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US-Israel special relationship

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ABSTRACT

The US has for many years had a strong relationship with Israel. However, in this relationship something does not add up; The US presents itself as a strong defender of human rights and liberty, and at the same time they have this strong relationship with Israel, who has been violating the rights and liberties of Palestinians for many years now. So how come the US has this strong relationship with Israel despite Israeli violations towards the Palestinians? This is the question which this thesis investigates. To answer this question, Robert W. Cox's theory of international hegemony will be applied, and the method which will be applied is Critical Discourse Analysis. The paper focuses on the motives for the US strong relationship with Israel from the late 1960's, because this is when the relationship started to become strong, and until the mid 80's - and it focuses on Presidential and Prime Minister speeches from mostly American (sometimes upcoming) Presidents, but also from an Israeli Prime Minister, as well as an article from an upcoming US President. The paper concludes that it is the *political*, *economic* and *social* interests which the US has for both creating as well as sustaining its world hegemony, that can explain its strong relationship with Israel.

Keywords: USA, Israel, Palestinians, world hegemony, democracy, oil, culture

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INTRODUCTION

The Israel-Palestine conflict has been on-going since 1948 (House of the Historian). However, since October 7th 2023, the conflict has escalated into extreme levels. Now, more than 35.000 Palestinians have been killed since October 7th according to the Palestinian Health authorities (Reuthers 2024), and around 1.200 Israelis have been killed due to Hamas' attack on October 7th according to Israeli tallies, while Hamas additionally took more than 240 Israeli hostages (MacKenzie 2024). There are currently 1.7 million Palestinians displaced in Gaza, more than 13.000 Palestinian children have been killed, around 2/3rds of the previously 33.000 killed Palestinians are women or children (Frankel 2024). The levels of hunger and starvation in Gaza is currently the highest ever recorded on the IPC scale (Frankel 2024) because Israel will not allow for sufficient amounts of food to enter Gaza. Additionally, the ICJ has found it plausible that Israel's acts in Gaza could amount to genocide (OHCHR 2024). Despite this, the US still stands by Israel as its unwavering ally.

Besides being horrific numbers, the difference between casualties and damage on the Palestinian side, contrasted to the Israeli side, also shows big power differences between these two actors - a power difference which the US has been central in creating, having Israel as their number one recipient of military aid (Masters & Merrow 2024). The US has been hesitant to take firm stances against Israel throughout these past six months - which facts beneath will illustrate - despite many other countries doing so (Aljazeera 2023). Only recently have we seen stronger criticism from the US towards the Israeli handling of the situation in Gaza (Collinson 2024). In these past six months the US has vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions demanding a ceasefire in Gaza (Ebrahim, 2024), and just recently has the US sent "billions of dollars worth of US bombs and planes for Israel" (Borger 2024). As mentioned, historically Israel has been the number one recipient of US foreign aid (Masters & Merrow 2024), and the US has extensively protected Israel from international criticism by vetoing 34 UN draft resolutions criticizing Israel's actions against Palestinians (Asrar & Hussein 2023) - thus, it can be argued that the US carries a substantial responsibility for the status quo of the conflict today.

Why does the US, a country that presents itself as a strong defender of human rights and liberty, continue to strongly support Israel, despite what Israel is currently doing in Gaza, and what it has been doing in Palestine for many years now in regard to occupation, killings of Palestinians, arbitrary detention of Palestinians amongst other things? (Amnesty 2023),

This has led to the following research question:

What can explain the US' strong relationship with Israel, despite Israel's continuing violations toward Palestinians?

The argument which this paper proposes as an explanation to the RQ is, that back when the US-Israel relationship became a strong one, it was the interests which the US had, as a world hegemon (and previously as an upcoming hegemon) trying to both establish and sustain its own hegemonic world order, which could explain its strong relationship with Israel. These interests were *political*, *economic* and *social*. The *political* aspects concerned spreading democracy abroad and fighting the Soviets, the *economic* aspects concerned assuring US access to Middle Eastern oil through Israel working as a “peace-maker” in the Middle East so that the oil could flow unhindered, and lastly the *social* aspect concerned strengthening cultural characteristics or values similar to the US’s; all of these aspects strengthened US hegemony, and today these motives are still present to a certain extent. These three aspects will be analyzed and the paper will focus on the time period from when the US-Israel relationship became a strong one, thus namely from the late 1960s to the mid 80s. Importantly, the situation and the relationship today will also be discussed. The method which will be applied is Critical Discourse Analysis, and the theoretical framework which will be applied is Robert W. Cox’s theory of international hegemons. As previously indicated, this is not only a one-sided conflict - there have been casualties on both the Israeli side, most clearly shown by the Hamas attack of October 7th, and on the Palestinian side as well. However the number of casualties and violations has been significantly higher on the Palestinian side than on the Israeli side, as shown by statistical data from, amongst others, Statista (McCarthy 2021).

Importantly; It is not uncommon for the US to support countries who have values contrary to US values; the US supported the repressive government in El Salvador during the Cold War (Carothers & Feldman 2023), and up until today the US has a close relationship with Saudi-Arabia (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs 2023). However the US’ relationship/support of Israel is different from these other countries, both because of the extent of US military aid to Israel (Masters & Merrow 2024), but also because of the extent of US protection of Israel - as shown by the previously mentioned 34 UN vetoes by the US in regards to Israel (Asrar & Hussein 2023). Starting to use their veto so frequently was uncommon behavior for the US, because they had not used their veto at all before 1970 (Sinha 2019, p.240).

