel is to continue maintaining an expensive and delicate military balance in the Middle East. The US Defence Department reported that US arms ordered by Israel dropped by almost half in 1977 – from one billion dollars in 1976 to $552 million last year – although this did not reflect major decisions which were then still pending on proposed
purchases of the US F-15 and F-16 fighters. In the economic sector, too, dependence upon the United States is already great. Due to the heavy defence burden (more than one-third of the GNP) and high inflationary rate the prospects are for this dependence only to increase; public sector aid from the US alone amounted to over $2 billion in each of the fiscal years 1976 and 1977. The fact is, therefore, that American financial assistance is indispensable for the survival of Israel as a viable entity until such time as a resolution of the Arab-Israel conflict and peace are achieved.

As seen from Jerusalem relations with the United States have a third positive function. For according to the 'one Great Power' tradition the friendship and support of a major outside actor serve as a counter to Arab numerical superiority and hostility. So much of the emphasis in Israeli foreign policy upon cementing ties with America thus rests upon the following premise: superpower reinforcement, both moral and material, works in important ways to deter possible Arab aggressive designs against Israel, and thereby contributes to a lowering of tension. Because Britain did not remain steadfast in support of Zionism, Arab intransigence gained the upper hand in the earlier period. Now, America's commitment to a strong Israel, and the willingness of US leaders to play an active role in the peace process, would seem to have been instrumental in finally breaking the deadlock and in encouraging Arab moderation.

Legitimacy, a substitute for power deficiencies, deterrence value - these then have continued to be the three main arguments in favour of a great power or superpower orientation. A corollary might be that by securing the support of at least one power, Israel virtually precludes the possibility of the two superpowers acting against her in concert, as the US and the USSR threatened to do in 1957 or as they might contemplate in imposing a settlement upon her; hence Jerusalem's uneasiness upon learning of the joint Soviet-American memorandum on October 1, 1977. Also, psychologically and bureaucratically it is admittedly easier for leaders of a state with limited assets to concentrate upon the one potentially than it is to suffer the insecurity and risks of maneuvering among the two or more giants without alienating either one, and without the assurance of consistent support from either side.

For each of these reasons, and so long as the benefits far outweigh the discomforts of dependency, Israel can be expected to devote herself to promoting the relationship established with the United States in recent years, in which event the 'one Great Power' doctrine will continue to serve as an accurate guide for Israeli foreign policy well into the fourth decade of statehood. This, however, ignores the American side of the equation and possible US interests.
Israel’s Role in Middle East Politics

Non-interference in regional Arab politics is a fourth durable feature of both Zionist and Israeli foreign policy. While the reasons may be somewhat different in each of the respective periods this need not alter the fact that policymakers have shown neither a flair for directly influencing the affairs of the neighbouring countries nor even a real desire to do so. This is as true for the domestic political scene inside each country as it is for the overall regional balance between conservative and radical Arab forces, or between those advocating a pro-Soviet or a pro-American policy. Rather, such considerations have tended to be only secondary and indirect, such as when deep-penetration sorties by the Israeli air force during the War of Attrition drove Egypt to strengthen her ties with the Soviet Union.

This pattern of aloofness and of refusing to participate in regional intrigues and political alignments - whether out of disdain or as a result of rational calculation - says something about prevailing attitudes and assumptions then as well as now with regard to Israel’s place in the Middle East. Israel’s being poised to intervene against Syria in the 1970 Jordan civil war and her open defence of the Lebanese Christian community in that country’s strife are really exceptions which only prove the point. It is perhaps indicative again of the narrow constraints which exist. To adopt a clear position on regional issues exposes Israel to the charge of exploiting Arab world centrifugal pressures with the aim of dominating her neighbours. The irony is that, conversely, by this political abstinence first the pishuv and then Israel have opened themselves to the Arab complaint of being a foreign body alien to the region and insensitive to its rhythms, its passions and concerns.

The pre-state period did see a number of Zionist attempts at breaking the wall of Arab rejection. But the Palestinian Arab leadership showed itself over the years to be uncompromising. One way of sidestepping this direct obstacle was thought to be in moving beyond the actual confines of Palestine, seeking Arab moderation elsewhere and a willingness to accept in principle the Zionist claim in the other Arab capitals. Here the record is a fairly long one, beginning with the Weizmann-Faysal agreement in 1919 and involving such Arab leaders as Nuri Sa’id of Iraq and the Amir Abdullah of Transjordan. But these efforts were futile. No Arab political figure offered the two conditions essential to an accord: one, a desire to reach an accommodation with Zionism; and two, a combination of authority and courage to make such an agreement binding in the face of criticism from his fellow Arabs. Abdullah, for example, possessed the former but not the latter; whereas the Mufti, Haj Amin al-Husayni, might have had the necessary power over his constituency but surely not the motivation to forego a struggle against Zionism.
These experiences only proved to be dysfunctional. Meeting a solid wall of intransigence resulted in a deep and abiding frustration as well as impatience with inter-Arab politics. Also, Weizmann and many of his colleagues shared a much closer cultural affinity towards Europe than to Asia; they would undoubtedly sympathize with Prime Minister Begin’s distaste for bazaar trading. Even those negotiations which were conducted by Zionist emissaries tended to be rather sporadic and half-hearted, causing one expert on Arab affairs to write in 1936:

