

# Crossing the Rubicon

Ronald Reagan and US Policy in the Middle East

NICHOLAS LAHAM



Crossing The Rubicon

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## Preface

This book argues that American policy in the Middle East underwent a transformation as a result of a long-forgotten, but ultimately fateful, political battle which occurred in 1981: the debate over President Ronald Reagan's decision to approve the sale of the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) to Saudi Arabia. Whether the transformation in policy which the AWACS debate unleashed was truly profound, historic, and momentous ultimately depends upon the nature of American diplomacy in the region which existed at the time Reagan entered the White House — specifically, whether it was evenhanded or pro-Israel — an issue which members of the Middle East policy community have yet to resolve. But there can be no doubt that the Reagan presidency represents a critical watershed in the evolution of that policy.

The AWACS debate embroiled the Reagan Administration in a pitched battle against perhaps the most well-organized and politically influential interest group in the United States — the roughly 300 national and 200 local Jewish organizations which collectively represent the pro-Israel lobby.<sup>1</sup> Charging that the AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia, an Arab nation with a long history of unrelenting hostility toward Israel, would threaten the security of the Jewish state, organized American Jewry mounted an intense and vociferous lobbying campaign to persuade Congress to block the deal. In the end the pro-Israel lobby was unsuccessful in this endeavor: defying the appeals of organized American Jewry, the Senate approved the sale, albeit by the very narrow margin of 52 to 48.

However, the pro-Israel lobby had succeeded in mobilizing substantial opposition to the AWACS sale in Congress. Indeed, in contrast to the Senate's approval of the sale by the bare of margin of four votes, the House of Representatives had summarily rejected the deal by an overwhelming margin of 301 to 111. Opposition to the sale in Congress was so massive that Reagan decided to give up on any hope that the House might approve the deal. Instead, Reagan focused his efforts on winning congressional approval for the sale in the Senate. From the time Reagan formally notified Congress of his intent to conclude the sale on 1 October 1981 until the Senate approved the deal 27 days later, Reagan mounted perhaps the most intense and massive lobbying campaign ever waged by any President on Capitol Hill to obtain congressional approval for a major public policy goal on his agenda. But for Reagan's October lobbying campaign, the sale would have gone down to a resounding defeat in the Senate.

The AWACS debate had left Reagan politically bruised and battered. He had taken on perhaps the most powerful interest group in Washington — the pro-Israel lobby — and he had defeated organized American Jewry over a major foreign policy issue involving the interests of Israel. However, Reagan's 'victory' had not come without political costs. In 1980 Reagan had been elected to the presidency with the largest share of the Jewish vote ever received by a Republican nominee — a source of enormous importance to his efforts to build a solid Republican majority based upon the support of such traditionally Democratic constituencies as Jews and other Northern white ethnic urbanites and suburbanites. However, the AWACS debate had cost Reagan vital support within the Jewish community. In 1980 Jews had voted for Reagan with the expectation that he would honor his campaign promise to provide strong and unswerving support for Israel. However, only months into his presidency, Reagan had decided to approve the sale of advanced and sophisticated weaponry, especially the AWACS, to one of Israel's foremost enemies — Saudi Arabia — and then mounted an all-out campaign to win approval for the

AWACS deal in Congress against the opposition of the pro-Israel lobby.

During his news conference on 1 October 1981, in which he formally notified Congress of his intent to conclude the sale, Reagan had declared, 'It is not the business of other nations to make American foreign policy' — an indirect attack against Menachem Begin for having lobbied Congress against the deal during the Prime Minister's visit to Washington the previous month. This remark had anti-Semitic overtones, insofar as it conjured up the image of Israel using the American Jewish community as a surrogate to persuade Congress to block the sale — an image which played into the hands of anti-Semites who believe that Jews exert 'excessive' influence over American policy in the Middle East.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Reagan might resort to the use of anti-Semitic tactics, which were obviously intended to intimidate organized American Jewry into backing away from the continued pursuit of its fierce lobbying campaign against the sale, was a source of deep consternation and disillusionment within the Jewish community. Reagan emerged from the AW ACS debate having won the battle to sell the planes to Saudi Arabia, but with his reputation in the Jewish community having sunk perhaps to the lowest level for any President since the creation of Israel in 1948.

Reagan's first priority following his victory in the AW ACS debate was to repair his damaged and diminished reputation within the Jewish community. All hope for achieving this endeavor was certainly not lost: despite the bitterness and acrimony which characterized the debate, Reagan retained a reservoir of good will among American Jewish leaders, if not the rank and file. Jewish leaders understood that Reagan was perhaps the best friend Israel had ever had in the White House; they knew that the President could be called upon to assist the Jewish state in future controversies Tel Aviv was sure to become embroiled in. Accordingly, in the waning days of the AW ACS debate, American Jewish leaders began to make overtures to the White House, extending an olive branch, and hoping that the two sides could resume their friendship and cooperation and work on behalf of the interests of Israel once Congress had disposed of the AW ACS issue. The White House was more than glad to seize upon organized American Jewry's gesture of good will toward Reagan, and in the month following the Senate's approval of the AW ACS sale the President succeeded in reestablishing the strong ties he had enjoyed with the Jewish community prior to his decision to approve the deal.

However, Reagan's success in rebuilding his firm ties to the American Jewish community did not come without a price. In order to restore his shattered credibility among Jews he needed to reaffirm his friendship toward Israel. To do so, Reagan had to commit himself to pursue a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East and renounce some positions taken during the AW ACS debate which favored the Arab world in its conflict with Israel. Reagan could not have persuaded the Senate to approve the AW ACS sale without affirming that Saudi Arabia was playing a constructive role in the Middle East peace process. This was difficult to do since Saudi Arabia opposed the Camp David peace process, which the United States was committed to pursuing. The Camp David peace process was based upon the principle that a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East could only be achieved through direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and that the Jewish state must not be compelled by outside powers to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories as the basis for a resolution of the Arab—Israeli conflict. By contrast, Saudi Arabia insisted, pursuant to a peace plan then Crown Prince (and currently King) Fahd introduced during the AW ACS debate, that either the United States or the international community must impose such a settlement — one which compelled Israel to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories and permitted the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital. During the

AWACS debate, Reagan had implicitly endorsed the Saudi position on the peace process — perhaps with no intent to actually do so — which raised alarm bells in the American Jewish community.<sup>3</sup> Reagan needed to reassure the American Jewish community that he remained committed to the Camp David peace process.

In addition, Reagan needed to reaffirm his position that Israel's archenemy — the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) — was a terrorist group. In an address delivered on 3 September 1980 before the annual convention of B'nai B'rith International, a leading Jewish organization, Reagan proclaimed the PLO to be a terrorist organization — in contrast to his opponent, President Jimmy Carter, who refused to do so. However, Reagan's attitude toward the PLO seemed to have softened during the AW ACS debate. This reflected the fact that Reagan needed to bring American policy in the Middle East closer to that of Saudi Arabia, which strongly supported the PLO, in order to defend the position that Riyadh was exercising a stabilizing influence in the region. This was necessary to enhance prospects for Senate approval of the AWACS sale.

In an interview conducted during the AW ACS debate, Reagan reaffirmed his commitment to honor the Memorandum of Agreement, which the United States and Israel signed in 1975. Pursuant to the memorandum, the United States pledged not to open a formal dialogue with the PLO until the organization agreed to recognize the right of Israel to exist and accept United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which define the framework for a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Reagan's affirmation of his adherence to the memorandum raised questions within the American Jewish community as to whether the President remained firm in his belief that the PLO was a terrorist organization. Reagan needed to reassure the American Jewish community that his attitude toward the PLO had not changed since he entered the White House.

In a critical meeting held with 34 prominent Jewish supporters at the White House on 19 November 1981, Reagan gave his audience the assurances they needed: the President committed himself to pursue a firm and unyielding pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. That policy included a renunciation of the Fahd Plan, an American commitment to pursue the Camp David peace process and reject a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East imposed by outside powers, and Reagan's reaffirmation that he considered the PLO to be a terrorist organization, which all but ruled out any role for the group in the peace process. During his meeting with Jewish supporters, Reagan committed himself to pursue a staunch and unequivocal pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, and for the most part he kept his promise to do so during the remainder of his presidency.

Does the policy Reagan pursued in the Middle East represent a sharp departure from that of his predecessors? Did the assurances Reagan provided his Jewish supporters on 19 November 1981 represent a renunciation of past American policy in the Middle East? The answer to those questions is very complicated, and members of the Middle East policy community have yet to adequately address, let alone resolve, this issue. The answer to those questions would depend upon whether the United States actually pursued an evenhanded policy in the Middle East from the end of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 to Reagan's ascension to the presidency, or whether that policy favored Israel in its conflict with the Arab world.

On the surface it would appear that American policy in the Middle East from 1973 to 1981 was evenhanded: the United States broke the stalemate in the peace process which had existed since the end of the Six-Day War of 1967 by acting as the mediator in the negotiation of disengagement agreements between Israel and Egypt, and between Israel and Syria in 1974. This



was followed by a more substantial disengagement agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1975. The crowning achievement of this step-by-step American diplomacy in the Middle East was the negotiation of the Camp David peace treaty in 1979.<sup>4</sup>

However, despite the diplomatic achievements the United States made in advancing the peace process during the 1970s, there is every reason to believe that this nation was not evenhanded in its policy in the Middle East, but in fact favored Israel in its conflict with the Arab world. The primary factor motivating the United States in its step-by-step diplomacy in the Middle East was not a moral commitment to resolve the tragedy of the Arab—Israeli conflict, but rather a cynical and manipulative effort to satisfy the political demands of the Arab oil producing nations. They had imposed an oil embargo during the Yom Kippur War in retaliation for the military support the United States had provided to Israel during that conflict. The embargo was only lifted in March 1974 when the United States, through step-by-step diplomacy, had advanced the peace process sufficiently to satisfy the Arab oil producing nations that Washington was truly committed, however disingenuously, to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East. This came after the United States had pursued a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East following the end of the Six-Day War.

Were the Arab oil sheiks actually satisfied that the United States was committed to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East in response to American step-by-step diplomacy, which resulted in their lifting of the oil embargo? Or were the sheiks only asking that the United States undertake the empty diplomatic maneuverings which President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger initiated following the end of the Yom Kippur War in order to justify their decision to lift the embargo? Would the sheiks have imposed another embargo had they become convinced that the United States was not really committed to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, but only to a more limited agreement to resolve the dispute between Israel and Egypt, which resulted in the Camp David peace treaty?

Perhaps the best answer is that the Arab oil sheiks really expected the United States to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East when Nixon and Kissinger initiated step-by-step diplomacy. By the time the sheiks came to the realization that the purpose of step-by-step diplomacy was to ignore the Palestinian problem and concentrate on the more limited aim of negotiating a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel during 1978 and 1979, the Persian Gulf became consumed by a wave of political instability.

Fearing for their own survival, the sheiks lost interest in the Palestinian cause and allied themselves with the United States in order to procure American protection. Operating under an American protective military umbrella, the sheiks would no longer be able to brandish their oil weapon against the United States, leaving Presidents, beginning with Reagan, free to essentially abandon the 'peace process' Nixon and Kissinger began in 1973 and focus instead on their domestic political imperative of building support within the American Jewish community by providing almost absolute and total backing for Israel. Pursuant to their commitment to pursue a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, Reagan and his successors would not ask Israel to make any substantive political and territorial concessions to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region.

In all likelihood, Presidents Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter succeeded in deceiving the Arab oil sheiks into believing that step-by-step diplomacy would ultimately lead to a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. However, during 1978 and 1979, Carter had abandoned his initial attempt at a Middle East peace plan, focusing instead on the conclusion of a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. The Arab oil sheiks had by then learned that step-by-step

diplomacy was an illusion, but they could not impose another oil embargo because the political instability which erupted in the Persian Gulf made them dependent upon the United States for military protection.

The period of step-by-step diplomacy from 1973 to 1979 did not really bring a clear and concerted effort to achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East — only the appearance of such an effort. Rather, Nixon, Ford, and Carter were stalling for time, attempting to create the illusion of a momentum for peace, but knowing that the peace process would end once the negotiation of a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was achieved. Determined to avoid addressing the politically explosive Palestinian issue, Nixon, Ford, and Carter could only hope that 'something' would come along which would allow the peace process to end with an Israeli—Egyptian peace treaty and would not antagonize the Arab oil producing nations, resulting in another oil embargo. And as luck would have it for the United States, 'something' did come along to spare this nation from having to address the Palestinian issue — the overthrow of the Shah, which prompted the Arab oil sheiks to embrace Washington in order to procure its protection.

The United States could now openly and firmly ally itself with Israel, bury the Palestinian issue, and retain access to Arab oil in the process. Beginning with Reagan, the Presidents could have the best of all possible worlds: they could openly embrace two major enemies in the Middle East — Israel and the Arab oil producing nations — in a way which would satisfy the demands of organized American Jewry that the United States pursue a firm and unyielding pro-Israel policy in the region, and induce the Arab oil sheiks to accept American support for their archenemy — Israel — by promising the protection they needed to survive in power.

The 'evenhanded' policy the United States pursued in the Middle East from 1973 to 1981 was the result not of a moral desire to address the plight of the Palestinians, but of the economic necessity of having to satisfy the energy needs of American consumers. And because this policy was the result of crass economic, rather than principled moral, considerations, the political foundations of America's newly found commitment to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East rested on shaky ground. Because American sympathies lay with Israel, and because the United States was motivated in its Middle East diplomacy by oil, not morality, Washington's commitment to pursue an evenhanded policy in the region during the 1970s — such as it existed — would be ephemeral and ultimately unsustainable. As soon as American access to Arab oil was secure and the threat of another oil embargo passed, the United States was sure to resume the staunch and unequivocal support for Israel which existed prior to the Yom Kippur War.

Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter were not really committed to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East — their sympathies lay with Israel no less than their successor, Reagan's, did. But Nixon, Ford, and Carter had a problem. Despite their firm and unwavering support for Israel they could not antagonize the Arab oil producing nations; such animosity could have resulted in another oil embargo. In 1973 Nixon had ignored repeated warnings from King Faisal that he would impose an oil embargo against the United States if Washington continued its steadfast and unshakable support for Israel in its conflict with the Arab world.<sup>5</sup> When Nixon ignored an appeal from Faisal not to continue the arms airlift the President had ordered to support Israel in the Yom Kippur War, the King responded by leading the Arab oil producing nations in imposing an oil embargo against the United States.<sup>6</sup> When the war concluded, Nixon, and later Ford and Carter, were determined not to pursue the mistake made in 1973; they would not take American access to Arab oil for granted, and would attempt to advance the peace process sufficiently to avoid another Arab oil embargo.

But the peace process pursued from 1973 to 1981 was not really genuine; not only were

Nixon, Ford, and Carter politically and morally committed to the interests of Israel, they had no 'grand strategy' to resolve the very heart and crux of the Arab—Israeli conflict — the Palestinian problem. Indeed, Nixon, Ford, and Carter avoided this problem altogether, focusing instead on defusing the conflict between Israel and Egypt, which ultimately resulted in the negotiation of the Camp David peace treaty. As a result the peace process, despite the illusion of moving forward during the 1970s, actually floundered.

The three presidents were performing a delicate balancing act in attempting to satisfy the incompatible demands of Israel and the Arab world regarding the peace process, hoping all the while not to antagonize either side in the Arab—Israeli conflict, but ultimately committed to assuring that the Israeli position would prevail in this dispute. They hoped that the Arab oil sheiks would not brandish their oil weapon against the United States for its continued embrace of the Jewish state.

Nixon, Ford, and Carter were creating the illusion of a 'peace process' with their step-by-step diplomacy — which certainly satisfied the Arab oil sheiks — while avoiding the Palestinian problem in order to pacify Israel and its Washington lobby. And because Nixon, Ford, and Carter were committed to ignoring the plight of the Palestinians, the peace process was sure to go nowhere. The step-by-step diplomacy of the 1970s was a dubious exercise designed to achieve the aim of appeasing the Arab oil sheiks with the illusion of a diplomatic momentum for peace while satisfying the demands of Israel and its Washington lobby that the peace process assure that the Palestinians be left out in the cold; and without justice for the Palestinians no peace in the Middle East is possible.

If the policy the United States pursued in the Middle East during the 1970s was essentially pro-Israel, much as that followed by Reagan, how can it be said that he executed a major shift in that policy in favor of the Jewish state? The answer is that unlike Nixon, Ford, and Carter, who attempted to conceal their support for Israel behind empty diplomatic measures designed to create the illusion that the peace process was advancing, Reagan was honest, explicit, and blunt in his support for the Jewish state. Indeed, there was hardly a modicum of real and genuine effort to inch the peace process forward during the Reagan presidency: he felt no need to conduct Kissinger-style shuttle diplomacy or Carter-style summitry in order to hide his pro-Israel proclivities. Reagan was able to all but ignore the peace process because, unlike his predecessors, he did not need to appease the Arab oil sheiks with the appearance of conducting an evenhanded policy in the Middle East; he could be openly and unabashedly pro-Israel in his conduct of American policy. How was Reagan able to accomplish this feat? The answer remains: the AW ACS sale.

The political dynamics in the Middle East were greatly altered as a result of a wave of political instability which gripped the Persian Gulf during the final half of the Carter presidency. The overthrow of the Shah, the Iran hostage crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the failed Iran hostage rescue mission, and the outbreak of the Iran—Iraq War — all occurring in rapid succession during 1979 and 1980 — resulted in the quick breakdown of political stability in the Persian Gulf, home to nearly two-thirds of the proven oil reserves of the world.<sup>7</sup> The political instability consuming the Persian Gulf was not just a foreign policy issue, but a domestic matter as well. The interruption of Iranian oil exports resulting from the Iranian revolution triggered a steep rise in international oil prices, provoking double-digit inflation and interest rates during the final half of the ill-fated Carter presidency. With the American economy in chaos, the vital national security interests of the United States under threat by the power vacuum in the oil-rich Persian Gulf which followed the fall of the Shah of Iran, and the United States facing humiliation

at the hands of militant Iranian hostage takers of Americans held at the former American Embassy in Tehran, Reagan had no problem defeating the hapless President Carter in the 1980 presidential election.

Reagan was elected to the presidency largely on a pledge to reverse the precipitous economic and military decline the United States had suffered during the Carter presidency. This pledge could not be fulfilled unless Reagan restored security to the most economically and strategically vital region in the world — the Persian Gulf. Indeed, the wave of political instability which gripped the Persian Gulf during 1979 and 1980 served as the source of economic and military setbacks during the last half of the Carter presidency.

Reagan's strategy for restoring security to the Persian Gulf rested upon the creation of a strategic alliance between the United States and its closest ally in the region, Saudi Arabia. The AWACS sale represented the linchpin of that alliance. The sale would enable the United States to develop an air defense system which would protect Saudi Arabia and the other Persian Gulf monarchies from the potential threat posed by Iraq, Iran, or Soviet military forces in Afghanistan. However, the sale would also do much more than this: it would enable the United States to use the vast territory of Saudi Arabia to place the entire Persian Gulf under the protective umbrella of the massive military power of Washington.

However, the United States did not move to provide security to the Persian Gulf monarchies out of an altruistic impulse. Rather, it did so out of self-interest, the industrial world being dependent for its economic survival on the vast oil reserves of the Persian Gulf. Any interruption in oil exports from the Persian Gulf would bring devastation to the entire industrial world. To guarantee against such an eventuality, the United States needed to protect its allies in the Persian Gulf, which were no match for the military power Iraq, Iran, or the Soviet Union could bring to bear.

An unintended consequence of the AWACS sale was that it effectively ended any credible possibility that the Arab oil producing nations might impose another embargo against the United States in retaliation for its support for Israel, as had been the case during and immediately following the Yom Kippur War. Saudi Arabia and the other Persian Gulf monarchies were dependent upon the United States for their protection and very survival; they certainly would not brandish their oil weapon against Washington and inflict economic devastation upon their military protector, leaving themselves vulnerable to invasion from their potential enemies in the region.

The AWACS sale now unleashed two major developments, which would decisively alter American policy in the Middle East. First, the pro-Israel lobby had for the first time demonstrated its impressive political power through the enormously effective pressure organized American Jewry had brought to bear in its nearly successful attempt to persuade Congress to block the deal. Second, for the first time since 1973, the United States was no longer under the potential threat of another Arab oil embargo. This left the President — in this case Ronald Reagan — free to follow his domestic political imperative of satisfying the demands of organized American Jewry and pursue a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East.

The casualty of America's emergence as the dominant military power in the Persian Gulf, which resulted from the AWACS sale, was the peace process. The achievement of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East requires that the United States serve as an honest broker in the Arab—Israeli conflict — able to pressure both parties to make the political and territorial concessions required for peace. However, with the Arab oil producing nations no

longer able to brandish their oil weapon against the United States, and with successive Presidents acknowledging this strategic reality by responding to their domestic political imperative of pursuing a steadfast and unshakable pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, the United States ceased to be an honest broker in the Middle East after the conclusion of the AWACS debate. Instead, the United States became an advocate for Israeli interests, refusing to pressure the Jewish state to make the political and territorial concessions required for achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. It is therefore little wonder that no real progress has been made in advancing the peace process since the signing of the Camp David peace treaty in 1979.

The AWACS sale marks the critical juncture when the United States 'crossed the Rubicon' from pursuing a policy in the Middle East which attempted to hide and conceal American support for Israel — as was the case from 1973 to 1981 — to openly, explicitly, and unapologetically allying Washington to the interests of Israel. Reagan's decision to bring American support for Israel out into the open, in repudiation of the previous U.S. policy of attempting to conceal that support through empty and meaningless diplomatic initiatives in order to create the illusion of an active peace process following the end of the Yom Kippur War, is a critically important development in the evolution of American diplomacy in the region. By bringing American support for Israel out in the open, Reagan could back the Jewish state in many more ways than Nixon, Ford, and Carter were able to do. Reagan did so by overturning previous American policy branding Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories as illegal; by openly condemning the PLO as a terrorist organization, contrary to previous American policy, which avoided this explosive issue; by sabotaging the peace process by going to extraordinary lengths to exclude the PLO from occupying a seat at the peace table; and by abrogating the precedent Ford established in 1975 that American, not Israeli, interests would prevail in the peace process, and reversing this order instead by making Israeli, not American, interests the governing factor in the search for peace. Whether Reagan's policy in the Middle East was either qualitatively or quantitatively different from that of his three immediate predecessors is a question which members of the Middle East policy community will have to resolve; but it was different in affording Israel greater American support than the Jewish state previously received — all the support Tel Aviv could have ever hoped to have.

With the political power of the pro-Israel lobby clearly revealed through the AWACS debate, and the AWACS sale cementing a close strategic alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia, such that the Persian Gulf monarchies became dependent upon Washington for their protection and very survival, Reagan and all his successors were guaranteed that they could follow their domestic political instincts and build support within the American Jewish community by allying themselves with the interests of Israel without endangering American access to Arab oil in the process. The AWACS sale created the best of both worlds for Reagan and his successors: they could ensure their domestic political interests by embracing the policies of Israel while providing the monarchs of the Persian Gulf the military protection they needed in order to guarantee American consumers a steady and reliable flow of Arab oil.

This book is based almost entirely on research I conducted at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California. The White House Office of Records and Management (WHORM) represents the central White House File during the Reagan Administration, and is divided into 58 different subject categories. This book draws exclusively from two of the WHORM Subject File categories, with the abbreviations listed in the notes contained in parentheses — foreign affairs (FO) and speeches (SP658). The latter file contains the records pertaining to Reagan's nationwide television address on the Middle East delivered on 1

September 1982.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge a number of individuals whose invaluable assistance made this book possible. My first words of thanks go to the excellent archival staff at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. I want to thank Jennifer Sternaman for processing my Freedom of Information Act request, Lisa Jones for managing my request, and David Bridge, Catherine Sewell, and Josh Tennenbaum for supervising my research and photocopying of the records used to write this book.

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*To the memory and life of my mother*

# Chapter 1

## Reagan Repairs His Relations with the Jewish Community in the Aftermath of the AWACS Debate

Ronald Reagan... garnered a comparatively large Jewish vote for a Republican (39 percent). This achievement can be explained in part by his longstanding backing of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

—Steven L. Spiegel, political scientist

Ronald Reagan's landslide election to the presidency was largely the result of his success in mobilizing the support of Northern white ethnic voters who had previously served as loyal and reliable constituencies of the Democratic Party. Perhaps the most important of those constituencies was the Jewish community. In 1980 Reagan received the largest share of the Jewish vote of any Republican presidential nominee in recorded history.<sup>2</sup>

Reagan valued the support of the Jewish community. As one of the most affluent, organized, and professionally accomplished ethnic groups in the United States, the Jewish community had substantial political and financial resources which its members could use to support Reagan's policies and his reelection campaign. Therefore, the rift created between Reagan and the Jewish community over the President's proposal to sell AWACS to Saudi Arabia represented a source of grave concern to him. Reagan strongly supported the AWACS sale, believing the deal to be vital to the national security interests of the United States. Viewing the sale as a threat to the security of Israel, interest groups representing the American Jewish community, which represent a politically powerful and formidable pro-Israel lobby, mounted an intense campaign in order to persuade Congress to block the deal. Deferring to Reagan's pleas that U.S. national security interests would be gravely compromised if Congress blocked the sale, the Senate ultimately approved the deal, giving the President a major political victory in perhaps the most bitter battle ever waged on Capitol Hill.

### **The AWACS Sale Leaves Reagan Free to Pursue a Pro-Israel Policy in the Middle East**

Reagan's success in persuading the Senate to approve the AWACS sale was interpreted at the time as a major defeat for organized American Jewry. However, the sale actually turned out to provide the Jewish state enormous political benefits which were not seen at the time. The deal provided Reagan an opportunity to pursue the strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East to which he committed himself when he entered the White House. A major constraint on the ability of Reagan's three immediate predecessors to pursue such a policy was the threat that it would trigger the imposition of another Arab oil embargo.



On 17 October 1973, King Faisal led the Arab oil producing nations to impose an oil embargo in retaliation for President Richard Nixon's decision to order an arms airlift to Israel to replenish the depleting stock of weaponry the Jewish state had expended during the Yom Kippur War.<sup>3</sup> The embargo was lifted on 18 March 1974 when those nations were finally satisfied, however incorrectly, that the United States was committed to pursuing an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, as evidenced by the diplomatic initiative Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger undertook during 1973-1974 to break the stalemate in the peace process which had existed since the end of the Six-Day War.<sup>4</sup> From 1974 to 1979, Ford and Carter labored under the continued threat of another embargo and pursued the diplomatic initiative Nixon began in order to avert that prospect.

However, during the last half of the Carter presidency, the Persian Gulf became consumed by a wave of political instability as the fall of the Shah, the Iran hostage crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the outbreak of the Iran—Iraq War occurred in rapid succession. Saudi Arabia, which had led the Arab oil producing nations in imposing their embargo, was now in need of American military protection in light of this instability, and Reagan was eager to have the United States fill the power vacuum left by the overthrow of the Shah. The AWACS sale was designed to enable the United States to achieve this goal by cementing a close strategic alliance between Washington and Riyadh, which would result in the placing of the Persian Gulf under the protective umbrella of the vast military power of this nation. With the monarchies of the Persian Gulf operating under this protective umbrella, the prospect of another Arab oil embargo was now gone.

The irony is that the AWACS sale, which by eliminating the threat of another Arab oil embargo against the United States left Washington free to provide firm and unwavering support for Israel, was almost defeated in Congress as a result of pressure exerted by the very constituency which has demanded such a policy — the pro-Israel lobby. Of course, the pro-Israel lobby perceived the sale within the narrow context of the potential threat the deal posed to the security of Israel. However, the pro-Israel lobby failed to view the sale in the wider context of the benefits Israel would gain from the strategic alliance the deal forged between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

By placing Saudi Arabia under the protective military umbrella of the United States, the AWACS sale would all but guarantee that Riyadh could never again lead the Arab oil producing nations in another embargo. Possessing over a quarter of the proven oil reserves of the world, no such embargo would be possible without Saudi leadership.<sup>5</sup> By removing Saudi Arabia as a potential hostile Arab power, the sale now freed Reagan to pursue his domestic political imperative of satisfying the demands of organized American Jewry that he return to his 1980 campaign pledge to pursue a firm and unyielding pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, which is precisely what he did following the Senate's approval of the sale on 28 October 1981.

## **The AWACS Debate Inflicts Severe Damage Upon Relations Between Reagan and the Jewish Community**

The AWACS debate had imposed a severe rupture in relations between Reagan and the Jewish community, given the bitter and acrimonious nature of the conflict between the two sides over

this issue. Just how severe that rupture was became evident in the weeks following the Senate's approval of the AWACS sale when Elizabeth Dole, Assistant to the President for Public Liaison, undertook a series of extensive consultations with prominent members of the Jewish community. The purpose of those consultations was to determine how relations between the White House and the Jewish community could be repaired in the wake of the fierce political battle the two sides waged against each other over the sale.

Perhaps Dole's most important consultation was with George Klein, Director and Vice President of the United Jewish Appeal and a Co-Chairman of the Coalition to Elect Reagan—Bush in 1980. As both a prominent member of the Jewish community and a leading supporter of Reagan during the 1980 presidential campaign, Klein was well positioned to provide the White House the information its staff required to heal the political breach existing between the President and the Jews in the aftermath of the AWACS debate. On 6 October 1981 Klein called Dole, but was unable to reach the White House adviser. Stein returned Klein's call, and following their phone conversation sent Dole a memorandum which reported, 'I returned George Klein's call to you. He indicated that he wanted to chat with you about improving relations between the administration and the Jewish community.'<sup>6</sup>

In response to a subsequent inquiry he received from Dole, on 16 November 1981 Klein sent the White House adviser a letter designed to apprise her of how the Reagan Administration could repair the damage the AWACS debate had inflicted upon its relations with the Jewish community. In his letter Klein informed Dole, 'As promised, enclosed are some thoughts and concepts relating to what steps the administration should take in presenting its programs and positions to the Jewish community over the AWACS vote in the Senate.' Klein noted that Reagan had been elected to the presidency with the largest share of the Jewish vote of any Republican nominee in recorded history as a result of his commitment to pursue a strong pro-Israel policy in the Middle East.

President Reagan received approximately 40 percent of the Jewish community vote in 1980. As you know, the community is heavily registered as Democrats, and the percentage [of the Jewish vote] received by President Reagan was the highest received by any Republican presidential candidate. The main reason for this shift was that the community lost confidence in President Carter, did not trust his statements regarding [the] U.S. commitment to the security of the State of Israel, and had strong confidence in the campaign statements made by President Reagan, Ed Meese, Dick Allen, and many of us regarding the proposed shift [in American policy in the Middle East] that would occur under President Reagan's leadership in ensuring Israel's security through their new strong commitments [to Israel] and not bowing to Arab blackmail.<sup>7</sup>

However, Klein noted that the Jewish community became deeply dismayed when, contrary to his campaign pledge to pursue a staunch pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, Reagan decided to approve the AWACS sale against the strident opposition of organized American Jewry, which regarded the deal as a threat to the security of Israel. Most alarming to Jewish leaders were the anti-Semitic overtones which characterized the AWACS debate, which Reagan and his three predecessors, especially Nixon, had fostered through their own zealous attacks against opponents of the deal who were concentrated within the Jewish community. From the perspective of Jewish leaders, Reagan had added insult to injury when, in remarks made at his news conference on 1 October 1981, in which he formally notified Congress of his intent to conclude the sale, the President declared, 'It is not the business of other nations to make American foreign policy,' which represented a less-than-subtle attack against Menachem Begin for his lobbying efforts against the sale during the Prime Minister's visit to Washington in September.<sup>8</sup> During the AWACS debate the White House had succeeded in enlisting Nixon's strong support for the deal. In an article published in the 4 October edition of the *New York Times*, Nixon attacked Begin and

the American Jewish community when the former President stated, 'We know, the Saudis know, and everyone in the Middle East knows, that if it were not for the intense opposition by Begin and parts of the American Jewish community, the AWACS sale would go through.'<sup>9</sup>

The AWACS debate occurred within the context of increasing tensions between the United States and Israel which followed the Jewish state's bombing of a French-made nuclear reactor in Iraq. The bombing was designed to prevent Iraq from using spent fuel from the reactor to develop nuclear weapons. The Reagan Administration reacted angrily to the bombing by supporting a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning the Israeli action. To demonstrate further his displeasure over the bombing, Reagan had temporarily suspended the delivery of F-15 fighters to Israel.

Since the security of the State of Israel is the strongest unifying factor in the Jewish community as compared to other U.S. domestic and international policies, the focal point of the success of the Reagan Administration would tend to revolve around this major point. There is no question that a large majority of the community feels that President Reagan has not lived up to the campaign promises, and that the methods used by the administration to assure passage of the AWACS proposal not only helped enhance this feeling, but also raised anti-Semitic innuendos which seemed to be orchestrated by the White House, and shook the foundation of confidence [in Reagan's leadership] of this community. Their opinion that they have the right to question and to speak out on issues, as any other American does, was being placed in jeopardy. There is no doubt that the community felt singled out [for criticism], and that the State of Israel was being accused of interference in American and domestic affairs. ... I could list many other items, including the proposed sale of the AWACS and enhanced F-15 equipment (contrary to the promise of the previous administration), the delay in shipping airplanes to Israel, the U.S. vote in the U.N. regarding the Iraqi raid, and the feeling of breakdown in dialogue with the State of Israel, and many other items which have created an impression that there is a shift in U.S. policy vis a vis Israel, with a strong tilt to Saudi Arabia at Israel's expense, and that the actions and decisions of this administration for the past nine months would lend credence to this perception.<sup>10</sup>

Klein noted that despite the political breach between Reagan and the Jewish community as a result of the AWACS debate, Jews retained confidence in Reagan's commitment to the security and survival of Israel.

I think there is still a basic feeling in the community that the President has respect and understanding for the State of Israel; [he] considers Israel a strategic ally, does not mean to harm its security, and means what he says: that he will ensure its security and survival. However, this is being dissipated. It is impossible to say if an election were held tomorrow whether the community would not substantially go to the Democrats. It would depend upon the Democratic [presidential] candidate and the perception of his policies. There is some time [for Reagan] to retrieve the [Jewish] support that has been lost. Certain steps, however, must be taken and continued throughout the balance of the President's term.<sup>11</sup>

Klein proceeded to recommend that the Reagan Administration take the following steps to repair the rupture in its relations with the Jewish community which stemmed from the AWACS debate.

1. President Reagan, through his spokesman or himself, must make it explicitly clear that
  - a. There was no intention of creating any anti-Semitic innuendos during the AWACS debate.
  - b. The statements made by former Presidents Carter, Ford, and Nixon who blamed the State of Israel and the Jewish lobby [for the AWACS battle] were not orchestrated.
2. U.S. policy has not changed toward Israel.
  - a. That this country assures Israel of its strategic qualitative and quantitative superiority [in the Middle East].

- b. The fact that this might become an unbearable economic burden on Israel might also be addressed by assuring that the U.S., if necessary, will assume some of the economic burdens.
  - c. The U.S. will not negotiate with the PLO unless the previously stated conditions [for opening a dialogue with the organization] are met, and will not accept a PLO state on the West Bank.
3. The U.S. must strengthen the perception of Israel being a strategic ally in positive terms by encouraging co-production, stockpiling, joint defense, mutual alliance treaties, and other positive policies. The meeting I chaired in Washington, Wednesday, November 4, 1981, with 200 top UJA [United Jewish Appeal] leaders from New York with Ed Meese, Dick Allen, Secretary [of State Alexander] Haig, and General Jones, also helped calm some of the fears by their very positive statements regarding these matters.
4. There must be an increased amount of dialogue with the community through some of the Jewish organizations as well as strengthening and enforcing the Republican Jewish coalition so that there can be greater Jewish involvement [in public policymaking],
5. There should be additional appointments of members of the Jewish community to positions of importance in the White House and other areas. The recent appointment of Elliott Abrams to the post of Under Secretary of State for Human Rights is a step in the right direction.
6. The office of liaison to the Jewish community should be given additional coordination and political strength so that policies, domestic and international, could be discussed with members of the community and/or the Republican coalition prior to their final enactment, and also whenever policies are made that they be presented in the best possible light.
7. There should be meetings arranged with the President and key Jewish Republican leaders and others which should be well publicized. The statements made by the President should follow the lines as discussed above. Ongoing meetings should be held with various members of the administration, including the Departments of State and Defense, which should be on a scheduled basis and publicized.
8. The community should be called upon to be involved in other issues, not only matters relating to the State of Israel and Soviet Jewry. Our community is broad based and deeply concerned with economic affairs, defense, urban affairs, energy, as well as a host of other concerns. The strength and vitality of this community could be extremely helpful in these areas. Their involvement would show that there is a strong interest in involving them, but would help dispel the fact that they are perceived as a 'one issue group.'
9. Republican leaders of our community who have strong ties and respect within the community must be strengthened, and their perceptions of access to the administration must be reinforced. This can only be accomplished by publicizing an adequate number of meetings with members of the administration and the President. Again, if the community feels that they are represented [in the Reagan Administration] this will help dispel many fears and anxieties [within the Jewish community].
10. We should continue to encourage their political and financial involvement within the Republican Party, and help find candidates with [a] Jewish background to run for local and national office.<sup>12</sup>

Klein urged the White House to implement his recommendations for improving relations between Reagan and the Jewish community in order to reassure Jews that the administration

continued to value their membership in the political coalition which elected him to the presidency.

