

Israel's Starry-Eyed Foreign Policy

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The remarkable success of the Zionist movement--from its inauguration by a group of amateur enthusiasts, to statehood, and finally to near acceptance in the Middle East--owes much to Realpolitik, or realism, as it is more commonly known in its American incarnation.¹ But there is more to the story of Israeli politics than realism. Some of the most effective aspects of Israeli foreign policy flatly contradict the tenets of pragmatism. To rehabilitate a shattered people and build a state required hefty doses of ideological romanticism, heroic mythology, benign illusion, and rhetorical hyperbole--in short, what we call "unrealism."

It is this sometimes precarious balance of realism and unrealism that makes Israeli foreign policy unique. To understand the nature of this balance, it is necessary to review the distracting nature of Israeli Realpolitik rhetoric as well as examine the core of Zionist unrealism lying beneath it.

THE RHETORIC OF ISRAELI REALPOLITIK

Since the inception of the Zionist movement, its leaders have proved masters of the art of the possible. From Theodor Herzl and Chaim Weizmann, through David Ben Gurion and Levi Eshkol, to Yitzhak Rabin in our own day, Israeli leaders have been consummate realists noted for their capacity to see political life as it really is, without preconceptions or illusions; to accept as given the ways of the world; to accurately gauge the balance of forces both at the local and international levels; and to tailor policy to what can be achieved in given circumstances. They resist abstract speculation and eschew generalization, pontification, formalisms, and even consistency.

True, for a brief moment following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, idealists on the left of the Zionist movement entertained the hope that Israeli leaders might take seriously the prophetic image of a state that was "a light unto the nations," basing its policies on the principles of justice and right.² Within a short time, however, given the extreme duress imposed by its security vulnerabilities, Israel's foreign relations appeared to settle permanently into the

grooves of Realpolitik.

In conformity with realist assumptions, state organs and agencies were paramount, and non-state-to-state relations, increasingly prominent in contemporary North American and Western European thinking, were disregarded or subject to national considerations. Ben Gurion elevated *mamlakhtiut* (stateness) into a political principle. The state explained its actions by *raison d'état*, not human rights, the future of the planet, or some other universal good. Ends were assumed to justify means. Resort to armed force was accepted as a necessary evil. In the crunch, few Israelis disputed that economic or social welfare interests should be sacrificed to security considerations.

Thus it has been, more or less, ever since. In 1982, for example, the argument for going to war in Lebanon to root out the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) hardly noted that this campaign would damage Israel's relations with Western Europe (Israel's major trading partner). The Israeli foreign policy discourse before, during, and since the war in Lebanon conforms essentially to standard characterizations of the realist paradigm of international politics.

Israeli statesmen and envoys have adroitly presented Israeli policy in Realpolitik terms. Despite the revolutionary origins and goals of the Zionist movement, Israel from the beginning adopted with ease the rhetoric of the classic Western state system, oriented toward the national interest and status quo. As early as May 14, 1948, Eliahu Elath, the Jewish Agency representative in Washington, cabled U.S. president Harry Truman that

The Provisional Government has been charged to assume the rights and duties of government for preserving law and order within the boundaries of Israel, for defending the State against external aggression, and for discharging the obligations of Israel to the other nations of the world in accordance with international law.³

Forty-five years later, when Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin shook hands with the PLO's Yasir Arafat on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993, he stunningly exemplified the pragmatism and tactical flexibility of Israel's foreign relations. Asked about his decision to recognize the PLO, Rabin provided a classic explanation:

Perhaps I had illusions that the local factor [i.e., West Bank and Gaza leaders] could contribute much more than it actually did to moderate extreme demands. I saw that the process was reversed. Then I had to make a decision: either to go for an agreement or not. To proceed meant going to the boss. . . . I suppose that during the negotiations on reparations [in the 1950s] Ben Gurion did not forget the Holocaust. But he believed that there was a chance of a different Germany, and that we would use the reparations to build up the State of Israel.⁴

The Zionist tradition of pragmatism in foreign policy, established early on by Chaim Weizmann, was adopted at independence by Ben Gurion and Moshe Sharett. With international ostracism at its height, they, and officials such as Reuven Shiloah, Abba Eban, Walter Eytan, Gideon Rafael, and others, proved adept at playing the game of flexible, nonideological international politics.⁵ The environment was explored, without bias, for opportunities and obstacles. Anything within reason might provide the incentive for cooperation: arms, intelligence, aid, oil, military assistance, war. Alliances, however partial or informal, were constructed on ruthlessly objective grounds; no one was excluded a priori. Thus, candidates for

mutually beneficial working relationships included the Hashemite house of Jordan; the "outer tier" of states hostile to potential Arab regional hegemony (Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia); a France embroiled in Algeria; a Federal Republic of Germany eager for legitimacy; the emerging states of Africa and Asia; Kurds, Maronites, and disaffected or minoritarian Muslims; right-wing regimes in South America-- whatever and whoever possessed some conceivable common interest with the Jewish state.