What have all the Zionist Executives up to now done, if not to solve, at least to ease, the severity of the Arab-Jewish problem? What initiative did Zionists take in this field? ... Was a complete and inclusive programme on the Arab-Jewish question ever formulated in any higher Zionist body?¹³

Not even waiting for an answer this critic of Zionist indifference to the Arab sector continued:

Not a single serious attempt (or even a desultory one) to deal with the question! In the forty years of political Zionism we have had congresses, conventions, councils, and committees on all sorts of topics and matters, all of them doubtless important, but when did a Zionist quorum ever get together to formulate a plan on the Arab-Jewish question, the importance of which is indisputable?

Although perhaps exaggerated there is considerable truth to the accusation, because early Zionist diplomacy, with its fixation upon the European centre of power, for the most part did tend to neglect the Arab diplomatic front.

Frustration combined with existing psychological and cultural predispositions to cause a great leap outward in Zionist statecraft beyond the Middle East and into the arena of European and world politics. Energies were concentrated instead upon gaining recognition of the Jews’ right to be in the region not from those peoples presently in the Middle East but from parties external to the area like England, France, Germany, Russia, or the United States. Thus perceived, the overwhelming preoccupation with great power support has been a corrective to, and escape from, first, the region’s hostility and, second, its endemic political instability.

The creation of the state in 1948, particularly in light of the manner in which it came about, brought to the fore this unresolved problem of Israel’s place among the surrounding states of the Middle East. Involved with her own constructive efforts at strengthening the foundations of the state, Israel continued to refrain from an active regional role following independence. As Arab antagonism also continued unabated, this only added to Israeli resolve not to meddle in the internal affairs of other states or in power politics generally. Policy decisions on such matters as possible trade rela-

tions with the Arab states, regional cooperation and the status of Middle Eastern minorities were deferred along with that of the Palestinian refugees on the grounds of their being impractical until such time as the Arabs would take the one essential step: the conclusion of peace and the establishment of normal relations. To avoid total exclusion from the region efforts in the 1950s were made in the direction of friendly relations with the two non-Arab but Muslim countries of the Middle East, Turkey and Iran. In general, however, Israel's interests were felt to cut across inter-Arab rivalries; these could be ignored with impunity just so long as protection against a possible 'second round' and the actual means for her self-defence remained available from sources outside the region.

As one might expect of a conservative state following a cautious foreign policy, Israeli views of regional politics became rigid with time, and also somewhat simplistic. For example, policymakers adopted a monolithic image of an Arab world stretching from the Maghrib to the Euphrates united in its hostility to the Jewish state. The region came to be viewed in monochromatic terms of black or white, as comprising a solid enemy front yet one incapable of surmounting internal controversies in order to concert fully the effort against Israel. This defensive attitude of suspicion, of constant vigilance but not direct involvement in Arab affairs did not require any initiative on the part of Israel. Instead, Israeli leaders found refuge in adhering to certain standard conceptions. Arab hostility was one of these. It represented the only permanent 'given' in policy deliberations. Similarly, the Arabs could be trusted at the crucial moment to sow inter-Arab disunity. Signs of this growing rigidity were also to be discerned in the legalistic argument, given official sanction, that the conflict was confined exclusively to sovereign states (Israel and the neighbouring Arab countries), leaving the Palestinians without any locus standi in the political dispute or its resolution.

The institutionalization of Israeli conceptions towards the politics of the region is best expressed in the case of Jordan. Preference for the Hashemite Kingdom as her eastern neighbour is a longstanding principle of Israel's policy, since the years of the British mandate. By a process of incrementalism the existence of Jordan is today a vested interest for Israel and a cardinal tenet in her military-political conception of national security.

Through frequent personal contacts the Zionist leaders arrived at an appreciation for Amir Abdullah (the first ruler of Jordan, from 1921 until his assassination in 1951) as a moderate Arab leader willing to bargain with them on a basis of quid pro quo. Abdullah, however, suffered from a single glaring defect which Zionist statecraft converted into an asset. He possessed only a weak ter-

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14 For a presentation of this viewpoint, see Ya'acov Shimoni, 'Israel in the Pattern of Middle East Politics', Middle East Journal, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July 1950), p. 293.
ritorial power base which everyone regarded as a 'parasite state'; even Abdullah spoke of 'this wilderness of Transjordania.' Yet this very weakness meant that Jordan could not constitute a military threat for the Jewish state.