Outlining the paper; after this introduction, chapter two will revise the US-Israeli relationship historically. Chapter three will go over the literature which already exists on this topic and my contribution to it, and chapter four will describe the theory which will be applied in this paper. Chapter five describes the method which will be applied, and chapter six and seven consist of the analysis, and then the discussion. Lastly, chapter eight is the conclusion.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Before the relationship became strong - 1948 - 1966

The US-Israel relationship has not always been strong/special. In fact the US had for several years found Israel to be a burden to their interests in the Middle East (Bar-Siman-Tov 1998, p.232-233). To understand this, some background information is necessary: As Abu-Manneh (2006) points out “The initial point of analysis of US involvement in the region [the Middle East] has to be oil” (p.41) and as Noam Chomsky has stated “It has been a basic principle of international affairs since World War II that the reserves of the Middle East constitute an essential element in the US-dominated global system” (Abu-Manneh 2006, p.41). Therefore, the so-called Open Door policy over Middle Eastern oil, has played a crucial role in the US imperial grand strategy (Abu-Manneh 2006, p.42). However one should be aware that both Abu-Manneh and Chomsky have a Marxist backgrounds. Additionally, fighting the Soviets has also been an important part of the US engagement in the region, as Bar-Siman-Tov (1998) writes, the U.S. objective of both securing the flow of energy supplies as well as containing the Soviet Union, required strategic cooperation with the Arab states - and since there was an Arab-Israeli conflict going on, inviting Israel to join this alliance or giving them arms, would have pushed away the Arab states from the US, which would not be in the US interest. Close cooperation with the Arab states were of paramount to US interests at the time, and Israel was not part of this strategy (p. 234). During the whole Cold War, thus slightly transcending into the next section of the text, the Arab regimes had to be kept away from USSR and their own independent economic and political initiatives had to be suppressed, if not destroyed - so that it wouldn't threaten US interests in the area (Abu-Manneh 2006, p. 42).

How did the distant US-Israel relationship show itself during this time? An example is the 1956 Suez Crisis, where the US forced both France, England and Israel to withdraw their troops from Egypt, thereby acting against the Israeli military (The Editors of

Encyclopaedia Britannica 2024). Other examples are that the US blocked Israel's attempts of becoming a NATO member, and the US consistently refused to supply Israel with arms (Bar-Siman-Tov 1998, p.233-34). However at the same point in time, President Eisenhower stated that the common "Judeo-Christian civilization" was what bound the US and Israel together, but he, and several future US Presidents would not let this affect the foreign policy (Tal 2023) However, this could be seen as Eisenhower planting the first seeds for the later coming strong/special US-Israel relationship. This "Judeo-Christian" discourse is something which David Tal (2023) argued provided the foundation for American support for Israel (Tal 2023).

The relationship improved over time, starting in 1961 when Kennedy became President. Both Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson significantly changed the US-Israeli relationship in a positive direction, however, this transformation was based on a deterioration of US-Arab relations, rather than a change in the US view of Israel's strategic or political importance (Bar-Siman-Tov 1998, p.238-39). Still, the US wanted to keep the new relationship as implicit as possible, not to decline its influence amongst the Arab states further - thus, the relationship was not truly special yet (Bar-Siman-Tov 1998, p.239).

2.2 When the relationship became strong - 1967 - mid 80s

The turning point for the establishment of the strong/special relationship with Israel came in 1967 after Israel's military victory. The victory increased Israel's strategic importance to the US (Bar-Siman-Tov 1998 p.232) because as Cheryl A. Rubenberg writes "Israel's spectacular military performance validated the thesis that Israel could function as a strategic-asset to the United states in the Middle East." (Abu-Manneh 2006, p.42). Additionally, the victory created a new strategic and political situation in the region, particularly in regards to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which enabled the US, now having a special relationship with Israel, to be able to try to "create peace" in the Middle East (Bar-Siman-Tov 1998, p.232), so that their access to Middle Eastern oil would still be secure (Abu-Manneh 2006, p.42). As Bar-Siman-Tov (1998) writes "Only when the strategic-security factors became part of the relationship did it become special" (p.232). And at this point the US started providing almost unlimited amounts of military equipment and economic assistance to Israel (Abu-Manneh 2006, p.42). During the Nixon Doctrine, Israel worked to preserve a regional balance of power in the region favorable to US interest - primarily by holding back Arab radicalism and Soviet expansion (Abu-Manneh 2006, p.42).

Shifting focus to the cultural aspects of the US-Israeli relationship, during the late 1960s and early 70s, changes appeared. US elite-commentators (journalists, diplomats,

policy makers etc.) started constructing the Israeli society in romantic ways - they portrayed them as a “happy, free-wheeling, yet mobilized consensus” (Mitelpunkt 2018, p. 331). According to Mitelpunkt (2018) both Americans and Israelis created together an image of Israel as being a “liberal, democratic, yet united and military potent society” (p.2), which ultimately laid the cultural backdrop which made Americans approve of their country’s support for Israel (p.2). However, after 1973, Americans saw Israel in a new light - now Israel was rather a state in need of US guidance towards peace, putting the US in a good light internationally (Mitelpunkt 2018, p.13).

During this time, domestic political factors also shaped the US approach to Israel, and its conflict with Palestine. As Lustick (2020) writes, the so-called “Peace-process carousel” between Israel and Palestine “continues in great measure because of the cumulative effects of the Israel lobby in the United States” (p.177) having investigated attempts at creating peace between the two actors between 1969-2017 (p.180). Lustick stresses that the failed efforts at achieving a negotiated solution between the actors is driven, to a great extent, by the “effective veto of the Israel-lobby over US foreign policy towards Israel and especially towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” (p.178). When talking about the Israel lobby, Lustick is referring mainly to AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby organization which started to become influential in the 1970s (McGreal 2024). There are however also other Israel lobbying groups in the US, such as J Street (Samuels 2022). It is important to be aware that the impact of these lobbying groups is not being exaggerated, as several scholars have pointed out (Slater 2009). It is also important to remember that there are many other lobbying organizations working with different topics in the US (Statista 2024). However, since the 1970s and up until today, slowly transcending to the next section, AIPAC has had influence on US policy towards Israel, and American public opinion towards Israel (Rossinow 2018).

