

The U.S. and Israel: In the Eye of the Storm

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When I wrote in these pages two years ago that "1977 is shaping up as a year of possibly unprecedented political confrontation between Israel and the United States," the Ford-Kissinger "reassessment" of American Middle East interests was still alive, though crippled by what Kissinger termed "the prevailing domestic political situation." The Brookings Report had emerged a few months earlier, detailing what was to become during the first months of Jimmy Carter's presidency his personal outline for a "comprehensive Middle East settlement." And the Palestinian issue was just then affecting the American consciousness as one of self-determination and legitimate nationalist fervor.

Nineteen seventy-seven, I added then, "is likely to be the toughest year ever in Israeli-American relations. . . . The United States will press and cajole Israel finally to put its own cards on the table at Geneva or some other forum." But Menachem Begin's unpredictable triumph and Anwar Sadat's unimaginable leap toward normalization aborted the Geneva process and pushed the expected confrontation a year forward. After a period of confusion following Sadat's Israeli sojourn, the Carter administration recovered sufficiently to reassert pressures on Israel to make concessions on the crucial territorial and Palestinian issues.

But the White House was chastened by its earlier experiences in advocating a "Palestinian homeland," in covertly championing PLO representation at Geneva, and in overtly advocating a concept of overall settlement (although implementation might have been drawn out over years). And today the Carter team is bumbling toward its original vision of a Middle East peace formula, apparently hoping to maintain momentum sufficient to keep the earlier vision from dissolving entirely.

This history of the Carter approach to resolving the Arab-Israeli tangle is well known. Less fully grasped, however, is the fact that since the 1975 "reassessment" by the U.S. a basic transformation has been taking place in the "special relationship" between the U.S. and the Jewish state. "Something has gone sour in that friendship," NBC news commentator John Chancellor noted during Begin's March visit to Washington.

America's commitment to Israel's existence and basic

security *is not* the issue and has never been more firm than today. The American-Israeli connection remains, and will remain, one of the most profound international responsibilities the U.S. has ever assumed. It results not from a treaty commitment reflecting shifting geopolitical alignments but, rather, from historical developments and feelings running deep in the American spirit and character. "Israel's survival is not a political question," Vice-President Mondale reiterated recently, "but rather stands as a moral imperative of our foreign policy."

Beyond this reality, as President Carter has repeatedly stressed during his talks with Begin, Israel has never been better able to defend itself—a direct result of Washington's providing greater economic and military aid to Israel than to any other country on the globe.* And never before have both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the major powers of the Arab world, been willing to evolve normal relations with Israel—in part the result of the American connection with these key countries.** In

*In its annual Strategic Survey the much-respected International Institute for Strategic Studies in London notes that "Israel is now so strong militarily compared with her neighbors that there is no immediate need for American support or supplies in the event of another violent conflict." The study adds: "The economic gamble Israel has taken, if it is successful, means that in the not too distant future she will rely much less on Western and American subventions than hereto."

**In last May's "Around Washington" column in *Worldview* I drew attention to new Saudi attitudes toward Israel, which have not been properly assessed by the American media. In particular I referred to the following statement by Saudi Crown Prince Fahd, which opens the door to eventual Saudi-Israeli relations. Though the statement appeared on page one of Egypt's leading daily, *Al Ahrām*, it received little notice in the States. "If a comprehensive solution is reached that ensures Israel's evacuation of all occupied Arab lands and restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in their homeland, including the establishment of their own state, then it would be possible to discuss the issue of recognizing Israel within the framework of a unified Arab stand."

In June the executive editor of the *New Republic*, a magazine not noted for being insensitive to Israel's viewpoint, visited Saudi Arabia and returned with the following assessment: "Despite their reputation among many American Jews as being bent on Jihad [holy war], Saudi leaders say they accept Israel's existence and will make peace if Israel with-

addition, the U.S. has been sounding out Israel privately on a future security treaty relationship, which could include the stationing of a symbolic number of troops, to stabilize further a comprehensive settlement once it is achieved.