Identical considerations govern contemporary Israeli policy. In King Hussein Jerusalem sees a moderate, rational and also weak antagonist. The Hashemite monarchy is strong enough to maintain control over the desert kingdom, as proved in 1970 against the Palestinian extremists, but not so strong militarily as to risk another debacle like that of 1967. Not to be overlooked is that support for Jordan is a shared interest with the United States instead of yet another source of friction with US policymakers. Furthermore, there is a similarity of interest between Jerusalem and Amman, the product of mutual probing and testing by the two sides as well as of covert cooperation and consultation over the years. One such shared interest is in economic and trade links, reflected in the 'open bridges' policy. A second complementary interest is the desire not to have the Palestine Liberation Organization given political status west of the Jordan River. The formula adopted by Jerusalem in response to the reopening of the Palestine question in the past decade perhaps shows Israel's good faith in this regard. Under existing circumstances (and there is no indication by Israel of a desire to engineer fundamental change in them), to consent to have only two states inhabit the area between the desert and the Mediterranean amounts to preserving the status quo and to endorsing Hussein's claim of representing the Palestinians.

A vested interest in Jordan may also be the sole explanation for an enigma of Israeli foreign policy. Israel has been under tremendous international pressure since 1967 to relinquish her hold over the West Bank (Judea and Samaria). Yet she has refrained from employing what is an otherwise cogent argument. If acquisition of territory by force is inadmissible, then the same standard ought to apply to Jordan as well. Having annexed Arab Palestine in 1950 after its occupation by the Arab Legion during the 1948 War, Jordan by right ought to be seen as having no more of a valid claim to 'return' of the territory than Israel. Indeed, Abdullah's unilateral aggrandizement of territory was opposed by the Arab League. Only Britain and Pakistan formally recognized the annexation. The decisive voice, in fact, was Israel's, whose de facto consent to the occupation was given in the Armistice Agreement between Israel and Transjordan, signed in April 1949. Yet this argument has never been pressed by Israel; on the contrary, since then the emphasis has been upon maximal regularizing of this working, functional, arrangement with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. With the possible exception of Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon no Israeli leaders evidence a preparedness to abandon Jordan in favour of a Palestinian solution.

This tacit alliance with Jordan appears from an historical
perspective to be one of the more significant divergences from post-independence diplomacy. Throughout the earlier period discussions took place outside of Palestine with virtually any Arab dignitary prepared to talk with Zionist representatives. But the core issue was always understood on the Zionist side to be a struggle for the right to Palestine between two nationalist movements inside Palestine. It was the Palestinian Arab leadership which persisted in refusing to acknowledge Jewish nationalism, not the reverse. The question for Zionist diplomacy after 1917 was not a matter of principle—whether Palestinian nationalism existed—but of procedure: who among the local factions and notables could claim to represent the Palestinian community? Until as late as 1947 Zionist statesmen had no hesitation in accepting the Palestinian nationalist movement as a direct party to the dispute with certain legitimate interests. Zionists criticized British policy for introducing extraneous elements into the Palestine problem and causing it to become regionalized instead of restricted to the two nationalist movements alone. In endorsing the UN partition proposal the Zionists in fact were giving their consent in principle to the formation of a Palestinian Arab entity in a large portion of Palestine.

In this sense the events of 1947–1949 were responsible for the single most revolutionary transformation in the guidelines of Israeli foreign policy. Even after statehood diplomacy remained in the hands of a few political leaders. The pragmatic approach continued to characterize decision-making. Concern for the favour of at least one global actor persisted. And regional detachment increased, if anything, because of total Arab rejection. But as to the original Palestine problem a basic asymmetry resulted. Instead of two approximately equal national movements thirsting for recognition, later phases of the conflict feature an independent sovereign state of Israel, on the one hand, and a Palestinian nationalist movement still in disarray, still motivated by negativism and still searching for legitimacy. How, when and just where these find a solution will surely dominate the challenges we can anticipate for Israel’s security and diplomacy as she enters upon the fourth decade of statehood.