2.3 Today?

Are the same motives for the relationship still present today? Looking first at US oil imports from the Middle East: in 2022 the US imported 7% of their petroleum (including crude oil) from Saudi Arabia, and 4% of this from Iraq, and they imported 7% of their crude oil from Saudi Arabia and 4% of this from Iraq (Eia 2024). However, the US import of petroleum from these two countries has been declining since the 1990s - while on the other hand, US imports of Canadian petroleum has increased rapidly in this time period (Eia 2024). Regarding the political aspect: the promotion of democracy - the US still stands firm on this principle, which Biden’s speech at the Summit for Democracy on March 29th 2023 illustrated, where he said that his administration would commit \$9.5 billion to advance

democracy around the world. Regarding the social aspect, some of the same discourses from the past still prevails from Biden, one example is his speech at the Arrival Ceremony in Tel Aviv on July 13th 2022, where he said “The connection between the Israeli people and the American people is bone deep. It’s bone deep... We’re united in our shared values and our shared vision”. So out of these three aspects, one in particular has changed, which is the amount of US imports of oil from the Middle East.

As previously mentioned, the US has recently vetoed three UN resolutions demanding a ceasefire in Gaza, and Israel is still the number one recipient of US aid as of today (Masters & Merrow 2024). However, there are other things which too seem to change at the moment in the American population. There have been massive pro-Palestine student demonstrations at various university campuses around the US recently (Cabral & Faguy 2024), pressuring Biden's Israel-policy. There have been massive pro-Palestine demonstrations throughout the US since October 7th (Sottile & Baggini 2023), and recently, Democratic senator Chuck Schumer gave quite a critical speech to Israel and Netanyahu (Collinson 2024). A transformation of the political landscape has also taken place in the US regarding the Democratic party, its voters and Zionists, as Beinart (2024) writes: “The American Jews most committed to Zionism ... understand that liberal American is becoming less ideological hospitable. And they are responding by forging common cause with the American right”. Thus, the public opinion is also shifting in some places.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literary field which covers the reasons behind the US strong relationship with Israel is broad. David Tal (2023) argues that this field is roughly divided into two camps, in terms of their understanding of the driving forces behind the US strong relationship with Israel: the realist, who focuses on power and interests, and the idealists, who focuses on ideology and ideas.

One of these realist explanations stresses that the US strong support for Israel comes from the “Israel Lobby”. This argument has been presented by many scholars before (Plitnick & Toensing 2007, p.42), including Ian Lustick (2020) who will be discussed later on, however most notably by Mearsheimer and Walt, who published an article in 2006 called “The Israel Lobby”. Their main argument was that the main force driving US policy in the

Middle East was domestic politics, and especially the so-called Israel lobby (p.1). However, this proposition has created heated debates among scholars; for instance Jerome Slater (2009) points out that some of the scholars critical towards the article, think that it exaggerates the power of the Israel-lobby. Stephen Zunes (1997) and Abu-Manneh (2006) have both focused on the realist explanation, stressing the strategic value which the oil in the Middle East has for the US, and Abu-Manneh also stresses the US interest in fighting Soviet expansion in the Middle East.

Looking at the idealist explanations; Shaul Mitelpunkt (2018), David Tal (2023), Michael Koplow (2011) and Elizabeth Stevens (2013) focus on factors such as the American public opinion, religious factors and the political cultural understandings of Israel and the US itself as explanations to this strong relationship.

However many scholars propose a combination of these two camps of explanations - this is also the literary group which this paper is part of, thus writing itself against the above mentioned *either* realist *or* idealist explanations. These are scholars such as Eytan Gilboa (2023), Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (1998) and Don Waxman (2007). For example, Gilboa (2023) stresses both the so called “hard elements”, such as trade benefits, intelligence sharing, deterrence against superior power etc. and on the other hand “soft elements” such as similar features in US-Israel history, values, the US jewish community, amongst other things - and Waxman (2007) also proposes several reasons, such as strategic, political, cultural, religious etc. (p.105). These scholarly articles in particular have assisted me in defining the three analytical aspects of this paper.

Thus, the strong US-Israel relationship has been covered extensively by scholars. However, these explanations have not systematically been linked to an even broader understanding and explanation of the relationship, focusing on *what sort of behavior* that lays behind these motives - Cox’s theory proposes a hegemonic sort of behavior. Several scholars have briefly linked the US policies in the Middle East to its hegemonic status, however the relationship between the US and Israel has not been *systematically* and *thoroughly* investigated as a case of *hegemonic behavior* as Robert w. Cox understands hegemonic behavior. Steven E. Fleischman (2004) has very briefly touched upon the topic, connecting US interest in Israel to its hegemonic agenda (p.309). However, Fleischman does not go systematically into detail with *how* this fits into a hegemonic behavior in accordance with Cox's theory. In this thesis I will therefore systematically - meaning going through *all* three aspects of Cox’s theory (the *political, economical and social* aspect) - analyze the US’

motives for its strong relationship with Israel.

THEORY

4.1 Gramsci & National Hegemons

The theory which I will be applying originates from Gramsci's theory of national hegemons, therefore I will briefly describe the basics of Gramsci's original theory, to give a better understanding of this new theory which I will be applying. I will use the theory to explain the US strong relationship with Israel.

Nationally, Gramsci believed that the bourgeoisie, and the mechanisms of hegemony of the dominant class (the bourgeoisie), exercised hegemony over the other social classes within society. However, in order to exercise hegemony over other societal classes, the ruling class had to make some concessions to the other societal classes, ultimately creating a type of social democracy, where a capitalistic system was preserved, a system which was now more acceptable to workers due to the concessions, and also acceptable to the bourgeoisie (Cox 1983, p.163). Normally, the bourgeois did not need to run the state themselves, aristocrats, junkers or others did so for them, as long as these rulers recognized the hegemonic structures of civil society as a fundamental limit of their politics. This also led Gramsci to broaden his definition of the state. Since the state apparatus (the administrative, executive and coercive apparatus) was so constrained by the dominating social class within the society, Gramsci found it meaningless to only define the state by this. He therefore included the underpinnings of the political structure in civil society, meaning all the institutions which "helped to create in people certain modes of behavior and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order." (Cox 1983, p.164) - such as the church and educational system (Cox 1983, p.164).

