

The Israel Lobby?

The Influence of American Jewish Groups on the Carter Administration's Middle
Eastern Policy

By

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Thesis

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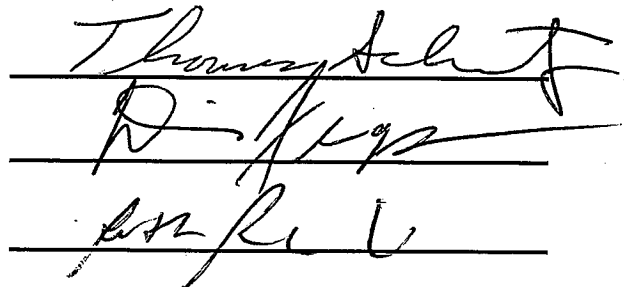

Three handwritten signatures are written on three horizontal lines. The top signature is 'Thomas Scholtz', the middle one is 'D. Kays', and the bottom one is 'S. R. U.'.

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding the “Israel Lobby” and Carter as a Case Study

Barack Obama’s promise for new policies towards the Middle East was tested only weeks into his term. Congressional and media criticism reacted to the administration’s choice for the head of the National Intelligence Council. Charles Freeman, a former ambassador to Saudi Arabia and outspoken critic of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, charged in a public statement that “a powerful lobby” motivated the outcry against him as the nominee. He further alleged that his contentious experience proved that Obama’s goal for policy change in the Middle East was doomed at the outset.¹ Freeman accused the “Israel Lobby” of using “dishonor and indecency” to force “exclusion of any and all options for decision by Americans and our government other than those that it favors.”² His implication that American Jews knowingly and successfully controlled American policy toward the Middle East did not represent a unique argument.

Notably, Freeman’s personal view aligned itself with the highly debated book *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, written by political scientists John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. Mearsheimer and Walt asserted, “The activities of the groups and individuals who make up the (Israel) lobby are the main reason why the United States pursues policies in the Middle East that make little sense on either strategic or moral grounds.”³ Specifically, Mearsheimer and Walt contended the “Israel Lobby” in

¹ “Freeman speaks out on his exit | The Cable,” *The Cable | FOREIGN POLICY*, section goes here, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/03/10/freeman_speaks_out_on_his_exit (accessed March 29, 2009).

² *Ibid.*

³ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U. S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), 111.

the United States was the factor responsible in leading President George Bush to invade Iraq in 2003. Their argument came at a critical time, striking a nerve in Jewish and pro-Israel communities in the United States. In 2007, the year the book was published, leaders in politics and media were grappling with the perception that Iraq had been a failure. This belief made Mearsheimer and Walt's argument even more politically charged as it looked to assess blame for the "mistake" on a specific American constituency.

Mearsheimer and Walt made broad, sweeping claims about an "Israel Lobby" without basing their argument on historical research or analysis. The authors admit in their book that their sources derive mostly from secondary literature. Additionally, they conceded that the American political system was made up of a plurality of forces, but the two spent little time at all uncovering these additional influences in shaping Middle East policy. These oversights included leadership in specific Arab countries, domestic populations in the Middle East, terrorism, and the personal views of American leaders. Mearsheimer and Walt concentrated on the "Israel Lobby" without putting the lobby into a larger context.

A historical case study, with full consideration of the role of the "Israel Lobby" offers one road to gain an understanding of how policy is made in regards to the Middle East. Instead of continuing intellectual debate based on broad statements, this thesis aims to test specific policy decisions made during the Jimmy Carter administration. President Carter provides a critical case study because of his choice to sell F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia and his task in negotiating an agreement between Egypt and Israel. Singling out

these policy decisions allows for the influence of pro-Israel lobbies to be considered within the context of other significant factors affecting American foreign policy.

The Intersection of Carter and Pro-Israel Lobbies

Soon after reaching D.C., Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan wrote Carter a memorandum explaining the American Jewish community and their political capabilities in Washington.⁴ His memorandum served two purposes. First, Jordan's memorandum gave credence to American Jews historical involvement in American politics. Second, Jordan laid out to the president the political realities of American Jewish participation in terms of voting, campaign contributions, and Congress. Jordan's work proved that the administration understood the ability of the American Jewish community to affect their political initiatives, but current scholarship does not stress the intersection of these two forces. Instead, two separate literatures make up the current intellectual space: Carter and his policy in the Middle East, and the "Israel Lobby" and its role in American politics.

America's Policy in the Middle East Under the Carter Administration

Conventional scholarship places Carter in the category of a failed president. To investigate the reason for this label, Gaddis Smith wrote Morality, Reason, and Power in 1986 to analyze Carter's foreign policy agenda. Smith concentrated on the shaping of Carter's worldview and how this ideology was reflected in his foreign policy. As a campaigner, Carter focused on morality in forming foreign policy. Carter believed world order problems should be solved by "international collaboration" through multilateralism

⁴ "Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics." Hamilton Jordan to Jimmy Carter. June 1977. In *Jordan*. Vol. 34. Jimmy Carter Library.

rather than acting alone.⁵ Smith depicted Carter's change in ideas about foreign policy coinciding with his closeness to Zbigniew Brzezinski. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski viewed power as the ultimate end and importance in international relations. Even more pressing, Brzezinski contended, "The nature and very existence of Soviet power were the primary obstacles to the creation of a stable world."⁶ Brzezinski viewed foreign policy through a lens focused on increasing American power and crippling any Soviet attempts to increase their own power or sphere of influence in the world. Carter's change in favor of Brzezinski's ideology was a major factor in shaping Carter's policy decisions. Eventually Carter and Brzezinski's close relationship factored in Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's decision to step down from Carter's cabinet.⁷ Not only did the Carter-Brzezinski relationship affect Carter's inner circle, but also this relationship strained relations with the American Jewish community.

Camp David and the bilateral peace between Egypt and Israel marked a triumph for the president, and a moment that Gaddis Smith seized as a way to highlight the positives of the Carter years. Smith asserted that Carter worked harder than any president before him to solve issues relating to the Middle East.⁸ Even with Smith focusing on peace between Egypt and Israel as a direct product of Carter's actions, Smith still maintained that on the whole defeat and struggle described President Carter's foreign policy record.

Gaddis Smith's attempt to stress the positive of Carter's foreign policy with Camp David was seconded by Burton and Scott Kaufman. Conversely, the Kaufmans put little

⁵ Gaddis Smith, *Morality, reason, and power: American diplomacy in the Carter years*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

energy into praising Camp David and spent more time focusing on Carter's failures. In their book published in 2006, The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr., the authors' agreed with E.J. Dionne's argument that Carter represented a "lost opportunity" to implement modern day liberalism into the mainstream of American political thought.⁹ This "lost opportunity" occurred because of Carter's inability to organize the White House at the beginning of his term and the president's trouble in creating a message to reach out to the American people.¹⁰ While 1978 presented a turning point where Carter became a stronger leader, the mistakes of the first half of his administration were exacerbated by Iran's revolution and the rapid increase in inflation at home.

Pro-Israel Lobbies in the United States and Their Role

Before the creation of the state of Israel, the question of American Jewish loyalty and Zionism was an issue in American political circles. The writings and speeches of Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis best encapsulate this fear of American Jewish political activity and the repercussions for American policy. In a speech given April 25, 1915 titled "The Jewish Problem: How to Solve It," Brandeis addressed dual loyalty and patriotism. In the section of his speech titled *Zionism and Patriotism*, Brandeis alleged, "Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine, though he feels that neither he nor his descendants will ever live there, will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so."¹¹ Brandeis's contention that an American Jew can be a Zionist and still be loyal to the United States serves as an intellectual starting

⁹ Scott Kaufman and Burton Ira Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr* (New York: University P of Kansas, 2006), xiii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xvi.

¹¹ Louis D. Brandeis, "The Jewish Problem: How to Solve It," Speech to the Conference of Eastern Council of Reform Rabbis, 25 Apr. 1915, University of Louisville, Louis D. Brandeis School of Law, 5 Apr. 2009

<<http://www.law.louisville.edu/library/collections/brandeis/node/234>>.

point for discussion. His speech also proves a consistent mistrust of American Jewish political action in the United States.

After the creation of the state of Israel, the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 was reconsidered in the 1960's. Congress looked at Jewish organizations to see if they did in fact convey too much Israeli government influence into the American political process. Nancy Jo Nelson's "The Zionist Organization Structure" attested that the structure of Jewish organizations allowed for pro-Israel influence on American media and public opinion.¹² Published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* in 1980, Nelson's article tracked the development and change in the hierarchy of Jewish organizations in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s in order to measure these organizations' political power. She found that the Conference of Presidents and the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee presented the two strongest political forces in the Jewish community. Nelson's article contributed a historical and practical overview of political organizations constructed by the American Jewish community. This allowed her to comprehend pro-Israel sentiment and its effect on the larger American public.

Nelson pushed forth an argument that stressed a great deal of influence on the government from American Jewish organizations, a manifestation of the Jewish community as a whole. In response to arguments of this nature, Stuart Eizenstat contended that the United States' policy with Israel resulted from a healthy relationship between American Jews and the United States government. Eizenstat worked for the Carter administration before becoming an adjunct professor at the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government. In his article published in 1990 "Loving Israel-

¹² Nancy J. Nelson, "The Zionist Organizational Structure" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1980), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2536485> (accessed February 25, 2008).

Warts and All,” Eizenstat argued that the American government was constructed to allow special interest groups to display their wants and needs. American Jews acted the same way as other lobbies in the United States. In the case of American Jewry, a large majority wanted Israel to be protected and supported, and pro-Israel lobbies were a result of this organized movement, not an illegitimate conspiracy.¹³

Brandeis’s writings and speeches in the early part of the 20th century followed by Nelson and Eizenstat’s work show a distinct course of academic literature that either questioned or defended the work of pro-Israel lobbies in the context of American foreign policy. Yet, the historical narrative of the “Israel Lobby” reached a peak of discussion and outrage with the publishing of Mearsheimer and Walt’s The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy. This increased political and media attention can be explained by the time period Mearsheimer and Walt chose to blame an “Israel Lobby” for having too much influence. In the wake of the Iraq war, the two academics reasoned that an “Israel Lobby” effectively halted debate in the American government about the basic premise regarding the U.S.-Israel relationship. One consequence of which in their view was the lobby greatly influencing the Bush administration to start the war in Iraq.

Mearsheimer and Walt’s thesis ultimately blamed an “Israel Lobby” for steering the national interests of the United States down a terribly wrong path. The two defined the national interests in the Middle East as having access to oil, keeping Arab nations from going nuclear, and stopping the spread of anti-Americanism in the region. By supporting Israel, the United States instilled, “Doubt on America’s wisdom and moral vision, helping inspire a generation of anti-American extremists, and complicating U.S.

¹³ Stuart E. Eizenstat, "Loving Israel, Warts and All," *Foreign Policy*, no. 81 (Winter 1990-1991), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1148810> (accessed February 25, 2008).

interests.”¹⁴ Mearsheimer and Walt confessed the “Israel Lobby” did not act illegally, but they blamed the lobby for being too powerful. In their view, this effectiveness leads American politicians into blindly accepting the “Israel Lobby’s” arguments, thus leaving no room for deliberation about the Middle East. Israel is a “great benefactor” of material aid and moral support, and as a result Middle East policy is one sided and unhealthy.

Intellectuals and past government officials with contrasting views and backgrounds, including Alan Dershowitz, Eliot Cohen, and George Shultz disagreed publicly. Dershowitz proclaimed that top officials of the Bush administration were not Jewish, and believing that the president, vice president, secretary of state, and other officials were pawns of the “Israel Lobby” assumed implausible amounts of control.¹⁵ Cohen pointed out that Mearsheimer and Walt did not mention at all the actions of terrorists.¹⁶ Former Secretary of State Shultz in his own words stated, “The notion that they have a uniform agenda and that the U.S. policy in Israel and the Middle East is the result of this influence is simply wrong.”¹⁷ Mearsheimer and Walt’s contentions and the responses to these contentions made one conclusion clear. The literature on pro-Israel lobbies lacked a strong historically researched basis for judgment.

¹⁴ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U. S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), 77.

¹⁵ Alan Dershowitz, "Debunking the Newest-and Oldest-Jewish Conspiracy": A Reply to the Mearsheimer-Walt "Working Paper" Harvard Kennedy School, 06 Apr. 2009 <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/research/working_papers/dershowitzreply.pdf>.

¹⁶ Eliot A. Cohen, "Yes, It's Anti-Semitic," *The Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), April 5, 2006, A23 sec.

¹⁷ George P. Shultz, "The 'Israel Lobby' Myth," *U.S. News and World Report*, September 9, 2007.

The Carter Administration as a Case Study

President Jimmy Carter's administration served at a vital time period for the U.S.-Israel relationship, one that may be utilized to consider the role of pro-Israel lobbies in the United States. Even though some in the American Jewish community questioned Carter's comprehensive approach to the region, the American Jewish community voted overwhelmingly for Carter and gave Democrats large campaign contributions.¹⁸ The American Jewish constituency's support of Carter portended that pro-Israel groups would receive clout in shaping policy under his leadership. At the same time Israel elected its first right wing, conservative leader in Menachem Begin. The American Jewish community was forced to respond to change on the home front and in Israel, as political ideology between Carter and Begin clashed.

Defining Pro- Israel Institutions

In order to assess the role of American Jews as a political factor during the Carter years, it is essential to define the organizations involved in setting forth American Jewish political aims and goals. When pundits, historians, and political scientists consider the term "Israel Lobby," each person offers a different definition. Mearsheimer and Walt chose the phrase the "Israel Lobby" as a "convenient shorthand term for the loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively work to shape U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction."¹⁹ By establishing the term "Israel Lobby," Mearsheimer and Walt created a singular force to accuse for their perception that American policy makers put Israel's interests over American interests.

¹⁸ David Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 249.

¹⁹ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U. S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), 112.

Opposing Walt and Mearsheimer's definition and term is Morris Amitay, former executive director of AIPAC. Amitay claims that he does not agree with creating and using a term like "Israel Lobby" because "it is not a lobby for Israel. It's a lobby dealing with issues relating to Israel but the bottom line is always what is in the best interest of the United States."²⁰ Quickly it becomes clear that a simple term creates tension and argument over its true meaning. For my own research, I will either refer to groups individually by their names or by the terms pro-Israel institutions, pro-Israel lobbies, or pro-Israel organizations. A variety of organizations, people, think tanks, and views can fit under this large umbrella group. I believe that the term itself "Israel Lobby" does not offer a clear meaning and oversimplifies the pro-Israel community in the United States.