It is impossible to spell out in a letter all the perceptions, innuendos, misapprehensions, misunderstandings, and inaccuracies that have been generated [as a result of the AWACS debate]. It is also impossible to discuss all the recommendations to solve these problems in a letter.

The worst feeling that can happen is that a feeling of finality settles upon this community; that this administration and the Republican Party have written off their votes [and] involvement, both politically and economically, and has totally shifted its previously stated policies

[in the Middle East].<sup>13</sup>

Klein warned that if the Reagan Administration failed to take action to heal its political breach with the Jewish community, the President would lose the vital political support which he maintained among Jews: 'If this problem is not attacked with strength and vigor, the [Democratic] coalition that was broken [in favor of Reagan] in 1980 will reemerge in even stronger terms. The [Republican] Party may be hurt in 1982, support for the President and his policies [within the Jewish community] in the next three years will greatly diminish, and support [for Reagan within the Jewish community] will disappear in the presidential election year of 1984.'<sup>14</sup>

Despite the potential which existed for an irreparable rupture in relations between Reagan and the Jewish community, Klein expressed the hope that the political breach could be healed and offered his assistance to the White House in achieving this goal: 'I am confident that a lot can be done. I am willing to lend any help and support in these matters since I and many others have worked too hard and too long to lose what we have all achieved together.'<sup>15</sup>

Klein concluded his letter by assuring Dole that he would work with the White House to repair the damage inflicted upon relations between Reagan and the Jewish community. 'I hope I have a chance to meet with you to personally discuss these matters in greater detail. Please feel free to call me at any time.'<sup>16</sup>

## **George Klein Sends the White House a Memorandum on Relations Between Reagan and the Jewish Community**

On 15 March 1982, Klein sent the White House a memorandum, entitled "The Reagan Administration and the American Jewish Community," which essentially reiterated the analysis concerning this issue, which he had provided Dole in the letter he sent the White House adviser on 16 November 1981. The memorandum emphasized that the Jewish community represented a critical constituency in the political coalition which had elected Reagan to the presidency.

The 1980 presidential election represented what could have been a permanent shift in the traditional fifty years of American Jewish allegiance to the Democratic Party. Political analysts unanimously held that the 40 [percent] to 45 percent of the total [Jewish] vote Ronald Reagan received could have significant implications for the future political map of the country. Although Jews comprise less than 3 percent of the total population, because of their heavy registration and voter turnout, and their concentration in states with the most electoral votes, they will continue to be a significant factor in American politics.<sup>17</sup>

In his memorandum Klein outlined the two major factors which in 1980 had enabled Reagan to garner the largest share of the Jewish vote of any Republican nominee in recorded history:

First, it was largely a negative vote against Carter because of the perception that he was tilting away from Israel, and that his policies would endanger its security. Secondly, it reflected an overall trend in the Jewish community toward more conservative views on social and economic issues. This combination undoubtedly persuaded many Jewish voters who had never voted Republican to do so.<sup>18</sup>

Klein warned that the substantial inroads Reagan had made in gaining vital political support within the Jewish community were in danger of being squandered as a result of the poisonous atmosphere the AWACS debate had created in relations between the two sides.

The opportunity to consolidate this support [for Reagan within the Jewish community] for future elections is being lost. In fact, given the current unhappiness with the administration's policies in the Middle East during the past year (e.g., AWACS sale with its anti-Jewish innuendos, possible arms to Jordan, suspension of the strategic agreement and aircraft deliveries to Israel, reactions to Iraq and Beirut raids, etc.) and the distinct possibility of a strong Democratic presidential nominee in 1984, the Democrats could expect to capture 80 percent to 90 percent of the Jewish vote. Certainly the Democratic candidates will be maintaining and broadening their contacts with the community in order to achieve this goal.<sup>19</sup>

Klein warned that because the Jewish vote was concentrated in the states with the largest number of electoral votes, a return of the Jewish community to the Democratic fold in the 1984 presidential election could assure Reagan's defeat in that contest should the President seek reelection to a second term and the election turn out to be close.

Unless there is another Republican landslide in 1984, the current deep dissatisfaction of Jewish voters with the Reagan Administration could well be the difference between victory and defeat for the Republican presidential candidate in 1984 and for many local races. This prospect could be avoided by greater attention to the problem [of the Jewish vote] and a higher degree of sensitivity to this constituency.<sup>20</sup>

Klein argued that the only way Reagan could be assured of continued political support within the Jewish community was to commit himself to pursuing a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East.

It is worth noting that given the concern of American Jews for Israel's security, public assurance of U.S. support [for Israel] must be given on a regular basis even though it might seem superfluous or redundant. Analyses after the 1980 presidential election support the view that Israel was a preeminent concern to Jewish voters. For example, in the Orthodox community, where identification with Israel's security is intense, in some precincts Carter's percentage [of the Jewish vote] plunged 60 percent from its 1976 total. This concern by the Jewish electorate was also evident in the spring Democratic primaries after the United States on March 1, 1980 voted for an Arab sponsored resolution [against Israel] in the U.N. Security Council. In the New York primary the Jewish community voted four to one for [Senator Edward M.] Kennedy, and in some districts, where concentrations of Jews were high, the margin was nine to one. The vote shows that Jews were voting against someone [Carter] whom they perceived as enunciating policies that could endanger Israel's basic security. Working on the assumption that this [hostility toward Israel] is not Reagan Administration policy, it would be very worthwhile to deal with the current negative perception [within the Jewish community against Reagan] in a timely manner.<sup>21</sup>

Klein recommended that Reagan make it clear to the Jewish community that his strong support for the AWACS sale had in no way diminished his equally strong support for Israel. This would be the single most important action Reagan could take to shore up his sinking support within the Jewish community.

Despite a number of public differences of opinion between the United States and Israel, and the administration's actions cited earlier which have created the current situation [of opposition to Reagan within the Jewish community], there are certain positive features in the administration's attitudes and policies [toward the Middle East] which must be transmitted.

1. The administration's tough stand against international terrorism, the PLO, and Libya.
2. The veto of the U.N. Security Council sanctions against Israel over [its occupation of] the Golan Heights.
3. The increase in aid levels to Israel.
4. And most importantly, President Reagan's instinctive and spontaneous support for Israel as a reliable ally.<sup>22</sup>



Klein stressed that the intense political friction the White House and the Jewish community had experienced during the AWACS debate could be overcome through a formalized system of communications between the two sides.

The problem of differences over specific actions or statements can be overcome to a great extent if there is adequate communication with [the] Jewish leadership at regular intervals and at appropriate levels. This will not only enable the positive aspects of its [the Reagan Administration's] policies to become known to the Jewish community, but demonstrate that importance is placed in the relationship with the American Jewish community.

During the height of the various conflicts between the community and the Carter Administration, there was always high-level access to the White House by [the] Jewish leadership, if not with the President himself, certainly with Vice President Mondale and with National Security Adviser Brzezinski and Secretary of State Vance. In addition, the three Jewish Cabinet members were also looked upon as a conduit for suggestions and expressions of concern. Having visible figures in the White House such as Bob Lipschutz, Anne Wexler, and Stuart Eizenstadt provided an easy means of two-way communication between the White House and the community.<sup>23</sup>

Klein argued that because Reagan's policy in the Middle East was, from the viewpoint of the Jewish community, no worse than that of his predecessor, there was no excuse for the White House to avoid dealings with the Jewish community, as had been the case during the months of debate in Washington over the AWACS sale, especially in light of the fact that Carter had maintained communications with the Jewish community despite the animosity many Jews had toward him: 'Because it is arguable as to whether the current administration policies in their totality are "worse" than those of the Carter Administration, there is no reason for such poor relations. However, at this time the administration is viewed [within the Jewish community] as being hostile. The necessary communication is obviously lacking.'<sup>24</sup>

Klein concluded his memorandum by urging the White House to immediately take action to shore up Reagan's sinking support within the Jewish community before it inflicted political damage to the Republican Party in the 1982 congressional and 1984 presidential election: 'Relations between the administration and the American Jewish community are at a dangerously low state. It is definitely in everyone's interest to change this, and it can be done. The outcome will affect administration policies, and the elections of 1982 and 1984. Time is of the essence; what is decided should be done now!'<sup>25</sup>

Klein's argument that the Jewish community could be the decisive swing vote in determining the outcome of presidential elections is not credible. As Klein readily conceded, the Jewish vote represents only 3 percent of the electorate and could only determine the outcome of a presidential election in which the successful nominee won by a razor-thin margin. To be sure, Klein is correct to argue that the Jewish community is concentrated in the states with the largest number of electoral votes. The Jewish vote could be the factor in determining the outcome of the presidential election in those states. However, even if this were the case, those states would be unlikely to make the difference in determining the outcome of the presidential election, especially if the successful nominee wins by a landslide.

Indeed, attached to Klein's memorandum was an analysis of the Jewish vote in nine of the states with the largest number of electoral votes where the Jewish community is concentrated.<sup>26</sup> From 1956 to 1980, the Democratic presidential nominee won an average of 71 percent of the Jewish vote. The attachment to Klein's memorandum shows the outcome of the 1980 presidential election in the states with the largest number of electoral votes, which would have occurred had Carter received 60 percent of the Jewish vote in those states rather than the 45 percent share of the Jewish vote nationally he actually garnered during his unsuccessful campaign for reelection. With 60 percent of the Jewish vote, Carter would have carried only two key states which he lost

to Reagan — Pennsylvania and Florida. This would have raised the number of electoral votes Carter won in 1980 by 44, from 49 to 93, far short of the 270 electoral votes Carter needed to win reelection.<sup>27</sup>

In his memorandum, Klein argued that the Jewish vote could be a decisive factor in determining the outcome of the presidential election and used this argument as his basis to warn that Reagan risked defeat in the 1984 election if he failed to pursue a strong pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. However, the election data Klein attached to his memorandum contradicted this argument, showing that even if Carter had gained the overwhelming share of the Jewish vote in the 1980 presidential election, it would have made little difference in determining the outcome of that contest. The Jewish vote would only matter in determining the outcome of an extremely close presidential election, and the contests Reagan won in 1980 and 1984 were landslide victories, and anything but close. Indeed, since the creation of Israel in 1948, the Jewish vote has determined the outcome of only two presidential elections — in 1948 and 1960.<sup>28</sup>

Reagan did not need the Jewish vote to win in 1980 and 1984. To be sure, it was impossible to predict the outcome of the 1984 presidential election in 1982, when Klein warned the White House that Reagan could lose his campaign for reelection should he pursue a less-than-staunch pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, which would cost him the Jewish vote. However, the fact that Reagan would have won his landslide victory in 1980 even if he failed to receive a single Jewish vote, and that the Jewish vote has determined the outcome of only two presidential elections since the creation of Israel in 1948, made it highly unlikely that the Jewish vote would be the determining factor in the outcome of the 1984 electoral contest. Given the extreme unlikelihood that the Jewish vote would affect his reelection prospects, Reagan had no rational basis to conduct American policy in the Middle East in order to assure that he would win the Jewish vote in 1984.

In all likelihood, Klein's warning represented a self-serving scare tactic designed to frighten the President into abandoning his commitment to pursue evenhanded diplomacy in the region, as expressed by the AWACS sale. Whatever Klein's motivation and lack of credibility, his tactic worked. Unwilling to risk loss of political support within the Jewish community, Reagan was determined to veer American policy in the Middle East in a pro-Israel direction in order to assure that Jews would remain an essential part of the political coalition which had elected him to the presidency. While Reagan did not need the Jewish vote to win the 1980 and 1984 presidential elections, he nevertheless valued the fact that he had made substantial headway in winning the support of the Jewish community and was unwilling to risk the loss of that backing.

## **Elizabeth Dole Urges the White House to Repair the Damage in Relations Between Reagan and the Jewish Community**

Klein's correspondence with the White House illustrates the severe damage the AWACS debate had inflicted on relations between Reagan and the Jewish community. Perhaps no member of the White House staff was more aware of this problem than Dole. In his correspondences with the White House, Klein emphasized that the single most important action Reagan could take to repair the damage in his relations with the Jewish community was to open a channel of communication with its representatives. Dole fully shared this sentiment and actively lobbied the



White House to arrange a meeting between Reagan and representatives of the Jewish community. To this end, on 4 November 1981 Dole sent a memorandum to Gregory J. Newell, Director of Presidential Scheduling and Appointments. In her memorandum, Dole requested that Reagan hold a 30-minute 'Meeting with [the] Jewish community leadership' in the Cabinet Room on either 17 or 18 November. The purpose of the meeting would be 'To alleviate [the] remaining concern in the Jewish community regarding the President's support of Israel.... The President can stress the multitude of issues on which the administration and the Jewish community are in general agreement, and it is now time to work together as never before.' Dole recommended that the meeting would commence with a 'Greeting by Dole, followed by [a] Middle East briefing ... with [a] wrap up visit by the President.'

Attached to Dole's memorandum was a list of 26 prominent Jews, including Klein, whom she recommended attend the meeting.<sup>29</sup> Dole noted that 'Approximately one-third [of the individuals on the list] were in attendance at the President's March 9 meeting with Jewish supporters,' the first and, at the time, last conference of its kind which had occurred.<sup>30</sup> Dole pointed out that

This ad hoc group represents the leadership of the Jewish community, although not all American Jews. This group, predominantly Democrats, can be described as somewhat liberal on social issues and more conservative on fiscal issues. A number of this group did not support the President's candidacy, but have generally respected his strong stand and longstanding record of support for Israel.<sup>31</sup>

To repair the damage the AWACS debate had inflicted upon relations between Reagan and the Jewish community, Dole recommended that the President reassure leaders of major Jewish organizations at their meeting that the administration shared the basic views of organized Jewry with respect to the issues of anti-Semitism and Israel: 'Although without foundation in fact, this group does need the extra reassurance of hearing directly from the President that his administration does not tolerate anti-Semitism, supports the Camp David process, and will help Israel maintain its qualitative [military] superiority in the Middle East.'<sup>32</sup>

Newell approved Dole's recommendation for a meeting between Reagan and representatives of the Jewish community in the Cabinet Room. To obtain the information required to prepare Reagan for this meeting, on 10 November 1981 Dole began a series of consultations with representatives of the Jewish community by meeting a group of four Jewish leaders at the White House.<sup>33</sup> The following day Dole sent a memorandum to James A. Baker III, Chief of Staff to the President; Michael K. Deaver, Deputy Chief of Staff to the President; and Edwin Meese III, Counselor to the President. In her memorandum, Dole reported on her meeting with Jewish leaders the previous day. Dole noted that the Jewish leaders had accumulated a number of grievances against the Reagan Administration, especially with respect to its handling of the AWACS debate. The Jewish leaders noted that Reagan had attacked Israel at his news conference 1 October 1981; Nixon had done the same to Begin and the Jewish community in his article published in the 4 October edition of the *New York Times*.

In addition to offensive statements Reagan and Nixon made against Israel, Begin, and the American Jewish community during the AWACS debate, the Jewish leaders were concerned over the President's conduct of American policy in the Middle East. In their meeting with Dole, the Jewish leaders expressed two major concerns over American Middle East policy.

First, the Jewish leaders were alarmed that the Reagan Administration had failed to express opposition to the Middle East peace plan presented by Fahd on 8 August 1981. The Fahd Plan would require Israel to withdraw from all Arab territories Tel Aviv captured in the Six-Day War of 1967 and permit the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

with East Jerusalem as its capital.<sup>34</sup> Israel flatly rejected the Fahd Plan, condemning it as 'a Saudi annihilation plan, a model of how to liquidate Israel in stages.'<sup>35</sup> To make matters worse from the viewpoint of Jewish leaders, Reagan indirectly endorsed the Fahd Plan when, in an interview with the *Jewish Times* on 17 October, the President praised the peacemaking efforts of Saudi Arabia, declaring, 'I believe that the Saudis are the key to spreading peace throughout the Middle East.'<sup>36</sup>

A second concern of the Jewish leaders was that Reagan had failed to devote special attention to the peace process in the Middle East. Indeed, Reagan had failed to appoint a special peace negotiator for the Middle East to build on the work of the two negotiators Carter designated in 1979 — Robert Strauss and his successor, Sol Linowitz. During 1979 and 1980, Strauss, followed by Linowitz, had participated in negotiations between representatives of Israel and Egypt designed to reach agreement on providing autonomy to the Palestinians residing on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as required by the Camp David peace treaty leaders of the two nations of the Middle East had signed at the White House on 26 March 1979.<sup>37</sup> Reagan's failure to appoint a peace negotiator for the Middle East served as a symbol of the President's own neglect of the peace process.

The AWACS debate had imposed a severe rupture in relations between Reagan and the Jewish community. Reagan's strong support for selling advanced and sophisticated military technology to Saudi Arabia, an Arab nation with a long record of unrelenting hostility toward Israel, brought into question the President's commitment to maintain the military superiority of the Jewish state in the Middle East. Reagan's criticism of Israel at his news conference on 1 October 1981 might be construed as having anti-Semitic overtones. To make matters worse, Reagan had held no meeting at the White House with any group of Jewish leaders or supporters since the first such conference of its kind on 9 March, following his assumption of the presidency, which represented a deliberate snub against organized Jewry for having opposed the AWACS sale.

Reagan's praise for Saudi peacemaking efforts during the AWACS debate brought into question the President's commitment to the Camp David peace process. This is true since the Fahd Plan required that Israel be compelled to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories as the basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Since Israel refused to make such a territorial concession to its Arab neighbors, the Fahd Plan would have required the imposition of such a settlement by outside powers against the Jewish state's will. Indeed, one of the eight points contained in the Fahd Plan called for 'The U.N. or some member states of the U.N. to guarantee implementation of these principles' of the Saudi peace proposal — a clear demand that such a settlement be imposed by outside powers against Israel's wishes.<sup>38</sup> This stood in flagrant contradiction to the Camp David process, which required that such a settlement could only be achieved through direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

In her memorandum to Baker, Deaver, and Meese, Dole made it clear that Reagan would have his work cut out for him in his effort to use his scheduled meeting with representatives of the Jewish leadership as an opportunity to heal the political breach between the President and the Jewish community. Dole noted that the four Jewish leaders she met on 10 November 1981 had made it clear that Reagan had accumulated a reservoir of animosity and distrust within the Jewish community as a result of a number of controversial decisions, actions, and statements he had made with respect to his conduct of American policy in the Middle East during his first year in office:

This meeting produced the following comments which may be helpful in thinking through our Wednesday session [with representatives of the Jewish community]. There is great anger at all levels of the American Jewish community toward the President and the administration, not [only] over AWACS, but over other events leading up to and following the [Senate] vote [approving the AWACS sale]. The community questions the President's credibility, and is concerned that he has written off the Jews.<sup>39</sup>

Dole noted four specific grievances Jewish leaders had accumulated against the Reagan Administration in its conduct of American policy in the Middle East.

1. Questioning a citizen's loyalty for disagreement [between Reagan and the Jewish community over the AWACS issue], and subsequent perceived tolerance of anti-Semitism (much focus on Nixon comments).
2. Favorable comments on the Fahd Plan.
3. Lack of visible and high-level commitment to Camp David process (Strauss or Linowitz caliber).
4. Need to institutionalize access to policy personnel through regular quarterly meetings.<sup>40</sup>

Dole reported that the Jewish community had high hopes for Reagan when he was elected to the presidency but that he had let his Jewish supporters down during his first year in office: '[The] community loved this GOP President as no other, and felt that they could count on his integrity. The view is that neither the President nor the GOP could get 5 percent of today's Jewish vote.'<sup>41</sup>

Dole noted that the Jewish leaders she met recommended that Reagan take a number of steps to repair the severe damage the AWACS debate had inflicted upon his relations with the Jewish community:

It was strongly recommended that the President take a firm moral leadership position, and decry anti-Semitism in a public fashion prior to [his] meeting with [representatives of] the Jewish community. These leaders confirmed the urgent need for a Jewish leadership meeting with the President, as well as one with Jewish GOP leaders (It was also recommended that the Vice President or another high-level official make a trip to Israel soon).<sup>42</sup>

Dole made it clear that Reagan's upcoming meetings with Jewish leaders must be substantive, rather than symbolic, insofar as '[The] results of our meetings must show substance — what is our policy in the Middle East and with Israel?' Moreover, Reagan 'Must be prepared to deal with concerns which lie ahead.' Dole noted that Jewish leaders had expressed a number of concerns over Reagan's conduct of American policy in the Middle East, including the possibility that the administration might consider selling bomb racks to Saudi Arabia in order to enhance the offensive capability of the F-15s the Carter Administration transferred to Riyadh in 1978, and items to enhance the capacity of the AWACS scheduled for delivery to Saudi Arabia in 1985. Jewish leaders were also concerned that Reagan might abrogate American leadership over the peace process in the Middle East to the nations of Western Europe.

1. What about continued arms sales to moderate Arab states?
2. Will we be strong enough to disassociate ourselves from the European initiative [to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East]?
3. How will we react to [the] State Department study on F-15 bomb racks, which is due in mid-December?
4. What will our position be on [the] AWACS enhancement in two or three years?
5. Will Camp David be forgotten in four years?<sup>43</sup>

To enable Reagan to successfully repair the damage inflicted upon his relationship with the Jewish community, Dole reported that the Jewish leaders she met 'suggested the following agenda items for [their] meeting with the President to begin the process of restoring [his] credibility.' Those agenda items would require that, during his meeting with Jewish leaders, Reagan would

1. Decry anti-Semitism and dual loyalty claims [against the Jewish community].
2. Reaffirm [the] Camp David [peace treaty] and allay Fahd Plan concerns [within the Jewish community].
3. Reiterate [Reagan's] earlier strong stand against PLO terrorism.
4. Provide public and private stroking of Israel.
5. Reinforce [Israel's position] that Jerusalem is part of Israel.
6. Discuss [the] Israeli economy.
7. Reassure [the Jewish community] on F-15 bomb rack decision.
8. Resume open door consultations [between Jewish leaders and] key [White House] staff] on a regular basis.<sup>44</sup>

The seventh point on Dole's list of assurances to the Jewish community refers to the assurances Reagan provided Jack J. Spitzer, President of B'nai B'rith International, in a letter to the Jewish leader in October 1981 — that he would not include bomb racks as part of the equipment included in the AWACS sales package to enhance the offensive military capability of the F-15 fighters the Carter Administration sold to Saudi Arabia in 1978.<sup>45</sup>

On 13 November 1981, Dole sent a memorandum to David Gergen, Assistant to the President for Communications. In her memorandum, Dole informed Gergen:

Attached you will find two lists which contain some suggestions for attendees at the respective Jewish meetings with the President on Thursday, November 19, 1981.

The first meeting is with Jewish supporters, and the guest list is to be comprised of those leaders who have worked actively on the President's behalf in the Jewish community.

The second meeting is with leaders of Jewish community organizations. This group, many of whom will be traditional Democrats, represent the heads of formalized Jewish organizations which are active in numerous community and international volunteer efforts.<sup>46</sup>

Dole left Gergen the following instructions regarding the completion of the final lists of Jewish leaders who would meet Reagan on 19 November 1981.

1. [The lists] must be completed by noon today.
2. On each of the attached sheets [containing the lists], please circle the name of those you wish to endorse for inclusion. If you have additional preferences, please write those names on the attached (Note: You must be prepared to provide addresses this afternoon).
3. A maximum of thirty-six [participants] will be allowed for each meeting.  
The ultimate invitation list will be developed on a consensus basis. Due to the Jewish Sabbath, the invitation will be telephoned today, and no additions can be allowed.<sup>47</sup>

## **Elizabeth Dole Prepares Reagan for His Meeting with His Jewish Supporters**

The White House rejected Dole's recommendation that Reagan meet with leaders of major Jewish organizations. As Dole noted, most of those leaders were Democrats and supported Carter over Reagan in the 1980 presidential election. The White House believed that a more effective means for Reagan to shore up his sinking political support within the Jewish community was to reach out to its prominent members who backed rather than opposed him. Accordingly, the White House decided to schedule Reagan for a 30-minute meeting in the Cabinet Room on 19 November 1981 with 34 prominent Jews, including Klein, who supported him during the 1980 presidential campaign.<sup>48</sup> The purpose of the meeting was to enable the President to reach out to his Jewish supporters in the hope that he might repair the damage to his relations with the Jewish community.

Reagan placed great importance on this meeting: he saw it as a critical opportunity to heal the political breach between himself and the Jewish community. Hours before this meeting, Dole sent Reagan a memorandum in order to prepare the President for the conference. In her memorandum, Dole noted that the purpose of the meeting was 'To bridge the chasm of misunderstanding that has developed between the administration and the American Jewish community, in this instance, as it affects Reagan—Bush supporters. This session is intended to reassure them of your continuing support for your campaign commitments regarding the security of Israel and your denunciation of anti-Semitism.'<sup>49</sup>

In her memorandum, Dole explained the reasons why a meeting between Reagan and many of his prominent Jewish supporters was necessary.

In the past weeks, I have consulted with numerous Jewish leaders; Ed Meese, Jim Baker, and Mike Deaver have also participated in some of the sessions. All of our Jewish friends recommended two meetings in the post-AWACS period, one with our supporters, and a second with leaders of major Jewish organizations. All parties wish to place AWACS behind us, clarify the administration's views on issues of concern to the American Jewish community, and look to improved communications and cooperation on matters of mutual interest.<sup>50</sup>

Dole informed Reagan that the President retained the support of his prominent Jewish backers despite the fact that they were no less opposed to the AWACS sale than was the case with other Jewish leaders. However, Dole noted that Reagan's Jewish supporters had been placed on the political defensive within their ethnic community as a result of a number of controversial remarks Reagan had made during the AWACS debate, including his criticism of Israel during his news conference in which he formally notified Congress of his intent to conclude the AWACS sale, and his praise for **Saudi** peacemaking efforts in the Middle East in his interview with the *Jewish Times*.

As was typical of the general Jewish community, virtually no one in this group supported you on AWACS. They are, however, predominantly Republicans, and supported you on all other issues. Most of these attendees [at the 19 November 1981 meeting] met with you in a similar session in March. Recent media misrepresentations of some of your views [on the Middle East] have caused this group a loss of political capital in the Jewish community for their advocacy of you. You may wish to stress their value in terms of making even further converts among a traditionally bedrock Democratic constituency.<sup>51</sup>

Dole informed Reagan that despite their support for him, the President's prominent Jewish backers were alarmed at the growing perception that the AWACS debate had forced him to adopt a negative view of the American Jewish community and to move away from his strong support for Israel toward a more evenhanded policy in the Middle East.

Emotions will be high as a result of the virtual universal anxiety of the [Jewish] community over a perceived administration indifference toward anti-Semitism. This is compounded by a developing community view that your support for Israel is softening in favor of the Arabs. This session [with Reagan's prominent Jewish supporters] is likely to be a bit tense and strained. Ed Meese,

Dick Allen, and the Vice President will have briefed the group, and handled questions prior to your arrival, and Ed will open with a strong statement hitting head-on the major four issues [for discussion]: anti-Semitism, [the] Fahd eight-point peace plan [for the Middle East], [the] PLO, [and America's] strategic partnership with Israel.

The group [of Reagan's prominent Jewish supporters] will also need to hear from you on these points. In all my meetings [with Reagan's prominent Jewish supporters], it has been stressed that, in the final analysis, it was not so much the AWACS issue as the undertones, which have left scars and predictions that we would not get over 5 percent of the Jewish vote today.<sup>52</sup>

Dole concluded her memorandum by expressing her belief that reassurances by Reagan concerning his strong opposition to anti-Semitism, and his equally strong support for Israel, would go a long way in relieving anxieties of prominent Jewish supporters toward the President and rebuilding the firm backing he enjoyed within the American Jewish community prior to the AWACS debate. 'This first post-AWACS meeting [between Reagan and his prominent Jewish supporters] has strong symbolic significance. Fortright statements on each of the four issues [outlined in Dole's memorandum] will go a long way toward defusing our problem [with the Jewish community].'<sup>53</sup>

Dole's memorandum contained the following 'sequence of events,' which Reagan would follow in conducting his meeting with a group of his Jewish supporters.

10:15 a.m. You enter the Cabinet Room and greet guests as you move around the table en route to your seat.

10:18 a.m. You are seated and offer brief remarks.

10:23 a.m. On conclusion of your remarks, you acknowledge several guests for questions.

10:45 a.m. You thank your guests and depart.<sup>54</sup>

Attached to Dole's memorandum were talking points Reagan was to use in the meeting with his Jewish supporters. The talking points covered the four issues on the agenda of this meeting: anti-Semitism, the Fahd Plan, the PLO, and the strategic partnership between the United States and Israel. Dole's talking points highlighted the assurances Reagan was to have made to a group of his Jewish supporters on each of the four issues.

### 1. Anti-Semitism

- A. We are aware that some of your concerns about anti-Semitism.
- B. This administration does not condone anti-Semitism in any form, and we shall attack it wherever we find it.
- C. We recognize that it is the right — indeed the duty — of all Americans to state their views (as individuals or in groups) on public issues that concern them.
- D. Likewise, Israel has the right, as do all other nations, to state its views on U.S. policies that affect it.

### 2. Eight Points Offered by Saudi Arabia [on Peace in the Middle East]

- A. This administration is committed to the Camp David process as the only path to peace.
- B. We are not negotiating on any other basis — not the eight points, and the European initiative.
- C. We derive hope that Saudi Arabia has substituted talk of peace for talk of jihad (holy war).

### 3. PLO

- A. Top administration officials (including the President) have characterized the PLO as a



terrorist organization. We still do.

- B. U.S. policy toward the PLO remains the same: No negotiations or recognition so long as the PLO refuses (1) to renounce terrorism; (2) to acknowledge Israel's right to exist; and (3) to accept UNSC [United Nations Security Council Resolutions] 242 and 338.

#### 4. Strategic Partnership with Israel

- A. Defense Minister Sharon will arrive here November 30 for meetings at the Pentagon.
- B. Those meetings will transform our strategic dialogue into actual strategic cooperation.
- C. The basis of this partnership is not charity, but mutual benefit. It is in our interest as well as Israel's.
- D. We are proud to bring the U.S.—Israeli strategic partnership out into the open.
- E. We shall maintain Israel's qualitative [military] edge [in the Middle East].<sup>55</sup>

## **Reagan Repairs the Damage in His Relations with the Jewish Community**

The talking points Reagan used in his 19 November meeting amounted to a sweeping commitment by the President to pursue a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. During this meeting Reagan condemned the PLO as a terrorist organization and reaffirmed American policy that the United States would not open a formal dialogue with the PLO except on Washington's own terms; rejected the Fahd Plan, which required Israel to withdraw from all Arab-occupied territories the Jewish state captured in the Six-Day War as the foundation for any comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East; and promised to pursue his administration's plan to sign a strategic cooperation agreement with Israel, formalizing Tel Aviv's status as America's closest ally in the region. Reagan's pledges of almost total and absolute support for Israel were certainly music to the ears of his Jewish supporters, and the American Jewish community could not have asked for a stronger American commitment to the interests of Tel Aviv than they received from Reagan. Accordingly, the meeting served its intended purpose: it healed the political breach between the two sides.

Reagan's assurance that he rejected the Fahd Plan represented a renunciation of the President's praise for Saudi peacemaking efforts in the Middle East during the AWACS debate a month prior to his conference with Jewish supporters. In order to obtain congressional approval of the AWACS sale, Reagan needed to persuade lawmakers that Saudi Arabia represented a moderating influence in the region. This required Reagan to affirm that Saudi Arabia was playing a constructive role in the search for the achievement of a comprehensive peace settlement.

However, Reagan's praise for Saudi peacemaking efforts represented an alarming development for American Jewish leaders since Riyadh rejected the American insistence that the imposition of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East by outside powers must be avoided, and that such an agreement must be the result of direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Rather, Saudi Arabia was committed to the imposition of such a settlement by outside powers, which would compel Israel to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories. American Jewish leaders strongly supported both Israel's insistence that such a settlement must be the result of direct negotiations between Tel Aviv and its Arab neighbors and its refusal to withdraw from

all occupied Arab territories.

To repair the severe rupture in his relations with the Jewish community as a result of the AWACS debate, Reagan decided to renounce his support for Saudi peacemaking efforts and reaffirm his commitment to the Camp David process, which required the achievement of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East through direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and specifically rejected the imposition of such an agreement by outside powers. Because the Camp David process required Israeli acquiescence to any such settlement, the American-sponsored peace process essentially gave the Jewish state veto power over any such agreement. Accordingly, the Camp David process ensured that Israel would not have to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories as part of such an agreement, which the Jewish state remained adamantly opposed to doing. By insulating Israel from any requirement to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories, the Camp David peace process was strongly supported by both Tel Aviv and organized American Jewry. Consequently, Reagan's reaffirmation of his support for the Camp David peace process was the single most important gesture he made in restoring his strong and close relations with the Jewish community in the aftermath of the AWACS debate.

## **Reagan Makes a Sharp U-Turn in American Policy in the Middle East**

American policy in the Middle East made a dramatic U-turn in the months of October and November 1981. But who was responsible for this change in policy? On the surface, it would appear that Dole was the White House official most responsible. As we have seen, during November 1981 Dole sent a number of memorandums to Reagan and other senior White House advisers warning that relations between the President and the Jewish community had suffered serious and irreparable harm as a result of the AWACS debate, and urging that the administration reach out to Jewish leaders in order to heal the political breach between the two sides. To this end, Dole provided Reagan the talking points he used in his 19 November meeting, in which he reaffirmed his commitment to pursue a strong pro-Israel policy in the Middle East.

## **Jacob Stein Acts to Close the Political Rift Between the Reagan Administration and the Jewish Community**

However, Dole was not the only White House official lobbying Reagan on behalf of the Jewish community; an even more influential pro-Israel lobbyist within the White House was Jacob Stein. He had served as Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella group composed of 35 major Jewish organizations. During the 1980 presidential campaign, Stein had served with Klein as a Co-Chairman of the Coalition to Elect Reagan—Bush.<sup>56</sup> As both a prominent member of the Jewish community and an influential political supporter of Reagan, Stein represented the perfect candidate to maintain a bridge of friendship and understanding between the President and organized Jewry. Accordingly, upon his



assumption of the presidency, Reagan appointed Stein as Special Adviser to the White House for Jewish Affairs. Upon entering the White House, Stein's immediate responsibility was to close the growing rift between Reagan and the Jewish community the AWACS sale had opened.

On 15 December 1981, Stein sent Dole a memorandum detailing just how difficult a year it had in been in relations between Reagan and the Jewish community.

The thrust of the involvement of this office during 1981 was designed to communicate the position of the administration on issues of concern to the American Jewish community ... and to bring back concerns and sensitivities of the Jewish community to the administration.

This has been a most difficult year for the administration in its dealings with the American Jewish community. The administration's proposal to sell F-15 enhancements and AWACS to the Saudis was met by universal Jewish disapproval. During the course of the AWACS debate, statements and actions interpreted by the Jewish community as supporting anti-Semitism occurred. The perceptions of an anti-Jewish attitude of this administration and of an indifference on the part of this administration echoes still today throughout the Jewish community. To date, we have yet to have a strong statement from the President on this issue.

The administration's comments indicating a degree of support for the Fahd Eight-Point Plan was strongly opposed by the Jewish community as seen as a further move away from the President's campaign commitment to support Israel.<sup>57</sup>

Stein reported that since 15 April 1981, when he was appointed as Special Adviser to the White House for Jewish Affairs, he had arranged with representatives of the Jewish community four meetings with Reagan, three with Vice President George Bush, and four with members of the Cabinet or senior members of the White House staff. In addition, Stein reported that he had initiated 107 formal contacts with representatives of the Jewish community, consisting of either private briefings to Jewish delegations or public addresses to Jewish organizations. Accordingly, despite the strained relations existing between the Reagan and Jewish community during 1981, the two sides remained in almost constant touch with each other.

During two major meetings with the President, Vice President, and Jewish groups, commitments were made that the Memorandum of Understanding [on Strategic Cooperation] to be signed between the United States and Israel would be substantive. The Jewish community does not view the agreed Memorandum of Understanding as substantive.

A series of eighty-seven meetings with Jewish groups from across the country were held in the White House. During each briefing we provided an administration to address both domestic and foreign (Middle East) issues.

During a series of twenty plus speeches to conventions, annual meetings, and special meetings, I presented in a positive fashion the President's position of the Saudi arms package, the Fahd Plan, and the United States-Israeli Memorandum of Understanding as well as explaining the administration's reaction to the bombing of the PLO headquarters in Beirut.<sup>58</sup>

Stein concluded by urging an increase in communications between the Reagan Administration and representatives of the Jewish community in order to assure improved relations between the two sides.

Despite the clear differences between the administration and the American Jewish community on American—Israeli relations, I believe it is important that there be increased communication and a continuing dialogue with the representative leadership of the political and organizational Jewish community. I feel that it is particularly important to provide access and communication to the Fisher Group of [the Jewish] Republican leadership in order that their effectiveness in the American Jewish community be enhanced as we approach the 1982 elections.<sup>59</sup>

## **Jacob Stein Urges the White House to Reaffirm Reagan's Commitment to Pursue a Pro-Israel Policy in the Middle East**

As his memorandum to Dole on 15 December 1981 reveals, Stein had been determined to prevent the AWACS debate from inflicting permanent damage upon relations between Reagan and Jewish community. To this end, on 2 September Stein sent Dole a memorandum outlining the steps he believed must be taken to restore close ties between Reagan and the Jewish community. In his memorandum Stein warned that 'The Jewish community is prepared to launch a campaign of strong opposition to the proposed sale of military equipment and weaponry to the Saudis.' In order to prevent the AWACS debate from provoking a severe and irreparable rupture in relations between Reagan and the Jewish community, Stein recommended that the White House 'Restate its firm commitment to the physical security and economic viability of Israel.'<sup>60</sup>

Throughout the AWACS debate, the Reagan Administration had countered the pro-Israel lobby's opposition to the AWACS sale by warning that Saudi Arabia would turn to an alternative foreign supplier to the United States for the purchase of airborne surveillance technology if Congress blocked the deal. The administration would impose stringent safeguards to assure that Saudi Arabia would not use its newly acquired AWACS to threaten the security of Israel. By contrast, other foreign suppliers of airborne surveillance technology would not do the same.