4.2. Robert Cox & International Hegemons

Contrary to Gramsci, Robert W. Cox applies the concept of hegemony to the global world order, instead of a national order (Cox 1983, p.170). According to Cox, this global hegemon consists of several things; to become a world hegemon, the particular state would have to establish as well as protect a world order which is "universal in conception" (Cox 1983, p. 171). Being "universal in conception" means that the world order is one which most other states find compatible with their own interest - or at least the states which are within the reach of the hegemony does so. This means that the world hegemon does not exploit other countries directly in this hegemonic order, but offers some benefits to other

countries around it which persuades them to accept this world order (Cox 1983, p.171). This world order is based on a regulation of inter-state conflict, but very importantly it is also based on a “globally-conceived civil society” based on Cox’s words - this consists of a global mode of production which creates social classes among the countries which are part of this global mode of production (Cox 1983, p.171). To go further into the economic perspective of the hegemonic world order - the order does not just consist of the above mentioned relationship between states, it is an order that works within a *certain world economy*, which as mentioned has a dominant mode of production, that invades into all countries (Cox 1983, p.171). What also characterizes a world hegemon, is that it is a state which has undergone a profound economic as well as social revolution. The changes which this state has undergone internally through these revolutions also transcend the national boundaries and they become an outward expansion of the national hegemony that exists within the specific country after these revolutions have taken place - this national hegemony consists of a dominant social class within the country. This means that the culture, the technology, the economic institutions as well as social institutions within the global hegemon become “patterns for emulation abroad” (Cox 1983, p.171).

Additionally, Cox points out that this world hegemony consists of three specific structures: a *social structure*, an *economic structure* and a *social structure* - and it must consist of all three (Cox 1983, p.171-72). Cox does not describe further what these three aspects consist of, thus, based on relevant literature, I have picked out what seems relevant for each aspect in regards to the US-Israeli case. Lastly, world hegemony is also expressed through institutions, mechanisms and norms which are universal (Cox 1983, p.172).

4.3 Previous applications and criticisms

What are the theory’s previous applications and criticisms? As Barbara Jenkins (2003) writes, the theory has been used as an alternative explanation to the realist explanation of how global power is established and spread, and more specifically, it has been used to explain how global capitalism became a dominant and naturalized system of power in the Pax Americana world order, which Robert Cox had in mind when he wrote the theory (p.65). Additionally, Stephen Gill (1988) has also applied the theory to the Trilateral Commission (TC), arguing that the TC is an international actor that works to maintain US hegemony in the world (Jenkins 2003, p.65). Thus, this paper brings in a new type of application of the theory, by focusing on the US relationship with Israel. Worth (2015) has made some critical points about Cox’s theory. Cox writes that this hegemonic world order can be transformed first of all by changing the power dynamics *within* a country (1983, p.173-174). However Worth

(2015), is quite critical to the prospects of a transformation of this hegemony, writing for example that the BRICS countries at the end of the day, rely on the global economy for their prosperity and power, and thus do not make up a real threat for US hegemony (Chodor 2015). Also, Cox does not talk about how domestic factors, such as for example lobbying, may also affect the hegemonic states behavior, which can also be considered a weakness of his theory.

METHOD

5.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

The method which I will be applying in this paper, is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA primarily focuses on “the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (A. Van Dijk 2015, p.466). Critical discourse analysts do not only try to describe discourse structures, they also try to explain them, by looking at characteristics of social interaction and in particular social structures” (A. Van Dijk 2015, p.467). Further, Critical Discourse Analysts also seek to expose social inequality and ultimately challenge it (A. Van Dijk 2015, p.466). According to A. Van Dijk (2015) CDA consists of two basic concepts, which are *the relation between the Micro-and Macro-level* and *Power as control* - which in turn consists of *control of text and context of discourse, mind control* and *discourse of domination* (p.468 - 475). However, this paper will only focus on the mind control aspect, therefore only elaborating on that part.

Power as control has to do with the fact that social power is deeply connected to control - and more specifically control over the minds and acts of members of other societal groups. However this power is only possible to (potentially) obtain, if you have the privilege of having access to scarce social resources such as money, fame, force amongst other things, which will give you access to controlling influential discourses. However, the power which these groups possess, is not only expressed in discourses, but can also be integrated in rules, laws, habits etc within a country or internationally (A. Van Dijk 2015,p.469). Going back to the power of control of other groups minds and acts, CDA research focuses on a specific question in regards to this which is:

How does such power discourse control the minds and actions of less powerful groups, and what are the social consequences of such control, such as social inequality?

This question focuses on how other people (individuals and groups) can be persuaded/convinced by the discourses, and thus be controlled, by the use of *discourse structures*, such as news headlines and leads, implications and presuppositions, metaphors, lexical expressions, passive sentence structures (A. Van Dijk 2025, p.474-75) as well as omissions (Huckin et. al. 2012, p.121) which the analysis of this paper will focus on.

5.2 Why this method?

What is suiting for CDA to this paper, is its focus on power imbalances between different groups, which is very prevalent in the US-Israeli relationship where Israel/Israelis are put on a pedestal compared to other states/people, when the US motives for its strong relationship with Israel are described. CDA also has an elite point of view, focusing on how a few powerful actors, through discourse, can have lots of power over people, while also, and more importantly, investigating *how* this power is expressed, which corresponds well with the aim of this thesis; looking at how the US elite has discursively presented the US motives for its strong relationship with Israel, while also challenging this discourse.

5.3 Operationalization

In this paper I will analyze how elite actors discourses are enacted towards other people based on the discourse characteristics (e.g. metaphors, omissions) mentioned in section 5.1. I will analyze quotes from speeches and an article based on Cox's three theoretical aspects; the *social*, *economic* and *political aspect*. I will base the analysis on a combination of *a priori* coding and *open coding*. The *a priori* coding will consist of the following: the *social* aspect will focus on the text mentioning common characteristics between US/Americans and Israel/Israelis, such as religion, the citizen-soldier mentality portrayed by the US elite, their relationship to the military, values and history. The *political aspect* will focus on anti-Soviet alliances opinions, as well as positive notions of democracy and freedom - however democracy and freedom can also be related to the *social aspect* to some extent. Lastly the *economic aspect* will focus on US dependence on oil in the Middle East and US desire for peace and stability in the Middle East for trading purposes. However it is important to note that these three aspects are *closely* related to each other.

