



**Peter L. Hahn, “The View from Jerusalem: Revelations about U.S. Diplomacy from the Archives of Israel,” *Diplomatic History* Vol. 22, Issue 4 (Fall 1998): 509-532.**

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Dear fellow members of H-DIPLO:

I was honored to have been asked to open the discussion concerning Hahn’s article. My perspective is informed by being a graduate student in U.S. political and diplomatic history concerning human rights in an American university, and by having lived in North America for over eleven years after having grown up in Israel. I found the issues brought forward of major importance to both countries, and to any historian. Furthermore, Hahn personifies the ability to successfully traverse two cultures and two polities without a marked degree of bias toward neither, or a crusade to lead. That is a quality sometimes lacking among faculty of American universities, be they native-raised or foreign-born.

This topic is particularly timely given the on-going Middle East peace process in which the U.S. is intimately involved through the trilateral meetings scheduled for this week between American, Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Camp David, and, not coincidentally, the announcement last Friday of the appointment of Ariel Sharon -- justifiably described as an ardent right-wing warrior, but also a pragmatic politician who was instrumental in reaching Israel’s Peace Treaty with Egypt by supporting American pressure to evacuate settlements in the Sinai Peninsula in 1978 and personally supervising their dismantle in 1982 -- to become Israel’s Foreign Minister. In fact, the leader who selected Sharon, Israel’s American-educated Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, who served a former Ambassador to the United Nations, and as a high-ranking officer in the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, is very aware of the rich history of American-Israeli relations. So should all scholars of U.S. diplomatic history and contemporary politics.

Derived from a lecture Hahn delivered in April, this article makes a considerable thematic and empirical contribution to the discussion of American-Israeli relations by experts in the field. It is well written, weaving skillfully a methodological presentation, outlining the broad context of the complex American-Israeli relationship complemented with new archival materials. Insightful and informative, Hahn added here to his own comprehensive analysis in the spring issue of *Diplomatic History* (of which he is an associate editor). That article was part of a first-rate roundtable concerning the contours and the uniqueness of American-Israeli relations that covered the richness of scholarship in the field.

Careful readers of the current issue will be left without a doubt as to whether fully exploring foreign archives comprises a crucial element of researching U.S. history, let alone fully presenting the field of U.S. diplomatic history, which was one of Hahn’s intentions as he

addressed the epistemological debate concerning the need to know foreign cultures and inputs on the formulation of American foreign policy.

Hahn contended that the internationalist critique, citing such reputable scholars as Sally Marks, of the narrow-minded, parochial, archaic, Americano-centric approach prevalent in diplomatic history has been justified. Presumed scholars, often self-righteous and uncritical concerning American motives, miss the larger picture. These writers can discuss ad nauseam details of American law and procedure or obscure politicians that are of little consequence to the general public (and even to fellow intellectuals) to try and prove how correct American actions were. Concurrently, they tend to be ignorant of others.

Devoid of familiarity with competing ideologies, sensitivity to histories other than their own, and reluctant to concede any grounds to frameworks or paradigms that do not accept American conduct as imperfect, these people recast their insecurity into their own work. They easily dismiss foreign sources and vantage points (as indeed was evident yet again as conservative observers recently voiced their opposition to the legitimacy and to the veracity of the Amnesty International report on rampant human rights violations in the U.S.).

While acknowledging that there is merit in arguments put forward by such scholars as Richard Immerman as to the huge amount of information and exposure required for a balanced, nuanced comprehension of other cultures and of divergent interests, and the futility of many foreign archives as pointed out by Melvyn P. Leffler, Hahn's own work helps to counter those who are oblivious -- sometimes proudly so -- to the vast knowledge available in other countries and by foreign scholars, often only in languages other than English.

Hahn convincingly proved his point by showing the importance of Israeli archives (documents in both English and in Hebrew were read) to reaching a better understanding of U.S. policy toward Israel and U.S.-Israeli relations during the presidencies of Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower. His own blending of "how" and "why" (what foreign archives reveal on U.S. decision-making so designated by Robert J. McMahon, affirmatively cited by Hahn) is nothing but exemplary.

