

Iran and on broad regional stability unless Washington pressures Israel on a peace initiative." Or as one Arab diplomat put it, "The road to Baghdad runs through Jerusalem, and not the other way around."⁸⁸ And that is why the bipartisan Iraq Study Group concluded in December 2006 that "the United States will not be able to achieve its goals in the Middle East unless the United States deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict."⁸⁹

In short, treating Israel as America's most important ally in the campaign against terrorism and against assorted Middle East dictatorships exaggerates Israel's ability to help on these issues, overlooks how the relationship contributes to these problems, and ignores the ways that Israel's policies make U.S. efforts to address them more difficult. Israel's strategic value has declined steadily since the end of the Cold War. Steadfast support for Israel can no longer be justified by the argument that it is helping us defeat a great power rival; instead, backing Israel unconditionally helps make the United States a target for radical extremists and makes America look callous and hypocritical in the eyes of many third parties, including European and Arab allies. The United States still benefits from various acts of strategic cooperation with Israel, but on balance, it is more of a liability than an asset.

A DUBIOUS ALLY

A final reason to question Israel's strategic value is that it sometimes does not act like a loyal ally. Like most states, Israel looks first and foremost to its own interests, and it has been willing to do things contrary to American interests when it believed (rightly or wrongly) that doing so would advance its own national goals. In the notorious "Lavon affair" in 1954, for example, Israeli agents tried to bomb several U.S. government offices in Egypt, in a bungled attempt to sow discord between Washington and Cairo. Israel sold military supplies to Iran while U.S. diplomats were being held hostage there in 1979-80, and it was one of Iran's main military suppliers during the Iran-Iraq War, even though the United States was worried about Iran and tacitly backing Iraq. Israel later purchased \$36 million worth of Iranian oil in 1989 in an attempt to obtain the release of Israeli hostages in Lebanon. All of these acts made sense from Israel's point of view, but they were contrary to American policy and harmful to overall U.S. interests.⁹⁰

In addition to selling weapons to America's enemies, Israel has transferred American technology to third countries, including potential U.S. adversaries like China, actions that violated U.S. laws and threatened American inter-

ests. In 1992, the State Department's inspector general reported that starting in 1983 there was evidence of a "systematic and growing pattern of unauthorized transfers" by Israel.⁹¹ At about the same time, the General Accounting Office officials looking into the "Dotan affair" (the embezzlement and illegal diversion of millions of dollars of U.S. military aid by the former head of Israeli Air Force procurement) made repeated efforts to meet with Israeli officials to discuss the matter. According to the GAO, "The Government of Israel declined to discuss the issues or allow [U.S.] investigators to question Israeli personnel."⁹²

Little has changed in recent years. Indeed, even Douglas Feith, the former undersecretary of defense and a consistent supporter of Israel, was reportedly angry when Israel agreed in 2004 to upgrade a killer drone it had sold to China in 1994.⁹³ "Something is going badly wrong in the [U.S.-Israeli] military relationship," said another senior Bush administration official.⁹⁴

Amplifying these tensions is the extensive espionage that Israel engages in against the United States. According to the GAO, the Jewish state "conducts the most aggressive espionage operations against the United States of any ally."⁹⁵ Stealing economic secrets gives Israeli firms important advantages over American businesses in the global marketplace and thus imposes additional costs on U.S. citizens.

More worrying, however, are Israel's continued efforts to steal America's military secrets. This problem is highlighted by the infamous case of Jonathan Pollard, an American intelligence analyst who gave Israel large quantities of highly classified material between 1981 and 1985. After Pollard was caught, the Israelis refused to tell the United States what Pollard gave them.⁹⁶ The Pollard case is but the most visible tip of a larger iceberg. Israeli agents tried to steal spy-camera technology from a U.S. firm in 1986, and an arbitration panel later accused Israel of "perfidious," "unlawful," and "surreptitious" conduct and ordered it to pay the firm, Recon/Optical Inc., some \$3 million in damages. Israeli spies also gained access to confidential U.S. information about a Pentagon electronic intelligence program and tried unsuccessfully to recruit Noel Koch, a senior counterterrorism official in the Defense Department. The *Wall Street Journal* quoted John Davitt, former head of the Justice Department's internal security section, saying that "those of us who worked in the espionage area regarded Israel as being the second most active foreign intelligence service in the United States."⁹⁷

A new controversy erupted in 2004 when a key Pentagon official, Larry Franklin, was arrested on charges of passing classified information regarding U.S. policy toward Iran to an Israeli diplomat, allegedly with the assistance

of two senior AIPAC officials, Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman. Franklin eventually accepted a plea bargain and was sentenced to twelve years in prison for his role in the affair, and Rosen and Weissman are scheduled to go on trial in the fall of 2007.⁹⁸

Israel is of course not the only country that spies on the United States, and Washington conducts extensive espionage against both allies and adversaries as well. Such behavior is neither surprising nor particularly reprehensible, because international politics is a rough business and states often do unscrupulous things in their efforts to gain an edge over other countries. Nonetheless, the close relationship between Washington and Jerusalem has made it easier for Israel to steal American secrets, and it has not hesitated to do just that. At the very least, Israel's willingness to spy on its principal patron casts further doubt on its overall strategic value, especially now that the Cold War is over.

CONCLUSION

There is no question that Israel has derived substantial benefits from U.S. support, although one might also argue that this support has been used to pursue policies—such as settlement construction—that were not in Israel's long-term interest. It is also clear that the United States derived some strategic value from its aid to Israel, especially during the Cold War. Yet these benefits cannot fully justify or explain why the United States has been willing to give Israel such consistent support over such an extended period. Subsidizing and protecting Israel may have been a net plus for the United States at the height of the Cold War—though even this claim is not open and shut—but that rationale evaporated when the Soviet Union collapsed and the superpower competition in the Middle East ended. Today, America's intimate embrace of Israel—and especially its willingness to subsidize it no matter what its policies are—is not making Americans safer or more prosperous. To the contrary: unconditional support for Israel is undermining relations with other U.S. allies, casting doubt on America's wisdom and moral vision, helping inspire a generation of anti-American extremists, and complicating U.S. efforts to deal with a volatile but vital region. In short, the largely unconditional "special relationship" between the United States and Israel is no longer defensible on strategic grounds. If a convincing rationale is to be found, we must look elsewhere. In the next chapter, we examine the moral case for American support.

A DWINDLING MORAL CASE

When George W. Bush spoke at the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in May 2004, he invoked a set of moral themes to help explain U.S. support for Israel. The president began his speech by applauding AIPAC's efforts "to strengthen the ties that bind our nations—our shared values, our strong commitment to freedom." He went on to emphasize that Israel and the United States "have much in common. We're both . . . born of struggle and sacrifice. We're both founded by immigrants escaping religious persecution in other lands. We have both built vibrant democracies, built on the rule of law and market economies. And we're both countries founded on certain basic beliefs: that God watches over the affairs of men, and values every life. These ties have made us natural allies, and these ties will never be broken."

Bush also noted one important difference and drew a moral conclusion from it. Whereas the United States was relatively safe in the past because of its geographical location, "Israel has faced a different situation as a small country in a tough neighborhood. The Israeli people have always had enemies at their borders and terrorists close at hand. Again and again, Israel has defended itself with skill and heroism. And as a result of the courage of the Israeli people, Israel has earned the respect of the American people."¹

Bush's remarks underscore the degree to which U.S. support for Israel is often justified not on strategic grounds but on the basis of essentially moral claims. The *moral rationale* for American support rests on several distinct lines of argument, and Israel's supporters often invoke one or more of these claims in order to justify the "special relationship." Specifically, Israel is said to deserve generous and nearly unconditional U.S. support because it is

weak and surrounded by enemies dedicated to destroying it; it is a democracy, which is a morally preferable form of government; the Jewish people have suffered greatly from past crimes; Israel's conduct has been morally superior to its adversaries' behavior, especially compared to the Palestinians; the Palestinians rejected the generous peace offer that Israel made at Camp David in July 2000 and opted for violence instead; and it is clear from the Bible that Israel's creation is God's will. Taken together, these arguments underpin the more general claim that Israel is the one country in the Middle East that shares American values and therefore enjoys broad support among the American people. Many U.S. policy makers accept these various arguments, but even if they did not, the American people supposedly want them to back Israel and certainly do not want them to put any pressure on the Jewish state.

Upon close inspection, the moral rationale for unqualified U.S. support is not compelling. There is a strong moral case for supporting Israel's existence, but that fortunately is not in danger at present. Viewed objectively, Israel's past and present conduct offers little moral basis for privileging it over the Palestinians or for undertaking policies in the region that are not in America's strategic interest.

The moral rationale relies heavily on a particular understanding of Israel's history that is widely held by many Americans (both Jews and gentiles). In that story, Jews in the Middle East have long been victims, just as they were in Europe. "The Jew," Elie Wiesel tells us, "has never been an executioner; he is almost always the victim."² The Arabs, and especially the Palestinians, are the victimizers, bearing a marked similarity to the anti-Semites who persecuted Jews in Europe. This perspective is clearly evident in Leon Uris's famous novel *Exodus* (1958), which portrays the Jews as both victims and heroes and the Palestinians as villains and cowards. This book sold twenty million copies between 1958 and 1980 and was turned into a popular movie (1960). Scholars have shown that the *Exodus* narrative has had an enduring influence on how Americans think about the Arab-Israeli conflict.³

The conventional wisdom about how Israel was created and how it has subsequently behaved toward the Palestinians as well as neighboring states is wrong. It is based on a set of myths about past events that Israeli scholars have systematically demolished over the past twenty years.⁴ While there is no question that Jews were frequently victims in Europe, in the past century they have often been the victimizers in the Middle East, and their main victims were and continue to be the Palestinians. Not only is the basic point

backed up by an abundance of evidence, but it is also intuitively plausible. After all, how could Jews coming to Palestine from Europe create a state of their own without taking harsh measures against the Arab population that already dwelt in the land they wanted for their new state? Just as the Europeans who created the United States and Canada could not do so without committing significant crimes against the native inhabitants, it was virtually impossible for the Zionists to carve out a Jewish state in Palestine without committing similar crimes against the local residents, who were bound to resent their encroachments and attempt to resist them. Unfortunately, this "new history," as it is called in Israel, has not been adequately acknowledged in the United States, which is one reason why the moral rationale still carries significant weight for many Americans.⁵

Israel's more recent conduct is a different matter, however. With the global reach of the Internet and twenty-four-hour cable news networks, many Americans have seen considerable evidence of Israel's brutal treatment of its Palestinian subjects in the Occupied Territories. They have also seen the consequences of Israel's actions in the second Lebanon war (2006), in which the Israel Defense Forces pummeled civilian targets across Lebanon and then dumped several million deadly cluster bomblets in the towns and villages of southern Lebanon.⁶

Although these actions have tarnished Israel's public image in the United States, its supporters remain undaunted and continue to make the moral case for sustaining the present relationship between those two countries. In fact, a good case can be made that current U.S. policy conflicts with basic American values and that if the United States were to choose sides on the basis of moral considerations alone, it would back the Palestinians, not Israel. After all, Israel is prosperous and has the most powerful military in the Middle East. No state would deliberately start a war with it today. Israel does have a serious terrorism problem, but that is mainly the consequence of colonizing the Occupied Territories. By contrast, the Palestinians are stateless, impoverished, and facing a deeply uncertain future. Even allowing for the Palestinians' various shortcomings, which group now has the stronger moral claim to U.S. sympathy?

Getting to the bottom of this issue requires that we look in more detail at the particular arguments that make up the moral rationale. Our focus will be primarily on Israeli behavior, and no attempt will be made to compare it with the actions of other states in the region or in other parts of the world. We are not focusing on Israel's conduct because we have an animus toward the Jewish state, or because we believe that its behavior is particularly worthy of

censure. On the contrary, we recognize that virtually all states have committed serious crimes at one time or another in their history, and we are cognizant of the fact that state building is often a violent enterprise. We are also aware that some of Israel's Arab neighbors have at times acted with great brutality. We focus on Israel's actions because the United States provides it with a level of material and diplomatic support that is substantially greater than what it gives to other states, and it does so at the expense of its own interests. Our aim is to determine whether Israel deserves special treatment because it acts in an exceptionally virtuous manner, as many of its supporters claim. Does Israel behave significantly better than other states do? The historical record suggests that it does not.

BACKING THE UNDERDOG

Israel is often portrayed as weak and besieged, a Jewish David surrounded by a hostile Arab Goliath. This image has been carefully nurtured by Israeli leaders and sympathetic writers, but the opposite is closer to the truth. Israel has always been militarily stronger than its Arab adversaries. Consider Israel's 1948 War of Independence, where the popular belief is that the Zionists—who fought against five Arab armies as well as the Palestinians—were badly outnumbered and outgunned. Benny Morris, a prominent Israeli historian, refers to this description of the balance of power as “one of the most tenacious myths relating to 1948.”⁷

One might think that Israeli forces were at a significant quantitative and qualitative disadvantage in 1948, because it was a small new country surrounded by Arab states that had far more people and far greater material resources. In fact, comparing the population size and the resources of Israel and the Arab world tells you little about the balance of military power between them. As Morris notes, “The atlas map showing a minuscule Israel and a giant surrounding Arab sea did not, and, indeed, for the time being, still does not, accurately reflect the true balance of military power in the region. Nor do the comparative population figures; in 1948, the Yishuv [the Jewish settlement in Palestine before Israel was created] numbered some 650,000 souls—as opposed to 1.2 million Palestinian Arabs and some 30 million Arabs in the surrounding states (including Iraq).”⁸ The reason is simple: the Arab states have been remarkably ineffective at translating those latent resources into actual military power, while Israel, by contrast, has been especially good at doing so.