Funded by the American Jewish community the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) were the central pro-Israel institutions during the Carter administration. Theodore Mann chaired the Conference of Presidents, an organization that served as an umbrella to various Jewish organizations in the United States including AIPAC. The Conference of Presidents encompassed community service, religious, and lobbying organizations among others. The purpose of the Conference of Presidents was to unify the American Jewish voice in order to effectively reach out to political leaders. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) was the key pro-Israel lobbying organization during the Carter years. Based in Washington D.C., Executive Director Morris Amitay led the organization's attempts to lobby the American government.

²⁰ "Morris Amitay." Telephone interview by author. September 22, 2008.

F-15s and Camp David

The sale of F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia and the Camp David Peace Accords were two key policy decisions during the Carter presidency. Chapter One weighs Carter's policy choice to sell F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia. His administration's decision needed the approval of Congress to pass the arms sales. Eventually, the Senate voted 54-44 in favor of the plane sales. The authorization of this policy decision passed in spite of American Jewish efforts, certain congressional members disapproval, and public opinion siding against the F-15 plane sales. Pro-Israel lobbies and organizations in the United States acted as a factor, but other influences including the administration, the State Department, the Saudi Arabian lobby, and business interests affected the decision. Even with the Senate's vote, pro-Israel lobbies marginally shifted the policy in a more favorable way for Israel and, in their view, the United States. As a result, Carter's original policy proposal differed from the eventual piece of legislation passed in May 1978, and serves as an example for how a domestic lobby can help shape U.S. foreign policy decisions.

In Chapter Two, President Carter's achievement of a bilateral peace between Egypt and Israel is analyzed. Before Camp David, Israel found itself as a nation with neighbors that did not believe in its existence. The Palestinian problem in the state of Israel offered Arab nations one of many strong reasons to band together against the Jewish state and refuse to accept its legal statehood. At this same time, Egypt and its leader Anwar Sadat found itself struggling economically, courted in a Cold War setting by the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States had a vested interest in pulling Egypt to its side and away from the sphere of Soviet influence. Egypt wanted to

capitalize on a special relationship with the United States.²¹ This triangle effect between the nations set the stage for Carter to mediate.

Carter's position as mediator between Egypt and Israel affected the ability of pro-Israel lobbies to play a major part. AIPAC's influence in Congress did not impact Carter's strategy at Camp David because Congress's powers could not check Carter's actions. Even with this isolation, the American Jewish community had access to the government which allowed their views to be heard. The Conference of Presidents met with Carter, but evidence makes it clear that Carter's rhetoric to the Jewish community did not translate into an impact on policy.

Adding a Critical Case Study to the Scholarship

In a democratic country, political institutions need to constantly be questioned. By investigating the parties that partake in politics, the system exposes undemocratic practices and can fix these holes in the system. With that in mind, intellectual and public discourse on pro-Israel domestic lobbies met a tipping point with the publishing of Mearsheimer and Walt's The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy. Mearsheimer and Walt's arguments met criticism in the form of academic and mainstream media reaction. The responses critiqued specific arguments and statements made by Mearsheimer and Walt, but lacked an in-depth historical reply to the literature.

A historical case study for considering these arguments develops by focusing on Carter's policy of F-15 plane sales to Saudi Arabia and his choice to mediate at Camp David between Egypt and Israel. The case study of Jimmy Carter persuasively responds

²¹ William J. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Policy Toward Egypt, 1955-1981* (New York: State University of New York P, 1985), 175.

to arguments about the role of pro-Israel lobbies on American foreign policy. In order to construct a case study, primary source materials allowed for the intersection of the Carter and “Israel Lobby” scholarly narratives. These primary documents included national security advisor, Jewish liaison, presidential, secretary of state, and advisor files from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta. Also, mainstream newspapers *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Tribune* aided the research. Finally, vital to the research were the memoirs of Cyrus Vance, Jimmy Carter, and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Jimmy Carter’s rise to the presidency came just before a significant time in the history of Israeli politics. The election of Menachem Begin ended the power of the Labor Party in Israel and supplanted the old political ideology with a new political ideology. This domestic change in Israel meant a time for soul searching in the American Jewish population. Yet, the change in Israel did not completely shape this time for thought. Carter’s comprehensive policies for the region endangered the political power of pro-Israel opponents in the United States, Jews and gentiles alike.

During the Carter administration, pro-Israel institutions sought to influence the president. Nevertheless, Jewish and pro-Israel lobbies remained one of a plurality of influences trying to affect Carter’s policy. In the case of F-15 plane sales the administration went head to head with Congress, the chief branch of government pro-Israel lobbies influenced. With Camp David, Carter isolated domestic pro-Israel lobbies from policy and strategy all together. In the end, this thesis will stress that pro-Israel lobbies attempts to influence policy only occurred at the margin and that the Cold War,

foreign leadership, the ideology of Carter, and personal figures in the administration played a much greater part in determining policy.

CHAPTER 1

Contested Policy: Selling F-15 Planes to Saudi Arabia

In February of 1978 the Carter administration announced its intention to sell F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia. The public announcement was preceded by months of strategy and speculation about the possible sale. In July of 1977, *The New York Times* leaked the administration's objective for arms sales.²² *The Times* also documented in August of 1977 the Pentagon's suggestion that the White House sell planes to Saudi Arabia.²³ The Carter administration saw pro-Israel lobbies as their chief antagonist in preventing Congress from passing the plane sales deal. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski proclaimed that the White House's plane sale package sent to the Senate "was designed to paralyze the powerful Israeli lobby on the Hill."²⁴ From the discussions in the summer of 1977 to the public announcement in February and the vote in May of 1978, the plane sales issue was debated intensely. A plurality of forces worked to sway politicians in power both for and against the sale of F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia. Congressmen were lobbied, interests were heard, compromise was made, and votes were cast.

On May 15, 1978 with a 54 to 44 vote in the Senate, the United States agreed to sell sixty F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia.²⁵ *Time* magazine called the vote, "The worst

²² Bernard Weinraub, "U.S. WEIGHING SALE OF F-15'S TO SAUDIS: Tentative Approval by President Reported--Congress Fight Likely U.S. WEIGHING SALE OF F-15'S TO SAUDIS," *The New York Times*, January 20, 1977.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and principle: memoirs of the national security advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Staus, Giroux, 1983), 248.

²⁵ Robert G. Kaiser, "Senate Approves Mideast Jet Sales, 54-44: Senate Approves Mideast Warplane Package," *The Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), May 16, 1978.

defeat suffered in Congress by Israel and its U.S. supporters.”²⁶ In contrast, the Carter administration saw the sale of F-15’s to Saudi Arabia as part of the White House’s new comprehensive policy for the Middle East. Carter’s strategy for peace relied on reaching out to moderate Middle Eastern countries seeking security from the spread of Soviet communism. Saudi Arabia presented itself to the United States as a more moderate regime resisting Soviet expansion and willing to use its own money to influence other Middle Eastern states to do the same.

Israel depended on the United States for military and economic security. As a country with virulent anti-Zionist states in its region including Saudi Arabia, the Israelis believed that the United States was an essential friend to have. Israel’s democracy meshed well with the United States. Not surprisingly, because of Israel’s dependence on the United States, Israel, pro-Israel lobbies in the United States, and Jewish leaders in the United States felt threatened by Carter’s supplying Saudi Arabia with the most technologically advanced planes the United States had to offer.

The sale to Saudi Arabia marked a democratic political experience during which domestic and foreign points of view were considered and weighed. To understand the plane sales and their significance I will look at the history of the American-Saudi relationship, explore the context of Carter’s sale decision, show the debate and arguments for and against providing Saudi Arabia with F-15s, and analyze the final sales package. While pro-Israel lobbies influenced the process, Brzezinski’s statement above clarifies the administration’s perception that pro-Israel lobbies were the number one factor impeding congressional approval. Joining pro-Israel lobbies in their arguments was

²⁶ "F-15 Fight: Who Won What," *Time Magazine*, May 29, 1978.

strong public opinion against sales and an equally prevalent anti-arms sales environment found in citizens, media, and Congress.

The United States and Saudi Arabia's Shared History

At first glance, a relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia seems difficult to perceive, but an economic and political connection is rooted in the past. The world wars of the 20th century placed the United States in a position of power never seen before by the country, while Saudi Arabia's untapped oil market presented the literal fuel needed to aid the United States in World War II and the Cold War era. These economic ties eventually resulted in a relatively intimate political connection between the United States and Saudi Arabia. This political context was stated clearly when President Franklin Roosevelt articulated, "I hereby find that the defense of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defense of the United States."²⁷ Political systems differed, religion differed, but the 20th century found the United States and Saudi Arabia stressing narrow commonality rather than dwelling on their immense cultural divide. Needless to say, this friendship began and remained on edge as both sides undermined their own values as the relationship matured. From the American perspective, political officials realized that a relationship with Saudi Arabia meant neglecting democratization, human rights, and religious freedom. The extreme Wahhabi religion practiced in Saudi Arabia contradicted these American values. For Saudi Arabia the concept of Zionism, its implementation, and

²⁷ David Holden, *The House of Saud: the rise and rule of the most powerful dynasty in the Arab world*, 1st ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982), 123.

America's evolving relationship with Israel in the second half of the 20th century could have on countless occasions terminated a U.S.-Saudi relationship. ²⁸

American Historical Interest in Saudi Arabia

In *Thicker Than Oil* by Rachel Bronson the American relationship with Saudi Arabia is discussed. She believes that the American-Saudi relationship is based on three pillars: oil, location, and religion. In 1933 Standard Oil of California won the right to drill Saudi Arabian lands for oil. This original business deal eventually became known as ARAMCO, Arabian American Oil Company, as more American companies chose Saudi Arabia as a willing and lucrative oil resource. The interwar years were met with a new energy challenge. World War I had proven that oil was imperative to power vital pieces of equipment for war. At this same time, the United States found itself the odd man out in the Middle East, as France and Britain led the way in colonizing the area. Consequently, Saudi Arabia became a "great prize" both for the Second World War but also for "postwar needs" as oil became a fundamental commodity for a country leading the fight against communist expansion during the Cold War. ²⁹

Initially, the American-Saudi experience was based on business and not politics. Yet, with America's newfound status in the world, military prowess became that much more important. Saudi Arabia offered a prime location for the United States to extend their hegemony; as it was in the neighborhood of Egypt, Jordan, and Israel among other important Middle Eastern states.³⁰ With access granted, in 1944 the United States built

²⁸ David Holden, *The House of Saud: the rise and rule of the most powerful dynasty in the Arab world*, 1st ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982), 123.

²⁹ Ibid., 127.

³⁰ Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2006), 15.

the Dhahran airport and was given permission to fly over the Saudi Arabian country.³¹ To this day America covets the right to use the Saudi airspace for pursuits in the region.

Bronson's third pillar is religion. The United States and Saudi Arabia agreed on having a belief in God even though the extreme Wahhabi Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia did not mix with the Judeo-Christian values of the United States. In spite of this, the head of Saudi Arabia after World War II, Ibn Saud, feared the Soviet Union's atheistic communism and its expansion more than Christianity.³² Within a Cold War context, the United States and Saudi Arabia found themselves agreeing about a belief in God and in turn established themselves on the same side of the world's post World War II ideological and religious struggle.

Saudi Arabian Historical Interest in the United States

The United States saw Saudi Arabia as a source for energy supplies, a strategic position in the region, and a partner against the Soviet Union. In this same vein, America offered the Saudi regime necessary security, more open markets, and a belief and policy concerning the Soviet Union that connected well with the religious Saudi Kingdom.³³ Like America's founding, the Saudi political elite fought for legitimacy in their borders. It took three tries for the Saudi family to finally secure power. This power struggle began with the Saudi family taking control and creating a state in the mid 18th century. By 1745 the Saudi family controlled the area, but in 1818 the Ottoman Empire allowed Egyptian troops loyal to the empire to ransack the area and take over. In 1891, a second attempt for a state fell to an alliance between the Al Rashids and the Ottoman Empire. Finally, at

³¹ John P. Miglietta, *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992: Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 199.

³² Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil : America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2006), 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

the beginning of the 20th century, a third attempt placed Ibn Saud and his family in power of what became the third Saudi state. After overtaking Riyadh, Ibn Saud placed his mark and solidified political territory.³⁴ Ibn Saud, and his Saudi family, understood that to remain in political power in 1902, they would have a constant fight to stay in control of their territory. In fact, not until September 23, 1932 did the area become officially known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.³⁵ With the rise of oil as a means for energy, Ibn Saud and his regime realized this precious resource could be leveraged for security. Therefore, America's need for oil, later in the century, offered Saudi Arabia the chance to earn income from its precious resource and attain military aid and security. For a young, insecure nation, with a history of being taken over, this chance for Saudi Arabia to partner with the United States, a powerful, fuel-driven country, amounted to a golden opportunity.

Why the United States? It is easy to answer why not the Soviet Union. The Saudis' religion and ideology clashed with the Soviet experiment. Still, the United States existed in the western world with the rest of Europe that needed oil as well. The answer comes in the form of anti-colonialism. Not only was Saudi leadership adamantly against communism, but also the Saudis were skeptical of British and French intentions. Britain and France already controlled most of the area. The young nation needed money and protection, and the United States offered both without the chains of colonialism attached. Originally, United States oil companies did not mix economic gain with politics. Profit was the goal and meant that American businessmen stayed away from the political

³⁴ John P. Miglietta, *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992 : Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 196.

³⁵ Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil : America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2006), 33.

landscape in Saudi Arabia. A young Saudi Arabian nation ingrained with power struggle found in the United States an alternative to Britain and France and their colonialism.³⁶ In the future the United States would become more entrenched politically, but this original hands off policy in regards to domestic politics gave the Saudis trust in their powerful partner.

Military Buildup

Political, social, and economic reasons for a U.S.-Saudi relationship have been discussed, but military buildup offers tangible evidence that the American-Saudi experience grew stronger, more trusting, and more interconnected as the century moved forward. From the middle of the 1960s onwards the United States government increased military arms sales to the Saudi Kingdom. In the 1970s alone the Saudis received from the United States government over thirty-four billion dollars of American made military equipment.³⁷ The United States and Saudi Arabia cemented a symbiotic friendship with military aid providing one example of the trust between the two nations.

Israel: A Point of Contention

While the two countries found mutual benefits from each other, the concept of Jewish people in Arab lands outraged Saudi leadership. Ibn Saud made clear before the creation of an Israeli state that he would stand tall with his Arab brethren rather than aid any developments in favor of a future state of Israel.³⁸ Roosevelt and Churchill considered that Ibn Saud might be the lynch pin in a peaceful process and a creation of

³⁶ Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2006), 34.

