

The United States and Israel: A (Neo) Realist Relationship

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This paper considers the relationship between the United States and Israel through the lens of the realist paradigm. The discussion draws on understandings of neo-realism in order to develop a hypothesis which allows us to make predictions about the US-Israeli relationship and to gain a better understanding of the realist paradigm. Drawing on the case-study of the pro-Zionist lobby and its role in United States politics, the article concludes that US-Israeli relations cannot be fully explained by classical or neo-realism for several reasons. Domestic level factors, normally downplayed by the realist paradigm must be included in the discussion, while the complex subject of national interest cannot be fully taken into account if secondary interests, unrelated to security and survival, are ignored. Despite this, an attempt has been made to reconcile them with structural realism. Rather than arguing that the US-Israeli relationship is above and exempt from the traditional features of neo-realist thought, it can be suggested that the relationship exhibits a temporary liberal facade. The primary finding of this study suggests these ties are still anchored in the neo-realist realm and will continue to be inextricably bound to the concepts of power and security.

Introduction

American support for Israel has flowed with increasing volume since the 1960s. This paper will discuss how this relationship can be explained using the realist paradigm. Initial observations of the relationship suggest that it runs against the realist grain, nominally concerned with power, security, and self-interest. Is this relationship truly 'special', i.e. one that political realism is unable to accommodate, or is it different from other relationships in that it transcends preoccupation with security and power politics? The aim here is to develop a hypothesis, drawing on neo-realism in particular, in order to make predictions about this international relationship.

The aspect that promises to explain this 'special' nature is the pro-Zionist lobby. The role the Zionist lobby plays within the US-Israeli relationship will be studied alongside more traditional realist interpretations in an attempt to gain insight into both US-Israeli ties and the realist paradigm itself. At issue is the extent to which explanations of this relationship rely on domestic level factors that do not fit readily into realist thought. Can realism help us to understand this relationship at all? Alternatively, can this case study help the realist paradigm to move forward and traverse the divide between theory and practice?

The investigation will start with a detailed examination of two realist concepts within the context of this relationship; power and the national interest. The antagonism between domestic and international explanations, particularly the structural forces of Kenneth Waltz's neo-realism, loosely dictates a dichotomy that can potentially be positively reconciled. This article attempts to frame the entire relationship within the realist paradigm, drawing on the relationship between the aforementioned variables (power utility, security, and domestic influence). Ultimately, this discussion highlights the struggle between theory and practice and the attempt to meld the two in a constructive manner.

Power

Power is both a notoriously subjective and a conceptually crucial factor in theories of international relations. Can it be quantified? Do states pursue power for security, for its own sake, or even at all? In order to investigate the implications the US-Israel relationship has for the concept of power, we begin by challenging familiar realist assumptions about international behaviour. A standard neorealist account will depict the United States as a unitary actor, interacting with Israel in a system of anarchy, in a relationship which enhances its power. The specifics of this relationship display the problems it presents to this already-contentious concept. Traditional realist polemic does not attempt to explain a domestic group actor such as the pro-Zionist lobby, feeling them to have no effect on the concept of power. A more inductive approach here posits alternative notions of power that cannot be explained through normative realist models but require greater practical detail. What power is, and what it can do for the international system is an ephemeral and intangible idea. Alternatively, the introduction of such a group as the pro-Zionist lobby into the discussion opens up avenues of conjecture over the nature of power which may prove useful in determining how, and if, the concept of power works as it is expected to.

The structure of the discussion juxtaposes explanations of American foreign policy with- and without- the lobby, but in practice the levels of abstraction are not so easily divorced and, using Waltz's dialectic, explanations should be seen as a continuum with strict neorealist structural interpretations at one end and 'unit level' decision-making and foreign policy theories at the other (Waltz, 1979: 80).¹ Many prominent contemporary realists recognise that there is too much relegated to the "unit-level storage bin" in the name of generality (Snyder, 1996, p.169; Milner, 1991, p.81).² Waltz's (2001) "third image" explanations are an appropriate place to start but as we move through the spectrum we can explore different conceptions of power before any outright rejection of realist maxims.

¹ Waltz introduces the 'unit-level' as consisting of details of political leadership, social and economic institutions, culture and ideology.

² Helen Milner concurs; 'the units of greatest capability set the scene of action for others as well as for themselves...Developing continuums along which all policies - domestic and international - are understandable can be fruitful.'

Power without the Lobby

Hans Morgenthau (1956: 5) famously expounded the view that a state's interest can be defined in terms of power, lending international relations an air of rationality that makes theorising possible. The most evident divergence between realist theorists over the concept of power is whether it should be viewed, in the strict neorealist sense, as a systemic, objective, universal attribute or as a context specific, relational, and subjective concept. Power itself is most often described as the ability to get others to act as they would not otherwise do or "the ability (exercised or not) to produce a certain occurrence", but this vague proposition leaves room for different interpretations which include control, influence, and coercion as elements and functions of power (Gould, Kolb, 1964: 524). Most commonly, power has been congruent with the military capabilities of states, "the element which contributes directly or indirectly to the capacity to coerce, kill and destroy" (Claude, 1962:6). From this view, the US-Israeli partnership can be seen as a patron-client relationship; a vastly superior power providing economic and military aid to a relatively weak Israel. Israel is of "extrinsic" value to the US as it allows it to increase its economic power via its position in an oil rich area, acting as a "force multiplier" (Desch, 1996: 370), allowing American military access to this vital region and beyond. This approach can be thought of as a one way street, the US by virtue of its strength dictating the terms of the relationship to a junior partner. However, the definition of power is not as simple as this.