The War of Independence was actually two separate conflicts. The first was a civil war between the Jews and the Palestinians, which started on November 29, 1947 (the day of the UN decision to partition Mandate Palestine) and ran until May 14, 1948 (the day Israel declared its independence). The second was an international war between Israel and five Arab armies, which began on May 15, 1948, and ended on January 7, 1949.

The Zionists won a lopsided victory over the Palestinians in their civil war because they enjoyed a decisive advantage in numbers and quality of both soldiers and weapons.⁹ Jewish fighting units were far better organized and trained than the Palestinian forces, which had been decimated by the British during the 1936–39 revolt and had not recovered by 1948. As the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé notes, “A few thousand irregular Palestinians and Arabs were facing tens of thousands of well-trained Jewish troops.”¹⁰ Not surprisingly, Israeli leaders were fully aware of this power imbalance and sought to take advantage of it. In fact, Yigal Yadin, a senior military commander in the 1948 war and the IDF’s second chief of staff, maintained that if it had not been for the British presence in Palestine until May 1948, “we could have quelled the Arab riot in one month.”¹¹

The Israelis also had a clear advantage in manpower throughout their war with the five Arab armies. Morris notes that when the fighting started in mid-May, Israel “fielded some 35,000 armed troops as compared with the 25–30,000 of the Arab invading armies. By the time of Operation Dani, in July, the IDF had 65,000 men under arms and by December, close to 90,000 men under arms—at each stage significantly outnumbering the combined strength of the Arab armies ranged against them in Palestine.”¹² Israel also enjoyed an advantage in weaponry, save for a brief twenty-five days at the start of that conflict (May 15–June 10, 1948). Moreover, with the possible exception of Transjordan’s small Arab Legion, the quality of the Israeli fighting forces was far superior to their Arab adversaries and they were much better organized as well. In short, the Zionists won the civil war against the Palestinians and the international war against the invading Arab armies because they were more powerful than their adversaries, despite the absolute advantage in population that their Arab foes enjoyed. As Morris notes, “It was superior Jewish firepower, manpower, organization, and command and control that determined the outcome of battle.”¹³

The IDF won quick and decisive victories against Egypt in 1956 and against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in 1967—before large-scale U.S. aid began flowing to Israel. In October 1973, Israel was a victim of a stunning surprise attack by the Egyptian and Syrian armies. Although an outnumbered IDF

suffered serious setbacks in the first days of fighting, it quickly recovered and was on the verge of destroying the Egyptian and Syrian armies when the United States and the Soviet Union intervened to halt the fighting. The remarkable turnaround, according to Morris, was due to the fact that "the IDF's machines, both in the air and on the ground, were simply superior. So was its manpower: Israeli pilots, maintenance and ground control staffs, tank officers, and men were far better trained and led than their Arab counterparts."¹⁴ These victories offer eloquent evidence of Israeli patriotism, organizational ability, and military prowess, but they also reveal that Israel was far from helpless even in its earliest years.¹⁵

Today, Israel is the strongest military power in the Middle East. Its conventional forces are far superior to those of its neighbors, and it is the only state in the region with nuclear weapons. Egypt and Jordan have signed peace treaties with Israel, and Saudi Arabia has offered to do so as well. Syria has lost its Soviet patron, Iraq has been decimated by three disastrous wars, and Iran is hundreds of miles away and has never directly attacked Israel. The Palestinians barely have effective police, let alone a military that could threaten Israel's existence, and they are further weakened by profound internal divisions. The deaths caused by Palestinian suicide bombers are tragic and strike fear in the hearts of all Israelis, but they do relatively little damage to Israel's economy, much less threaten its territorial integrity.¹⁶ Groups like Hezbollah can launch low-yield missiles and rockets at Israel and might be able to kill a few hundred Israelis over the course of months or years, but these attacks do not represent an existential threat to Israel. According to a 2005 assessment by Tel Aviv University's prestigious Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, "The strategic balance decidedly favors Israel, which has continued to widen the qualitative gap between its own military capability and deterrence powers and those of its neighbors."¹⁷ If backing the underdog were a compelling rationale, the United States would be supporting Israel's opponents.

Of course, there is another dimension to the argument that Israel has long been under siege and is always the victim: the claim that despite Israel's military superiority, its Arab neighbors are determined to destroy it. Indeed, some argue that the Arabs precipitated wars in 1948, 1967, and 1973 in order "to drive the Jews into the Sea."¹⁸

While there is no question that Israel faced serious threats in its early years, the Arabs were not attempting to destroy Israel in any of those three wars. This is not because the Arabs were happy about the presence of a Jewish state in their midst—they clearly were not—but rather because they have

never had the capability to win a war against Israel, much less defeat it decisively. There is no question that some Arab leaders talked about "driving the Jews into the Sea" during the 1948 war, but this was largely rhetoric designed to appease their publics. In fact, the Arab leaders were mainly concerned with gaining territory for themselves at the expense of the Palestinians, one of the many occasions when Arab governments put their own interests ahead of the Palestinians' welfare. Morris, for example, writes:

What ensued, once Israel declared its independence on 14 May 1948 and the Arab states invaded on 15 May, was "a general land grab," with everyone—Israel, Transjordan, Syria, Egypt, and even Lebanon—bent on preventing the birth of a Palestinian Arab state and carving out chunks of Palestine for themselves. Contrary to the old historiography, Abdullah's [king of Transjordan] invasion of eastern Palestine was clearly designed to conquer territory for his kingdom—at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs—rather than to destroy the Jewish state. Indeed, the Arab Legion stuck meticulously, throughout the war, to its non-aggressive stance *vis-à-vis* the Yishuv and the Jewish state's territory . . . It is not at all clear that Abdullah and Glubb [the British general who commanded Transjordan's Arab Legion] would have been happy to see the collapse in May 1948 of the fledgling Jewish republic. Certainly Abdullah was far more troubled by the prospects of the emergence of a Palestinian Arab state and of an expanded Syria and an expanded Egypt on his frontiers than by the emergence of a small Jewish state.¹⁹

And Abdullah, as Morris notes, was the only Arab leader who "committed the full weight" of his military power to attacking Israel, "indicating either inefficiency or, perhaps, a less than wholehearted seriousness about the declared aim of driving the Jews into the sea." Shlomo Ben-Ami, a noted historian and a former Israeli foreign minister, has a similar view of Arab goals in the 1948 war: "Ill prepared and poorly co-ordinated, the Arab armies were dragged into the war by popular pressure in their home states, and because their leaders each had his own agenda of territorial expansion. Securing the establishment of a Palestinian state . . . was less of a motive for the Arab leaders who sent their armies to Palestine than establishing their own territorial claims or thwarting those of their rivals in the Arab coalition."²⁰

The myth of Israel as a victim is also reflected in the conventional wisdom about the 1967 war, which claims that Egypt and Syria are principally re-

sponsible for starting it. In particular, the Arabs are said to have been preparing to attack Israel when the IDF beat them to the punch and scored a stunning victory.²¹ It is clear from the release of new documents about the war, however, that the Arabs did not intend to initiate a war against Israel in the late spring of 1967, much less try to destroy the Jewish state.²² Avi Shlaim, a distinguished Israeli "new historian," writes, "There is general agreement among commentators that [Egyptian President] Nasser neither wanted nor planned to go to war with Israel."²³ In fact, Israel bears considerable responsibility for the outbreak of the war. Shlaim writes that "Israel's strategy of escalation on the Syrian front was probably the single most important factor in dragging the Middle East to war in June 1967, despite the conventional wisdom on the subject that singles out Syrian aggression as the principal cause of war."²⁴ Ben-Ami goes even farther, writing that Yitzhak Rabin, the IDF chief of staff, "intentionally led Israel into a war with Syria. Rabin was determined to provoke a war with Syria . . . because he thought this was the only way to stop the Syrians from supporting Fatah attacks against Israel."²⁵

None of this is to deny that Egypt's decision in May 1967 to close the Straits of Tiran was a legitimate cause of concern to Israel. But it was not a harbinger of an imminent Egyptian attack, and that point was recognized by American policy makers and many Israeli leaders. Serious diplomatic efforts were also under way to solve the crisis peacefully. Yet Israel chose to attack anyway, because its leaders ultimately preferred war to a peaceful resolution of the crisis. In particular, Israel's military commanders wanted to inflict significant military defeats on their two main adversaries—Egypt and Syria—in order to strengthen Israeli deterrence over the long term.²⁶ Some also had territorial ambitions. General Ezer Weizman, the IDF's chief of operations, reflected this sentiment when he said on the eve of the war, "We are on the brink of a second War of Independence, with all its accomplishments."²⁷ In short, Israel was not preempting an impending attack when it struck the first blow on June 5, 1967. Instead, it was launching a preventive war—a war aimed at affecting the balance of power over time—or, as Menachem Begin put it, a "war of choice." In his words, "We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him [Egyptian President Nasser]."²⁸

The Egyptians and the Syrians certainly did attack Israel in October 1973, but it is a well-established fact that both Arab armies were pursuing a limited aims strategy. The Egyptians hoped to conquer a slice of territory in the Sinai Peninsula and then bargain with Israel for the return of the rest of the Sinai, while the Syrians hoped to recapture the Golan Heights. Neither the Egyptians nor the Syrians intended to invade Israel, much less

threaten its existence. Not only did Israel have the most formidable army in the region, but it also had nuclear weapons, which would have made any attempt to conquer it suicidal. Benny Morris puts the point well: "Presidents Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Hafez Assad of Syria sought to regain the territories lost in 1967. Neither aimed to destroy Israel."²⁹ In fact, key decision makers in both Cairo and Damascus recognized that they were pursuing an especially risky strategy by picking a fight with the mighty IDF. General Hassan el Badri, who helped plan the Egyptian attack, remarked that "it almost seemed that success would be impossible."³⁰ And these doubters were correct, because the IDF, after recovering from the initial attack, routed both Arab armies.

With the possible exception of Iran, it is hard to make the case today that Israel's neighbors are bent on destroying it. As noted, Israel has signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, and, as will be discussed in Chapter 9, Israel walked away from a possible peace treaty with Syria in 2000. At an Arab summit in March 2002, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia attempted to defuse the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by putting forward a proposal calling for full recognition of Israel by virtually every Arab government and normalization of relations with the Jewish state. In return, Israel would have to withdraw from the Occupied Territories and work toward a fair solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. The initiative was unanimously endorsed by the Arab League. Even Saddam Hussein backed it.³¹ The proposal went nowhere at the time, but the Saudis resurrected it in early 2007. There is certainly no evidence that post-Saddam Iraq is interested in destroying Israel. While Hamas and Hezbollah may reject Israel's existence and inflict suffering, they do not, as noted, have the capability to pose a mortal danger. Iran would obviously be a serious threat to Israel if it acquired nuclear weapons, but as long as Israel has its own nuclear arsenal, Iran cannot attack it without being destroyed itself.

AIDING A FELLOW DEMOCRACY

American backing is often justified by the claim that Israel is a fellow democracy. Indeed, its defenders frequently remind Americans that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East and that it is surrounded by hostile dictatorships. This rationale sounds convincing, but it cannot account for the current level of U.S. support. After all, there are many democracies around the world, but none receives the level of unconditional aid that Israel does.

In fact, whether a country is democratic is not a reliable indicator of how Washington will relate to it. The United States has overthrown a few democratic governments in the past and has supported numerous dictators when doing so was thought to advance U.S. interests. The Eisenhower administration overthrew a democratically elected government in Iran in 1953, while the Reagan administration supported Saddam Hussein in the 1980s. Today, the Bush administration has good relations with dictators like Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan, and at the same time it has worked to undermine the democratically elected Hamas government in the Occupied Territories. It also has an acrimonious relationship with Hugo Chávez, the elected leader of Venezuela. Being democratic neither justifies nor fully explains the extent of American support for Israel.