*Will the Fourth Decade be Different?*

Given the subject’s importance for Israel we may be excused for concluding on a note of speculation towards foreign policy in the coming years. In contrast to open debate on the issues, the actual conduct of diplomacy (decision and implementation) is of necessity restricted to a small policy elite. Hence one is left to trust that the political system in Israel will show itself to be a reliable mechanism for the selection of national leaders who, although lacking experience in the practice of diplomacy, will nevertheless share those
qualities possessed by a Weizmann or a Ben-Gurion: sensitivity to the intricacies of diplomacy, realism as to the benefits as well as the risks inherent in statecraft, and prudence. By way of compensating for their own inexperience, it is to be hoped the next generation of diplomats will be more inclined than their predecessors to rely upon a professional, career foreign service for guidance, demanding for the latter in particular a greater role – as opposed to the role already exercised by the military establishment – in the formulation and planning of policy. In this context, it will be interesting to see whether the tenure of Moshe Dayan, a military man, as head of the Foreign Ministry will in any meaningful way improve the status and functioning of that vital yet neglected agency of national security.

If granted a second preference it would be for pragmatism – and its adjunct, flexibility – to figure as prominently in the calculation of overall policy and of specific moves as it has until now. Statesmanship is not a contest with either history or prophecy, but with objective political realities. The test lies not in the realm of the impossible but in how skillfully Israel can secure the attainable. It is the more disturbing, therefore, to detect signs of an inability to accept, let alone initiate, change, preferring instead to entrench foreign policy behind frozen images or stereotypes – towards Arab hostility, towards the Soviet Union, towards the United Nations and the Third World, towards Jordan and the Palestinians; indeed, towards international relations as a whole. In contrast with earlier Zionist enthusiasm and idealism with regard to the world arena and the opportunities it afforded, a good deal of weariness and of cynicism has crept into Israeli attitudes governing foreign policy. A primary task of coming leadership will be to reawaken this former appreciation for what can be obtained through adept diplomacy, converting it into a power asset as well as a support for the taking of initiatives in pursuit of the national interest.

In retrospect we conclude that statehood involved less of a transformation in basic foreign policy attitudes or strategies than might otherwise be assumed. Attitudes change slowly, while strategies are prisoner to actual situations. There is no reason, therefore, to expect any abrupt shift in Israel’s diplomatic posture. Yet certain breaks with the past – and which are in her power to effect – would be commendable if diplomacy is to make its maximum contribution to the national security. Professional considerations instead of coalition bargaining would have to be used in making appointments to sensitive Foreign Ministry posts in Jerusalem. Instead of being guaranted as a largely private matter the foreign policy process could be made more meaningful were an informed and attentive public to be encouraged and debate stimulated as a healthy safeguard against the likely defects of ‘lone wolf’ and ‘summit’ diplomacy. In general greater sophistication needs to be shown in stemming the harmful effects outside Israel of unneces-
sary traits in Israeli politics: leakage of sensitive information, impromptu ‘off-the-cuff’ remarks, seemingly uncoordinated and unauthorized statements or action, and subordinating foreign and security policy to coalition, personal or internal party politics. Lastly, world public opinion is neither closed nor lost to Israel, but must be cultivated constantly through a major, concerted information effort.

For at least a decade relations with the United States promoted a sense of satisfaction in Israel, both at the official and the public level, precisely because these relations were going so well. Now, belatedly, there exists a sobering awareness of the perils for a small state, especially one priding itself upon self-reliance, of too great a dependence upon any superpower, even one as well-intentioned and benevolent as the United States. Consequently, the challenge hereafter lies in determining to what extent Israeli policymaking can retain a high degree of freedom of action without at the same time sacrificing American goodwill and American interests in a secure, less dependent Israel. There is certainly no single prescription for accomplishing this necessarily selective, gradual and sensitive decoupling. But one function surely will be to show greater adaptability and flexibility in exploiting systemic, global change to ensure somewhat more balanced relations with the USSR, China, and the Communist bloc.

Alternatively, resolution of the Arab-Israel conflict would ease if not entirely free Israel as well as her neighbours from the fear of outside interference and domination, promoting instead a spirit of self-reliance on the part of all those inhabiting the Middle East within a regional framework. Whatever the long-term repercussions of the 1977 diplomatic upheaval, it has made possible really for the first time to contemplate an Israel actively and directly participating in Middle East politics. At an early stage in the shaping of Israel’s diplomatic tradition Zionist leaders were quick to profess:

We are convinced that a Jewish renaissance in this country can only have a strong and invigorating influence upon the Arab nation. 13

They felt confident the ‘two brother nations, Jews and Arabs, working together in peace and harmony, are destined to bring about the cultural and economic revival of the awakening peoples of the Near and Middle East’. These words were written over a half century ago. Moving them from theory into practice would be comparable to the ‘diplomatic revolution’ of 1756, causing a realignment in Middle Eastern and world politics, while freeing Israel of the serious constraints under which she has conducted foreign policy – without respite and without success – for so long.

13 Memorandum submitted by representatives of the Jewish yishuv on March 28, 1921 to Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, during a visit to Jerusalem. The text can be found in Aaron S. Klieman, Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 275–8.