If the US is to be regarded as 'rational' this relationship must serve to enhance its power, though this still does not explain what power is. Waltz's conception of power, estimated by comparing the capability of states to perform similar tasks (the fundamental task being survival), portrays a systemic variable differentiating functionally similar units (1979: 91, 96-98).³ His theory assumes this capability to be fungible and, like money in economics, to be transferable from one situation to another (2001:16). The power advantage *is* the relationship in a structural approach. Power within the US-Israeli relationship, however, is not as asymmetrical as a structural overview might suggest. Despite the military and economic superiority of America, these elements do not necessarily transfer into US gains: a US senator once despaired, "[t]he United States has done as much for Israel as one nation can do for another...Surely it is not too much to ask in return that Israel give East Jerusalem and the West Bank as the necessary means of breaking a chain of events which threatens us all with ruin" (Spiegel, 1985: 224).⁴

Glenn Snyder (1996: 170) has attempted to account for such difficulties within neo-realism by introducing "process variables" as an interposing force between structure and outcomes;

[o]nce the effects of anarchy and power distribution are established theoretically, outcomes that deviate from these effects may be established in terms of norms and institutions that modify them...[W]ithin the broad constraints established by structure, relationships pose more specific constraints on behaviour, thus permitting richer and

³ Waltz's neo-realism sees power only as a means to achieve security and has claimed therefore that 'defining power is not a theoretical problem – it is a practical one,' explaining a lack of clarity here (1990: 36).

⁴ Said by Senator Fulbright, November 1974.

more discriminating predictions and explanations (Snyder, 1996: 172).⁵

The origins of this particular 'process variable' can be found within the Cold War's ideological rivalry which was unsuited to outright coercion, policy instead being designed to increase American prestige or "soft" power (Sheffer, Hofnung, 1987: 3).⁶ Morgenthau (1956: 67, 75) suggests that the "policy of prestige", which can be traced back to Hobbes (1949: 64), is merely a means to gaining power of the more tangible kind. Israel's 'illusory' power may be explicable using this idea. The US-Israel relationship highlights the problems in structuralist assumptions of power's fungibility. Although the US was militarily powerful enough to deter the Soviets, this same power was inadequate in winning hearts and minds. American power within this relationship was practically still-born, conceived within a situation that severely hampered coercive policy. Indeed, the constraints on military force in general due to the system wide process variable, or 'structural modifier', of nuclear weapons has determined the nature of the US commitment to Israel in terms of indirect rather than direct assistance.

Snyder's process variables also allow for shared interests between the United States and Israel, in particular the survival of the state of Israel itself. Whilst this may appear as an unusual end for US policy in a self-help system, it can be explained by the strategic utility it sees embodied in Israel as well as the credibility, or 'soft power', it has invested there (Reich, 1984: 181).⁷ Strategically, oil makes the Middle East vitally important and, in power politics, "states seek to control what they depend on to lessen the extent of their dependency" (Waltz, 1979: 106).⁸ Additionally, the 'investment trap' that Israel represents concerns aspects of economics and credibility which may lead to a self-perpetuating interest in Israeli security (Sheffer, Hofnung, 1987: 25; Baldwin, 1979: 166). Arnold Wolfers (1962: 103-107) and Hans Morgenthau (1956: 27) argued that influence is the preferred way for all states to exercise their power over others, the carrot being cheaper and producing more favourable outcomes than the stick. The US maintains sufficient wealth to adopt a policy of influence and to exercise its power this way, rather than via coercion; "[t]he United States has more levers to pull than other states but need not always pull them" (Waltz, 1986: 333-334). Problems will still arise when allies disagree, however, vindicating structural ideas as the organising principle of anarchy dictates that no matter the closeness of an alignment the basic desire for survival in the system cannot be eclipsed by influential pressure; Israel annexed East Jerusalem regardless of US opposition (Reich, 1984: 217; Chomsky, 1999: 48). Despite the considerable influence the US has over Israel, the precarious security situation Israel has found itself in since its inception may explain why the forces of Waltz's structure will often 'shape and shove' it and the US in opposite directions (Waltz, 2001: 24); the need to maintain the

5 Baldwin calls for the creation of 'policy-contingency frameworks' to address these 'malfunctioning conversion processes.' (Baldwin, 1979: 168, 163).

6 The phrase 'soft power' was originally coined by Joseph S. Nye (2002: 8).

7 Nixon and Kissinger felt it vital for US credibility that Israel take victory from the 1973 October War, despite their simultaneous need demonstrate their impartiality to their Arab allies (Spiegel, 1985: 248).

8 The ephemeral nature of power is evident here in the new strength of the OPEC nations who, despite their dearth of other tools of power, caused the largest sudden transfer of wealth in history with their oil embargo in the early 70s (Hoffman, 1975: 185).

sovereignty of the Israeli state will always be stronger than its gratitude to the US.

Waltz (1979: 201) argues the US to be less constrained by systemic pressures due to its unprecedented levels of relative power.⁹ As the US breaks loose from the shackles of systemic constraint, and the obsession with threats to its survival, the influence of domestic factors will be necessary to explain power relations of the state. In contrast, the very presence of an Israeli state remains controversial and Israel still perceives existential threats arising from its neighbours, resulting in what has been referred to as an “asymmetry of motivation” (Walt, 1987: 44; Keohane, 1986: 185).¹⁰ This creates a paradox; while the US is powerful and secure enough to choose to influence rather than coerce allies, as it moves further from systemic limitations these very same pressures are inhibiting its power utility with regards to Israel. When issues of dispute arise within this relationship, the conversion of power sees Israel punching above its weight (Sheffer, Hofnung, 1987: 26).¹¹ The United States will not be significantly affected should, for example, the settlements in the occupied territories remain, whereas Israel sees a zero-sum game at stake.¹²

McFaul and Goldgeier (1992: 469-479) see the current system as divided between a core of more powerful states whose shared norms cause a reduction in the constraints of anarchy, and the periphery where states are less constrained by the shared norms, or ‘process variables,’ to return to Snyder’s terminology, which encompass regions such as Europe and North America, but does not cover the geopolitics of Israel’s position in the Middle East region. Closely linked is the idea of interdependence which can further explain the failure to convert power into outcomes without denying basic realist assumptions of anarchy and rational, unitary state actors.¹³ However, Keohane and Nye’s work on power and interdependence does shift significantly away from systemic abstraction towards a case by case approach, arguing “[t]here will never be a substitute for careful analysis of actual situations” (1977: 4). The crux of the interdependence argument revolves around the idea that both states will suffer if their relations are damaged. Hoffman (1975: 201) notes that the manipulation of interdependence is a key game in power relations today;

[a] way of narrowing the asymmetry...consists of accentuating the interdependency, even if it entails an apparent loss of autonomy...for the weaker partner. For it may be in his interest to entangle himself and the stronger one in a relationship in which the latter will in fact be obliged to transfer wealth or other resources to the weaker.