Similarly, Jerusalem explored a nonaligned status--even before the term was invented--only to discard it in favor of the free world when the U.S. government, embroiled in Korea and the cold war, ordered its clients to stand up and be counted. Later, Israeli rhetoric became staunchly anticommunist, skillfully mobilizing friends in Washington by presenting Israel as a bulwark against communism and a strategic asset. When this appeal became anachronistic, some Israelis developed a new rhetorical basis for strategic cooperation with the United States on the basis of cooperation against fundamentalist Islam.

Israeli academics mirrored their government's outlook. Unlike their colleagues in the United States and Western Europe--among whom the realist outlook is simply not mentioned in polite company--a great majority of Israeli writers on foreign relations sympathize intuitively with the realist paradigm. The peace studies, alternative security programs, feminist theory, critical theory, and ecopolitics that reign from Amsterdam to Amherst don't seem to move them. In fact, realism marks all areas of specialization, including strategic studies, Middle Eastern and other regional studies, international law and history, and international relations theory.⁶ What they see as American academic fads are viewed skeptically in public and outright derided in private. Tellingly, the last international relations textbook translated into Hebrew was Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations*, the classical expression of American realism.

It would seem that Israeli foreign policy is conducted, understood, explained, and studied within a realist framework. But that is so only on the surface.

"IF YOU WILL IT, IT IS NO DREAM"

Profoundly unconventional, very unrealistic assumptions also drive Israel's foreign relations. At critical moments in the past, when practical realism would have counselled immobility, caution, and even submission, Zionist and Israeli leaders made a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, basing fateful decisions on will, intuition, and what comes down to religious belief. Unrealism is understood as the conviction of a community that it has a certain destiny, and that seeking this destiny requires a dismissal of conventional odds and a willingness to take risks to reach historical goals. Herzl's statement "If you will it, it is no dream" serves as the appropriate founding motto of the Zionist movement.

Unrealism, take note, is not the same as irrationality. Unrealism relates to choices concerning ultimate aims and values; irrationality concerns choices about ways and means. A purpose can conform to unrealism while the means chosen to achieve it can be fully rational.

That the unrealism of Israel's foreign policy is so little appreciated is largely a function of the fact that so many people confuse the methods of statecraft, and especially its common, conventional, rhetorical tone, with the core objectives and values that underlie that statecraft.

The unrealistic but absolutely necessary policies of the Zionist movement have

included:

The choice of Ottoman Palestine as the future site of the Jewish national home, even though this meant transplanting an essentially European people into the heart of the Muslim world;

A preference for Britain as the great power sponsor of the Zionist movement, and then a shift of focus to the United States; and

The declaration of the State of Israel in May 1948, despite the near certainty that it would touch off a war in which Jews would be a minority on the battlefield.

After the State of Israel came into being, unrealistic policies continued:

The promulgation of the Law of Return, despite the lack of state resources to deal with massive and diverse immigration;

The declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of the state, despite its strategic vulnerability and ambiguous legal status;

The decision to go to war in 1967, and reunify Jerusalem, despite all the risks of losing the battle and some crucial allies; and

The willingness, through years of crushing international criticism and ostracism, to insist that territories acquired in the 1967 war only be returned in exchange for full peace.

Finally, the Israelis have now taken the most risky and paradoxical step of all (by the measure of Realpolitik): sloughing off the rhetoric and habits of a century, they seek reconciliation with the Palestinian national movement precisely when Israel has the greatest military, diplomatic, and economic advantage.

How does one explain such decisions? The truth is, the whole Zionist enterprise is framed by a set of very unrealistic beliefs, which have proved a potent source of inspiration and provided the basis for the Jewish national renaissance. The myths that make up the Hebrew world view are perhaps unexceptional by the standards of small ethnic communities and religious sects. What is extraordinary about them is not only that they compose a secularized version of Judaism's historical self-consciousness itself but also that, with some variation and rationalization here and there, they have undergirded the ideology of a revolutionary political movement and molded the day-to-day discourse of a government in power in the midst of the twentieth century.⁷

In essence, the original myth runs as follows: Civilization centers on the divinely ordained mission of a chosen people, the descendants of individuals--Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob--who acquired a favored, unmediated relationship with the Creator of the universe. As a result of the primal covenant, his descendants have dedicated themselves to the service of God. This obliges them to preserve their separate identity from the non-elect. History is an unending struggle between the elect and everybody else (composed of Seventy Nations, according to the Midrash), the earthly enactment of a cosmic narrative of good and evil. At the culmination of history the Hebrew tribe, dispersed and chastened as a result of divine displeasure, is destined to gather in its scattered fragments from among the nations of the world and return redeemed--and acknowledged thus by the non-elect--to its original divinely promised homeland.

The Zionist myth, which secularizes the foregoing, has been the major motif in the

conduct of Israel's foreign relations. So while practical realism dominates the ways and means of Israel's diplomacy, its foreign relations have never conformed to any doctrine of realism with respect to goals.

ARTICLES OF FAITH

Zionist external discourse has four main features.

Israel belongs to the entire Jewish people. The State of Israel is not just a legal and administrative entity catering to the interests of its resident citizens but a vehicle in the historical service of the entire Jewish people--and indeed, by some interpretations, the whole world--most of whom are in fact citizens of other states. The founding ethic of Zionism is the "ingathering of the exiles" via aliyah (ascension) to the Holy Land. It is a powerful myth founded in prophetic texts and ceaselessly quoted in Jewish liturgy. Here, the classical Jewish conception of the teleology of history conforms most directly to the central tenant of the Zionist myth--all that's missing is God.