Nevertheless, there is an escalating and unprecedented tension in U.S.-Israeli relations, the result of the ongoing "reassessment" of American Middle East interests. This new reality has actually been taking shape for nearly a decade. It can be traced back as far as Governor William Scranton's "even-handedness" remarks on behalf of President-elect Nixon in late 1968. The change is based on the belief that, bluntly stated, it has become imperative for the U.S. to free itself from the constraints imposed on its policies by the Israeli interpretation of that "special relationship." Especially with Begin at Israel's helm, the U.S. simply can no longer afford to coordinate or subordinate crucial policies affecting our relations with other key countries in the region to Israeli perceptions of its own interests.

This alteration of the "special relationship"—made more dramatic and more intense by Begin's coming to power—is a healthy and necessary development. It comes at a moment when Israel should be seeking its place in the Arab Middle East, not holding fast to its Western origins. To believe, as Professor Robert Tucker states (*Commentary*, July), that "the Carter Administration has effectively ended the special relationship," is to misunderstand the fundamental nature of Washington's Middle East policies and goals.

What the Carter administration has done is revive the "reassessment" that was shelved by Ford and Kissinger during the 1976 election campaign. More important, Carter has taken concrete steps to implement it, most notably in the package arms sale. Indeed, this package of great symbolic importance was desperately fought by Israel and the Jewish lobby in the hope of blocking Carter's entire course (as the letter from seventy-six U.S. senators in May, 1976, had upset Ford's course) while discrediting the new American government in Arab eyes.

Though Carter has greatly increased the time needed to implement his "comprehensive peace formula"—in a sense he has returned to a step-by-step approach—there is a basic difference from the Kissinger policy associated with that term. Now there is a public outline, still remaining from the efforts and statements made by Carter during the first nine months of his presidency, of where the peace process is eventually leading: Israeli withdrawal on all fronts to approximately the 1967 borders, normalization of relations between the major countries, a Palestinian "homeland" in the West Bank and Gaza strip (restricted by ties to Jordan), and American security guarantees to provide the glue for a settlement.

draws to its 1967 borders. The Saudis favor a Palestinian link with Jordan, though they think they could control an independent Palestinian state. They want control of old Jerusalem, but they are not adamant on that point. . . . The Saudi position is not the fulfillment of Israel's dreams, but it is far more moderate than it might be. . . ."

U.S.-Israeli political maneuvering in the past few months has been designed by the White House to give Begin a final opportunity to accept gracefully this overall outline, at least in principle. Though Begin hardly had such an outcome in mind when he put forth his "peace plan" following Sadat's November visit, he is being given the option of declaring American policy compatible with his approach. If he continues to choose confrontation, he is being warned that Israel will have to watch the U.S. go farther along this basic path without Israeli acquiescence. The latest worry for Begin is finding himself completely isolated at a Geneva conference that both Carter and Sadat might enthusiastically support.

When this is compared with American policy a year ago, Israel is being made a most attractive offer. The PLO is being sidelined, chances for an independent Palestinian state are being minimized with Jordanian involvement in a Palestinian region maximized, and real normalization of relations with key Arab countries has become a realistic reward.

Another Israeli government might eventually be led to see the benefits of such a package deal, if not its inevitability. But in Washington's present view Begin has proved himself the dangerous zealot history shows him to have been, rejecting more opportunities than most political leaders can realistically expect (see "Menachem Begin: The Reality," by Uri Avnery, *Worldview*, June). Now Carter and Sadat are eagerly and anxiously awaiting Begin's political demise. Both are hoping desperately that a new Israeli coalition—one led by a resurgent Labor party and the remnants of Yigal Yadin's disintegrating Democratic Movement for Change—will accept what appears inevitable, as did Ben-Gurion in 1957, and yield.

In all likelihood the coming months will witness a series of progressively more bitter, bruising struggles between Carter and Begin. Both leaders will be assessing possibilities and risks as they determine what alternatives they have and whether to proceed on a collision course. Begin, like Carter, faces dwindling support at home. And Carter will soon be forced to think of the approaching reelection campaign.