5.4 Materials

The materials consist of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of quotes from US presidential speeches (in some cases before they became presidents), one speech by Israel's former Prime Minister Begin and one article written by Reagan. I have chosen Presidential speeches/articles because they express a state's official stance on a topic, and for the speeches made by politicians who *would become* US presidents later on, it shows what their thoughts were a short time before they took office - maybe also setting the stage for themselves. I have included quotes from speeches/articles from all the presidents (or upcoming presidents) who were in office between 1967 and the mid 80s, thus five presidents, since this is the time-period I am focusing on. I have selected the quotes which most clearly relate to the three aspects of Cox theory.

ANALYSIS

6.1 Political aspect

The political aspect seems to have played a relevant role in the explanation of the US's strong relationship with Israel. However it is important to keep in mind that the three aspects are closely related, and sometimes hard to separate. There are several omissions in the speeches beneath, which will be analyzed collectively at the end of the section.

6.1.2 Soviet vs. US - and democracy more broadly

Gerald Ford, on the first day of the 11th AIPAC conference in 1970, a couple of years before he became president, and not long time after Israel had expanded its territory in Palestine which most of the world did not recognize (Beaumont 2017), nevertheless said

"If we were to allow the Soviet Union, through brutal application of its own military force, to crush Israel, this would mean the end of hope for all free nations of the Mediterranean and even Western Europe" (Khalel 2019).

Here Ford is setting the Soviet union up against Israel, who is, according to Ford, a free nation - and he is saying that the Mediterranean and even Western countries are dependable on Israel for having hopes of being free nations - thus giving Israel a special position in regards to these countries and to the US, and thus also stressing the importance of Israel being a free democracy which stands in opposition to the Soviet union. However, indicating that Israel is a "free nation" is a presumption which contains important omissions, which will be analyzed at the end of this section. By using these two discourse mechanisms (presumption and omissions), Ford is elevating Israel and portraying Israel as a special and important political ally to the US in the world.

In 1979, shortly before he became president of the US, Ronald Reagan wrote an article about Israel's importance for the US, writing

"Moreover, our own position would be weaker without the political and military assets Israel provides. Yet, American policy-makers downgrade Israel's geopolitical importance as a stabilizing force, as a deterrent to radical hegemony and as a military offset to the Soviet Union" (Reagan 1979).

Here, Reagan highlights the political importance of Israel to the US, but at the same time he also describes the potentially strong Soviet influence in the region as “radical hegemony” - however, leaving out that the US strong influence in the region could be characterized as being the same, by the US dominating a region which is in many ways very different from itself in terms of religion, culture etc. He also does not mention that one could also characterize Israel’s relationship with Palestine, and especially due to its strong support from the US, as a sort of “hegemony” and perhaps also “radical”, because of Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine which began in June 1967 (Amnesty International 2017). Thus he does not acknowledge the violence which his own discourse hides and he thus allows it, both for the region, but also specifically for Palestine and Palestinians - by leaving out these contradictions. This can be characterized as an omission, which elevates both Israel politically and the US relationship with Israel’s, as well as partially explains the US-Israeli relationship. In this article Reagan also writes that:

“Israel's strength derives from the reality that her affinity with the West is not dependent on the survival of an autocratic or capricious ruler. Israel has the democratic will, national cohesion, technological capacity and military fiber to stand forth as America's trusted ally. With a democratic political system like our own we need have no fear of Israel's political stability or of the rise of a radical, anti-American leadership at her helm” (Reagan 1979).

Again Reagan places Israel’s democratic political rule as an important factor in the strong US-Israel relationship. However, describing Israel to be a country with “democratic will”, is a presumption which is not entirely based on facts, and it contains several omissions which goes against democratic values of equality, which will be analyzed further down. Thus Reagan’s statement again elevates Israel because of its supposedly “democratic rule”, which also legitimizes and to some extent explains the strong relationship.

Reagan also uses the noteworthy lexical expression that, in Israel there is no fear of “radical, anti-American leadership”. “Anti-american leadership” means leadership going against US interests - thus this could also be expressed in other words such as “independent leadership”, referring to leadership which is not dictated by another external state (in this case the US) - also making it sound more legitimate. However, by using the word “Anti-American leadership” the threat to the US sounds greater and less legitimate, and therefore it legitimizes the US strong relationship with Israel, and Israel’s proclaimed democracy.

On September 9th, 1981, Prime Minister Begin of Israel held a speech at his

Welcoming Ceremony in the US saying:

“Mr. President, my colleagues and I are grateful to you and to Mrs. Reagan for your kind invitation, for having given us the opportunity to discuss with you and your advisers...the danger to freedom resulting from Soviet expansionist policy in our region and its periphery and elsewhere, and the defense of human liberty, which is the essence of our lives, demotive of our efforts, the reason of our labors” (Begin 1981).

Here, Begin both stresses the political threat which the Soviet presents to the Middle East while also placing Israel as a firm ally of the US in fighting the Soviet political influence in the area. By proclaiming Israel’s commitment to fighting Soviet political influence in the Middle East with Western political influence, and saying that human liberty is the essence of Israeli life, Begin places Israel as being special for the US and special in comparison to the rest of the Middle East. However, saying that “human liberty is the essence of Israeli life” can be said to contain important omissions while also being a presumption, which will be analyzed further down. Using these presumptions and omissions in the discourse again heightens Israel's political position compared to the rest of the region and validates the strong US-Israeli relationship.

6.1.3 Lobbying

Another debated explanation to the US-Israel relationship, is the American Israel-lobby. Back when President Nixon wanted to push forward with the “Rogers initiative”, trying to reach a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Egypt, but ended up not pushing forward because of the Israel-lobby, Kissinger, who was Secretary of state at the time, reported that Nixon’s “Complaints about the pro-Israel lobby” were a main topic of conversation on a National Security meeting in July 1971” (Lustick 2020, p.181). Nixon not being able to do what he wished, and being frustrated with the Israel-lobby, indicates that the lobby had a very powerful position in Washington, giving special treatment to Israel - and in that way contributing to a “special relationship” between the US and Israel. President Gerald Ford experienced a similar problem when he tried to deal with Israel and its conflicts in the Middle East, as shown in a personal letter which Ford sent to President Sadat of Egypt, promising that “Next year is a presidential election year, I can’t do anything... But when Im re-elected, were (sic) going to drop the step by step approach for a comprehensive settlement” (Lustick 2020, p.186). At the time, the Jewish population in the US only took up 2.94% of the whole population (Chenkin 1970, p.346), thus the reason why he could not do anything could

not be the Jewish population broadly, but rather the Israel-lobby. By writing “I can’t do anything...” Ford is indicating that the Israel-lobby is stronger than him, and that it has special status within the political system in Washington, which he is not able to go against. This special status which Ford indicates that the Israel-lobby has, is thus also part of creating this strong/special US relationship with Israel, and giving Israel a heightened position in comparison to other states/people.