This conception has several unusual implications. First, Israel can and should be a homeland and refuge for Jews everywhere--desperate Russians, Serbs, and Ethiopians, as well as idealistic Americans. Israel as the homeland for all Jews, then, is not based on an instrumental logic of need but on a categorical logic of moral obligation. It doesn't matter, therefore, whether immigration is useful to Israel. "Aliyah," Ben Gurion informed defense and foreign ministry officials in April 1949, was the "core interest" of the state and even took priority over defense. "The fate of the state depends on aliyah," he stated, not on military capacities conventionally defined.⁸

The changed economic and demographical circumstances of the state show that aliyah is a categorical and not an instrumental matter. In 1948-49, the emphasis on aliyah made sense given the pressing need to increase the meager population of the fledgling state and to settle areas newly conquered in the war of independence. Since then, Israeli governments have expended vast resources and efforts to translate aliyah into a continuing, concrete reality.⁹ Although Israel is no longer underpopulated (indeed, urban sprawl, overcrowding, and pressure on resources and services are serious problems), immigration remains a categorical imperative. Further, recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union include a significant proportion of individuals with no attachment to or knowledge of Jewish culture, religion, or language, whose sole link with Israel is the (supposed) possession of one Jewish grandparent, while the Beta Israel of Ethiopia are, according to the latest academic research, probably not Jewish at all, but an indigenous Ethiopian phenomenon that emerged as an outgrowth of the Christian Ethiopian tradition in the period of the fourteenth to sixteenth century.¹⁰ Far from their ancestral environment and traditional culture, often housed in inappropriate conditions, offended by what they believe to be unjust aspersions by the Israeli religious establishment on their identity, the Beta Israel face a hard task in integrating into Israeli society.

Continuing mass immigration, especially from places like Ethiopia, may not seem to make a great deal of sense in terms of conventional practical realism. Would it not be better to concentrate on absorbing past waves of newcomers and stemming emigration? Nevertheless, aliyah has a Realpolitik logic as well, even if that is not what motivates it: the sight of Israel welcoming tens of thousands of new immigrants was one of the factors that convinced the Arabs that Israel was here to stay; the prospect that Russians and Ethiopians would be settled in the occupied

territories provided the Palestinians with a strong incentive to settle. From an economic point of view, too, the newcomers are a long-term gain for Israel despite short-run costs of absorption, for many of the Russians possess needed skills and the Ethiopians also display a human potential that may be tapped over time.

But the most important consideration in the current wave of immigration is not utilitarian, but moral and spiritual--the epitome of unrealism. Russians and Ethiopians are accepted with open arms because the State of Israel exists to gather in its exiles. For Israel to turn away such people would be to renounce its historical mission. Moreover, the beautiful sight of fair Russian Jews and their black Ethiopian brothers and sisters joining other ingathered exiles in the Promised Land is an Isaiah-like enactment of harmony and universal Jewish kinship. For Israelis--and diaspora Jews--it confirms the ordained position of Israel as the healing, teleological completion of Jewish (and, therefore, world) history.

Israel exists to protect Jews. Israeli governments vigorously assume responsibility for the succor of Jews worldwide, irrespective of their formal citizenships. The supreme national interest of the state, in other words, is not limited to the sustenance and survival of its own immediate citizens but is bound up with the interests of Jews everywhere, whether or not they intend one day to live in Israel. Such a dogma is not just a marked deviation from classic realism; it is positively counterproductive in Realpolitik terms.

It is also a marked deviation from historical cases of irredentism; Israel's concern for Jews worldwide really cannot be likened, except in the most general terms, to the concern of German, Russian, or Serbian governments for their kin outside of national boundaries.

This categorical imperative--measured by practical realism--leads to counterproductive results. Israel's claim to speak for Soviet Jewry, however tactfully articulated, roiled relations with the Soviet Union; at the same time, it prevented Israel from "formally and unequivocally" declaring itself "part of the anti-communist Western camp" in the early 1950s.¹¹ Concern for South African Jews long constrained and even harmed Israeli relations with black African states and complicated Israel's contacts with American blacks. Israel's concern for world Jewry, generalizes Shlomo Avineri, a former director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry, "has entangled Israel in many complex relationships; and since Jews suffer, by definition, not in open and liberal societies, but in totalitarian and authoritarian ones, it follows that Israel sometimes feels itself a hostage of some of the nastiest regimes that happen to populate the globe."¹²

Israel must maintain good relations with Americans. Nothing in the realist paradigm--the primacy of state-to-state channels of communication and transaction, the grounding of power and influence in the calculus of relative capabilities--prepares one for Israel's intimate relationship with the United States, both as a people and as a government. Here, aspects of the Zionist myth combine with the metaphorical inheritance from centuries in diaspora.