The storm created by the resurgence of the American "reassessment" has not yet passed. We may look back in some months' time and find we were only in the eye of the storm in the summer of 1978. Coming trials may strain the bonds of U.S.-Israel friendship even more. Recognition of this possibility has motivated many of Israel's best friends abroad to support Israel's still expanding "Peace Now" movement.

Carter is being advised by Secretary of State Vance as well as National Security Advisor Brzezinski (who themselves have been so advised in private by reputable Jewish leaders, among others) that only unyielding American pressure can hope to bring about Israeli policies sufficiently forthcoming that Sadat's peace initiative may be saved.

Yet such planning may be grounded in illusion. Even without Begin the Washington-Jerusalem schism is now so fundamental that, after a brief respite, serious tensions will resume. Ezer Weizmann, a possible succes-

sor to Begin, and to many the current Israeli savior, has only marginal differences with Begin—though his style is considerably more pragmatic. And he simply lacks the authority within the Herut party, which dominates the Likud, to go very far very fast, even should he want to. Already Herut hardliners have been insisting that Weizmann live up to the party platform or move aside. Weizmann may eventually find himself a subordinate in a Labor-led coalition to which a small minority of the Likud might move to attach itself in desperation. As for Labor, Shimon Peres remains unable to free himself from Golda Meir's authority and unwilling to take upon himself the burdensome responsibility for what many of his own party have reluctantly concluded must be done.

Begin left the United States in March visibly shaken. He returned in May for Israel's Thirtieth Anniversary with a false smile. Following his trip, much of the organized Jewish community has become involved in a major campaign to discredit Carter and Brzezinski and to threaten defection to the Republicans in 1980. "American Jewry," remarked one Israeli official, is "our oil weapon."

Carter, as his actions have shown, decided to fight fire with fire. By dramatizing how greatly Begin himself has exacerbated the previously existing differences between the two countries—to the point where the "special relationship" itself is seriously strained and in doubt—Carter is threatening Begin with progressive erosion of his political base at home and within American Jewry. Not only is Begin's government experiencing serious disharmony from within, but the "Peace Now" movement has made remarkable progress in asserting a fundamental challenge to Begin's entire approach to the Sadat initiative. In May, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, former president of the American Jewish Congress, formally endorsed the "Peace Now" movement in Israel. It was one of the many signs of the widespread support that the call for greater concessions has mobilized among Israelis and American Jews. Hertzberg has also publicized Harris poll results showing that more than 60 per cent of American Jews favor territorial concessions on the West Bank if a peace settlement could be reached. In short, Begin has been shown clearly that American policy can affect Israeli politics, just as Israeli policies can affect American politics.

Down the road now looms the possibility of President Carter taking his case over the heads of Israel's American Jewish constituency (and, if necessary, of Congress too) by directing an appeal to the country at large. The Begin government's refusal in June to address seriously the issues of the West Bank's future and Palestinian representation in future peace negotiations makes such a presidential initiative likely.

According to the *Washington Strategic Review* published in April, the president has since January been making private threats about taking Middle East policy to the public at large. It was then that "complex efforts" began "to pressure Israel into making greater concessions to Egypt's President Sadat." The *Review*, published by the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), noted that these

efforts involved such unpublicized steps as requests to European, Latin American, and Asian allies to "hold up arms purchases from Israel" and requests to Iran "that oil supplies" to the Jewish state "be slowed down or interrupted pending a peace agreement."

In short, now that the Begin government has confirmed Israel's unwillingness to recast the deficient Begin plan to provide for West Bank territorial withdrawal and some form of Palestinian self-determination, the American Government has pledged to take steps on its own. For Carter's entire Middle East policy rests on American credibility in Arab eyes, and this credibility is dependent on his making good.