Accordingly, far from threatening the security of Israel, the sale would serve the national interests of the Jewish state by enabling Saudi Arabia to purchase airborne surveillance technology under terms which assured that Riyadh would not use this technology to endanger Tel Aviv. In order to reassure the Jewish community that the sale posed no credible threat to the security of Israel, Stein urged the Reagan Administration to

Point out that the proposed sale is important to American security interests in the Persian Gulf. It will provide greater involvement of American maintenance personnel whose presence will act as a stabilizing force to prevent misuse of military equipment and weaponry. ... The proposed date of transfer of the AWACS systems is 1985 at the earliest. A change in the government of Saudi Arabia adverse to U.S. interests would provide the administration with the opportunity to review its commitment

[to sell AWACS to Saudi Arabia].<sup>61</sup>

Despite Reagan's commitment to successfully conclude the AWACS sale, the President had adopted a steadfast pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. Stein recommended that

In a positive manner, we should state the administration's commitment to Israel has been made manifest in a number of areas:

1. Economic

- a. Despite sharp cutbacks in every budget area, including foreign aid, the administration supports a program of foreign aid to Israel that is unchanged.
- b. [The] administration has agreed to review Israel's economic obligations to determine if they can be restructured to ease [the] current economic pressures on Israel.
- c. The administration has permitted Israel to sell its Kfir aircraft with American engines to other countries, substantially improving Israel's balance of trade.

2. Military

- a. The administration is continuing its program of supplying Israel with items of military hardware necessary to its defense.
- b. The administration has offered to sell Israel an additional fifteen F-15 fighter planes.
- c. The administration has agreed to the involvement of U.S. forces in the multinational force to police the border between Israel and Egypt following Israel's scheduled April 1982 Sinai withdrawal.

3. Political

- a. Ambassador Novack in Geneva spoke out against growing anti-Semitism.

- b. Ambassador Kilpatrick in the United Nations has refused to join efforts to censure Israel for 'hot pursuit' of terrorists in Lebanon.
- c. This administration does not consider Israeli settlements as illegal or consider Israel as 'intransigent.'
- d. The Chairman of the National Security Security Council has branded the PLO 'terrorists.'
- e. This administration does not support the creation of an independent Palestinian state between Israel and Jordan.
- f. This administration does favor continuation of the Camp David peace process as the best means of resolving outstanding problems between Israel and her enemies.<sup>62</sup>

Stein recommended that the Reagan Administration reaffirm its commitment to pursue a steadfast pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. This would serve to reassure the Jewish community that the administration's strong support for Israel remained intact, despite its equally strong commitment to successfully conclude the AWACS sale.

From time to time, additional points can be developed to support the administration's strong stand in favor of Israel as a strong and dependable ally.

We should urge that those in opposition to the proposals of the administration [to sell AWACS to Saudi Arabia] understand that it is not possible to get universal agreement [between Reagan and the Jewish community] on every aspect of America's strategic policy in the Middle East. This proposed sale to the Saudis represents but one aspect of an increased American involvement in the area, which can only redound to the benefit of Israel, reassuring Israel as to its security.<sup>63</sup>

Stein's memorandum made it clear that, despite his strong support for the AWACS sale, Reagan was committed to pursuing a firm and unwavering pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. Stein believed that the deep rupture in relations between Reagan and the Jewish community created by the AWACS debate could easily be closed once the White House made it clear that Reagan's strong commitment to successfully conclude the sale would in no way diminish the President's equally strong support for Israel.

On 4 November 1981, Meese, Haig, and Allen met in Washington with a group of 200 prominent members of the United Jewish Appeal from New York, which included Klein. Stein seized upon this meeting as an opportunity for the White House to reaffirm its commitment to Israel. Stein believed that such a reaffirmation to this large group of prominent Jews would go a long way toward healing the political breach between Reagan and the Jewish community. Accordingly, on 3 November Stein sent Meese a memorandum in order to apprise the Counselor to the President of the concerns the Jewish community had with respect to issues raised during the AWACS debate.

Reagan's remarks at his news conference on 1 October 1981 — that 'It is not the business of other nations to make American foreign policy' — was construed by Jewish leaders as having anti-Semitic overtones. The clear implication of Reagan's remarks was that the American Jewish community was using its substantial political and organizational resources to exert 'excessive' influence over American policy in the Middle East. The purpose of that influence was to persuade Congress to thwart Reagan's efforts to adopt a more evenhanded policy in the Middle East, as manifested by the President's commitment to successfully conclude the AWACS sale over the strong opposition of the pro-Israel lobby. Through its intense lobbying campaign against the sale, the pro-Israel lobby was placing the national security interests of Israel above those of the United States and seeking to influence the White House and Congress to adopt a policy in the Middle East which satisfied the needs of Tel Aviv to the detriment of Washington.

The implication Reagan made at his news conference — that Israel was using the substantial political and organizational resources of the American Jewish community to subvert his policy in the Middle East — had anti-Semitic overtones. Reagan's remarks against Israel's alleged attempts to control American policy in the Middle East could lead the Gentile community to view its Jewish counterparts with suspicion — as a potential Fifth Column working to subvert the

national security interests of the United States in the region on behalf of those of Israel. This could incite Gentiles with anti-Semitic inclinations to use Jews as scapegoats for any adverse developments in the United States which resulted from the 'excessive' influence organized Jewry allegedly exerts over American policy in the Middle East.

In his memorandum to Meese, Stein focused particular attention on the anti-Semitic overtones of Reagan's attack against Israel during his news conference and on the possibility that the bitter and acrimonious disagreement between the President and the Jewish community over the AWACS sale could serve as a major source for the growth of anti-Semitism in the United States: 'The major concern in the mind of the Jewish community today is the perception that there is an anti-Jewish attitude in the White House. This must be addressed There are increasing signs of growing anti-Semitism which should be strongly denounced by the administration.'<sup>64</sup>

The purpose of Reagan's attacks against Israel during his news conference may have been to intimidate American Jewish leaders into abandoning their lobbying campaign to persuade Congress to block the AWACS sale. Through their strong opposition to the sale, American Jewish leaders risked appearing to place the national security interests of Israel above those of the United States. Such an appearance, which Reagan may have been attempting to create for the American Jewish community, was certain to result in a rise in anti-Semitism throughout the United States, placing the interests of its members in grave danger. Due to the anti-Semitic overtones of the AWACS debate, many American Jewish leaders might have been reluctant to continue lobbying on behalf of the interests of Israel for fear that they may have appeared, however incorrectly, to be serving the position of Tel Aviv at the expense of that of United States. To ease the fears of Jewish leaders, Stein recommended in his memorandum to Meese that the White House issue 'A statement to the effect that it is in the American tradition to express one's opinion individually or collectively, and that such an expression, even when differing with that of the administration, will not be permitted to call into question the integrity and loyalty of any American.'<sup>65</sup>

In addition to making remarks that Jewish leaders construed as anti-Semitic, Reagan signaled the possibility that he might abandon the Camp David process in favor of the imposition of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East by outside powers. This possibility arose from Reagan's praise for Saudi peacemaking efforts during his interview with the *Jewish Times*. Saudi Arabia rejected the Camp David process in favor of the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, which would require Israel to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories. Since Israel refused to do this on its own, such a settlement would necessarily have to be imposed against the Jewish state's will by outside powers. Accordingly, Reagan's support for Saudi peacemaking efforts left the clear impression that the President would back Riyadh in its demand that Israel be forced to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories by outside powers. In his memorandum to Meese, Stein urged that the Reagan Administration reaffirm its strong commitment to the Camp David peace process: 'Repeated reassurance as to the administration's commitment to the Camp David peace process and to the commitment to maintain Israel's security are very much in order at this time.'<sup>66</sup>

On 13 November 1981, Meese held a meeting at the White House with a group of Jewish Republican supporters of Reagan. Stein seized upon this meeting as a further opportunity to repair the damage the AWACS debate had inflicted upon relations between Reagan and the Jewish community. On 2 November Stein sent a memorandum to Meese in order to prepare the Counselor to the President for his meeting with a group of Jewish Republican supporters of Reagan: 'This group, supporters of the administration, wants to discuss ways and means of

reassuring the Jewish community as to the administration's commitment to Israel [and] combating charges of anti Jewish perceptions in the administration.' Stein also noted that the group was intent on 'Discussing a process for [ensuring] more effective input into and support for the administration [from the Jewish community].'<sup>67</sup>

Stein was determined that Reagan close the rift in his relations with the Jewish community. To this end, on 9 November 1981 Stein sent a memorandum to Red Cavaney, Deputy Assistant to the President for Public Liaison. In his memorandum, Stein argued that Jewish leaders had 'Perceptions of [an] anti-Jewish attitude in the White House and Congress. A series of statements critical of [the] Jewish community opposition to the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia has been interpreted as supportive of anti-Semitism.'<sup>68</sup>

Jewish leaders were especially concerned that Reagan had violated a pledge he had made to the Jewish community during the 1980 presidential campaign that, if elected, he would not provide any favors to Arab nations unless they committed themselves to the Camp David peace process. Now, in a dramatic about-face, Reagan had agreed to approve the AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia without eliciting a pledge from Riyadh that the Persian Gulf monarchy would abandon its opposition to the Camp David peace process and support it. As Stein put it, 'During the campaign, the President said that there would be a "quid pro quo" in terms of support for the peace process. Now arms are approved for the Saudis without a viable "quid pro quo".'<sup>69</sup>

Stein argued that Reagan's own praise for Saudi peacemaking efforts during the AWACS debate called into question the President's commitment to the Camp David peace process. This is true since the Fahd Plan rejected the Camp David process, which required that a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East must be negotiated between Israel and its Arab neighbors and could not be imposed by outside powers. In contradiction to the Camp David process, the Fahd Plan required that Israel be compelled to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories as the basis for such a settlement. Since Israel refused to do this on its own, such a settlement could only be imposed upon the Jewish state by outside powers: '[There is a] lack of clarity in our commitment to the Camp David peace process, and the finding of merit in the eight-point Fahd Plan.'<sup>70</sup>

The Fahd Plan would require the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which would be governed by the PLO, the organization Saudi Arabia and the other Arab nations had designated as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. By indirectly supporting the Fahd Plan through his praise for Saudi peacemaking efforts, Reagan gave every indication that the United States might enter into a dialogue with the PLO in order to involve the organization in the peacemaking process, pursuant to the Saudi peace proposal. Stein reported that there was 'Nervousness [within the Jewish community] over indications that some elements of the PLO are moderate, and concern that U.S. opposition to the PLO is weakening.'<sup>71</sup>

In order to heal the political breach between Reagan and the Jewish community, Stein urged the White House to make the following overtures:

1. [The] credibility of the Reagan Administration [within the Jewish community] can best be restored by a one-on-one interview with the President by a leading widely syndicated Anglo-Jewish press writer, i.e., Wolf Blitzer.
  - a. All questions of U.S. positions [on] Camp David, [the] PLO, [and the] Fahd Plan can be properly addressed by the President.

- b. Wide readership of [the] Anglo-Jewish press will contribute to restoring [the] credibility [of the Reagan Administration within the Jewish community], and easing doubts over U.S. positions [in the Middle East],
- c. A strong statement on [the] issue of anti-Semitism should be part of the interview. ...
- d. [The interview will provide Reagan an] opportunity to restate [his] commitment to Israel's security.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to scheduling an interview between Reagan and a Jewish journalist, Stein recommended that the White House schedule 'A meeting with the President with briefings by Allen and [Director of the Office of Management and Budget David A.] Stockman with Jewish organizational leaders [and] a similar meeting with members of the Reagan Coalition [composed of his Jewish supporters].' Stein also argued that Israel 'needs to be reassured' of continued American support in the aftermath of the conclusion of the AWACS debate. To this end, Stein recommended that 'George Bush visit Israel to reassure' the Jewish state of such support, and that such a trip by the Vice President to the Jewish state should receive 'High visibility [and] maximum exposure.'<sup>73</sup>

## **The White House Reassures Jewish Leaders Regarding Reagan's Support for Israel**

On 20 November 1981, Dole sent Meese a memorandum in order to prepare the Counselor to the President for his meeting with members of the Board of Trustees of the American Jewish Congress (AJC), which would occur three days later in the Roosevelt Room. The purpose of the meeting would be to reassure officials of the AJC of Reagan's commitment to pursue a steadfast pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, pursuant to the promise the President made in his conference with Jewish supporters in the Roosevelt Room the previous day. In her memorandum to Meese, Dole noted that 'Howard Squadron, President, American Jewish Congress, requested that you and Murray Weidenbaum meet with the AJC's Board of Directors on the aforementioned date [November 23], You have agreed to address this group, and you are scheduled to speak from 11:00-11:20 a.m.'<sup>74</sup> Dole outlined the issues members of the Board of Trustees wished Meese to address during their meeting. Included in the memorandum were the responses Stein recommended Meese deliver to the questions members of the Board of Trustees had regarding those issues.

1. The growth of anti-Semitism. JS [Jacob Stein] suggests: This administration will not condone anti-Semitism and will attack [it]. [The] President plans [an] address on this subject.
2. Fahd Plan. JS suggests: Camp David is the only road to peace we are following — not the Fahd Plan or the European initiative.
3. Special representative for autonomy talks. JS suggests: [A] meeting [is] now [underway] on the ambassadorial level. When appropriate it will be moved to a higher level. [The] administration [is] very interested in [a] successful conclusion of [the] talks.
4. Status of Jerusalem. JS suggests: [The] President prefers [Jerusalem] remain undivided under Israeli sovereignty, but this matter is the subject of negotiations between the parties



and must be resolved by negotiations.

5. Arms sales to the Saudis. JS suggests: The question is whether we sell arms to the Saudis with the moderation of our control [over Saudi use of those arms], or other nations sell arms without any moderating influence.<sup>75</sup>

By rejecting the Fahd Plan, reaffirming the Reagan Administration's commitment to the Camp David peace process, and supporting Israel's assertion of sovereignty over a united Jerusalem, Meese confirmed the President's commitment to Israel in the aftermath of the AWACS debate. On only one issue — the administration's continued support for providing Saudi Arabia the military technology and weapons required for its security — did Meese take a position at odds with the sentiments of organized Jewry. Accordingly, Meese's meeting with members of the Board of Trustees of the AJC on 23 November 1981 served to reaffirm the strong assurances of support for Israel Reagan provided four days earlier during his conference with 34 prominent Jews who backed him in the 1980 presidential campaign. In the month following the Senate's approval of the AWACS sale on 28 October, the Reagan Administration had done much to repair the damage the AWACS debate had inflicted upon its relations with the Jewish community through the strong words of support for Israel the President and Meese delivered to Jewish leaders and supporters of Reagan.

## **Reagan Makes Contradictory Commitments with Respect to the Peace Process**

On 30 October 1981, Edward C. Levy, Jr., a prominent supporter of Reagan and one of the 34 Jewish backers of the President who met with him on 19 November, sent a letter to Stein. The letter was addressed to Reagan from Janet Aronoff of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, a member of the Executive Committee of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and Republican supporter of the President. In her letter, Aronoff called upon Reagan to obtain a Saudi commitment to join the peace process in reciprocation for the President's successful conclusion of the AWACS sale:

The Saudis, I assume, will stop rejecting and join in the American-initiated Camp David peace process. Instead of sanctioning Egypt economically for being a courageous partner in the Camp David Accords, it would seem now that the U.S. has gone so far in its attempts for Saudi friendship that the Saudis would lift their economic sanctions on Egypt and be a partner to those like us who support peace in the Middle East.<sup>76</sup>

On 5 November 1981, Stein attached Aronoff's letter to a memorandum he sent to Anne Higgins, Director of White House Correspondence and Assistant to the President. In his memorandum, Stein noted that 'The attached letter was forwarded to me by Ed Levy, Jr., a member of the Jewish Republican Fisher Group and a supporter of the President, and brother of the author of this letter to the President, Janet Aronoff. I would appreciate if we could send a reply by the President to this letter.'<sup>77</sup>

On 14 December 1981, Reagan wrote Aronoff in order to reassure her that, despite his strong support for the AWACS sale, he remained steadfast in his support for Israel:

This administration's commitment to the security of Israel is firm, and will remain so. After Prime Minister Begin's recent

visit, he announced publicly his belief that relations between our nation and Israel are better than they have been under any administration. Mr. Begin made that remark notwithstanding his opposition to the [Saudi] air defense enhancement package that was being considered by the Congress.<sup>78</sup>

Reagan assured Aronoff that he would seek to involve the moderate Arab nations in the peace process:

We are working for a just peace in the Middle East and attempting to involve other nations in the process begun at Camp David. The success of that effort will require time, for the problems of that region are difficult and developed long ago. Nevertheless, we shall persist in our endeavors to establish that peace on a firm foundation. Without the cooperation of the moderate Arab nations, that peace cannot be achieved.<sup>79</sup>

Reagan's commitment to secure the cooperation of moderate Arab nations in the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East was not credible in light of his rejection of the Fahd Plan during his 19 November meeting with Jewish supporters. The Fahd Plan outlined the only such settlement the moderate Arab nations were likely to accept, based upon an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Reagan's policy in the Middle East, as outlined in his letter to Aronoff — combining a commitment to provide strong and unswerving support to Israel with an effort to involve the moderate Arab nations in the peace process — represented an exercise in inconsistency, insofar as the Jewish state and the Arab world remained at odds over the final terms of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Ultimately, Reagan would have to resolve this contradiction by either pressuring Israel to accept the Fahd Plan — which represented the Arab world's terms for peace — or side with the Jewish state in its outright rejection of the Saudi peace proposal, which would drive the moderate Arab nations away from involvement in the peace process. As we will see in the next chapter, Reagan would resolve this contradiction in favor of the Israeli position in the peace process. In his letter to Aronoff, Reagan pledged both to provide firm and unwavering support to Israel and to involve the moderate Arab nations in the peace process, but it was only his promise with respect to his backing for the Jewish state which he actually honored. Reagan affirmed the fact that no peace was possible without the involvement of the moderate Arab nations in the peace process, and his failure to entice those states to support the American peace initiative, due to his one-sided support for Israel in its conflict with the Arab world, is ultimately the reason why he made no headway in advancing the cause of peace in the Middle East.

## **The Limits of the Reagan Administration's Pro-Israel Policy in the Middle East**

On 6 June 1982, the Middle East exploded into violence when Israeli military forces invaded Lebanon in an effort to drive the PLO out of the territory of its northern Arab neighbor.<sup>80</sup> The Israeli invasion of Lebanon revealed the limits of the Reagan Administration's pro-Israel policy in the aftermath of the Senate's approval of the AWACS sale. While the Administration's policy represented good politics, insofar as the President's relationship with the Jewish community was concerned, it represented bad foreign policy. Such a policy risked damaging the credibility of the United States as an honest broker which could bridge the deep political differences dividing Israel and its Arab neighbors. Worse yet, such a policy could encourage Israel into further



attempts at the sort of military adventurism which occurred in Lebanon.

The United States needed to serve as a restraining influence over Israel, reining in the Jewish state from undertaking military operations, such as the one in Lebanon, which threatened to further destabilize the Middle East. The United States needed to persuade Israel that its security and survival could be best achieved through a negotiated settlement of its conflict with its Arab neighbors. This could not occur if the United States became an almost total and absolute supporter of Israel, refusing to question, let alone criticize, any action its government might undertake, regardless of how wrongheaded it may be. Rather, this could only happen if the United States was willing to pressure Israel into making the political and territorial concessions required to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The pursuit of an evenhanded policy in the Middle East would provide the United States the flexibility to divorce itself from Israeli actions which had questionable political validity insofar as the peace process was concerned. This would enable the United States to maintain its credibility in the Arab world, which was vital if Washington was to succeed in inducing key Arab nations, especially Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria, to join the peace process. By contrast, the pursuit of a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East would drive a wedge between the United States and its friends in the Arab world and deprive Washington of the credibility necessary to serve as a positive force in the peace process. Since the United States was the only nation which had the trust and confidence of both sides in the Arab—Israeli conflict, any loss of such credibility would have disastrous consequences for the peace process. Without American leadership, the peace process would quickly break down, placing the vital national security interests of the United States in the Middle East in grave peril.

Accordingly, the top priority on the Reagan Administration's diplomatic agenda following the evacuation of members of the PLO trapped in West Beirut from Lebanon on 1 September 1982 — which represented the central part of the cease-fire agreement ending the war between Israel and the PLO — was the reinvigoration of the peace process in the Middle East. This would be designed to send a clear signal to the Arab world that the United States was abandoning its previous policy of providing almost total support for Israel in favor of the adoption of an evenhanded approach to the region. Such a policy would enable the United States to rebuild its diminished credibility in the Arab world.

## **Conclusion**

Reagan was elected to the presidency with the largest share of the Jewish vote of any Republican nominee in recorded history. The strong political support Reagan enjoyed within the Jewish community was due in large part to his long history of staunch and unequivocal backing for Israel. The Jewish state had every reason to expect that Reagan would pursue a steadfast pro-Israel policy in the Middle East.

Accordingly, the Jewish community was deeply dismayed when Reagan betrayed his pro-Israel convictions to strongly support the AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia, an Arab nation with a long history of unrelenting hostility toward the Jewish state. The AWACS sale signaled Reagan's determination to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, in seeming contradiction to the President's commitment to provide strong support for Israel. To be sure, during the AWACS debate Reagan went to extraordinary lengths to reassure the Jewish community of his support for

Israel. However, Reagan's reassurances fell upon deaf ears within the American Jewish community: to its leaders, the sale signaled that the President was backing away from his promise to support Israel. This is especially true since Jewish leaders were convinced that the sale posed a threat to the security of Israel, and organized American Jewry mounted an intense lobbying campaign to persuade Congress to block the deal.

Reagan ultimately won his battle against the pro-Israel lobby over the AWACS sale, but the controversy generated a deep reservoir of bitterness against Reagan within the American Jewish community. Jewish leaders felt betrayed by Reagan's determination to successfully conclude the sale. The AWACS debate had cost Reagan vital support within the Jewish community, and the President needed to shore up his sinking support among Jews by reassuring them that, despite the controversy, he remained a staunch and reliable ally of Israel. Reagan accomplished this task on 19 November 1981 when he met a group of 34 Jewish supporters at the White House and reassured them that he would henceforth provide almost total and absolute support for Israel. To this end, Reagan committed himself to support the Camp David peace process and reject the Fahd Plan, which called for Israel to be compelled by outside powers to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories as the basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Pursuant to the Camp David peace process, Israel would be free to reject Arab demands for an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories as the basis for the negotiation of such a settlement, allowing the Jewish state to assert sovereign claims over some of those captured lands. By branding the PLO a terrorist organization, Reagan all but shut the organization out of the peace process, thereby allowing Israel to avoid negotiating with the group, which represented the Jewish state's archenemy.

The Jewish community could not have asked for a more pro-Israel policy in the Middle East than the one Reagan promised. However, Reagan's newly unveiled pro-Israel policy quickly resulted in an erosion in American credibility in the Arab world, and the United States became increasingly incapable of acting as a stabilizing influence in the Middle East. Armed with almost total American support, Israel felt free to engage in whatever military adventurism the Jewish state felt necessary to safeguard its security, regardless of what effect that might have in further destabilizing the Middle East. With the United States providing Israel steadfast support and excluding the PLO from the peace process, Palestinians saw military confrontation with the Jewish state as the only means for their plight to be addressed.

With the United States unable to influence political developments in the Middle East, the region became ripe for war. That war erupted on 6 June 1982 when Israel invaded Lebanon in a successful effort to drive the PLO out of the territory of the Jewish state's northern Arab neighbor. With the Middle East experiencing its worst bout of political instability since the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Reagan Administration recognized that a sharp change in policy in the region was necessary.

Accordingly, the Reagan Administration decided to revert to its original intent, expressed during the AWACS debate, to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East. The basis of this new policy shift would be a new effort by the administration to reinvigorate the stalled peace process. By breathing new life into the moribund peace process, the administration hoped to rebuild the credibility of the United States as an honest broker in the Arab—Israeli conflict and preserve the vital national security interests of this nation in the Middle East, which were placed in grave peril by the escalating political violence engulfing the region. However, the administration proved to be too closely identified with the interests of Israel to pursue the evenhanded policy in the Middle East required to advance the peace process, and Reagan's

efforts to move the region on a path toward peace ultimately foundered, as we will now see.

## Chapter 2

# Reagan Unsuccessfully Attempts to Revive the Stalled Peace Process in the Middle East

Few broad overviews of the Reagan Presidency take note of his Arab-Israeli diplomacy. No such monument as Camp David sticks in collective memory when Reagan's Middle East policy is evoked.<sup>1</sup>

—William B. Quandt, political scientist

On 1 September 1982, the last members of the PLO trapped in West Beirut were safely evacuated from Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, the evacuation was part of a cease-fire agreement the Reagan Administration had negotiated between Israel and the PLO to end the war between the two sides, which followed the Israeli invasion of Lebanon on 6 June. The removal of the PLO from Lebanon eliminated the only neighboring Arab nation where Palestinians could operate freely to mount terrorist attacks against Israel. With the PLO deprived of its base of military operations in South Lebanon, the Palestinian guerrillas had no territory which they could use to mount terrorist attacks against Israel.

The inability of the PLO to mount terrorist attacks against Israel deprived the organization of any military option to resolve the Palestinian problem. The only option left for the PLO would be diplomacy. With Israel having dealt the PLO a fatal military blow in Lebanon, the organization could no longer pursue its aim of resolving the Palestinian problem through the destruction of the Jewish state. Rather, the Palestinian problem would have to be resolved diplomatically — through direct negotiations between Israel and the PLO.

To be sure, the enmity between Israel and the PLO made diplomatic negotiations between the two sides a practical impossibility. Nevertheless, Israel's military victory against the PLO created a diplomatic opening for negotiations between the Jewish state and its Arab neighbors which could place the Middle East on a path toward peace. Reagan was determined to seize this opportunity in order to advance the peace process. Accordingly, on 1 September 1982 — hours after the last members of the PLO trapped in West Beirut were evacuated from Lebanon — Reagan delivered a nationwide television address from the studios of KNBC-TV in Burbank in which he presented the first and only comprehensive peace plan for the Middle East ever publicly proposed by any President.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Reagan Peace Plan for the Middle East**

In his nationwide television address on the Middle East, Reagan called for an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in exchange for Arab recognition of the right of the Jewish state to exist within secure and recognized borders, consistent with Resolutions 242 and 338. The resolutions laid down the basic framework for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement based upon a 'Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied' in

the Six-Day War of 1967 and the 'Termination of all claims of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every state in the area, and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.'<sup>4</sup>

Reagan rejected the Saudi demand expressed in the Fahd Plan that a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East must be imposed by outside powers. Rather, he insisted that such a settlement must be achieved by direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors, consistent with the Camp David process.

Reagan failed to define what the final borders of Israel should be. He assured Israel that he would not demand that the Jewish state withdraw to its pre-1967 borders. However, in his memoirs, Reagan made it clear that he intended that Israel essentially withdraw to its pre-1967 borders, with the Jewish state allowed to retain only a sliver of the West Bank adjacent to Israel's narrow waist in order to make its boundaries more defensible.<sup>5</sup> Reagan expressed his view that Jerusalem should remain undivided, but that its final status must be determined by direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Reagan specifically rejected the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip as called for in the Fahd Plan. Rather, Reagan recommended the establishment of a self-governing Palestinian authority on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which would be associated with Jordan. To facilitate direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors and pave the way for Palestinian self-government on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Reagan demanded a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories.

While he was curiously silent on the issue of the Golan Heights, Reagan made it clear that Resolutions 242 and 338, which call upon Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab territories, apply to 'all fronts' of the Arab—Israeli conflict, which would include occupied Syrian territory.<sup>6</sup> This sentiment is consistent with Reagan's decision to suspend the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Cooperation between the United States and Israel, signed in 1981 by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon after the Jewish state extended its law to the Golan Heights, which fell just one step short of Israeli annexation of the occupied Syrian territory. Reagan's action was intended to make it clear that he considered Resolutions 242 and 338 to apply to the Golan Heights, and he reiterated this sentiment in his memoirs.<sup>7</sup>

## **An Evaluation of the Reagan Plan**

The Reagan Plan represented a substantial contribution to the peace process. The plan represents the first and only outline of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East ever publicly proposed by any President. To be sure, the plan represented a vague outline, rather than a detailed formula, to achieve peace in the region. Nevertheless, the plan provided a basic framework for the establishment of a just, lasting, and durable peace which could guide all parties to the Arab—Israeli conflict in finding the path to a final settlement of their longstanding, and seemingly irresolvable, dispute.

While advancing the peace process, the Reagan Plan was not without flaws. The most important such flaw was Reagan's rejection of the establishment of an independent Palestinian

state in favor of the creation of a self-governing Palestinian authority which would be associated with Jordan. This represented a flat American rejection of the unanimous decision reached by the Arab heads of state at their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974, where they declared the PLO to be 'the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people' and proposed the establishment of an independent Palestinian state 'on any Palestinian soil that is liberated' from Israeli occupation.<sup>8</sup> Pursuant to the Rabat Declaration, the PLO was sure to demand nothing less than the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as the basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. However, the Reagan Plan foreclosed this option, thereby eliminating the only realistic basis for peace.

Why was Reagan so vehemently opposed to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, in light of the fact that Palestinian nationhood offers the only viable option for resolving the seemingly endless and intractable Arab—Israeli conflict? The reason is that Reagan wanted to avoid any American dealings with the PLO, and the President fully recognized that his endorsement of Palestinian statehood would automatically bring the PLO into the peace process. Why was Reagan so adamant in his desire to avoid American contacts with the PLO? Part of the answer lies in Reagan's adherence to official American policy regarding formal contacts between the United States and the PLO defined in the Memorandum of Agreement signed by the United States and Israel on 1 September 1975 following the negotiation of a second disengagement agreement between Tel Aviv and Cairo on the Sinai Peninsula. The memorandum contained a list of assurances the Ford Administration agreed to provide to Israel as compensation for its willingness to agree to a partial withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula as called for in the disengagement agreement. Among those assurances was an American promise not to 'recognize or negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization as long as the Palestine Liberation Organization does not recognize Israel's right to exist, and does not accept Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.'<sup>9</sup>

In the exclusive interview he granted in the Oval Office to Trude Feldman, White House correspondent for the *Jewish Times*, on 17 October 1981, Reagan affirmed his commitment to abide by the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement regarding formal American contacts with the PLO. Reagan declared in the interview that he would be willing to authorize his administration to open a formal dialogue with the PLO —but only 'Providing that they are willing to recognize Israel's right to exist.'<sup>10</sup> In an address delivered to a meeting of the Young Leadership Conference of the United Jewish Appeal in Washington on 13 March 1984, Reagan reaffirmed his commitment to honor the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement: 'Permit me to reaffirm a longstanding American commitment: So long as the PLO refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist and to accept Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the United States will neither recognize nor negotiate with the PLO.'<sup>11</sup>

On 8 August 1985, Reagan signed the Foreign Aid Authorization Act, which codified into federal law the conditions the PLO would have to meet before the United States would open a formal dialogue with the organization — that it recognize the right of Israel to exist and accept Resolutions 242 and 338. The bill also added a third condition the PLO would have to meet before the United States would open such a dialogue — that the organization renounce the use of terrorism.<sup>12</sup> This third condition reflected the fact that the PLO had engaged in an active and sustained campaign of terrorism both within and outside of Israel since the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement.

However, despite his public assurance to abide by the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement and the Foreign Aid Authorization Act of 1985 regarding formal American contacts

with the PLO, Reagan was intent on avoiding any dealings with the PLO even if it had met the three conditions the United States had spelled out for the establishment of a dialogue between the two sides. Reagan and senior members of his foreign and national security policy team found the PLO to be so contemptible that the administration was unwilling to even consider entering into such a dialogue. As Kathleen Christison notes, 'Senior [Reagan Administration] officials were not particularly interested in pursuing a dialogue with the PLO under any circumstances.'<sup>13</sup>

Given his aversion to dealing with the PLO, Reagan hoped that he could induce Jordan to serve as alternative to the PLO in negotiating with Israel on behalf of the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. To remove the PLO from and bring Jordan into the peace process, Reagan rejected the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in favor of the creation of a self-governing Palestinian authority on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which would be associated with Jordan, as the basis for a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.

Jordan served as an ideal alternative to the PLO in representing the Palestinians at the negotiating table with Israel. Over 70 percent of the Jordanian population is of Palestinian origin, and this has served to solidify close cultural ties between the two peoples.<sup>14</sup> From 1950 to 1967, Jordan retained sovereignty over the West Bank.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, despite the decision that Arab heads of state made at their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974 — and reaffirmed at a subsequent conference at Fez in 1982 — recognizing the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian residents of the West Bank, Jordan retained sovereign claims over the occupied Arab territory. This provided Reagan with a legitimate basis to argue that the establishment of a self-governing Palestinian authority on the West Bank, as well as Gaza Strip, be linked to Jordan.

Reagan actively lobbied Jordan's King Hussein to agree to represent the Palestinians in direct negotiations with Israel. However, in deference to the Rabat and Fez decisions, Hussein refused to enter into such negotiations without the approval of the PLO. However, such approval was not forthcoming. At the end of their sixteenth meeting, held in Algiers on 27 February 1983, members of the Palestine National Council (PNC), the Palestinian parliament-in-exile, issued a statement formally rejecting the Reagan Plan because it foreclosed the possibility of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The PNC insisted that no peace in the Middle East was possible without a Palestinian state.

With the PLO flatly rejecting the Reagan Plan, the President's proposal could not serve as a basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Moreover, if such a settlement were to be negotiated then Reagan would have to deal directly with the PLO, and Jordan could no longer serve as an alternative to the organization in representing the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. Accordingly, on 10 April 1983, Hussein issued a statement announcing that Jordan would not enter into direct negotiations with Israel, declaring that only the PLO could represent the Palestinians in such talks.<sup>16</sup> Hussein's decision reflected his desire to abide by the Rabat and Fez decisions and not allow Reagan to use Jordan as a means of excluding the PLO from the peace process. As a result of Hussein's action, the only way Reagan could achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East was by dealing with the PLO.

The Palestinian problem represents the very core of the Arab-Israeli conflict: no resolution of this dispute is possible without adequately addressing this issue. However, with Jordan refusing to represent the Palestinians in direct negotiations with Israel and Reagan rejecting any formal contacts with the PLO, no acceptable authority could be found to represent the Palestinians at the peace table. Accordingly, no means existed to address the Palestinian problem, resulting in the quick collapse of the Reagan Plan. Like previous American efforts to achieve a comprehensive

peace settlement in the Middle East — most especially the Rogers Plan and the Camp David peace process — the Reagan Plan failed because it lacked a means to address the very core of the Arab—Israeli conflict: the Palestinian problem. Unless this problem was addressed, the Middle East would remain a region beset by chaos, tension, and instability.

## **The Reagan Plan Signals the President's Retreat from Pursuing a Pro-Israel Policy in the Middle East**

Despite the failure of the Reagan Plan to break the stalemate in the peace process and move it forward, the President's peace initiative did accomplish one major foreign policy goal in the Middle East: it succeeded in restoring the image, however illusory, of the United States in the Arab world as an honest broker committed to negotiating a comprehensive peace settlement in the region. Reagan's pursuit of a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East following the conclusion of the AWACS debate had undermined U.S. credibility in the Arab world and Washington's ability to exert a stabilizing influence over the region. With the United States pursuing a firm pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, Israel did not feel constrained from undertaking military operations of questionable validity, such as its invasion of Lebanon, which might harm Washington's relations with the Arab world.

Indeed, Israel did not have to take American interests in the Middle East into account in pursuing military action against its Arab neighbors, since the Jewish state could take American support for granted as long as Reagan persisted in tying Washington's interests so closely to those of Tel Aviv. By doing so, Reagan had to assume responsibility for any controversial military action Israel might undertake, since Tel Aviv could count on American support for almost anything it did. Such a close alliance between the United States and Israel was bound to have disastrous consequences for Washington's relations with the Arab world. The inability of the United States to exert a constraining influence over Israel, which culminated in its invasion of Lebanon, greatly heightened tensions in the Middle East.

The AWACS sale demonstrated Reagan's initial commitment to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, at least insofar as balancing America's competing interests in Israel and Saudi Arabia was concerned. Reagan needed to revert back to that policy in order to disassociate the United States from any identification with the more extreme actions Israel might undertake. By committing the United States, if only in principle, to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, the Reagan Plan served as the linchpin of the President's commitment to restoring America's diminished credibility in the Arab world. The problem is that Reagan was never willing to take the political actions necessary to assure the success of his peace plan. This was because Israel remained adamantly opposed to the Reagan Plan; and the President remained unwilling to even consider imposing the punitive measures against the Jewish state necessary to save his peace proposal in the face of unrelenting Israeli opposition, as we will later see.