The "shared democracy" rationale is also weakened by aspects of Israeli democracy that are at odds with core American values. The United States is a liberal democracy where people of any race, religion, or ethnicity are supposed to enjoy equal rights. While Israel's citizens are of many backgrounds, including Arab, Muslim, and Christian, among others, it was explicitly founded as a Jewish state, and whether a citizen is regarded as Jewish ordinarily depends on kinship (verifiable Jewish ancestry).³² Israel's Jewish character is clearly reflected in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which was officially proclaimed on May 14, 1948. It explicitly refers to the United Nations' recognition "of the right of the Jewish people to establish their state," openly proclaims "the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel," and later describes the new state as "the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land."³³

Given Israel's Jewish character, its leaders have long emphasized the importance of maintaining an unchallenged Jewish majority within its borders. Israelis worry a great deal about the flow of Jews and Palestinians into and out of Israel, the relative birthrates of Palestinians and Jews, and the possibility that expanding Israel's borders beyond the pre-1967 lines might result in many more Arabs living in their midst. David Ben-Gurion, for example, proclaimed that "any Jewish woman who, as far as it depends on her, does not bring into the world at least four healthy children is shirking her duty to the nation, like a soldier who evades military service."³⁴ There are now about 5.3 million Jews and 1.36 million Arabs living in Israel, including the disputed area of East Jerusalem. There are another 3.8 million Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, which means that there are only about 140,000 more Jews than Palestinians living in what used to be called Mandate Palestine, and by almost all accounts the Palestinians have a higher birthrate than

the Jews.³⁵ It is not surprising, in light of these numbers, that it is commonplace these days for Israeli Jews to talk about their fellow Arab citizens and Palestinian subjects as a potential "demographic threat."³⁶

One might think that although Israel is a Jewish state at its core, its Basic Laws (there are eleven) still guarantee equal rights for all its citizens, Arabs or Jews. But that is not the case. The initial draft of the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty, which approximates the U.S. Bill of Rights, contained language that promised equality for all Israelis: "All are equal before the law, and there shall be no discrimination on the grounds of gender, religion, nationality, race, ethnic group, country of origin or any other irrelevant factor."³⁷ Ultimately, however, a Knesset committee removed that clause from the final version that became law in 1992. Since then, Arab members of Israel's Knesset have made numerous attempts to amend that Basic Law by adding language that provides for equality before the law. But their Jewish colleagues have refused to go along, a situation that stands in marked contrast to the United States, where the equality principle is enshrined in law.³⁸

In addition to Israel's commitment to maintaining its Jewish identity and its refusal to grant de jure equality for non-Jews, Israel's 1.36 million Arabs are de facto treated as second-class citizens. An Israeli government commission found in 2003, for example, that Israel behaves in a "neglectful and discriminatory" manner toward them.³⁹ Indeed, there is widespread support among Israeli Jews for this unequal treatment of Israeli Arabs. A poll released in March 2007 found that 55 percent of Israeli Jews wanted segregated entertainment facilities, while more than 75 percent said they would not live in the same building as an Israeli Arab. More than half of the respondents said that for a Jewish woman to marry an Arab is equal to national treason, and 50 percent said that they would refuse employment if their immediate supervisor was an Arab.⁴⁰ The Israel Democracy Institute reported in May 2003 that 53 percent of Israeli Jews "are against full equality for the Arabs," while 77 percent of Israeli Jews believe that "there should be a Jewish majority on crucial political decisions." Only 31 percent "support having Arab political parties in the government."⁴¹ That sentiment squares with the fact that Israel did not appoint its first Muslim Arab cabinet minister until January 2007, almost six decades after the founding of the state. And even that one appointment, which was to the minor portfolio of science, sports, and culture, was highly controversial.⁴²

Israel's treatment of its Arab citizens is more than just discriminatory. For example, to limit the number of Arabs in its midst, Israel does not permit

Palestinians who marry Israeli citizens to become citizens themselves and does not give these spouses the right to live in Israel. The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem called this restriction "a racist law that determines who can live here according to racist criteria."⁴³ Also, the Olmert government is pushing—and the Knesset's ministerial committee on legislation approved on January 10, 2007—a law that would allow the courts to revoke the citizenship of "unpatriotic" citizens. This legislation, which is clearly aimed at Israeli Arabs, was labeled "a drastic and extreme move that harms civil liberties" by Israel's attorney general.⁴⁴ Such laws may be understandable in light of Israel's founding principles—the explicit aim of creating a Jewish state—but they are not consistent with America's image of a multi-ethnic democracy in which all citizens are supposed to be treated equally regardless of their ancestry.

In early 2007, Benjamin Netanyahu apologized to ultra-Orthodox Israelis with large families for the hardships that were caused by welfare cuts that he had made in 2002 when he was finance minister. He noted, however, that there was at least one important and unexpected benefit of these cuts: "there was a dramatic drop in the birth rate" within the "non-Jewish public."⁴⁵ For Netanyahu, like many Israelis who are deeply worried about the so-called Arab demographic threat, the fewer Israeli Arab births, the better.

Netanyahu's comments would almost certainly be condemned if made in the United States. Imagine the outcry that would arise here if a U.S. cabinet official spoke of the benefits of a policy that had reduced the birthrates of African Americans and Hispanics, thereby preserving a white majority. But such statements are not unusual in Israel, where important leaders have a history of making derogatory comments about Palestinians and are rarely sanctioned for them. Menachem Begin once said that "Palestinians are beasts walking on two legs," while former IDF Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan referred to them as "drugged roaches in a bottle" and also said that "a good Arab is a dead Arab." Another former chief of staff, Moshe Ya'alon, referred to the Palestinian threat as like a "cancer" on which he was performing "chemotherapy."⁴⁶

Such discriminatory views are not restricted to Israeli leaders. In a recent survey of Jewish high school students in Israel, 75 percent of the respondents said that Arabs are "uneducated." The same percentage said that they are "uncivilized," while 74 percent of those polled said that Arabs are "unclean." Commenting on this last finding, Larry Derfner wrote in the *Jerusalem Post*: "To say Arabs are unclean is not a hard-line political statement. It's not an unduly harsh comment on Arab behavior. To say Arabs are un-

clean is to evince an irrational, hysterical, impenetrable, absolute hatred for an entire ethnic group—which, in fact, happens not to be unclean, no more than Jews are. To say Arabs are unclean is an expression of racism in about its purest, most virulent form.” The person who oversaw the survey said, “We were not surprised by the outcome of the research. Anyone who is familiar with the field knows that these warped perceptions exist, but these findings are at the most severe extreme of a disturbing phenomenon.” It is noteworthy that the same survey polled Israeli Arab youth as well, and Derfner reports that “while their attitudes toward Jews are awful, they’re considerably less awful than the Jewish students’ attitudes toward them.”⁴⁷

These hostile attitudes toward Israeli Arabs, coupled with fears about a “demographic threat” and the desire to maintain a Jewish majority, have led to considerable support among Israeli Jews for expelling or “transferring” much of the Arab population from Israel. Indeed, Avigdor Lieberman, who was appointed deputy prime minister for strategic threats in 2006, has made it clear that he favors expulsion, so as to make Israel “as much as possible” a homogeneous Jewish state. Specifically, he advocates trading portions of Israel that are densely packed with Arabs for areas of the West Bank that contain Jewish settlers. He is not the first Israeli cabinet minister to advocate expulsion.⁴⁸

Although he is a controversial figure, Lieberman is not an outlier in Israel on this issue. The Israel Democracy Institute reported in May 2003 that 57 percent of Israel’s Jews “think that the Arabs should be encouraged to emigrate.” A 2004 survey conducted by Haifa University’s Center for the Study of National Security found that the number had increased to 63.7 percent. One year later, in 2005, the Palestinian Center for Israel Studies found that 42 percent of Israeli Jews believed that their government should encourage Israeli Arabs to leave, while another 17 percent tended to agree with the idea. The following year, the Center for Combating Racism found that 40 percent of Israel’s Jews wanted their leaders to encourage the Arab population to emigrate, while the Israel Democracy Institute found the number to be 62 percent.⁴⁹ If 40 percent or more of white Americans declared that blacks, Hispanics, and Asians “should be encouraged” to leave the United States, it would surely prompt vehement criticism.

These attitudes are perhaps to be expected, given the long conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and the considerable suffering it has produced on both sides. They are also no worse than the attitudes that many Americans had for different minority groups (especially African Americans) throughout much of American history. Yet whatever their origins, they are

clearly attitudes that would now earn widespread condemnation here in the United States, if their existence were more widely known, and they pose a serious challenge to clichés about “our shared values, our strong commitment to freedom.”

Finally, Israel’s democratic status is undermined by its refusal to grant the Palestinians a viable state of their own and by its continued imposition of a legal, administrative, and military regime in the Occupied Territories that denies them basic human rights. Israel at present controls the lives of about 3.8 million Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, while colonizing lands on which they have long dwelt. Israel formally withdrew from Gaza in the summer of 2005 but continues to maintain substantial control over its residents.⁵⁰ Specifically, Israel controls air, sea, and land access, which means that the Palestinians are effectively prisoners within Gaza, able to enter or leave only with Israeli approval. Jan Egeland, a senior UN figure, and Jan Eliasson, the Swedish foreign minister, wrote in September 2006 that the Palestinians are “living in a cage,” which naturally has had devastating effects on their economy, as well as their mental and physical well-being.⁵¹

On the West Bank, Israel continues to expropriate Palestinian land and build settlements. The situation was succinctly described in a *Ha’aretz* editorial in late December 2006: “Virtually not a week goes by without a new revelation, each more sensational and revolting than the previous one, about the building spree in West Bank settlements, in blatant violation of the law and in complete contradiction to official government policy.”⁵² Indeed, the Israeli organization Peace Now recently released a study based on Israeli government records, which shows that more than 32 percent of the land that Israel holds for the purpose of building settlements is privately owned by Palestinians. Israel intends to keep almost all of this land forever. This seizure of Palestinian property violates not only Israeli law but also a fundamental principle of democracy: the protection of private property.⁵³

In sum, Israel has a vibrant democratic order for its Jewish citizens, who can and do criticize their government and choose their leaders in open and free elections. Freedom of the press is also alive and well in Israel, where, paradoxically, it is much easier to criticize Israeli policy than it is in the United States. This is why so much of the evidence in this study is drawn from the Israeli press. Despite these positive features, Arab Israelis are systematically marginalized, the millions of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are denied full political rights, and the “shared democracy” rationale is correspondingly weakened.

COMPENSATION FOR PAST CRIMES

A third moral justification is the history of Jewish suffering in the Christian West, especially the tragic experience of the Holocaust. Because Jews were persecuted for centuries and many believe they can be safe only in a Jewish homeland, Israel is said to deserve special treatment. This view formed the basis for the original Zionist program, played an important role in convincing the United States and other countries to back Israel's founding, and continues to resonate today.

There is no question that Jews suffered greatly from the despicable legacy of anti-Semitism and that Israel's creation was an appropriate response to a long record of crimes. This history provides a strong moral case for supporting Israel's founding and continued existence. This backing is also consistent with America's general commitment to national self-determination. But one cannot ignore the fact that the creation of Israel involved additional crimes against a largely innocent third party: the Palestinians. Crimes against Jews justify backing Israel's existence, but its crimes against Palestinians undermine its claim to special treatment.

The history of these events is well documented. When political Zionism began in earnest in the late nineteenth century, there were only about fifteen thousand to seventeen thousand Jews living in Palestine.⁵⁴ In 1893, for example, the Arabs comprised roughly 95 percent of the population, and though under Ottoman control, they had been in continuous possession of this territory for thirteen hundred years.⁵⁵ The old Zionist adage that Palestine was "a land without people for a people without a land" was dead wrong regarding the land; it was occupied by another people.⁵⁶

The early Zionists hoped that the waves of Jews who began leaving Europe in the last decades of the nineteenth century would come to Palestine, allowing the Jews to gain a decisive numerical advantage over the Arabs there. But that did not happen, mainly because most of these Jews preferred to go to the United States. Only one hundred thousand of the four million Jews who left Europe between 1880 and 1920 went to Palestine.⁵⁷ In fact, until Hitler came to power, the Jews in Palestine could not fill "the generous immigration quotas allowed by the British."⁵⁸ In 1948, when Israel was founded, its 650,000 Jews were only about 35 percent of Palestine's population and they owned only 7 percent of its land.⁵⁹

From the start, the leading Zionists were determined to create a Jewish state that covered virtually all of Palestine, and even parts of Lebanon and Syria.⁶⁰ Of course, there were differences among them on where they

thought the borders should be drawn in an ideal world, and almost all recognized that it might not be possible to realize all of their territorial ambitions. The mainstream Zionist leadership, it should be emphasized, was never interested in establishing a binational state where Arabs and Jews lived side by side in a country that had no religious identity and might even have more Arabs than Jews. The goal from the beginning was to create instead a Jewish state in which Jews comprised at least 85 percent of the population.⁶¹

The Zionists' ambitions also went beyond a permanent partition of Palestine. It is widely believed in the United States, especially among Israel's supporters, that the Zionists were willing to agree to a permanently partitioned Palestine, and indeed they did agree to the partition plans put forward by Britain's Peel Commission in 1937 and the UN in 1947. But their acceptance of these plans did not mean that they intended to accept only part of Palestine in perpetuity, or that they were willing to support the creation of a Palestinian state. As recent scholarship makes abundantly clear, the Zionist leadership was sometimes willing to accept partition as a first step, but this was a tactical maneuver and not their real objective. They had no intention of coexisting alongside a viable Palestinian state over the long run, as that outcome was in direct conflict with their dream of creating a Jewish state in all of Palestine.

There was fierce opposition among the Zionists to the Peel Commission's partition plan, and their leader, David Ben-Gurion, was barely able to get his fellow Zionists to accept it. They eventually agreed to the proposal, however, because they recognized that Ben-Gurion intended eventually to take all of the land of Palestine. The Zionist leader made this point clearly in the summer of 1937 when he told the Zionist Executive, "After the formation of a large army in the wake of the establishment of the state, we will abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine." Similarly, he told his son Amos that same year, "Erect a Jewish State at once, even if it is not in the whole land. The rest will come in the course of time. It must come."⁶²

The Peel Commission's plan went nowhere in 1937, and over the course of the ensuing decade the Zionists remained committed to incorporating all of Mandate Palestine into a future Jewish state. Ben-Gurion made a number of comments in the first half of 1947 that show he still wanted all of Palestine. For example, the Israeli scholar Uri Ben-Eliezer reports:

On May 13, 1947, Ben-Gurion told a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive which was held in the United States: "We want the Land of Israel in its entirety. That was the original intention." A week later,

speaking to the Elected Assembly in Jerusalem, the leader of the Yishuv wondered: "Does anyone among us disagree that the original intention of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, and the original intention of the hopes harbored by generations of the Jewish people, was finally to establish a Jewish state in the whole Land of Israel?" Speaking to the Mapai Secretariat in June, Ben-Gurion stated that it would be a mistake to forgo any part of the land. We have no right to do that, he said, and there is no need for it.⁶³

Later that year, in November, the UN devised a new plan to partition Palestine between the Zionists and the Palestinian Arabs. The Zionists publicly accepted this plan as well. But in fact Ben-Gurion had already negotiated a deal with King Abdullah of Transjordan to divide up Palestine between Israel and Transjordan and deny the Palestinians a state.⁶⁴ This secret arrangement, which Britain endorsed, allowed Transjordan to acquire the West Bank and Israel to take what it could of the rest of Palestine. The deal was ultimately implemented during the 1948 war, although in a somewhat disjointed fashion. Israeli leaders, not surprisingly, gave serious thought during the war to conquering the West Bank and taking all of Mandate Palestine for their new state, but they decided that the likely costs outweighed the potential benefits. Transjordan, which later became Jordan, controlled the West Bank until the 1967 Six-Day War, when the IDF conquered it. In short, Israel's founding fathers were determined from the beginning to create a "greater Israel," which left no room for a Palestinian state and little room for Palestinians inside the Jewish state.