As mentioned throughout this section, there are several omissions in these speeches/article, which will be analyzed collectively now. First, Ford says that Israel is a “free nation”, and later on in his article Reagan writes about Israel’s “democratic will” - these statements contain substantial omission by ignoring the fact that Palestinians living in Israel at the time were “subjected to a system of oppression and domination through discriminatory policies that affect their legal status, access to land, resources and services, and ultimately their human development.” (Amnesty International 2022, p.75), which does not correspond with an Israeli “democratic will” or Israel being a “free nation”. Prime Minister Begin of Israel thereafter says that “human liberty is the essence of Israeli life” - a statement which also contains important omissions such as the above mentioned discrimination of Palestinians in Israel, Israel having killed about 15.000 Palestinians between 1947-1949 “in a series of mass atrocities” (AlJazeera 2017) and Israel’s invasion of the Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula in 1956 (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica) - examples of acts not corresponding with “human liberty being the essence of Israeli life”.

6.2 Economic aspect

The economical aspect seems to have played a rather large role in the explanation of the US strong relationship with Israel.

6.2.1 The American energy crisis, the oil in the Middle East and US hegemony

On November 7th 1973 President Nixon gave a speech on the American Energy Crisis, a crisis which was created by the US’ increasing dependence on oil from abroad, in combination with an oil embargo imposed on the US by OAPEC members (History). Nixon links the Energy crisis to the conflict in the Middle East, starting by saying:

“I want to talk to you tonight about a serious national problem, a problem we must all face together in the months and years ahead. As America has grown and prospered in recent years, our energy demands have begun to exceed available supplies. In recent

months, we have taken many actions to increase supplies and to reduce consumption...Unfortunately, our expectations for this winter have now been sharply altered by the recent conflict in the Middle East. Because of that war, most of the Middle Eastern oil producers have reduced overall production and cut off their shipments of oil to the United States” (Nixon 1973).

Here, Nixon is emphasizing the seriousness of the American energy crisis, and linking it closely to the crisis in the Middle East - he does not mention Israel’s role in mediating this crisis, but this will be mentioned in section 6.2.2. In the 1979 article by Reagan, referred to in the previous section, Reagan wrote the following about US dependence on Middle Eastern oil:

“Stripped of rhetoric, the paramount American interest in the Middle East is to prevent the region from falling under the domination of the Soviet Union. Were Moscow, or even its radical allies in the region, allowed to establish dominance or acquire a strangle-hold on the West's sources of petroleum, either at the wellhead or at various oil route chokepoints, the economies of the major industrial states would be jeopardized and the capacity of NATO and Japan to resist Soviet pressure would be dangerously impaired. Indeed, any American government which allowed oil supplies to its allies to be placed in question would almost certainly invite the neutralization of Western Europe and Japan, the encirclement of China, and -- eventually -- its own isolation”.

Here, Reagan is describing the US strong dependence on Middle Eastern oil while also saying that oil is the main interest of the US in the Middle East, thus stating the main explanation of the strong US-Israel relationship from the US’ point of view. Reagan is also making use of the metaphor “Strangle-hold” - which is emphasizing the threat towards the US, and thus legitimizing the US’ acts in the region - however not pointing out the threat which the US also poses to the Soviets in the region and others, who is not interested in US dominance in the region.

In the article Reagan also wrote the following about the Soviet Union’s threat to US access to Middle Eastern oil, and how Israel can help the US in this regard:

“Only by full appreciation of the critical role the State of Israel plays in our strategic calculus can we build the foundation for thwarting Moscow's designs on territories

and resources vital to our security and our national well-being”.

Reagan is first of all saying that Israel is the US’ strategic ally in making sure that US access to Middle Eastern oil is not blocked by the Soviets - indicating an important explanation of the strong US-Israeli relationship from an American point of view. Additionally, focusing on lexicals, Reagan says that thwarting Moscow is vital for US’ “well-being” - however as argued in this paper based on the Cox’ theory, US desires for Middle Eastern oil is about developing and sustaining a hegemonic world order, thus not necessarily about US “well-being” - even though those terms can be confused, however important to note is that a country can be “doing well” without being a world hegemon. Therefore “well-being” could be understood to be a mild and/or distracting way of saying that the US wants to secure its hegemonic status and domination in the area - however, using “well-being” as a cover for “hegemonic status” or “domination” is a presumption since, as mentioned, “well being” does not have to equate being a world hegemon. Thus Reagan is legitimizing the US’ fight against the Soviets by saying this and priming US interests, however this is based on a presumption. Also, when talking about “security” and “well-being”, Reagan is only considering this in regards to the US, thus giving the US special status, and not considering the negative implications for other countries/people.

How Israel could help the US in creating “peace” in the Middle East will be investigated in the next section.

6.2.2 Peace in the Middle East and US access to oil

Already back in 1968, on September 10th, President Lyndon Johnson held a speech at the 125th Anniversary Meeting of B’rith B’nai saying “The American interest in the Middle East is definite, is clear. There just must be a just peace in that region, and soon. Time is not on the side of peace” - this would be repeated many times in the following years. On September 18th 1978 Jimmy Carter gave a speech before a Joint Session of the Congress, linking peace in the Middle East to US access to Middle Eastern oil. This connection between peace and access to oil was linked to Israel in the 1981 speech by Ronald Reagan which will be analyzed later. In his 1978 speech, Carter said:

“At Camp David, we sought a peace that is not only of vital importance to their own two nations but to all the people of the Middle East, to all the people of the United States, and, indeed, to all the world as well... The United States has had no

choice but to be deeply concerned about the Middle East and to try to use our influence and our efforts to advance the cause of peace... But the dangers and the costs of conflicts in this region for our own Nation have been great as well”.