In many ways, Israel's attitude toward the United States is rooted not in the statist heritage of Richelieu and Bismarck but in the communal traditions of the shtetl (the small, East European Jewish township).¹³ Israeli decision makers interpret relations with the great powers on the analogy of relations between the vulnerable and itinerant Jewish communities of Poland and Russia, and the local potentate (in Yiddish, poritz). This relationship was historically fraught with ambiguity. On the one hand, the Jews, as an alien minority, demonized by the Gospels and Christian

doctrine as Christ-killers, were utterly beholden to the prince. Their well-being rested on his good will. On the other hand, should he choose to withdraw his protection, complete disaster loomed. So the poritz was both benefactor and potential tormentor at one and the same time.

The persistence of this model in dealing with powerful outsiders helps to explain the ambivalence of Israeli attitudes and policies towards the United States. At one time Israel is compliant accomplice--for instance, in the Iran-Contra affair; at other times, suspicious rival--as in the case of Jonathan Pollard, an American Jew working as a Navy analyst who was imprisoned in 1987, on charges of spying for Israel. Acclamation of the United States as "our greatest ally" is accompanied by expressions of resentment, such as Prime Minister Menachem Begin's December 1981 outburst to U.S. ambassador Samuel Lewis: "We are not a banana republic!"¹⁴ Even such a low-key figure as Gad Ya'acobi, formerly economics minister and now ambassador to the United Nations, bitterly complained about American economic advice at the very moment Israel was receiving \$3 billion dollars in aid: "The High Commissioner sent us a note from Washington and gave us a negative term report!"¹⁵ Sometimes one hears from Israel the prideful independent Jew-as-Zionist, but just as often one hears the shtetl rabbi supplicating before the poritz.

This duality is really not surprising. Israel and Israeli society are relatively new, and the Zionist ambition to create the new Jew is necessarily unfinished. Meanwhile, throughout a history of dispersion, the Jews developed sharp and precise tools of communal diplomacy for dealing with local rulers. These instruments are documented to at least the Middle Ages, in the form of Rashi's missions, and are recorded (in a possibly fictitious form) at a much earlier date in the Book of Esther. From the Middle Ages on, Jewish communities often turned to the Hofjude, a talented Jew often responsible for administering the financial affairs of the realm, to plead their case in time of distress before the prince. The Hofjude had no autonomous power. His success depended on native wit, eloquence, and good connections at court.

All these elements reemerged in Zionist and Israeli diplomacy through the persons of such statesmen as Weizmann, Sharett, Eban, and Shimon Peres, who cultivated special pleading into the finest of arts. The Israeli foreign ministry devotes a considerable proportion of its resources to information work (hasbara). Ironically, Israelis profess to be rather resistant to others' propaganda, and stress the importance of deeds rather than words: "The dogs bark and the caravan moves forward" is an Arabic saying beloved of right-wing Israeli politicians. An intuitive belief in the persuasive force of the Zionist case contradicts the stated conviction in the power of deeds alone and the futility of others' arguments.

Israel is pitted against eternal enemies. The Jews' long and painful history of persecution strongly influences Israel's perception of its enemies. The Realpolitik assumption that yesterday's enemy is tomorrow's potential friend flies in the face of the Jewish image of an implacable enmity between Israel and its eternal foes. Jews have a tendency to seek out the latest embodiment of Amalek, the nefarious enemy of the tribes of Jacob who, according to legend, arises in every generation to attempt to carry out his satanic mission.¹⁶ As with other nonrealist aspects of the Zionist world view, the Amalek doctrine made perfect sense in terms of communal survival. Eternal enemies can be as useful an instrument of solidarity and self-definition as more positive beliefs: we define ourselves in part by what we abhor.

Israeli leaders have inherited an entire vocabulary and set of metaphors from Biblical and especially Rabbinic sources to describe and prescribe relations with

"the nations." Indeed, even the word for nations, *goyim*, carries connotations of fear and suspicion. "We Jews carry an ancestral memory of being the persecuted minority," notes Gad Ya'acobi. "The *goyim* were always against us."¹⁷ "Esau hates Jacob,"¹⁸ "a people that dwells alone,"¹⁹ and, more generally, "all the world's against us" are thought to be timeless truths defining the Israeli predicament.²⁰

Fresh memories of pogroms and Nazi death camps also have had a formative impact on Israeli perceptions and actions. On the eve of the Six Day War, these images dominated not only the popular view of Arabs, but even that of the cabinet. Israel's leaders elevated the resort to war to the level of a moral obligation, making Israeli motives nearly incomprehensible to a contemporary critic like French president Charles de Gaulle.²¹ This demonization of foes long complicated the possibility of direct contacts with the PLO.

The normalization of Israel's relations with the rest of the world, however, has made it increasingly imperative over time to modify this doctrine. Images of immutable enmity are accurate and functional for a state under siege, but not for a strong, established power. Already by 1982, when Prime Minister Begin ordered attacks on PLO headquarters in Beirut in order to destroy Arafat "in his bunker"--just as Hitler had perished in the ruins of the Third Reich--the myth was clearly becoming counterproductive. Identification of the PLO with the Nazis, or Maronite Christians with Jews facing extermination in the concentration camps, was both inexpedient and tasteless. It also trivialized the uniqueness of Jewish suffering at the hands of the Nazis by relegating the memory of the Holocaust to the service of partisan political interests.