There have been five distinct periods in the Carter White House's Mideast planning:

1. January, 1977-September, 1977
Serious Geneva preparations, which included the expectation of bringing in the PLO.
2. October, 1977-November, 1977
Geneva preparations without advance agreement on principal differences and with nondirect PLO participation.
3. December, 1977-January, 1978
Confusion over Sadat initiative; hope for Israeli flexibility; mediation as the process of direct negotiations stumbled
4. February, 1978-March, 1978
Determination to push a first-step Egyptian-Israeli accommodation with a "Declaration of Principles" offering hope for a gradual, comprehensive settlement (at least in theory); decision to defer Palestinian issue to later date under cover of the declaration.
5. April, 1978—
Attempts to undermine Begin government in Israel and among American Jews; decision to de-emphasize the unreachable formal "Declaration of Principles" in favor of a de facto declaration; decision to attempt to use the framework of the "Begin plan" to elicit possible territorial compromise on the West Bank and Israeli agreement to Palestinian representation; continuing hope that Sadat, faced with major economic and social troubles, would accept some Egyptian-Israeli arrangement rather than total defeat for his initiative; hopes for Begin's political collapse.

The new administration's Middle East outlook fol-

lowed closely the Brookings Report, two of its notable signers having been Zbigniew Brzezinski and William Quandt, Brzezinski's deputy for the Middle East. By May, 1977, Carter had decided the time was ripe for a major effort to reconvene the Geneva talks. "To let this opportunity [for peace] pass could mean disaster not only for the Middle East, but perhaps for the international political and economic order as well," he insisted ominously. Already troubled by Israeli resistance, the president sent chills through Jerusalem when he said, also in May: "I would not hesitate if I saw clearly a fair and equitable solution [to the Middle East problem] to use the full strength of our own country and its persuasive powers to bring those nations to agreement." It is on the inescapable Palestinian issue that Carter has made the greatest deviation from his original plans. Until September of last year Carter hoped to bring the PLO into the Geneva negotiations. The Brookings Report called for "Palestinian self-determination," and so did the new president, however waveringly.

As circuitous negotiations continued with the PLO, Carter took cautious steps during the summer to convince Yasir Arafat he was genuinely willing to deal with the hitherto leprous organization. Most important, the president began to prepare the American public for what might be in store.

At a press conference on July 28 Carter stated that "the major stumbling block" to reconvening the Geneva conference "is the participation of the Palestinian representative." He then added: "We will discuss" matters with the Palestinians if they will agree to recognize and coexist with Israel. Should this occur, the U.S. would then advocate "participation by them at peace negotiations."

On the following day Secretary Vance hinted at what was already becoming widely understood—the U.S. now publicly accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians. Poised to leave on a Middle East shuttle, Vance was asked if he expected to meet with any members of the PLO. His response was telling. "I do not expect that there will be any meeting with the PLO during this trip," because, he added, "there has yet been no suggestion by the PLO that they are prepared to do the things which President Carter outlined."

In a *Time* interview a few days later Carter reextended his offer to the PLO. *Time* quoted the president's views as follows, supplying the bracketed material: "If the Palestinian leaders adopted that position [acceptance of Israel's existence] or espoused the U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338 as a basis for negotiations at Geneva, we would immediately commence plans to begin talks with the Palestinian leaders. I hope Mr. Begin would accept that [the participation of some Palestinian leaders at Geneva], but I don't have any way to predict what Mr. Begin will do."

Behind the scenes, though, negotiations with the PLO gradually became stalemated. The PLO had finally indicated a willingness to accept U.N. Security Council Resolution 242—with the understandable reservation that the Palestinians had "national rights," not just refugee rights as mentioned in the resolution. But in return the PLO insisted that the Americans go beyond a vague

commitment to "begin talks." The PLO demanded that the U.S. grant it recognition, extend the PLO an actual invitation to Geneva, or otherwise show, by some *unambiguous action*, that as far as the Americans were concerned the PLO deserved to be a party to the negotiations and to any settlement. This hurdle was never surmounted, and both sides remain bitter today over their experiences.