Given that Arabs heavily outnumbered Jews in Palestine and that the Zionists were bent on conquering as much territory as feasible, they had little choice but to expel large numbers of Arabs from the territory that would eventually become Israel. There was no other way to accomplish their objective, as the Arabs were hardly likely to give up their land voluntarily. This is why the Peel Commission's plan to partition Palestine called explicitly for population transfer. It is also why the UN partition plan, which called for establishing an Israel that was 55 percent Jewish and 45 percent Arab, was unworkable.⁶⁵ There was certainly no way that a Jewish state could be created in all of Palestine without convincing large numbers of Arabs to leave.

In light of these realities, expulsion was a frequent topic of conversation among Zionists since the earliest days of the movement, and it was widely recognized as the only realistic way to solve the demographic problem that stood in the way of creating a Jewish state.⁶⁶ Ben-Gurion saw the problem

clearly, writing in 1941 that "it is impossible to imagine general evacuation [of the Arab population] without compulsion, and brutal compulsion."⁶⁷ Or as he wrote his son in October 1937, "We shall organize a modern defense force . . . and then I am certain that we will not be prevented from settling in other parts of the country, either by mutual agreement with our Arab neighbors or by some other means."⁶⁸ No doubt he would have preferred to do so via "mutual agreement," but Ben-Gurion understood that this was a remote possibility and that the Zionists would need a strong army to accomplish their aims. Morris puts the point succinctly: "Of course, Ben-Gurion was a transferist. He understood that there could be no Jewish state with a large and hostile Arab minority in its midst . . . Ben-Gurion was right. If he had not done what he did, a state would not have come into being. That has to be clear. It is impossible to evade it. Without the uprooting of the Palestinians, a Jewish state would not have arisen here."⁶⁹

Expulsion is a horrible and controversial strategy and it makes no sense for any group contemplating the transfer of a rival population to announce its intentions to the world. Thus, after commenting in 1941 that he could not imagine how transfer could be accomplished without "brutal compulsion," Ben-Gurion went on to say that the Zionists should not "discourage other people, British or American, who favour transfer from advocating this course, but we should in no way make it part of our programme."⁷⁰ He was not rejecting this policy, however; he was simply noting that the Zionists should not openly proclaim it. Further reflecting how "highly sensitive" the subject of transfer was to Israel's founding fathers, Benny Morris notes that "it was common practice in Zionist bodies to order stenographers to 'take a break' and thus to exclude from the record discussion on such matters." Moreover, he notes that "Jewish press reports" describing how Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders reacted to the Peel Commission's plan for partitioning Palestine "generally failed to mention that Ben-Gurion, or anyone else, had come out strongly in favor of transfer or indeed had even raised the subject."⁷¹

The opportunity to expel the Palestinians and create a Jewish state came in 1948, when Jewish forces drove up to seven hundred thousand Palestinians into exile.⁷² Israelis and their supporters in the United States long claimed that the Arabs fled because their leaders told them to, but scholars have demolished this myth. In fact, most Arab leaders urged the Palestinian population to stay home, but fear of violent death at the hands of Zionist forces led most of them to flee.⁷³ After the war, Israel barred the return of the Palestinian exiles. As Ben-Gurion put it in June 1948, "We must prevent

at all costs their return."⁷⁴ By 1962, Israel owned almost 93 percent of the land inside its borders.⁷⁵ To achieve this outcome, 531 Arab villages were destroyed "and eleven urban neighborhoods emptied of their inhabitants."⁷⁶ Former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan captures the catastrophe that the Zionists inflicted on the Palestinians to create the state of Israel: "Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you because geography books no longer exist, not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either . . . There is not a single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population."⁷⁷

The fact that the creation of Israel entailed a grave injustice against the Palestinian people was well understood by Israel's leaders. As Ben-Gurion told Nahum Goldmann, president of the World Jewish Congress, in 1956, "If I was an Arab leader I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: we have taken their country. Sure, God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them? Our God is not theirs. We come from Israel, it's true, but two thousand years ago, and what is that to them? There has been anti-semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They only see one thing: we have come here and stolen their country. Why should they accept that?"⁷⁸

Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the founding father of the Israeli right, made essentially the same point when he wrote in 1923, "Colonization is self-explanatory and what it implies is fully understood by every sensible Jew and Arab. There can only be one purpose in colonization. For the country's Arabs that purpose is essentially unacceptable. This is a natural reaction and nothing will change it."⁷⁹ Berl Katznelson, a close ally of Ben-Gurion and a leading intellectual force among the early Zionists, put the point bluntly: "The Zionist enterprise is an enterprise of conquest."⁸⁰

In the six decades since Israel was created, its leaders have repeatedly sought to deny the Palestinians' national ambitions.⁸¹ Prime Minister Golda Meir, for example, famously remarked that "there was no such thing as a Palestinian."⁸² Many Israeli leaders also maintained a deep interest in incorporating the West Bank and Gaza into Israel. In 1949, for example, Moshe Dayan proclaimed that Israel's boundaries were "ridiculous from all points of view." Israel's eastern border, he felt, should be the Jordan River. Dayan was no exception in this regard; many of his fellow generals as well as Ben-Gurion himself were keen on acquiring the West Bank for Israel.⁸³ Benny Morris is certainly correct when he notes that "the vision of 'Greater Israel' as Zionism's ultimate objective did not end with the 1948 war."⁸⁴

After the start of the First Intifada in December 1987, some Israeli leaders began to countenance giving the Palestinians limited autonomy in particular areas of the West Bank and Gaza. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who signed the 1993 Oslo Accords, is often said to have been willing to allow the Palestinians to have a viable state in almost all of the Occupied Territories. But this view is not correct; Rabin in fact opposed creating a full-fledged Palestinian state. Speaking in 1995, the year that he was murdered, Rabin said, "I seek peaceful coexistence between Israel as a Jewish state, not all over the land of Israel, or most of it; its capital, the united Jerusalem; its security border with Jordan rebuilt; next to it, a Palestinian entity, less than a state, that runs the life of Palestinians . . . This is my goal, not to return to the pre-Six-Day War lines but to create two entities, a separation between Israel and the Palestinians who reside in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip."⁸⁵

The depth of Israel's opposition to creating a Palestinian state—even in the late 1990s—is reflected in an incident involving First Lady Hillary Clinton. In the spring of 1998, Israelis and their American supporters sharply criticized her for saying that "it would be in the long-term interests of peace in the Middle East for there to be a state of Palestine, a functioning modern state that is on the same footing as other states." White House officials, according to the *New York Times*, immediately "disowned" her comments and "insisted that she was speaking only for herself." Her view, the White House press secretary said, "is not the view of the President."⁸⁶

By 2000, however, it was finally acceptable for American politicians to speak openly about the desirability of a Palestinian state. At the same time, pressure from extremist violence and the growing Palestinian population has forced recent Israeli leaders to dismantle the settlements in the Gaza Strip and to explore territorial compromises involving the West Bank. Still, no Israeli government has been willing to offer the Palestinians a viable state of their own. As discussed below, even Prime Minister Ehud Barak's purportedly generous offer at Camp David in July 2000 would have given the Palestinians only a disarmed and dismembered state under de facto Israeli control. In 2002, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir reiterated his opposition to giving the Palestinians any kind of state, while former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made it clear the following year that he favored only a semisovereign Palestinian state.⁸⁷

Europe's crimes against the Jews provide a strong moral justification for Israel's right to exist. No new settler state can hope to come into existence without some degree of violence, but Israel has continued to impose terrible violence and discrimination on the Palestinians for decades. These policies

can no longer be justified on the grounds that the existence of Israel is at stake. Israel's survival is not in doubt, even if some Islamic extremists harbor unrealistic hopes or Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says that Israel "should vanish from the page of time."⁸⁸ More important, the past suffering of the Jewish people does not obligate the United States to help Israel no matter what it does today.

"VIRTUOUS ISRAELIS" VERSUS "EVIL ARABS"

Another moral argument portrays Israel as a country that has sought peace at every turn and showed great and noble restraint even when provoked. The Arabs, by contrast, are said to have acted with deep wickedness and indiscriminate violence. This narrative is endlessly repeated by Israeli leaders and by American apologists for Israel such as Alan Dershowitz and the *New Republic* editor in chief Martin Peretz. Israel, according to Peretz, adheres closely to a doctrine called "purity of arms," which means that "everything reasonable must be done to avoid harming civilians, even if that entails additional risks to Israeli soldiers." Moreover, he maintains that "Israel has for years vacillated between responding to terror with exquisitely calibrated force and pacifying terrorists by giving them some of what they want," while its Arab enemies are part "of the very same terror that was launched on us on Sept. 11."⁸⁹ The IDF, according to Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert, among others, "is the most moral army in the world."⁹⁰ This description of Israeli behavior is yet another myth, another element in what Meron Benvenisti, the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, calls Israel's "sacred narrative."⁹¹

Israeli scholarship shows that the early Zionists were far from benevolent toward the Palestinian Arabs.⁹² The Arab inhabitants did resist the Zionists' encroachments, sometimes killing Jews and destroying their homes. But this resistance would be expected given that the Zionists were trying to create their own state on Arab lands. "Were I an Arab," Ben-Gurion candidly remarked in June 1937, "I would rebel even more vigorously, bitterly, and desperately against the immigration that will one day turn Palestine and all its Arab residents over to Jewish rule."⁹³ The Zionists responded vigorously and often ruthlessly, and thus neither side owns the moral high ground during this period.

This same scholarship also reveals that the creation of Israel in 1948 involved explicit acts of ethnic cleansing, including executions, massacres, and rapes by Jews.⁹⁴ Of course, Zionist leaders did not tell their troops to

murder and rape Palestinians, but they did advocate using brutal methods to remove huge numbers of Palestinians from the land that would soon be the new Jewish state. Consider what Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary on January 1, 1948, at a time when he was involved in a series of important meetings with other Zionist leaders about how to deal with the Palestinians in their midst: "There is a need now for strong and brutal reaction. We need to be accurate about timing, place and those we hit. If we accuse a family—we need to harm them without mercy, women and children included. Otherwise, this is not an effective reaction . . . There is no need to distinguish between guilty and not guilty."⁹⁵ It is hardly surprising that this sort of guidance from the Zionist leadership—Ben-Gurion was summarizing the emerging policy—led Jewish soldiers to commit atrocities. After all, we have seen this pattern of behavior in many wars, fought by many different peoples. Regardless, the occurrence of atrocities in this period undercuts Israel's claim to a special moral status.

Israel's subsequent conduct toward its Arab adversaries and its Palestinian subjects has often been severe, belying any claim to morally superior conduct. Between 1949 and 1956, for example, Morris estimates that "Israeli security forces and civilian guards, and their mines and booby-traps, killed somewhere between 2,700 and 5,000 Arab infiltrators." Some of them were undoubtedly bent on killing Israelis, but according to the available evidence, "the vast majority of those killed were unarmed; the overwhelming majority had infiltrated for economic or social reasons." Morris notes that this "free-fire" policy led to "a series of atrocities" against the infiltrators.⁹⁶

These kinds of acts were not anomalous. The IDF murdered hundreds of Egyptian prisoners of war in both the 1956 and 1967 wars.⁹⁷ In 1967, it expelled between 100,000 and 260,000 Palestinians from the newly conquered West Bank and drove 80,000 Syrians from the Golan Heights.⁹⁸ When the victims of these ethnic cleansings tried to sneak back to their homes, often unarmed, Israelis sometimes shot them on sight.⁹⁹ Amnesty International estimates that between 1967 and 2003, Israel destroyed more than ten thousand homes in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.¹⁰⁰ Israel was also complicit in the massacre of innocent Palestinians by a Christian militia at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps following its invasion of Lebanon in 1982. An Israeli investigatory commission found Defense Minister Ariel Sharon to bear "personal responsibility" for these atrocities by allowing the Phalangists to enter the camps.¹⁰¹ While the commission's willingness to hold a top official like Sharon accountable is admirable, we should not forget that Israeli voters subsequently elected him prime minister.

Israel has now controlled the West Bank and Gaza for forty years, making it, as the historian Perry Anderson notes, "the longest official military occupation of modern history."¹⁰² When the occupation began, Benny Morris explains, Israelis "liked to believe, and tell the world, that they were running an 'enlightened' and 'benign' occupation, qualitatively different from other military occupations the world had seen. The truth was radically different. Like all occupations, Israel's was founded on brute force, repression and fear, collaboration and treachery, beatings and torture chambers, and daily intimidation, humiliation, and manipulation."¹⁰³ During the First Intifada (1987–91), for example, the IDF distributed truncheons to its troops and encouraged them to break the bones of Palestinian protestors. The Swedish branch of the Save the Children organization released a thousand-page report in May 1990 that detailed the effects of that conflict on the children in the Occupied Territories. It estimated that "23,600 to 29,900 children required medical treatment for their beating injuries in the first two years of the [first] intifada." Moreover, it estimated that almost one-third of the children were ten years or under; one-fifth were five and under; more than four-fifths "had been beaten on their heads and upper bodies and at multiple locations"; and almost one-third of the children "sustained broken bones, including multiple fractures."¹⁰⁴

Ehud Barak, the IDF's deputy chief of staff during the First Intifada, said at the time, "We do not want children to be shot under any circumstances . . . When you see a child you don't shoot." Nevertheless, Save the Children estimated that sixty-five hundred to eighty-five hundred children were wounded by gunfire during the first two years of the Intifada. Regarding the 106 recorded cases of "child gunshot deaths," the report concluded that almost all of them "were hit by directed—not random or ricochet—gunfire"; almost 20 percent suffered multiple gunshot wounds; about 12 percent were shot from behind; 15 percent of the children were ten years or younger; "most children were not participating in a stone-throwing demonstration when shot"; and "nearly one-fifth of the children were shot dead while at home or within ten meters of their homes."