THE CULT OF THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES

Israel's attitude toward the use of force departs most markedly from the *Realpolitik* heritage, again combining Zionist and diaspora Jewish impulses. In the classic tradition, force is a legitimate extension of political action. But it is also a costly expedient to be used only in the absence of better alternatives. For a people that was long deprived of conventional tools of state power, however, armed force has a deeper significance.²² The modern Jewish experience of military powerlessness only reinforces this preoccupation.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are today cherished as the chief symbol of statehood, proof that Jews can defend themselves without begging favors of the *poritz*. They have also become the centerpiece of Israel's civil religion, the ceremonies and rituals by which the state legitimizes its institutions, cements the loyalty of its citizens, and commemorates its history. Clearly, Israel has faced grave military challenges. But the critical battle for its existence was decisively fought and won as early as the summer of 1948. Never again was its physical survival really in question, not even in 1967, when the lesson of its military supremacy was rubbed home.

Notwithstanding, Israel became entangled in an interminable series of reprisals and preventive wars. The last of these was in 1982, variously justified as a war to bring peace to Galilee, eliminate the PLO, and establish a new Middle Eastern political order. Other operations such as the Qibya raid in 1953, the Gaza raid in 1955, the Suez operation in 1956, and the attack on the Beirut airport in 1969, exemplify the use of armed force in a way that cannot simply be explained in *Realpolitik* terms.

An exaggerated pride in military prowess, the legend of the IDF, the avenging cult of reprisal, the myth of the fighting Jew, an exceptionally low threshold for the

resort to arms--all this suggests the psychologically compensatory role of force.²³ Revealingly, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon justified the Lebanon war by evoking the image of the defenseless victims of the Nazis: "Never again will Jews go like sheep to the slaughter."²⁴ Incongruous as this statement was in the context of the Lebanese situation, the war itself was positively counterproductive against the background of Israel's recently concluded 1979 peace treaty with Egypt--the last Israeli withdrawal from Sinai having been completed in April 1982--and predictably damaged Israel's standing worldwide. Negotiations to update the vital 1975 trade agreement with the European Community were set back for a decade.

Like aliyah and the Amalek legend, the myth of the IDF performed an important state-building function. Following the Nazi exterminations, the Jewish people urgently needed to demonstrate that Jews were more than defenseless scapegoats, the eternal victims of history. Israeli historiography initially interpreted the Holocaust as the negation of all meaning; today, it is commemorated as a defining episode in Jewish history. How was this metamorphosis achieved? It was psychologically vital for the Jewish people to come to terms with a catastrophe that threatened its existence and refuted belief. Yet traditional mechanisms for dealing with disaster, especially self-reproach and repentance, were utterly inappropriate in the circumstances for all except an ultra-Orthodox minority. Denial, the mechanism resorted to in the fifteen years preceding the Eichmann trial, ceased to be sustainable. Some thinkers sought to put a positive face on things. The very word "Holocaust," popularized by Elie Wiesel, has sacrificial connotations. "No posthumous victories for Hitler," declared Emil Fackenheim, justifying Jewish life as an act of defiance.²⁵ This could hardly be an agenda for national survival.

In the final analysis, the most effective therapy was the very mechanism renounced so long ago by the rabbis in the wake of the Bar Kochba revolt disaster: reprisal against an (albeit surrogate) enemy. Ironic indeed that war, the most ancient of biblical motifs withheld for two thousand years, was to provide the means for national catharsis. For Jews everywhere, the exploits of the IDF suggest evocatively and powerfully that centuries worth of Jewish victims are at last being avenged. Since the time of the Crusades, Jews have prayed for (heavenly) vengeance in the Av Harahamim prayer, which is read on nearly every sabbath, just after the Torah scroll(s) are returned to the ark. Given the chance, Jews, too, have the guts to stand up and fight. Moreover, does military victory not demonstrate that the Lord--who had "hidden his face" from the Jews being herded into the gas chambers--had returned to his people Israel?

Here, too, it eventually became necessary for Israel's leaders to restore the balance between realism and unrealism. The 1982 war was a gratuitous adventure that did Israel more harm than good. Worse, it was nationally divisive as no previous war had been. The time had come for the nation to sheath its avenging sword. How appropriate for Yitzhak Rabin, battalion commander in 1948, chief of staff in 1967, and now prime minister, to declare to the world on September 13, 1993, his "farewell to arms":

We, the soldiers who have returned from battles stained with blood; we who have seen our relatives and friends killed before our eyes; we who have attended their funerals and cannot look into the eyes of their parents; we who have come from a land where parents bury their children; we who have fought against you, the Palestinians, we say to you today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough!²⁶

INNOVATIONS BY ZIONIST DIPLOMATS

Through the combination of realism and unrealism, and the sometimes quirky admixture of the Zionist and pre-Zionist mentality, Israelis have reformulated the key components of the realist worldview--the concept of power. Power, in the mercantilist tradition of sixteenth-century Spain and seventeenth-century France, was generally seen as a function of four major elements: territory, population, economic resources, and armed might. For most of their history, the Jewish community lacked all these attributes. Israel today, as well, ranks low on all but the military dimension, and, in 1948, its overall weakness was even more pronounced. The answer to the power gap was to develop resources not usually tapped by other states. But how? Innovations include the cultivation of influential intermediaries, intelligence diplomacy, and the deployment of diaspora wealth.