By October it was "Bye-bye PLO" (Brzezinski's now famous indiscretion—or was it?) and "Hi, hi Soviet Union." Frustrated by the PLO's internal squabbling as well as Israel's intransigence, and increasingly aware that Geneva was going to be a highly speculative endeavor, Washington altered its plans in three respects.

First, with Anwar Sadat's encouragement (and perhaps even Arafat's), a search began for Palestinian representatives who were not under the PLO's formal umbrella but were not necessarily unacceptable to the PLO. The press made mention of three Palestinian intellectuals in the United States, any one of whom might head a delegation to Geneva comprised of diverse Palestinians, including West Bankers and low-level PLO personalities. In early November *Agence France-Presse* reported that Walid Khalidi, a brilliant and highly respected scholar spending the year at the Harvard Center for International Studies, might soon become president of a government-in-exile.*

Second, Carter realized that preparations for Geneva were going to be nearly totally procedural. Substantive matters would have to be dealt with on the spot.

And *third*, faced with a potentially disastrous Geneva conference, the Americans decided to enlist the cooperation of the Russians. To do so, it was thought, might increase substantially the chances for progress once the procedural hurdles were overcome and the parties had gathered at the Palais des Nations.

The White House panicked at the intensity of the outcry over the U.S.-Soviet Joint Statement of early October. Though it hardly went beyond policies that had been enunciated formerly, the Israelis rightly realized the cards were being stacked against them and that it would be rough going at Geneva. Faced with strident domestic protests inspired by Israel, Carter held a late-night session with Foreign Minister Dayan at the United Nations Plaza Hotel in New York. The resultant "American-Israeli working paper" undid much of what Carter had attempted with the Joint Statement. It was an example of Israel's leverage over Washington, and of Carter's ineptitude.

President Carter never did resolve the discrepancies between the joint statement and the working paper, for in mid-November Sadat had his own gambit. Confused by preparations for a Geneva conference destined for failure, frustrated by the Arab world's fetters on Egypt's pursuit of nationalist goals, and disenchanted with America's indecisiveness and weakness, Sadat accepted

*Khalidi's article, "Thinking the Unthinkable: A Sovereign Palestinian State," in the July, 1978, issue of *Foreign Affairs*, has since increased his visibility and stature.

the risks of taking a historic leap. His move was startling in its simplicity, stupendous in its implications. That the Carter White House was caught unawares was to be expected; that at first it attempted seriously to hold back Sadat was a sign of Washington's reluctance to give up the probably doomed Geneva strategy.

As the Egyptian-Israeli talks floundered the American role gradually became that of intermediary, then mediator, and then, once again, participant. By January, with the talks going nowhere, Saudi Arabia pressed Sadat to break them off. Though every Israeli statement denied it, it had become apparent by mid-December that Begin's actual response to Sadat was an effort to maneuver the Egyptian into a separate deal. Begin tried offering the Sinai as bait. When Sadat balked, Begin retrenched, allowing settlements of occupied territories to go forward and then began renegeing publicly on Resolution 242 (something implicit in Begin's positions from the beginning). Begin was showing both Sadat and Carter how tough he could be—as he would do in March, when he used the army to savage southern Lebanon.

By January the president realized the ball had left his court only temporarily. Sadat had strengthened Carter's hand tremendously, but Egypt could do little more. Hesitantly at first, Carter began maneuvering to build a fire under Begin. When Begin responded in February by counterattacking, Carter began to realize he would have to confront Begin openly.

It was within this framework that administration officials began letting journalists know, a few weeks before the March Begin-Carter talks, that they would be candid, harsh, and decisive. Carter refused to allow the PLO attack on an Israeli bus and the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon to divert the talks from their intended purpose: confrontation. The president had simply had enough of Begin's deceptions, slanders, and irksome charm. As Begin was on his way to Washington the U.S. rammed through the U.N. Security Council a resolution calling for Israeli withdrawal and a U.N. force for south of the Latani, and this without so much as a consultation with Israeli officials. The message for Israel was clear and blunt: policy coordination was no longer to be assumed. "The U.S. used to be our protection from the U.N.," an Israeli Foreign Ministry official complained just before Begin's arrival.