Israel's response to the Second Intifada (2000–05) was even more violent, leading the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* to declare that "the IDF . . . is turning into a killing machine whose efficiency is awe-inspiring, yet shocking."¹⁰⁵ The IDF fired one million bullets in the first days of the uprising, which is hardly a measured response.¹⁰⁶ Over the course of that uprising, Israel killed 3,386 Palestinians, while 992 Israelis were killed by the Palestinians, which means that Israel killed 3.4 Palestinians for every Israeli lost.

Among those killed were 676 Palestinian children and 118 Israeli children; thus, the ratio of Palestinian to Israeli children killed was 5.7 to 1. Of the 3,386 Palestinian deaths, 1,815 were believed to be bystanders, 1,008 were killed while fighting the Israelis, and the circumstances of 563 deaths are unknown. In other words, well over half of the Palestinian fatalities appear to have been noncombatants. A similar pattern holds on the Israeli side, where 683 of its 992 deaths were civilians; the remaining 309 were military.¹⁰⁷ Israeli forces have also killed several foreign peace activists, including a twenty-three-year-old American woman crushed by an Israeli bulldozer in March 2003.¹⁰⁸ Yet the Israeli government rarely investigates these civilian deaths, much less punishes the perpetrators.¹⁰⁹

These facts about Israel's conduct have been amply documented by numerous human rights organizations—including prominent Israeli groups—and are not disputed by fair-minded observers.¹¹⁰ And that is why four former officials of Shin Bet (the Israeli domestic security organization) condemned Israel's conduct during the Second Intifada in November 2003. One of them declared, "We are behaving disgracefully," and another termed Israel's conduct "patently immoral."¹¹¹

A similar pattern can be seen in Israel's response to the escalation in violence in Gaza and Lebanon in 2006. The killing of two Israeli soldiers and the capture of a third by Hamas in June 2006 led Israel to reoccupy Gaza and launch air strikes and artillery fire that destroyed critical infrastructure, including the electric power station that provided residents of Gaza with half of their electricity. The IDF has also killed hundreds of Palestinians since moving back into Gaza, many of them children.¹¹² This dire situation led the UN high commissioner for human rights, Louise Arbour, to proclaim in November 2006 that "the violation of human rights in this territory . . . is massive."¹¹³ Likewise, when Hezbollah units crossed the Israeli-Lebanese border in July 2006 and captured two IDF soldiers and killed several more, Israel unleashed a bombing campaign that was designed to inflict massive punishment on Lebanon's civilian population by destroying critical infrastructure like roads, bridges, gas stations, and buildings. More than one thousand Lebanese died, most of them innocent civilians. As discussed in Chapter 11, this response was both strategically foolish and a violation of the laws of war. In short, there is little basis for the often-heard claim that Israel has consistently shown great restraint in dealing with its adversaries.

An obvious challenge to this point is the claim that Israel has faced a mortal threat throughout its history, both from "rejectionist" Arab governments and from Palestinian terrorists. Isn't Israel entitled to do whatever it

takes to protect its citizens? And doesn't the unique evil of terrorism justify continued U.S. support, even if Israel often responds harshly?

In fact, this argument is not a compelling moral justification either. Palestinians have used terrorism against their Israeli occupiers as well as innocent third parties; their willingness to attack civilians is wrong and should be roundly condemned. This behavior is not surprising, however, because the Palestinians have long been denied basic political rights and believe they have no other way to force Israeli concessions. As former Prime Minister Barak once admitted, had he been born a Palestinian, he "would have joined a terrorist organization."¹¹⁴ If the situation were reversed and the Israelis were under Arab occupation, they would almost certainly be using similar tactics against their oppressors, just as other resistance movements around the world have done.¹¹⁵

Indeed, terrorism was one of the key tactics that the Zionists used when they were in a similarly weak position and trying to obtain their own state. It was Jewish terrorists from the infamous Irgun, a militant Zionist group, who in late 1937 introduced into Palestine the now-familiar practice of placing bombs in buses and large crowds. Benny Morris speculates that "the Arabs may well have learned the value of terrorist bombings from the Jews."¹¹⁶ Between 1944 and 1947, several Zionist organizations used terrorist attacks to drive the British from Palestine and took the lives of many innocent civilians along the way.¹¹⁷ Israeli terrorists also murdered the UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte in 1948, because they opposed his proposal to internationalize Jerusalem.¹¹⁸ The perpetrators of these acts were not isolated extremists: the leaders of the murder plot were eventually granted amnesty by the Israeli government and one of them was later elected to the Knesset. Another terrorist leader, who approved of Bernadotte's murder but was not tried, was future Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. He openly argued that "neither Jewish ethics nor Jewish tradition can disqualify terrorism as a means of combat." Rather, terrorism had "a great part to play . . . in our war against the occupier [Britain]." Nor did Shamir express regrets about his terrorist past, telling an interviewer in 1998 that "had I not acted as I did, it is doubtful that we would have been able to create an independent Jewish state of our own."¹¹⁹

Of course, Menachem Begin, who headed the Irgun and later became prime minister, was one of the most prominent Jewish terrorists in the years before Israeli independence. When speaking of Begin, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol often referred to him simply as "the terrorist."¹²⁰ The Palestinians' use of terrorism is morally reprehensible today, but so was the Zionists' re-

liance on it in the past. Thus, one cannot justify American support for Israel on the grounds that its past or present conduct was morally superior.

Another possible line of defense is that Israel does not purposely target noncombatants, while Hezbollah and the Palestinians do aim to kill Israeli civilians. Moreover, the terrorists who strike at Israel use civilians as human shields, which regrettably leaves the IDF no choice but to kill innocent civilians when it strikes at its deadly foes. These rationales are not convincing either. As discussed in Chapter 11, the IDF targeted civilian areas in Lebanon, and there is little evidence that Hezbollah was using civilians as human shields. While there is also no evidence that it has been official Israeli policy to kill Palestinian civilians, the IDF has often failed to take care to avoid civilian casualties when fighting against groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The fact that Hezbollah and the Palestinians target civilians does not entitle Israel to jeopardize civilian lives by using disproportionate force.

There is no question that Israel is justified in responding with force to violent acts by groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, but its willingness to use its superior military power to inflict massive suffering on innocent civilians casts doubt on its repeated claims to a special moral status. Israel may not have acted worse than many other countries, but it has not acted any better.

CAMP DAVID MYTHS

The portrayal of Israel as primed for peace and the Palestinians as bent on war is reinforced by the standard interpretation of the Clinton administration's failed effort to complete the Oslo peace process. According to this story, Prime Minister Barak offered the Palestinians "almost everything" they wanted at Camp David in July 2000.¹²¹ But Arafat, still determined to derail the peace process and eventually destroy Israel, rejected this generous offer and instead launched the Second Intifada in late September 2000. Israel accepted and Arafat rejected an even more generous proposal—the so-called Clinton parameters—put forth by President Clinton on December 23, 2000, providing further evidence that he had no interest in peace.

In this story, the failure of the peace process was almost entirely Arafat's fault. Israel was eager to make peace but could not find a reliable partner, confirming Abba Eban's famous quip that "the Arabs never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity." This account also implies that neither Israel nor the United States bears responsibility for the continued conflict and bol-

sters the argument that Israel was correct in refusing to make concessions to the Palestinians as long as Arafat was in charge.

There is only one problem with this widely held version of events: it is not correct.¹²² Although Barak deserves credit for being the first—indeed, the only—Israeli leader to offer the Palestinians their own state, the terms he offered them at Camp David were far from generous. To start, it seems clear that Barak's best offer at Camp David promised the Palestinians immediate control of Gaza and eventual control of 91 percent of the West Bank.¹²³ Even so, there were major problems with this offer from the Palestinians' perspective. Israel planned to keep control of the Jordan River Valley (roughly 10 percent of the West Bank) for between six and twenty-one years (different accounts of the negotiations vary on this point), which meant that the Palestinians would be given immediate control over no more than 81 percent of the West Bank, not 91 percent. The Palestinians, of course, could not be sure that Israel would ever relinquish control of the Jordan River Valley.

In addition, the Palestinians had a slightly more expansive definition of what constituted the West Bank than the Israelis did. This difference, which amounted to roughly 5 percent of the territory in question, meant that the Palestinians saw themselves immediately getting 76 percent of the West Bank and, if the Israelis were willing to surrender the Jordan River Valley at some future date, maybe 86 percent. What made this deal especially difficult for the Palestinians to accept was the fact that they had already agreed in the 1993 Oslo Accords to recognize Israeli sovereignty over 78 percent of the original British Mandate.¹²⁴ From their perspective, they were now being asked to make another major concession and accept at best 86 percent of the remaining 22 percent.

To make matters worse, the final Israeli proposal at Camp David in the summer of 2000 would not have given the Palestinians a continuous piece of sovereign territory in the West Bank. The Palestinians maintain that the West Bank would have been divided into three cantons separated by Israeli territory. Israelis dispute this claim, but Barak himself acknowledges that Israel would have maintained control of a "razor-thin" wedge of territory running from Jerusalem to the Jordan River Valley.¹²⁵ This wedge, which would completely bisect the West Bank, was essential to Israel's plan to retain control of the Jordan River Valley. Thus, the Palestinian state proposed at Camp David would have been composed of either two or three distinct cantons in the West Bank, and Gaza, which is itself separated from the West Bank by Israeli territory. Barak later said that the Palestinian areas on the West Bank

could have been connected by "a tunnel or bridge," while Gaza and the West Bank would have been connected by a travel corridor.¹²⁶

With regard to the thorny issue of Jerusalem, Barak's proposal to divide the city was a major step in the right direction. Nonetheless, the Palestinians were not offered full sovereignty in a number of Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, which made the proposal significantly less attractive to them. Israel would also have kept control over the new Palestinian state's borders, its airspace, and its water resources, and the Palestinians would be permanently barred from building an army to defend themselves.¹²⁷ It is hard to imagine any leader accepting these terms. Certainly no other state in the world has such curtailed sovereignty, or faces so many obstacles to building a workable economy and society. Given all this, it is not surprising that Barak's former foreign minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, who was a key participant at Camp David, later told an interviewer, "If I were a Palestinian I would have rejected Camp David, as well."¹²⁸

The common claim that Arafat launched the Second Intifada in late September 2000—either to enhance his leverage in the negotiations or to destroy the peace process itself—does not stand up against the evidence either.¹²⁹ He continued negotiating with the Israelis and the Americans after Camp David, and he even visited Prime Minister Ehud Barak's home a few nights before the violence broke out. According to Charles Enderlin, a French journalist who has written an important book on the failure of these negotiations, the two leaders were uncharacteristically friendly and optimistic about the negotiations that evening.¹³⁰ Moreover, the former head of Shin Bet, Ami Ayalon, has stated that "Arafat neither prepared nor triggered the Intifada."¹³¹ The so-called Mitchell Commission, headed by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell and charged with restarting the peace process, reached the same conclusion.¹³²

The Second Intifada broke out shortly after Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount, Judaism's most holy site, on September 28, 2000. He had to be accompanied by more than a thousand Israeli police, because Muslims consider that same site, the location of the al-Aqsa Mosque, to be the third holiest site in Islam. But Sharon's provocative move was only the precipitating cause, not the root cause, of the violence. Trouble had been brewing among the Palestinians well before Sharon's visit, and key individuals on both sides recognized the danger. In fact, Palestinian leaders asked American and Israeli officials to bar Sharon's visit precisely because they anticipated a violent reaction and wanted to prevent it.¹³³

Part of the problem was the Palestinians' growing dissatisfaction with

Arafat, whose corrupt leadership had done little to improve their lives, much less deliver a state. But the main cause was Israel's provocative policies in the Occupied Territories, compounded by its harsh response to the demonstrations that immediately followed Sharon's visit.¹³⁴ Ben-Ami is exactly right that the Second Intifada "did not start merely as a tactical move. It erupted out of the accumulated rage and frustration of the Palestinian masses at the colossal failure of the peace process since the early days of Oslo to offer them a life of dignity and well-being, and at the incompetence and corruption of their own leaders in the Palestinian Authority."¹³⁵

The Palestinians' frustrations are not hard to fathom. Between the start of the Oslo peace process in September 1993 and the outbreak of the Second Intifada seven years later, Israel confiscated more than forty thousand acres of Palestinian land, built 250 miles of bypass and security roads, established thirty new settlements, and increased the settler population in the West Bank and Gaza by almost one hundred thousand, which effectively doubled that population.¹³⁶ The Israelis also reneged on promises to transfer territory back to the Palestinians and created a system of checkpoints that sharply reduced the Palestinians' freedom of movement and badly damaged their economy. The Palestinians were primed to explode by 2000, and when they did, the Israelis unleashed their superior firepower with scant restraint.¹³⁷ The IDF, as noted, fired more than a million bullets in the first few days of the uprising.

Although Arafat did not launch the Second Intifada, he exploited the resulting violence in a foolish attempt to enhance his bargaining position. Not only did this move make Barak less willing to cut a deal, but it also damaged Barak's standing with the Israeli electorate and paved the way for Sharon's election in February 2001. Arafat's attempt to leverage the uprising also delayed the negotiations, which meant that the lame-duck Clinton administration had even less time in which to complete the process.