## **George Shultz Reports to Reagan on Foreign Reaction to the President's Peace Plan**



On 3 September 1982, Secretary of State George P. Shultz sent Reagan a memorandum reporting on foreign reaction to the peace plan proposed by the President during his nationwide address on the Middle East. Shultz began by reporting that the moderate Arab nations had generally responded positively to the address — clear evidence that, through the speech, Reagan had achieved his intended goal of restoring America's diminished credibility in much of the Arab world.

Arab moderates continue to react favorably to your September 1 address: [the] response in Saudi Arabia and Egypt in particular had become noticeably warmer in the past twentyfour hours. Egyptian newspapers hailed your initiative as 'courageous' and urged Arab leaders to consider it seriously even if it falls short of their demands. [The] Saudi media have called the initiative 'unprecedented' and noted that it contained 'constructive' as well as negative points...

The Lebanese media have been generally in favor of your [peace] initiative. [The] Jordanian media have pointed up the 'positive' points, but expressed the view that the PLO would have to be involved

[in the peace process].<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to the generally positive response to the Reagan Plan from moderate Arab nations, Shultz reported that Israel and Syria had flatly rejected President's proposal: 'Israeli and Syrian reactions continue to be negative. [The] Israeli media featured the Cabinet's rejection of your proposals today as well as ominous pronouncements by various officials. The Syrian reaction continues to stress the theme that your initiative contains nothing new, but is just more Camp David.'

Shultz reported that the Reagan Plan had won praise from a number of key nations of Western Europe — a vital point which gave the President's proposal international credibility: 'British government statements have been actively supportive of your proposals and French reaction has been generally favorable. President Mitterrand declared that the U.S. [peace] initiative seems to be headed in the same direction as the French proposals. The FRG [French] and Austrian governments have expressed support for your proposals, [with] Chancellor Kreisky stating that the address filled him with "extreme gratification." <sup>18</sup>

## **The Arab Heads of State Present the Fez Plan**

On 9 September 1982, the Arab heads of state concluded their summit meeting in Fez by jointly presenting a peace plan of their own for the Middle East. The Fez Plan called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital, and reaffirmed the Arab position that the PLO was the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The Fez Plan called for the United Nations Security Council to guarantee 'implementation of these principles and peace among all states in the region including the independent Palestinian state.'<sup>19</sup> By committing themselves to achieve peace among all the nations in the Middle East, the Arab nations and the PLO granted implicit Arab recognition of the right of Israel to exist within its pre-1967 borders. However, despite this Arab concession to Israel, on 10 September 1982 Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir condemned the Fez Plan, arguing that the Arab peace proposal represented 'a renewed declaration of war on Israel... that has no weight, no value ... and contains the same hate, the same war against peace.'<sup>20</sup>

## **The Reagan Plan Signals the President's Determination to Pursue an Evenhanded Policy in the Middle East**

In the aftermath of Reagan's nationwide television address, the President had at least appeared to have steered American policy in the Middle East away from its previous almost total and uncritical support for Israel to a more evenhanded approach to the region, rebuilding America's damaged credibility in the Arab world and enabling the United States to reassert itself as a stabilizing influence in the region. With Israel no longer able to take American support for granted, the Jewish state was unlikely to undertake military operations of questionable validity, such as its invasion of Lebanon, which risked further destabilizing the Middle East. This was sure to enable the United States to improve its relations with the Arab world, which sought American protection from what it regarded as reckless Israeli military adventurism, and Washington's commitment to aggressively pursue a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, which would guarantee the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

However, as we will see, Reagan's commitment to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, as expressed in his peace plan, proved to be illusory, insofar as the President was unwilling to pressure Israel to accept his proposal in the face of the Jewish state's certain opposition to his diplomatic initiative. Israel remained committed to retaining control of major portions of the occupied Arab territories and was sure to reject Reagan's demand that the Jewish state withdraw from practically, if not virtually, all those lands as the basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Unless Reagan seriously considered imposing sanctions upon Israel for its expected rejection of his peace plan, his commitment to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East would represent an empty gesture —more a public relations ploy to appease the Arab world than a serious effort to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region.

The Reagan Plan contained something for both sides in the Arab—Israeli conflict. For the Arab world, the Reagan Plan insisted that Israel withdraw from practically all the occupied Arab territories as the basis for a comprehensive peace settlement. For Israel, the Reagan Plan demanded Arab acceptance of the right of the Jewish state to exist within secure and recognized borders. In addition, Reagan expressed his clear opposition to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, a sentiment Israel fully shared.

Because the Reagan Plan was founded upon the principal of 'the exchange of land for peace,' the three major allies of the United States in the Arab world — Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt — expressed support for the President's peace proposal, though their backing for it was still lukewarm due to Reagan's outright rejection of Palestinian statehood. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt supported the universal consensus existing within the Arab world that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip must be the outcome of the negotiation of any comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.

## **American Jewish Leaders Convey a Mixed Response to the Reagan Plan**

As Shultz's memorandum shows, the Reagan Plan won support from three key moderate Arab nations — Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt. Their support was obviously necessary if Israel's Arab neighbors were to accept the Reagan Plan as the basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. However, another critical constituency whose support Reagan needed to successfully implement his peace plan was organized American Jewry. The Reagan Plan required the support of the American Jewish community if the President was to have any hope of persuading Israel to accept his peace proposal. Indeed, the Reagan Plan required Israel to make painful but necessary political and territorial concessions to its Arab neighbors as a condition for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the region, which the Jewish state would be reluctant to do.

Support for the Reagan Plan within the American Jewish community would provide the President the critical backing he needed to persuade Israel to make the political and territorial concessions required for peace. Reagan could call upon American Jewish leaders to use their substantial influence over the Israeli government to persuade Tel Aviv to accept the concessions the Jewish state would have to make under the Reagan Plan. Accordingly, critical to the successful implementation of the Reagan Plan was the President's ability to garner support for his peace proposal within the American Jewish community.

Because the Reagan Plan tilted in certain respects toward the Arab position in the Arab-Israeli conflict but leaned toward the Israeli position in other respects, Jewish leaders conveyed a mixed response to the Reagan Plan. Jewish leaders essentially embraced those aspects of the Reagan Plan which favored the Israeli position in the Arab—Israeli conflict, while denouncing those elements of the President's peace proposal which supported the Arab position.

### ***Julius Berman Conveys a Mixed Response to the Reagan Plan***

Organized American Jewry's decision to provide a mixed response to the Reagan Plan — endorsing those aspects of the President's peace proposal which favored the Israeli position while deriding those aspects which supported the Arab position — was announced by Julius Berman, Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. As the umbrella group representing 35 major Jewish organizations, the Conference represents the most authentic voice of the Jewish community. Accordingly, as Chairman of the Conference, Berman could legitimately speak on behalf of the entire American Jewish community, and his endorsement of important elements of the Reagan Plan assured that the President's peace proposal would have the qualified support of organized Jewry.

Berman conveyed his mixed response to the Reagan Plan in a letter the Jewish leader sent the President on 7 September 1982. In his letter, Berman told Reagan, 'Your nationwide address on September 1 was significant, and of a scope that impels analysis and study. I have sought to do so, in consultation with colleagues in the Conference of Presidents, so that I might share with you the consensus representing broad agreement in our ranks.'<sup>21</sup>

Berman proceeded to spell out for Reagan a detailed position both he and the Presidents of the Jewish organizations affiliated with the Conference had taken on the President's peace proposals.

1. We welcome your effort to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. The suspension of the talks by Egypt many months ago was a disservice, both to the cause of Arab—Israeli peace, and to the spirit of the Camp David agreement that led to the treaty between

Jerusalem and Cairo. The consistent refusal of the Kingdom of Jordan and the Palestinian Arabs to participate in the peace talks has been a pernicious factor serving to stultify the Middle East peace process.

2. We particularly commend your call on all Arab states to accept the reality of Israel as a necessary precondition for progress toward peace. It is our powerful conviction that in this acceptance lies the very key to a just and lasting resolution of the Middle East conflict, and to the protection of our country's national security interest. Until the Arab states that surround Israel follow Egypt's lead, and meet face to face with representatives of the Jewish state at the negotiation table, there can be no true Middle East peace. It is the stubborn and intransigent refusal of Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and all other Arab states (except Egypt) to acknowledge Israel's proper and rightful place in the Middle East that has prevented peace and caused war in the region. Only when these Arab governments are prepared to negotiate can peace become a possibility.
3. We are gratified by your recognition that Arab acceptance of 'Israel's unchallenged legitimacy' is the sine qua non of any new American initiative. We fully support your declaration that there must be no Palestinian state on the West Bank, and that Israel must not be required to return to its pre-1967 borders. These statements give weight and substance to your welcome reaffirmation of our country's 'ironclad' commitment to Israel's security. But it is precisely because of that pledge to Israel's security that we take exception to other parts of your address, which seem to us to be contradictory to the basic premise that you so well expressed.
4. Thus, we cannot hide our disappointment at your statement on Jerusalem. We are, of course, gratified that you repeated your conviction that Jerusalem must remain undivided, but we are dismayed by your proposal that the sovereignty issue should be determined by negotiation. We had believed, from earlier statements you had made, that it was your position — which the Conference of Presidents holds unequivocally — that, not only must Jerusalem never again be divided, but also that it must remain under Israeli sovereignty so that peace can reign in the Holy City, and so that all faiths may enjoy full and free access to their holy places, which only Israeli sovereignty has assured....
5. More serious of all, however, is the change in role of our government, which your statement makes clear. No longer is America to be mediator in Arab—Israeli negotiations —if indeed any Arab state is ready to negotiate. Rather, your administration has proposed its own solution to the dispute, thus preempting the very negotiations called for in the Camp David Accords.<sup>22</sup>

As the fifth point of Berman's letter makes clear, the Jewish leader was concerned that, by defining the basic outlines of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, the Reagan Plan, rather than representing an attempt to reinvigorate the Camp David peace process, as the President was attempting to do, actually undermined Camp David. By defining the basic contours of such a settlement, the Reagan Plan appeared to be dictating the final outcome of a resolution of the Arab—Israeli conflict in lieu of a negotiated settlement between the two opposing sides of the dispute. This represented a violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the Camp David peace treaty, which is based on the premise that a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East cannot be imposed by outside powers like the United States, but must be the result of direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Berman made clear to Reagan the Conference's displeasure at the President's subde but

unmistakable attempt to dictate the terms of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.

It would appear that you seek to dispose of these questions now, prior to the five-year transition period [to the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East] required under the terms of Camp David. That transition period was clearly contemplated as a time during which Israelis and Palestinian Arabs would be able to work out a *modus vivendi* — a way of living together — that would serve to create a harmonious relationship on the basis of which a final [Palestinian] autonomy could be agreed upon. Such a building block approach, if it is to have any lasting value in the process of peace, cannot be telescoped into the quick fix remedy suggested by your proposal.

Thus, Mr. President, and without going into the merits of these proposals, we believe that the position you have expressed does violence to the spirit of Camp David because it substitutes a specific American plan for the free give and take that is essential if the parties to the dispute are to resolve their differences.

In our judgment, this is the wrong step, at the wrong time, and for the wrong reason.<sup>23</sup>

In his nationwide television address on the Middle East, Reagan proposed a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories as an essential step in inducing Israel's Arab neighbors to join the peace process. However, Berman took exception to the view that Israeli settlement activity represented the major obstacle to peace in the Middle East. Rather, Berman charged that the Arab refusal to recognize the right of Israel to exist was the real obstacle to peace: 'It is not due to Israel's settlement policy in Judea and Samaria that the Palestinian Arabs and the King of Jordan have refused to sit with Israel at the negotiation table. Rather, it is their rejection of Israel's just and rightful place in the Middle East that remains the fundamental obstacle to further progress in Arab—Israel relations.'<sup>24</sup>

Berman argued that the expulsion of members of the PLO trapped in West Beirut from Lebanon opened a new opportunity to revive the peace process. With the power of the PLO gravely diminished by its defeat in Lebanon, more moderate Palestinian leaders could emerge to replace the organization as legitimate representatives of the Palestinians and join Israel at the negotiating table. This would open the door to a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.

There was a reason to believe — and we believe such reason remains — that, following the expulsion of the PLO terrorists from Beirut, the Palestinian Arabs living in the West Bank and Gaza district would find the courage to enter into a dialogue with Israel on the terms of the five-year autonomy period called for in the Camp David agreement. We know that PLO gunmen over the years have assassinated hundreds of Palestinian Arabs who were willing to live in peaceful coexistence with the other side. Now that the PLO has been removed, and the threat they represented gone, should we not give the Palestinians time to find their voice so they may negotiate with Israel? Would that not be a more reasonable approach — a solution worked out by the parties rather than imposed from above?

Mr. President, you have been and remain a staunch supporter of our country's democratic ally, Israel. We wish to suggest, however, that Israel's historic achievement in ridding Lebanon of PLO terrorism opens a new era in which, for the first time since 1964, the Palestinian Arab community on the West Bank will be able to make its own decision to negotiate with Israel free of the threat of PLO terror. This is the area in which our country's influence should be directed — not in preempting the negotiations by proposing the terms of settlement.<sup>25</sup>

Berman urged the Reagan Administration to encourage moderate Palestinian leaders not tied to the PLO, as well as Hussein, to join the peace process in the Middle East, which remained, in the opinion of the Jewish leader, the only means to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the region:

Let us, Mr. President, give the dust of Lebanon time to settle. Let our country urge the West Bank Palestinians and the King of Jordan to come to the peace table with no other precondition than recognition of Israel. Then and only then, we believe, will our country be able to help Israel and her Arab neighbors move toward mutual acceptance, and to that peace for which we all yearn.<sup>24</sup>

Berman's letter contains two notable factual errors pertaining to the Jewish leader's claim that during his nationwide television address on the Middle East, Reagan was attempting to dictate the final outcome of negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors in direct contradiction to the Camp David peace process and had expressed his opposition to an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories. However, contrary to Berman's claims, in his address Reagan affirmed that 'The Camp David Agreement remains the foundation of our policy [in the Middle East]. Its language provides all parties [in the Arab—Israeli conflict] with the leeway they need for successful negotiations.'<sup>27</sup> Pursuant to his support for the Camp David peace process, Reagan declared that a comprehensive peace settlement in the region must 'be achieved through the give and take of negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.'<sup>28</sup>

Concerning the issue of Israeli territorial concessions to its Arab neighbors, Reagan actually took contradictory and confusing positions regarding how much occupied Arab territory Israel should relinquish. In his address Reagan flatly declared, 'I am not about to ask' Israel to return to its pre-1967 borders.'<sup>29</sup> However, Reagan made it clear in his memoirs that he expected only insubstantial alterations in Israel's pre-1967 borders in order to make them more defensible.

To make matters more muddled, in his address Reagan also argued, 'the extent to which Israel should be asked to give up territory will be heavily affected by true peace and normalization, and the security arrangements offered in return.'<sup>30</sup> With this remark Reagan left the door open to the possibility that he might demand that Israel withdraw from all occupied Arab territories should the Arab world offer to fully normalize relations with the Jewish state as part of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Accordingly, contrary to Berman's claims, Reagan did not completely foreclose the possibility that he might demand that Israel withdraw from all occupied Arab territories. Indeed, in his address the President gave every indication that he would make such a demand if the Arab world was ready to fully normalize relations with the Jewish state.

### ***Howard M. Squadron Conveys a Mixed Response to the Reagan Plan***

In addition to Berman, another prominent Jewish leader, Howard M. Squadron, conveyed a mixed response to the Reagan Plan. Squadron served as President of the American Jewish Congress (AJC), one of 35 organizations affiliated with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. On 3 September 1982, Squadron wrote Meese in order to inform the White House adviser that he had issued a statement responding to Reagan's nationwide television address on the Middle East: 'I enclose a copy of my public statement regarding the President's speech. If you think it appropriate please bring it to the President's attention.'<sup>31</sup>

In his statement Squadron declared, 'We commend President Reagan for his effort to provide a "fresh start" to the Middle East peace process. The proposals presented by him contain elements which are positive as well as some that cause us deep concern.'<sup>32</sup>

Squadron outlined those elements of the Reagan Plan which the AJC could enthusiastically endorse.

We welcome his call to all Arab countries to accept the reality of Israel, and to engage Israel in direct negotiations. We welcome his categorical assertion of 'Israel's right to exist in peace, behind secure and recognizable borders,' and of his demand of Israel's neighbors that they recognize these facts. He thus makes it absolutely clear that such unqualified recognition by the Arab states of 'Israel's unchallenged legitimacy' — in the President's own words — is an absolute precondition for any new American initiatives in this area.

We are gratified by the President's unequivocal rejection of a Palestinian state on the West Bank, and his understanding that under no circumstances can Israel return to its pre-1967 borders. As Mr. Reagan pointedly stated, those borders were barely ten miles wide at their narrowest point, and the bulk of the Israeli population lived within artillery range of hostile Arab armies. We applaud his declaration that, 'I am not about to ask Israel to live that way again.'

Finally, we welcome the President's reaffirmation of [the] U.S. commitment to the security of Israel, describing it as 'ironclad,' and to the Camp David Accords as the only framework for future progress in the Middle East.<sup>33</sup>

After reviewing those elements of the Reagan Plan the AJC could strongly support, Squadron turned to those parts of the President's peace proposal with which the organization had grave misgivings.

We are deeply disappointed that in declaring his conviction that Jerusalem must remain undivided, the President failed to repeat the position he has expressed on many occasions in the past — that Jerusalem must remain under Israeli sovereignty.

The Camp David Accords specifically provide that the ultimate status of the West Bank and Gaza are to be negotiated by the original parties to the accords, as well as Jordan and the Palestinians, following a five-year transition period. Mr. Reagan referred to that provision in his speech. Unfortunately, he also gave the impression that he intends to seek a resolution of these ultimate issues at this time, before the transition period has even begun.<sup>34</sup>

In his statement, Squadron repeated what Berman had argued in his letter to Reagan regarding Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories: that the primary obstacle to peace in the Middle East was not Israeli settlement activity, but the failure of Israel's Arab neighbors to recognize the right of the Jewish state to exist.

The lack of progress so far in the autonomy discussions is due not to alleged Israeli intransigence concerning settlements, as the President implied, but the refusal of Jordan and the Palestinians to join these talks. Any new American initiative must begin with an insistence that the Arab states recognize Israel, and that Jordanian and Palestinian representatives join Israel in face-to-face negotiations. Until the Arab states accept the reality of Israel, we have no right to make any demands on Israel with respect to freezing settlements, or any other matter.<sup>35</sup>

Squadron concluded his statement by arguing that, on balance, the Reagan Plan represented a positive step forward in advancing the cause of peace in the Middle East:

We believe that if the U.S. continues to adhere faithfully to the principles of the Camp David Accords, and to the requirement of unqualified recognition of Israel by its Arab neighbors as a necessary precondition for further progress in the Middle East, the initiative he has undertaken at this time can become an important contribution to the advancement of peace in the area.<sup>36</sup>

Squadron's statement contains the two same factual errors found in Berman's letter concerning Reagan's adherence to the Camp David peace process, the related issue of whether a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East should be imposed by outside powers, and the final borders of Israel. Contrary to Squadron's claims, Reagan affirmed his commitment to the Camp David process, declaring that such a settlement must be the result of direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors and could not be imposed by outside powers, and conveyed confusing and contradictory statements on the issue of the final borders of Israel, which left the door open that he might demand that the Jewish state withdraw from all occupied Arab territories under certain circumstances.

On 8 November 1982, Meese wrote Squadron to thank the Jewish leader 'for your comments concerning the President's peace plan. The President has been apprised of your position on both the areas [of the plan] you support, and those with which you have reservations. We appreciate input from the American Jewish leaders such as yourself. We look forward to continuing the dialogue between the administration and the American Jewish community.'<sup>37</sup>



## ***Kenneth J. Bialkin Conveys a Mixed Response to the Reagan Plan***

In addition to Squadron, another Jewish leader who headed an organization affiliated with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations conveyed a mixed response to the Reagan Plan. Kenneth J. Bialkin served as Chairman of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith, a major Jewish organization. On 14 September 1982, Bialkin sent Reagan a letter informing the President that 'The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith supports the general goals expressed in your address to the nation on September 1st. We question, however, the timing and advisability of several of your specific proposals.'<sup>38</sup>

Bialkin expressed to Reagan that the ADL had found many positive elements in the President's peace proposals.

The principles you espoused reflect your deep commitment to peace; and your forceful injunction that the Arab states must recognize the reality of Israel and accept it as a negotiating partner in the peace process is most welcome.

We also applaud your dedication to the principles that peace is only possible by voluntary agreement of the parties, and that the 1967 borders must be renegotiated in order to provide the necessary minimum assurance of security to Israel. Your commitment to the continued undivided status of Jerusalem provides firm leadership for world opinion. You have on other occasions stated your view that Jerusalem should remain under Israeli sovereignty, and we assume you have not changed your policy on that point. And your rejection of a separate Arab state on the West Bank of the Jordan River reflects a principled appreciation of historic and political reality.<sup>39</sup>

After reviewing those elements of the Reagan Plan strongly approved by the ADL, Bialkin turned to other aspects of the President's proposals with which the organization had serious reservations.

There are . . . several aspects of the specific details of your address, which give us deep concern. You have offered your administration as an honest broker to try to affect a negotiated settlement. Unfortunately, no broker, however honest, can succeed unless the parties to the proposed transaction are willing to negotiate with each other. So far only one of those parties, Israel, has shown a willingness to negotiate without preconditions with any Arab state. Only Egypt has taken up that offer, and even Egypt has lately shown some signs of hesitation in the face of pressure from its Arab colleagues. A party cannot negotiate with itself, and it is unrealistic to expect Israel to make advance concessions in the absence of true negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

Bialkin was especially concerned about Reagan's demand for a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories as a precondition for the commencement of peace talks between Tel Aviv and its Arab neighbors. Bialkin charged that, by demanding a settlement freeze, Reagan was attempting to force Israel to make unilateral concessions to its Arab neighbors before negotiations between the two sides had even begun.

We feel that the call for an immediate freeze of settlements in the occupied territories is more than Israel should be fairly requested to give. Once before Israel entered into a voluntary freeze of settlements, but no Arab response was forthcoming. On other occasions you stated that Israel's settlements were not illegal, and you further stated your views that the resolution to the Palestinian issue should be determined by negotiations amongst the parties in the region. It is, therefore, puzzling as to why a unilateral concession is sought at this time, or why Israel should agree to any such request.<sup>41</sup>

Bialkin repeated the concerns Berman raised in his letter to Reagan regarding the possibility that the President's peace proposal could serve as the basis for the imposition of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East by the United States. Bialkin reiterated Berman's argument that such a settlement must be achieved through direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and not imposed by an outside power like the United States.

Israel has recently announced its rededication to the Camp David autonomy principle, just as you have done. That principle contemplates that sovereignty in the region will be subject to negotiation following the five-year autonomy period. Since that

issue is one for negotiation between the parties at some future date, we assume that you did not intend to repudiate that element of the Camp David autonomy principle, which leaves that and other issues for future determination. Of course, if autonomy cannot be implemented by reason of the continued refusal of the Arabs to enter into meaningful negotiations, the problem becomes somewhat more difficult.<sup>42</sup>

Bialkin also repeated the argument Berman made in his letter to Reagan that the PLO must be excluded from any peace talks between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Mr. President, you have announced your personal commitment to a fair approach to the Middle East dispute. You have shown a clear recognition that the key to that solution rests with an end to the Arab intransigence, and refusal to recognize reality. In order for your efforts to succeed, we earnestly submit that you press these points with Arab rejectionists. So far the Arabs have rejected your appeals. The path of moderation also suggests that the Arab states should not continue their nihilistic support of the PLO, which has now been unmasked for the lawless and irresponsible group that it is.

Financial and diplomatic support of the PLO previously provided by the so-called 'moderate' Arab states should be terminated, and U.S. policy should clearly indicate that further aiding and abetting of the PLO will be contrary to United States policy and interests.<sup>43</sup>

Bialkin concluded his letter to Reagan by inviting the White House to engage in a dialogue with the Jewish community on the best means to negotiate a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East: 'We would be most pleased with you or your designated representative to pursue any of the thoughts which we have expressed in this letter.'<sup>44</sup>

As in the case of the comments Berman and Squadron made on Reagan's nationwide television address, Bialkin made the mistake of assuming that the President may have expressed his support for the imposition of a comprehensive peace settlement in the region by outside powers, in contradiction to the Camp David process, and opposition to an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories. As we have seen, Reagan explicitly expressed his opposition to such a settlement, stressing that the Arab—Israeli conflict must be resolved through direct negotiations between the two sides in the dispute, while taking confusing and contradictory positions on the issue of Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab territories, leaving the door open that he might demand that the Jewish state return to its pre-1967 borders under certain circumstances.

On 4 October 1982 Richard Fairbanks, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, wrote Bialkin, informing the Jewish leader that 'The President has forwarded to the State Department your letter of September 14 supporting the goals of the President's peace initiative. We appreciate your candid and thoughtful analysis, and the public support you have provided.'<sup>45</sup>

Fairbanks rejected Bialkin's insinuation that the Reagan Plan might serve as the basis for the American imposition of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Rather, Fairbanks reaffirmed the Reagan Administration's commitment to the Camp David peace process: 'As you have noted, the President has challenged the moderate Arabs to enter into direct negotiations [with Israel].'<sup>46</sup>

In his nationwide television address, Reagan had insisted on a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories as a precondition for the commencement of peace talks between the Jewish state and its Arab neighbors. Bialkin opposed this precondition, charging that Reagan was forcing the Jewish state to make unilateral concessions to its Arab neighbors before peace talks would begin. In responding to Bialkin, Fairbanks argued that a settlement freeze was essential for the Jewish state to demonstrate its willingness to negotiate in good faith with its Arab neighbors. Without this expression of good faith, Israel's Arab neighbors would be highly unlikely to join the Jewish state at the peace table.

We have not sought from any party advance concessions, but only steps, which will allow the negotiations contemplated in the Camp David Accords to move forward.

Thus we have challenged the Arabs to come to the table within the Camp David framework. We have similarly requested Israel to consider a settlements freeze, a request which we have made for some time in meetings associated with negotiations. We believe that no other single gesture would create a feeling of goodwill. Given the present level of Israeli settlement and other provisions of the Camp David Accords, we do not believe a freeze would create a security problem.<sup>47</sup>

Fairbanks concluded his letter by assuring Bialkin that the Reagan Administration would actively pursue the President's peace initiative and pledged that the White House would continue to solicit the views of Jewish leaders as it continued its efforts to advance the peace process.

Over the past month, we have been engaged in quiet diplomatic efforts to move the President's initiative forward. Those efforts will be continuing, and there are signs of movement.

As the Secretary [of State] stated in his meeting with you and other leaders of the Jewish community on September 2, we will continue to discuss these matters with you, and solicit your views. I know the Secretary intends to meet with the group of leaders again, but if, prior to the scheduling of the meeting, you would like to discuss your views, or raise other points about the President's initiative, I will be happy to see you.<sup>48</sup>

## **The National Council of Jewish Women Condemns the Reagan Plan**

As we have seen, the response from major Jewish organizations to the Reagan Plan was generally lukewarm and muddled: they endorsed those portions of the plan which favored the Israeli position in the Arab—Israeli conflict while expressing reservations concerning those aspects of the proposal which tilted toward the Arab world. However, in a dramatic departure from this consensus within organized American Jewry, the National Council of Jewish Women issued a scathing denunciation of the Reagan Plan.

On 2 September 1982 Shirley I. Leviton, President of the National Council of Jewish Women, sent Reagan a telegram expressing the interest group's absolute and unequivocal opposition to the President's peace proposal. Leviton charged that the outline of a comprehensive peace settlement Reagan had defined in his nationwide television address favored the Arab position in the Arab—Israeli conflict. Leviton expressed organized American Jewry's belief that such a settlement could only be achieved through direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and could not be imposed by outside powers like the United States.

Although the National Council of Jewish Women is encouraged by your administration's commitment, expressed in your televised address last night (September 1), to once again become active in the Camp David process, we are distressed that you have chosen to make specific proposals which go beyond the accepted accords and which put pressure on Israel. These proposals have been universally interpreted as biased toward the Arab position. It is our position that the United States should be a facilitator in the peace process and that the most effective way to fulfill that role is for our President to secure full recognition of Israel by all parties involved [in the Arab—Israeli conflict] before negotiations can begin. Peace can be possible only when all nations concerned can sit together on an equal diplomatic basis and consider specific proposals placed on the negotiating table.<sup>49</sup>

Reagan was stung by Leviton's criticism of his peace plan. Consistent with his determination to maintain support within the Jewish community, Reagan took the highly unusual step of writing a response to Leviton's letter by hand. The White House then typed the letter, which Reagan signed, and the correspondence was sent to Leviton on 25 October 1982. Three days

earlier Reagan had met with representatives from the Arab League at the White House to discuss the peace process.<sup>50</sup> A primary goal of Reagan's letter was to provide the President the opportunity to reassure Leviton of his commitment to obtain Arab recognition of the right of Israel to exist as a fundamental foundation of any comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East which might be negotiated.

Reagan began his letter by apologizing to Leviton for the delay in delivering a response to her correspondence: 'I'm sorry to be so late in answering your wire. It takes a while before things make their way through the system to my desk.'<sup>51</sup> Reagan reassured Leviton of his commitment to honor the Camp David peace process:

I just want to assure you we do intend that negotiations should be within the framework of Camp David and U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338. This, of course, requires acceptance of Israel's right to exist as a nation. I have so informed a meeting of Arab leaders in a White House meeting [on 22 October 1982], We have never and will never retreat from that position.<sup>52</sup>

## Israel Rejects the Reagan Plan

Given the mixed response of American Jewish leaders to the Reagan Plan (with the notable exception of Shirley I. Leviton), one might assume that the President's proposal would have received the same reception from Israel. This is true given the fact that American Jewish leaders have traditionally represented the interests of Israel in Washington and lobbied the White House and Congress on behalf of issues affecting the welfare of the Jewish state. However, this turned out not to be the case.

On 2 September 1982, the members of the Israeli Cabinet held a meeting to consider the Reagan Plan. Following the meeting, the Cabinet issued a statement which charged that the plan contradicted the Camp David peace treaty: 'The positions conveyed to the Prime Minister of Israel on behalf of the President of the United States consist of partial quotations from the Camp David Agreement or are nowhere mentioned in that agreement or contradict it entirely.'<sup>53</sup> The Cabinet listed seven points in which its members claimed the Reagan Plan had contradicted the principles of the Camp David peace treaty: (1) the final status of Jerusalem, (2) the provision of internal security for the West Bank and Gaza Strip, (3) a settlement freeze, (4) the nature and scope of Palestinian autonomy, (5) the future ties between the Palestinian self-governing authority and Jordan, (6) the security of Israel, and (7) Palestinian statehood.

The Cabinet argued that the establishment of a self-governing Palestinian authority on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as called for in the Reagan Plan, would pose a threat to the security of Israel. Accordingly, the Cabinet announced its flat rejection of the plan. Instead, the Cabinet called for the resumption of negotiations to provide Palestinian autonomy on the West Bank and Gaza Strip pursuant to the Camp David peace treaty. As interpreted by the Cabinet, that autonomy would create a much weaker Palestinian self-governing authority than the one envisaged by the Reagan Plan.

Since the positions of the government of the United States seriously deviate from the Camp David Agreement, contradict it, and could create a serious danger to Israel, its security, and its future, the government of Israel has resolved that on the basis of these positions it will not enter into any negotiations with any party. The government of Israel is ready to renew the autonomy negotiations forthwith with the governments of the United States and Egypt, signatories to the Camp David Agreement, and with other states and elements invited at Camp David to participate in the negotiations with a view to reaching agreement on the establishment of full autonomy for the Arab inhabitants of Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza District.<sup>54</sup>

Dan Meridor, Secretary of the Cabinet, publicly read the statement its members had issued rejecting the Reagan Plan. Following the conclusion of the statement, Meridor made remarks of his own on behalf of the Cabinet in which he denounced the Reagan Administration for having failed to consult with Israel before the President delivered his address.

The Cabinet meeting ministers expressed surprise and bitterness that the U.S. positions were presented to us without having consulted us first. All the more so as they [the United States] consulted, not only with Egypt, a signatory to the Camp David Accord, but also with Jordan and Saudi Arabia which totally reject the accord. The ministers noted that this is a clear violation of U.S. commitments given to Israel. In the Memorandum of Understanding, signed on December 28, 1973, the United States clearly undertook, and I am quoting — to consult Israel fully, on the basis of one step after another, regarding any idea, which the United States may want to raise with the Soviets or Arabs regarding a political settlement [in the Middle East]. In the letter by President Ford to Prime Minister Rabin on September 1, 1975 the United States clearly undertook that if it wants — and this is a quote — to raise proposals of its own in the future it will make every effort to coordinate its proposals with Israel with the aim of refraining from raising proposals that Israel will consider unsatisfactory. These commitments were not honored [by the Reagan Administration] and the ministers took note of this.<sup>55</sup>

Members of the Cabinet misrepresented Reagan's positions on four of the seven points in which Israel claimed that the President's peace plan contradicted the Camp David peace treaty. In their statement, members of the Cabinet alleged that, during his nationwide address, Reagan had called for the Palestinian self-governing authority to exercise sovereignty over East Jerusalem and provide for internal security on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Members of the Cabinet also charged that Reagan had defined the powers of the Palestinian self-governing authority and the ties it would maintain with Jordan. However, the text of Reagan's address shows that the only one of those issues the President ever addressed was that of Jerusalem. And contrary to the Cabinet's claims, Reagan never stated that the Palestinian self-governing authority must exercise sovereignty over East Jerusalem. Rather, Reagan expressed the position that Jerusalem should remain united, but that its status must be defined through direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

In their statement, members of the Cabinet erroneously charged that the Reagan Plan conflicted with the Camp David peace treaty because there is no provision in the agreement which requires an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as the President's proposal requires. However, members of the Cabinet failed to note that the Camp David peace treaty does not preclude such a withdrawal, which is in fact required under Resolutions 242 and 338. Accordingly, contrary to the Cabinet's claims, Reagan's call for such a withdrawal was not inconsistent with the Camp David peace treaty, which never addressed this issue.

Despite their misrepresentations of Reagan's positions and their erroneous interpretation of the Camp David peace treaty, members of the Cabinet made it unmistakably clear that they would have absolutely nothing to do with the Reagan Plan. Unless Reagan was prepared to pressure Israel to reverse its hard-line rejection of his peace plan, it could not serve as any basis to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. This was obviously true since any such settlement requires the acquiescence of the two opposing sides in the Arab—Israeli conflict, and one of those sides — the Jewish state — had made it abundantly clear that it found the Reagan Plan to be totally unacceptable.

Perhaps the member of the Cabinet who was the most strident and vociferous in his denunciation of the Reagan Plan was Minister of Defense (and current Prime Minister) Ariel Sharon. Following the unveiling of the Reagan Plan, Sharon issued a statement making it clear that Israel would have nothing to do with the Reagan Plan: 'Not only will Israel not accept it, it will not discuss it.' Sharon declared that the Reagan Plan had 'no chance' of ever receiving serious consideration from Israel. Accordingly, Sharon argued that 'The United States could have

saved itself a lot of embarrassment and frustration' by not proposing the Reagan Plan. Sharon predicted that Reagan would have no alternative but to withdraw his peace plan in the face of Israel's unqualified rejection of the President's peace proposal: 'In the end, the United States will have no choice but to back down because its plan cannot be implemented.'<sup>56</sup>

By rejecting the Reagan Plan in the most strident manner possible, the Cabinet made it clear that Israel would not even consider any withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories as long as the Likud Party remained in power, foreclosing any possibility of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East — at least in the immediate future. As Israeli journalist Ammon Kapeliouk aptly noted in an article published in the 5 January 1984 edition of the *International Herald Tribune*,

Movement [toward peace] is what Begin is determined to avoid. He wanted time to complete the construction of Greater Israel, not peace talks at which he would be asked to make [territorial] concessions. Hence the rejection of the Reagan Peace Plan and his tactical exploitation of the Lebanese side show to shelve ... any consideration of the disposal of the occupied territories.<sup>57</sup>

## **The Disagreement Between the United States and Israel Over the Reagan Plan Sets Off Alarm Bells in Congress**

The tension in Israeli—American relations triggered by the Jewish state's denunciation of the Reagan Plan set off alarm bells in Congress. Israel's many supporters in Congress were concerned that the disagreement between the United States and Israel over the Reagan Plan could inflict permanent and irreparable damage upon relations between the two allies. Israel's supporters in Congress were particularly concerned about the fact that by appearing to dictate the terms of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, the Reagan Plan contradicted the Camp David process.

Representing the sentiments of Israel's supporters in Congress, on 8 September 1982 Representative James H. Scheuer of New York wrote Reagan in order to inform the President that 'Your September 1st speech outlining a new policy for the United States with regard to Israel and the Middle East has raised several serious questions.' Scheuer raised particular concerns over the Cabinet's charge that the Reagan Plan contradicted the Camp David peace treaty.

I have read carefully the text of the Israeli Cabinet response dated September 2, 1982, which states: 'The positions conveyed to the Prime Minister [of Israel] on behalf of the President of the United States consist of partial quotations from the Camp David Agreement or are nowhere mentioned in that agreement or contradict it entirely.'

The Cabinet response then goes on to list seven major points that the Israeli government considers major deviations from the letter and spirit of the Camp David Agreement.

In reviewing the text of your address to the nation on September 1, 1982 I note that nowhere is such language included.

The 'positions' conveyed to the Israeli government must have come from some document.<sup>58</sup>

Noting that Reagan had written Begin regarding the President's peace plan, Scheuer requested that this correspondence be made public, since it could substantiate Israel's claim that the American peace initiative involved a renunciation of the Camp David process.