Influential intermediaries. Israel's most important and original expedient derives from a refinement of a traditional tool of diaspora statecraft: the shtadlan. A shtadlan is, literally, one who intercedes. Drawing, presumably, on the institution of the broker--a figure familiar from Jewish commercial activity--Jewish diplomacy sought to cultivate influential intermediaries in contacts with "the prince." The shtadlan might be a well-connected, assimilated Jew or a well-disposed gentile. For example, the Hofjude might also serve as a shtadlan.

In modern Zionist and Israeli diplomacy, the concept of the shtadlan has been developed into an effective tool. Examples include the use of such statesmen and politicians as Harold Wilson, Henry Kissinger, Henry Jackson, and François Mitterrand to plead on behalf of Soviet Jews. Figures "with the ear" of the U.S. president have also been put to work, whether Eddie Jacobson, Harry Truman's former drapery store partner in Independence, Missouri in 1948, or Leon Charney, an influential Democratic Party lawyer and Jimmy Carter's acquaintance.

The most noteworthy use of the shtadlan device by the State of Israel comes in the shape of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). (Significantly, the Hebrew word for a lobby is shdulah, from the same root as shtadlan.) This Washington-based organization, canvassing on Israel's behalf in the corridors of power, has acquired a formidable reputation both at home and abroad. Third parties--Turkey, South Africa, and others--have solicited Israel to use AIPAC on their behalf, whether to acquire aid or respectability. The body's assets are superlative organization, wide grassroots Jewish communal support, utter dedication to the welfare of the State of Israel, the ability to mobilize substantial funding when necessary, and the assiduous cultivation of members of Congress.²⁷ In all, no body remotely comparable to AIPAC exists in the foreign affairs field. One might even say that AIPAC is a virtually unprecedented diplomatic expedient.

The shtadlan device enabled Israel to piggyback on the colossal power of the United States to the extent that Arab leaders (such as Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1967, Saddam Husayn in 1991) identified Israel with its superpower patron.

Intelligence diplomacy. Information, of course, has always been a component of power, and intelligence has long been traded in the market place. Israel took a simple idea and developed it into a sophisticated instrument of statecraft, using intelligence to barter for other information and as the basis of wider political alignments. Conceived in the Second World War by a former Talmudic student, Reuven Shiloah, on behalf of the Jewish Agency, this device was then perfected in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁸

The tacit alliance with France during the period 1954 to 1962 was Israeli intelligence diplomacy's greatest achievement. Thirsty for information about the Algerian insurrectionist National Liberation Front's sources of funds and arms, French military intelligence cooperated closely with its Israeli counterpart against President Nasser of Egypt.²⁹ In return, France became a major source of arms and nuclear technology, and a military partner in the 1956 attempt to depose the Egyptian leader.

Warm relations with the Central Intelligence Agency counts as another achievement of intelligence diplomacy. It paid off on several occasions, most notably in May-June 1967, when Mossad chief Meir Amit's last-minute visit to Washington helped clear the decks for war.³⁰ But the invention of the intelligence triangle, by which Israel brokered and became the indispensable hypotenuse of information alliances, must rank as its most ingenious contribution to the field of clandestine diplomacy. Trident, the trilateral organization established by the Mossad in 1958, together with Turkey's National Security Service (TNSS) and Iran's Sazman Kashvar Va'amniyat Ettala'at (SAVAK), is the leading case of a triangular operation.³¹

Diaspora wealth. Since earliest times, Jews living in Eretz Yisrael have had a special call on the generosity of their more prosperous brethren living elsewhere. In the nineteenth century, Sir Moses Montefiore, Lord Rothschild, and Baron Hirsch contributed munificently to newly organized Jewish colonial settlement in Palestine. The so-called system of haluka or shnorr persists to this day, and provides a major source of funding for many institutions in Israel, including museums, political parties, hospitals, and universities.

In the diplomatic sphere, Israel extended the system by capitalizing on the wealth and connections of such international figures as Edgar Bronfman, Shmuel Eisenberg, Nissim Gaon, Armand Hammer, and Robert Maxwell. Just as the Western powers use their economic muscle to obtain political benefit, so Jewish businessmen have linked investment in or trade with countries such as Russia, Poland, Zaire, Ethiopia, or China to political concessions to Israel. These might include Jewish emigration, support in international forums, or diplomatic ties. The innovation is not so much in the method itself, which has a long and ecumenical history, but in Israel's use in the Zionist cause of Jews who are usually not Israeli citizens.

THE EFFICACY OF UNREALISM

If Israeli conduct is so idiosyncratic, how has it been able to engage in mutually beneficial relations with other actors? Myth may help in nation building, but it may equally court disaster in foreign relations. Diplomacy based on shared conventions and conformism is usually more appreciated than unorthodoxy.

Israel's government did for much of its existence find it difficult to establish a shared reality with its surrounding Arab neighbors. The early Zionist slogan "a land without a people for a people without a land" could never be a realistic basis for relations between Jews and Arabs. Israeli and Palestinian myths negated the existence of the other, and each national grouping defined itself in contradistinction to its historical enemy.³² Even the Egyptian-Israeli peace has sometimes seemed like a dialogue of the deaf.³³ And Israel has indeed often paid a high price in diplomatic and economic terms for its unconventional behavior.

