

## Introduction

On 27 December 1962, Foreign Minister Golda Meir met President John F. Kennedy in the White House. This was their first meeting, and it produced one of the more known statements made by an American president regarding Israeli–American relations: ‘The United States has special relations with Israel, as we have had and still have with Great Britain.’<sup>1</sup> Though no student of Israeli–American relations will deny that there were and are special ties between the two nations, the debate was: Since when were Israeli–American relations special? The answers varied depending on the scholar’s approach and understanding of the causes of those relations. Some emphasize realism, while others see ideals as factors that drive and underpin the relationship between the two countries. Melvyn Leffler summarizes the difference between these schools of thought. The ‘realist theories focus on power and survival and dwell on the distribution of power in the international system’; the idealists believe that foreign policy was driven by ideas, ideologies, and historical memories.<sup>2</sup> The realists assume that the relations between the two countries are underlined by strategic considerations, and these determine the date on which special relations between the two countries began. Thus, most proponents of the realist school of thought mark the 1967 June War as the turning point in American–Israeli relations. Following its outstanding victory, they argued, the United States came to regard Israel as a strategic asset. A few scholars have suggested that the 1958 crisis in the Middle East was the point of change. Following the crisis, the Eisenhower administration came to view Israel as a stalwart ally in a volatile region. Others cite 1970 as the date of change, when Israel acted, under American request, to save King Hussein of Jordan from the threat of Syria. There are those who

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of Meeting of Foreign Minister Mrs. Meir with President Kennedy, 27 December 1962, Israel State Archives [henceforth ISA], FO 4317/8.

<sup>2</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 6.

go as far as the 1973 Yom Kippur War, after which the Nixon administration provided Israel with unprecedented military and economic aid.<sup>3</sup> This line of argument is problematic. Basing Israeli–American relations on interests and power makes it difficult to explain why President Woodrow Wilson endorsed the Balfour Declaration in 1917; why his successors and members of congress supported the Balfour Declaration and the idea of a Jewish national home throughout the interwar years; and why President Harry S. Truman actively supported the idea of a Jewish state. After all, a quick glance at the Middle East’s map lays bare where the American interests laid, and interests would have dictated that the Americans would shy away from the Zionists.

It is more probable that idealism is a better explanation. Compared to the relatively homogenous realist school of thought – its proponents differ on timing but agree on substance (i.e., that strategic interests decided the course of the Israeli–American relations) – the proponents of the idealistic school of thought are more heterogeneous. They offer three different approaches to the factors underlying the special relationship. One is ‘political culture’, which is a combination of religion, values, and self-identity.<sup>4</sup> Another feature is the study of

<sup>3</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, ‘The United States and Israel since 1948: “Special Relations?”’ *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Spring 1998), 232; Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3; Abraham Ben-Zvi, *From Truman to Obama* (Tel Aviv: Miskal, 2011), 14; Arlene Lazarowitz, ‘Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance: The Johnson Administration, the State Department, and the Middle East, 1964–1967’, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (January 2008), 25; Zach Levey, ‘The United States’ Skyhawk Sale to Israel, 1966: Strategic Exigencies of an Arms Deal’, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (April 2004), 256; Douglas Little, ‘The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957–68’, *Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 25 (1993), 563–564; John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 4–23; David Rodman, ‘Phantom Fracas: The 1968 American Sale of F-4 Aircraft to Israel’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6 (November 2004), 140–141; Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.–Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015); Nadav Safran, *Israel the Embattled Ally* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 448ff.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Russell Mead, ‘The New Israel and the Old: Why Gentile Americans Back the Jewish State’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 4 (July/August 2008), 28–46; Richard Ned Lebow, ‘Woodrow Wilson and the Balfour Declaration’, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (December 1968), 501–523; Bernard Reich, *Securing the Covenant: United States–Israel Relations after the Cold War*

Israeli–American special relations through cultural representations such as media, films, and literature.<sup>5</sup> Another subfield is the distinct, rich, and flourishing study of the history of Christian Zionism. It encompasses the relations between Protestants and Zionists from the seventeenth century to the end of the twentieth century and their impact on the American relations with the Zionist movement and Israel.<sup>6</sup> The idealists, with their wide variety, offer a time frame that extends from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. However, some of them limit the discussion to the 1910s and 1920s, while others start their discussion in the post-1967 June War period or even later. While idealism seems to better explain American–Israeli special relations, still, the fractured time frame presented by the various scholars and their divergent approaches lead to more questions. After all, religion and political culture remained significant forces during the years missing from the present literature. In addition to that, the

(Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 4–6; Jonathan Rynhold, *The Arab–Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 28; Elizabeth Stephens, *US Policy toward Israel* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), ix; Michael Thomas, *American Policy toward Israel* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1–3.