³⁷ John P. Miglietta, *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992 : Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 211.

³⁸ David Holden, *The House of Saud: the rise and rule of the most powerful dynasty in the Arab world*, 1st ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982), 132.

Israeli statehood, but in reality Ibn Saud “deplored the systematic Judaization of what Arabs universally regarded as part of their homeland.”³⁹ His son upon succession to the throne in 1954 maintained, “Israel to the Arab world, is like a cancer to the human body, and the only way of remedy is to uproot it just like a cancer.”⁴⁰ King Saud stated, “Arab nations would sacrifice up to 10,000,000 of their 50,000,000 people, if necessary, to wipe out Israel.”⁴¹ An AIPAC document released before the sale of F-15’s declared that King Khalid told *The New York Times*, “When we build up our military strength we have no aims against anybody except those who took force on our land and our shrines in Jerusalem-and we know who that is.”⁴² American and Saudi leadership walked a tight rope to not allow this schism to hinder the development of a political and economic relationship, but American support for Israel and Saudi antipathy against Israel continues to divide the nations. This political divergence offers insight into the arguments of pro-Israel lobbies that distrust the Saudi Kingdom. Regardless of this difference, it should be noted that Roosevelt and Churchill believed that Saudi Arabia might serve as the mediator for peace in the Middle East even before the creation of the state of Israel. This concept has been a consistent foreign policy thought with American intellectuals and politicians, including President Carter and his administration.

³⁹ David Holden, *The House of Saud: the rise and rule of the most powerful dynasty in the Arab world*, 1st ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982), 132.

⁴⁰ *The New York Times*, "Saud Bids Arabs Destroy Israel," January 10, 1954.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Office of Strategic Research, *Subject: US Aircraft and the Middle East Military Balance*, report, vol. Box 2 (The Jimmy Carter Library: NSA).

The Carter Administration and the Context for a Bipartisan Promise

A historical relationship, a war on communism, and a new Middle Eastern strategy combined to create the Carter context for plane sales to Saudi Arabia. The three structures of the Saudi Arabian relationship with the United States stayed intact. Oil, location, and religion were more imperative than ever due to Carter's shift in strategy for the region. Carter's comprehensive plan concerning the Middle East meant he needed support from moderate states willing to consider America as an integral player in forging a peace process. Carter and his administration understood that peace in the Middle East was in America's national, economic, and energy interests.

Carter's policy for the Middle East meant a tightening of the U.S.-Saudi relationship from the moment he took the oath of office. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance reasoned that the "United States would have to be a fair and active mediator between parties if there was to be any chance of a genuine peace."⁴³ Secretary Vance and the administration deemed that a comprehensive approach hinged on the engagement of "stable, moderate, pro-Western regimes."⁴⁴ Saudi Arabia was a moderate regime willing to work with the new American administration. Prince Fahd, the Saudi leader who held true power at the time, told Carter during a visit that he believed the Arab world was ready for the prospect of peace, and he assured Carter the state of Israel had a right to exist. By making this promise to the administration, Prince Fahd furthered Carter's belief that an arms deal would aid in the peace process.⁴⁵ Prince Fahd's statement on Israel was the first time such a high level member of the Saudi regime demonstrated any form of

⁴³ Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 163.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁵ Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2006), 141.

support for Israel. Prince Fahd grasped America's special relationship with Israel. Even if the kingdom publicly supported an overall Arab hatred of the Jewish state, Fahd had enough political savvy to know that in order to continue further interconnecting the kingdom with the United States these private assurances to the administration about Israel's right to exist were paramount. Carter perceived this support of Israel from Fahd as the political capital necessary to live up to President Ford's promise of selling F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia in 1975.⁴⁶ This perception was a major step forward and one that the administration implicitly knew would lead to a showdown with pro-Israel institutions in the United States.

President Ford's administration left documents to the Carter administration claiming that Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan were more modern and helpful states than other nations in the Middle East region.⁴⁷ No matter the strategy, comprehensive or step-by-step, the United States acted in a Cold War setting. Carter's goal was to engage moderate regimes while keeping them away from the Soviet sphere of influence.⁴⁸ By advancing the relationship with Saudi Arabia, Carter hoped that Saudi Arabia would in turn influence other states like Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. With Egypt's Anwar Sadat choosing to rid the country of Soviet military men, Saudi Arabia filled a power vacuum by providing "financial and political support."⁴⁹ In President Carter's own words, "Although its territory did not border on Israel's, Saudi Arabia could play a powerful component in influencing the Syrians, the Jordanians, and the PLO because the three

⁴⁶ Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 179.

⁴⁷ Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2006), 140.

⁴⁸ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 298.

⁴⁹ Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 162.

groups were heavily dependent on Saudi financing.”⁵⁰ The administration contended that impressionable regimes in need of economic support, like Egypt, would cooperate with the United States. This argument was based on the United States foothold in Saudi Arabia and the Saudis directly influencing the political discussion and direction of more moderate Middle Eastern states through foreign aid.

Carter and the United States shared with moderate and conservative Middle Eastern states distaste for Arab radicalism. For the United States, Arab radicalism meant instability in the region and trouble for Israel. In Saudi Arabia’s view, radicalism could result in military actions that put the kingdom at risk of losing political legitimacy. On top of security fears, both the United States and Saudi Arabia viewed Arab radicals in the Middle East as a population that the Soviet Union could take advantage of in order to gain ground in the region.⁵¹ Saudi Arabia became a proxy to fight the spread of communist and Soviet activity. With its historic distrust and loathing of communism, Saudi Arabia chose the United States as its big powerful security blanket. Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor to the president, believed the administration needed enhanced interaction with the moderate Arab states in the region. Brzezinski thought the American association with Saudi Arabia, in particular, needed to be increased.⁵² The commitment offered by Saudi Arabia made the administration feel indebted to their regime when their leadership asked for highly coveted F-15 planes.

⁵⁰ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 287.

⁵¹ Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 161.

⁵² Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and principle: memoirs of the national security advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Staus, Giroux, 1983), 93.

Saudi Arabia's Thirst for F-15 Technology

Saudi Arabia's leadership experienced the insecurity of a history wrought with losing power, land, and legitimacy. For this reason, the F-15 planes took on a practical and symbolic connotation. Practically, the Saudi regime articulated the need for as much technological military capability as possible in order to ensure security from the Soviet Union. Symbolically, the regime considered the planes, and the eventual sale, a transaction representing a "litmus test" of American friendship, trust, and security.⁵³

From a security standpoint, the region represented a setting for competition between Soviet and American influence. Threats to the Saudis and the American sphere of influence increased with Soviet action. The Soviets transferred arms and military equipment to Iraq, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, and Ethiopia. Regime change resulted in Afghanistan and South Yemen. Nur Muhammad Taraki took Afghanistan away from its leader Muhammad Daoud through a military coup. Taraki's takeover occurred in the spring of 1978 just two weeks before the Senate voted for the plane sales.⁵⁴ In South Yemen on June 26, 1978, a Soviet endorsed people's militia led by Abdel Fattah Ismail defeated troops loyal to the president.⁵⁵ These shifts increased Soviet footholds in the Middle East upsetting the United States and Saudi Arabia alike. The military accomplishments of Soviet proxies resulted in the Saudis having leverage to lobby the United States in arming the state. For the United States, Soviet expansion in the region hurt American national interests, while for Saudi Arabia, Soviet successes furthered the kingdom's belief and contention that their regime could be next. The Saudi

⁵³ John P. Miglietta, *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992 : Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 233.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁵ *The New York Times*, "South Yemen Chief Reported Slain, But Pro-Red Group Stays in Power," June 27, 1978.

regime's insecurities seethed as they turned to their "reliable" friend and asked the United States to provide planes in order to protect the country's borders.

Equally important to security, the Saudi regime believed F-15 planes displayed American trust in the country's leadership and political agenda. Secretary Vance believed that moderate Arab leaders in favor of American influence knew that the United States' dedication to the security of Israel would not change, but the Saudi regime wanted the United States to recognize their legitimacy as well.⁵⁶ The regime wanted to be rewarded for helping to sway states away from political radicalism, and economically the Saudi regime wanted to be reimbursed for taking a leading stand in OPEC price controls.⁵⁷

Debates and Debaters For and Against the Sale of F-15s

The Carter White House realized that selling arms to Saudi Arabia would come under criticism. In response, Frank Moore, chief congressional lobbyist for Carter, suggested a packaged deal in a memo a year before the vote on the sale took place. The administration's preemptive package combined the sale of planes to Saudi Arabia with plane sales to Egypt and Israel. Strategically birthed the summer before, "On February 25, (Secretary of State) Vance laid out the administration's terms bluntly: all three sales, or none."⁵⁸ Carter's decision took an aggressive step in framing the debate and the lobbying that followed. Domestic lobbies, American business, Saudi Arabia, and Israel put their arguments forward as Congress grappled over the plane package.

⁵⁶ Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 161.

⁵⁷ John P. Miglietta, *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992: Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 233.

⁵⁸ Robert G. Kaiser, "Jet Deal: 'Gang That Can't Shoot Straight' Wins One," *The Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), May 18, 1978.

Administrations View on the "Jewish Lobby"

In a highly sensitive document written in June of 1977 by Hamilton Jordan to the president, Chief of Staff Jordan argued that Congress would be essential in achieving the administrations foreign policy agenda. Jordan told the president that the administration must reach out to leaders in Congress in order to create political capital in the branch of government. More specifically, Jordan stressed that the administration did not yet comprehend the strength of the American Jewish community in terms of Middle East policy. Jordan called the organized political efforts of American Jews towards the Middle East, the "Jewish Lobby."⁵⁹ The chief of staff pointed to the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) as the collective organization involved in lobbying Congress.

Jordan highlighted reasons for AIPAC's political strength and ability to reach members of Congress. These circumstances included AIPAC's single-issue approach, security and protection of Israel. AIPAC's strength of organizing and tapping into the various Jewish groups that it represented, and the claim that AIPAC lacked any real threat from other lobbying group in the United States. All of these combined to allow AIPAC to lobby for an issue to a degree that no other organization could achieve at the time.⁶⁰

With congressional support in mind, Jordan laid out the political reality of individual senators voting tendencies pertaining to Israel. On votes that dealt with Israel's interests, Jordan believed that the "Jewish Lobby" could count on votes from sixty-five to

⁵⁹ "Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics." Hamilton Jordan to Jimmy Carter. June 1977. In *Jordan*. Vol. 34. Jimmy Carter Library.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

seventy-five members. Jordan divided the support for Israel from senators into categories “hard support”, “sympathetic support”, “questionable”, and “generally negative”. Hard support meant a senator actively took initiative to help with Israel votes. The sympathetic category alluded to senators that sided with Israel if a controversial vote came before Congress. Jordan’s document listed thirty-one Senate members under the “Hard Support” category including Senators Case, Church, Glenn, Humphrey, Javitz, Sarbanes, and Stone. These seven Senate members all were part of the important Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee and its members controlled all legislation pertaining to foreign policy. On the other side of the spectrum, Jordan’s document pointed to only three Senate members generally negative about legislation that supported Israel, Senators Abourezk, McClure, and Hatfield.⁶¹

Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan’s document put into numbers what other members of the administration feared about Congress’s general pro-Israel bent. Jordan proposed, “To gain a majority on any issue before the Senate, the Jewish lobby has only to get its “hard” votes and half of the votes of those that are “sympathetic.”⁶² These numbers set the stage for a political showdown. The administration and State Department believed F-15 plane sales to Saudi Arabia promoted their comprehensive agenda for the region. AIPAC disagreed as it saw the sale of planes as a direct threat to Israeli security and American interests. The administration needed the Senate’s approval; while in the Hamilton Jordan’s estimation, votes threatening Israel would be difficult to come by.

⁶¹ "Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics." Hamilton Jordan to Jimmy Carter. June 1977. In *Jordan*. Vol. 34. Jimmy Carter Library.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Efforts Against the Sale

The sides for and against the sale of planes to Saudi Arabia began to work as soon as rumors mounted publicly and privately about the prospect of the administration providing Saudi Arabia with F-15 planes. AIPAC, certain members of Congress, anti-arms sales proponents, and public opinion all resolutely rejected the policy of selling F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia.⁶³ These influences were interconnected. Public opinion helped create the argument for AIPAC, while AIPAC's work affected congressional leadership.

Due to AIPAC's emphasis on lobbying Congress, the organization took the lead in the Jewish community against fighting the plane sales. An AIPAC memorandum titled "F-15s to Saudi Arabia- A Threat to Peace" gives a background of the lobby's arguments. AIPAC believed that the sale of planes to Saudi Arabia would "upset the military balance in the Middle East, endangering American interests and peace prospects."⁶⁴ Additionally, AIPAC thought F-15s gave Saudi Arabia the capability to attack Israel and increased the chance the Saudis would aid other Arab countries by transferring the planes to them if war broke out. In the memorandum, AIPAC downplayed security threats to Saudi Arabia and focused on King Khalid's rhetoric in 1976. According to AIPAC, the king made clear that the building up of Saudi military ability with tangible equipment would help the

⁶³ It should be noted that the state of Israel could not have accepted or been happy with the fact that the administration wanted to sell F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia; however, I can find no major evidence that Israel made major efforts to lobby against the sales. The bill sent to the Congress lumped all three states Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, together making it even more difficult for state officials from Israel to lobby against the bill put forth in front of the Senate.

⁶⁴ *F-15s To Saudi Arabia- A Threat to Peace*, report (The Jimmy Carter Library: AIPAC).

kingdom bring justice to those that occupied Israel. While King Khalid's actual quote did not name Israel, he alluded to Israel in his tone and his words.⁶⁵

AIPAC's arguments reached powerful members in the Senate. In a letter written by Senator Frank Church to the Secretary of State Cyrus Vance on January 24, 1978, Church offered reasons why the sale of planes to Saudi Arabia was not in the interests of the United States. The arguments were very close if not identical to the ones stated in the AIPAC memorandum. Senator Church doubted how viable it was to arm the Saudis with such a highly advanced plane. His arguments included that in his opinion the planes would "destabilize the Arab-Israeli balance of power, aircraft might be transferred to other Arab governments, and (the sale) is against the president's arms sales policy."⁶⁶ Senator Church's letter suggests that Morris Amitay, head of AIPAC, and the organization's arguments were at least heard. Some Members of Congress found the AIPAC arguments compelling and worthy of the president's attention. Journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak made the connection between the AIPAC memorandum and Senator Church's letter. Evans and Novak disapprovingly wrote in *The Washington Post* on February 2, 1978, "Indeed, Church's letter to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was couched with generous overstatement in terms of how Israel views the sale, but not in terms of U.S. interests." The article furthers this argument by quoting a senator who made the case that "Church wrote his letter like a senator from Israel."⁶⁷

On AIPAC's side, anti-arms sales advocates in the United States made clear their opposition to arming the Saudi regime. Carter came under attack for policy promises

⁶⁵ *F-15s To Saudi Arabia- A Threat to Peace*, report (The Jimmy Carter Library: AIPAC).