Because of the seriousness of your proposals, and their potential life and death effect on the security of the State of Israel, I believe it would be in the public interest to release the text of your letter to Prime Minister Begin and the accompanying document which outlined in detail the major positions the United States is adopting with regard to an overall Middle East



settlement. The Israelis contend that these proposals amount to a repudiation of previously agreed upon positions and a de facto abrogation of the Camp David Agreement.

Accordingly, I believe it is in the best interests of the American people and the Congress that we are able to examine these documents.<sup>59</sup>

Reagan's correspondence with Begin concerning the President's peace plan was classified and not open to public review for national security purposes, and remains so. Accordingly, the White House was certain to reject Scheuer's request that the correspondence be made public. Anticipating such a White House response, Scheuer nevertheless argued that this correspondence should be made public because this communication had already been circulated among various Arab governments: 'Surely there can be no argument that these documents, which were shown to various Arab governments even before Israel saw them, constitute a threat to American security [if they are made public].'<sup>60</sup>

Scheuer concluded his letter by repeating his charge that Reagan's correspondence with Begin was the source of the great consternation in Israel the President's peace proposal had caused, and urged that this communication be made public.

Surely the distressing rupture, which may be developing between our government and the State of Israel, cannot help but be aggravated by the curious dichotomy between your relatively mild public statements and the outrage that these secret documents are causing our closest ally in the Middle East.

Mr. President, I urge you to order the release of these documents so that the American public and the Congress may have the opportunity to judge the true scope of your proposals in an atmosphere of informed opinion.<sup>61</sup>

Scheuer assumed that the Israeli Cabinet's characterizations of the positions Reagan had taken on the peace process must have come from the President's correspondence with Begin, since the President had not expressed those sentiments during his nationwide television address on the Middle East. However, in its statement the Cabinet did not refer to any such correspondence, and it appears from the text of its statement that its members were referring to Reagan's nationwide television address. Scheuer was perplexed concerning why the Cabinet would cite positions Reagan had allegedly expressed which are not contained in the text of his address. The answer is most probably not that the Cabinet was referring to positions Reagan had related in his correspondences with Begin, but rather that its members had misrepresented the positions the President had taken during his address.

As we saw, contrary to the Cabinet's claims, Reagan did not call for the Palestinian self-governing authority to exercise sovereignty over East Jerusalem, nor did he take any positions on the issues of security on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the nature and scope of Palestinian autonomy, and the ties the Palestinian self-governing authority would maintain with Jordan. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that the positions Reagan took during his address conflicted in any way with those he took in his correspondence with Begin; had that been the case Israel would have made this contradiction public in order to undermine the credibility of the Reagan Plan, which the Jewish state had contemptuously rejected. Scheuer's assumption that Reagan had communicated positions to Begin in confidence which conflicted with those he expressed during his address is implausible, and the Congressman failed to consider the more persuasive reason why the Cabinet had cited the President's sentiments regarding the peace process which are not contained in the text of his speech — because its members had misrepresented his remarks.

On 10 September 1982 Kenneth M. Duberstein, Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs, wrote Scheuer in order to inform the Congressman that

This is to acknowledge your September 8 letter urging the President to release to the Congress and the public the text of the



recent letter to Prime Minister Begin and the accompanying document detailing the major positions the United States is adopting regarding an overall Middle East settlement.

Please know that your letter has been brought to the President's attention, and I have also transmitted a copy to the appropriate officials for further analysis and review. I assure you that careful consideration will be given to the concerns you have raised.<sup>62</sup>

Duberstein sent Scheuer's letter to Michael O. Wheeler, Executive Secretary of the NSC. On 14 September 1982 Wheeler sent the letter to L. Paul Bremer III, Executive Secretary of the State Department.<sup>63</sup> On 26 October Powell A. Moore, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, wrote Scheuer in order to inform the Congressman that the White House would not make Reagan's correspondence with Begin concerning the President's peace plan public. Nevertheless, Moore assured Scheuer that all correspondence the United States had had with Israel during the Reagan Administration was consistent with official American policy of providing strong and unswerving support for the Jewish state and upholding the Camp David peace treaty.

This is with regard to your letter of September 8 to the President suggesting the release of certain diplomatic correspondence relating to the President's Middle East peace initiative.

It is not our practice to release the contents of diplomatic exchanges. I can assure you that all diplomatic correspondence on this subject is consistent with the President's September 1 announcement, particularly with regard to our unswerving commitment to the security of Israel and our support for the Camp David process as the only route to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We believe the American public, by virtue of the September 1 announcement, Secretary Shultz's remarks of September 12 to the United Jewish Appeal, and other pertinent statements, including appearances before relevant congressional committees, has been provided sufficient information to assess the worthiness and urgency of our call for a fresh start in the negotiations.<sup>64</sup>

Moore concluded his letter by assuring Scheuer that the Reagan Administration would diligently pursue its peace initiative in the Middle East: 'Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us. I can assure you that we will be devoting great attention and energy to this critical effort in the weeks and months ahead.'<sup>65</sup>

Moore's assurances that no classified information existed which undermined official American policy upholding the Camp David peace treaty tends to confirm the explanation offered in this book concerning why the Israeli Cabinet took issue with positions Reagan had allegedly expressed on the peace process which are not contained in the text of the President's nationwide television address. The explanation for this anomaly lies not in Scheuer's charge that Reagan took positions in his correspondence with Begin which conflict with those he expressed during his address, but in the probable fact that the Cabinet simply misrepresented those positions in its statement denouncing the President's peace plan.

By assuring Scheuer that no classified information exists which undermines official American policy upholding the Camp David peace treaty, Moore served to defuse the concerns of Israel's supporters in Congress that the Reagan Plan might serve as a precursor to a weakening of the traditionally staunch support the United States had provided to the Jewish state. Any weakening of such support would have provoked a firestorm in Congress against the Reagan Administration which would have resulted in a severe rupture in relations between the two branches of government, given the strong backing Israel enjoyed on Capitol Hill. To prevent such a firestorm, Moore assured Scheuer that Israel's outright rejection of the Reagan Plan would in no way serve to undermine the President's continued support for the Jewish state. This effectively foreclosed any possibility that Reagan might even consider imposing sanctions against Israel for its harsh denunciation of his peace plan in an effort to moderate the Jewish state's hard-line stance against his proposal. While Moore assured Scheuer that the Reagan Administration would be 'devoting great attention and energy' to pursuing the President's peace initiative, in truth the

White House would be moving in the opposite direction: shelving and burying the Reagan Plan in order to avoid a political confrontation with Israel and its allies in Congress, given the fact that the Jewish state adamantly rejected the proposal.

## Israel Rejects Reagan's Demand for a Settlement Freeze

Israel added insult to injury against the Reagan Plan when the Cabinet accompanied its announcement that its members had rejected the President's proposal by revealing that the government had approved a plan for the development of 42 new settlements in the occupied Arab territories.<sup>66</sup> On 5 September 1982, Israel announced that it was undertaking the immediate implementation of the first phase of this plan with the development of five new settlements — three on the West Bank and two on the Golan Heights.<sup>67</sup> Israel's announcement that the Jewish state was accelerating its settlement activity represented a direct slap in the face against Reagan, who had demanded a settlement freeze during his nationwide television address on the Middle East. The announcement was intended by Israel as a flagrant act of defiance and a clear signal that the Jewish state would not bow to the demands of the President for a settlement freeze as a condition for reviving the stalled peace process.

As a further act of defiance against Reagan, on 10 April 1983 Israel announced another ambitious plan to develop 57 new settlements on the West Bank and Gaza Strip within the next four years.<sup>68</sup> Israel came close to meeting its goal. The number of Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories, excluding East Jerusalem, rose from 73 in 1982 to 115 in 1989 when Reagan left the White House. The number of Israeli settlers residing in the occupied Arab territories increased from 21,000 to 69,800 during the same period.<sup>69</sup> Instead of freezing all settlement activity, as Reagan had demanded during his nationwide television address, Israel actually continued its feverish development of new settlements in the occupied Arab territories, which had begun with the Likud Party's assumption of power in 1977.

Reagan must take full responsibility for Israel's decision to completely ignore his demand for a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories. Upon assuming the presidency, Reagan reversed longstanding American policy regarding the settlements. From the end of the Six-Day War until Reagan's assumption of the presidency, official American policy proclaimed the settlements to be both illegal and an obstacle to peace.

The American position that the settlements were illegal is based upon Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which declares, 'The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.'<sup>70</sup> William W. Scranton, the American Ambassador to the United Nations, declared in an address before the Security Council on 23 March 1976 that the

substantial resettlement of the Israeli civilian population in occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under the convention, and cannot be considered to have prejudged the outcome of negotiations between the parties or the location of the borders of the states of the Middle East. Indeed, the presence of these settlements is seen by my government as an obstacle to the success of the negotiations for a just and final peace between Israel and its neighbors.<sup>71</sup>

On 21 April 1978, the State Department reaffirmed that the settlements were 'inconsistent with international law.'<sup>72</sup>

In a dramatic shift in official American policy on the settlements, on 2 February 1981 Reagan

declared during an interview with a group of reporters in the Oval Office that 'I disagreed when the previous administration referred to the settlements as illegal. They are not illegal.' However, Reagan made it clear that he would continue official American policy, which regarded the settlements as an obstacle to peace: 'I do think now with this rush to do it [develop settlements] and this moving in there the way they are is ill advised because if we're going to continue with the spirit of Camp David to try and arrive at peace, maybe this, at this time, is unnecessarily provocative.'<sup>73</sup>

Despite his opposition to Israeli settlement activity, Reagan's reversal of official American policy regarding the settlements as illegal only served to accelerate the pace of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories — the very opposite result of what the President intended when he demanded the imposition of a settlement freeze. As Noam Chomsky notes, 'Settlement was accelerated when Begin took power in 1977. There was a further substantial expansion in the settlement program after President Reagan announced that he regarded the West Bank settlements as "legal." This reversal of U.S. policy (at least at the rhetorical level) set off a huge "land grab" operation on the West Bank.'<sup>74</sup>

In addition to reversing longstanding American policy regarding the settlements as illegal, Reagan refused to openly condemn, let alone take any meaningful action to halt, the accelerated pace of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories which followed the Likud Party's assumption to power in 1977 and continued unabated during his presidency, other than to call them an obstacle to peace. Accordingly, Israel had reason to believe that Reagan was not serious when he demanded that the Jewish state freeze all settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories. Consequently, Israel chose to ignore Reagan's call for the imposition of a settlement freeze and announce plans to develop dozens of new settlements on the West Bank, fully recognizing that the President would not retaliate in any manner against the Jewish state for its act of defiance against him. In December 1982 Senator John Glenn of Ohio concluded that Reagan's acquiescence to Israel's accelerated pace of settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories represented tacit presidential approval of the Jewish state's efforts to use the settlements as a *fait accompli* to lay an irreversible sovereign claim to the West Bank: 'The consent that the Israelis have obviously read into a consistent record of silence on the part of the President over at least the last year and half has carried the de facto annexation of the West Bank very close to, if not beyond, the point of no return.'<sup>75</sup>

The argument that Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories has resulted in the Jewish state's de facto annexation of those lands has been perhaps most eloquently advanced by Richard Falk, who notes that Reagan's

call upon Israel to establish a freeze on further settlements so as to promote Arab-Israeli negotiations... has been superseded to a large degree by Israel's refusal to halt the settlement process, creating a situation that is now claimed by some observers to have established a relationship on the ground that is tantamount to annexation. Even a freeze would not be very meaningful at this stage. President Reagan had further confused the situation by apparently contradicting earlier US assessments [opposing Israeli settlement activity] when on February 2, 1981 he declared in a press interview that the settlements were 'legal.' ...

The establishment of settlements on the scale that has occurred and for the professed purpose (at least after the ascension to power of the Likud in 1977) of realizing historic dreams to 'Greater Israel' is a profound, continuing violation of international law of gravest consequence for the rights and prospects of the Palestinian inhabitants of these territories, severely complicating their supreme rights of national self determination.'<sup>76</sup>

The argument that Reagan, by reversing longstanding American policy regarding the settlements as illegal, encouraged Israel to accelerate the pace of its settlement activity to the point where prospects for peace in the Middle East became increasingly threatened is fully

supported by William B. Quandt, who argues that

Reagan's change of policy on settlements is not the reason that the number of Israeli settlers in the occupied territories grew to nearly 100,000 by 1992. But the permissive American attitude certainly encouraged the determined settlement policy of Shamir and Sharon. Some even concluded in the early 1980s that settlement activity had gone so far that a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian agreement was no longer possible. Even those who resisted this conclusion acknowledged the difficulty of dealing with the large number of Israeli settlers living beyond the 'green line.' Reagan never seemed to worry much about this issue because he was essentially uninvolved with the details of trying to advance the peace process.<sup>77</sup>

## **Reagan Refuses to Consider Exerting Any Pressure on Israel to Reverse Its Opposition to His Peace Plan**

Israel's unqualified rejection of the Reagan Plan meant that it was dead: the proposal could obviously not serve as the basis for the achievement of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East if a principal party to the negotiations — Tel Aviv — rejected it out of hand. Accordingly, if Reagan was to have any hope of reviving his moribund peace plan in the face of Israel's unequivocal rejection, the President needed to pressure the Jewish state to reevaluate its dismissal of the proposal.

Reagan had substantial leverage over Israel that he could use to accomplish this objective. The most significant leverage involved the generous levels of foreign aid the United States had provided to Israel since the end of the Yom Kippur War. Reagan could have threatened to request Congress to either substantially reduce or suspend this aid if Israel persisted in its rejection of the peace plan. To be sure, Congress would find it very difficult to accede to any presidential request to take such action. As Paul Findley, who served as a Representative in Congress from Illinois during 1961 to 1983, puts it, 'Each year the U.S. Congress donates \$1,000 for every Israeli man, woman, and child. No matter how sharply Congress cuts other items in the federal budget, gifts to Israel sweep through without restrictive amendment or murmur of opposition. My years on Capitol Hill led me to conclude that aid to Israel is more sacrosanct than even Social Security and Medicare.'<sup>78</sup>

Given Congress' commitment to continuing the generous levels of foreign aid the United States has provided to Israel, it is virtually certain that lawmakers would have flatly rejected any presidential request to either substantially reduce or suspend this assistance for any reason Reagan may have provided for recommending such action. Nevertheless, any effort Reagan may have undertaken in order to persuade Congress to either substantially reduce or terminate aid to Israel would have put the Jewish state on notice that its continued rejection of the President's peace plan risked a severe rupture in Israel—iAmerican relations. This would have been bound to have some effect in moderating Israel's hard-line position against making the political and territorial concessions required to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. In the end, Reagan could have achieved a substantial change in Israel's intransigent opposition to his peace initiative had he made a credible effort to persuade Congress to either substantially reduce or suspend aid to the Jewish state. This is true even though Congress would not have taken such action against Israel. However, Reagan rejected any such confrontation with Israel in order to salvage the credibility of his peace initiative.

Indeed, Reagan refused to even consider making the provision of continued aid to Israel conditional upon its willingness to reevaluate, much less reverse, its flat rejection of the

President's peace plan. Rather, Reagan approved a substantial increase in such aid during his presidency, essentially rewarding Israel for its contemptuous dismissal of his peace plan. In fiscal year 1980 American military and economic assistance to Israel totaled \$2.1 billion.<sup>79</sup> In order to reassure Congress of the Reagan Administration's commitment to preserve the security and survival of Israel in the wake of the President's decision to approve the AW ACS sale, on 29 June 1981 Fairbanks wrote one of the leading opponents of the deal on Capitol Hill, Representative William M. Brodhead of Michigan, in order to inform him that Reagan would request an additional \$300 million in military credits to the Jewish state in fiscal 1982 and 1983, respectively. This would raise the level of American aid to Israel to \$2.8 billion for fiscal 1982.<sup>80</sup> In December 1982 — just three months following Israel's total repudiation of the Reagan Plan — the President proposed that Congress grant \$2.5 billion in aid to Israel for fiscal year 1984 — essentially the same level which had prevailed since fiscal year 1976.<sup>81</sup> Since aid to Israel had the support of practically every member of Congress, Reagan had no problem winning the approval of lawmakers for continuing annual assistance to Israel at a level amounting to roughly \$2.5 billion.

The fiscal 1984 aid package to Israel actually represented an increase in this assistance since Congress took \$500 million in loans the Jewish state had previously received on an annual basis and converted the funds into grants. Reagan objected to this move, fearing that the Arab world would perceive it as an American subsidy to finance Israel's invasion and occupation of Lebanon. However, Congress shrugged off Reagan's protests and included the grants in the final aid package. In contradiction to his opposition to this move, Reagan dutifully signed legislation appropriating the aid to Israel. In an interview with Madiha Rashid Madfai, Nicholas Veliotis, who served as American Ambassador to Egypt during the Reagan Administration, argues that the President's acquiescence to Congress' decision to increase aid to Israel in the wake of its invasion of Lebanon destroyed the credibility of the United States as an honest broker in the peace process and assured the death of his peace proposal: 'We knew this money was going to be viewed in Israel and everywhere else as payment for [the Israeli invasion of] Lebanon. We fought [against it] and lost. With it we lost any chance of moving on the Reagan Plan.... The President clearly sold out.'<sup>82</sup>

## **Congress Raises Foreign Aid to Israel to Record Levels**

In 1985 Congress passed the Foreign Aid Authorization Act, which appropriated \$1.8 billion in military aid and \$1.2 billion in economic assistance to Israel for fiscal years 1986 and 1987, respectively. In addition, the bill appropriated \$1.5 billion in supplemental economic assistance to Israel for fiscal year 1986 — bringing the total amount of aid the United States provided to Israel in that year to \$4.5 billion, a record level to that date. All aid provided to Israel under the bill was in the form of grants, which Israel would not have to pay back to the United States.<sup>83</sup> This represented a sharp departure from previous aid to Israel, which consisted of a mix of grants and loans — the latter requiring repayment by the Jewish state. In fiscal year 1983 American aid to Israel totaled \$1.5 billion in grants and \$1 billion in loans.<sup>84</sup> By eliminating loans from Israel's annual subsidy and increasing grant aid to the Jewish state, Congress doubled total annual grants to the Jewish state in the period from fiscal year 1983 to fiscal year 1986. On 8 August 1985,

Reagan signed the bill without expressing any reservations concerning the record amount of military and economic assistance Congress had provided Israel, despite its rejection of the President's peace plan.<sup>85</sup>

The Foreign Aid Authorization Act of 1985 resulted in a sharp and permanent rise in aid to Israel. During fiscal years 1976 to 1985, annual aid to Israel averaged \$2.5 billion. However, since fiscal year 1986, average annual aid to Israel has more than doubled, to \$5.5 billion. In real terms, aid to Israel has risen even higher than this amount, due to the fact that since fiscal year 1986 all American military assistance to Israel has consisted entirely of grants, without the large loan component which characterized aid to the Jewish state in previous years. Since fiscal year 1981 all American economic aid to Israel has also consisted of grants.<sup>86</sup>

In 1984 Congress passed an amendment to the Israel aid legislation, introduced by Senator Alan Cranston of California. The Cranston Amendment required that the annual level of economic aid to Israel be at least equal to the annual amount of payment the Jewish state makes on its debt to the United States. The amendment guarantees that Israel will be able to repay its debt to the United States with the economic aid the Jewish state receives from Washington.<sup>87</sup>

## **The Reagan Plan Results in the President's Final Decision to Pursue a Pro-Israel Policy in the Middle East**

The Reagan Plan was designed to commit the United States to pursuing an evenhanded policy in the Middle East (after the President had veered that policy in a sharply pro-Israel direction following the conclusion of the AWACS debate) in order to compensate organized American Jewry for its loss on this issue. Reagan believed that an evenhanded policy in the Middle East was necessary in order to enable the United States to rebuild its credibility in the Arab world, which had been undermined by the President's almost total and absolute support for Israel. Such a policy was also necessary in order to serve notice on Israel that the Jewish state could not take American support for granted. Israel's belief that it had the unlimited support of the United States had led the Jewish state to launch its invasion of Lebanon. Israel was confident that its invasion would have the support of the United States, which turned out not to be the case. Reagan needed to send a clear message to Israel that it could not take American support for granted, which his peace plan was intended to do. This would serve to restrain Israel from undertaking military actions, such as its invasion of Lebanon, which further destabilized the Middle East.

However, far from committing the United States to pursuing an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, the Reagan Plan actually led Washington into an even closer embrace of Israel than had previously been the case. By refusing to even consider recommending the imposition of sanctions against Israel in retaliation for its strident rejection of his peace plan, Reagan abrogated the precedent President Gerald Ford established in 1975. That precedent arose from a dispute between the United States and Israel over the political and territorial concessions the Jewish state should make to Egypt in order to permit the negotiation of a second disengagement agreement between the two nations on the Sinai Peninsula, captured by Israel during the SixDay War. This dispute resulted in a temporary breakdown in negotiations between Israel and Egypt on 22 March 1975 — negotiations which were being facilitated through the shuttle diplomacy Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had undertaken in the Middle East since the conclusion of the Yom



Kippur War. Ford angrily responded on 24 March by threatening to undertake a 'reassessment' of American policy in the Middle East — 'reassessment' being a euphemism for the imposition of unspecified American sanctions against Israel in retaliation for the intransigent position the United States believed the Jewish state had adopted in negotiations with Egypt. Indeed, Israel's supporters in Congress were fearful that Ford might recommend that lawmakers either substantially reduce or suspend aid to Israel in order to induce a moderation in the Jewish state's hard-line stance toward the negotiations. In order to forestall such action, on 21 May, 76 senators cosigned a letter which they sent to Ford in order to 'urge that you reiterate our nation's longstanding commitment to Israel's security by a policy of continued military supplies and diplomatic and economic support' — a clear signal that Congress would resist any presidential effort to use the threat of either a substantial reduction or suspension of aid to Israel as a means of pressuring the Jewish state to adopt a more moderate stance in the peace process.<sup>88</sup>

Ford's threatened 'reassessment' of American policy in the Middle East never occurred, since Israel responded to the President's warning by adopting a more flexible position in negotiations with Egypt, permitting the conclusion of a second disengagement agreement between the two regional powers in the Middle East on 1 September 1975.<sup>89</sup> However, through the mere threat to 'reassess' American policy in the Middle East, Ford established the precedent that the United States would consider imposing sanctions against Israel, including a substantial reduction, or even suspension, of American aid to the Jewish state should a major dispute arise between the two allies over how best to pursue the peace process, and that it would be the American, not the Israeli, position which would prevail in the event of such a disagreement.

Reagan abrogated the precedent Ford established, which held that the United States would grant serious consideration to imposing sanctions against Israel if a major disagreement between the two allies occurred over the peace process. When such a disagreement occurred in 1982 over the Reagan Plan, it was the Israeli, not the American, position which prevailed — the President quietly shelved his peace proposal once Israel made it clear that it was unacceptable to the Jewish state. Indeed, in a dramatic renunciation of the precedent Ford established, Reagan refused to even consider undertaking any 'reassessment' of American policy in the Middle East. The mere threat Ford made to undertake such a 'reassessment' resulted in Israel's willingness to moderate its hard-line position against Egypt, resulting in the negotiation of a second disengagement agreement on the Sinai Peninsula in 1975. However, with no such 'reassessment' forthcoming in the face of Israeli defiance against the Reagan Plan, no progress would be made in the peace process during the Reagan presidency, in contrast to the experience of the 1970s.

To be sure, the stakes for Israel were much higher with respect to the Reagan Plan, which involved the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, than was the case with respect to the peace process the United States pursued during the 1970s, which essentially focused on the American effort to defuse the conflict between Israel and Egypt. Nevertheless, through his threat to 'reassess' American policy in the Middle East in light of the intransigent position he believed Israel had taken in the peace process, Ford established the precedent that American, not Israeli, interests would prevail in the search for peace. Accordingly, by caving in to Ford's threat to 'reassess' that policy, and moderating its hard-line stance in the peace process, Israel accepted the fact that it would have to make whatever political and territorial concessions the United States might demand in the future. This could include an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as eventually called for in the Reagan Plan. Ford's pressure against Israel to make political and territorial concessions to Egypt as part of the second disengagement agreement between the two nations on the Sinai Peninsula established the



precedent for further concessions in the future. The stakes involved in Ford's threat to 'reassess' American policy in the Middle East not only involved an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, but possibly the remaining occupied Arab territories as well.

In repudiation of the precedent Ford established in 1975, Reagan's decision to back down in the face of Israeli intransigence essentially gave the Jewish state veto power over any peace plan a future President might introduce — a precedent which exists to this day. Accordingly, it is not surprising that no President since Reagan has ever proposed a peace plan for the Middle East which did not have the prior approval of Israel. Far from signaling an American determination to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, Reagan's decision to kill his peace plan in order to appease Israel represented the final turn in his decision to provide almost total and absolute support for the Jewish state, a practice which his three successors thus far have dutifully followed.

Reagan's refusal to undertake a much-needed 'reassessment' of American policy in the Middle East following Israel's unqualified rejection of his peace plan in 1982 represents the critical action which resulted in his final abandonment of an evenhanded policy in the Middle East in favor of providing almost total and absolute support for the Jewish state. Reagan's decision to pursue a one-sided pro-Israel policy in the Middle East stemmed not from the President's support for the Israeli position in the Arab—Israeli conflict — in many ways he sided with the Arab position, as his peace plan clearly reveals — but because he could not bring himself to punish Israel in retaliation for its strident rejection of his proposal. Unable to stand up to Israel, Reagan essentially abandoned his peace plan, gave the Jewish state veto power over the peace process, and decided to reward, rather than punish, Tel Aviv for its flat rejection of his proposal by approving a substantial increase in aid to Israel during his presidency.

Reagan's weakness in his dealings with Israel stemmed from his desire to avoid a repeat of the AWACS experience, when the President became embroiled in a politically bruising battle with the pro-Israel lobby over the issue of arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The AWACS debate served as a vivid reminder of the political firestorm in Washington Reagan knew he would trigger if he imposed sanctions against Israel for its strident rejection of his peace plan. Indeed, retention of occupied Arab territories, not blocking arms sales to Saudi Arabia, represented the top priority on Israel's national agenda. Accordingly, any meaningful effort by Reagan to pressure Israel to accept his peace plan was sure to trigger a political firestorm in Washington which would have dwarfed the AWACS debate.

Having been politically bruised and battered in the AWACS debate, despite his ultimate victory over the pro-Israel lobby on this issue, Reagan was not about to embroil himself in another political battle with organized Jewry — this time over the most politically sensitive issue for Israel, the question of what political and territorial concessions the Jewish state must make to its Arab neighbors as the basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Such a battle would have inflicted permanent damage upon Reagan's relationship with the Jewish community and risked the prospect that the President would suffer a humiliating repudiation from Congress, since its members would oppose any sanctions against Israel, such as a substantial reduction or suspension of aid to the Jewish state, which Reagan might have proposed in retaliation for its flat rejection of his peace plan. Having exhausted himself in a fierce political battle over the AWACS sale, Reagan was not about to repeat this experience by embroiling himself in another confrontation with organized American Jewry, which would have followed any effort by the President to sanction Israel for its outright rejection of his peace plan. As Christison aptly puts it,

Although AIPAC lost the AWACS battle in a head-to-head political confrontation with President Reagan... the struggle actually became a victory for the pro-Israel lobby, for it tended to demonstrate graphically just how limited policymaker freedom of action was on sensitive issues involving Israel. On the one hand, the struggle showed that a determined administration can do enough arm twisting and cajoling to push an issue opposed by Israel through Congress, but on the other hand, it demonstrated the heavy and exhausting expenditure of political capital that can be involved in such a fight. In fact no one in the Reagan Administration was willing to accept such a fight again. 'We blew three fuses with those guys [the pro-Israel lobby],' one former White House official said, 'and we don't want to go to the mat with them again.'<sup>90</sup>

Determined to avoid a new political confrontation with the pro-Israel lobby, which was sure to inflict substantial political costs on him, Reagan decided that his best option was to quietly bury his peace plan in the face of strident Israeli opposition, rather than make a meaningful effort to moderate the Jewish state's hard-line position in the peace process. As Nasser H. Aruri aptly notes,

Reagan welcomed the opportunity to rearrange the strategic landscape of the Middle East. His September 1982 [peace] plan, however, was thwarted by a junior ally [Israel] with strategic designs of its own. The prompt and categorical rejection of the Reagan Plan by the Israeli Cabinet, only a few hours after it was enunciated on prime time television, had simply sealed its fate. The plan's denial of sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza to both Israel and the Palestinians, in favor of Jordan, guaranteed Israel's quick rejection. The stillborn plan was thus shelved.<sup>91</sup>

When it came to the peace process, Reagan acted more like a politician, determined to appease organized American Jewry and its many allies in Congress, than a statesman who was willing to bear the domestic political costs required to advance the cause of peace. As former Ambassador Viets, who served as the American diplomatic representative in Jordan during the Reagan Administration, aptly put it during an interview with A1 Madfai,

We backed away from our [peace] proposal... as fast as we could.... It was at that point that the friends of Israel in this country moved in very fast and began to lay the groundwork for what developed into a huge change in bilateral relations between the U.S. and Israel, when Israel became the dominant party and the relation is totally out of control

[in favor of Israel].<sup>92</sup>

## **AIPAC Praises Reagan and Congress for Their Strong Support for Israel**

Among the roughly 500 interest groups which represent the pro-Israel lobby, there is unquestionably no Jewish organization more important to the maintenance of strong and close relations between the United States and Israel than the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). As David Howard Goldberg aptly notes, 'AIPAC remains the only American-based agency registered with Congress for lobbying and disseminating propaganda in the field of American—Israeli relations.'<sup>93</sup> Addressing AIPAC's twenty-seventh annual policy conference, held in Washington on 6 April 1986, Thomas A. Dine, Executive Director of the organization, praised Reagan and Congress for the numerous acts of support they had provided to Israel. Dine went through a laundry list of such acts of support. At the top of the list was passage of the Foreign Aid Authorization Act of 1985, which increased American aid to the Jewish state to record levels.

Congress in 1985 passed — and the President signed into law — the first foreign aid bill since 1981. Despite the budget cutting mood here in Washington, the legislation contained the most generous Israeli aid package ever: \$3 billion in regular

aid plus an additional \$1.5 billion in emergency economic aid. All the funds are grants. The \$3 billion in aid represents an increase of \$400 million above the previous fiscal year, and a doubling of grant assistance since 1983.<sup>94</sup>

Dine pointed to the record level of American aid to Israel as irrefutable proof that the Jewish state enjoyed absolute and total support in Congress.

When Senator Richard Lugar (R—IN) took the aid authorization bill to the Senate floor as the new Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations... he wanted to plant the bill firmly into the most solid political foundation possible. He began with something easy for his colleagues to vote on — \$1.5 billion in emergency aid money for Israel. The amendment passed unanimously! There could be no better indicator of support for Israel than that.

Senator Lugar's tactic of starting with Israel acknowledges that aid to Israel is the locomotive that powers the whole foreign aid train through the legislative process. It was a signal also to the administration that foreign aid passes largely because of support for aid to Israel, and that Israel is a congressional priority.<sup>95</sup>

Dine announced that AIPAC would lobby Congress to pass Reagan's request for \$3 billion in aid to Israel for fiscal year 1987. Dine argued that the political consensus in Washington on behalf of high levels of American aid to Israel reflected the fact that American support for Israel was unshakable:

This year we will be lobbying for another grant of \$3 billion in aid to Israel, as recommended by the Reagan Administration. The generous scope and consistently supportive provisions of U.S. aid for Israel, especially during this period of deficit reduction, reflect the widely held belief, both in Congress and in the administration, that a strong, economically stable Israel is in the highest interest of the United States.<sup>96</sup>

Dine was indeed correct in his argument that the record levels of aid to Israel which Congress granted under the Foreign Aid Authorization Act reflected the fact that American support for Israel was steadfast. One can legitimately argue that Reagan should have imposed punitive measures against Israel for having denounced his peace plan in the most strident manner possible, assuming the President was serious in honoring his commitment to pursue the peace process. Those measures should have taken the form of either a substantial reduction or suspension of aid to Israel. Such measures might have altered Israel's hard-line position against the peace process; at the very least, such measures would have signaled American disapproval with Israeli extremism and enhanced the credibility of the United States in the Arab world.

However, instead of punishment, Reagan rewarded Israel for its flat rejection of his peace plan by approving a substantial increase in aid to the Jewish state. Reagan's refusal to use foreign aid as political leverage to change Israeli behavior in the peace process made it clear that he was not serious about bringing peace to the Middle East, and that his peace plan represented nothing more than a public relations stunt to create the illusion that the President was committed to peace. Reagan was not interested in peace, but in maintaining good relations with Israel, which necessitated that he go along with the Jewish state's refusal to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East — a position which made such an agreement politically impossible.

With Israel enjoying near-unanimous support in Congress, Reagan was unwilling to use foreign aid as a means to moderate Israel's stance against the PLO in the peace process, fully recognizing that any confrontation between Washington and Tel Aviv over the issue of peace in the Middle East would trigger a political firestorm in Washington. Working through its politically powerful Washington lobby, Israel had the capacity to mobilize its many allies in Congress who were sure to succeed in thwarting any presidential effort to use foreign aid to compel the Jewish state to make the political and territorial concessions required for peace. Unwilling to embroil himself in another fierce political battle with Israel and its allies in

Congress in the aftermath of the AWACS debate, Reagan went along with the desire of lawmakers to increase aid to the Jewish state to record levels despite the fact that, by encouraging continued Israeli intransigence in the peace process, such action guaranteed that there would be no peace through the foreseeable future. For Reagan, averting a confrontation with Israel and its Washington lobby, not achieving peace in the Middle East, remained his most important priority in the region.

## **Reagan Demonstrates a Lack of Seriousness in His Commitment to Peace**

By both reversing previous American policy, which regarded the settlements as illegal, and approving a more than doubling of annual aid to Israel in the face of its outright rejection of his peace plan, Reagan made it clear that he was not serious about advancing the peace process. As long as Israel rejected the Reagan Plan, no basis existed to advance the peace process. To assure that his peace plan would serve as a viable basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, Reagan needed to moderate Israel's intransigent opposition to his proposal. The only means to have achieved this result was for Reagan to have threatened to recommend either a substantial reduction or suspension of aid to Israel unless the Jewish state reversed its strident rejection of his peace plan and accepted the proposal as the basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace plan in the Middle East. Rather than doing so, Reagan approved a more than doubling of annual aid to Israel — in effect rewarding the Jewish state for its outright rejection of his peace plan.

Reagan's decision to approve Congress' expansion of the generous program of foreign aid the United States has routinely provided to Israel raises serious questions about the credibility of the President's commitment to his peace plan. By reaffirming his commitment to substantial levels of aid to Israel in the face of its outright rejection of his peace plan, Reagan acted to subvert the very peace proposals which he had unveiled during his nationwide television address on the Middle East. Without Israeli acceptance, the Reagan Plan was dead: there was no way that the President's proposal could ever serve as the basis for the achievement of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East unless it was accepted by the principal parties to the Arab—Israeli conflict, which obviously includes the Jewish state.

Accordingly, if Reagan were truly serious about the success of his peace plan, then he would have imposed sanctions on Israel to compel the Jewish state to re-evaluate its unconditional opposition to his proposals. The fact that Reagan granted no meaningful consideration to taking such action strongly suggests that the President was not truly serious about advancing the peace process. In all likelihood, the Reagan Plan was a public relations ploy designed to create the illusion that the President was seeking to advance the peace process when in fact he was doing nothing of the sort. As A1 Madfai aptly puts it, 'President Reagan's initiative was a model for sheer embarrassment. Before it received the coup de grace from the PLO, it had been fatally weakened by Israel's outright rejection and defiance, and the inept half-hearted diplomacy of the President and his Secretary of State, George Shultz. In short, they were not serious.'<sup>97</sup>

Reagan demonstrated a lack of serious commitment to advancing the peace process precisely because he was completely unwilling to pressure Israel to moderate its hard-line stance against making the political and territorial concessions required for peace. As Christison notes, 'the

administration's failure to work for Israeli acceptance [of the Reagan Plan and] the absence of U.S. pressure delivered to Israelis the dangerous message that there was no cost to retaining the occupied territories.<sup>98</sup>

By dealing with Israel from a position of weakness, rather than strength, Reagan served notice that he would work with the Jewish state to destroy the credibility of his own peace plan. Indeed, as Chomsky aptly notes,

Reagan's proposals were rejected angrily by the Begin government, which announced that it would have absolutely nothing to do with them. The Reagan Plan was therefore stone dead from the first moment unless the U.S. would have chosen to put some pressure on Israel, or more accurately, to withdraw its material support for Israel's settlement programs in the occupied territories. The U.S. at once made clear that it would not limit this support, and in fact extended it shortly after, increasing aid to new heights while permitting the unique arrangements that permit U.S. aid to be used without supervision, hence for settlements in the occupied territories (in violation of aid legislation). In short, the U.S. and Israel immediately killed the Reagan Plan.<sup>99</sup>

Chomsky is correct in his argument that Reagan participated with Israel in the death of his own peace plan, since the President refused to exert any meaningful pressure on the Jewish state to moderate its opposition to, let alone accept, his proposals. Rather, Reagan indirectly encouraged Israel to pursue its opposition by promising unconditionally that he would approve a substantial expansion in the generous levels of foreign aid the United States has provided the Jewish state since the end of the Yom Kippur War. Without Israeli acceptance, the Reagan Plan stood no chance of serving as a viable basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace plan in the Middle East.