Here, Carter is saying that peace in the Middle East is very important for the US - however, when saying that the US tries to “advance the cause of peace” this contains substantial omissions, such as how the US has massively armed Israel, thereby making life even harder for the Palestinians, thus not promoting peace between these two actors. In the speech Carter also said about the Middle East that:

“The strategic location of these countries and the resources that they possess mean that events in the Middle East directly affect people everywhere. We and our friends could not be indifferent if a hostile power were to establish domination there”.

Here, an omission can be found; Carter says that the US cannot be indifferent if “hostile power” were to establish dominance in the Middle East, however Carter does not consider how the US itself, in the eyes of some Arab states, could be considered a “hostile power” itself in the region trying to establish dominance there (Kohut 2005). By leaving this out, Carter is making the US presence in the region more legitimate, morally right and *not* a threat.

In the following speech by Reagan from the Welcoming Ceremony for Prime Minister Begin of Israel on September 9th 1981, Reagan is describing how Israel is helping the US in achieving this peace in the Middle East, thus indicating the economic explanation of the relationship: Israel’s efforts at creating peace in the region, so that US oil imports are not hindered by conflicts. Reagan said “Our dream, our challenge, and, yes, our mission, is to make the golden age of peace, prosperity, and brotherhood a living reality in all countries of the Middle East”. By using words such as “dream”, “mission” and “golden age of peace” Reagan is glorifying the US’ presence and plans for the region, thus morally heightening the general understanding of the US presence in the region. Further, Reagan said:

“As we consult about these problems, rest assured that the security of Israel is a principal objective of this administration and that we regard Israel as an ally in our search for regional stability... Equally important in our discussions is the commitment of our two countries to advance the cause of peace. Mr. Prime Minister, your strong leadership, great imagination, and skilled statesmanship have been indispensable in reaching the milestones of the past few years on the road toward a just and durable peace in the Middle East”.

Here, Reagan is highlighting the US and Israel's common desires for peace, thus making their relationship more legitimate and important, and making them stand out in relation to other countries in the region in their search for peace. However, the same omissions as in the 1978 Carter speech are also present here, as well as the ones mentioned in the previous Political section.

6.3 Social aspect

The outspoken cultural understanding of Israel and Israelis portrayed by the American political elite, religious ties, the American public opinion and American Jewish community, appears to be playing a role in regards to the explanation of the US strong relationship with Israel.

6.3.1 The US' Elite's Cultural Understanding

On September 8th 1976, Jimmy Carter gave a speech at the B'nai B'rith Convention in Washington DC, talking about cultural connections between the US and Israel. He said:

“It is a special pleasure to be here today, because I believe we share a common heritage, and a common commitment, that brings us together. In 1843, B'nai B'rith was founded by a small group of immigrants who sought to preserve for themselves and others the religious and personal liberty they had been denied abroad. So it was with those who founded my church in this country, to insure liberty of conscience. I am proud to meet with a group of men and women with whom I share a total commitment to the preservation of human rights, individual liberty, and freedom of conscience”.

Carter is mentioning several cultural commonalities between the US and Israel, such as their heritage (the religious heritage one must assume), being societies founded by immigrants seeking liberty, values of individual liberty etc. - all of this making Israel special to the US because Israel therefore is closely related to the US culturally, according to Carter. This also heightens the US, by focusing on the positive side of US history of immigrants seeking freedom in the US many years ago - however both of these uplifting stories leaves out several less positive stories in regards to human liberty in both of these countries: for example the slavery of black people in the US (Shah & Adolphe 2019) and the previously mentioned discrimination against Palestinian people in Israel - these presumptions and omissions thus

uplifts the US and Israel as very liberal countries.

Later, on September 9th 1981, Ronald Reagan gave a speech at the Welcoming Ceremony for Prime Minister Menahem Begin of Israel, saying:

“The United States and Israel share similar beginnings as nations of immigrants, yearning to live in freedom and to fulfill the dreams of our forefathers. We have both sought to establish societies of law, to live in peace, and to develop the full potential of our lands”.

Here, Reagan is saying nearly the same as what Carter previously said in his speech.

However, saying that the US and Israel have both sought to “live in peace” can be challenged by the same arguments as mentioned right above - thus indicating, again, an omission. Using the word “yearning” also intensifies the US and Israel's desires for freedom.

Here, Reagan also said: “Our peoples embrace common ideals of self-improvement through hard work and individual initiative” this statement is quite in line with the picture which was portrayed by elite commentators in the US back in the late 60s and early 70's mentioned in the “Historical background” section, portraying Israel as a “united and military potent society” (Mitelpunkt 2018, p. 2).

6.3.2 Religion

On September 10th 1968, Lyndon Johnson held a speech at the 125th Anniversary Meeting of B'nai B'rith, saying:

“Our society is illuminated by the spiritual insights of the Hebrew prophets. America and Israel have a common love of human freedom and they have a common faith in a democratic way of life ... Most if not all of you have very deep ties with the land and with the people of Israel, as I do, for my Christian faith sprang from yours the Bible stories are woven into my childhood memories as the gallant struggle of modern Jews to be free of persecution is also woven into our souls”.

Here, Johnson is stressing both the religious, cultural and political ties between the US and Israel - however the focus now will be on the religious ties. Johnson is using noteworthy lexical expressions, such as “Illuminated” and “common love” - heightening the meaning of

the US-Israeli relationship, and portraying it as very special and precious, and at the same time as a very positive relation, since both countries “have a common love of human freedom”. However, this “common love of human freedom” is a presumption which contains omissions as the ones mentioned previously in the paper. Johnson is also making use of a metaphor when he says the struggle of modern Jews to be free of persecution is “woven into our souls”, connecting deeply the American people with the Jewish people, stressing American compassion for Israelis/Jews, as well as portraying Israel to be very special to the US religiously.