⁶⁶ "To the Honorable Cyrus R. Vance," Frank Church to Cyrus Vance, January 24, 1978 (The Jimmy Carter Library).

⁶⁷ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Carter's Dilemma on Saudi Arms Sales," *The Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), February 2, 1978.

made during his campaign for presidency. Throughout his campaign, Carter consistently critiqued Ford's arms sales policy. Carter claimed that the United States had become "the world's leading arms salesman."⁶⁸ Carter maintained that his administration would help end the vast amounts of arms sales all over the world. Before announcing the sales package, Carter had been quoted calling arms trades an "unsavory business."⁶⁹ Clayton Fritchey exposed the hypocrisy of Carter's rhetoric versus policy in a *Washington Times* Opinion Editorial published February 18, 1978. Titled "Arms Rhetoric versus Arms Policy," Fritchey compared the anti-arms language of Carter in May of 1977 to the actions in February of 1978 when the president announced goals to sell F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia.⁷⁰

In addition to the fact that certain popular, established media sources mirrored the beliefs of American citizenship, the fight over public opinion was central. Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan made clear that the administration needed to attempt to reach out to the public. Jordan believed that the public's views on foreign policy decisions were malleable; therefore, the administration could attempt to shape public opinion in their direction through fireside chats, town meetings, the media, and mailing lists. Although the administration conceptualized changing public opinion, the choice of the president to sell F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia remained extremely unpopular. Public opinion polls released May 5, 1978 just before the Senate vote, demonstrated that seventy-three percent

⁶⁸ *New York Times*, "Arms Sales: Another Wobbly Promise," May 8, 1977.

⁶⁹ Richard Burt, "Curb on Arms Exports Runs Into Obstacles and May Not Survive Beyond 1978:Imposes Partial Ceiling New Agency Created New Carter Commitments Need for Own Forces Would Imperil Future Effort," *The New York Times*, February 13, 1978.

⁷⁰ Clayton Fritchey, "Arms Rhetoric vs. Arms Policy," *Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), February 18, 1978.

of the country opposed plane sales to Saudi Arabia.⁷¹ AIPAC did not present a rogue organization imposing undemocratic lobbying tactics on Congress. Instead, AIPAC's arguments coincided with media criticism and overwhelming public opinion.

In Favor of the Sale

On the other side of the debate, the White House along with leaders of the National Security Council, the State Department, and the Office of Strategic Research campaigned for the sale of F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia. Also, the Saudi Kingdom sent diplomats to the United States and employed United States businesses and officials to lobby on their behalf. American business made sure its voice was heard as well.

The White House proclaimed that strengthening the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia was integral in a comprehensive peace process. In the White House's view, the sale of F-15 planes helped solidify the affiliation between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Despite legislative and citizen opposition, Cyrus Vance knew the importance of this "controversial sale" as a "policy of strengthening the vital U.S.-Saudi relationship."⁷² His work along with other members in the cabinet tried to win congressional support. Zbigniew Brzezinski believed the "battle was absolutely necessary to retain American credibility with the increasingly more moderate Arab states of Egypt and Saudi Arabia."⁷³ President Carter himself spent time lobbying for the sale. Carter's arguments were based on his broader comprehensive initiative to bring peace to the region. President Carter wrote in a letter to Congress, "Shall we support and give

⁷¹ "Information Items," Zbigniew Brzezinski to The President, May 5, 1978, in *NLC*, vol. 19 (Jimmy Carter Library).

⁷² Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 179.

⁷³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and principle: memoirs of the national security advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Staus, Giroux, 1983), 247.

confidence to those in the Middle East who work for moderation and peace? Or shall we turn them aside, shattering their confidence in us and serving the cause of radicalism.”⁷⁴

The Office of Strategic Research prepared a memorandum released March 7, 1978, defending the sale of F-15s to Saudi Arabia. To prepare and publish the document the Office of Strategic Research was joined by the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the National Security Agency, and Air Force Intelligence. The document made the case that the administration’s proposition to sell highly advanced military planes to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt would not hurt Israel’s overall standing in the region. Even with increasing Egypt and Saudi Arabia’s amount of American planes, Israel would still remain militarily stronger than the other Arab states. The memorandum gave credence to Saudi Arabia’s need for protection against enemies, and questioned the legitimacy of Prime Minister Begin’s assertions about Saudi Arabia’s intentions with the F-15 planes in their possession. The memorandum challenged Begin’s contentions as unfounded, stating that Saudi Arabia would not offer the use of their F-15 planes to Arab neighbors if war were to break out in the region.⁷⁵

Saudi Arabia joined the American democratic process as well. The Saudi regime sent two sons of the late King Faisal to Washington to lobby on behalf of the country. The two sons, Saud and Turki joined Prince Bandar bin Sultan to lobby the United States Congress.⁷⁶ Alongside these diplomats, the kingdom employed the American firm Cook, Reuf, Spann and Weiner to help communicate their message to Congress through a public

⁷⁴ Edward Walsh, "Carter Escalates Lobbying Effort On Plane Sales" *Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), May 13, 1978.

⁷⁵ Office of Strategic Research, *Subject: US Aircraft and the Middle East Military Balance*, report, vol. Box 2 (The Jimmy Carter Library: NSA).

⁷⁶ Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2006), 142.

relations campaign.⁷⁷ While Saudi Arabia did not have a domestic lobby in the United States, by employing Cook, Reuf, Spann, and Weiner the kingdom attempted to even the playing field on Capitol Hill. According to Hamilton Jordan the "Jewish Lobby" worked in a vacuum without competition, but the Saudis consciously tried to fill this vacuum. The kingdom did not just hire a public relations firm. Saudi officials employed former Senator J. William Fulbright and Frederick Dutton, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Elections under John F. Kennedy.⁷⁸ Fulbright and Dutton offered to the mix politically aware and seasoned individuals who knew the political ins and outs of Washington D.C. Overall, the Saudi regime spent \$365,000 in a campaign to influence American congressional members. The Saudi lobbying worked to counter the already well-organized pro-Israel lobbying groups in the United States.⁷⁹

Members of the American business community campaigned in favor of the F-15 plane sales as well. In particular, McDonnell-Douglas Corporation fought together with the Saudi lobbyists in an attempt to protect their own interests in the region.⁸⁰

McDonnell-Douglas Corporation manufactured the F-15 planes in the United States. The company, which thrived on export sales, had a vested interest in Congress passing the president's initiative.

⁷⁷ Robert G. Kaiser, "Saudis Retain U.S. Firm to Lobby for Warplanes," *Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), March 29, 1978.

⁷⁸ Richard Halloran, "Saudis Act to Enhance Image in U.S.: Registered With Justice Department," *The New York Times*, March 31, 1978.

⁷⁹ John P. Miglietta, *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992 : Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 236.

⁸⁰ Robert G. Kaiser, "Saudis Retain U.S. Firm to Lobby for Warplanes," *Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), March 29, 1978.

Saudi Arabia Receives Their Request

On May 15, 1978 the Senate voted 54-44 to pass legislation allowing the sale of planes to Saudi Arabia. The vote marked the end of almost a yearlong journey of compromise, debate and lobbying. The package passed by Congress included arms to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel, responding to all three country's request for military materials. Saudi Arabia received sixty F-15 planes, Egypt received fifty FEs planes, and Israel received thirty-five F-15s and seventy-five F-16s planes.⁸¹ Based on the administration's assumptions, the vote marked a deviation from Senate voting behavior on votes that affected Israel. Chief of Staff Jordan assumed that seventy-four senators either were totally pro-Israel or sympathetic to Israel when votes placed any stress on the U.S.-Israeli relationship.⁸² The White House flexed its muscle as the Senate voted in favor of the package; however, the result of the plane sales dispute was not so black and white. Even though National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski believed the package sent to the Senate was meant to cripple the Jewish lobby; in reality, the package revealed how influences on both sides of the issue affected the actual legislation.

The White House deftly created a package that sold planes to all three states. This action forced the hand of congressman and the pro-Israel community in the United States. Even with this package, pro-Israel senators and AIPAC did not simply bend to the original package. Because of this, the White House found itself having to make more changes to the final bill in order to get the mandatory votes to pass it. The original bill did not satisfy important members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in regards to

⁸¹ John P. Miglietta, *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992 : Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 232.

⁸² "Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics." Hamilton Jordan to Jimmy Carter. June 1977. In *Jordan*. Vol. 34. Jimmy Carter Library.

ensuring Israeli safety. Carter offered a compromise in response to Foreign Relations Committee member Senator Frank Church's arguments against the plane sales.⁸³ The bill eventually passed looked very close to the conciliations offered by the president on May 10th even though Church publicly avowed that this concession would not be enough.

The planes sold to Saudi Arabia came with conditions attached to the transaction. While F-15 planes would still be sent to Saudi Arabia, the planes lacked the ability to use all the bomb offensive operations. Also, the F-15 planes were sent to Saudi Arabia without long-range fuel tanks that pro-Israel advocates believed added to the existential threat against Israel. The location of the planes was vital to the sale as well. Pro-Israel supporters in the United States worried that if the planes were stationed right next to Israel the threat of the planes would increase dramatically. To calm these fears, the F-15 planes sold could not be stationed at Tabuk, the closest air base in Saudi Arabia to Israel.⁸⁴ Finally, the changes responded to the pro-Israel communities fear that if war broke out Saudi Arabia would transfer their F-15 planes and capabilities to the Arab state fighting the war with Israel. The Saudis agreed to the United States that the F-15 planes could not be transferred to any other Arab country.⁸⁵ When the White House originally announced plans to sell F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia the administration had not made these concessions to the sale. As debate for and against the sales heated up, the administration attached these measures in order to win over support in the May 15th vote.

⁸³ Robert G. Kaiser and Edward Walsh, "Church Spurns Compromise Plan on Mideast Jets," *Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), May 11, 1978.

⁸⁴ John P. Miglietta, *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992: Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 233.

⁸⁵ David Holden, *The House of Saud: the rise and rule of the most powerful dynasty in the Arab world*, 1st ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982), 478.

With these deals in place, the White House and Saudi Arabia won over Congress and the kingdom received American F-15 planes.

Conclusions about Pro-Israel Lobbies

The Carter administration realized that pro-Israel lobbies would be galvanized by the White House's decision that selling F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia was in American interests. Most extreme in the administration, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote, "During this time period all of us were under severe attack from the Jewish lobby."⁸⁶ National Security Advisor Brzezinski framed the debate over plane sales as the administration versus the pro-Israel lobby; yet, this argument was not broad enough to establish the accurate confrontation over the sale. Brzezinski did not mention stalwart public opinion against plane sales to Saudi Arabia, and he marginalized the effects of disgruntled citizens holding onto Carter's campaign promises of reducing arms sales. The plane sales proved AIPAC had some influence, but AIPAC's influence did not control policy nor was it the only voice being heard. AIPAC mobilized its supporters along with other domestic and foreign influences.

AIPAC's campaign goal was to keep any American F-15 plane out of the hands of Saudi Arabia. According to AIPAC Executive Director Morris Amitay, the organization spent their resources lobbying Congress knowing this was the branch of government they could use to check the president. AIPAC tactically realized that the White House and State Department favored plane sales to Saudi Arabia. Congress became the branch of government accessible to AIPAC's concerns and arguments. Of extreme importance and

⁸⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and principle: memoirs of the national security advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Staus, Giroux, 1983), 249.

help were strong supporters of Israel in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. While their names have already been mentioned, Amitay made clear that Senator Frank Church and Senator Richard Stone along with Armed Services Committee member Senator Scoop Jackson fought on the side of Israel based on their perceptions of American national interests.⁸⁷

AIPAC put forth a memorandum with legitimate facts and arguments against the sale. It is clear from the memorandum that AIPAC was not a proxy representing Israel. The organization concentrated on American interests in the Middle East not Israeli interests in the Middle East. AIPAC's focus on American interests made it an interest group with an agenda that its leaders believed benefited the United States.⁸⁸ Cynical critics might have labeled AIPAC as a foreign agent or an "Israel lobby", but in the case of F-15 sales the organization made clear that the United States was there first and foremost interest.

AIPAC's objective was to keep Congress from voting to allow the sale of F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia. The organization could check the president's intentions if AIPAC attained enough NO votes. AIPAC was unable to receive the proper vote. Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan's list of congressional supporters for Israel was debunked. Eight senators that he described as "hard supporters" of Israel voted to sell the planes to Saudi Arabia. Twenty senators that Jordan listed as "sympathetic" but "can be counted on in showdown" voted to sell planes to Saudi Arabia. The administration's perceptions of congressional votes for Israel either were not as unyielding as they considered them to be, or the administration made a strong case for the sale. Either way, the defections in votes

⁸⁷ "Morris Amitay," telephone interview by author, September 22, 2008.

⁸⁸ *F-15s To Saudi Arabia- A Threat to Peace*, report (The Jimmy Carter Library: AIPAC).

prove that AIPAC lacked the ability to control policy. The plane sales to Saudi Arabia presented a showdown, and twenty-eight senators responded by voting against the wishes of the pro-Israel community.⁸⁹ AIPAC failed to achieve this vote in the Senate, but Morris Amitay considered the lobby's influence important in the final compromise on sales. Amitay reasoned AIPAC had "influence" on the sale based on measures put in place on rules and regulations with the planes.⁹⁰ AIPAC's executive director believed, "Because of our fight there were modifications made to the aircraft and where they could be stationed."⁹¹ The compromises meant more stability in the region, a vital interest for the United States.

Amitay's belief that AIPAC influenced the sale on planes appears justifiable because of a letter written by Senator Frank Church to the administration. In the letter Church enumerates reasons why American sales of F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia did not represent America's interests abroad. Church's letter and AIPAC's memorandum have a lot in common with one another. It would be dishonest not to consider the parallels between AIPAC's contentions and Senator Church's document as evidence that AIPAC had success lobbying Congress. AIPAC efforts and congressional response presents an example of a healthy democratic system rather than a controlled Congress. Democratically, AIPAC's lobbying was transparent evidenced by the *Washington Post* article written by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak mentioned above. The two journalists painted AIPAC in a negative light and focused on the connection between the

⁸⁹ "124 Cong. Rec. 13710 (1978)," in Hein Online, section goes here, <http://heinonline.org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/HOL/Page?handle=hein.congrec/cr1240010&id=1&size=2&collection=congrec&index=congrec/crbr> (accessed April 9, 2009).