<sup>5</sup> Amy Kaplan, *Our American Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Shaul Mitelpunkt, *Israel in the American Mind: The Cultural Politics of U.S.–Israel Relations, 1958–1988* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Irvine H. Anderson, *Biblical Interpretation and Middle East Policy* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 1–19; Yaakov Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Frank Brecher, *Reluctant Ally* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 10; Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Eric R. Crouse, *American Christian Support for Israel, 1948–1975* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015); Hertzfel Fishman, *American Protestantism and a Jewish State* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1973); Samuel Goldman, *God's Country* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Daniel G. Hummel, *Covenant Brothers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Paul C. Merkley, *Christian Attitudes towards the State of Israel* (Montreal: McGill–Queens University Press, 2001); Jason M. Olson, *America's Road to Jerusalem* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018); Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Faydra L. Shapiro, *Christian Zionism: Navigating the Jewish–Christian Border* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015); Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

separation between the various components of the idealist school of thought, political culture, cultural representations, and history of Christian Zionism, seem artificial.

Or maybe it was the Jewish, or the Israeli lobby, as John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt suggested in their controversial book, that decided the course of the Israeli–American relations. This is undoubtedly a point worthy of careful consideration – which will be reviewed throughout the next pages. But once again, President Woodrow Wilson’s endorsement of the Balfour Declaration, which was followed by sweeping congressional support for the Declaration in the following years, suggests otherwise. To talk about the Israeli or Jewish lobby in 1917 and the rest of the 1910s and 1920s is to overstretch the idea and meaning of the lobby. Hence, there must be other explanations.

In this book, I will propose a structure that draws upon all of the previous and add to it. Employing an integrative approach that will synthesize existing literature and primary sources, I will suggest that the relations between the two nations were based on idealism, political culture, and strategic ties. Suggesting that the Zionist and later Israeli–American relations resemble a tangled web that consist of multiple threads woven together, my intention is to explore those various threads. Based on primary sources collected in multiple archives in Israel and the United States, I will discuss the development of relations built through the constant contact between peoples and ideas. The book will show how presidents and prime ministers, state officials, and ordinary people from both countries impacted each other. This influx was possible as the relations between Israel and the United States were based on constants, over which the ephemeral was negotiated. The constants were religion, values, and history, serving the bedrock of the relations between the two countries, and, more importantly, between the two people. The ephemeral, which was American interests, was negotiated against those constants.

But can values and ideas supersede interests and power considerations? Scholars of international history grappled with this question. The proponents of the idealist school have an answer. They went to the archives, read the documents, the memories, the testimonies, and came back convinced that ideas matter. Leaders and politicians justified their actions with ideas and ideology, and their deeds validated the

legitimacy of their reasoning.<sup>7</sup> I think so, too. The book examines the forces which shaped the relationships as well as the people and institutions who gave meaning and content to the special relations. These will include presidents, senior officials, members of congress, members of media, religious figures, people of influence, words and arts, and members of the security, intelligence, economic, and industrial communities. Their labour laid the groundwork for the special relations and filled them with content in various fields of interest and point of connection. By integrating these components and the constant contact between the people from each country – from the President down – it is possible to understand how deep, intense, and pervasive the ties between the two countries were – and, as of 2021, still are. The underlying thesis of this book is that constants – religion, values, and history – set the course of the relations as well as their development and structure, whereas the ephemeral – the interests – were weighed against the constants. In order to show the longevity of the constants, I will apply a *long durée* approach. I will start in 1917 when the constants had yielded, for the first time, an actual political action and will end the discussion at the present (2021). This extended time frame will make it possible to comprehend the scope and breadth of the Israeli–American special relationship.

My broad spatial and temporal approach will also allow me to overcome a significant obstacle, which is the lack of primary sources for the period beginning in the late 1980s. The vast majority of the archival documents pertinent to this book became available to the public twenty-five to thirty years after their creation.<sup>8</sup> By this reasoning, the book should have ended with the Reagan administration and the first Shamir government. I did not do that for

<sup>7</sup> Akira Iriye, ‘Culture and International History’, in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 241–256; Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 8–9.

<sup>8</sup> In many cases throughout the book, I present an American position or statement based on Israeli sources. This is possible because the Israeli diplomats were in constant touch with American officials and diplomats in the Department of State and White House as well with members of Congress and, of course, friends of Israel, Jews and non-Jews, who had access to the president. The Israeli diplomats reported back to Jerusalem what they heard in Washington, allowing the researcher a glance into what happened behind closed doors also from the American side, where American sources were not available.

two main reasons. First, this is a study of New Diplomatic History, which means that I embarked on a quest that involved exploring issues beyond the realm of state-produced diplomatic documents. That serves my argument that the Israeli–American special relations have been and continue to be forged not only by diplomats and heads of state but also by people within and without the government, involved in the cultural, economic, and strategic issues. Their actions are recorded in documents deposited in state archives, and beyond. Moreover, my argument is that the bedrock of these relations were constants. I will show how the constants were in operation during the ‘documented’ period and how they were still applicable, mainly through performance, in the ‘undocumented’ period. Thus, the *long durée* approach will allow me to show the sources, the development, and the prevalence of the constants and the dimension of continuity that dominated the relations between the two nations.