Hahn documented with meticulous footnotes drawn from his investigation in official Israeli archives of the (previously largely unknown in its depth) confidential interface between senior American and Israeli officials already in the early 1950s. This dialogue benefited Israel considerably, but also affected a more favorable Israeli policy toward U.S. interests. In fact, Hahn's research helps to clarify why did Israel effectively terminate its declared neutrality in the Korean War (and thus also in the Cold War) by early 1951, strong reasons for amicable relations with the East Bloc notwithstanding.

The wide scope of Israeli inside information derived from a panoply of sources -- Jews and gentiles, statesmen and businessmen, politicians and clergy, Democrats and Republicans, Senators and Members of the House of Representatives, labor activists and media molders, practically anybody who would volunteer, or who could be approached, or could be pressured into providing some help -- and the behind-the-scenes maneuverings revealed here for the first time was outstanding. Knowledge WAS power even back in the 1950s.

Hahn showed how complex and intricate American-Israeli relations were even before the 1962 private assurance given by President Kennedy that there is a “Special Relationship” between the two countries. That assertion was enshrined into policy thanks to Israel’s impressive victory in the 1967 Six days’ War. It has been buffeted through public affirmations by numerous U.S. leaders, military and economic help. Israel’s military supremacy in the Middle East -- often challenged but never persuasively refuted by wars or by hostile diplomacy -- truly heralded Israel’s role as a strategic asset to U.S. interests in the region, a strong alliance, conflicts about Israel’s nuclear capability notwithstanding.

Israel often succeeded in influencing U.S. policies through official and non-official contacts and exploitation of inter-departmental rivalry in American Administrations, and between the White House and Congress. The scale of coordinated Israeli efforts to shape American public opinion through information activities (HASBARA - a Hebrew term that means a combination of informing, explaining and convincing, which is not loaded with the negative connotation of propaganda, TAAMULAH) utilizing all potential resources within the United States is compellingly described.

That was particularly case during the Truman era, as Israel had more assets amongst Democratic officials as opposed to their Republican counterparts, but also evident in the Eisenhower Administration . A variety of tactics were employed to secure support in the public opinion, in the platforms of the major political parties and among American decision-makers. The success was translated to better relations between the U.S. and Israel in terms of diplomatic cooperation, financial assistance and military aid -- and in a detrimental affect on American relations with the Arab world.

The gamut of efforts in communication -- or in manipulation -- included a broad array of illicit actions to gain access to the people who made a difference in their communities. Its range was impressive. Operations included using Jewish groups in elect orally-rich, swing-states; cultivating strategic friendships with politicians, reporters and alike; getting officials drunk so they will reveal classified information; attempts aimed at affecting academic analysis such as sponsoring a chair in Near East Studies at Columbia University; subsidizing African-American activism; the recruitment of faculty members throughout the U.S.; the planting of reports favorable to Israel and critical of American conduct in prominent vehicles of the media such as CBS and The Nation; and the incessant touting of Israel’s relevance as a pillar of western-style democracy and as a military power in the Middle East.

But there were some major defeats in the bi-lateral relations. The most spectacular was the misinterpretation of power-structures within the Eisenhower Administration and the misreading of signals from its officials. This failure culminated in a major crisis following Israel’s collusion with Britain and France in launching the 1956 Suez War. Having realized their mistakes, Israeli leaders were able to mitigate some of the damage through personal contacts with such influential individuals as speech writers and presidential advisers.

While this scholarly essay contributed facts to lend countenance to the myth of unbreakable Israeli power (and clandestine operation) in the U.S., supporting the work of the journalists

Seymour Hersh, Andrew Cockburn and Leslie Cockburn in their fascinating accounts of covert Israeli actions in the U.S. (in their books which are not cited here but in Hahn's Spring article), we must now await works by experts on Arab-Americans and their presumed efforts in the corridors of power in the U.S. and comparative studies of multi-faceted lobbying by other countries in the U.S. In addition, there is a need for scholarship on what emerged at the other side of domestic policy-formation aparati -- within the Israeli government, the Israeli body politic, their Arab counterparts, the European powers and the USSR -- to provide a synthesis of the personalities, the issues, the interests, the groups, the parties and the ideas involved.

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