That said, Israel has prospered and enjoyed productive ties with many states that

were not self-evident partners. Who could have predicted Israel's close relationship with the German Federal Republic or its productive ties with Nicolae Ceausescu's Romania?

The myth of the Jew in Western civilization goes far to explain this unexpected shared "reality" between Israel and other states. Chaim Herzog, then Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, might protest the hypocritical criticism of Israel's human rights record with reference to "the irrational attitude of the Western world towards Jews, Judaism, and, in our case, the Jewish state."³⁴ But this "irrational attitude" also helped the the Zionist movement garner support and establish a state, for Jews and anti-Semites shared opposing but functionally compatible assumptions.

Jews saw themselves as a blessed elect, awaiting the rebuilding of their Temple and the restoration of their former glory. The church, in contrast, portrayed them as an eternally tormented remnant, the enemies of mankind, condemned to roam the Earth. Persecution enacted Christian cosmology and confirmed Jewish theology alike. Suffering was the price paid by the Jewish people for their special relationship with God and their failure to satisfy His demands of proper moral behavior (a view still expressed in Orthodox Jewish circles). "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land," say the Jewish festival prayers.

Conversely but compatibly, seen as children of the devil, the Jews were depicted in Christian and subsequent anti-Semitic legend as drawing on demonic powers of knowledge, wealth, healing attributes, and influence. Ironically, as a highly literate group, for whom the study of law acquired a transcendental value, the Jews were actually able to acquire valuable skills, which then sustained the countervailing myth. Literacy and correspondence on matters of religious law permitted the creation, from the Middle Ages onwards, of far-flung trading networks based on absolute trust.³⁵ The commensurability of opposing prejudices thus underpinned the relationship of the Jewish community and the poritz.

Curiously, too, this intertextual dialogue sustained the very genesis of Zionism: seeing the writing on the nationalist wall of Eastern Europe, the Zionists sought their own state; anti-Semitic statesmen were only too pleased to get rid of them. This compatibility of opposites can be seen in central episodes of Zionist history: the Herzl-Witte conversations, the Weizmann-Balfour negotiations, U.S. support for Jewish emigration to Palestine (rather than to the United States) after the Second World War. Witte, Balfour, and Stalin supported Zionist aspirations not because they liked Jews but precisely because they did not.

Just as the Jewish myth metamorphosed into the Zionist myth, and just as Zionist statecraft retains some diaspora traits, A similar intertextual compatibility has long served the State of Israel. Israel was so successful in trading intelligence assets in part because it made a virtue of others' assumption that the Jews would have superior clandestine sources of information: "Clever chaps you Jews," went the British cliché. The legend of the Mossad, reflected in countless sensational news items and an entire popular literature, is but a sanitized and sometimes inverted version of such conspiratorial myths as those found in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion or Mein Kampf. So too with AIPAC, Its sources of influence are no secret; more effective lobbies conduct their business away from the public gaze. which taps age-old myths of Jewish power and influence. (Significantly, whenever U.S. presidents chose to call AIPAC's bluff, they prevailed.) Edgar Bronfman's missions to Eastern Europe as president of the World Jewish Congress reveal a similar exploitation of stereotypes. And why do Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and Russian leaders fall over

themselves to visit Israel and establish museums and memorials to Jewish communities obliterated in the Holocaust?³⁶

CONCLUSION

In an inauspicious environment, Israeli leaders have, on the whole, played their cards with skill. Their collective achievement evokes respect. Had the Zionist movement simply restricted itself to realism, it is doubtful whether there would now be a thriving Jewish state of five million people. For Holocaust survivors to settle in Palestine, declare a state, and then withstand a thirty-year siege, called on remarkable reserves of blind courage and faith. A judicious blend of realism and unrealism has stood Israel in good stead for much of its existence.

Staying on the tightrope between the abysses of realism and unrealism depends on the maintenance of a fine balance. Realism risks degradation into cynicism; unrealism may slide into fantasy. Menachem Begin, for example, proved himself in his first term the equal in the arts of statesmanship of any of his predecessors in the Zionist movement. But subsequent Likud and National Unity governments seemed to lose their way. The government's disturbing loss of judgment came out in the Lebanon war, the Pollard affair, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's sabotage of the Peres-Husayn London accords, continuing confrontations with the United States, the sacrifice of relations with the European Community, and the conduct not in good faith of the autonomy negotiations by Shamir. Ironically, as Israel became stronger and more secure, and the country more populous and prosperous, old fears and solipsistic claims reemerged with redoubled force.

The policies of the Labor-led coalition under Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres have gone far to restoring equilibrium. It was both right and proper for Prime Minister Rabin, in his inaugural address to the Knesset of July 13, 1992, to attempt the redress of the balance. In a momentous reorientation of historiography, Rabin redefined the modern condition of the Jewish people in its own land:

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the atlases and the history and geography books no longer depict reality. Walls of hatred have crumbled, borders have been erased, superpowers have collapsed, ideologies have broken down, countries have been born and passed away, and the gates have opened to immigration to Israel. It is our duty, both to ourselves and to our children, to see the new world as it is today, to examine the risks and explore the chances, and to do everything so that the State of Israel becomes part of the changing world. We are no longer an isolated nation, and it is no longer true that the entire world is against us. We must rid ourselves of the feeling of isolation that has afflicted us for almost fifty years.³⁷

Recognizing historical changes in the wider world and in Israel's own condition, Rabin was not shy about proclaiming them before the Israeli people and, by extension, the entire Jewish world. While cherishing its Zionist vocation, the present government has abandoned counterproductive myths of eternal isolation and universal enmity. The shrill rhetoric of the Likud years has ceased. AIPAC is required to play a less intrusive role. No single, minority group of ideologues is permitted to impose its view of the general good.