Some argue that Arafat's ultimate goal in manipulating the violence was to erase Israel from the map. That was certainly his goal when he first emerged on the world stage in the 1960s, but he recognized by the late 1980s that there was no way that the Palestinians could make Israel go away. Arafat went to some lengths in the 1990s—certainly by participating in the Oslo peace process—to make clear that he accepted Israel's existence and that his struggle with Israel was over control of the Occupied Territories, not all of historic Palestine.¹³⁸ When Camp David failed and the Second Intifada began, almost all of Israel's key intelligence figures believed that Arafat accepted Israel's existence and merely sought a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.¹³⁹ Furthermore, as the Middle East specialist Jeremy

Pressman points out, if Arafat and the Palestinians were determined to eliminate Israel, they would have accepted Barak's offer and used the new state as "a launching pad for the elimination of Israel." But instead they negotiated "as if they expected to abide by any agreements and live for the long term within the framework of a two-state solution."¹⁴⁰

Finally, the oft-repeated claim that Arafat rejected the December 2000 Clinton parameters, which did improve on Barak's last offer at Camp David, is also wrong. The official Palestinian response thanked Clinton for his continued efforts, declared that considerable progress had been made, asked for clarification on some points, and expressed reservations about others.¹⁴¹ The Israeli government also had its own reservations about the proposal, which Barak outlined in a twenty-page single-spaced document. Thus, both the Palestinians and the Israelis accepted the Clinton parameters and saw them as the basis for continued negotiation, but neither side accepted them in toto. The White House spokesman Jake Siewert made just this point on January 3, 2001, when he said that "both sides have now accepted the President's ideas with some reservations," and Clinton confirmed this point in a speech to the Israel Policy Forum four days later.¹⁴² Negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians continued at Taba, Egypt, until late January 2001, when Ehud Barak, not Arafat, broke off the talks. With elections in Israel imminent and public opinion there running strongly against the talks, Barak felt that the clock had run out on him.¹⁴³ His successor, Ariel Sharon, who was adamantly opposed to the Oslo peace process as well as the Clinton parameters, refused to resume negotiations despite repeated Palestinian requests. We will never know if peace was within sight by early 2001, but the charge that Arafat and the Palestinians rejected a last chance for peace and chose violence over reconciliation is false.

SUPPORTING ISRAEL IS GOD'S WILL

There is a final moral claim that some say justifies the close embrace between the United States and Israel. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, some evangelical Christians—especially so-called Christian Zionists—view the establishment of the Jewish state as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Genesis says that God gave Abraham and his descendants the land of Israel; by colonizing the West Bank, Jews are merely taking back what God gave them. Some Christians also see the creation of a greater Israel as a key event leading to the end-time "final battle" depicted in the New Testament's Book

of Revelation. Both perspectives imply that Israel deserves U.S. support not because it is a democracy, an underdog, or a morally superior society, but because backing Israel is God's will.

This line of argument undoubtedly appeals to some fervently religious individuals, but anticipating Armageddon is not a sound basis for making American foreign policy. Church and state are separate in the United States, and the religious opinions of any group are not supposed to determine the country's foreign policy. It is also an odd reading of Christian ethics to support the powerful Israeli state in its mistreatment of dispossessed Palestinians and its suppression of their rights.

WHAT DO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WANT?

The six moral arguments that we have just examined underpin the broader claim that the real basis of U.S. support for Israel is the American people's enduring identification with the Jewish state. The columnist Jeff Jacoby of the *Boston Globe* writes that "solidarity with Israel is an abiding feature of American public opinion. Because the American people are pro-Israel, the American government is pro-Israel. And because Americans so strongly support Israel in its conflict with the Arabs, American policy in the Middle East is committed to Israel's defense." As the AIPAC spokesman Josh Block said on the eve of its 2007 Policy Conference, "There's one issue—that is, support for the U.S. relationship with Israel—that brings everyone together." In fact, he argued that "all trends indicate that Americans . . . understand quite clearly that the basic values we celebrate are reflected in only one country in the Middle East—our ally Israel."¹⁴⁴

This claim, however widely believed, does not stand up to close inspection. There is a degree of cultural affinity between the United States and Israel, based in part on the shared Judeo-Christian tradition. There is also no question that many Americans look favorably on Israel because it is a democracy, because of the history of anti-Semitism, and because they sympathize with Israel in its fight against Palestinian terrorism. But the common roots of Judaism and Christianity have hardly been a reliable source of amity between Jews and Christians in the past.¹⁴⁵ Not only have Christians waged brutal wars against each other, but they have also been the primary perpetrators of violent anti-Semitism in previous centuries. And some fundamentalists—including Christian Zionists—still regard the conversion of Jews as an important evangelical objective. By itself, therefore, this "cultural affinity" cannot

account for the consistent level of U.S. support, or even the generally favorable attitudes that many Americans express toward the Jewish state.

As will become clear in later chapters, the American people are inclined to support Israel in part because its supporters in the United States cultivate sympathy by stifling criticism of Israel while simultaneously portraying it in a favorable light. Indeed, there is much more criticism of Israel's actions in Israel itself than there is in America. If there were a more open and candid discussion about what the Israelis are doing in the Occupied Territories, and about the real strategic value of Israel as a U.S. ally, there would be much less sympathy for Israel in the American public.

Nonetheless, the degree of public support for Israel—and for specific Israeli policies—should not be overstated. Although the American people have favorable perceptions of Israel and clearly support the existence of a Jewish state, support for Israel is not especially deep. Most Americans also recognize that the United States pays a price for its unyielding support of Israel. For example, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press has been asking Americans for many years whether they sympathize more with Israel or the Palestinians. There has always been much more sympathy for Israel, but from 1993 through 2006, the number went above 50 percent only once—it was 52 percent during the second Lebanon war in 2006—and was as low as 37 percent in July 2005.¹⁴⁶

Regarding the consequences of U.S. support for Israel, a Pew survey conducted in November 2005 found that 39 percent of the American public said that it was “a major cause of global discontent.” Among opinion leaders, the numbers were substantially higher. Indeed, 78 percent of members of the news media, 72 percent of military leaders, 72 percent of security experts, and 69 percent of foreign affairs specialists believe that backing Israel seriously damages America's image around the world.¹⁴⁷ A *Newsweek* poll released a few weeks after the September 11 attacks found that 58 percent of the respondents believed that U.S. support for Israel was a factor in Osama bin Laden's decision to attack America.¹⁴⁸

The American people are considerably more critical of some Israeli actions than U.S. politicians are, and the public clearly supports taking a hard-nosed approach to dealing with Israel when they think it is in the national interest to do so. As we explain in Chapter 7, a survey in the spring of 2003 showed that 60 percent of Americans were willing to withhold aid to Israel if it resisted U.S. pressure to settle its conflict with the Palestinians. In fact, 73 percent said the United States should not favor either side in the conflict.¹⁴⁹ Two years later, the Anti-Defamation League found that 78 percent

of Americans believed that Washington should favor neither Israel nor the Palestinians.¹⁵⁰ Andrew Kohut, the director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, points out that “average Americans see shades of gray in the Middle East conflict, and their sympathies notwithstanding, they favor a neutral role for the United States.”¹⁵¹

Unlike their leaders, the American people displayed a tough-minded approach to dealing with Israel during the Lebanon war in 2006. As discussed in Chapter 11, polls showed that slightly more than half of the public thought that Israel was either equally responsible or mainly responsible for the war, and in at least two polls more than half of the respondents said that the United States should not take sides.¹⁵² But the United States emphatically took Israel’s side in Lebanon, as it has in every recent conflict involving Israel. This enthusiastic and unconditional support cannot be explained by the generally favorable opinion of Israel held by most Americans.

CONCLUSION

The moral or strategic arguments commonly invoked by Israel’s backers cannot account for America’s remarkable relationship with the Jewish state over the past three decades. This is especially true for the post–Cold War period, when the strategic rationale largely evaporated and the moral rationale was badly undermined by Israeli behavior in the Occupied Territories. Yet the relationship continued to grow and deepen.

Some Americans surely do not find this situation anomalous, as they sincerely believe that there are powerful moral and strategic reasons behind U.S. support for Israel. Because the essential facts in this story are so at odds with this perspective, it is hard to imagine that the number of true believers is large enough to account for America’s exceptional relationship with the Jewish state. We are left with a puzzle: either a relatively small number of true believers are exerting a disproportionate influence on U.S. foreign policy, or they have managed to persuade lots of other people—especially key politicians and policy makers—that these flawed rationales are in fact correct. Because the strategic and moral case is increasingly weak, something else must be behind the striking pattern of ever-increasing U.S. support. We address that issue in the next chapter.

WHAT IS THE "ISRAEL LOBBY"?

In the United States, interest groups routinely contend to shape perceptions of the national interest and to convince legislators and presidents to adopt their preferred policies. The interplay of competing factions was famously extolled by James Madison in the *Federalist No. 10*, and the influence of different interest groups has long shaped various aspects of American foreign policy, including decisions for war.

When a particular interest group is especially powerful or politically adept, it may influence policy in ways that are not good for the country as a whole. A tariff that shields a particular industry from foreign competition will benefit certain companies but not the many consumers who have to pay more for that industry's goods. The National Rifle Association's success in thwarting gun control legislation undoubtedly benefits gun manufacturers and dealers, but it leaves the rest of society more vulnerable to gun-related violence. When a former lobbyist for the American Petroleum Institute becomes chief of staff at the White House's Council on Environmental Quality, and uses this position to water down reports on the connection between greenhouse gas emissions and global warming (before resigning to take a job at ExxonMobil), one may reasonably worry that the oil industry is protecting its interests in ways that may harm all of us.¹

The influence of the Israel lobby on U.S. foreign policy merits the same scrutiny as the impact of energy interests on environmental regulations or the role of pharmaceutical companies in shaping policy on prescription drugs. We believe the activities of the groups and individuals who make up the lobby are the main reason why the United States pursues policies in the Middle East that make little sense on either strategic or moral grounds.

Were it not for the lobby's efforts, the strategic and moral arguments that are commonly invoked to justify unconditional American support would be called into question more frequently and U.S. policy in the Middle East would be significantly different than it is today. Pro-Israel forces surely believe that they are promoting policies that serve the American as well as the Israeli national interest. We disagree. Most of the policies they advocate are not in America's or Israel's interest, and both countries would be better off if the United States adopted a different approach.

As we have already noted, we are not questioning American support for Israel's right to exist, because that right is clearly justified and is now endorsed by more than 160 countries around the world. What we are questioning—and what needs to be explained—is the magnitude of U.S. support for Israel and its largely unconditional nature (as described in Chapter 1), as well as the degree to which U.S. Middle East policy is conducted with Israel's welfare in mind (as explored in detail in Part II). To begin that task, this chapter identifies the central components of the Israel lobby and describes how it has evolved over time. We also discuss why it has become so influential, especially when compared to potential competitors like the "Arab lobby" and the "oil lobby." The following chapters describe the different strategies that have made it such a powerful interest group and a remarkably effective player in the making of U.S. Middle East policy.

DEFINING THE LOBBY

We use "Israel lobby" as a convenient shorthand term for the loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively work to shape U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. The lobby is not a single, unified movement with a central leadership, however, and the individuals and groups that make up this broad coalition sometimes disagree on specific policy issues. Nor is it some sort of cabal or conspiracy. On the contrary, the organizations and individuals who make up the lobby operate out in the open and in the same way that other interest groups do.

Using the term "Israel lobby" is itself somewhat misleading, insofar as many of the individuals and some of the groups in this loose coalition do not engage in formal lobbying activities (direct efforts to persuade elected officials). Rather, the various parts of the lobby work to influence U.S. policy in a variety of ways, much as other interest groups do. One might more accurately dub this the "pro-Israel community" or even the "help Israel move-

ment," because the range of activities that different groups undertake goes beyond simple lobbying. Nonetheless, because many of the key groups do lobby, and because the term "Israel lobby" is used in common parlance (along with labels such as the "farm lobby," "insurance lobby," "gun lobby," or other ethnic lobbies), we have chosen to employ it here.²

As with other special interest groups, the boundaries of the Israel lobby cannot be identified precisely, and there will always be some borderline individuals or organizations whose position is hard to classify.³ It is easy to identify groups that are clearly part of the lobby—such as the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA)—as well as individuals who are key members—such as Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. There are also many groups that are obviously not part of the lobby—such as the National Association of Arab-Americans—and individuals who should clearly be excluded as well—such as Columbia University scholar Rashid Khalidi. Nevertheless, there will always be some groups and individuals whose position is more ambiguous. Like other social and political movements, the Israel lobby's boundaries are somewhat fuzzy.

This situation highlights that the lobby is not a centralized, hierarchical organization with a defined membership. There are no membership cards or initiation rites. It has a core consisting of organizations whose declared purpose is to encourage the U.S. government and the American public to provide material aid to Israel and to support its government's policies, as well as influential individuals for whom these goals are also a top priority. The lobby, however, also draws support from a penumbra of groups and individuals who are committed to Israel and want the United States to continue supporting it, but who are not as energetically or consistently active as the groups and individuals that form the core. Thus, a lobbyist for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a research fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), or the leadership of organizations like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and Christians United for Israel (CUFI) are part of the core, while individuals who occasionally write letters supporting Israel to their local newspaper or send checks to a pro-Israel political action committee should be seen as part of the broader network of supporters.

This definition does not mean that every American with favorable attitudes toward Israel is a member of the lobby. To offer a personal illustration, the authors of this book are "pro-Israel," in the sense that we support its right to exist, admire its many achievements, want its citizens to enjoy se-

cure and prosperous lives, and believe that the United States should come to Israel's aid if its survival is in danger. But we are obviously not part of the Israel lobby. Nor does it imply that every American official who supports Israel is part of the lobby either. A senator who consistently votes in favor of aid to Israel is not necessarily part of the lobby, because he or she may simply be responding to political pressure from pro-Israel interest groups.