## **The Reagan Administration Confronts Obstacles in Opening a Formal Dialogue with the PLO**

Israel's outright rejection of the Reagan Plan was not the only factor which killed the President's peace proposal; the other major factor which achieved this result was Reagan's inability to find any credible party to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with the Jewish state. The Palestinian problem remains the core issue of the Arab—Israeli conflict: no comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East is possible without addressing the plight of the Palestinians. Accordingly, critical to the success of the Reagan Plan was the President's ability to find a credible party to represent the Palestinians. However, this proved to be no easy task.

The Arab summit meeting in Fez in 1982 reaffirmed the decision of the Arab heads of state at their previous conference in Rabat in 1974 that the PLO represents the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and that the PLO constituted the only organization which could represent the Palestinians at the negotiating table with Israel. Hussein reaffirmed the Rabat and Fez decisions on 10 April 1983, when the King rejected a personal invitation from Reagan to agree to have Jordan represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel, insisting that only the PLO could do so. Hussein's decision to reject Reagan's invitation was based upon three considerations.

First, the PNC rejected the Reagan Plan at the end of its sixteenth meeting in Algiers on 27 February 1983. Jordan was unwilling to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel unless authorized to do so by the PLO. However, such authorization was not forthcoming as long

as the PNC rejected the Reagan Plan, which would have served as the basis for the pursuit of such talks.

Second, Hussein recognized that any Jordanian representation of the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel would violate the Rabat and Fez decisions. Recognizing that Jordanian failure to adhere to the two decisions would risk Amman's isolation from the rest of the Arab world, Hussein decided to reaffirm his support for the PLO when he announced the Hashemite monarchy's refusal to enter into such talks on 10 April 1983.

The third and most important reason for Jordan's refusal to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel was that Amman lacked confidence in Reagan's ability to act as an honest broker in negotiations to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Jordan was disheartened by Reagan's refusal to exercise the considerable leverage the United States exerts over Israel in order to reverse the Jewish state's outright rejection of the President's peace plan and accept it as the basis of negotiations to achieve such a settlement. Jordan was especially alarmed at Reagan's failure to retaliate against Israel for having flatly rejected the President's demand for a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories, and for Tel Aviv's decision to initiate the development of dozens of new settlements instead. With Reagan unprepared to confront Israel's active efforts to subvert his peace proposal, it was clear that the United States would be unable to deliver the Israeli political and territorial concessions required to elicit Jordanian participation in the peace process.

In order to take the risk of entering the peace process, Jordan needed some tangible sign that the Reagan Administration could deliver the Israeli political and territorial concessions required to make Jordanian participation in the peace process worthwhile. However, with Reagan unwilling to exercise any pressure against Israel to reverse its unequivocal rejection of the President's peace plan, it was clear that such concessions would not be forthcoming in any peace talks which might be held between the Jewish state and Jordan. Accordingly, Hussein concluded that no credible basis existed for Jordan to enter the peace process, and the King flatly rejected Reagan's invitation that Amman do so.

Jordan was especially discouraged at Reagan's failure to pressure Israel to abandon its ambitious plans, announced in 1982 and 1983, respectively, to develop dozens of new settlements on the West Bank. One can legitimately argue that Israel's act of defiance on the settlements issue required Reagan to respond with a threat to recommend either a substantial reduction or suspension of the generous levels of foreign aid the United States has provided to the Jewish state since the end of the Yom Kippur War until Tel Aviv accepted the President's demand for a freeze on all settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories. However, no such threat was ever contemplated. Jordan was also suspicious of Reagan's call for Jordan to represent the Palestinians at the negotiating table with Israel, suspecting that the President was attempting to use Amman in this manner to exclude the PLO from the peace process.

Jordan's misgivings about Reagan's intentions and credibility were expressed by an anonymous individual representing 'official Jordanian thinking,' who remarked on 2 September 1982 that 'The crucial question is whether Mr. Reagan has the will and the power to back up his words. If Sharon starts a new series of settlements tomorrow, will Washington stop arms supplies or financial aid to Israel? Will it... recognize the PLO?'<sup>100</sup>

The answer to those questions was that Reagan was unwilling to recommend either a substantial reduction or suspension of American foreign aid as a means of forcing Israel to accept the President's peace plan; nor would the administration even consider entering into a formal dialogue with the PLO as long as the White House could avoid doing so. Because Reagan



remained committed to pursuing a one-sided pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, the President lacked credibility as an honest broker in the peace process. Accordingly, Jordan concluded that Reagan was unwilling to deliver the Israeli political and territorial concessions required for peace and decided to forego the President's invitation to join the peace process.

The fact that Jordan rejected Reagan's invitation to join the peace process because the President had lost credibility in Amman is confirmed by A1 Madfai, who notes that

The Reagan Administration never grasped what King Hussein and the PLO needed as a minimum condition to proceed [with the peace process], namely... any sign, which would show that Reagan would make his plan work. But no evidence of American determination was forthcoming. . . . Under these circumstances it was difficult see why King Hussein should opt to stand by the President, breaking ranks with his kinfolk in the process, when neither Israel nor the U.S. had anything to offer him in return.<sup>101</sup>

As a result of Hussein's announcement on 10 April 1983 that Jordan would not represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel, there was no way the stalled peace process in the Middle East could ever be revived unless the United States could elicit the PLO's direct participation in the peace process. The means to achieve this result represented a particularly complicated and tricky matter. Pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement the United States and Israel signed in 1975, and the Foreign Aid Authorization Act Reagan signed into federal law a decade later, the United States committed itself to forego any formal contacts with the PLO unless the organization recognized the right of Israel to exist, accepted Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, and renounced the use of terrorism. The PLO could not participate in the peace process unless the organization had relations with the United States, which represented the mediator in the Arab—Israeli conflict. Accordingly, if the Reagan Administration was to have any hope of eliciting the PLO's participation in the peace process, then the White House would have to find some way of persuading the organization to accept the conditions the United States was insisting upon in order for the two sides to enter into a formal dialogue. How to persuade the PLO to do so became the problem the administration would have to resolve before the White House was to succeed in its efforts to revive the peace process.

## **Jordan and the PLO Attempt to Revive the Stalled Peace Process**

Despite Hussein's announcement that Jordan would not represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel, Amman remained the key to reviving the stalled peace process. This could not occur until the United States and the PLO opened a formal dialogue with each other. Jordan, which had excellent relations with both the United States and the PLO and was poised to play a major role in the peace process, was the nation best positioned to facilitate the opening of such a dialogue.

On 11 February 1985, Jordan and the PLO announced a five-point agreement on a framework for reviving the peace process. The agreement called for the establishment of a joint Jordanian—Palestinian delegation to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. The delegation would be comprised of an equal number of representatives from the Jordanian government and the PLO. The peace talks would occur within the framework of an international conference in which representatives from all parties to the Arab—Israeli conflict would attend, together with additional representatives from the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. The purpose of the conference would be to establish arrangements which would enable



the Palestinians to exercise their right of self-determination through the creation of a Palestinian state associated in a confederation with Jordan.<sup>102</sup>

Jordan and the PLO fully recognized that their joint peace initiative could not get off the ground without the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the PLO prior to the convening of an international peace conference. Accordingly, Jordan and the PLO submitted a four-step process for the initiation of such a dialogue. First, the representatives of the United States and the joint Jordanian—Palestinian delegation, which would enter into peace talks with Israel, would meet. Second, following the meeting, the PLO would announce its official acceptance of Resolutions 242 and 338, one of the three conditions the United States had laid down as a requirement for its opening of a formal dialogue with the organization. Third, the United States would respond by opening such a dialogue. Fourth, the convening of the international peace conference, as defined in the five-point 11 February agreement, would commence.

The Jordanian—Palestinian peace initiative collapsed when the PLO refused to officially accept Resolutions 242 and 338 until the United States recognized the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination — in effect demanding that Washington formally declare its support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state as the basis for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. This ran counter to Reagan's flat rejection of Palestinian statehood, which the President expressed in his nationwide television address on the Middle East. Pursuant to the Reagan Plan, the United States expressed its willingness to recognize the 'legitimate rights' of the Palestinians, but not the exercise of their right to self-determination, though Washington conceded that representatives of the Palestinians would be free to pursue their demand for an independent state in any peace talks they may enter into with Israel. Accordingly, the United States flatly rejected the PLO's demand that Washington formally recognize the right of the Palestinians to self-determination as the basis for the opening of a formal dialogue between the two parties. With the United States and the PLO unable to agree on the conditions which would permit the opening of such a dialogue, on 19 February 1986 Hussein announced in a nationwide television address that Jordan was abandoning the year-long Jordanian—Palestinian peace initiative.<sup>103</sup> There was simply no way that the initiative could get off the ground as long as the United States and the PLO persisted in their adamant refusal to talk to each other.

## **The Reagan Administration Opens a Formal Dialogue with the PLO**

Following the collapse of the Jordanian—Palestinian peace initiative, the Reagan Administration persisted in its efforts to elicit Jordan to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. However, those efforts also collapsed on 31 July 1988 when Hussein announced in a nationwide television address that Jordan was severing all administrative and legal ties to the West Bank and recognizing the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian residents of the occupied Arab territory.<sup>104</sup> Hussein's announcement — which effectively relinquished all Jordanian sovereign claims over the West Bank — effectively eliminated any hope that Amman would ever represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. Henceforth, no negotiations

toward a comprehensive peace settlement could take place without the direct involvement of the PLO.

In the aftermath of Hussein's announcement that Jordan was severing all administrative and legal ties to the West Bank, the Reagan Administration and the PLO were eager to enter into a formal dialogue. The administration wanted a dialogue because the White House fully recognized that, as a result of Hussein's announcement, no comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East was possible without the direct participation of the PLO. Indeed, Hussein's announcement ended all efforts the administration had pursued since Reagan introduced his peace plan for the Middle East on 1 September 1982 to involve Jordan as the representative of the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. Henceforth, the administration fully recognized that only the PLO could represent the Palestinians in those talks.

With the Reagan Administration now having no choice but to recognize the PLO, the organization was well positioned to enter into a formal dialogue with the United States. The PLO fully recognized that Hussein's announcement represented an opportunity to gain American recognition of the organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and therefore concluded that the time was ripe to accept the American conditions for entering into a dialogue with the United States. After four and a half months of protracted negotiations, on 13 December 1988, in an address before a special session of the United Nations General Assembly in Geneva and a subsequent news conference the following day, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat—in clear, explicit, and precise language—met the three basic conditions the United States had insisted upon as the basis for its opening of a formal dialogue with the PLO. He announced that his organization accepted the right of Israel to exist within secure and recognized borders, would enter into negotiations to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East based upon Resolutions 242 and 338, and renounced the use of all forms of terrorism.<sup>105</sup> With Arafat having met the American conditions for the initiation of formal contacts between the United States and the PLO, Secretary of State Shultz immediately responded by announcing that Washington would open a formal dialogue with the organization.<sup>106</sup> The 13-year prohibition against any formal contacts between the United States and the PLO, which had begun with the Memorandum of Agreement signed by Washington and Tel Aviv in 1975, had finally been lifted.

With the United States having opened a formal dialogue with the PLO on 14 December 1988, the Reagan Administration now had the opportunity to restart the peace process in the Middle East but little time to do so, since Reagan had barely more than one month left in office at the time the White House opened this dialogue. With time for the administration running out, the White House was unable to make any tangible progress in advancing the peace process. As Quandt aptly notes,

in both 1983 and 1985, especially the latter, Reagan and Shultz might have inched the peace process forward had they shown more drive and determination. Nothing like Kissinger's intense shuttle diplomacy, or Carter's summitry, was tried.... So the Reagan period produced little in the way of tangible progress toward Arab—Israeli peace.... On balance Israel and its neighbors were no closer to agreement in 1988 than they were in 1980.<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

As Quandt keenly observes, Reagan failed to take any significant steps to advance the peace process. The reason for Reagan's failure is not that the President was disinterested in pursuing

peace in the Middle East, but due to his desire to protect himself from the political retribution which was sure to come from the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in Congress had he attempted to pressure Israel into making the political and territorial concessions required for a just and lasting peace in the region. The AWACS debate had served as a vivid reminder of the severe political costs Reagan would have sustained had he embroiled himself in another politically bruising battle with the pro-Israel lobby over another controversial issue involving Israel. Retention of occupied Arab territories, not blocking American arms sales to Saudi Arabia, represented the dominant priority on Israel's national agenda. Accordingly, any effort by Reagan to pressure Israel to make the political and territorial concessions required for peace would have provoked a political firestorm which would have dwarfed the AWACS debate.

By placing the Persian Gulf under the protective military umbrella of the United States, the AWACS sale removed the threat of another Arab oil embargo against this nation in retaliation for its support for Israel. With the United States committed to using its vast military power to protect the monarchies of the Persian Gulf, the Arab sheiks of the region were certain not to brandish their oil weapon again — at least not as long as they were dependent upon this nation for their existence. Accordingly, the sale left Reagan free to pursue the strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East he was committed to implementing when he entered the White House.

On 19 November 1981 Reagan met with a group of prominent Jewish supporters and promised henceforth that he would rigidly adhere to a staunch and unequivocal pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. Reagan saw the pursuit of such a policy as essential to repair the damage inflicted upon his relations with the Jewish community as a result of his support for the AWACS sale. However, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon served notice that the pursuit of such a policy in the Middle East compromised the ability of the United States to restrain Israel from undertaking military operations, such as the campaign in Lebanon, which threatened to further destabilize the region. Taking American support for granted, Israel felt free to invade Lebanon with the full expectation that its action would have the unqualified support of the Reagan Administration, which turned out not to be the case.

Reagan needed to adopt an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, if for no other reason than to serve notice on Israel that American support for the Jewish state was not open ended, and that the United States would not tolerate future Israeli military operations which threatened to further destabilize the region. Reagan's unveiling of his peace plan during his nationwide television address on the Middle East signaled his commitment to pursue such a policy in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Pursuant to this policy, the Reagan Plan demanded substantial Israeli political and territorial concessions to its Arab neighbors as a condition for the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.

However, the Reagan Plan directly contradicted the commitment the President made to his prominent Jewish supporters. When Israel flatly rejected the Reagan Plan the President had no choice but to accept the Jewish state's repudiation of his peace proposal. Consistent with his commitment to pursue a clear and consistent pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, and unwilling to embroil himself in another politically bruising battle with organized American Jewry, Reagan backed down in the face of Israeli intransigence and quickly abandoned his peace plan. Reagan refused to even consider imposing any sanctions against Israel in an effort to moderate its hard-line position against his peace plan. Accordingly, rather than representing an exercise in diplomatic evenhandedness in the Arab—Israeli conflict, the Reagan Plan resulted in veering American policy in the Middle East in an even more pro-Israel direction.

By failing to consider imposing sanctions against Israel in retaliation for its rejection of his peace plan, Reagan abrogated the precedent Gerald Ford established in 1975. That precedent held that the United States would grant serious consideration to imposing sanctions against Israel if a major disagreement between the two allies occurred over the peace process. This would assure that when such a disagreement occurred, it would be the American, not the Israeli, position which would prevail. However, when such a disagreement did occur in 1982 over the Reagan Plan, the result was reversed: the President quietly shelved his peace plan once Begin made it clear that it was unacceptable to Israel. In repudiation of the example Ford set in 1975, Reagan's decision to back down in the face of Israeli defiance essentially gave the Jewish state veto power over any peace plan a future President might introduce—a precedent which exists to this day. Accordingly, it is not surprising that no President since Reagan has ever proposed a peace plan for the Middle East which did not have prior Israeli approval. Far from signaling an American determination to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, Reagan's decision to kill his peace plan in order to appease Israel represented the final turn in his decision to pursue a staunch pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, which his three successors thus far have dutifully followed.

In order to salvage his peace plan, one would have expected Reagan to punish Israel for its unconditional rejection of his proposal. However, the opposite was the case: Reagan rewarded Israel for its contemptuous dismissal of his peace plan by approving a substantial increase in the generous levels of foreign aid the United States has routinely provided to the Jewish state since the end of the Yom Kippur War. By contrast, Reagan continued the official American policy of refusing to deal with the PLO. Indeed, Reagan made every effort to exclude the PLO from the peace process, despite the fact that the organization had implicitly recognized the right of Israel to exist when the group joined the Arab nations in introducing the Fez Plan in 1982.

However, the PLO's public commitment to a negotiated settlement of the Arab—Israeli conflict fell upon deaf ears at the White House. From 1982 to 1988, the Reagan Administration persisted in its effort to have Jordan agree to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. This would enable both the United States and Israel to avoid having to deal with the PLO in those talks. However, Reagan's effort to exercise the Jordanian option in excluding the PLO from the peace process was dealt a fatal blow on 31 July 1988 when King Hussein announced that Jordan was severing all administrative and legal ties to the West Bank. Hussein's action left the PLO as the only party which could represent the Palestinian residents of the West Bank in peace talks with Israel. It was only when faced with this realization that the Reagan Administration recognized that it had no option but to involve the PLO in the peace process, resulting in Shultz's reluctant decision to open a formal dialogue with the organization.

However, the formal dialogue the Reagan Administration opened with the PLO in 1988 could have been done six years earlier, had the White House not squandered important time in a futile effort to exclude the PLO from the peace process through its meaningless efforts to enlist Jordan in representing the Palestinians at the negotiating table with Israel. Only days after Reagan introduced his peace plan on 1 September 1982, the PLO formally committed itself to a negotiated solution to the Arab—Israeli conflict when the organization joined the Arab nations in unveiling the Fez Plan, which granted implicit Arab recognition of the right of Israel to exist. All that was needed was for the Reagan Administration to persuade the PLO to make its implicit recognition of Israel explicit. This could have been done in 1982 as easily as it eventually was six years later. The Reagan Administration's six-year effort to exclude the PLO from the peace process represented a tremendous waste of time, which could have been invested in advancing

the peace process. By 1988, the administration was forced into the realization that the PLO's participation was crucial to the success of the peace process, and to his credit Shultz undertook a successful initiative to open a formal American dialogue with the PLO. However, the Shultz initiative came too late in the Reagan Administration's tenure in office for the Secretary of State to capitalize on the normalization of Palestinian—American relations in order to advance the peace process.

Moreover, even if the Reagan Administration had succeeded in opening a formal dialogue with the PLO in 1982, which it could have done, this in itself would not have been sufficient to advance the peace process. The administration needed to persuade Israel to moderate its hard-line position toward the peace process and declare its willingness to make the political and territorial concessions required for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. However, the administration was unwilling to exert any pressure on Israel to do so. Accordingly, no basis existed for advancing the peace process, even if the administration had succeeded in opening a dialogue with the PLO prior to 1988, as a result of Reagan's refusal to handle Israel with anything other than kid gloves.

By refusing to exert any pressure on Israel to accept his peace plan, Reagan effectively prevented his proposal from serving as the basis for the achievement of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Why did Reagan go to such extreme lengths to continue his support for Israel, despite the fact the President's persistent favoritism toward the Jewish state assured the death of his own peace plan? Why did Reagan demonstrate such hostility and contempt for the PLO, despite the fact that the organization had declared its willingness to recognize the right of Israel to exist by joining with the Arab nations in presenting the Fez Plan? The answer to those two questions lies in the extraordinary influence the pro-Israel lobby exerted over American policy in the Middle East. Reagan knew that any effort to either impose sanctions on Israel for its outright rejection of his peace plan, or to authorize his administration to open a formal dialogue with the PLO prior to the very end of his presidency, would have embroiled him in a politically bruising battle with the pro-Israel lobby. The AW ACS debate served as a vivid reminder to Reagan of what would have come had he once again deviated from the pursuit of an almost total and absolute pro-Israel policy in the Middle East.

The pro-Israel lobby stood ready to mobilize its many allies in Congress to thwart any effort Reagan may have made to make continued aid to Israel conditional upon its willingness to moderate its stance against his peace plan. While Reagan had the constitutional power as President to authorize the opening of a formal American dialogue with the PLO, such action would have poisoned his relationship with Israel's many allies in Congress, imperiling the ability of the President and lawmakers to cooperate on the implementation of elements of his foreign and domestic policy agenda where disagreement between the two branches of government existed. A confrontation with the pro-Israel lobby over American policy in the Middle East was sure to inflict enormous damage upon the Reagan presidency. Indeed, Israel's primary interest was in retaining control of at least major portions of the occupied Arab territories and avoiding any dealings with the PLO. Any effort by Reagan to pressure Israel into reversing its stance against withdrawing from those territories and dealing with the PLO was sure to provoke a political firestorm which would dwarf the AW ACS debate and inflict far more damage upon the Reagan presidency than his disagreement with the pro-Israel lobby over the AW ACS sale ever caused. Given his need to avoid a political confrontation with Israel, Reagan could not contemplate imposing any sanctions on the Jewish state, despite Tel Aviv's rejection of the President's peace plan.

Reagan's strong friendship with Israel and open contempt for the PLO led the President to pursue a seemingly contradictory policy in the Middle East: approving the provision of generous levels of aid to Israel despite its hostile rejection of his peace plan, while refusing to deal with the PLO until the very end of his presidency even though the organization had implicitly recognized the right of Israel to exist by joining with the other Arab nations in presenting the Fez Plan. While Reagan's policy in the Middle East made sense insofar as it reflected the President's differing feelings toward Israel and the PLO, it made no sense as a means to advance the peace process. The cause of peace required that Reagan both pressure Israel to accept his peace plan and persuade the PLO to make its implicit recognition of the Jewish state explicit in order to involve the organization in the peace process as the only credible party which could represent the Palestinians at the negotiating table with Israel.

However, Reagan failed to make any headway in bringing Israel and the PLO to the negotiating table until the very end of his presidency, when Shultz succeeded in persuading the PLO to accept the conditions required for the United States to open a dialogue with the organization. However, throughout his presidency Reagan failed to take any action to moderate Israel's hard-line stance toward the peace process. Accordingly, while the PLO's explicit recognition of the right of Israel to exist in 1988 should have represented an important breakthrough in the peace process, it did not because the Jewish state persisted in its refusal to make the territorial and political concessions required for achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. By allowing Israel to continue to derisively dismiss his peace plan, Reagan effectively destroyed his proposal and any prospect for achieving peace during his presidency.

It is impossible to conceive of how a just and lasting peace in the Middle East can be achieved without an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is the demand that the Arab nations and the PLO made when they presented the Fez Plan in 1982, and the Arab world has never retreated from that demand. The Reagan Plan did not go this far in its demand for Israeli territorial concessions while continuing to deny the right of the Palestinians to establish an independent state. Nevertheless, the Reagan Plan came just one step short of the minimum conditions required for achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East: demanding an Israeli withdrawal from unspecified, though still substantial, portions of the occupied Arab territories and calling for the establishment of a self-governing Palestinian authority on the West Bank and Gaza Strip which would be associated with Jordan.

The Reagan Plan certainly served as a reasonable basis for pursuing peace talks between Israel and its Arab neighbors, even if the proposal did not go far enough in recognizing the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination. And yet Israel could not even bring itself to accept the modest proposals Reagan had outlined in his peace plan, making it clear that the Jewish state would under no circumstances make the political and territorial concessions necessary for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The peace process went nowhere during the Reagan Administration both because of Israel's obstinate refusal to make meaningful political and territorial concessions to its Arab neighbors and because of Reagan's unwillingness to prod the Jewish state to adopt a more moderate and reasonable position. Reagan's weak-kneed approach to dealing with Israel, based upon his fear of the awesome political power its Washington lobby wielded on Capitol Hill, resulted in the death of his own peace plan as well as all prospects for advancing the peace process, much less achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

## Chapter 3

# The Reagan Administration's Hostility Toward the PLO and Yasser Arafat

The Reagan Administration tried hard [in] at least implicitly supporting Israel's attempts to destroy the PLO, attempting to shut the PLO out of peace negotiations, and in general denying the relevance and existence of Palestinian national ism.<sup>1</sup>

—Kathleen Christison, author

The single, central, overriding obstacle to the Reagan Administration's efforts to revive the stalled Middle East peace process was the White House's inability to deal with the PLO. At their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974, and subsequent conference in Fez in 1982, the Arab heads of state had affirmed that the PLO constituted the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. However, Israel refused to have anything to do with the PLO, branding it as a terrorist organization. The Reagan Administration essentially adopted the Israeli position on the PLO. Despite official American policy, which opened the door to a formal dialogue between the United States and the PLO subject to certain conditions, the administration preferred to avoid dealing with the organization.

Indeed, despite repeated declarations by the PLO that it was ready to meet the American conditions required for entering into a formal dialogue with the United States, the Reagan Administration refused to take advantage of the opportunity. Rather, the administration was determined to avoid such contacts, even if the PLO met all three conditions the United States laid down as the requirement for Washington to open a formal dialogue with the organization, which included its recognition of the right of Israel to exist, acceptance of Resolutions 242 and 338, and renunciation of the use of terrorism. Only in the closing weeks of the Reagan presidency did the administration finally relent and agree to open such a dialogue with the PLO, which came after Chairman Yasser Arafat issued a statement meeting those conditions, as we saw in the previous chapter.

However, the formal dialogue opened by the Reagan Administration in 1988 could have been initiated six years earlier, had the White House been prepared to deal with the PLO following the introduction of the Reagan Plan. The administration squandered six years in a fruitless effort to enlist Jordan as the representative of the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel, thereby excluding the PLO from the peace process. This strategy ended in complete failure on 31 July 1988 when King Hussein announced that Jordan was severing all administrative and legal ties to the West Bank, thereby leaving the administration no alternative but to open a formal dialogue with the PLO — but by then it was too late in the Reagan presidency for the White House to use its newly developed relationship with the organization to advance the peace process. Reagan's contempt for the PLO represents the main reason why he proved so ineffective as a facilitator of peace in the Middle East. The PLO has a central role to play in the peace process; without the organization's direct involvement in the peace process no peace in the Middle East is possible — a painful lesson the Reagan Administration took eight years to learn.



## **The Reagan Administration Condemns the PLO as a Terrorist Organization**

During the 1980 presidential campaign, both Reagan and his running mate, George Bush, made it clear that, if elected, they would adopt a policy of unbridled hostility toward the PLO based upon their view that it represented a terrorist organization. Addressing the annual convention of B'nai B'rith International, a major Jewish organization with 500,000 American members, on 3 September 1980, Reagan announced that, if elected, he would make it official American policy to consider the PLO a terrorist organization: 'President Carter refuses to brand the PLO as a terrorist organization. I have no hesitation in doing so. We live in a world in which any band of thugs clever enough to get the word liberation into its name can thereupon murder school children, and have its deeds considered glamorous and glorious.'<sup>2</sup>

Reagan rejected the decision of the Arab heads of state at their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974 to declare the PLO to be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Rather, Reagan argued that the PLO could not legitimately claim to represent the Palestinians as long as the organization remained committed to the destruction of Israel: 'The PLO is said to represent the Palestinian refugees. It represents no one but the leaders who established it as a means of organizing aggression against Israel.'

During his 1980 address at the B'nai B'rith International convention Reagan made it clear that his administration would have nothing to do with terrorist organizations like the PLO: 'Terrorists are not guerrillas, or freedom fighters, or anything else. If others wish to deal with them, establish diplomatic relations with them, let it be on their heads. And let them be willing to pay the price of appeasement.' In remarks delivered on 19 October 1980, Bush offered even harsher words against the PLO than Reagan had: 'The PLO — let there be no doubt about this — is nothing more or less than an international Ku Klux Klan, pledged to hatred, violence, and the destruction of the values and free institutions we hold dear.'<sup>3</sup>

Pursuant to the remarks Reagan and Bush had made during the 1980 presidential campaign, the President made it official American policy to regard the PLO as a terrorist organization once he entered the White House. This policy was most graphically affirmed on 8 April 1986 when Attorney General Edwin Meese III declared: 'We know now that various elements of the PLO and its allies and affiliates are in the thick of international terror. Yasser Arafat must be ultimately held responsible for their actions.' Meese came close to advocating that the United States seek either the imprisonment, or even the assassination, of Arafat and other high-ranking officials of the PLO: 'You don't make real progress until you close in on the kingpins.'<sup>4</sup>

In conformity with the Reagan Administration's official policy, which branded the PLO as a terrorist organization, the White House did everything possible to avoid dealing with the group. The administration's determination in this regard was bolstered by the PLO's terrorist campaign against Israel during the 1980s. To this end, on 1 October 1984 Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam declared unequivocally that the administration would have nothing to do with the PLO: 'Anyone who thinks that we can stop suicide bombings by cozying up to the PLO, or by walking away from Israel, is dead wrong.' The remarks of Reagan and Dam concerning the administration's unwillingness to deal with terrorist organizations appeared to close the door to any prospect that the United States might open a formal dialogue with the PLO. However, throughout his presidency, Reagan reaffirmed his commitment to authorize his administration to open a formal dialogue with the PLO once it met the three conditions the United States had laid

down as a requirement for its initiation of formal contacts with the organization, as we saw in the previous chapter.

In addition to regarding the PLO as a terrorist organization, the Reagan Administration declared the group to be a threat to the national security of the United States based upon its support for Communist and leftist military forces which sought to gain control of Central America during the 1980s. On 24 June 1984 Secretary of State George Shultz declared that 'The terrorists who assault Israel are also enemies of the United States. When Libya and the PLO provide arms and training to the Communists in Central America, they are aiding Soviet efforts to undermine our security in that vital region.'<sup>5</sup>

Arafat reacted bitterly to the Reagan Administration's strident denunciations of the PLO. In a series of statements made from 18 November 1984 to 31 December 1985, Arafat called the United States 'a principal adversary' of the PLO. Arafat made it clear that the PLO would align itself with the Soviet Union in the Cold War rivalry between the two superpowers, calling Moscow 'our friend and ally.' Responding to American charges that the PLO was a terrorist organization, Arafat argued that the United States was the real source of international terrorism: 'The United States is conducting terrorism, as it has done in Guatemala, Vietnam, Latin America, Central America, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and by implanting Israel in Palestine as a terrorist entity.' Arafat charged that 'Israel is the major hand of U.S. terrorism in the Middle East' and 'the imperialist center... a bridgehead for the United States' in the region. In Arafat's view, 'The U.S. is the center of this aggression' against the Arab world.

Arafat declared that American policy in the Middle East 'is not [only based upon] partiality for Israel, but rather a direct confrontation between us and the United States.

... As for me, my objective is to defy the Americans and resist their policies. The Arab nation and its masses must deal with the U.S. by boycotting it politically.' Arafat proclaimed that the United States and the PLO stood on the verge of all-out war: 'We are on the threshold of a fierce battle — not an Israeli-Palestinian battle, but a Palestinian-U.S. battle.' Arafat blamed Reagan for the deterioration in what relations existed between the United States and the PLO: 'I personally believe Reagan is a simple robot and a parrot [who] lacks reason.'<sup>6</sup> Given the bitter war of words exchanged between the Reagan Administration and Arafat, which descended into an exchange of personal insults between the White House and the Chairman of the PLO, no basis existed for the establishment of relations between the United States and the organization until the very end of the Reagan presidency, when the White House was forced by circumstances to open a dialogue with the group.

## **The Public Adopts a Hard Line Against International Terrorism and the PLO**

The Reagan Administration's refusal to deal with the PLO until the very end of its tenure in office is consistent with the hard-line stance Americans took against the wave of terrorism which beset the international community during the 1980s. Since the PLO represented a major source of international terrorism, the public generally regarded the organization with contempt and opposed any American dealings with the group. Accordingly, the Reagan Administration's position against the PLO was fully consistent with the intense hostility Americans had for the

group.

One of the most infamous acts of international terrorism occurred on 7 October 1985, when four Palestinian gunmen hijacked the Italian cruise liner *Achille Lauro* off the Egyptian coast as the ship was bound for Israel. The terrorists were members of the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) led by Abu Abbas, a member of the Executive Committee of the PLO. The terrorists agreed to surrender to Egyptian authorities two days later, but only after they murdered Leon Klinghoffer, a crippled American passenger. As part of the surrender agreement, Egypt agreed to fly the terrorists to Tunis, where the PLO was headquartered. However, on 10 October Reagan ordered American F-14 fighters to intercept the Egyptian plane carrying the terrorists bound for Tunis and forced the jet to land in Sicily, where they were apprehended by Italian authorities. An October 1985 Harris Survey found that 80 percent of the public approved Reagan's decision to order American fighters to divert the Egyptian plane carrying the four terrorists to Italy.

In addition to the four terrorists, the Egyptian plane carried Abbas. Identifying Abbas as the mastermind behind the hijacking, Reagan demanded that Italy arrest and extradite the PLF leader. However, Italy rejected Reagan's demand, arguing that Abbas remained under the jurisdiction of Egypt, and allowed him to leave Italy.

Americans generally sided with Reagan in his confrontation with Italy over the fate of Abu Abbas. A poll taken jointly by the *Washington Post* and ABC News during 24-28 October 1985 found that 'By a margin of almost three to one, Americans think that it is more important to take action against terrorists, such as those who hijacked the *Achille Lauro*, than to maintain good relations with countries like Italy.'

In addition to the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro*, one of the most infamous acts of international terrorism occurred on 14 June 1985 when two Lebanese Shiite gunmen hijacked TWA Flight 847, which took off from Athens bound for Rome, and forced the airliner to land in Beirut, and then Algiers, before the flight was finally brought to an end in the war-torn capital of Lebanon. Most of the passengers of the hijacked airliner were released during the plane's odyssey between Algiers and Beirut. However, when the airliner made its final stop in Beirut, 39 American passengers were taken hostage by Shiite militias.

The hijackers demanded that Israel free over 700 Shiite prisoners captured during its occupation of Lebanon, which followed the Jewish state's invasion of its northern Arab neighbor in 1982, as a condition for the release of the 39 American hostages held in Beirut. However, on 30 June 1985 Iran, which was allied with the Shiite militias holding the hostages, succeeded in arranging for their release. Israel made it clear that it would consider releasing all 700 Lebanese Shiite prisoners whose freedom was demanded by the hijackers, but only if the United States requested the Jewish state to do so. However, the Reagan Administration did not make such a request, refusing to give in to the demands of the hijackers.<sup>7</sup>

Americans generally supported the administration's refusal to have anything to do with the hijackers. An NBC News poll taken on 8 July 1985 found that 'by a margin of two to one, respondents polled on the TWA hijacking opposed negotiating with the Shiite terrorists who hijacked the plane. A majority felt that the U.S. should refuse to give in to terrorist demands.'

Since the public generally regarded the PLO as a terrorist organization, Americans were intensely hostile toward the group. A 1981 Harris Survey found that 'by a margin of two to one, Americans believe the U.S. should neither officially recognize the PLO, nor agree to have Israel sit down to negotiate with the PLO.'<sup>8</sup>

Following the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro*, the Harris Survey conducted a poll of 1,252 adults during 23-27 October 1985 regarding their opinion of the PLO and other Middle East

issues in order to determine what effect the terrorist incident had on public attitudes concerning the region. In a news release issued on 14 November 1985, Lou Harris, head of the Harris Survey, summarized the findings of his poll. Harris concluded:

As a result of the recent hijacking of the Italian cruise ship in the Mediterranean, hostility toward the Palestine Liberation Organization has risen sharply. As a consequence of the four PLO members being caught on the Egyptian plane, and also being indicted for the murder of an American, the PLO is in effect viewed as an outlaw force of which the American people want no part.<sup>9</sup>

The Harris Survey found that 86 percent of those polled had a negative opinion of the PLO, as opposed to only 7 percent who viewed the organization favorably. American public hostility toward the PLO was especially strong when compared with popular attitudes toward moderate Arab nations. The Harris Survey pollsters asked their respondents the following question: 'Now, I'm going to read the names of some countries or groups. For each, tell me if you feel that the country is a close ally of the U.S., is friendly but not a close ally, is not friendly but not an enemy, or is unfriendly and an enemy of the U.S.' Fifty-two percent of those polled regarded the PLO as an 'enemy' of the United States; 34 percent viewed the organization as 'not friendly'; 6 percent saw the group as 'friendly'; 1 percent considered it a 'close ally'; and 7 percent were not sure. The only nations regarded as enemies of the United States by a similar majority of Americans as the PLO was in 1985 were Iran during the hostage crisis of 1979-1981 and the Soviet Union. The Harris Survey found that American public hostility toward the PLO had risen sharply since May 1983, when the organization last took a poll on popular opinion toward the PLO. In that poll 38 percent of those surveyed viewed the PLO as an 'enemy' of the United States; 37 percent perceived the organization as 'not friendly'; 9 percent saw the group as 'friendly'; 2 percent considered it a 'close ally'; and 14 percent were not sure.

The American public's negative opinion toward the PLO stood in sharp contrast to their generally favorable view of such moderate Arab nations as Egypt and Jordan. The Harris Survey found that 50 percent of those polled considered Egypt to be 'friendly'; 13 percent saw the Arab nation as a 'close ally' of the United States; 24 percent perceived it as 'not friendly'; 3 percent regarded it as an 'enemy' of the United States; and 10 percent were not sure. Similarly, 41 percent of those surveyed considered Jordan to be 'friendly'; 7 percent saw the Arab nation as a 'close ally'; 28 percent viewed it as 'not friendly'; 5 percent regarded it as an 'enemy' of the United States; and 19 percent were not sure.

The increase in American hostility toward the PLO in October 1985 was a direct result of the *Achille Lauro* hijacking. The Harris Survey asked its respondents the following question: 'The takeover of the ship and the murder of the crippled American passenger proved that the PLO is no better than a band of terrorists, unfit for the U.S. to have anything to do with.' Seventy-three percent of those surveyed agreed with this statement; only 24 percent disagreed, and 3 percent were not sure.