9 The further loosening of systemic constraints in what is now arguably a unipolar system, means US-Israeli relations are today more difficult to explain theoretically than ever.

10 Iranian President Ahmadinejad in 2006 allegedly called for Israel to be wiped from the map, (*The Economist*, May-2006), www.economist.com.

11 Examples of US resentment about being kept in the dark include the bombing of the Osiraq reactor in Iraq, the annexation of the Golan heights, and the siege of West Beirut (Stephens, 2006: 6). Mearsheimer and Walt (2006) also list a number of instances in which Israel has not behaved as a loyal ally should.

12 An American report in 2001 called for a freeze on settlements in the occupied territories but was ‘blatantly ignored’ by Ariel Sharon (Monshipouri, 2002: 68). Meanwhile, the repatriation of Arabs into Israel is seen as a potentially existential threat (Ben-Zvi, 2002: 89).

13 ‘Reductionist’ is the term used by Waltz (1979: 18) to describe theories that attempt to understand a whole through ‘the attributes and the interactions of its parts’.

Keohane and Nye's (1977: 13) notion of 'vulnerability' interdependence, described as the costliness and availability of alternatives or the ability of an actor to change the rules of the relationship, may help to shed light on the reality of this relationship. US attempts to court Arab states in the fifties were soon overtaken by the realisation that Israel could be a more stable partner in the face of determined Soviet and Pan-Arabic anti-Americanism (Walt, 1987: 52).¹⁴ Disproportionate provision of aid evinces the reliance the US has on Israel as an irreplaceable ally in the region. This may explain why the relationship is closer to parity than traditional measures of power might suggest.

It is the degree to which power between the US and Israel is affected that seems unique to this specific relationship. Interdependence begins to explain the deviation from regular power conceptions within this relationship while approaching the point on the aforementioned continuum after which specific domestic level factors within the United States are needed for a "special interpretation" (Sheffer, Hofnung, 1987: 2). Interdependence takes us into an adapted analysis of the relationship which abandons key realist concepts such as the notion of the state as a unitary actor.

Power with the Lobby

The influence of the lobby within the US may help to explain, with more accuracy, the power relationship between the United States and Israel. Whilst Israel may be dependent on US aid, in what Keohane and Nye (1977: 8) refer to as 'sensitivity', domestic factors constrain America from altering the rules of the relationship and increasing its vulnerability. The notion of the US as a unitary actor in the international system appears void here as direct links between powerful lobby organisations like the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and unofficial Israeli advocates circumvent the diplomatic process (Mearsheimer, Walt, 2006; Waltz, 1968: 44). Traditionally, and crucially for realist political theory, a state's stance toward another appears unified; no matter how many "internal heads were broken", only the actual decision reached has any significance (James, 1989: 220). The US-Israel relationship is unusual as the decision-making process has been significantly penetrated by single-cause political movements which take advantage of America's system of democracy.¹⁵

The power conversion processes mentioned previously may explain slight discrepancies between power and outcomes but the lobby is an exceptional case. While other lobby groups may from time to time inhibit the ability of the US to fully exercise its power abroad, e.g. the Greek lobby in the 1970s (Terry, 2005: 43-49), the particular strength of this lobby group makes this relationship especially difficult for any general theory to explain.

Reich (1984: v) notes, "the more economically and militarily dependent Israel becomes on the United States, the more it seems able to frustrate U.S. policy makers". This has led to the justification that only a strong Israel can be flexible, flying in the face of the standard logic that recalcitrance will increase with strength (Spiegel, 1985: 212; Walt, 1987: 45). It may be that this is due to the failure of the US to appear, or to act, as a single unit. Israel's relative international weakness is supplemented

¹⁴ For a discussion of the growth of Arab nationalism and Soviet influence in this period see Walt (1987: 50-105).

¹⁵ Elman (1995: 215) argues that it is a trait common to presidential systems, in which the 'electoral origins' of the executive and legislature are separated, that foreign policy is strongly influenced by parochial interests.

by its strong position within the US political system, sustained by the pro-Zionist lobby. Such a level of interdependence, argue Keohane and Nye (1977: 23), is “the opposite of realism.”

There are also implications here for neo-realism’s state of anarchy and the subsequent maximisation of power. While the United States is less constrained than most states by structural forces, having accepted the lobby as a significant force within the relationship, questions must be raised regarding the extent to which the US even gains from this relationship. Alexander Wendt (1992: 395) argues “[a]narchy is what states make of it” and that the self-help leitmotif of realism comes not from the structure but from the processes within it; “[s]elf-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy.” It is the inter-subjective factors of states’ relationships, particularly early interactions, that form their identities with regard to one another (1992: 396-399). The institution, relationship, or process variable thus formed can, under certain circumstances, maintain Wendt, produce altruism rather than self help between two states. Most other states share relations that have been ‘shaped and shoved’ over the course of time by structural forces which have caused hostility and conflict, keeping fresh within the collective mind the potential for friend to become enemy. This is the driving force behind the self-help system, the idea that anarchy makes the future ever uncertain. The US, nevertheless, has been a benign ally ever since Israel’s inception, arguably playing a crucial role in the establishment of the state.¹⁶ Lobby pressure within the United States has promoted an apparently altruistic policy towards Israel, negating the fear engendered in other relationships, even between the US and Britain, that realpolitik will dash the relationship on the rocks of anarchy. Interestingly, the ties of kinship and cultural affinity between the US and Britain are comparable to those between the US and Israel, and yet interdependence between the two is not as great. Could this be a result of Britain’s chequered past with the US: a colonial master, imperial oppressor, invading enemy, and finally a ‘special’ friend, all within recent history? Perhaps domestic factors have helped to construct a system of altruism rather than self-help. This proposition lends credibility to the next point: the US does not in fact gain at all in terms of power from its relations with Israel.