⁹⁰ "Morris Amitay," telephone interview by author, September 22, 2008.

⁹¹ Ibid.

AIPAC memorandum and Church's letter.⁹² The significance of the Evans and Novak article was not their opinion on AIPAC. Instead the article showed that AIPAC worked in open society for all to see.

Most critical, the organization was not the only lobby or political force working with Congress. In fact, Congress fielded arguments from AIPAC, Saudi Arabia, and American business interests. Also, Congress answered to public opinion. House and Senate members understood the importance of voting with public opinion in order to win elections. AIPAC came to the Hill armed with citizen support and congressional members who constantly needed to consider reelection. In general, the public did not agree with arms sales to foreign countries, and Harris polls revealed that Saudi Arabia was a particularly unpopular destination for any type of arms. President Carter campaigned under the pretense of ending arms sales based on his own campaign's consideration of public unpopularity. Once in office, Carter backed out on campaign promises, but the public resistance to arms sales remained.

Conclusion: F-15 Sale an Example of Democracy

The setting for F-15 sales was shaped by a variety of actors, influences, and interests. The Cold War was chief among all influences as it forged a backdrop that the White House and the United States Congress worked within. Additionally, Carter's decision to institute a comprehensive approach for the Middle East weighed heavily on decision-making and forced the hand of Congress. Carter believed arms sales engaged moderate Middle Eastern regimes, interconnecting them to American policy in the

⁹² Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Carter's Dilemma on Saudi Arms Sales," *The Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), February 2, 1978.

region. America's past relationship with the Saudi Kingdom furthered the arguments for Saudi Arabia to receive their F-15 request. As I attested earlier, the United States and Saudi Arabia achieved their new places in the international system in the same time period. America became a global power while the Saudis realized that oil meant economic prosperity and increased influence in the Middle East. The Carter administration chose to interweave the American-Saudi relationship even more.

The Cold War, the intertwined national histories, and Carter's comprehensive policy formed the conditions for interests to compete within the legislative process. AIPAC, members of Congress, and anti-arms export organizations put their weight behind an anti-sale policy.⁹³ The anti-sale policy argued on the side of public opinion that steadfastly disagreed with arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Kingdom's diplomats, a paid Saudi campaign, and American business interests fought for the sale to pass in a congressional vote in spite of public opinion. Money, time, and resources were spent trying to convince lawmakers either to sell or not to sell. In the end, the Saudi lobby and the White House's perception of American interests won out with Congress voting in favor of a package that included sixty F-15 planes to be sold to Saudi Arabia.

The sale cannot be measured just on the fact that it was voted for by Congress. The final Saudi package provided evidence of negotiation. For example, the sale did not allow for certain equipment to be sold to the Saudis. Also, the Saudi's promised to not provide the planes to other Arab countries, and the regime agreed to not station the planes at the Tabuk airbase. Compromises in the final package prove that influence on both sides played a role in the eventual decision. The F-15 sale represents an example of

⁹³ Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2006), 142.

American democracy going to work. A plurality of influences shaped the arguments and debate as many voices were heard, weighed, and considered.

In the end, President Carter's policy initiative became law. The American Jewish community was more organized and more entrenched in American society than the Saudis when the concept of plane sales came up. Still, President Carter and his administration were able to overcome opposition to acquire the amount of votes needed to pass the final bill. AIPAC was able to defend its interests on the margin by protecting Israel to a degree, but in reality their first and true goal was to stop the sale altogether. The president's comprehensive plan predicated on arms sales stayed largely intact. Even more notably, the F-15 plane sales meant a victory for the White House and a defeat to the American Jewish community, a constituency that voted and supported Carter. Carter had won a fight against some of his Democratic party's most important and historic supporters.

CHAPTER 2

Camp David: A Framework for Peace

On November 19, 1977 Anwar Sadat boldly went to Jerusalem. During his visit he spoke to the Israeli Knesset, something unprecedented for an Arab leader.⁹⁴ To Jimmy Carter, Sadat's speech launched two distinct possibilities to achieve Carter's policy goals in the Middle East. With Sadat's action came the prospect for moderate Arab states to consider ending war with and recognizing Israel, and offered the United States the opportunity to solidify its influence in the Arab world. With the Cold War as a constant setting, Carter felt Sadat embodied the necessary leadership to count on Egyptian support against the Soviets and to work on peace between Israel and its most dangerous neighbors. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin hailed from the conservative political portion of Israel. His position of power marked a change in Israeli domestic politics; however, differing political ideologies did not deter Carter from engaging Begin. In the summer of 1978, Jimmy Carter's administration chose to extend invitations to Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to meet at Camp David. Carter's goal was to discuss the prospect of peace between Israelis and the rest of the Arab world. His risky effort placed him in the position of mediator between two entrenched enemies. If Carter could not find peace, the United States and the world would deem his optimism naïve and his actions a failure.

Secretary of State Cyrus Vance grasped the historic anomaly of the Camp David Summit between Israel and Egypt. In fact, Theodore Roosevelt had been the last

⁹⁴Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 297.

president to mediate on such a high level. In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Roosevelt met with leaders to end the Russo-Japanese war. This mediation session did not compare to Camp David.⁹⁵ In the case of Roosevelt, the president did not directly deal with negotiations. Carter's choice to take on the lead negotiating responsibility came with a lot of political peril and little chance for reward. Structurally, Carter meant for Camp David to serve as an escape from domestic and foreign influence. He thought if he isolated Begin and Sadat peace was possible. While the thirteen days at Camp David literally isolated the three leaders from the outside world, in reality the events leading up to Camp David, Camp David itself, and events after Camp David were marked by domestic political pressure for Carter and Begin and regional and domestic pressure for Sadat.

In the United States the American Jewish community continued to support Israel by trying to gain access to the American government. Even though Camp David prevented AIPAC from directly influencing the proceedings, Carter recognized the importance of reaching out the Jewish community as a whole during the process. From Sadat's speech in late 1977 to Camp David in September of 1978 and the months following Camp David, American Jewish leaders found themselves pandered to by the Carter administration. This time period and the Camp David negotiations provides a case of a president reaching out to an ethnic constituency through rhetoric and not action. It is clear from Camp David that Carter tried to contain all lobbying functions in the Jewish community. From Democratic Party leaders and officials, Carter found himself constantly reminded of how significant the American Jewish constituency was. This open appeal to the president was in stark contrast to discussions within the administration. The honesty

⁹⁵ Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 218.

in memorandums between Carter and his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski proved a difference in tone and commitments behind closed doors versus open meetings. Carter walked a fine line of trying to suppress Jewish lobbying capabilities without tarnishing a strong constituency with a history of support for the Democratic Party.

The result of Camp David was a framework that led to a bilateral peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in March of 1979. The peace agreement was only between Egypt and Israel and not regionally comprehensive in the way Carter had wanted it to be. Carter should be praised for his political decision-making in the face of a enormous hazard of failure. A perceived "Israel Lobby" lacked any foothold in the proceedings before, during, and after Camp David as administration attempted to keep pro-Israel institutions from directing the negotiations.

Events Leading Up to Camp David

Carter and the Middle East

Jimmy Carter came to office in 1976 with a vision for the Middle East. Even as many around him warned against trying to reach out to the region, Carter looked optimistically at the prospect for peace. This optimism resulted in an extensive amount of time spent on the region. In his own words, "It is remarkable to see how constantly the work for peace in the Middle East was on my agenda and on my mind."⁹⁶ To Carter his perception of morality and his deep religious convictions drove his passion for securing peace in the Middle East. The Palestinian issue was front and center in Carter's thoughts about Israel. "Since I had made our nation's commitment to human rights a central tenet of our foreign policy it was impossible for me to ignore the very serious problems on the

⁹⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 276.

West Bank.”⁹⁷ By reaching out to Palestinians in rhetoric Carter alienated the American Jewish community from the outset of the administration.⁹⁸ Carter stated at a town hall meeting in Massachusetts that Palestinian refugees needed a homeland due to their pain and suffering.⁹⁹ The connotation of suffering and homeland in the same sentence forced American Jews to question Carter’s methods and commitment to the state of Israel, serving as a pretext for his entire administration’s relationship with the American Jewish community.

Carter considered the plight of Palestinians important; be that as it may, for his administration the drive for peace in the region was predicated more strategically on oil and the Cold War.¹⁰⁰ With this broader context in mind, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt held the worldview required for the United States to reach out to the moderate Arab world. Egypt’s decision to turn in the direction of American influence instead of Soviet influence was integral in Carter’s entire perception of the Middle East. Carter’s personal relationship with Sadat fostered a sense of trust that Carter held dear. Carter described Sadat by stating, “On April 4, 1977, a shining light burst on the Middle East scene. I had my first meeting with President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, a man who would change history and whom I would come to admire more than any other leader.”¹⁰¹ Carter’s initial hopefulness for the prospect of peace in the region was vindicated by the actions of Sadat.

⁹⁷ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 297.

⁹⁸ "Morris Amitay." Telephone interview by author. September 22, 2008.

⁹⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and principle: memoirs of the national security advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Staus, Giroux, 1983), 91.

¹⁰⁰ Scott Kaufman and Burton Ira Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr* (New York: University P of Kansas, 2006), 57.

¹⁰¹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*(New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 282.

Sadat: A Rebel with a Cause

Anwar Sadat believed in strengthening Egypt's relationship with the United States. While his predecessor Nasser flirted with the Soviet Union, Sadat concluded that the United States offered the best opportunity for the people of Egypt to rise out of their economic doldrums.¹⁰² Sadat committed to the United States while Nasser refused to take such a step. In response to Sadat's moderation, the United States increased the foreign aid bill to Egypt. For Sadat recognizing Israel was the most politically charged and difficult part of forging a stronger relationship with the United States. Sadat knew Israel was an important ally to the United States. Rationalizing his decision to reach out to Israel, he responded to the Arab radical backlash by Egypt and the rest of the Arab world by conceptualizing the idea of a "peace dividend"¹⁰³ For the Egyptian president decreasing tension with Israel was a cost worth paying in order to reap the material gain offered by a capitalist friend in the United States.

On November 9, 1977, Sadat announced his willingness to visit Jerusalem, something that no other Arab leader had considered as a viable political option. From November 19th until November 21st Sadat visited Israel and Jerusalem, speaking directly to Israeli political members in the Knesset. His actions were aggressive, bold, and historically significant. Sadat's speech in Israel solidified an actual opportunity for talks between Israel and Egypt to ensue. The Arab world shunned Sadat for his decision, and even small numbers of Arab Americans lobbied President Carter and his administration

¹⁰² William J. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Policy Toward Egypt, 1955-1981* (New York: State University of New York P, 1985), 175.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 174.

to not deal with Sadat.¹⁰⁴ In spite of the uproar, Carter found an action fit to fill his own expectation for peace; seeing a partner he believed would help fashion comprehensive Middle Eastern peace. The actions of Sadat in November of 1977 resulted in the eventual concept of Camp David in the summer of 1978.

Begin: A Shift for Israelis and American Supporters of Israel

On June 20, 1977, Menachem Begin and his Likud party came to power in Israel to the surprise of Israelis and the detriment of the Carter administration. Begin marked a clear change from domestic politics in Israel of the past, politics formerly controlled by the Labor Party. The optimism Carter held for Sadat was equaled by his administrations aversion with Begins more extreme, right wing worldview.¹⁰⁵

Begin's upbringing offers insight into the difficulty the Carter administration and liberal Jewish community in the United States had in reacting and accepting the Likud prime minister. Menachem Begin was born in Brest Litvosk, Russia in 1913. During his years studying at the University of Warsaw, Begin experienced anti-Semitism. In 1942, Begin immigrated to Palestine. In Palestine, Begin became a leader in the Irgun Zvai Leumi, a militant organization that fought for Israel's independence. Between 1943 and the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, Begin led military attacks and bombings against British authorities.¹⁰⁶

The Labor Party had been the political power structure of Israel since her independence in 1948. By the late 1970s, Begin and the Likud Party judged their opposition had a chance to take over Labor dominance. During the election, the Likud

¹⁰⁴ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 292.

¹⁰⁵ "Israeli Elections." William B. Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski. May 18, 1977. In *National Security Affairs: Brzezinski*. Vol. 34. Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁰⁶ "Menachem Begin (1913-1992)." The Knesset Website.

http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/begin_eng.htm (accessed February 24, 2009).

Party and Begin did not focus on their more right wing extreme views about settlements, occupied territories, and the concept of a Greater Israel. Rather Begin and his campaign strategists focused on family values, honesty, and the economy. Rabin and the Labor Party suffered from inflation and scandal, while Begin and Likud stressed a return to honest politics.¹⁰⁷

The Carter administration's feelings about Begin and Likud were made clear in a memorandum written on May 18, 1977 from Middle East Advisor William Quandt to National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski.¹⁰⁸ Quandt advised that the administration should do nothing "publicly" to show their regret in Likud coming to power. Quandt lobbied for repercussions targeted at the Israeli public for the results of their democratic election. He contended, "Israeli voters should know that a hardline government will not find it easy to manage U.S.-Israeli relations." In order to show a breakdown in the relationship, Quandt believed arms sales acted as a threatening policy decision that would make Israelis question their electoral decision. The tone and ultimate findings of Quandt spoke to the overall reaction from the Carter administration to the domestic change in Israel.

Despite ideological difference, Carter's political beliefs pushed him to still reach out to Begin. The left leaning American president enumerated to the right leaning Begin his goals for peace. Carter focused on a broad, comprehensive peace based on UN resolution 242 and Israel's leaving the occupied territories. Begin agreed with all of these concepts, but could not find common ground with Carter's idea that the Palestinians

¹⁰⁷ David Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 247.

¹⁰⁸ "Israeli Elections." William B. Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski. May 18, 1977. In *National Security Affairs: Brzezinski*. Vol. 34. Jimmy Carter Library.

should receive self-rule. On a personal level, Carter got along better with Begin than he thought he would during their first meeting.¹⁰⁹

The American Jewish community also responded to Begin and his ascension to power in Israel. The community wavered over the prospect of Begin. This hesitation was reasonable as Begin represented a complete change in the political sphere of power. For thirty years the American Jewish community connected to the Labor party through personal relationships and shared political beliefs. Begin changed the political ideology in power of Israel. At the same time, his shift in political beliefs went against the innate ideological inclinations of American Jewry. Americans voted in vast majorities for Democrats whom shared the same values of the Labor Party in Israel.¹¹⁰

American Jewish policy circles urged Begin to move in the direction of moderation. In April 1978 before Camp David, American Jewish leaders traveled to Israel to illustrate to Begin his negative effect on United States opinion. The American Jews posited to Begin that his policies hurt support for Israel both in American government institutions such as Congress and more generally the American public as a whole. The data presented came from a wide array of American Jewry including intellectuals and rabbis trying to persuade Begin to depart from his more hard line ways.