More recently, confirming the new policy of no prior consultation, the U.S. considered submitting a resolution to the June NATO summit, seeking full territorial withdrawal by Israel from occupied Arab lands. The Israelis learned of this from European sources a few days before the summit and entered "energetic and indignant" protests, according to the *Jerusalem Post*. For as yet unknown reasons the U.S. yielded. But, as the *Post* added, Israeli "officials continue to regard the episode of the NATO draft as a significant omen of intensified American pressure on Israel."

The package arms sale, of course, has been the most dramatic departure from the past. The Israelis were more incensed that their arms supply was being linked to weapons for Arab states than that the U.S. was actually agreeing to supply weapons to these countries. The

furious and bitter Capitol Hill battle that erupted was simply one of the crucial hurdles the White House had to jump in its determination to regain the freedom to decide on major Middle East policies according to its own best judgment.

By April it had become clear that even a "Declaration of Principles" could not be squeezed from the Begin coalition. The *Economist* expressed as the "depressing truth" that "Mr. Begin as prime minister is basically the same man as Mr. Begin the opposition leader." Carter was shocked in his March meetings with Begin when he received repeated "NOs" to a series of questions he had prepared about possible Israeli concessions. A serious breach developed at the time. But later consultations with Moshe Dayan in April led to Carter's willingness to scrap the notion of a formal declaration and concentrate on modifications of the Begin plan itself.

Carter elaborated on this new approach in an interview with Trude Feldman that startled the Arabs. It was a generous face-saving offer to Begin by Carter, giving Israel the opportunity to accept the notions of withdrawal from the West Bank and of participation by the Palestinians in a gradual, limited process of self-determination. Both sides knew very well that the original Begin plan allowed for neither of these two crucial notions. But they could be said to be within the outer limits of the "Begin Plan" if only Begin would agree to say so. By offering Begin the chance of so modifying his plan, Carter was giving Israel the chance to look good. By reacting as he did, Begin brought an American-Israeli showdown to near inevitability and, in the words of a statement released by the "Peace Now" movement, dealt "a death blow to the peace process."

Some political analysts, including former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Joseph Sisco (see "Mideast Peace: The Best of Chances," *Worldview*, June), are attempting to play down the notion that never before have Israeli-American relations been so traumatic. Other incidents are recalled—Eisenhower's 1957 threat of sanctions, the 1970 "Rogers Plan," the 1975 "reassessment" period. But this time Israel faces much more than a passing crisis. This time American interests are causing a transformation of the "special relationship" itself. The basic friendship, security commitment, and special arms relationship will remain, as they should. But the U.S. is determined to conduct a regional and global Middle East policy that, by definition, subordinates Israel's interests as perceived by Jerusalem to American interests as perceived by Washington. By persisting in an often blind determination either to reverse American perceptions or block American initiatives, Israel is seriously alienating various constituencies of former supporters and thus causing the transformation to be more detrimental than it need be.

The U.S. will continue to champion Israel's political independence and security, but no longer to the exclusion of other vital concerns. A Washington-Riyadh-Cairo axis has become a major American goal in the Middle East. It would be to Israel's advantage to find a way to make the triangle a rectangle.

LOBBY CONFRONTATION IN WASHINGTON

Two lobbyists faced the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as it considered the recent Mideast arms sale package. One was a well-known face on the Hill, Morris J. Amitay, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)—the Washington umbrella for thirty-plus American Jewish organizations, commonly known as “the Jewish lobby.” The other was a newcomer, John Richardson, director of public affairs for the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA)—the only Arab-American organization specifically devoting itself to political affairs and registered to lobby the Congress.