Normally a state would be expected to eschew any relations in which an ally would disproportionately benefit (Schweller, 1996: 110). The removal of concerns over relative gains would be consistent with the previously discussed tempering of anarchy resulting from America’s hegemony (Van Ness, 2002: 146).¹⁷ More useful, however, is the presence of domestic pressure which may have institutionalised the relationship to such an extent that it stands above and aside from any traditional

¹⁶ The lobby may even have had a direct hand in Truman’s decision to acknowledge the state of Israel, depending on which account is believed: Gilboa (1987: 40) states that Truman overruled his closest advisors in supporting the UN’s partition resolution whilst Spiegel (1985:33-37) claims an administration mix-up left Truman with little choice but to support a decision that had already been decided. Both these accounts differ from the image of a powerful domestic interest swaying Truman, as his famous comment about not having to answer to Arab constituents might suggest (Reich, 1984: 183). Spiegel (1985: 388) suggests such rhetoric may simply be opportunistic; making an unrelated decision appear to have been a response to constituent pressure. Gerson, (1977: 56-57) argues that the confluence of a number of external factors had a greater impact on Truman’s decision than internal groups, and also posits the lack of ‘hard’ evidence that any domestic ethnic group has ever altered US diplomacy. Such contradictory versions of causation make the use of such detail difficult for theorising.

¹⁷ Van Ness sees the current system of hegemony as the reason why many realist assumptions ‘provide little guidance or understanding in explaining state behaviour.’

conception of power politics, echoing liberal sentiments long reviled by realist thinkers. Since the first major arms deal between these two states, domestic propaganda, initially to justify this course of action, has evolved into a liberal crusade to protect the state of Israel from annihilation. The pro-Zionist movement garnered legitimacy from Kennedy's move toward Israel, securing support for increased amounts of aid even the ignominy of the Sabra and Shatila massacres severely dented US prestige by association, and even when the end of the Cold War removed the need to secure the region from Soviet expansion (Mearsheimer, Walt, 2006). The constant variable in American support for Israel appears to come from within, as any obvious power benefits the US may have once sought through Israel, prestigious or strategic, have been nullified. America's subsequent failure to play the honest broker in the Middle East has led to increasing radicalisation in the region and a vicious strain of anti-Americanism that has decimated US 'soft' power and threatened its economic interests in the area (Monshipouri, 2002: 67).

We have now moved from the extreme realist notion that the states pursue only power that can be directly converted into a universally applicable military preponderance, to a convoluted and subjective form of power that will be ignored or even sacrificed depending on the relationship. But what does endless subjectivity and relativism of power mean for international relations theory? We can redress the notion that a state will always pursue power by investigating how the US benefits from its links with Israel. Closer examination may lead us to believe that Israel is the more powerful partner or even that the US does not pursue power at all.

National Interest

National interest is perhaps even more an unruly concept than power. The two are very closely related as Morgenthau (1956: 5) famously theorised that national interest could be defined in terms of power, and Mearsheimer and Walt (2006) controversially argued that the pro-Zionist lobby significantly diverted and distorted the US national interest. National interest can be discussed by using rigid and abstract realist assumptions or, alternatively, more detailed analyses of foreign policy formation at the domestic level. Just as certain elements of the US-Israel relationship appeared to challenge the ubiquitous concept of power in theory, the potential influence of the lobby within this relationship may highlight the extent to which national interest is manufactured, endogenous, and theoretically unwieldy. Does policy follow interest or vice versa; does the tail in actuality wag the dog? If it does, the concept that Morgenthau tamed in order to explain and 'infuse rational order' into the subject of international relations may have broken away from the leash (1956: 5). Theory, realism in particular, should take what it finds in practice as its starting point, "a codification of political reality," rather than presenting idealistic visions of what *should* be, the rejection of which prompted the original formation of the paradigm (Carr, 1940: 17). Does this case study confirm or confound a theoretically utilitarian realist notion of the national interest?

National Interest without the Lobby

A realist interpretation of the national interest would depict a permanent set of policies, closely linked to power, involving the protection of the state's territorial, economic, and military interests, with survival the underlying priority; the rational choice of a unitary actor. Pareto (1935: 79) claims logic is often used to 'varnish' over conduct after the fact. He argues logical conduct must appear so both objectively and subjectively, positing the example of Greek mariners who felt sure that sacrifices to Poseidon were as rational as rowing with oars for a successful voyage (1935: 77). Without an objective and externally valid set of interests it is difficult for the theorist to assign the notion of rationality or logic to any set of policies. For this reason national interest cannot be deduced simply from political rhetoric. Can US ties to Israel be viewed as objectively rational, mandated by an interest in survival derived exogenously from the international system of anarchy, or are these links 'rational' only from an American perspective?

Realist theorising should recognise only the core principles, or 'primary national interest', if the concept is to retain its theoretical utility. Stephens (2006: 23) sees interests as divided between 'vital,' "which governments consider worthy of sacrifice and are prepared to back up with the use of force," and 'secondary,' "from which they can [choose] to retreat." There is a strong argument that US-Israel relations do not benefit America's primary national interests. The Middle East is undoubtedly a vital area in terms of prestige and strategy, but it is the Middle East, not the State of Israel, that is of intrinsic 'primary' interest to the United States (Chomsky, 1999: 19, 22). Israel may be attractive as a like-minded state in an otherwise antithetical area, but for realists this does not warrant unflinching US support. The pursuit of core interests is evident in the maintenance of close ties with Arab states as well as Israel. The relationship with Israel began only as it aligned with more fundamental American concerns, despite earlier pressure from lobbyists (Spiegel, 1985: 18). Kennedy only agreed to a closer Israeli partnership when earlier attempts to keep the area neutral and demilitarised had failed as Soviet military hardware permeated the region. The origins of the 'special' relationship can be found in the name of that most realist of concepts, the balance of power in the Middle East (Ben-Zvi, 2002: 387). Had Israel's survival been a core American interest it would not have been left to rely on Soviet arms during the first Arab-Israeli conflict, it would not have had arms requests repeatedly rejected prior to 1962, and significant arms sales to its Arab neighbours would not have continued since (Spiegel, 1985: 39, 265; Ben-Zvi, 2002: 7-9; Stephens, 2006: 41).