¹¹¹ On the other side, head of AIPAC Morris Amitay had a great relationship with Begin, showing the schism created by Begin even within American Jewish leadership. Amitay considered Begin integral in founding Israel, and his respect for Begin went a long way in a strong relationship between the AIPAC leader and the new prime minister of Israel. The

¹⁰⁹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 291.

¹¹⁰ David Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 244.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

two met years before, and Amitay made sure to meet with Begin every time he visited Israel.¹¹²

Not surprisingly, the administration perceived confusion in the American Jewish community. Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan's document in 1977 offered Carter a context for the American Jewish community, its lobbies, and its overall apprehension with the political change in the state of Israel. Jordan specified two reasons for American Jewish anxiety over the election of Begin. First, Jordan suggested that unlike the Labor Party, American Jewish leaders did not have the strong connection with Likud or Begin. After thirty years of political control for Labor in Israel, American Jewish leaders found themselves dealing with an administration led by a party they had not worked with. The personal ties and years of good will were lost with the Likud victory. Secondly, Jordan speculated that the American Jewish community and its leaders feared that Begin would "erode" the political support garnered in the United States for Israel. Begin's hard line mentality could alienate American leaders and hurt American public support for the state of Israel.¹¹³

Despite American Jewry and its leaders reacting to Begin with some semblance of cynicism, in the end Begin's policies as prime minister did not in any way substantially throw off American Jewish support of Israel. Instead, American Jews found themselves distrusting both Begin and Carter. In a sense the community rallied around the Israeli flag deciding that policy differences should not change the goal of protecting the democratic state in the Middle East. Even with some disconnect between American Jews and the

¹¹² "Morris Amitay," telephone interview by author, September 22, 2008.

¹¹³ "Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics." Hamilton Jordan to Jimmy Carter. June 1977. In *Jordan*. Vol. 34. Jimmy Carter Library.

Begin administration, "American Jews were also unwilling to be a weapon against Israel."¹¹⁴

Carter and the American Jewish Communities Perceptions of Each Other

The American Jewish community struggled to believe in the Carter administration. This strain was experienced during the election year as voting numbers from American Jews and campaign donations were both down for Carter compared to traditional Democratic candidates. (Carter still received high percentages in both categories and only lost support on the margin.)¹¹⁵ Hamilton Jordan described it as "widespread concern in the American Jewish community over the president's positions."¹¹⁶

Once in office, the head of AIPAC Morris Amitay pointed to Carter's failure in trying to reconvene the Geneva Conference as angering the American Jewish community. In fact, this action resulted in American Jewish community members picketing the White House.¹¹⁷ Both Israel and Egypt were skeptical of Carter's original plan to try to bring the peace process under the jurisdiction of the United States and the Soviet Union.¹¹⁸ American Jews also perceived from Carter's rhetoric his affinity for the Palestinians. They took his words as a direct threat.

Carter and American Jewish leaders, felt an element of distrust in one another. The administration recognized that any Middle East policy needed to come with support from American Jews. This belief caused Carter to discuss candidly some of his arguments

¹¹⁴ David Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 256.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹¹⁶ Scott Kaufman and Burton Ira Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr* (New York: University P of Kansas, 2006), 57.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹¹⁸ "Morris Amitay." Telephone interview by author. September 22, 2008.

for problems in the peace process. For example, on February 8, 1978, Carter told a group of American Jewish leaders that Israel and settlements were the biggest problems in achieving Middle East peace.¹¹⁹ This moment of honesty was masked by a more consistent pro-Israel rhetoric from Carter to leaders in the American Jewish community, even when Carter's statements were not supported by actions. This disconnect was also experienced on the other side. The president had his own reservations about American Jewish leaders. The president concluded that in private American Jewish leaders agreed with many of his policies, but the public assertions by these same leaders went against the administration. Carter described, "In our private conversations they were often supportive and, like the Arab leaders, urged us to explore every avenue that might lead to peace. But in a public showdown on a controversial issue, they would almost always side with the Israeli leaders and condemn us for being "evenhanded" in our concerns for Palestinian rights and Israeli security."¹²⁰

It is difficult to quantify how much American Jewish leadership agreed with Carter privately versus argued with him publicly. One thing is for sure, American Jewish leaders felt powerless because of Carter's high-level talks. Because of this, it was rational for American Jewish leadership to publicly question Carter. By questioning him to their Jewish constituency, they pressured the administration to reach out to American Jews in order to continue the important connection between American Jews and the Democratic Party. American Jewish leaders lobbied their constituency in order to try and keep Carter honest when he met one on one with Sadat and Begin. Even though high-level talks kept

¹¹⁹ Scott Kaufman and Burton Ira Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr* (New York: University P of Kansas, 2006), 106.

¹²⁰ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 298.

Amitay and AIPAC mostly out of the loop in terms of Congress, Carter still had to respond to an important voting bloc that offered campaign money and consistent support. For the most part Carter's administration was aggravated by the political reality of reaching out to American Jews, and in most cases the administration chose to act against the wishes of the American Jewish community. Chief among these efforts was Camp David. The administration's plan to reach peace knowingly hindered AIPAC's ability to become a part of the process; as a result, Carter sacrificed accountability with his Jewish constituency.

Stalemate Before Camp David

Following Sadat's trip to Israel the process for peace between Israel and its neighbors struggled to move forward. On January 12, 1978, William Quandt wrote a memo to Zbigniew Brzezinski outlining his beliefs about where the chance for peace stood. Quandt labeled the assessment "The Moment of Truth" as he laid out three possible scenarios for the path between Sadat, Begin, and Carter. If the administration had its way broad, comprehensive negotiations would occur including other moderate Arab states in the region, but by this point experts deduced the more likely of options would be a bilateral agreement between Egypt and Israel, or even worse a stalemate.¹²¹ Quandt considered the minimum requirements for peace to include self-rule for Palestinians and Israeli withdrawal in accordance to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242. Quandt blamed Begin for the current troubles stating, "I see no sign that Begin is ready to accept this principle."¹²²

¹²¹ "The Approaching Moment of Truth." William B. Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski. January 12, 1978. In *NSC Brzezinski Material*. Vol. 35. Jimmy Carter Library.

¹²² *Ibid.*

By the summer of 1978 the administration looked at a stalemate, the worst of scenarios that Quandt and the rest of the National Security Council had feared at the beginning of the year. With this standstill a political reality, the administration's dire straights were best summed up by a memo written by Zbigniew Brzezinski to Carter. Brzezinski departed from his consistent insularity in regards to domestic political reaction when he wrote to the president, "Do we have the political strength to manage a prolonged strain in U.S.-Israeli relations?"¹²³ Brzezinski showed his awareness that this strain "touch(ed) both on international and domestic sensitivities."¹²⁴ The administration realized its policies alienated an important constituency. American Jews found themselves at odds with the administration, while the administration put the "onus" on Begin for the difficulties in deliberating peace.

In 1977 Hamilton Jordan wrote to the president about American Jewish struggle with Begin. By the summer of 1978 the administration realized the disconnect did not result in the political capital essential to putting pressure on Begin. The prime minister refused to fold on issues such as settlements, the West Bank, and Palestinian self-rule. American Jewish leaders and pro-Israel institutions from all circles pressured Begin to be more moderate, but they refused to give Carter the keys to pressure Israel in any way.¹²⁵ Carter and his administration could have easily chosen to give up on the prospects of peace at this point. If Carter had given up at this point, the influence of a "Jewish Lobby" would have become clear. The administration sensed pressure, but not enough to steer clear of the Middle East. Instead, Carter contained the American Jewish community even

¹²³ "The Middle East." Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter. July 18, 1978. In *Zbigniew Brzezinski Middle East*. Vol. 13. Jimmy Carter Library.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ "The Approaching Moment of Truth." William B. Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski. January 12, 1978. In *NSC Brzezinski Material*. Vol. 35. Jimmy Carter Library.

more by proposing an extreme attempt of seclusion. The administration might have concluded a continued effort was political suicide, but Carter daringly chose a different path.

Camp David: A Risk Carter Was Willing to Take

By the summer of 1978 peace talks between Egypt and Israel lacked any real substance. Recognizing the deadlock but still eyeing an aggressive and optimistic peace agreement, Carter made one of his more risky political decisions. When Carter came to office his counsel had told him to stay away from the Middle East, but Sadat's effort to extend himself to Israel made Carter believe there still remained a chance for peace. On January 31, 1978 Carter revealed in his diary the concept of Camp David.¹²⁶ Carter, in the face of political risk at home and abroad, contrived the idea of bringing Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat to Camp David. Carter asserted himself as the mediator. Jimmy Carter took his idealism to the next level. He would personally mediate, breaking the status quo in summits and negotiations. Customarily, presidents allow lower level statesmen to debate, quarrel, and work for peaceful solutions to problems. Once the peace agreement is met, heads of state meet to formally sign the treaty and congratulate all sides on the breakthrough. Carter chose to take on the task of lower level statesman putting himself in the direct fire if Camp David failed.¹²⁷

Carter underwent pressure from his own party and members of his cabinet for his decision. The president discussed in his memoir, "Many Democratic members of Congress and party officials were urging me to back out of the situation and repair the

¹²⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 297.

¹²⁷ Scott Kaufman and Burton Ira Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr* (New York: University P of Kansas, 2006), 150.

damage they claimed I had already done to the Democratic Party and U.S.-Israeli relations.”¹²⁸ In a memorandum to Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski put it bluntly. The national security advisor declared, “If we go “public” we must prevail.”¹²⁹ Carter realized the political risk, but he moved forward anyway. The president was making a conscious decision to isolate all three parties; a practice that Chief of Staff Jordan told Carter angered the Jewish community. Begin accepted the opportunity even with the American Jewish community losing its ability to influence the process. Sadat welcomed the meeting after putting himself on the line by traveling to Israel. The stage was set for the three leaders to bunker in Camp David. Carter saw the summit lasting three days with the goal of reaching a framework for peace that Egypt and Israel could extend to other Arab states afterwards.¹³⁰

Preparing for Camp David

Drafted on July 28, 1978, the memorandum titled “Agreement on Principles and Procedures for Negotiating Peace in the Middle East” set forth idealistic conclusions for Camp David. The document focused on Camp David resulting in comprehensive peace agreements between Israel and Egypt and Israel with other moderate Arab nations based on UN Resolution 242. Resolution 242 called for the Israeli withdrawal from all territories gained after the 1967 war.¹³¹ To conclude, the document presented a three-stage process for Israel to give up sovereignty to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

¹²⁸ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 316.

¹²⁹ "The Middle East." Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter. July 18, 1978. In *Zbigniew Brzezinski Middle East*. Vol. 13. Jimmy Carter Library.

¹³⁰ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 322.

¹³¹ Agreement on Principles and Procedures For Negotiating Peace in the Middle East. Report. Zbigniew Brzezinski. Vol. 13. The Jimmy Carter Library.

The idealism of the document was matched by the practicality of Zbigniew Brzezinski's memorandum to the president titled "Strategy for Camp David." AIPAC's fears about the State Department, the National Security Council, and the administration were substantiated in Brzezinski's document. Brzezinski outlined to Carter a synopsis of each leader. The goal of the document was to provide Carter with a profile of each leader's personality in order for Carter to plan and hone his negotiation tactics. Stressed continually by Brzezinski was the power of the Soviet Union.¹³² Brzezinski directed Carter to emphasize to Begin and Sadat that a failure at Camp David would inherently mark the rise of Soviet influence in the region. Most notably, in regards to American Jewish fears of the administration, Brzezinski emphasized "blackmailing" Begin. He called on the president to make clear to the prime minister of Israel that he would publicly ostracize him in America if peace was not reached. In this public display, he would set forth the administration's perception of national interests to the American public and emphasize that unconditional support for Israel did not make his list. Brzezinski's national interests included "strategic relations with Soviets, economic interests, oil, and cooperation with moderate regimes."¹³³ Finally, Brzezinski told Carter to let Begin know that if peace broke down and moved to another forum such as the UN or a Geneva Conference, America would not support Israel.

Through the document Brzezinski displayed his own personal detachment from the politics of elections and public opinion. In his position as national security advisor, Brzezinski focused less on domestic issues and popularity and more on policy. His calculation that Carter could "blackmail" Begin to the American public rested on

¹³² "Strategy for Camp David." Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter. In *Zbigniew Brzezinski Middle East*. Vol. 13. The Jimmy Carter Library.

¹³³ Ibid.

Brzezinski not giving credence to Democratic officials who warned against the strain Carter put on the relationship between his administration, the party, and the American Jewish constituency. Without answering to the public directly, Brzezinski's candid language highlighted his concentration on policy and not the convergence of political action leading to constituent fallout. Carter's predilection for Brzezinski further suggests the lack of influence from pro-Israel institutions in shaping the discussions at Camp David.

Cyrus Vance's "Optimal Outcome for Camp David" article written for the president honed the idealism publicly expressed by the administration. Vance offered four subjects to be agreed upon during the summit. He included withdrawal/security of West Bank/Gaza, settlements, negotiations, and Resolution 242/Palestinian Rights.¹³⁴ For each subject, Vance concluded responses for both Begin and Sadat. While Vance showed an idealistic response for each category, he also laid out more practical responses. The tone of Vance's documents marked a huge deviation from Brzezinski. While in Brzezinski's document his bias and personal beliefs show through, Vance was remarkably stoic in his rhetoric and less emotional.

Brzezinski and Vance were the competing voices in Carter's head as he met September 5, 1978 with Begin and Sadat at Camp David. According to Professor Jim Ray, the Carter-Brzezinski relationship solidified the growing power of the national security advisor in forming foreign policy. In agreement, Gaddis Smith documented Carter's move in the direction of Brzezinski's political worldview. This implies that Brzezinski carried more weight with the president. Vance's eventual stepping down from

¹³⁴ "Optimal Outcome for Camp David." Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter. In *Zbigniew Brzezinski Middle East*. Vol. 14. The Jimmy Carter Library.

secretary of state confirms this argument. For pro-Israel lobbies, the strengthening of the Brzezinski-Carter relationship carried with it practical consequences, especially because of Brzezinski's overarching argument for turning away from the status quo relationship with Israel.¹³⁵

Weakening AIPAC

Carter's organization for the Camp David summit structurally hindered the ability of domestic groups to put pressure on the three heads of state. It would be naïve to believe that lobbying before the Camp David meetings had no effect on the way the three heads of states acted at Camp David, but during the thirteen days of the summit domestic lobbies had no entry to the meetings. In addition, AIPAC lost the ability to influence the discussions because the lobby could not count on Congress as a means to counter Carter.