“We’ve never lost on a major issue,” Amitay told the *New York Times* in 1975, shortly after taking on his new job. Now he was required to share the stage with an upstart Arab-American counterpart. “I hope we are becoming known as ‘the Arab lobby,’” NAAA’s former president, Joe Baroody, said just a year ago. Though still unable to mobilize the two-and-a-half million-strong Arab-American community in the way AIPAC can enlist American Jews, NAAA has become an embryonic Arab American counterpart; its activities are beginning to be felt and, in some quarters, including the White House, appreciated.

“The voice of the Arabs is heard more clearly in the corridors of power today,” a recent lobby comparison in *Atlantic* magazine concluded. “But their lobby remains a distant second to Israel’s when it comes to size, efficiency, and fire power.” Baroody and Richardson have been the two key architects of NAAA’s rise. Until rather recently NAAA has been primarily an elaborate social club, made up of those mainly of Lebanese Christian ancestry, concentrating more on partying than politicking. But shortly after Baroody took over as president in April, 1977, he hired Richardson, despite Richardson’s lack of Arab lineage. Richardson had been president of a Palestinian relief organization, which had given him considerable experience for the move to NAAA’s key new public relations-lobbying post. NAAA established itself in a modest suite of offices on Connecticut Avenue north of Dupont Circle and raised its operating budget beyond \$250,000. According to *Atlantic*, AIPAC, with an annual budget of around \$750,000, continues to create

“an impact that others could not achieve with millions more.”

There are important differences also of style between the two groups. NAAA is still feeding on publicity and operates with a candidness befitting a political movement whose fortunes are on the upswing. AIPAC’s leadership, on the other hand, has developed a somewhat paranoid vision, neatly dividing Washington society into “we and they”—“they” being everyone, press and presidents included, except the hard-core supporters of Israeli policies. Since Amitay’s arrival AIPAC’s hold on the American Jewish community might be compared with the Begin coalition’s grasp on Israeli politics—neither has majority support but both

Richardson’s calm, reasoned attitudes are so in contrast with Amitay’s that some observers feel there is bound to be an effect as issue after issue pits these two against each other. Furthermore, while NAAA is reaching out to embrace a large network within the Washington foreign policy community, AIPAC is increasingly turning inward, refusing to accept the new atmosphere of “evenhandedness.”

NAAA’s entrance into the lobbying game was best symbolized last December with NAAA’s coordination of the first meeting between Arab-Americans and an American president. Next came NAAA’s major effort on Capitol Hill on behalf of the arms sale package. In endorsing the sale, NAAA concluded:



NAAA’s new President Hisham Sharabi, Senator James Abourezk and outgoing NAAA President Joe Baroody.

maintain control by emotional appeals and the absence of a strong opposition.

Amitay himself has become completely inaccessible to the press. As his lobbying staff expands, Amitay’s abrasive personality and belligerent views are often copied by his subordinates. Hyman Bookbinder, Washington representative of the American Jewish Committee, and one of the most respected Jewish “diplomats” in the Capital, has indicated that Amitay “has personal qualities which are outrageous and very harmful to the cause we all share.” Senator Abraham Ribicoff—on whose staff Amitay worked before shifting to AIPAC—recently mentioned AIPAC by name, and told the *Wall Street Journal* that “they do a great disservice to the U.S., to Israel and to the Jewish community.” According to one insider, Amitay has felt “he had to prove he was more Likud than the Likud people” in order to maintain the confidence of the Begin government.

“Much of the opposition to the Arab portion of the proposed arms sale is an attempt to thwart a shift in American political relations in the region rather than fear for the military security of Israel.” Taking a longer-range view, NAAA added a call for the administration “to build into its arms policy a schedule for systematic reduction in total transfers to the Middle East over a five to ten year period and to see that commitments from other major manufacturers do so too.” Aware of congressional anxieties about the ever-increasing American role as arms arsenal, it was an imaginative step.

The NAAA has a long way to go before it will be a real match for the organizing seriousness and experience of AIPAC. But the climate seems to be right for turning an impressive start into a long-term organized force that could further change the balance of pressure on U.S. policy in the Middle East.

—MAB