The only notable variable that changed before the initiation of prominent American-Israeli arms deals was America's perception of its core interests in the region being under threat (Stephens, 2006: 27). It was only after these events that the familiar rhetoric of a close kinship between the US and Israel began; Israel was America's fallback (Ben-Zvi, 2002: 13, 85; Spiegel, 1985: 91, 99, 123). The length of time between action and rhetoric speaks volumes about the causal relationship between core interests and policy, between 'primary national interest' and the ethical spin and bombast that sees previously insignificant states transformed into vital allies, just as 'Uncle Joe' became a 'Red Menace',

as the stamp of legitimacy is applied to a diplomatic volte-face (Carr, 1940: 87).¹⁸ When politicians posit the protection of Israel as being in the national interest they do not necessarily deceive the public, though it must be recognised that America's real interests and its relationship with Israel are not fully aligned. They are temporarily aligned and the relationship is obscuring America's core interests. Core interests, however, will remain constant and cannot be ignored.

The absence of a core national interest in the survival of Israel may explain the difficulties the US has in exercising its power. It can be hypothesised that real and fungible power is applicable only in cases where objective, 'primary', national interests are at stake. This may explain why America has never fought alongside Israel against its enemies, preferring indirect aid, yet it has taken up arms twice in the *region* since the end of the Cold War. America's core interests, rarely threatened in recent years, must be endangered to pull the state together, producing the kind of abstract personified actor that realist theorising requires. Without the firm 'shove' of structural forces, domestic groups will be free to move in different directions, subsequently hindering the application of power. If Israel is incidental to US security and survival, a secondary interest, then it is a small step to suggest it will be discarded should it begin to interfere with more vital interests

Realist principals have always seemed particularly at odds with America's idealism.¹⁹ For a nation founded on the rejection of the oppression and persecution rife in Europe, America's 'emotional urge' to escape the constraints of the distinctly European system of *realpolitik* is stronger than most (Morgenthau, 1952: 965). Political rhetoric in the US eschews the 'historical accident' of power politics and instead maintains a utopian vision of its own conduct; superior to the 'moral vacuum' they see in the affairs of others (Morgenthau, 1956: 34; Carr, 1940: 194). For expansionism read 'Manifest Destiny', for regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan, a 'War Against Terror' (Morgenthau, 1951: 9).

Nevertheless, morality in American policy, a realist would maintain, has always been subservient to realist goals of survival and security. Maslow's notion of the psychological need for man to pursue esteem, recognition, and love only after he has satisfied the basic human needs of food, shelter, and clothing is poignant here (1954: 80-106). It is a trait of US individualism that has seen its policy-makers frame international relations in terms of individual morals, despite their incompatibility (Waltz, 1968: 11; Kennan, 1952: 46). Many see the responsibility of a state's leaders as first and foremost to preserve the state, not to pander to the moral whims of special-interest groups therein; the former ensures the existence of the latter (Kennan, 1985/6: 206; Wolfers, 1962: 58). Morgenthau (1956: 12; 1952: 987) has argued that group morals can exist, contrary to the a-moralism that critics of realism ascribe to its theorising. A unitary actor model can have moral qualities which will be disrupted by attempts to introduce individual morality; Cavour D'Azeglio's famous remark that, "[i]f we did for

18 Carr (1940: 94, 186) highlights the sequence in which the US went from international debtor to creditor, preceding a reversal on the policy towards *laissez faire* before the justification of such a policy on ethical grounds, commenting 'political morality...tends...to be a codification of existing practice...' In a similar vein, Walt (1987: 42) quashes the notion that foreign aid is the cause rather than the effect of alliance formation.

19 Morgenthau argues such self-flattery is not an exclusively American trait; '[i]f anybody should be bold enough to write a history of world politics with so uncritical a method [as to believe such political rhetoric] he would easily and well nigh inevitably be driven to the conclusion that from Timur to Hitler and Stalin the foreign policy of all nations were inspired by the ideals of humanitarianism and pacifism' (Morgenthau, 1952: 966).

ourselves what we do for our countries, what rascals we would be” might be reversed to read, “if we did for our countries what we do for *ourselves* what rascals we should be” (cited in Smith, 1986: 107). It can be argued that the utopian experiment of the League of Nations and the neglect of traditional power politics were responsible for the horrors of the Second World War. Niebuhr (cited in Good, 1960: 601) similarly warned against both extreme self-interest and extreme moralism, recommending a “wise self-interest.” Carr (1940: 54) remarked that those who put ethics before politics will put the community’s needs before the individual. Are we to believe that this is what is happening here, the US sacrificing itself for Israel? It is more than likely that, if US interests were truly threatened, it would return to its pre-war, pre-hegemonic, policy of self-interested isolationism.

In short the lobby’s apparent influence, according to realist thought, is not a cause but an effect of true national interest. Much like the pressure from structural models, the persistence of lobby pressure does not determine policy, although it must be acknowledged that it does have an effect on details. Stephens (2006: 34) states, “domestic politics... does provide the immediate context in which decisions are made.” In this way, structural and lobby pressure can be seen as antagonistic, pushing and pulling US policy between realism and utopianism.²⁰ It is this ‘fine-tuning’ and ‘timing’, however, that leads us to talk of the lobby and its influence on perceptions of the external environment (Wolfers, 1962: 42; Spiegel, 1985: 386). Why have American interests in the Middle East focused upon Israel; why not a ‘special’ relationship with the oil-rich Saudis?

National Interest with the Lobby

The ‘national interest’ espoused by the lobby sees the core interest of the United States permanently aligned with those of Israel, a relationship which ‘transcends’ normal utility (Stephens, 2006: 3). It can be argued that special interests within US society have elevated Israel to a level akin to the protection of America’s own territory and values; framing a utopian pursuit as vital national interest. Subsequently, Waltz fears, “not only will policy be unstable but that its changing directions will be determined by internal pressures that have little to do with the state’s situation in the world,” causing fluctuation “between the grandiose and the frivolous” (1968: 14, 16). Domestic factors appear to have hijacked the realist concept of national interest, blurring the line between ‘desirable’ and ‘essential’ (Morgenthau, 1951: 117; Sheffer, Hofnung, 1987: 29). The pro-Zionist movement has taken a dual approach to the relationship, advocating its maintenance on both realist and utopian platforms.