For AIPAC, the organization of Camp David was both debilitating and worrisome for many reasons.¹³⁶ At the time, Congress represented AIPAC's most powerful ability to shape policy. Camp David made no room for congressional pulling or prodding. Unlike the sale of planes to Saudi Arabia, Carter's job as mediator did not have any checks or balances to it. Carter was a third party promoter and advocate, and his work was not met with any formal counterbalance. The format left AIPAC out of molding any type of argumentation during the summit itself.¹³⁷

Not only did Camp David leave AIPAC out of the policy mix, but also the meetings put mediators in place that AIPAC and its constituents did not feel comfortable with. AIPAC considered the State Department and the White House under Carter to side

¹³⁵ James Lee Ray, *American Foreign Policy and Political Ambition* (New York: CQ P, 2007), 125.

¹³⁶ "Morris Amitay." Telephone interview by author. September 22, 2008.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

more with the Arabs. Taking it a step further, the lobby group believed Carter, the State Department, and the National Security Council were in fact hostile to Israel.¹³⁸

Memorandums between National Security Advisor Brzezinski and President Carter help to substantiate AIPAC's reservations. Leading up to Camp David it was clear that Brzezinski advocated to Carter that Begin was the leader that he could most threaten with political backlash. On top of this threat, Carter's original Palestinian rhetoric remained in the minds of American Jewish leadership and the community.

Carter knowingly presented a situation that hindered outside influence. In his own words describing Camp David he stated, "Three leaders of nations would be isolated from the outside world."¹³⁹ Even worse for the American Jewish community was a lack of trust in all three leaders meeting. Publicly American Jews had shown their disapproval of Carter. Privately Democratic American Jews struggled to connect to Menachem Begin. Publicly and privately American Jews believed that Arab leaders could not be trusted. Carter brought all three heads of state together outside the public realm. The discussions at Camp David could not be affected by direct public opinion polls or lobbying, at least that is what Carter contended and wanted. In reality, Carter's statement was too simplistic. Yes, the three leaders were out of the scope of media and domestic politics, but the pressures remained for all three leaders before, during, and after Camp David.

Conclusions From Camp David

On September 17, 1978 the summit concluded. Camp David was supposed to last three days but it ended only after thirteen long days of concession and debate. The result of the proceedings was a framework for peace in the region and a framework for peace

¹³⁸ "Morris Amitay." Telephone interview by author. September 22, 2008.

¹³⁹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 319.

specifically between Egypt and Israel. Carter described, "For a few hours, all three of us were flushed with pride."¹⁴⁰ At points during the thirteen days the Carter camp felt nothing would result from Camp David. This pessimism reinforced to Carter the argument prevalent from his counsel and other D.C. insiders that the Middle East lacked a feasibly chance for peace. Accordingly, Carter should be given credit for considering this pessimism and still taking a risk.

In a speech drafted September 15, 1978, two days before the summit ended, Carter stressed the necessity for Camp David because of "profound moral commitments, vital strategic interests, and long standing friendships with the peoples of the Middle East." Carter went on to say, "Our national interest as well as our principles require that we make every effort to bring peace and stability to the Middle East."¹⁴¹ Carter conceived the idea of Camp David and carried it out not only because of stubbornness, but also because Carter thought Camp David served American national interests.

The thirteen days at Camp David separated Carter, Begin, and Sadat physically from the outside political world, but as soon as the three leaders left the confines of isolation, domestic politics roared. In his own words Carter realized at the end of Camp David, "We had no idea at that time how far we still had to go."¹⁴² A framework had been created but peace treaties had yet to be signed. On September 19, 1978 Carter met with key Jewish leaders. The meeting resulted from Carter trying to alleviate the public reaction from Begin's speeches to the American Jewish community after Camp David ended. Begin decided to criticize the process in order to achieve a rally around the flag

¹⁴⁰ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 319.

¹⁴¹ "Presidential Speech." Speech, Zbigniew Brzezinski Geo, The Jimmy Carter Library, 14, September 15, 1978.

¹⁴² Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 403.

effect among the American Jewish community. With American Jews on Begin's side, Carter's ideological and historical connection to American Jews became even more threatened. In response, Carter reached out to American Jewish leaders with electoral effects in mind. Like American Jewish leaders' public displays, Begin's speeches put Carter in position to respond. Even though Carter planned a meeting, American Jewish leaders still lacked any real leverage or foothold in future policy.¹⁴³

The Real Fight: From Framework to Peace Treaty

After the three leaders left Camp David, outside influences helped dictate the following months. For Sadat, Arab states remained at odds with his goals, while for Begin strong right wing members of his domestic political coalition established their qualms with the leaders' peace pursuits. Even Carter identified with the plight of Begin, "I sympathized with Begin, because he had to face strong opposition forces that are an inherent part of democracy."¹⁴⁴ Carter empathized with Begin, and in doing so Carter showed his own frustration in dissenting domestic factors. The seclusion of Camp David met the social and political realities of the real world as the three leaders inched from framework to an actual signed peace treaty.

Timeline Towards Peace

On November 30, 1978, over two months after the commencement of Camp David, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote to Jimmy Carter in a memorandum titled "Initial Reaction to the Latest Middle East Difficulty." Brzezinski submitted reasons that Camp David achieved a framework and why current talks had broken down. The national

¹⁴³ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 405.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 410.

security advisor alluded to Arab influences against Sadat at the Baghdad Conference and Begin's inability to deal with the issue of the West Bank.¹⁴⁵ Just as he had done before Camp David, Brzezinski suggested threatening Begin and Israel by pronouncing that the current relationship between the United States and Israel would be hurt if Begin could not forge a peace agreement. Brzezinski expounded that both on an economic level and a military level the United States policy of providing to Israel could not continue. The national security advisor charged Begin as the cause of what he called a "perpetual stalemate".¹⁴⁶ Once again, Brzezinski's personal separation from domestic lobbies allowed him to speak his mind and not feel intimidated by any one constituency or political impact. As a strong voice in the president's ear, Brzezinski used his authority as national security advisor and his increasing influence over Carter to put blame on Begin for the struggle in finding comprehensive peace.

In early December, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was sent to the Middle East with the objective to sign a peace treaty.¹⁴⁷ Brzezinski asked Carter to make sure that Vance made clear to the Israelis that they were the roadblocks in finding a peace settlement. Brzezinski armed Vance with the same rhetoric given before Camp David and directly after, that American relations with Israel would suffer greatly if they continued to be the perceived problem.¹⁴⁸ Yet again, an American member of government physically left domestic pressures. Pro-Israel institutions power in the United States continued to be diminished and their skepticism continued to be high.

¹⁴⁵ "Initial Reaction to the Latest Middle East Difficulty." Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter. November 30, 1978. In *Zbigniew Brzezinski Geo.* Vol. 14. The Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ "Strategy for the Vance Trip to the Middle East (U)." Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter. December 6, 1978. In *Zbigniew Brzezinski Geo.* Vol. 14. The Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

With Vance's mission to the Middle East not resulting in peace, by February of 1979 the White changed their objectives for peace. No longer were lofty goals set on comprehensive peace throughout the entire region. Instead, the White House sought a bilateral peace between Egypt and Israel. As part of this bilateral initiative, Carter and his administration still wanted Palestinian rights and the West Bank to remain on the bargaining table.¹⁴⁹ In the winter of 1979, Carter invited Begin and Sadat back to the United States. Both came on trips as well as other ministers representing each country, but peace remained out of hand. In early March, Carter found himself making yet another risky and desperate move. Without sufficient movement in the process the president decided a personal trip to Egypt and Israel was necessary.

American Jewish Efforts: Responding to Isolation at Camp David

The American Jewish community was apprehensive with Carter as president. The announcement and carrying out of Camp David made them even more uncomfortable with the president. Insecurities with Carter combined with the American Jewish community's skeptical private response to Begin becoming prime minister of Israel. The more conservative leader did not connect well with the more liberal American Jewish community. Although a political divide characterized the relationship between Begin and American Jews, American Jewish leaders and their constituencies remained resolute about the security and safety of the state of Israel and their hope for peace in the region.

Theodore Mann, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, sent a letter to Carter on December 22, 1978. In his leadership position, Mann represented over thirty Jewish organizations including AIPAC, the

¹⁴⁹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 413.

American Zionist Federation, the World Zionist Organization American Section, and the Zionist Organization of America. These organizations played more of a role on the issue of Israel, but Mann represented other domestic Jewish organizations as well. He spoke for not only pro-Israel institutions but also the American Jewish community at large.

In the letter, Mann asserted that he had tried to schedule a meeting with the president, but because of the president's busy schedule no meeting had been arranged. As a result, his letter took the place of a personal meeting in offering the arguments and grievances of the American Jewish community. Mann showed frustration with the inability for the president to find time to meet with him. Mann's failure to meet in December with the president shows another limit on access for the American Jewish community in regards to the Carter administration.

In the letter, Mann contended that Egypt and not Israel should be credited with the difficulties in reaching peace. Mann stressed the belief of American Jewish citizens that Israel had been "the object of a campaign of intimidation."¹⁵⁰ It is feasible that this comment was directed specifically to the policy suggestions of National Security Advisor Brzezinski. Finally, Mann made clear that the current concessions needed for peace allowed for Egypt to use war against Israel as a method of dealing in the future, and allowed for the PLO a seat at the negotiating table.¹⁵¹

In January of 1979, Ed Sanders, Jewish liaison for the president, wrote to Zbigniew Brzezinski, Hal Saunders, David Aaron, and Bill Quandt about a briefing for

¹⁵⁰ "Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations." Theodore R. Mann to Jimmy Carter. December 22, 1978. In *Special Advisor to President Moses*. Vol. 1. The Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

fifteen members of the American Jewish community.¹⁵² The meeting included Theodore Mann, Bernard White from AIPAC, and professors Steve Spiegel, and Abraham Udovitch among others. Ed Sanders correspondence indicates Jimmy Carter did not plan on attending the meeting. However, on January 19th remarks from President Carter were recorded.

It was noteworthy that Carter came to the meeting, as it indicated his awareness of the strain between his administration and the American Jewish community. Carter's statements gave insight into his perception of the difficulty in finding peace. The president made clear, "Our overriding interest in the Middle East is in insuring the security and integrity of Israel."¹⁵³ He reiterated the United States commitment not to negotiate with the PLO, and ended his comments by reassuring the community, "We have nothing to gain by betraying the interests of Israel."¹⁵⁴ Carter's arguments during the meeting were talking points that American Jewish leaders wanted to hear.

In spite of these statements, members of Carter's inner circle, specifically National Security Advisor Brzezinski, demanded that the president press Begin and blame him for the failure to find peace. The distinction between meetings with American Jewish leaders and private discussions within Carter's inner circle is crucial in understanding the containment of pro-Israel institutions in lobbying the president. American Jewish leaders presented Carter with their arguments, but Carter's inner circle subscribed to the exact opposite view of the situation. While Theodore Mann believed

¹⁵² "Briefing on the Middle East, January 19." Edward Sanders to Participants. January 15, 1979. In *NSC*. Vol. 36. The Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁵³ President Carter's Remarks to Jewish Leaders 1/19/79, report (The Jimmy Carter Library: Sanders).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

that Egypt created the problems for peace, National Security Advisor Brzezinski antagonistically pushed a different policy. Brzezinski's arguments were the ones referred to by Vance and Carter when dealing with state representatives from Egypt and Israel. Yes, Carter met with and responded to the Jewish leaders but when negotiations actually occurred, the views expressed by the Carter did not convey the arguments made by Theodore Mann, AIPAC, or any other American Jewish organization. Carter met with Jewish leaders for political and electoral reasons, and not to heed their guidance or to use their contentions in negotiations. Once again, a divide between rhetoric and action ensued.

Final Steps to Peace

Carter understood the danger involved with Camp David, but the risk did not deter him. This same mentality led him to conclude that a personal trip the Middle East offered the best opportunity for seizing a peace agreement. Political disaster came along with deciding to take this trip because "a nonproductive trip by the president of the United States to the Middle East, would greatly dramatize failure." Zbigniew Brzezinski briefed the president on March 3, 1979 with a memorandum stating a positive scenario for the trip and a negative scenario for the trip. Once again, Brzezinski focused on Carter establishing ultimatums for the Israelis.¹⁵⁵ Brzezinski emphasized that if Begin were to stand in the way of peace; political reparations would be sought even if this meant domestic fallout for the administration.

Unlike attempts before his trip, Carter solidified a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. AIPAC accepted the peace agreement along with others in the American

¹⁵⁵ "Middle East Scenario." Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter. March 3, 1979. In *ZB Geo*. Vol. 14. The Jimmy Carter Library.

Jewish community. From an American perspective, AIPAC believed the agreement secured one of Israel's borders while keeping the Soviet influence out of Egypt. From an Israeli perspective, AIPAC believed if the democratic political system in Israel accepted the peace agreement, American Jews should respect the Israeli political choice and hope that the agreement benefited Israel in the long run.¹⁵⁶

The March 26th ceremony in Washington D.C. brought the three leaders together in a joyful day. While Carter was unable to secure any agreements about Palestinian autonomy or comprehensive Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, the chance he took did result in a reward. The bilateral agreement was one that mainstream Americans, Israelis, and Egyptians did not conceive as possible.¹⁵⁷

Conclusions About the American Jewish Community's Role

Camp David resulted in a framework that months later led to bilateral peace between Egypt and Israel. This type of peace was not considered viable when President Carter took office. With that said, the signing of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel occurred based on a framework developed without any direct influence from pro-Israel organizations. In effect, the Camp David process occurred while AIPAC and other pro-Israel organizations were paralyzed and unable to contribute to the policy discussion. Before and after the meetings in September of 1978, leadership in the American Jewish community reached out to the American government. In response, the Carter administration looked to appease the American Jewish constituency, while at the same

¹⁵⁶ "Morris Amitay." Telephone interview by author. September 22, 2008.

¹⁵⁷ Scott Kaufman and Burton Ira Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr* (New York: University P of Kansas, 2006), 155.

time shutting out lobbying apparatuses from the Jewish community. The American Jewish absence in the policy of Camp David kept the constituency from any influence on the proceedings. Evidence of this lack of policy influence can be best seen through three avenues: the administration's insistence on consistently creating structural blocks for American Jewish organizations, the behind closed doors rhetoric of administration officials, and the administration's ignoring of Democratic Party officials' attempts to stop the strain with the American Jewish constituency.