Most important of all, the Rabin government has irrevocably committed itself to completing the Camp David peace process. This step required acknowledging the unpalatable but inescapable truth that Israel is located in the Middle East, not Europe or North America. When Rabin shook Yasir Arafat's hand, he accepted the

Arab world as given--repressive, undemocratic, illiberal, violent.

But the need for balance between realism and unrealism does not stop here. In some ways, it is just beginning, for if Israel ever achieves a comprehensive peace settlement with its neighbors, the next great challenge for the Zionist movement will rise up: to endure normalcy.

¹ Ludwig von Rochau originated the term Realpolitik in his *Grundsätze der Realpolitik* (1853) to criticize what he saw as the lack of realism of German liberalism in the 1848-49 period.

² Aaron S. Klieman, *Israel and the World after 40 Years* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey, 1990), pp. 43-44.

³ Quoted in Walter Eytan, *The First Ten Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1958), p. 10.

⁴ *Yediot Ahronot*, Sept. 24, 1993.

⁵ Uri Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel's Foreign Policy Orientation 1948-1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶ Aaron S. Klieman, "The Study of International Relations in Israel," in Hugh C. Dyer and Leon Mangasarian, eds., *The Study of International Relations: The State of the Art* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 303-18.

⁷ On Israel's national symbols and myths, see Itzhak Galnoor, "Israel's Polity: The Common Language," *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, Summer 1981, pp. 65-82.

⁸ Quoted in Bialer, *Between East and West*, p. 59.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-90.

¹⁰ See Steven B. Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); and Kay Kaufman Shelemay, *Music, Ritual and Falasha History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1989).

¹¹ Bialer, *Between East and West*, pp. 57-67, 279.

¹² Quoted in Klieman, *Israel And the World*, p. 173.

¹³ Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952).

¹⁴ On the Lewis-Begin meeting see Shlomo Nakdimon, "This is how we did not concede the Golan," *Yediot Ahronot*, Oct. 11, 1992.

¹⁵ *Ma'ariv*, Dec. 26, 1984.

¹⁶ Exod. 17:8-18.

¹⁷ *The Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 23, 1987.

¹⁸ Gen. 27:41.

¹⁹ Num. 23:9.

²⁰ Charles S. Liebman, "Attitudes Toward Jewish-Gentile Relations in the Jewish Tradition and Contemporary Israel," *Kivunim*, 25, 1984.

²¹ Benjamin Geist, "A Question of Survival: The Holocaust Syndrome in 1967," *International Journal*, Autumn 1973, pp. 630-47.

²² Yehoshafat Harkabi, *The Bar Kochba Syndrome* (Chappaqua, N.Y.: Rossel Books, 1983).

²³ Shlomo Aronson and Dan Horowitz, "The Strategy of Controlled Retaliation--The Israeli Example," *Medinah Umimshal*, 1, 1971, p. 81.

²⁴ *Yediot Ahronot*, June 18, 1982.

²⁵ Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), esp. pp. 19-24.

- ²⁶ The Washington Post, Sept. 14, 1993, p. 1.
- ²⁷ Shai Feldman, ed., U.S. Middle East Policy: The Domestic Setting (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies; Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 56-58, 77-78.
- ²⁸ Haggai Eshed, Mossad Shel Ish Ehad (Jerusalem: Edanim, 1988).
- ²⁹ Ian Black and Benny Morris, Israel's Secret Wars (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), pp. 171-74.
- ³⁰ Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, The Imperfect Spies: The History of Israeli Intelligence (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1989), chap. 3.
- ³¹ Documents from the U.S. Espionage Den, America: Supporter of Usurpers of the Qods (Tehran), p. 24.
- ³² Jay Rothman, From Confrontation To Cooperation (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1992), chap. 1.
- ³³ Raymond Cohen, Culture and Conflict in Egyptian-Israeli Relations: A Dialogue of the Deaf (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- ³⁴ Quoted in Klieman, Israel and the World, p. 51.
- ³⁵ S. D. Goitein, Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973).
- ³⁶ Klieman, Israel and the World, p. 171.
- ³⁷ Israel Television Network, July 13, 1992, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report: Near East and South Asia, July 14, 1992.

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Israeli foreign policy. Includes index. 1 . Israel — Foreign relations — South Africa. The incredible success of Israel's lobby argues strongly that rather than progressively obligating Israel, the astronomical rise in aid is a product of Israeli influence on the Congress. That much of the influence is gained by pressure, browbeating, and intimidation rather than the presentation of a convincing case— Congress, for example, routinely appropriates billions for Israel's "defense" rather than pressing it to conclude a just peace with its neighbors and with the Palestinian people— suggests that as it wins more concessions from Congress, Israel is simultaneously e