The utopian credentials of this relationship are particularly strong. After the horrors of the Holocaust, the US became home to the largest Jewish population in the world which now constitutes a formidable demographic. In the American conscience, the story of Israel is one that mirrors that of the US, the duality of frontier societies breaking away from ‘old world’ oppression to settle in a land where they can live and worship freely is an oft cited reason behind the special relationship (Sheffer, Hofnung, 1987: 14; Spiegel, 1985: 1, 410).²¹ It should be noted that pro-Zionists have also sought to

²⁰ Good (1960: 614) insists such a tension can be ‘fruitful’.

²¹ Stephens (2006: 7) notes that within Israel American ties are more often framed in functional terms, explaining perhaps the charges of Israeli insensitivity to US interests. Biblical parallels with the salvation of mankind and the

frame their cause within a more traditional, rational, framework.

Great emphasis is placed, perhaps spuriously, on the role Israel plays in protecting the primary national interest more familiar to the average political realist. Apart from the legitimacy that this approach seeks to ensure, it also acts as an important counterweight to charges from scholars that this secondary interest actually harms primary ones. Israeli ties have been aligned with policies such as the Cold War and the 'War on Terror'; described as providing stability and prestige in the region. Pro-Israeli opinion has attempted to neutralise claims that support for Israel is directly responsible for Israeli belligerence, which destabilises the region, damages US credibility, and endangers economically important US-Arab relations (Sheffer, Hofnung, 1987: 14; Stephens, 2006: 19).²² Mearsheimer and Walt (2006) argue the US has a terrorism problem in part because it is so closely allied with Israel.²³ The form the relationship has taken, i.e. massive military and financial aid with the notable absence of a formal treaty, hints strongly that the relationship is the child of the American public. Congress, with its 'power of the purse', is far more exposed to public opinion and lobby tactics than the executive branch and has been the main source of governmental support for Israel. The primacy of core interests still surfaces occasionally as Presidents reject lobby pressure when they feel vital interests to be at stake, e.g. concerning arms sales to Arab states (Stephens, 2006: 41; Krasner, 1978). The true importance of the lobby comes between these occasions, when external constraints are reduced and the specifics of foreign policy are up for grabs (Jervis, 1976: 16-17). It is here that the national interest comes with a stamp reading 'Made in America'.

This national interest is the result of a 'trade-off' (Elman, 1995: 211, 213) between competing group biases, "the lowest common denominator" where separate interests meet (Jervis, 1976: 324). A national interest dictated by sentimentality and moral passion is far more unpredictable than a measured set of values formed rationally around a core set of universally objective goals. The power of the pro-Zionist movement represents an outright rejection of the concept of the state as a unitary actor, bringing a pluralistic concept of national interest (Stephens, 2006: 22). Examining the machinations of such a group appears necessary to fully explain this particular relationship but makes the theoretical study of international relations vastly more complex. If nature is a constant state of war, according to Hobbes (1949: 89), and certain rights were handed over to the 'Leviathan' in exchange for basic protection, it seems that as the anarchy of nature is temporarily tamed the state's subjects wish to renege on the deal.²⁴ The imposition of individual morality onto the action of the state appears to be evidential of the American public having their cake and eating it too, and will result in that

return of the Israelites has even seen the powerful Christian right join the pro-Zionist movement in support of close Israeli ties (Zunes, 2004).

²² Critics often cite the Middle East peace process as typical of the incompatibility of American and Israeli interests (Sheffer, Hofnung, 1987: 26).

²³ Such critics are often labelled anti-Semitic, and if in public office, can be sure to come up against the financial might of one of the many pro-Zionist public actions committees (PACs) come election time (Mearsheimer, Walt, 2006; Chomsky, 1999: 30); Professor Alan Dershowitz has indeed claimed Mearsheimer and Walt's article used information gathered from 'neo-Nazi hate groups' (Zunes, 2006).

²⁴ Similar sacrifices of 'natural rights' of the individual are to be found within the US constitution (Jay, 1787: accessed 10/07/07).

morality's destruction (Morgenthau, 1951: 34).

The inherent problem with pursuing this moralistic policy or even, to take the weaker argument, dressing self-interested policies in a liberal garb, is that such rhetoric means much more in this quixotic nation. What decision makers in the US may have failed to recognise is that, as they began to place closer ties with Israel in a moral framework, they inextricably anchored it in the public's mind to American identity; a mind Morgenthau (1951: 39) saw as "weakened in its understanding of foreign policy by half a century of...intoxication with moral abstraction." While decision makers may have seen such rhetoric as a harmless ploy to win the support of public opinion they may not have realised the bridges they were burning.²⁵ Arnold Wolfers (1962: 32) claimed the ability to switch quickly from amity to enmity is crucial for the balance of power as was evinced in the US reversals in policy toward the Soviet Unions, Japan, and Germany post 1945. He continues (1962: 65) to describe the rejection of morals in international politics to be "not only cynical but manifestly unrealistic" (and reality is what we should be explaining). Americans may feel the abandonment of such a policy threatens the 'survival' of the American ideal and its symbolism (Carr, 1940: 42; Good, 1960: 599). Snyder (1991: 262) blames this 'looseness' between what is and what is not a core national interest for the US interventions in Korea and Vietnam. He derides the "ideological mythmaking" of special interest groups and argues that the adoption of such moral crusades can transform a restless foreign policy into imperialism and overreach.²⁶ Morgenthau (1951: 116) cites the example of the Truman Doctrine, a legitimate realist policy of protecting the balance of power in Europe, soon hijacked by its moralistic rhetoric into justifying calamitous forays into South East Asia; lamenting this opportunistic faux-morality: "the Administration has become the prisoner of its own propaganda" (1951: 237).²⁷

Overall, it is clear that domestic factors can have a significant impact on international relations, whether it is simply the channelling of vague core interests into specific policies or the more ominous subversion of the national interest toward infinite moral crusading (Jervis, 1976: 17). From an abstract, realist, viewpoint it is more basic interests that determine policy, with the lobbyists merely "mimeograph operators", superfluous to a relationship that can be accounted for without their "moving papers around" (Sen. Benjamin Rosenthal cited in Reich, 1984: 201). All discussion of the sway of secondary over primary interests in this case, however, remains speculative. The US has not yet been significantly challenged and therefore it cannot be proved that ties with Israel are damaging core interests. Even should such a challenge be made, the complex nature of practice would leave a residual theoretical polemic over the causal variables. Domestic level groups may not have causal primacy over international pressures but they are extremely useful in explaining certain relationships

25 For example, Truman felt it necessary to argue that the fate of America's way of life depended on aid to Turkey and Greece in order to win congressional approval (Snyder, 1991: 265).