On March 23rd 1980 Jimmy Carter gave a speech at the White House reception of the first anniversary of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty saying “The United States, as all of you know, has a warm and unique relationship of friendship with Israel that is morally right. It is compatible with our deepest religious convictions”. By using the words “deepest religious convictions”, Carter is stressing how the relationship between Christianity and Judaism could be seen as being very close since it has the same origins - thereby making the US-Israeli relationship very special religiously - however one could also choose to focus on the fact that these two religions actually separated at a point in time, thus focusing on the difference between these religions - however by using the words “deepest religious convictions” Carter decides to focus on what unites these religions, thereby strengthening the relationship.

On September 6th 1984, Ronald Reagan held a speech at the International Convention of B’nai B’rith saying:

“In our country, Kristol asserts, “Ever since the Holocaust and the emergence of the state of Israel, American Jews have been reaching toward a more explicit and meaningful Jewish identity." As Americans of different religions find new meaningfulness in their beliefs, we do so together, returning together to the bedrock values of family, hard work, and faith in the same loving and almighty God”.

Here, Reagan is stating that the establishment of Israel has made American Jews search for a stronger connection to Judaism - thus portraying Israel as having a special and positive religious effect on American Jews - while also saying that the US wants to support American Jews, and other religions, in their journey of getting a closer connection to Judaism (or other religions).

6.3.3 Public opinion and the Jewish community

In Nixon's memoir, it's written that Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger agreed that in regards to pushing forward on the "Rogers initiative": "the political problems were too difficult... (and that) the problems with the Israelis in Israel was not nearly as difficult as the Jewish community here" (Lustick 2020 p.181). By being worried about the American Jewish community and not being able to do what he wants to do because of this community, Nixon places the American Jewish community to be very important for both him and for the American political elite in comparison to other communities in the US, despite the American Jewish population only making up 2.94% of the US population back in 1968 (Chenkin 1970). Also, focusing more broadly on the Middle East, by only mentioning the concern for the Israelis in Israel, and thereby not the other groups of people in the Middle East who are affected by this situation, Israelis are given primary concern and therefore status.

Later, when Ford was president, he sent a letter to President Sadat of Egypt promising that: "Next year is a presidential election year, I can't do anything... But when I'm re-elected, we're (sic) going to drop the step by step approach for a comprehensive settlement" (Lustick 2020, p.186). By writing that he "can't do anything" because of the upcoming election, Ford is indicating that the Jewish votes in the election are of special importance to him, and that they are in some instances (as this situation), deciding what he can and cannot do.

Further, on October 22nd 1977, Jimmy Carter gave a speech to the Democratic National Committee saying:

"I think political suicide would automatically result because it is not only our Jewish citizens who have this deep commitment to Israel, but there is an overwhelming support throughout the nation, because there is a common bond of commitment to the same principles of openness and freedom and democracy and strength and courage that ties us together in an irrevocable way".

Here, Carter is emphasizing the broad support for Israel both from American Jews but also from the whole American population - thus portraying Israel to be a special country for the American population. He does this by using several noteworthy lexical expressions such as "political suicide" in combination with "automatically", "overwhelming" and "irrevocable ways" which are reinforcing the picture of an American population in strong support for Israel.

DISCUSSION

Now these speeches, and one article, has been analyzed separately, but all together, can something more general be said about them? A common and obvious characteristic is that they are all very positive towards Israel in different ways, (besides the ones being frustrated with the Israel-lobbying) - but something which a lot of the speeches/article also have in common, is that they use several omissions when describing Israel and the US, thus putting Israel (and the US) in a very positive light, however hiding their negative, but highly relevant, sides in the respective areas discussed. They are thus choosing and picking what part of the story they want to tell about Israel and to a certain extent also the US, making the relationship seem more valid, important and good, while also indicating the US motives for the strong relationship. They are also doing so despite their different political orientations, some being Democrats and others Republican, which does not seem to divide them on the matter.

Also, does one explanation seem to be more important than the others? As both Reagan mentions in his 1979 article, and Abu-Manneh (2006) writes, the primary interest of the US in the Middle East, and therefore also its primary motive for its strong relationship to Israel, is oil - thus an economic motive/explanation. However, according to the speeches/article analyzed, the political and social explanations are also relevant, but based on Reagan (1979) and Abu-Manneh (2006), they seem secondary to the economic explanation. However, as mentioned Abu-Manneh has a Marxist background. If there had been no oil motives for the US in the Middle East, it is hard to say if the social and political motives would have been presented at all, and if there still would've been a strong US-Israeli relationship. In regards to the Soviets in the Middle East - it is hard to say if the political motive of fighting Communism in the region was just used as an excuse to get control over the oil - thus actually an economic explanation.

Having applied Cox's theory, it is relevant to reflect on the theory's ability to explain the case. The three aspects of the theory, the *political*, *economical* and *social*, have proved very useful in the explanation of the case - and there has been plenty of material to analyze in regards to these aspects. However it is still important to remember that these three aspects are very related to each other and sometimes hard to separate. Also, one thing which the theory does not focus on, which also seems to be playing somewhat of a role in regards to the US-Israeli relationship, is the American Israel-lobbying, which can be characterized as domestic factors. Cox does not write about these domestic factors; he does write about the

elites of each country - but he does not write about specific organizations or specific systems within the state, being a weakness of the theory regarding this case.

The future of the strong US-Israel relationship remains unknown, but as mentioned in the beginning, the scope of one of the key motives for the relationship, US import of Middle Eastern oil, is changing, just as the political landscape in the US is changing. This could indicate a potential transformation in the relationship - but exactly what this could look like remains unknown.

CONCLUSION

To sum up the answer which this paper proposes to the research question; according to Cox's theory, what can explain the US motives for its strong relationship with Israel, back when the relationship became strong, was that the world hegemony, which the US at some point strived for and later became, benefited greatly by having this strong relationship with Israel - both *politically*, *economically* and *socially*. *Politically* by spreading democracy in the world and fighting Communism. *Economically* because it secured US access to Middle Eastern oil, by Israel working as a "peace-maker" in the region. *Socially* by strengthening cultural characteristics or values similar to the US's - and these motives for the strong relationship still exists to a certain extent today.

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