To be part of the lobby, in other words, one has to actively work to move American foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. For an organization, this pursuit must be an important part of its mission and consume a substantial percentage of its resources and agenda. For an individual, this means devoting some portion of one's professional or personal life (or in some cases, substantial amounts of money) to influencing U.S. Middle East policy. A journalist or academic who sometimes covers Middle East issues and occasionally reports events that portray Israel favorably—such as the *New York Times* reporter David Sanger or the Duke University professor Bruce Jentleson—should not be seen as part of the lobby. But a journalist or scholar who predictably takes Israel's side and devotes a significant amount of his or her writing to defending steadfast U.S. support for Israel—such as the *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer or the former Princeton University historian Bernard Lewis—clearly is.

Of course, the level of effort and the specific activities will vary in each case, and these various groups and individuals will not agree on every issue that affects Israel. Some individuals—such as Morton Klein of ZOA, John Hagee of CUFI, and Rael Jean Isaac of Americans for a Safe Israel—oppose a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians and believe instead that Israel should retain all or most of the Occupied Territories. Others, such as Dennis Ross of WINEP and Martin Indyk of the Brookings Institution, favor a negotiated settlement and have occasionally criticized specific Israeli actions. Despite these differences, however, each of these individuals believes that the United States should give Israel substantial diplomatic, economic, and military support even when Israel takes actions the United States opposes, and each has devoted a significant amount of his or her professional life to encouraging this sort of support. Thus, although it would clearly be wrong to think of the lobby as a single-minded monolith, much less portray it as a cabal or conspiracy, it would be equally mistaken to exclude anyone who works actively to preserve America's special relationship with the Jewish state.

THE ROLE OF AMERICAN JEWRY

The bulk of the lobby is comprised of Jewish Americans who are deeply committed to making sure that U.S. foreign policy advances what they believe to be Israel's interests. According to the historian Melvin I. Urofsky, "No other ethnic group in American history has so extensive an involvement with a foreign nation." Steven T. Rosenthal agrees, writing that "since 1967 . . . there has been no other country whose citizens have been as committed to the success of another country as American Jews have been to Israel."⁴ In 1981, the political scientist Robert H. Trice described the pro-Israel lobby as "comprised of at least 75 separate organizations—mostly Jewish—that actively support most of the actions and policy positions of the Israeli government."⁵ The activities of these groups and individuals go beyond merely voting for pro-Israel candidates to include writing letters to politicians or news organizations, making financial contributions to pro-Israel political candidates, and giving active support to one or more pro-Israel organizations, whose leaders often contact them directly to convey their agenda.

Yet the Israel lobby is not synonymous with American Jewry, and "Jewish lobby" is not an appropriate term for describing the various individuals and groups that work to foster U.S. support for Israel. For one thing, there is significant variation among American Jews in their depth of commitment to Israel. Roughly a third of them, in fact, do not identify Israel as a particularly salient issue. In 2004, for example, a well-regarded survey found that 36 percent of Jewish Americans were either "not very" or "not at all" emotionally attached to Israel.⁶ Furthermore, many American Jews who care a lot about Israel do not support the policies endorsed by the dominant organizations in the lobby, just as many gun owners do not support every policy that the NRA advocates and not all retirees favor every position endorsed by the AARP. For example, American Jews were less enthusiastic about going to war in Iraq than the population as a whole, even though key organizations in the lobby supported the war, and they are more opposed to the war today. Finally, some of the individuals and groups that are especially vocal on Israel's behalf, such as the Christian Zionists, are not Jewish. So while American Jews are the lobby's predominant constituency, it is more accurate to refer to this loose coalition as the Israel lobby. It is the specific political agenda that defines the lobby, not the religious or ethnic identity of those pushing it.

The attachment that many American Jews feel for Israel is not difficult to understand, and as noted in the Introduction, it resembles the attitudes

of other ethnic groups that retain an affinity for other countries or peoples with similar backgrounds in foreign lands.⁷ Although many Jews in the United States were ambivalent about Zionism during the movement's early years, support grew significantly after Hitler came to power in 1933 and especially after the horrors inflicted on the Jews during World War II became widely known.⁸

Relatively few Jews chose to leave the United States and move to Israel after its founding in 1948, a pattern that Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and other Israeli leaders initially criticized. Nevertheless, a strong commitment to Israel soon became an important element of identity for many American Jews.⁹ The establishment of a Jewish state in historic Palestine seemed miraculous in itself, especially in the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust. Israel's achievements in "making the desert bloom" were an obvious source of pride, and a close identification with Israel provided a new basis for community for a population that was rapidly assimilating into American society and becoming increasingly secular at the same time. As Rosenthal notes:

To equate Israel with Judaism was a comforting way to avoid the encumbrances of religion by focusing one's Jewishness on a secular state 8,000 miles from home . . . Synagogues, the new mainstay of American Jewish life in the postwar era, became Israel-centered. A new class of Jewish professionals . . . arose in the suburbs. They soon discovered that Israel was the most effective means to counter the growing religious indifference of their constituencies. Primarily in response to Israel's overwhelming need for financial and political support, new institutions . . . arose, and fundraising and lobbying increasingly defined American Jews' relationship to Israel.¹⁰

American Jews have formed an impressive array of civic organizations whose agendas include working to benefit Israel, in many cases by influencing U.S. foreign policy. Key organizations include AIPAC, the American Jewish Congress, ZOA, the Israel Policy Forum (IPF), the American Jewish Committee, the ADL, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Americans for a Safe Israel, American Friends of Likud, Mercaz-USA, Hadassah, and many others. Indeed, the sociologist Chaim I. Waxman reported in 1992 that the *American Jewish Yearbook* listed more than eighty national Jewish organizations "specifically devoted to Zionist and pro-Israel activities . . . and for many others, objectives and activities such as 'promotes

Israel's welfare,' 'support for the State of Israel' and 'promotes understanding of Israel' appear with impressive frequency."¹¹ Fifty-one of the largest and most important organizations come together in the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, whose self-described mission includes "forging diverse groups into a unified force for Israel's well-being" and working to "strengthen and foster the special U.S.-Israel relationship."¹²

The lobby also includes think tanks such as the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), the Middle East Forum (MEF), and WINEP, as well as individuals who work in universities and other research organizations. There are also dozens of pro-Israel PACs ready to funnel money to pro-Israel political candidates or to candidates whose opponents are deemed either insufficiently supportive of or hostile to Israel. The Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan research group that tracks campaign contributions, has identified roughly three dozen such "pro-Israel" PACs (many of them "stealth PACs" whose names do not reveal a pro-Israel orientation) and reports that these organizations contributed approximately \$3 million to congressional candidates in the 2006 midterm election.¹³

Of the various Jewish organizations that include foreign policy as a central part of their agenda, AIPAC is clearly the most important and best known. In 1997, when *Fortune* magazine asked members of Congress and their staffs to list the most powerful lobbies in Washington, AIPAC came in second behind AARP but ahead of heavyweight lobbies like the AFL-CIO and the NRA.¹⁴ A *National Journal* study in March 2005 reached a similar conclusion, placing AIPAC in second place (tied with AARP) in Washington's "muscle rankings."¹⁵ Former Congressman Mervyn Dymally (D-CA) once called AIPAC "without question the most effective lobby in Congress," and the former chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Lee Hamilton, who served in Congress for thirty-four years, said in 1991, "There's no lobby group that matches it . . . They're in a class by themselves."¹⁶

The influence that groups like AIPAC now enjoy did not emerge overnight. During Zionism's early years, and even after Israel's founding, lobbying on Israel's behalf tended to occur quietly behind the scenes and usually depended on personal contacts between influential government officials, especially the president, and a small number of Jewish leaders, pro-Zionist advisers, or Jewish friends. For example, Woodrow Wilson's support for the Balfour Declaration in 1917 was due in part to the influence of his Jewish friends Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis and Rabbi Stephen Wise.

Similarly, Harry S. Truman's decision to back Israel's creation and to recognize the new state was influenced (though not determined) by intercessions from Jewish friends and advisers.¹⁷

The tendency for Israel's supporters to keep a low profile reflected concerns about lingering anti-Semitism in the United States, as well as the fear that overt lobbying on Israel's behalf would expose American Jews to the charge of dual loyalty. AIPAC itself had explicitly Zionist roots: its founder, I. L. "Si" Kenen, was head of the American Zionist Council in 1951, which was a registered foreign lobbying group. Kenen reorganized it as a U.S. lobbying organization—the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs—in 1953–54, and the new organization was renamed AIPAC in 1959. Kenen relied on personal contacts with key legislators rather than public campaigns or mass mobilization, and AIPAC generally followed "Kenen's Rules" to advance Israel's cause. Rule No. 1 was: "Get behind legislation; don't step out in front of it (that is, keep a low profile)."¹⁸

According to J. J. Goldberg, the editor of the Jewish newspaper *Forward*, Zionist influence "increased exponentially during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, because the affluence and influence of Jews in American society had increased," and also because Kennedy and Johnson "counted numerous Jews among their close advisers, donors and personal friends."¹⁹ AIPAC was still a small operation with a modest staff and budget, and as Stuart Eizenstat points out, "Not until the mid-1960s did overt organized Jewish political activity on behalf of the state of Israel come into its own."²⁰

The lobby's size, wealth, and influence grew substantially after the Six-Day War in June 1967. According to Eizenstat, that conflict "galvanized the American Jewish public like no event since Israel's War of Independence . . . The sense of pride in 'new Jews,' proud, strong, capable of defending themselves, had an incalculable effect on American Jewry." The successful campaign against anti-Semitism, aided by the widespread awareness of the horrors of the Holocaust, helped remove lingering discriminatory barriers, and Jewish Americans "lost the sense of fear that had stunted their political will" in earlier years. And because Israel was becoming a central focus of Jewish identity in a world where assimilation was increasingly viable and widespread, there were few reasons not to express that attachment in politics.²¹

The heightened concern with Israel's well-being within Jewish organizations continued during the War of Attrition (1969–70) and the October War (1973). These conflicts reinforced pride in Israel's military prowess, but they also raised fears about Israel's security, thereby reinforcing the Israelcentric

focus of many Jewish community-relations groups.²² Albert Chernin, the executive director of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC, later renamed the Jewish Council for Public Affairs), expressed this perspective in 1978 when he said that our "first priority is Israel, of course, reflecting the complete identity of views of the American Jewish leadership with the concerns of the rank and file." The historian Jack Wertheimer terms this comment a "stunning admission that political efforts to shore up Israel superseded all other concerns of Jewish community relations organizations in the United States."²³

As American foreign aid to Israel began to exceed private contributions, pro-Israel organizations increasingly focused on political activities intended to preserve or increase U.S. governmental support. According to Wertheimer, "The overall responsibility for lobbying for Israel was assumed by the Conference of Presidents . . . and AIPAC. Both had been founded in the 1950s and had played a modest role prior to 1967. The needs of Israel for political support catapulted these two organizations to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s."²⁴

This increased effort reflected awareness that backing Israel was costly for the United States and therefore had to be justified and defended in the political sphere. As Morris Amitay, who replaced Kenen as AIPAC's executive director in 1975, put it, "The name of the game, if you want to help Israel, is political action."²⁵ Under Amitay and his successor, Tom Dine, AIPAC was transformed from an intimate, low-budget operation into a large, mass-based organization with a staff of more than 150 employees and an annual budget (derived solely from private contributions) that went from some \$300,000 in 1973 to an estimated \$40–60 million today.²⁶ Instead of shunning the limelight, as it had done under Kenen, AIPAC increasingly sought to advertise its power. According to one former staffer, "The theory was, no one is scared of you if they don't know about you."²⁷ In contrast to the earlier patterns of intimate lobbying on behalf of Jews by Jewish advisers and sympathetic gentiles, AIPAC and other groups in the lobby did not define their public agenda as humanitarian support for Jews in Israel. Rather, the evolution of the lobby increasingly involved the formulation and promotion of sophisticated arguments about the alignment of America's and Israel's strategic interests and moral values.

Flush with cash and well positioned in the Cold War political landscape, AIPAC found its political muscle enhanced by new federal rules on campaign financing, which triggered the creation of independent PACs and made

it easier to channel money toward pro-Israel candidates. AIPAC may not have been all that formidable in the early 1960s, but by the 1980s, notes Warren Bass, it was a "Washington powerhouse."²⁸

UNITY IN DIVERSITY AND THE NORM AGAINST DISSENT

As noted above, the lobby is not a centralized, hierarchical movement. Even among the Jewish elements of the lobby, there are important differences on specific policy issues. In recent years, AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents have tilted toward Likud and other hard-line parties in Israel and were skeptical about the Oslo peace process (a phenomenon we discuss at greater length below), while a number of other, smaller groups—such as Ameinu, Americans for Peace Now, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom (Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace), Israel Policy Forum, Jewish Voice for Peace, Meretz-USA, and the Tikkun Community—strongly favor a two-state solution and believe Israel needs to make significant concessions in order to bring it about.²⁹

These differences have occasionally led to rifts within or among these different organizations. In 2006, for example, the Israel Policy Forum, Americans for Peace Now, Jewish Voice for Peace, and Brit Tzedek v'Shalom openly opposed an AIPAC-sponsored congressional resolution (HR 4681) that would have imposed even more draconian restrictions on aid to the Palestinians than the Israeli government sought.³⁰ A watered-down version of the resolution passed by a comfortable margin, but the episode reminds us that pro-Israel groups do not form a monolith with a single party line.