26 Snyder (1991: 41); 'a politically strong group could become the agent of extreme overexpansion if cynical, mobilising elites inadvertently socialised successor elite generations to believe the imperial myths, failing to explain their instrumental origins.'

27 He continues, forewarning policy makers, '[i]f your better judgment leads you near the road of rational policy, your critics will raise the ghost of your own deception, convict you out of your own mouth..., and stop you in your tracks.' (1951: 239); Similarly, Kennan warns that history will not forgive mistakes because they are justifiable in terms of domestic politics, and that such excuses can lead a state to 'complete disaster,' (Kennan, 1952: 73).

within foreign policy. Can we now attempt to predict whether America's idealistic affiliation with Israel will withstand a realist onslaught?

Domestic Influence and Structure / the Lobby and Neo-realism

Thus far we have concentrated on how far realist assumptions can help us to understand this relationship. Now we use the details that have emerged from this investigation to see what insight and additional hypotheses this relationship adds to realist thought, and in particular to the more methodologically rigorous branch of neo-realism. How can this relationship be used to develop, rather than to confound, political realism?

The realist paradigm appears to split over the causes of state behaviour and the role played by domestic actors in the international system. Classical realist thinkers from Thucydides (Doyle, 1991: 174) to Morgenthau (1956: 31) showed great interest in domestic affairs, tracing the inherent drives within the international system to man's natural lust for power, seeing international relations as a one-way street from states' interactions to outcomes (Smith, 1986: 27; Waltz, 1990: 33). Waltz's attempt to bring a more scientific approach to the study of international relations sees no place for the multitude of emotions, desires, and passions that accompany the study of men's decisions. Waltz (1979: 26) recognised earlier approaches as unwieldy, believing the disparity between the unbounded potential of men's minds and limited international outcomes to be better explained by structural forces acting on states. The controversy of this approach undoubtedly stems from its apparent portrayal of man as a helpless automaton, bound by the exaggerated constraints of structure (Burchill, 1996: 90). However, as Waltz has argued, much criticism comes from a failure to appreciate the nature of theory. Waltz's rejection of unit-level factors stems, not from his failure to acknowledge their existence, but from his primary aim of determining the pressures from international structure (2000: 27).

After Waltz (1979: 78) establishes these structural forces, however, the issue of drawing a line between domestic influences and structural pressures, free will versus determinism remains. Waltz (1986: 331) argued that these two levels of abstraction could never be brought into one theory but has called, with others (Donnelly, 2000: 120-126; Zakaria, 1992: 178; Keohane, 1986: 198), for an approach that would explain how international and domestic factors interact. M.J. Smith (1986: 224) feels that "[r]ealists have perhaps unwittingly contributed to an unfortunate compartmentalization of domestic and international history and theory, leading to fruitless methodological arguments about which factors have 'primacy' when we should be studying how they affect one another." Thus far the lobby has been used as a proxy for all domestic influences in international relations. The initial aim of investigating the US-Israel relationship through realism has shown that it ultimately requires a theory that can explain and predict when structural forces will predominate over domestic, and vice versa. In this case we can see the dominance of domestic factors does not contradict structural theory as they operate at a time when structural pressures are weak

The above discussion, while causing some difficulty for traditional realist interpretation, does not depart so radically from the paradigm that its features cannot be utilised to aid its progression, rather

than its demise. The core assumption of neorealist thought, that the state is the dominant actor in a system of anarchy relying on self-help to ensure survival emerges intact. However, the significance of domestic influence on state behaviour, is unavoidable if more than the minimal level of insight is to be gleaned from this type of case study. Using the strong base of Waltz's structure and its emphasis on the underlying forces of anarchy, an auxiliary hypothesis can attempt to explain the relationship between power utility, security, and domestic influence.

Power Utility – While expected roles were not completely reversed, the utility of power within the US-Israeli nexus did not conform to the fungible concept structuralists would expect. Power was seen to be subverted and hindered by non-structural variables, particularly factors emanating from within the US. It is for this reason that this variable is referred to as 'power utility' as power, or capability, is regarded as objectively constant while utility can be altered according to circumstance.

Security – Survival is felt to be the ultimate goal of states and so security will come before all else. In a system of anarchy where there is no higher authority than the state, the state must provide its own security. If security is seen as only the freedom from existential threats, it suddenly becomes far less of a constraining factor, arguably facilitating temporary neglect of strict self-help policies. This existential security spectrum, in which the US and Israel are poles apart, allows for a relaxation of anarchy and structural pressures. National interest plays a key role here, demonstrating the perception of security within the state.

Domestic Influence – This final variable is the major result of this investigation and comprises a theoretically useful manifestation of the pro-Zionist lobby. The domestic influence variable represents an attempt to bring theory and practice together; using some elements discarded to the unit level by Waltz (1979: 46, 57) whilst maintaining his level of abstraction, allowing them to interact with his structure. The idea that statesmen's motives are so multitudinous as to negate any useful categorisation holds true. What can be explained is when such ideas may influence policy and when they will take a back seat to structural imperatives. Structure can tell us something about foreign policy formation but does not replace its study, just as chemistry assists but does not replace biology (Waltz, 1979: 38). The hypotheses can be summarised as:

The influence of domestic groups is dependent upon the security of the state and is bound closely to it.

As less intrinsic goals are sought the power utility of the state will decline as fungible power, and the resolve and sacrifice that it requires, fails to follow policies not obviously linked to the survival of the state.

As insecurity follows the decline of power utility, structural pressures will return to the fore and will once more dictate foreign policy.

As has been noted in our case study, as security increases structural pressures subside and the results of anarchy become less prominent. As this happens, the influences of domestic groups such

as the pro-Zionist lobby grow into the vacuum that is left resulting in less predictable policies. Waltz (1990: 36) alluded to this notion; “[a]s internal and external circumstances change, structures and states may bear more or less causal weight.”