Because they viewed the PLO as a terrorist organization, Americans generally regarded the group as an obstacle to peace in the Middle East. Harris Survey pollsters asked their respondents the following question: 'I'm going to read off some countries and groups, and for each one, I'd like you to tell me if you feel it has leadership which is reasonable, and will really work for a just peace settlement in the Middle East, or if it has unreasonable leadership that will probably make it impossible to work out a peace settlement.' Eighty-two percent of those surveyed considered the PLO to be unreasonable; only 10 percent found it reasonable. By contrast, 72 percent viewed Israel as reasonable, and only 22 percent unreasonable; 69 percent saw Egypt as reasonable, and only 22 percent unreasonable; 55 percent perceived Jordan as reasonable, and only 28 percent

unreasonable; and 51 percent regarded Saudi Arabia as reasonable, and 37 percent unreasonable. Apart from the PLO, among the principal parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict, only Syria was generally viewed by the American public as an obstacle to peace. Fifty-one percent of those surveyed considered Syria unreasonable, and 30 percent reasonable.

Consistent with the American public's view that the PLO represented an obstacle to peace, the Harris Survey found that 54 percent of those polled favored the organization's exclusion from any negotiations to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East; 41 percent supported the PLO's participation in those negotiations, and 5 percent were not sure. Americans generally favored Palestinian representation in negotiations to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the region, as long as it did not include the PLO. The Harris Survey found that 64 percent of those polled supported the participation of 'Palestinian leaders not affiliated with the PLO' in those negotiations; only 29 percent opposed such an arrangement, and 7 percent were not sure. The public also generally believed that Palestinians not affiliated with the PLO should be joined by Jordan in peace talks with Israel. The Harris Survey reported that 72 percent of those polled favored Jordan's participation in those talks; only 20 percent opposed such an arrangement, and 8 percent were not sure.

The American public's negative opinion toward the PLO resulted in strong popular support for Israel in its conflict with the Arab world. The Harris Survey asked its respondents the following question: 'In the dispute between Israel and the Arabs, which side do you sympathize more with — Israel or the Arabs?' Sixty-four percent of those surveyed favored Israel; 14 percent supported the Arabs; 10 percent preferred neither side; 3 percent backed both sides; and 9 percent were not sure. American public support for Israel had risen significantly since July 1980 when the Harris Survey last conducted a poll on popular opinion regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. In that poll, 52 percent of those surveyed favored Israel; 12 percent supported the Arabs; 17 percent preferred neither side; 9 percent backed both sides; and 10 percent were not sure.<sup>10</sup>

The Harris Survey essentially found that American policy in the Middle East almost perfectly reflected public opinion. Americans were generally hostile toward the PLO, regarding it as a terrorist organization. Accordingly, Americans tended to favor exclusion of the PLO from the peace process. Americans generally believed that Jordan, in conjunction with Palestinians not affiliated with the PLO, should represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. Americans tended to favor Israel in its dispute with the Arab world. Reagan's policy in the Middle East was fully consistent with public opinion — in its strong and unswerving support for Israel, and in its efforts to exclude the PLO from the peace process and elicit Jordan to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with the Jewish state.

Because Reagan's policy in the Middle East so perfectly reflected American public opinion, one would be tempted to conclude that the President's diplomacy in the region was governed by popular support for Israel and hostility toward the PLO. However, the findings of the Harris Survey do not support such a conclusion. Despite the intense hostility Americans generally had toward the PLO, a substantial minority — 41 percent of those polled — still favored the organization's participation in the peace process. The Harris Survey clearly revealed that a substantial share of Americans fully recognized that the PLO remained the only entity which could legitimately represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. Accordingly, many Americans were willing to place their intense hostility toward the PLO aside and come to the pragmatic realization that no peace in the Middle East was possible without the direct participation of the organization in negotiations to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

However, unlike the pragmatic minority of Americans, the Reagan Administration remained

determined to exclude the PLO from the peace process, despite the fact that such action was sure to jeopardize the success of the White House's efforts to revive the stalled peace process. The administration's hostility toward the PLO went well beyond that of the American public — insofar as a pragmatic minority was willing to support the organization's participation. Why was the administration willing to defy the sentiments of that substantial and pragmatic minority of Americans who fully recognized that no peace in the Middle East was possible without the direct participation of the PLO in negotiations to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict? The answer is that Reagan's policy in the Middle East, while heavily influenced by American public opinion, was even more decisively governed by Israel and its Washington lobby.

## **The 11 February Agreement Paves the Way for the Initiation of a Formal Dialogue Between the United States and the PLO**

As we saw in the previous chapter, on 11 February 1985 Jordan and the PLO reached agreement on a five-point plan which would provide for Israel and its Arab neighbors to enter into negotiations to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East within the framework of an international conference to be attended by all parties to the Arab—Israeli conflict and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. The Palestinians would be represented by a joint Jordanian—Palestinian delegation, comprised of an equal number of representatives from the Jordanian government and the PLO.

Since the PLO was to have participated in the international peace conference which would have been convened pursuant to the 11 February agreement, the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative could not get off the ground until the United States — the mediator in the Arab—Israeli dispute — opened a formal dialogue with the organization. Accordingly, Jordan and the PLO submitted a four-step plan to the United States which would culminate in the opening of such a dialogue. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, the plan broke down as a result of the inability of the United States and the PLO to reach agreement on how the two parties were to lay the groundwork for the opening of such a dialogue.

The PLO insisted that the United States recognize the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination as a precondition for the organization's willingness to accept the terms Washington had laid down as the basis for the opening of a formal dialogue between the two parties. The Reagan Administration rejected this demand from the PLO, since recognition of the right of Palestinians to exercise self-determination would be equivalent to American support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. In his nationwide television address on the Middle East, Reagan had made it official American policy to oppose Palestinian statehood.

Why did the Reagan Administration reject the PLO's demand that the United States recognize the right of Palestinians to exercise self-determination as a condition for the initiation of a formal dialogue between the two parties? As we saw in the previous chapter, the administration wanted to avoid dealing with the PLO and recognized that American support for Palestinian statehood would automatically bring the organization into the peace process — a result the White House wanted to avoid. Instead, the administration was hoping to entice Jordan to agree to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. While this policy may have made sense in 1982, when an opportunity existed to bring Jordan into the peace process, it did not in 1985, when Amman and the PLO jointly launched their peace initiative. Pursuant to the 11 February agreement, Jordan



insisted that the PLO must participate in peace talks with Israel — a demand that made it imperative that the United States and the organization enter into a formal dialogue if there was any hope for breathing new life into the moribund peace process.

To create the momentum for peace, the United States needed to open a formal dialogue with the PLO; and its demand that Washington recognize the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination was eminently reasonable. In 2002 President George W. Bush made it official American policy to support Palestinian statehood, and no change of political conditions in the Middle East has occurred since 1985, which would have prevented Reagan from doing what his third successor ultimately did seventeen years later. On the surface, the Reagan Administration's rejection of the PLO's demand for official American recognition of Palestinian statehood in 1985 as a condition for the opening of a formal dialogue between the two parties makes no sense. This is all the more true since the opening of such a dialogue was an absolutely necessary precondition for reviving the peace process.

Why then did the Reagan Administration reject the PLO's eminently reasonable and necessary demand that the United States formally recognize Palestinian statehood as a precondition for ultimately reviving the stalled peace process? Why was the administration so adamant in its insistence that the PLO be excluded from the peace process despite the fact that the organization had declared its willingness to seek a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict? Surely the intense American public hostility to the PLO played a role in the administration's own aversion to having any dealings with the organization.

## **Israel and Its Washington Lobby Tighten Their Grip Over Policy in the Middle East**

However, as we have seen, many Americans took a pragmatic view of the PLO. As much as they disliked the organization, they fully recognized that no peace in the Middle East was possible without the group's direct participation in negotiations to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Why did Reagan fail to adopt this same view? The answer remains the close links the Reagan Administration forged with Israel and its Washington lobby in 1985. Those links resulted in a tightening grip over American policy in the Middle East by Israel and its Washington lobby.

As Reagan began his second term, Israel and its Washington lobby emerged as dominant actors in the formulation and execution of American policy in the Middle East. The central goal Israel and its Washington lobby wished to achieve in 1985 was assurance that the PLO would continue to be ostracized and excluded from the peace process, and that there would be no seat at the peace table for the organization. Reduced to being a servant of Israel and its Washington lobby, the Reagan Administration went along with organized American Jewry's demand that the PLO continue to be marginalized and shunted as a political actor which would continue to have no role in the peace process. This occurred despite the fact that, pursuant to the 11 February agreement, the PLO had reaffirmed its willingness, first declared in its decision to join the Arab nations in presenting the Fez Plan, to recognize the right of Israel to exist.

However, Israel was determined to avoid any dealings with the PLO, even if the organization recognized the right of the Jewish state to exist. As Israeli journalist Ammon Kapeliouk put it in an article in the 5 January 1984 edition of the *International Herald Tribune*: 'The Likud government was mortified by the existence of Arab moderation. More than once, Begin has



declared that even if the PLO accepted the right of Israel to exist and accepted [Resolution] 242, Israel would not negotiate with the PLO. More than once Shamir declared that all Israel wants is the PLO to disappear from the face of the earth.<sup>11</sup>

With Israel refusing to even consider dealing with the PLO, the Reagan Administration found it easy to accede to the demands of the Jewish state and its Washington lobby that the United States join Tel Aviv in continuing to exclude the organization from the peace process. Indeed, the administration was unwilling to even consider pressuring Israel to moderate its hard-line stance against making the political and territorial concessions required for peace, as we saw in the previous chapter. The most important of those concessions was Israel's recognition of the right of the Palestinians to establish an independent state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital. With such Israeli recognition out of the question, there remained no prospect for reviving the stalled peace process in 1985, even if the PLO had entered the peace process.

With the PLO certain to make political demands which were unacceptable to Israel and the Reagan Administration unwilling to pressure the Jewish state to moderate its stance toward the peace process, the White House decided that the most politically feasible means to address the thorny issues involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict was to accede to the demands of the Jewish state and its Washington lobby that official American policy prohibiting formal contacts with the PLO remain intact. And the administration was willing to take this policy one step further by refusing to deal with the PLO even if the organization met the three conditions the United States had laid down as a requirement for the opening of a formal dialogue between the two parties. Indeed, when the PLO declared its willingness to meet those conditions in 1985 the administration used its refusal to recognize Palestinian statehood as a stumbling block to prevent the opening of such a dialogue and maintain the prohibition against formal American contacts with the organization. This is exactly what Israel and its Washington lobby were demanding, and they had no problem persuading the administration to embrace the Jewish state's insistence that Washington continue its policy of avoiding all formal contacts with the PLO.

Israel and its Washington lobby fully recognized that the 11 February agreement opened the door to the PLO's direct participation in the peace process. Through the agreement, the PLO made clear its commitment to achieve a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This represented the most graphic statement thus far of the PLO's willingness to meet the three conditions the United States had laid down as a requirement for the opening of a formal dialogue between the two parties. A distinct possibility existed that the Reagan Administration might seize upon the opportunity presented by this display of PLO moderation in order to open such a dialogue once the group made an unequivocal statement accepting those conditions. Having essentially met those conditions by declaring its willingness to seek a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there is no doubt that the PLO would have been prepared to issue a such a statement if this action had resulted in the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and that organization. Such a statement, after all, was issued by Arafat on 14 December 1988 after the Reagan Administration made clear its commitment to open such a dialogue once the PLO met those conditions.

However, Israel and its Washington lobby were determined that the PLO's commitment to a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict must not lead to the opening of a formal American dialogue with the organization and its direct participation in the peace process. To achieve this result, Israel and its Washington lobby launched a public relations campaign against the PLO. This campaign featured the dissemination of a stream of position papers which were

sent to the White House, and undoubtedly to every member of Congress as well, designed to persuade the Reagan Administration to maintain its policy of avoiding any dealings with the organization.

Israel and its Washington lobby undertook their public relations campaign against the PLO in the months following the announcement of the 11 February agreement. This represented a critical period in American diplomatic efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East as Jordan and the PLO presented the United States with their four-step plan, which would have led to the opening of a formal dialogue between Washington and the organization. Israel and its Washington lobby launched their public relations campaign against the PLO in a successful effort to sabotage the opening of such a dialogue.

The Reagan Administration responded to the announcement of the 11 February agreement by agreeing to send Robert Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, to Jordan to meet with members of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation which would represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel pursuant to the principles of the accord.<sup>12</sup> This represented the first step in the four-step plan Jordan and the PLO had presented to the Reagan Administration. On 12 July 1985, Jordan submitted to the United States the names of seven Palestinians to serve in the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Jordan requested that the United States select from that group the four members who would be designated to serve on the delegation.<sup>13</sup> Following American selection of the required four names, on 9 August Reagan authorized Murphy to meet members of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation in Amman. However, following Murphy's arrival, Reagan ordered that the meeting be cancelled at the last minute.<sup>14</sup> Reagan's decision aborted the four-step plan which would have ultimately led to the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the PLO, thereby derailing the momentum for peace which Jordan and the organization had launched through the 11 February agreement.

Why did Reagan decide to cancel the scheduled meeting between Murphy and members of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, which provided the most promising avenue for peace since the President unveiled his own peace plan for the Middle East in 1982? The answer is that Israel opposed the meeting and was determined to scuttle the plan. As a member of the American diplomatic team involved in the planning for the meeting revealed in an interview with A1 Madfai, 'What Jordan could see was a U.S. which could not, or would not, move without Israel's consent. Israel objected to the whole process.'<sup>15</sup>

If Murphy had been allowed to proceed with the meeting, it would likely have resulted in the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the PLO. The fact that the administration would even contemplate entering into such a dialogue represented a source of alarm for Israel and its Washington lobby. Reagan only canceled the meeting at the final moment because he feared the political repercussions which would follow his decision to allow such a meeting to proceed. Such a meeting was sure to have infuriated Israel and its many allies in Congress.

## **Israel and Its Washington Lobby Launch a Public Relations Campaign in Washington Against the PLO**

The fact that the Reagan Administration would even grant initial approval to a meeting between a high-ranking American diplomat, Richard Murphy, and members of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation which was designed to lay the groundwork for the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the PLO, provided clear evidence that the White House was ultimately committed to lifting the prohibition against official American contacts with the organization until it met the conditions Washington had laid down as a requirement for American recognition of the group. To assure that the Reagan Administration would continue the official American policy of avoiding any dealings with the PLO, Israel and its Washington lobby launched their public relations campaign just days before Reagan authorized Murphy to meet with members of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. The campaign came in the form of a stream of position papers designed to provide extensive evidence that the PLO was a terrorist organization which the United States must have nothing to do with.

### ***AIPAC Opens the Pro-Israel Lobby's Public Relations Campaign Against the PLO***

The pro-Israel lobby opened its public relations campaign in Washington against the PLO on 6 August 1985. Launching the campaign was AIPAC. In a direct effort to persuade the Reagan Administration not to ease the prohibition against formal American contacts with the PLO, AIPAC issued a one-page memorandum entitled 'The PLO Is Not Ready to Make Peace with Israel.' The AIPAC memorandum attempted to refute Jordanian claims that the PLO was prepared to seek a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Is the PLO ready to make peace with Israel?

According to King Hussein, the Arafat-led wing of the PLO is now committed to negotiations with Israel on the basis of UN Resolution 242.

But since the convening of the Palestine National Congress [PNC] in Amman in November 1984, and the subsequent signing of the Jordan-PLO Accord on February 11, 1985, the PLO's actions and statements belie the peaceful image [of the PLO] that King Hussein is propagating.

Far from committing the PLO to a peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Arafat and his lieutenants have instead committed the PLO to four principles:

1. Rejection of UN Resolution 242.
2. Rejection of direct negotiations with Israel.
3. Rejection of all American peace proposals.
4. Promotion of terrorism against Israel.<sup>16</sup>

Attached to the AIPAC memorandum was a five-page list of statements issued by Arafat and a number of his associates, which purported to support the four charges the interest group had made against the PLO, along with a six-page list of 79 terrorist incidents in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip allegedly involving the PLO in the five months since the organization declared its willingness to seek a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict through its joint issuance with Jordan of the 11 February agreement.<sup>17</sup> AIPAC noted that

The attached record of PLO statements all occurred after the convening of the PNC [in November 1984], The attached record of PLO terrorist actions all occurred after the Jordan-PLO Accord [of 11 February 1985]. The statements were all made by members of Arafat's clique. The terrorist acts were all planned, perpetrated, or claimed by Arafat's people. They say far more about the PLO's 'peaceful' intentions than the claims made on the PLO's behalf by King Hussein.<sup>18</sup>

The AIPAC memorandum conveniently excluded repeated official declarations the PLO and Arafat had issued since 1977 expressing their commitment to seek a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and granting implicit recognition of the right of Israel to exist. Those declarations included the PLO's acceptance of the Soviet-American communique which called for a negotiated settlement of the Arab Israeli conflict on 1 October 1977; Arafat's statement issued through Representative Paul Findley of Illinois on 30 November 1978 declaring the organization's commitment to a peaceful solution to the dispute; and the PLO's acceptance of the Brezhnev Plan in April 1981, Arafat's joint issuance with the Arab heads of state of the Fez Plan in September 1982, and the 11 February agreement in which the PLO, on all three occasions, reaffirmed its longstanding commitment to seek a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>19</sup> All the statements contained in the AIPAC memorandum, which purported to show that the PLO was a terrorist organization bent upon the destruction of Israel, were unofficial utterances which did not reflect the formal policy of the organization. The policy of the PLO is determined by the official actions of the PNC, not by informal statements of Arafat and his associates, and AIPAC failed to cite a single statement issued by the PNC which supported the interest group's claim that the PLO was a terrorist organization bent upon the destruction of Israel.

AIPAC's list of numerous terrorist attacks committed by the PLO is undeniably legitimate, since the PLO claimed responsibility for all of those incidents. However, Palestinian terrorism is the inevitable consequence of Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The solution for ending such terrorism remained a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. However, such a settlement remained impossible as long as Israel and its Washington lobby remained determined to exclude the PLO from the peace process. By pursuing a public relations campaign to discredit the PLO, AIPAC was inadvertently and unwittingly fostering the very terrorism the interest group decried.

On 2 December 1985, AIPAC issued another one-page memorandum entitled 'Arafat's Personal Role in Terrorism.' The memorandum was issued following Arafat's summit meeting with President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Cairo on 7 November, in which the Chairman of the PLO publicly renounced the use of all forms of terrorism in what became known as the Cairo Declaration.<sup>20</sup> The memorandum charged that, despite the Cairo Declaration, Arafat remained a committed terrorist bent upon the destruction of Israel.

When Yasser Arafat announced in Cairo that the PLO would limit its terrorist attacks to 'the occupied Arab lands,' Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak hailed this as a renunciation of terror, and a sign that he was extending a hand for peace. But it quickly became apparent that Arafat was trying to hide his terrorist program behind empty words.

1. Egyptian officials said that the 'Cairo Declaration' meant PLO terrorism would be limited to the West Bank. But Arafat was quick to clarify, saying, 'It is not responsible to announce that we will confine our operations to the West Bank. Military operations are not excluded from Israeli territory.'...
2. And in case this declaration was interpreted that he was ready for peace, Arafat insisted, 'I don't simply want, I demand, more [commando] operations, and more resistance against the [Israeli] occupation until it leaves our land.'...

In fact, the 'Cairo Declaration' was little more than a reaffirmation of PLO terrorism against Israel. But this should come as no surprise as Arafat has clearly spelled out the PLO strategy for the destruction of Israel.

1. Arafat has repeatedly stated that terrorism is the PLO's policy of choice: 'Armed struggle will continue to be our main option for achieving all of our militant people's objectives and aspirations.'...
2. He has made clear who he regards as legitimate targets of armed struggle: 'What we face in our occupied lands are settlers totaling 3.5 million individuals.' . . . Recently he praised the 'daring' Egyptian soldier who murdered seven Israeli tourists.
3. He has made clear his rejection of negotiations: 'Our war is going to be a long and hard one. Palestine will not be regained

through peaceful solutions or through the Israeli Labor Party, as some believe, but through fighting and Palestinian blood.'...

4. And he had made clear that this armed struggle is not only aimed at Israel, but the United States also: The United States 'has become the principal adversary to us.'...

The 'Cairo Declaration' was just another attempt to put a new face on the same policy. Yasser Arafat remains the kingpin of PLO terror.<sup>21</sup>

On 4 December 1985, AIPAC issued a two-page memorandum entitled 'Arafat and Terrorism: Terrorist Acts Claimed by Arafat's Fatah Wing of the PLO Since February 11, 1985.' The document listed 95 terrorist attacks in Israel and the occupied Arab territories for which the PLO had claimed responsibility. The terrorist attacks occurred from 11 February 1985, when Jordan and the PLO announced agreement on a framework for achieving a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East, to 9 November.<sup>22</sup> The document was obviously designed to support AIPAC's claims that, despite his public commitment to seek a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Arafat remained a devoted terrorist bent upon the destruction of the Jewish state.

In April 1986 AIPAC issued an updated version of its one-page memorandum entitled 'Arafat's Personal Role in Terrorism,' which had been released four months earlier. The new memorandum was designed to respond to Meese's statement that the United States should grant serious consideration to seeking the imprisonment, or even the assassination, of Arafat.

On April 8, 1986 Attorney General Edwin Meese declared: 'We know that various elements of the PLO are in the thick of international terror. And the leader of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, must be ultimately held responsible for their actions.' Referring to the fight against terror, Meese said, 'you don't make real progress until you close in on the kingpins.'

Yasser Arafat is the kingpin of world terror. He is ultimately responsible for terrorism committed by the main wing of the PLO directed at Americans, Israelis, and other citizens.

1. According to the public record, Arafat's wing of the PLO and affiliated factions have been responsible for the murder of at least thirty-two Americans, the wounding of at least thirty-eight Americans, and the kidnapping of at least six Americans.
2. Arafat is directly linked, through his top aides, to such atrocities as the murder of United States Ambassador [to Sudan] Cleo Noel, the *Achille Lauro* piracy and the death of Leon Klinghoffer, and the terror campaign of Black September.
3. In recent months, Arafat's anti-American threats have been explicit. On November 13 he stated: 'We are on the threshold of a fierce battle — not an Israeli-Palestinian battle, but a Palestinian-U.S. battle.'...
4. In January Arafat reasserted his hostile position on the United States: The Arab strategy 'should take into consideration that... the enemy is the same, be he Israeli or the United States.'...
5. Terrorism lies at the core of Arafat's strategy. A recent report asserts thirteen of the sixty-seven major acts of international Palestinian terrorism committed in 1985 were carried out by Arafat's Fatah.
6. Arafat continues to call for the destruction of Israel through terrorism. Recently he reiterated these orders: 'I don't simply want, I demand, more (commando) operations, and more resistance against this occupation.'...
7. Arafat is not interested in making peace, but continuing terror: 'Palestine will not be regained through peaceful solutions or through the Israeli Labor Party, as some believe, but through fighting and Palestinian blood.'

Attorney General Meese is correct. Yasser Arafat continues to reaffirm his support for PLO terrorism. The kingpin of terror should be brought to justice.<sup>23</sup>

A major goal of AIPAC in pursuing its public relations campaign in Washington against the PLO was to personally discredit Arafat. Having led the PLO since 1969, Arafat represented the personification of his organization. The PLO could not be thoroughly discredited unless its leader was as well. Accordingly, by branding Arafat a 'kingpin of terror,' AIPAC hoped to make the Chairman of the PLO into such a thoroughly distasteful figure that it would be politically impossible for the Reagan Administration to deal with the organization. AIPAC's strategy worked, since the administration remained intent on avoiding the PLO like the plague.

## ***The ADL Joins AIPAC in the Pro-Israel Lobby's Public Relations Campaign Against the PLO***

In December 1985 the ADL joined AIPAC in contributing to Israel's public relations campaign in Washington against the PLO by publishing a six-page research report entitled 'PLO and Palestinian-Inspired Terrorism, 1982-1985: The Continuing Record of Violence.' The ADL research report contained nothing new: it essentially reiterated the same arguments made in the AIPAC memorandums, which charged that the PLO remained a terrorist organization bent upon the destruction of Israel.

In the past three years since the PLO was expelled from Beirut, terrorism has been 'business as usual' for the PLO, its factions, its allies, and other Palestinian terrorists around the world. Although Israel has been the main target, terrorism has been transnational....

Despite this patina of respectability, the PLO refuses to make peace with Israel, and accept Israel in the community of nations. Despite their splits and disagreements over tactics, the PLO and other Palestinian terrorists remain united by one goal that has always bound them together — the destruction of the State of Israel.<sup>24</sup>

Attached to the ADL research report was a 24-page document listing 155 terrorist attacks the PLO and other Palestinian organizations had launched against Israel and other nations since 1 September 1982, when the last members of the PLO trapped in West Beirut following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon were evacuated from the wartorn nation, until 6 October 1985, the day before the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro*.<sup>25</sup> However, many of the terrorist incidents on the ADL's list were committed by Palestinian groups with no affiliation to the PLO, especially the notorious renegade organization led by Abu Nidal.

Like AIPAC, the ADL charged that the PLO rejected a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and refused to recognize the right of the Jewish state to exist. This claim is completely false, as we saw earlier. The PLO had publicly declared its intention of seeking a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and had repeatedly expressed its willingness to recognize the right of Israel to exist since 1977. Like AIPAC, the ADL based its opposition to the PLO on the numerous terrorist attacks against Israel for which the organization had claimed responsibility during the 1980s. However, the problem of Palestinian terrorism remained rooted in Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The only way to effectively address this problem was to involve the PLO in peace talks with Israel to resolve the differences between the two sides, which the ADL opposed. It was hypocritical for the ADL to have decried the very terrorism which was an outgrowth of the pro-Israel lobby's successful efforts to exclude the PLO from the peace process.

However, the power of the ADL remained linked not to the truth of its claims against the PLO, but to the organizational strength of the interest group. The ADL remained an extremely well-organized interest group, with 30 local offices in major cities throughout the United States.<sup>26</sup> The ADL could activate their tens of thousands of members to lobby against any effort of the Reagan Administration to open a dialogue with the PLO.

Both AIPAC and the ADL had a formidable array of political resources they could have used to oppose such a dialogue — combining AIPAC's power on Capitol Hill with the ADL's grassroots lobbying capabilities. Unwilling to challenge the power of AIPAC and the ADL, the Reagan Administration decided that the most politically wise course of action was to continue its policy of avoiding any dealings with the PLO. The administration was unwilling to risk any of its political capital in engaging in a bruising battle with the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in



Congress, which would have resulted had the White House eased, let alone lifted, the prohibition against formal American contacts with the PLO.

### ***Israel Joins AIPAC and the ADL in Organized American Jewry's Public Relations Campaign Against the PLO***

Israel did not rely solely on the efforts of American Jewish organizations like AIPAC and the ADL to pursue Tel Aviv's public relations campaign in Washington against the PLO. Rather, Israel was directly involved in this campaign. In October 1985 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made its case against the PLO by publishing a 36-page document entitled 'The Threat of PLO Terrorism.' The document purported to produce evidence that the PLO was nothing more than a terrorist organization bent upon the destruction of Israel.

The Israeli Embassy in Washington distributed 'The Threat of PLO Terrorism' to the White House, almost certainly to every member of Congress, and perhaps to other Washington policymakers. Attached to the document was a 'Dear Friend' letter signed by Minister of Information Asher Naim and dated 4 November 1985. In his letter, Naim claimed that the enclosed document revealed the PLO's continued involvement in terrorism, which belied its leadership's public declarations that the organization was committed to a peaceful resolution of its conflict with Israel.

The attached White Paper — 'The Threat of PLO Terrorism' — is a unique and unprecedented document.

It is a comprehensive and up to date survey of the PLO's goals, organizational structure, leadership, and operations. Based upon invaluable evidence and testimony garnered from recently captured terrorists, it reveals the persistent pattern of PLO terrorism since its 1982 expulsion from Beirut until the *Achille Lauro* hijacking.

The study exposes the duplicity by which the PLO leadership adopts the pose of statesmanlike moderation while stepping up its terrorist activities; and shows that no meaningful change has occurred in its strategy, tactics, and aim, which remains the liquidation of Israel.

This document demonstrates that the PLO, by its character and actions, disqualifies itself from any role in authentic peace negotiations.

Just published by our Foreign Ministry, this White Paper can serve as a valuable source of information and analysis.<sup>27</sup>

The paper further detailed the PLO's role as a terrorist organization:

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established by a decision of the Arab League in 1964 as an instrument in the Arab war against Israel. Since then it has been financed and maintained by various Arab governments. The PLO serves as an umbrella organization of a number of terrorist factions, each following its own line with regard to tactics....

All the affiliated groups, however, are united in subscribing to the PLO Charter, the Palestinian National Covenant, which states that, 'the armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. Thus, it is an overall strategy, not merely a tactical phase' (Article 9); 'The liberation of Palestine... aims at the elimination of the Zionist presence' (Article 15); and the Arab Palestinian people... reject all substitutes for the total liberation of Palestine' (Article 21). These ideas and goals are reiterated in most of the thirty-three Articles of the Covenant, which has been confirmed repeatedly, in full, by the PLO.

In February 1969 Yasser Arafat, at the head of the PLO's largest constituent faction, Fatah, took control of the entire organization. Since then, the PLO has perpetrated some 8,000 acts of tenor, mostly against Israeli civilian targets, causing the deaths of over 650 Israelis and the wounding of thousands more. Other victims have included Jews abroad, innocent bystanders of many nationalities, and Arab political opponents.<sup>28</sup>

Through the document, Israel put the Reagan Administration on notice that the White House would be aiding and abetting the cause of international terrorism if the United States opened a formal dialogue with the PLO. Israel and its Washington lobby stood ready to wage a campaign to discredit the administration if Reagan authorized such a dialogue. Much of the administration's



credibility rested upon Reagan's commitment to wage a war against international terrorism, especially in the aftermath of the hijackings of TWA Flight 147 and the *Achille Lauro*, which occurred in the months and weeks prior to the publication of 'The Threat of PLO Terrorism.' Determined that the credibility of the administration's commitment to the war against international terrorism not be questioned, the White House was certainly influenced by the arguments Israel had made against the PLO in the document, which persuaded Reagan that the United States must avoid any dealings with the organization.

## **The Pro-Israel Lobby's Public Relations Campaign Against the PLO Results in the Collapse of the Jordanian-Palestinian Peace Initiative**

Despite the false and misleading claims contained in the anti-PLO position papers Israel and its Washington lobby sent to the White House from August 1985 to April 1986, their public relations campaign against the organization certainly influenced the Reagan Administration's determination to avoid any dealings with the PLO. Following their issuance of the 11 February agreement, Jordan and the PLO presented a four-step plan which would culminate with the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the PLO. However, the administration scuttled the plan when it rejected the PLO's demand that the United States recognize the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination. The PLO was insisting on this political concession as the price the United States would have to pay in exchange for the organization's willingness to accept the conditions Washington had laid down as a requirement to open a formal dialogue with the group. Why did the Reagan Administration reject this eminently reasonable demand from the PLO? The answer is that the administration did not want to deal with the PLO because Israel and its Washington lobby had made it clear during their public relations campaign against the organization that they would reject the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the group. In deference to the wishes of Israel and its Washington lobby, the administration used its rejection of the PLO's demand that the United States recognize the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination as the pretext to scuttle the Jordanian-Palestinian four-step plan.

The public relations campaign Israel and its Washington lobby mounted against the PLO commenced on 6 August 1985 when AIPAC issued its first of three memorandums attacking the organization. This came just three weeks after Jordan had submitted on July 12 the names of seven Palestinians to the United States, four of whom would be chosen by Washington to serve as a members of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation which would enter into peace talks with Israel pursuant to the 11 February agreement. The Jordanian-American initiative to establish the delegation represented the first step in the convening of an international peace conference involving the PLO. Israel and its Washington lobby were determined to prevent the implementation of the agreement as an essential means to continue excluding the PLO from the peace process — and the public relations campaign they launched against the organization, warning the Reagan Administration against any dealings with the organization, accomplished this purpose, insofar as it persuaded the State Department to abort its plan to initiate a formal dialogue with the group. The administration had agreed to consider opening such a dialogue

when it agreed to send Murphy to Amman to meet with members of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, which would enter into peace talks with Israel — the first in the four-step plan Jordan and the PLO presented to the United States for opening formal contacts between Washington and the organization. It was at the critical point in which the meeting between Murphy and members of the delegation was about to take place that Israel and its Washington lobby swung into action in launching their intense public relations campaign against the PLO, which persuaded Reagan to cancel the meeting at the last minute and convinced his administration to back away from its flirtations of dealing with the organization. As A1 Madfai aptly notes,

It was only when the world press began speculating about the identity of the chosen Palestinians [in the delegation] that the Zionist lobby in Washington decided to voice publicly its objections to the intended meeting [between Murphy and members of the delegation] and apply such pressure on the administration that the latter began, as King Hussein put it in his address to the nation on February 19, 1986, 'to justify, then defend, and finally retreat from its intentions [to initiate a dialogue with the PLO] as stated to Jordan.'<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, as A1 Madfai notes, on 19 February 1986 Hussein announced, in a nationwide television address, the collapse of the year-long Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative, which had begun with their issuance of the 11 February agreement. Hussein attributed the collapse of the peace initiative to the Reagan Administration's rejection of the PLO's demand that the United States recognize the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination as a condition for the opening of a formal dialogue between the two parties. The administration's rejection of this demand was a direct result of the public relations campaign Israel and its Washington lobby waged in the months prior to Hussein's announcement of the collapse of the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative.

Is it possible that the public relations campaign against the PLO could have resulted in the Reagan Administration's decision to scuttle the four-point Jordanian Palestinian plan, which would have resulted in the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the organization — an essential step to reviving the moribund peace process? The answer is absolutely yes: AIPAC represented a very powerful interest group on Capitol Hill, which had sufficient political clout to influence the direction of American policy in the Middle East. As Paul Findley, who served as a Representative from Illinois during 1961 to 1983, puts it,

It is no overstatement to say that AIPAC has effectively gained control of virtually all of Capitol Hill's action on Middle East policy. Almost without exception, House and Senate members do its bidding because most of them consider AIPAC to be the direct Capitol Hill representative of a political force that can make or break their chances at election time.<sup>30</sup>

As Findley reveals from his own long experience as a member of Congress, AIPAC represents an influential force to be reckoned with on Capitol Hill. AIPAC could have mobilized overwhelming congressional opposition to any decision by the Reagan Administration to ease the longstanding prohibition against formal American contacts with the PLO. To be sure, Congress could not prevent such contacts from occurring; the administration has the unequivocal right to open a formal dialogue with any nation or organization the White House wishes to contact. However, any effort by the administration to defy AIPAC and open such a dialogue would have substantially damaged Reagan's relations with Congress and impeded the ability of the President to gain a sympathetic ear on Capitol Hill for his domestic and foreign policy initiatives. Unwilling to antagonize AIPAC and its allies in Congress, Reagan decided that he could not afford the political firestorm on Capitol Hill the authorization for his administration to open a formal dialogue with the PLO would have provoked, and decided to cancel Murphy's

scheduled meeting with members of the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation in Amman.

To be sure, the Reagan Administration eventually opened a formal dialogue with the PLO during the closing weeks of its tenure in office, without significant opposition from AIPAC or its allies in Congress. However, this dialogue occurred only because the administration had no alternative in the wake of King Hussein's announcement on 31 July 1988 that Jordan was severing all administrative and legal ties to the West Bank. Hussein's decision left the PLO as the only legitimate entity which could represent the Palestinian residents of the West Bank in peace talks with Israel. Accordingly, the Reagan Administration found that it had no alternative but to open a formal dialogue with the PLO in order keep the peace process alive.

However, the situation the Reagan Administration confronted in the Middle East was much different in 1985 than was the case three years later. Hussein remained interested in having Jordan represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel, albeit in coordination with the PLO. As long as there remained a viable prospect for Jordan to represent the Palestinians at the negotiating table with Israel, AIPAC and their allies in Congress were determined that the PLO be excluded from the peace process. Accordingly, Reagan found that he had no alternative but to do so if he wished to maintain his political credibility on Capitol Hill.

## **The Reagan Administration's Efforts to Revive the Stalled Peace Process Collapse**

Reagan's unveiling of his peace plan during his nationwide television address on the Middle East provided hope that his administration might revive the peace process, which remained stalled following the negotiation of the Camp David peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. However, as Chomsky claims, Reagan actively participated with Israel and its Washington lobby in killing the very peace plan which the President hoped to use as a basis for placing the Middle East on a path to peace. The 11 February agreement, in which Jordan and the PLO declared their commitment to seek a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, provided a sound foundation in which to pursue the peace process based, for the most part, upon the principles of the Reagan Plan.

To be sure, the PLO remained committed to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, which Reagan had flatly rejected during his nationwide television address on the Middle East. Nevertheless, disagreement between the United States and the PLO over the issue of Palestinian statehood need not have prevented a revival of the peace process based upon the principles of the Reagan Plan. Indeed, in 1985 the Reagan Administration assured Jordan that the United States recognized the right of the PLO to pursue its demand for Palestinian statehood in any peace talks with Israel which might occur, as we saw in the previous chapter. There was nothing in the Reagan Plan or the PLO's demand for Palestinian statehood which served as irreconcilable obstacles to a reinvigation of the peace process.