First and foremost, the structure of Camp David meant an inability for AIPAC to affect the meetings. Unlike the plane sale to Saudi Arabia, Congress did not have to pass legislation in order for Carter to be allowed to mediate between Egypt and Israel. For this reason, Carter and the administration avoided any head to head confrontation with pro-Israel domestic groups and lobbies, where their majority of influence came from congressional support. The Camp David arrangement minimized influence from the outside on the three leaders and their staffs. In addition, to Camp David and the framework created after thirteen days, Carter personally went to the Middle East to finalize a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Carter purposely secluded himself from domestic pressure allowing him to weaken American Jewish role in the process.

The administration's ability to control the format of negotiations allowed for Carter to be more difficult with Begin in terms of Israeli concessions. This point is most apparent when comparing the rhetoric of Brzezinski to Carter compared to rhetoric from Carter to the American Jewish public. Brzezinski made obvious attempts throughout the entire process to use Carter's task as mediator to force Israel's hand and to threaten the Begin administration. Brzezinski put the entire blame for stalemates in negotiations on

Begin. When Carter spoke to American Jewish leaders, he reiterated Israel talking points, but his choice for national security advisor countered these arguments every step of the way. American Jewish leaders were unable to have a honest discussion with the administration. While American Jewish leaders were given a forum to offer contentions, Brzezinski's letters and memorandums to the president prove the lack of influence the American Jewish community's arguments had on policy and action from the administration.

American Jewish leaders found themselves left out of Camp David with their influence relegated to the administrations motive to maintain the status quo in campaign and electoral support. Carter recognized the historic connection between American Jews and the Democratic Party both in terms of voting behavior and campaign financing. Democratic leaders in Congress and party officials also reminded him of this significant voting bloc not only for him but also for the party as a whole. Despite their warnings, Carter continued down his path of idealistic peace. In the end, Carter's risky decisions paid off by forging a peace treaty, but Carter's decision to ignore Jewish domestic pressure shows the lack of influence the group had on policy and the process towards peace.

CONCLUSION

A Plurality of Forces: Putting Pro-Israel Efforts in Context

With intellectual and public debate in response to Mearsheimer and Walt's book The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy, researching a historical case study becomes one way to assess the arguments. Mearsheimer and Walt pointed to an "Israel Lobby" as a source of halting debate, unconditional support for Israel, and twisting of American national interests. On the other side, leading thinkers such as Eliot Cohen and Alan Dershowitz quickly pointed to bad scholarship and faulty logic in discounting The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy. My goal from the outset was to establish a more comprehensive list of influences affecting the development of policy. In order to do so, I singled out the case study of Jimmy Carter and focused on two critical policy initiatives. I have arrived upon more specific conclusions about the term "Israel Lobby," American Jewish political activity, and President Carter's handling of the Jewish community. Simultaneously, my work can point toward broader findings about how a plurality of influences affect foreign policy and the pursuit of America's national interest.

The Carter Administration as a Case Study

F-15s to Saudi Arabia

The White House's decision to sell F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia resulted from the administration's comprehensive approach to the Middle East. President Carter and his staff envisioned reaching out to more moderate Arab States in order to curb Soviet influence in the area and to affirm American authority. The White House, State Department, and National Security Council supported the measure to sell planes to the

Saudis. In response, Congress's predilection for Israel and its security made the body skeptical of the president's plan.

As the showdown for and against sales became more heated, the administration's lobbying was aided by the State Department, American business, and the Saudi regime. The Saudis sent diplomats, employed a public relations firm to lobby Congress, and hired former American politicians with experience dealing with Congress. The American Jewish community was highly critical of the sale. Certain members of Congress and the majority of Americans according to public opinion polls joined the Jewish community against the sale.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) led the American Jewish community's charge against the president's decision to sell planes. AIPAC declared to Congress that selling planes to Saudi Arabia armed a hostile state that was willing to attack, or to service others, willing to attack Israel. The role of AIPAC was reflected in a letter submitted to the secretary of state from Senate Foreign Relations member and influential proponent of Israel, Frank Church. The letter mirrored in many ways the memorandum released by AIPAC against the sale. The similarities of the memorandum and letter suggest that AIPAC's arguments were at least heard, weighed, and accepted by certain members of the Senate. Senator Frank Church's letter represented his own beliefs about American national interests and Middle East policy, but the letter also offered insight into the influence of domestic lobbies on Congress. In the end, the F-15 plane sales to Saudi Arabia passed by a 54-44 vote in the Senate. Some in the media charged that Congress's vote marked the worst defeat ever for the American Jewish

community.¹⁵⁸ The media's rash conclusion and the vote for the sale did not offer the full story. Carter's administration made concerted attempts before and during the process to amend the eventual bill in order to gain the amount of votes needed to pass it. First of all, the administration packaged the plane sales with arms sales to Israel and Egypt. This package made it impossible for pro-Israel members of Congress to provide Israel with planes if they did not vote in favor of plane sales to Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, notable modifications were made from the announcement of the administration's intention to sell planes to the actual passage of the bill. The eventual package included restrictions on where the planes could be stationed in Saudi Arabia and barred the United States from providing all weapons for the planes. These key developments demonstrated the influence from those against the sale, including AIPAC.

In the case of the F-15 plane sales, a variety of influences, domestic and foreign, played a part in the bill approved by the Senate. AIPAC influenced the policy, and one might conclude that some of the compromises in the eventual bill resulted from AIPAC's ability to lobby Congress. However, the playing field was open as the Saudis, business interests, and the administration lobbied Congress. A plurality of influences shaped the final sale of F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia.

Camp David: A Framework that Led to Peace

President Carter described feeling a special connection to the Middle East that resulted in his decision to become a mediator for the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁵⁹ While advisors told the president to stay away from the region, Carter moved forward as he engaged Anwar Sadat from Egypt and Menachem Begin from Israel. Anwar Sadat's

¹⁵⁸ "F-15 Fight: Who Won What," *Time Magazine*, May 29, 1978.

¹⁵⁹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 276.

decision to travel to Jerusalem and speak at the Knesset provided a political jumpstart towards peace. Sadat's speech brought hope but eventually led to a stalemate in negotiations between Egypt and Israel. With that in mind, Carter suggested the concept of Camp David. Carter wanted to physically take away Begin and Sadat from the rest of the world hoping that Camp David would act as a springboard for peace between Israel and moderate states in the region. It also allowed Carter to physically remove himself from domestic pressure. The president's personal undertaking as mediator was not checked by any formal institution in the United States. This fact crippled AIPAC's chances to influence the Camp David meetings. AIPAC relied on lobbying Congress to sway the executive branch, but the president's role as mediator hurt this ability.

With AIPAC, the formal pro-Israel lobby in the United States, out of the picture, the president found that he was still accountable to the historic relationship between the American Jewish community and the Democratic Party. Jewish leaders lobbied the president. Theodore Mann, Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, reached out to Carter through letters and meetings. Democratic political and party leaders also lobbied the president to listen to the American Jewish community because of the community's campaign support and voting record in favor of the party. Carter met with American Jewish leaders, and the president offered positive talking points about his personal commitment and his administration's commitment to the state of Israel. However, it is clear from the administration's documents, most notably the correspondence between Zbigniew Brzezinski, that basic points asserted by American Jewish leadership did not influence Carter and his staff. Instead, Carter listened and reassured, but policy was not changed because of Theodore Mann and his Jewish

constituency's lobbying. American Jewish leadership gained entry but not influence on policy.

Camp David resulted in a framework for peace that months later led to a bilateral peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. The president should be given credit for brokering the peace agreement. The agreement resulted from his willingness to take political risks. Carter worked to keep domestic political pressure out of the debate. By separating AIPAC from the equation, Carter kept an organized domestic lobby out of the policy making circle.

F-15 Sale and Camp David Compared

The Carter administration viewed the sale of F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia and the meetings at Camp David as policy decisions in the United States national interest and part of a broader comprehensive approach to the region. Carter and his team strived to reach out to moderate Arab states and use arms sales as a way to further connect the United States with these perceived forces of moderation. In both instances, the American Jewish community felt uncomfortable with Carter's approach. Proof of this nervousness came with the American Jewish community's attempts to meet with the government in response to the F-15 plane sales and Camp David.

American Jewish leaders accessed the government with a different technique for each policy. The different approaches resulted from Congress's responsibility in the proceedings. In the F-15 case, the administration could not further its policy initiative without receiving a majority vote in the Senate. Because it dealt with Congress, AIPAC led the American Jewish response against the plane sales. The sale of planes was a foreign policy decision, which required a legislative compromise. On the other side of the

spectrum, Carter's vision and execution of Camp David structurally excluded Congress. As a result, AIPAC lacked the ability to influence the summit. Theodore Mann took over the responsibility along with a coalition of American Jewish leaders. In spite of American Jewish lobbying, domestic politics on the whole took on a lot less meaning and influence with Camp David.

Conclusions about American Jewish Efforts and Pro-Israel Lobbying Organizations

The American Jewish community played a role in President Jimmy Carter's foreign policy. The community exerted force from traditional lobbying organizations like AIPAC as well as more ethnic, communal based organizations like the Conference of Presidents chaired by Theodore Mann.¹⁶⁰ The American Jewish community had the ability to access the government both through Congress and the White House. Senators allotted the time to listen and to weigh AIPAC's arguments, and the president met with American Jewish leaders about his policies. Whether senators or President Carter listened to Jewish leaders and accepted or discounted every argument needs to be weighed with each case (as I have done with F-15 and Camp David), but it is not debatable that American Jews did receive access. This access is a legitimate element of the democratic system in the United States. Elected leaders should be accessible to those that elected them to office. American Jews spent their time and resources exercising this right.

The American Jewish community organized itself more efficiently and better than Arab lobbying groups at the time. Saudi Arabia worked to lobby Congress on behalf of the F-15 plane sales. The country was forced to hire American organizations and past

¹⁶⁰ It should be noted that AIPAC was also under the umbrella of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the organization that Theodore Mann was chairman of during the Carter administration.

American politicians, because an American-Saudi lobby in the United States was not arranged at the time. The American Jewish community was coordinated in a large umbrella organization, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish organizations. While the organizations themselves differed in their efforts, aims, and goals, the broad organization allowed for different expertise and abilities to meet with the government. When one organization such as AIPAC found itself out of the policy game, the umbrella organization had the ability to reach out to the government in its place.

Based on the F-15 sales and Camp David, it is difficult to point to any one measure or policy decision implemented by the Carter administration that clearly was rooted in an American Jewish lobby. One conclusion might be the concessions in the final congressional bill voted on approving the sale F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia. The White House compromised with Congress in order to pass the bill. Some of Congress's most steadfast advocates against the policy also were some of AIPAC's closest friends, namely Senator Frank Church. Even in this case, other factors could have resulted in these conclusions. Public opinion was strongly against the sale along with anti-arms sales groups, measures congressmen respond to. During Camp David, the president knowingly worked to keep the "Jewish lobby" outside of the realm of influence. Camp David obstructed AIPAC's ability to have even a small function in the process.

The American Jewish community's role in Carter's foreign policy was an example of healthy political discourse. The community had diverse leaders petition to government, some representing specific causes others embodying the community as a whole. The community was unable to deter or change Carter's policies. With the sale of F-15 planes to Saudi Arabia, the administration earned the required votes to supply the

kingdom with planes. In the case of Camp David, AIPAC was shut out but replaced by other voices in the American Jewish community.

In the face of their efforts, Carter consistently went forward with his visions and policies. On the surface Carter would seem to be impressionable to American Jewish political activity. Carter was an outsider that did not know the ways of Washington. The president also received a majority electoral support and funding from the American Jewish community. This outsider status combined with American Jewish support indicated that Carter might adhere to the arguments of pro-Israel institutions. In practice, the Carter administration listened to the American Jewish constituency, but Carter continued to advance his comprehensive agenda, placing the dissenting voices in the background.

Broader Conclusion: A Plurality of Forces

While the American Jewish community benefited from access to the American government, it has already been noted that other organizations had the opportunity to reach American political officials. With that in mind, the American Jewish community was a lot more organized and ready to participate than Arab Americans at the time of plane sales to Saudi Arabia and Camp David. Still, the political climate of Carter's presidency was complex and affected by a variety of influences, influences that carried more weight than pro-Israel lobbies.

The Soviet Union played a distinct feature in Carter's comprehensive plan in dealing with the Middle East. National Security Advisor Brzezinski pushed his worldview stressing the Soviet threat. The administration's beliefs about the Soviet

Union were also molded by Soviet action. The Soviet Union funded proxies that began to take hold in the Middle East. Because of the pressure from the Soviet Union, the president felt the need to engage willing partners in the region in order to solidify America's sphere of influence. Predicated on this Cold War backdrop, Carter's comprehensive vision for the region marked the number one influence in policy making. In terms of the F-15 plane sales, Carter believed it was in the United States benefit to engage Saudi Arabia, thereby ensuring a stronger relationship with the country. For American support the Saudis were willing to contribute foreign aid to other nations in the region, such as Egypt, that backed away from Soviet influence. In addition to the plane sales, Camp David looked to bring peace in order to solidify America's overall national interests. Carter consistently pointed to this goal as a reason for acting as a mediator in the conflict.

Leadership marked another distinct influence in shaping Middle East policy for Carter. In terms of the sale of F-15 planes, domestic players had a much larger role than during Camp David. With Camp David, national leaders were the number one factor in the events. Egypt's President Anwar Sadat chose to reach out to Israel; this action bolstered the debate as Carter saw Sadat's goodwill as evidence that peace between Israel and its neighbors was possible. On the other side of the spectrum, the right wing Menachem Begin made it more difficult for Carter. Carter perceived Begin as a roadblock to peace, and this perception influenced the way Carter and his administration dealt with peace between Egypt and Israel.

As Carter's case study reveals, broad, sweeping claims about particular constituencies and lobbies must be considered in a larger historical context. Pro-Israel

lobby's role in the administration acted as one of many influences. If anything, Carter worked against the auspices of the lobby. In the end, the Soviet Union, the Cold War, and foreign leaders created the backdrop and specifically influenced the debate over the F-15 sales and the proceedings before, during, and after Camp David. Moreover, Arab lobbying organizations, business interests, the administration's goals, the State Department's beliefs, public opinion, Congress, domestic pressure in Israel, and regional pressure from other Arab countries influenced the development of American policy. The American Jewish Community played an active part, but this role can be defined by democratic practice and not as a conspiracy to steer American interests astray.

The conclusions from the case studies of F-15 sales and Camp David underlie the danger of simplistic explanations of complex decisions in regard to the Middle East. Whether under peace with Jimmy Carter or war with George Bush, both presidents' policies came out of a democratic process, decisions which demonstrate that democracies are capable of both wisdom and folly.

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