As security increases, the national interest will start to accommodate secondary pursuits which may or may not involve moral crusades of the type witnessed in this relationship. Secondary policies will also fail to solidify the state as a unitary actor. As the foreign policy of a state moves further from the core goals of survival, domestic influence will have more of a free hand in constructing the national interest.

Finally, the decline in power utility will cause a gradual haemorrhaging of security until it becomes a salient issue once more. National credibility, finances and political capital will be expended on policy that appears arbitrary in the eyes of other states. In short, as a state takes on the trappings of imperialism, it will waste its “national substance” (Rosecrance, Stein, 1993: 8).²⁸ The secondary projects that previously dominated the national interest will be forced to make way for these more powerful pressures and security will again determine the weight of domestic influence (and power utility).

This hypothesis also hints at the balance that must be struck between realism and idealism and between free will and determinism in examining state behaviour (Zakaria, 1992: 177). Once a state is privileged to pursue goals emerging from its domestic politics it must resist the temptation to ignore structure and pursue imperialistic crusades.

A state may feel it enjoys complete security and freedom of action but it must maintain a deep respect for the structural gods, sacrificing the pursuit of certain desires to retain its relative autonomy. Should a state become arrogant and refuse to accept the restrictions intrinsic to the system, it will soon find decreasing security leaving many policy paths blocked. Niebuhr once warned against policies based completely on self interest or alternatively on strict morality. Both he and Kissinger felt that states enjoy the greatest freedom when they accept their limitations (Smith, 1986: 125, 128). Such ideas are common in philosophy, Benedict de Spinoza (1996: 180) famously suggested that only when man acknowledges his physical and emotional limits can he truly be free. Simply because a state is not immediately constrained by the system, it does make it exempt from the system; states with greater options must choose wisely to in order to break the security cycle.

The US-Israel relationship can now be reviewed in light of this new hypothesis. Since the Second World War the US has enjoyed an unprecedented level of security, allowing it to indulge in policies not directly related to its survival. It could be argued that the Cold War represented a significant security threat as the Americans and Soviets found themselves locked in nuclear stalemate. The ideological nature of this ‘war’, however, demonstrated that the drive for this policy came from within the prospective states rather than the constraints of structure. The strength of the lobby has led to a commitment to Israel stretching beyond the structurally induced interest in the Middle East; securing

²⁸ The familiar idea of the ‘security dilemma’ applies here as freedom from structural constraint causes a lack of rationality within the secure state’s policies evoking anxiety elsewhere

the relationship as it assumes the symbolism of liberal America's rejection of from realpolitik. US power, however, has begun to be detrimentally affected by this policy. Increasingly moralistic policies have severely hindered what the US can do with its superior capabilities, including the withdrawal of support for Israel if it becomes a less reliable ally. The decline of US power utility is particularly extreme within this relationship as Israel can exploit, uniquely, domestic factors within the US. American power is restricted due to its inability to punish or even to control its partner.

The final stage of the hypothesis offers insight into the future of the relationship. The suggestion that a decline in power utility will see a subsequent fall in security and the shedding of such secondary, domestically induced, issues from what is regarded as the national interest, and foresees that American support for Israel will eventually evaporate. Waltz (2001: 28, 37) has argued that due to America's 'misuse of power' since the end of the Cold War "[m]ultipolarity is developing before our eyes." In this sense Mearsheimer and Walt's (2006) belief that the lobby group is working against the US national interest gains credibility. An early example of the return to hard realist solipsism can be seen in America's actions following the 2001 terrorist attacks, particularly the rejection of multilateralism, which is not accounted for in a self-help system. As the US begins to feel itself insecure, it will ally itself more with states that complement rather than obstruct its power and its pursuit of security. If Israel cannot pull its weight, it will be jettisoned.²⁹

Conclusion

This study has confirmed that US-Israeli relations cannot be fully explained by classical or neo-realism. However, the two-way process in which elements of the relationship have been studied through realism and in which the realist paradigm has been examined through this case study has yielded positive results. The focus on the pro-Zionist lobby, or at least what it represents, unearthed the key factor in this relationship, touching upon the problem of realist theory conflicting with practice.

Firstly, the difficulty traditional conceptions of power have encountered within this relationship have been displayed. It became apparent that in order to adequately explain what was happening in this partnership, domestic level factors must be included to account for America's failure to convert its power. Next, the traditionally unruly subject of the national interest was addressed. Once again it emerged that strict neo-realism could not fully account for the introduction of secondary interests which sought goals beyond the realist staples of security and survival. The concepts of power and national interest both displayed unpredictable tendencies, therefore realist assumptions became less applicable within this relationship, suggesting realist theory was unsuited to dealing with this anomalous case. Such conclusions would clearly display deep flaws and perhaps even the demise of the neo-realist project.

29 Chomsky (1999:23-27) reaches a similar conclusion: '[h]ad it not been for Israel's perceived geopolitical role... it is doubtful that the various pro-Israeli lobbies in the U.S. would have had much influence in policy formation....Correspondingly, it will very likely erode if Israel comes to be seen as a threat rather than a support to the primary U.S. interesting the Middle East region.'

Finally, these anomalous findings were taken and an attempt was made to reconcile them with structural realism. An attempt was made, through a consistency of abstraction which requires domestic influence to remain a necessarily vague concept, which attempts to predict (or at least make 'intelligible') the unexpected (Hoffman, 1977: 52). To the political theorist this opens up the possibility of delineating between structural and domestic forces. Strict adherence to Waltz's structure allows us only to lead the student of international relations as far as neorealist abstraction can before domestic level theories of foreign policy and decision making are needed, marking a clearer methodological boundary between theory and practice. This innovation will be useful in circumscribing and clarifying the use of theory in explaining this and other relationships. The most important outcome has been the validation of Waltz's theory; the prediction that a state's security and survival will continue to rely upon a respect for realist assumptions, which will return to prominence when security becomes scarce. Rather than proving that the US-Israeli relationship is in some ways above and exempt from the traditional features of neo-realist thought, it can be suggested that the relationship is merely exhibiting a temporary liberal facade. The primary finding of this study suggests these ties are still anchored in the neo-realist realm and will continue to be inextricably bound to the concepts of power and security.

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