These divisions notwithstanding, the majority of organized groups in the American Jewish community—especially the largest and wealthiest among them—continue to favor steadfast U.S. support for Israel no matter what policies the Jewish state pursues. As an AIPAC spokesman explained in June 2000, when concerns about Israel's arms sales to China led to calls for a reduction in U.S. support, "We are opposed to linking Israel's aid under any circumstances because once it starts it never stops."³¹ Even the dovish Americans for Peace Now supports "robust U.S. economic and military assistance to Israel," opposes calls to "cut or condition" U.S. aid, and seeks only to prevent U.S. aid from being used to support settlement activities in the Occupied Territories.³² Similarly, the moderate Israel Policy Forum does not advocate making American aid more conditional but rather focuses its efforts on persuading the U.S. government to work more actively and effectively for a two-state solution.³³ Despite differences on the peace process and related

issues, in short, almost every pro-Israel group wants to keep the "special relationship" intact. A notable exception is Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), which has called for the U.S. government to suspend military aid to Israel until it ends the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.³⁴ Indeed, given this position, one might argue that JVP is not part of the lobby at all.

Given their desire to maximize U.S. backing, Israeli officials frequently engage American Jewish leaders and ask them to help mobilize support in the United States for particular Israeli policies. As Rabbi Alexander Schindler, former chair of the Conference of Presidents, told an Israeli magazine in 1976, "The Presidents' Conference and its members have been instruments of official governmental Israeli policy. It was seen as our task to receive directions from government circles and to do our best no matter what to affect the Jewish community." (Schindler thought this situation was "not acceptable," telling the interviewer that "American Jewry is in no mood to be used by anyone.")³⁵ Yet Albert Chernin of NJCRAC offered a similar appraisal in the 1970s, saying that "in domestic areas we made policy, but in Israel affairs the policy was a given . . . In reality, [the Conference of Presidents] was the vehicle through which Israel communicated its policy to the community."³⁶ Ori Nir of the *Forward* quotes an unnamed activist with a major Jewish organization claiming in 2005 that "it is routine for us to say: 'This is our policy on a certain issue, but we must check what the Israelis think.' We as a community do it all the time." Or as Hyman Bookbinder, a high-ranking official of the American Jewish Committee, once admitted, "Unless something is terribly pressing, really critical or fundamental, you parrot Israel's line in order to retain American support. As American Jews, we don't go around saying Israel is wrong about its policies."³⁷

Israel's ability to galvanize support within the United States has been demonstrated on numerous occasions. Zionist (and later, Israeli) officials encouraged American Jewish leaders to campaign for the UN partition plan in 1947 and for U.S. recognition in 1948, and to lobby against the abortive peace plan formulated by the UN mediator Folke Bernadotte in 1948. Coordinated efforts such as these also helped convince the Truman administration to significantly increase economic aid to Israel in 1952 and to abandon a Pentagon and State Department proposal for a \$10 million grant of military assistance to Egypt.³⁸ During the crisis preceding the 1967 Six-Day War, the Israeli government instructed its ambassador in Washington to "create a public atmosphere that will constitute pressure on the [Johnson] administration . . . without it being explicitly clear that we are behind this public campaign." The effort involved getting sympathetic Americans to

write letters, editorials, telegrams, and public statements, etc.—“in a variety of styles”—whose purpose, according to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, was “to create a public atmosphere . . . that will strengthen our friends within the administration.” White House officials eventually asked their Israeli counterparts to shut down the letter-writing campaign, but the Israeli ambassador reported back to Jerusalem that “of course we are continuing it.” According to the historian Tom Segev, the White House was “inundated with letters from citizens calling on the president to stand by Israel.”³⁹

This tendency to support Israel’s actions reflexively may be less prevalent today, but major organizations in the lobby still defer to the preferences of Israel’s leaders on many occasions. Following the release of the Bush administration’s “road map” for Middle East peace in March 2003, for example, Malcolm Hoenlein of the Conference of Presidents reportedly told *Ha’aretz* that if the Israeli government expressed reservations about the road map, it would have the support of America’s Jewish community. And, Hoenlein emphasized, “We will not hesitate to make our voice heard.”⁴⁰

Despite the fissures that have emerged between the Israeli government and some groups within American Jewry, this community “has generally accepted the principle that on matters of fundamental security there ought to be no public criticism of Israel.”⁴¹ According to Steven Rosenthal, “For millions of American Jews, criticism of Israel was a worse sin than marrying out of the faith.” Or as Bookbinder once acknowledged, “There is a feeling of guilt as to whether Jews should double-check the Israeli government . . . They automatically fall into line for that very reason.”⁴² Recent surveys of American Jewish opinion reveal that roughly two-thirds of the respondents agree that “regardless of their individual views on the peace negotiations with the Arabs, American Jews should support the policies of the duly-elected government of Israel.”⁴³ Thus, even when both leaders and rank and file of important Jewish-American organizations have serious reservations about Israeli policy, they rarely call for the U.S. government to put significant pressure on the Israeli government.

The norm against public criticism has been vividly illustrated on a number of occasions over the past several decades. In 1973, for example, a group of progressive American Jews formed a new organization, Breira (Alternative), which called for more open discussion between Israel and the diaspora and sought to mobilize support for withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and a peace settlement with the Palestinians. In addition to making their views publicly known through advertisements in major American newspapers, several Breira leaders were part of a delegation of American

Jews who met in a private capacity with a group of Palestinian representatives, under the auspices of the American Friends Service Committee.

Although a few Jewish leaders defended Breira, a powerful backlash soon emerged from the major Jewish organizations. AIPAC's *Near East Report* accused Breira of undermining support for Israel, and the president of the Reform rabbinate, Arthur Lelyveld, said that groups like Breira "gave aid and comfort . . . to those who would cut aid to Israel and leave it defenseless before murderers and terrorists." A Hadassah newsletter labeled Breira members "cheerleaders for defeatism" and warned its own members to "reject the advances of these organizations with their dogmas that run counter to Israeli security and Jewish survival." The president of the conservative Rabbinical Assembly declared that Breira was "fronting for the PLO," and forty-seven rabbis issued a statement terming Breira's positions "practically identical with the Arab point of view." The prosettlement group Americans for a Safe Israel distributed a thirty-page pamphlet smearing Breira's leaders for their involvement with other left-wing causes and referring to them as "Jews for *Fatah*." Not to be outdone, the ZOA magazine *American Zionist* accused Breira of abusing the right of free speech, warning that "the Jews who cry 'Foul!' in public must realize the treacherous consequences of their efforts . . . Ramifications are felt not by them, but by fellow Jews thousands of miles away."

In the face of this assault, Breira stood little chance of building a following or establishing a more open climate for discussion. Local community groups excluded Breira representatives, and the Jewish Community Council of New Haven agreed to admit the local Breira chapter only on the condition that it confine its criticism within the community. An internal memorandum prepared by the American Jewish Committee recommended co-opting the group, but only if it agreed to "direct the exposition of their different views on sensitive Israel-Diaspora issues to the Jewish community itself and refrain from appealing to the general public." Unable to attract sustained funding and weakened by leadership defections, Breira disbanded after five years.⁴⁴

In response to the Breira controversy, organizations like the Conference of Presidents, the Synagogue Council of America, the American Jewish Committee, and NJCRAC conducted internal studies or public inquiries on the proper place of dissent. According to J. J. Goldberg, "All these organizations reached the same conclusion: American Jews had the right to discuss issues freely, but only within discreet forums outside public view." In 1976, the Israeli ambassador to the United States, Simcha Dinitz, working with

representatives from NJCRAC and the Conference of Presidents, developed a set of principles to guide behavior within the Jewish community. The first principle, Goldberg notes, was that "Israelis were the only ones entitled to decide Israeli policy" and the second was that "American Jews should stand publicly united with Israel and air disputes only in private."⁴⁵ By the 1970s, writes Edward Tivnan, "Total support of Israel had become a requirement of leadership in local Jewish communities throughout America."⁴⁶

The norm against public criticism of Israeli policy remains for the most part intact.⁴⁷ In October 1996, for example, the president of ZOA, Morton Klein, sent a letter to ADL head Abraham Foxman protesting an invitation to *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman to speak at an ADL dinner, charging that Friedman "regularly defames Israel and its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." Klein then circulated the letter to an array of officials at the Conference of Presidents, leading Foxman to denounce him as a "thought policeman." The dispute intensified when David Bar-Illan, Netanyahu's director of communications, weighed in and declared that Friedman should not be given a platform by "any organization that purports to be Zionist." Though sometimes critical of certain Israeli policies, Friedman is hardly anti-Israel, and Foxman himself is one of Israel's most ardent defenders. But Klein's response shows how deep the opposition to open discussion runs.⁴⁸

A few years later, Edgar Bronfman Sr., then president of the World Jewish Congress, was accused of "perfidy" when he wrote a letter to President Bush urging him to pressure Israel to curb construction of its controversial "security fence." The executive vice president of the congress, Isi Liebler, declared that "it would be obscene at any time for the president of the World Jewish Congress to lobby the president of the United States to resist policies being promoted by the government of Israel."⁴⁹ Liebler and others were similarly incensed two years later, when the president of the moderate Israel Policy Forum, Seymour Reich, advised Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to pressure Israel to reopen a critical border crossing in the Gaza Strip in November 2005. Reich's advice to Rice was reasonable and well intentioned, but Liebler denounced his action as "irresponsible behavior," and the president of the Orthodox Union, Stephen Savitzky, said it was "not only disrespectful to Israel's government but offensive to millions of American Jews who categorically reject such an approach." Liebler also warned, "There is obviously something sick in the state of World Jewry when purportedly mainstream leaders feel that they can lobby freely against the security policies of the democratically elected government of Israel. If this sort of behav-

ior is to be tolerated we may as well write off our one remaining ally—Diaspora Jewry." Recoiling from these attacks, Reich announced that "the word pressure is not in my vocabulary when it comes to Israel."⁵⁰

The reluctance to criticize Israel's policies openly is not difficult to fathom. In addition to the obvious desire not to say anything that might aid Israel's enemies, groups or individuals who criticize Israeli policy or the U.S.-Israel relationship are likely to find it harder to retain support and raise funds within the Jewish community. They also run the risk of being ostracized by the larger mainstream organizations. Although groups like Americans for Peace Now, the Tikkun Community, the Israel Policy Forum, and the New Israel Fund have endured and thrived where Breira did not, other progressive Jewish groups, such as New Jewish Agenda, encountered the same opposition that Breira had faced and lasted little more than a decade.⁵¹ Similarly, although Americans for Peace Now was eventually admitted to the Conference of Presidents in 1993 after a contentious struggle, the progressive Meretz USA and the liberal Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association were denied membership in 2002 despite support from moderate groups within the Conference. On a smaller scale, Jewish Voice for Peace was denied a booth at a major Jewish community event in the San Francisco area on the grounds that it was insufficiently supportive of Israel, and the Hillel chapter at the University of Texas refused to give an organization called Jewish Students for Palestinian Rights space to conduct a study group.⁵²

Efforts to marginalize dissenting Jewish voices continue to this day. When the Union of Progressive Zionists (UPZ) sponsored campus appearances in 2006 by Breaking the Silence, an organization of former Israeli soldiers that is critical of IDF operations in the Occupied Territories, ZOA denounced UPZ and demanded that it be expelled from the Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC), a network of pro-Israel groups that includes AIPAC and the ADL. According to ZOA's Klein, sponsoring groups that are critical of Israel "is not the mission of the ICC." UPZ's director emphasized the group's "love for Israel," other groups rallied to its defense, and the ICC steering committee unanimously rejected ZOA's demand. Undeterred, Klein denounced the members of the steering committee and said, "Their mission includes fighting incitement, and yet we are astonished that they would ignore this incitement by Israelis against Israel." ZOA also issued a press release urging member organizations in the ICC to change their votes. The press release quoted an Israeli Foreign Ministry report saying, "The willingness of Jewish communities to host these organizations and even sponsor

them is unfortunate . . . Their negative effect on Israel's image must be stopped." At least one Orthodox group on the ICC steering committee subsequently announced it was now in favor of removing the UPZ.⁵³

THE LOBBY MOVES RIGHT

Most American Jews have long supported liberal causes and the Democratic party, and a majority of them favor a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, some of the most important groups in the lobby—including AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents—have become increasingly conservative over time and are now led by hard-liners who support the positions of their hawkish counterparts in Israel. As J. J. Goldberg chronicles in his important book, *Jewish Power*, the Six-Day War and its aftermath brought into prominence a group of "New Jews" drawn disproportionately from hard-line Zionist, Orthodox, and neoconservative circles. "Their defiance was so strident, and their anger so intense," he writes, "that the rest of the Jewish community respectfully stood back and let the New Jews take the lead. The minority was permitted to speak for the mass and become the dominant voice of Jewish politics."⁵⁵

This trend was reinforced by the campaign on behalf of the 1974 Jackson-Vanik amendment (which linked most-favored-nation trading status for the Soviet Union to Moscow's willingness to permit greater Jewish emigration), by the emergence and growth of the so-called neoconservative movement (see below), and by the Likud party's successful effort to cultivate and strengthen hard-line support in key pro-Israel organizations during the years when Likud was sharing power with Israel's Labor party. According to Goldberg, "The genius of Shamir's strategy . . . was to manipulate the central bodies of Jewish representation so that, without taking sides, they became voices for the Likud half of the government." Likud party officials (including Prime Minister Shamir's chief of staff Yossi Ben-Aharon) worked to ensure that the Conference of Presidents was chaired by more conservative officials and also helped engineer the selection of Malcolm Hoenlein as executive vice chairman of the conference in 1986. More hard-line groups were given greater access and attention by Israeli leaders, which reinforced the perception that they were the authoritative voices of the Jewish community. As an adviser to Labor party leader Shimon Peres later admitted, "Ignoring American Jewry was one of the biggest mistakes we made . . . We let Shamir's people do whatever they wanted."⁵⁶