Given the fact that the Reagan Plan in 1982 and the mostly positive response to the President's peace proposal by Jordan and the PLO in 1985 created the essential elements for a revival of the peace process during the 1980s, why did the administration fail to make any headway toward peace? The answer remains that Israel and its Washington lobby were determined to prevent any American dealings with the PLO. Unwilling to provoke a political confrontation with Israel and the Washington lobby, the Reagan Administration decided to avoid any dealings with the PLO until its final weeks in office. Since no comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East was

possible without the direct participation of the PLO, the administration was unable to breathe any life into the moribund peace process.

By refusing to take on Israel and its Washington lobby, Reagan participated in the death of his own peace plan. For Reagan, avoiding any confrontation with Israel and its Washington lobby was more important than negotiating a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. In the end, Reagan's handling of the politically explosive issue of the Middle East shows him to be more of a politician than a statesman —more interested in satisfying the demands of the pro-Israel lobby than effectively addressing perhaps the longest and most tragic dispute in modern history — the Arab-Israeli conflict. Reagan simply lacked the leadership qualities required to make any meaningful contribution toward resolving this conflict.

In the two and a half years following Hussein's announcement of the collapse of the year-long Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative on 19 February 1986, the Reagan Administration continued its attempt to enlist Jordan to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. However, those attempts proved futile, and they ended when Hussein announced on 31 July 1988 that Jordan was severing all administrative and legal ties to the West Bank. While Hussein's announcement left the Reagan Administration no alternative but to open a formal dialogue with the PLO in the closing weeks of its tenure in office, the American initiation of official contacts with the organization came too late to advance the peace process during the little time which remained before the President's departure from the White House.

Had the Reagan Administration succeeded in opening a formal dialogue with the PLO in 1985, which the White House certainly could have done, tangible progress toward advancing the peace process could have been achieved during Reagan's second term. Coming as it did on 14 December 1988, just five weeks before Reagan left office, the new American dialogue with the PLO could only serve as the basis for a future peace following Reagan's departure from the White House. Reagan's refusal to deal with the PLO until the very end of his presidency cost him a unique opportunity to make substantial progress in advancing the peace process.

## **Why Does AIPAC Have So Much Influence Over American Policy in the Middle East?**

AIPAC was the single most influential political factor affecting Reagan's policy in the Middle East. Perhaps the most apt description of the power of AIPAC has been provided by Eric Alterman, who argues:

Without a doubt, AIPAC is the most powerful ethnic lobby to emerge in recent American history. A case can be made that it is, in fact, the most powerful Washington lobby of any kind— AIPAC's influence is felt, not merely on Capitol Hill, but in the White House, the Pentagon, the State Department, the Treasury, and a host of buildings in between. And its influence does not depend on a friendly administration; more often than not, it's the other way around.<sup>31</sup>

Alterman's assessment of the political influence of AIPAC is confirmed by *Fortune*, which in 1998 ranked AIPAC as the second most powerful interest group in Washington, behind only the American Association of Retired Persons.<sup>32</sup> In 1985 AIPAC displayed the awesome political power the interest group wielded in Washington: with the support of the ADL and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, AIPAC masterminded the public relations campaign in Washington against the PLO in 1985, which effectively killed the last remaining opportunity the Reagan

Administration had to revive the stalled peace process. Accordingly, AIPAC represents the single most important factor which prevented the administration from advancing the peace process.

Why has AIPAC proven to be such a formidable participant in the formulation and implementation of American policy in the Middle East? The answer lies in the fact that AIPAC has proven to be extremely skillful at keeping the White House and Congress mindful of the fact that Israel enjoys strong American public support. This support gives AIPAC enormous credibility in Washington. AIPAC can credibly advance the argument that American public support for Israel goes well beyond the Jewish community to include many Gentiles as well. AIPAC has the capability of mobilizing a formidable coalition of Jews and Gentiles to oppose any effort the President might undertake which is contrary to the interests of Israel. The impressive level of American public support which exists for Israel provides AIPAC the political resources the interest group needs to effectively advance the case for the Jewish state in Washington.

Determined to influence American policy in the Middle East during Reagan's second term, on 15 November 1984 AIPAC published a 52-page document entitled 'How Americans Feel About Israel,' which was sent to the White House. The document was authored by Steven J. Rosen, AIPAC's Director of Research and Information, and Yosef I. Abramowitz, a student in political science at Boston University. The purpose of the document was to demonstrate that Israel retained strong public support, and that American policy in the Middle East must reflect that fact. In his preface to the document, Thomas A. Dine, Executive Director of AIPAC, made it clear that, consistent with the existence of strong American public support for Israel, allies of the Jewish state did extremely well in the 1984 presidential and congressional elections. Dine argued that the 1984 election returns represented a public repudiation of those who sought to influence the Reagan Administration to abandon its pro-Israel policy in the Middle East in favor of an evenhanded approach to American diplomacy in the region.

This study of the feelings of the American people toward Israel and the Middle East goes to press just after an election, which swept into office an unprecedented number of friends of Israel. In the contest for the White House we knew that the results would be positive because both Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale, and George Bush and Geraldine Ferraro, reaffirmed their common commitment to a strengthening of relations between America and its principal ally in the Middle East. And our friends among candidates for the United States Senate and House of Representatives did very, very well.

This near wall-to-wall support for close U.S.-Israeli relations among both Democrats and Republicans is distressing to those who seek a 'tilt' [in American policy in the Middle East] toward the Arabs. Why, they must ask themselves, is their point of view so consistently repudiated at the ballot box?

This study provides the answer, and it is a very simple one. The American people elect pro-Israel leaders because Americans want pro-Israel leaders. U.S. policy [in the Middle East] is not the result of some mysterious conspiracy; it is the simple product of democracy at work.<sup>33</sup>

Dine argued that any American pursuit of an evenhanded policy in the Middle East would run counter to the public's desire for the United States to continue its strong and unswerving support for Israel:

Those who seek a 'tilt' toward the Arabs typically argue that their line is the true national interest, but it is quite plain that the American people disagree. In poll after poll over the past thirty-five years sound majorities have rejected the view of America's national interest that is put forward by the anti-Israel camp, and they have reaffirmed the central values of a pro-Israel policy.<sup>34</sup>

Dine concluded his preface by arguing that those who support the American pursuit of an evenhanded policy in the Middle East continued to be out of sync with the pro-Israel sentiments

of the overwhelming majority of the American public:

The 'Arabists'... try to depict support for Israel as the result of 'special interest influence.' But what emerges from the findings of this study is that the ones with influence out of proportion to their numbers in America's population are precisely those who seek a tilt toward the Arabs. Theirs is the perspective held by only a small faction on the fringe of American opinion.<sup>35</sup>

In 'How Americans Feel About Israel' Rosen and Abramowitz collected a wealth of public opinion data from American polling organizations taken as far back as the creation of Israel in 1948. The data provided irrefutable evidence of the American public's strong and unswerving support for Israel. Summarizing their findings, Rosen and Abramowitz argue that

Support for Israel over the Arab nations is the one foreign policy issue on which there has been wide consensus for over thirty years. In poll after poll over this extended period of time, and particularly over the past ten years, the results have been remarkably consistent: By an average of five to one, Americans have expressed greater sympathy for Israel than Arab nations....

Overall, the support of the American people for Israel and for a pro-Israel policy [in the Middle East] is wide and deep. The reason for this support, and for its impressive stability over time, is the American people's recognition that Israel is the one true democracy in the Middle East; their belief that Israel is the one ally we can count on in the region; their support for the idea of a Jewish homeland; and their sympathy for Israel's struggle against radical Soviet-backed Arab states. For all these reasons, support for Israel is one of the most consistent features of the American consensus on foreign policy, and is a value that the American people are unlikely to surrender.<sup>36</sup>

To support their argument that the American public strongly favored Israel in its conflict with the Arab world, Rosen and Abramowitz referred to polls taken by the Gallup and Roper organizations since the Six-Day War and ending in January 1984. In those polls a representative sample of the American public was asked the following question: 'In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with Israel or more with the Arab nations?' An average of 46 percent of those surveyed during this period answered that they supported Israel, while only 9 percent supported the Arab nations.

Consistent with their strong support for Israel, a substantial share of Americans regarded the Jewish state as a close ally of the United States. A Roper poll taken in June 1982 found that 20 percent of those surveyed considered Israel to be a 'close ally' of the United States. By contrast, the share of the public regarding West Germany and Japan, respectively, as 'close allies' of the United States was 16 percent; France 10 percent; Egypt 8 percent; Mexico 6 percent; and Saudi Arabia 4 percent. Israel topped the list of nations regarded as 'close allies' of the United States in the poll.

Given the existence of strong American public support for Israel, it is not surprising that Washington's commitment to the Jewish state remained popular in the United States. In November 1982 the Roper Organization asked a representative sample of Americans the following question: 'What do you think the United States should do in terms of economic and military assistance to Israel — do you think we should increase it, or decrease it, or continue it as it is?' Forty-two percent of those surveyed answered that American military and economic assistance to Israel should 'continue as it is'; 35 percent said it should be reduced; 8 percent thought it should be increased; and 14 percent did not know.

In addition to military and economic assistance, a majority of Americans favored the provision of continued diplomatic and moral support for Israel. In November 1982 the Roper Organization asked a representative sample of Americans the following question: 'The United States supports Israel both morally and diplomatically, and also with economic and military aid. In light of the situation that exists now in the Middle East, what do you think the United States should do in terms of moral and diplomatic support for Israel — do you think we should increase our support, or decrease our support, or continue it as it is?' Forty-four percent of those surveyed believed that

American diplomatic and moral support for Israel should 'continue as it is'; 29 percent said it should be reduced; 13 percent thought that it should increase; and 14 percent did not know. The November 1982 Roper poll found overwhelming American support for continuing the strong and unswerving backing the United States has traditionally provided to Israel.

In sharp contrast to their strong support for Israel, Americans remained hostile toward the PLO. A Harris Survey taken on 10 September 1981 asked a representative sample of the public the following statement: 'The PLO terrorists are part of a worldwide terrorist group who hijack planes, kidnap people, and are international outlaws who should not be given any official recognition by the United States or the rest of the world.' Sixty-one percent of those polled agreed with this statement, 28 percent disagreed, and 11 percent were not sure.

Because they opposed extending American recognition to the PLO, the overwhelming majority of the public was against pressuring Israel to deal with the organization. The 10 September 1981 Harris Survey asked its respondents whether they agreed with the following statement: 'The United States is right not to agree to have Israel sit down to negotiate with the PLO because the PLO is a terrorist organization that wants to destroy Israel.' Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed agreed with this statement, 29 percent disagreed, and 14 percent were not sure.

Rosen and Abramowitz concluded their study of American public opinion toward Israel by arguing that

Support for the Arab nations is actually lower today than it was in 1948 when it ranged from 11 percent to 14 percent. But support for Israel, which began at two to one among those with an opinion, has grown to a range of four to five to one. Americans have a very positive image of the Israelis and the Jews' struggle to survive. Eighty-six percent in a Harris Survey agreed that 'Israel is a small, courageous, democratic nation, which is trying to preserve its independence.' ...

Overall, the American public is strongly supportive of Israel, and trends suggest that this may be even more so in the future.<sup>37</sup>

## **The American Public's Less-Than-Unequivocal Support for Israel**

The wealth of polling data collected by Rosen and Abramowitz provide irrefutable evidence of the existence of strong American public support for Israel. Indeed, American public support for Israel is so strong that AIPAC is fully capable of mobilizing a formidable coalition of Jewish and Gentile supporters of Israel who could mount an effective lobbying campaign to prevent any softening in the support the United States has traditionally provided to the Jewish state. This is undoubtedly a major reason why the Reagan Administration continued to provide unwavering support for Israel throughout its tenure in office and avoided any dealings with the PLO until the very end of the President's residence in the White House. Reagan was simply unwilling to embroil himself in a politically costly and bruising battle with the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in Congress, which surely would have come had the President taken any action perceived as hostile to the interests of the Jewish state.

Nevertheless, while Americans strongly supported Israel, that backing was by no means open ended. The polling data collected by Rosen and Abramowitz, in addition to polls taken by the Harris Survey following the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* in October 1985, clearly show that a substantial minority of the public supported a reduction in American diplomatic, military, and economic support for Israel; supported the PLO's involvement in the peace process; and rejected the official position of the American and Israeli governments that the PLO was a terrorist



organization. Reagan could have used the existence of less-than-universal and unequivocal American public support for Israel to open a diplomatic initiative in 1985, which would have revived the stalled peace process.

Public support existed in 1985 for Reagan to have authorized his administration to open a formal dialogue with the PLO, involved the organization in the peace process, and used the considerable leverage the United States has over Israel to pressure the Jewish state into making the political and territorial concessions required for peace. To be sure, such action by Reagan would have been politically costly: the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in Congress would have strongly opposed such an initiative by Reagan.

Nevertheless, Reagan could have easily survived any ensuing political battle with the pro-Israel lobby. While the overwhelming majority of Americans expressed strong support for Israel, a substantial minority of the public still opposed Israel's refusal to deal with the PLO despite its commitment to seek a negotiated settlement of its conflict with the Jewish state. This pragmatic minority of Americans would have supported any pressure Reagan may have brought to bear to induce Israel to take reasonable stance in the peace process, which had not heretofore been the case. This would have given Reagan the political credibility to challenge the extreme views of the pro-Israel lobby, led by AIPAC, which insisted that the United States continue to provide absolute and uncritical support for Israel, despite its failure to negotiate in good faith with its Arab neighbors.

AIPAC cited the existence of strong public support for Israel as the reason why the United States should continue its steadfast backing of the Jewish state, but its own study of American public opinion toward Israel shows that support to be less unequivocal than AIPAC claimed. Indeed, a substantial minority of Americans expressed support for a reduction in the military, economic, diplomatic, and moral support the United States has traditionally provided to Israel. This same pragmatic minority also expressed support for the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the PLO, contrary to the sentiments of the Reagan Administration, and believed that the organization should have a seat at the peace table, in repudiation of the official policy of the American and Israeli governments, which were determined to exclude the group.

In the end, sufficient public support existed for Reagan to have pursued the evenhanded Middle East policy that Dine falsely charged was supported only by Arabist members of the Foreign Service and academic communities. While an overwhelming majority of Americans strongly supported Israel, the polling data provided by AIPAC also showed that a substantial minority of the public wanted the United States to serve as an honest broker in achieving a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. This required that the United States pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, and not the pro-Israel policy that AIPAC falsely argued that the public wanted. The American public's less-than-unequivocal support for Israel gave Reagan the political opportunity he needed to pressure the Jewish state into making the political and territorial concessions required for peace.

Reagan's failure to breathe new life into the peace process in 1985 was not only the result of the power of the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in Congress, but also of his unwillingness to challenge their power. Reagan was content to allow the status quo in the Middle East to continue, rather than launching a new diplomatic initiative to break the deadlock in the peace process, which was sure to be controversial. Reagan's aversion to engaging in a political fight with the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in Congress cost the President an opportunity to make a real contribution toward advancing the peace process. When it came to Middle East diplomacy,

Reagan left everything to be desired, and his leadership fell well short of what would have been expected of an American statesman.

## **The Reagan Administration Deals a Fatal Blow to the Peace Process**

This book has argued that the Reagan Administration had a unique opportunity to jump-start the stalled peace process in 1985. Jordan and the PLO undertook a diplomatic initiative to break the stalemate in the peace process through their issuance of the 11 February agreement. An essential element of the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative was the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the PLO. Jordan and the PLO presented the Reagan Administration with a four-step plan to achieve this goal. However, the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative collapsed when the administration rejected the PLO's demand that the United States recognize the right of Palestinians to exercise self-determination as a precondition for the opening of a formal dialogue between the two parties. The PLO's demand was eminently reasonable; after all, George W. Bush met this demand when he made support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state official American policy during an address on 24 June 2002.<sup>38</sup> Nothing existed which would have prevented Reagan from recognizing the right of the Palestinians to establish an independent state in 1985 as Bush eventually did 17 years later.

Further, this book has noted that the Reagan Administration's rejection of the PLO's demand for American support of Palestinian statehood represented a deliberate effort by the President to abort the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative and sabotage the peace process. The administration did this in order to avoid dealing with the PLO, which made American support for Palestinian statehood the essential precondition for the opening of talks between the two parties. By rejecting support for Palestinian statehood, the administration assured that no formal dialogue between the United States and the PLO would occur in 1985, which ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative the following year, and all hopes for reviving the moribund peace process during Reagan's second term.

Why did the Reagan Administration go to the extreme step of aborting the peace process in order to avoid dealing with the PLO? This book has argued that the administration's aversion to dealing with the PLO was in response to the demands of Israel and its Washington lobby, which undertook a public relations campaign designed to discredit the organization. The campaign occurred during a critical phase in the peace process in the final months of 1985 and opening weeks of 1986, when the Reagan Administration was contemplating the initiation of a formal dialogue with the PLO as an essential step to advancing the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative. That initiative broke down on 19 February 1986 after Hussein announced that the administration had rejected the PLO's demand for American recognition of the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination as its condition for the opening of such a dialogue. The administration deliberately provoked the collapse of the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative in order to comply with the demands of Israel and its Washington lobby that the United States avoid dealing with the PLO.

## **AIPAC Emerges as a Dominant Political Actor in the Making of American Policy in the Middle East**

Why did the Reagan Administration accede to the demands of Israel and its Washington lobby that the United States avoid dealing with the PLO, which resulted in the collapse of the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative in 1986? The answer is that AIPAC emerged as a politically influential actor in the making of American policy in the Middle East — a momentous event in the history of American diplomacy in the region, which accompanied the beginning of Reagan's second term. The single official in the Reagan Administration most responsible for giving AIPAC an influential hand in the formulation and implementation of American policy in the Middle East was Secretary of State George P. Shultz.

On 25 June 1982, Reagan had appointed Shultz as Secretary of State in the weeks following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The invasion was the direct result of the pro-Israel policy in the Middle East pursued by Reagan since the conclusion of the AW ACS debate. Armed with almost total and absolute American support, Israel had assumed that the Reagan Administration would support its invasion of Lebanon, which turned out not to be the case. Shultz was determined to move American policy in the Middle East in a more evenhanded direction, if for no other reason than to prevent a repeat of Israeli military operations, which risked further destabilization of the region. The crowning achievement of Shultz's new Middle East policy was the Reagan Plan, which the Secretary of State played a critical role in formulating. As Christison notes,

Shultz came to office believing that the United States had been too closely tied to Israel and too disinterested in the peace process, and that it needed to offer the Palestinians a realistic way to achieve a solution [to their problem].... Shultz criticized Israel's West Bank policies and spoke of the need to satisfy the Palestinians' 'political aspirations.' His first order of business after the Lebanon situation appeared to quiet down was to craft a peace initiative, the Reagan Plan, that took account of the Palestinian issue.<sup>39</sup>

However, Shultz's criticism of Israel, support for at least some aspects of the Palestinian cause, and backing for an evenhanded policy in the Middle East quickly drew protests from the Jewish state's many supporters in the United States. As Donald Neff aptly notes:

Shultz at first seemed determined to be evenhanded in the Middle East....

By February 1983 Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens publicly complained that relations between the United States and Israel had deteriorated to the point that 'frustration and impatience and anger' in the relationship was perhaps the worst in history....

Behind much of the criticism was a constant drumbeat that Shultz was too harsh on Israel. Under such criticism Shultz's attitude underwent transformation. Within two months Israel's relationship with the United States had improved... dramatically— After that the criticism of Shultz essentially ceased while Shultz's support for Israel grew greater. By mid-1984, Moshe Arens was describing relations between the two countries as 'probably better' than ever before. Media criticism of Shultz was henceforth muted.<sup>40</sup>

Why did Shultz undergo such a dramatic conversion in his opinion regarding American policy in the Middle East — from a staunch advocate of evenhanded diplomacy in the region to an unabashed and unapologetic supporter of Israel? Neff provides the answer.

Sources in Washington explained Shultz's sudden conversion not as the result of a divine revelation, but as a deliberate tactic aimed specifically at escaping Zionist attacks by the media. According to the sources, two of Shultz's closest colleagues, his new executive secretary, Charles Hill, and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Lawrence Eagleburger, later Secretary of State in the Bush Administration, called on him in the spring of 1983 and warned that unless he embraced Israel he would be driven from office by the media and Zionist attacks. Whatever the facts, the record clearly shows that from this

time forward Shultz never again opposed Israel, or treated the Palestinians with anything more than contempt.<sup>41</sup>

Addressing the twenty-sixth annual policy conference of AIPAC, held in Washington on 11 April 1985, Shultz committed the United States to provide almost total support for Israel.

Our original moral commitment to Israel has never wavered, but over the years Americans have also come to recognize the enormous importance of Israel — as a partner in the pursuit of freedom and democracy, as a people who share our highest ideals, and as a vital strategic ally in that important part of the world. Every year we provide more security assistance to Israel than any other nation. We consider that aid to be one of the best investments we can make - not only for Israel's security but for ours as well.<sup>42</sup>

Addressing the twenty-seventh annual policy conference of AIPAC, held in Washington on 6 April 1986, Dine proclaimed American support for Israel to be firm and unshakable, and attributed this development to Shultz's leadership. Dine candidly revealed that Shultz had promised the Jewish leader that the Reagan Administration was determined not only to provide strong and unswerving support for Israel, but to establish an irreversible precedent in which such backing for the Jewish state would continue long after Reagan left the White House in 1989.

Let me ... share with you what Secretary of State George Shultz recently explained. He said the point of strategic cooperation [between the United States and Israel] is, and I quote, to 'build institutional arrangements so that eight years from now, if there is a Secretary of State who is not positive about Israel, he will not be able to overcome the bureaucratic relationship between Israel and the U.S. that we have established.' For a Secretary of State to feel that way — think about how far we have come

[in Israeli-American relations].

And on the question of defending Israel, the Secretary of State forecasted: 'Eight years from now discussions about Israel's security will be different. They will be about the highest state of the art weapons technology and how Israel is taking advantage of that technology. That is how we are going to secure Israel.'<sup>43</sup>

Dine argued that the precedent the Reagan Administration had established of providing unequivocal American support for Israel was so firmly established that such backing was assured through the foreseeable future: 'We are in the middle of a revolution in the area of strategic cooperation [between the United States and Israel], and this President and this Secretary of State are going to leave a legacy [of American support for Israel] that will be important to Israel's security for decades to come.'

Based upon the Reagan Administration's support for Israel, Dine concluded that

The relationship today between the United States and Israel is excellent. This relationship has entered a revolutionary era. We are no longer talking about a transformation in the relationship; we are talking about a revolution. The old order in which Israel was regarded as a liability, a hindrance in America's relationship with the Arab world, a loud and naughty child — that order has crumbled. In its place, a new relationship is being built, one in which Israel is treated as — and acts as — an ally, not just a friend, an asset rather than a liability, a mature and capable partner, not some vassal state.<sup>44</sup>

Dine attributed the vast improvement in Israeli-American relations not only to the firm and unwavering support the Reagan Administration was providing to the Jewish state, but to the fact that American backing for Tel Aviv had become deeply rooted within every facet of the federal bureaucracy involved in foreign policy. Much as Shultz had promised to Dine, the administration had succeeded in establishing sufficient support for Israel within the federal bureaucracy so that future Presidents would have to adhere to a pro-Israel policy in the Middle East whether they wanted to or not. Dine argued that the existence of strong support for Israel within the federal bureaucracy represented the real source of the deeply rooted and lasting American backing the Jewish state was sure to receive long after Reagan left the White House.

We are in the midst of a revolution that is raising U.S.-Israeli relations to new heights. In the process a whole new constituency of support for Israel is being built in precisely the area where we are weakest — among government officials in the State, Defense, [and] Treasury Departments, in the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], in science, trade, agriculture, and other agencies. These are the people responsible for proposing [foreign] policy and for implementing it. In a crisis these anonymous officials will play a vital role. And they are now learning through personal experience the value of Israel to the United States. In other words, we are talking not only about a revolution in the relationship between two states, but also in the attitudes of key people responsible for that relationship. That is what we mean when we talk about sinking down roots that will secure the tree of U.S.-Israeli relations from future storms.<sup>45</sup>

Dine attributed the historic improvement in Israeli-American relations during the Reagan Administration to the President himself: 'At President Reagan's initiative and in pursuit of his vision, Israel is now being treated as an ally. What were mere words at the outset of Ronald Reagan's Presidency have now been translated into tangible actions undertaken by both democracies.'<sup>46</sup>

Dine's argument that American policy in the Middle East had undergone a 'revolution' during the Reagan Administration — from previously being evenhanded to staunchly pro-Israel — was supported by Richard B. Straus, who had served as a member of the AIPAC staff. In an article published in the 27 April 1986 edition of the *Washington Post*, Straus argued that during the administration, 'American Middle East policy had shifted so dramatically in favor of Israel' that Dine was correct to argue that a 'revolution' had occurred in Reagan's decision to abandon America's previous pursuit of a disingenuous, 'evenhanded' diplomacy in the region in favor of providing one-sided and biased support for Israel in its conflict with the Arab world. Straus quoted Dine as revealing that Shultz represented the 'architect of the special relationship' existing between the United States and Israel. Straus noted that Dine considered Israeli-American relations during the Reagan Administration to be 'a deep broad based partnership progressing day by day toward a full fledged diplomatic and military alliance' between the two nations. Straus noted that 'State Department Arabists acknowledge that Arab interests hardly get a hearing today in Washington: "We used to have a two track policy," says one State Department official. Now only Israel's interests are considered [in the formulation of American policy in the Middle East].'<sup>47</sup>

Addressing a meeting of AIPAC on 5 July 1987, Dine reiterated that Reagan and Shultz had succeeded in anchoring American policy in the Middle East firmly in support of Israel: 'There is wide agreement that Ronald Reagan is among the best friends of Israel ever to sit in the Oval Office, and George Shultz has been a friend beyond words as Secretary of State.... These stalwarts have truly transformed U.S. policy [in the Middle East] over the past five years, raising the relationship [between the United States and Israel] to a new level [of friendship].'<sup>48</sup>

Following the meeting of AIPAC on 5 July 1987, David K. Shipler reported in an article published in the *New York Times* that the interest group

has become a major force in shaping policy in the Middle East.... the organization has gained power to influence a presidential candidate's choice of staff, to block practically any arms sale to an Arab country, and to serve as a catalyst for intimate military relations between the Pentagon and the Israeli Army. Its leading officials are consulted by State Department and White House policymakers, by Senators and generals.<sup>49</sup>

The article concluded that AIPAC 'has become the envy of competing lobbyists and the bane of Middle East specialists who would like to strengthen ties with proWestern Arabs.'<sup>50</sup>

Pro-Israel lobbyists like Dine and Straus were not alone in arguing that American policy in the Middle East had undergone a dramatic shift in favor of Israel during the Reagan Administration. Kathleen Christison, who had served as a CIA analyst, has also noted this shift. In an article

published in the Winter 1988 edition of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Christison observed that 'the Reagan years have witnessed a marked change in the [pro-Israel] lobby's influence on [Middle East] policymaking. If in past administrations it was thought to have a major limiting impact on policy formulation, the magnitude of its influence today is so great it can no longer be considered merely a constraint on policy.'<sup>51</sup> Christison noted that 'Under Reagan, AIPAC has become a partner in [Middle East] policymaking. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee is so pervasive at the White House as well as in Congress that it is impossible to ascertain where lobby pressure ends and independent presidential thinking begins.'<sup>52</sup>

Christison quotes William B. Quandt, who served as Middle East policy expert on the NSC from 1977 to 1979, as noting that 'We would sometimes go to the Israelis in advance of some action and ask them not to make trouble, but we never went to AIPAC. The Reagan Administration has elevated AIPAC to a level of player in this game [of Middle East policymaking].'<sup>53</sup> Paul Findley, who served as a Representative in Congress from Illinois from 1961 to 1983, supports the claim of Christison and Quandt that AIPAC emerged as a dominant political actor in the making of American policy in the Middle East during the Reagan Administration, noting that 'relations [between the United States and Israel] became so close during the Reagan Administration that it was not unusual for high ranking State Department officials and AIPAC's Dine to privately discuss Middle East policy issues and how to handle them in Congress.'<sup>54</sup>

Joining in the consensus among members of the Middle East policy community that AIPAC emerged as a dominant actor in the making of American policy in the Middle East is Donald Neff, who argues that

The 1980s were... historic for the Israeli lobby in America. AIPAC soared to unparalleled strength under President Ronald Reagan. ... He was a total supporter of Israel and appeared to have little appreciation of the Palestinian and Arab side of the conflict. During the Reagan Administration, AIPAC became a full partner in forming U.S. policy toward the Middle East.<sup>55</sup>

Christison, Quandt, Findley, and Neff could not have been more correct in their keen observation that the Reagan Administration had made AIPAC an inside player in the policymaking process with regard to the Middle East. By 1985, the administration had become so extreme in its pro-Israel sentiments that it was completely in accord with AIPAC as to how American policy in the Middle East should be formulated and executed. AIPAC officials did not even need to communicate with the White House in order to influence its policy in the Middle East: all AIPAC needed to do was to issue a stream of memorandums outlining its policy positions on the Middle East, and the administration could be expected to uncritically adopt those positions as the official policy of the United States. This is precisely what occurred in 1985 when the Reagan Administration flirted with the idea of opening a formal dialogue with the PLO in order to jump-start the stalled peace process. Joined by Israel and the ADL, AIPAC issued a series of memorandums denouncing the PLO as a terrorist organization and Arafat as a terrorist, and warning against any American dealings with the organization. The Reagan Administration complied with AIPAC's demand, rejected the PLO's insistence upon American recognition of Palestinian statehood (which effectively ended any hope of opening a formal dialogue between the United States and the organization until the very end of its tenure in office), and sabotaged the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative, which represented the best hope for reviving the peace process during the President's second term.

Dine was correct in his claim that American policy in the Middle East had swung decidedly, and even momentarily, in favor of Israel during the Reagan Administration — amounting to a



'revolution' in American policy in the Middle East. However, Dine failed to explain the sources for that 'revolution.' As Christison, Quandt, Findley, and Neff observe, this 'revolution' was the direct result of the Reagan Administration's decision to give Dine's own organization, AIPAC, a seat at the policymaking table regarding the Middle East. AIPAC was not a political actor attempting to influence American policy in the Middle East from the outside, but an inside White House player and participant in the formulation and implementation of that policy — subverting all peace initiatives the administration might have undertaken in order to jumpstart the stalled peace process. Dine may have regarded Reagan and Shultz as close and valued allies of AIPAC and Israel, but in point of fact, by 1985 the two American leaders had been reduced to servants of the pro-Israel lobby, dutifully complying with its demands that the United States avoid the PLO and subverting all hopes for peace during the President's second term in the process.

The shift in American policy in the Middle East in favor of Israel during the Reagan Administration, which was aptly noted in Washington during the President's second term by both AIPAC and its critics, did not go unnoticed by a key player in the peace process — King Hussein. In an interview with the *New York Times* conducted on 15 March 1984, Hussein charged that Israel and its Washington lobby had virtually taken control of American policy in the Middle East:

We see things the following way: Israel is on our land. It is there by virtue of American military and economic aid that transfers into aid for Israeli settlements [in the occupied Arab territories] Israel is there by virtue of American political and moral support to the point where the U.S. is succumbing to Israeli dictates.... The U.S. is not free to move [in its Middle East policy], except within the limits of what AIPAC, the Zionists, and the State of Israel determine for it.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

The Palestinian problem remains the core issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict: no peace in the Middle East is possible without the Palestinians having adequate representation in peace talks between Israel and its Arab neighbors. At their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974, Arab heads of state declared the PLO to be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people — a decision they reaffirmed at their subsequent conference in Fez in 1982. Accordingly, the PLO remained the only credible entity which could represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel.

However, until 1993 Israel had consistently refused to deal with the PLO, branding it a terrorist organization bent upon the destruction of the Jewish state. Representing the interests of Israel, organized American Jewry actively lobbied the White House to prevent the Reagan Administration from easing the American prohibition against dealing with the PLO, which had existed since 1975. The pro-Israel lobby reminded the administration that Israel enjoyed strong American public support. Reflecting the sentiments of the American public, the pro-Israel lobby argued that the United States should continue its longstanding policy of providing strong and unswerving support for the Jewish state. The pro-Israel lobby also reminded the Reagan Administration that the American public remained deeply hostile to the PLO and shared the view of the American and Israeli governments that it was a terrorist organization.

To be sure, American public support for Israel, while enormous, was less than unequivocal: a large minority supported the direct involvement of the PLO in peace talks with Israel, fully recognizing that no peace was possible without the organization's active participation in the



process. Sufficient American public support existed for the Reagan Administration to have opened a formal dialogue with the PLO in 1985, when such a move could have made a substantial contribution to advancing the cause of peace. Moreover, a substantial minority of the American public favored reducing the generous diplomatic, military, and economic support the United States has provided to Israel. This support gives the United States enormous leverage over Israel. By threatening to either substantially reduce or suspend this support, a President can exert enormous pressure on Israel to make the political and territorial concessions required for peace — which Reagan could have done in 1985 as part of a diplomatic initiative to advance the peace process.

However, Reagan failed to jump-start the peace process in 1985 when the PLO declared its willingness to seek a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict by joining Jordan in issuing the 11 February agreement. Reagan refused to authorize the American initiation of a formal dialogue with the PLO until five weeks before he left office, which came too late for him to build upon this diplomatic breakthrough in order to advance the peace process. Rather, Reagan approved a substantial increase in aid to Israel when he signed the Foreign Aid Authorization Act in 1985, which rewarded the Jewish state for its contemptuous dismissal of his peace plan.

Reagan's commitment to pursue a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East and squander the opportunities he had to advance the peace process was based upon domestic political considerations: the President did not want to embroil himself in a politically bruising battle with the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in Congress, which certainly would have resulted had he decided to adopt an evenhanded policy in the Middle East. Reagan would have landed himself into political trouble had he authorized his administration to open a formal dialogue with the PLO in 1985 which, pursuant to the 11 February agreement, would have led to the convening of an international conference to negotiate a comprehensive peace settlement in the region.

Through the public relations campaign launched against the PLO in Washington during 1985 and 1986, Israel and organized American Jewry had made it clear that they would not tolerate any American dealings with the organization. This campaign was led by AIPAC, which by 1985 had assumed a de facto, albeit informal, role in the formulation and implementation of American policy in the Middle East. With AIPAC assuming substantial influence over that policy, Reagan had no alternative but to bow to the demands of Israel and its Washington lobby and avoid the PLO like the plague, thereby subverting the Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative, which relied upon the opening of a formal dialogue between the United States and the organization as a prelude to the convening of an international peace conference. Insofar as the Middle East is concerned, Reagan acted more as politician than a statesman — seeking to avoid domestic political controversy rather than making a genuine and meaningful effort to advance the cause of peace.

## Chapter 4

# Congress Persuades the Reagan Administration to Withdraw the Jordan Arms Sale Package

In the face of continuing congressional hostility, the administration finally withdrew the nearly \$2 billion arms package for Jordan on February 3, 1986.<sup>1</sup>

—William B. Quandt, political scientist

A familiar tactic the Reagan Administration pursued in its effort to advance the Middle East peace process was to use arms sales as a means to elicit the support of moderate Arab nations for the American effort. A primary reason for Reagan's decision to approve the AWACS sale in 1981 was to elicit Saudi Arabia's abandonment of its opposition to the Camp David peace process in favor of American efforts to resolve the Arab—Israeli conflict.<sup>2</sup> In 1985 Reagan once again resorted to the use of arms sales to elicit the support of a moderate Arab nation in the American push for peace—in this case to Jordan.

As we have seen, Reagan envisioned that Jordan would play a critical role in the peace process. Since he unveiled his peace plan during his nationwide television address on the Middle East, Reagan had attempted to enlist Jordan in representing the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. This would enable Reagan to avoid having to deal with the PLO as part of his diplomatic initiative to advance the peace process. However, pursuant to the Rabat and Fez decisions, the Arab world recognized the PLO to be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Accordingly, any attempt by Jordan to preempt the PLO in representing the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel was sure to provoke a firestorm of opposition from the rest of the Arab world and assure Amman's isolation from the community of Arab nations. This made King Hussein very reluctant to accept Reagan's open invitation for Jordan to join the peace process on behalf of the Palestinians.

In order to enable Hussein to overcome his extreme reluctance to join the peace process, Reagan decided to offer a substantial arms sale package to Jordan in 1985. The announcement of the sale came at a crucial time in the peace process, as Jordan and the PLO opened a diplomatic initiative in order to place the Middle East firmly on a path to peace through the establishment of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, which would enter into peace talks with Israel. Reagan was determined to take advantage of Jordan's renewed interest in joining the peace process by using the sale as a means to entice Amman to enter into direct negotiations with Israel on behalf of the Palestinians. The purpose of the sale was to enhance the security of Jordan, and demonstrate America's support for the Hashemite monarchy. Reagan hoped that Hussein would reciprocate for this gesture of American support for Jordan by agreeing to join the peace process.

However, the Jordan arms sale package provoked a storm of opposition from the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in Congress: they demanded that the sale be made conditional upon Jordan's willingness to enter into 'direct and meaningful' negotiations with Israel to achieve a peace settlement between the two nations. However, Hussein rejected this condition, since it would violate the decision reached by the Arab heads of state at their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974 — and reaffirmed at a subsequent conference in Fez in 1982 — recognizing the PLO as the sole

legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Hussein signaled Jordan's willingness to enter the peace process on behalf of the Palestinians through the peace initiative Amman and the PLO launched in 1985, but only in coordination with the organization. While the Reagan Administration briefly considered the prospect of involving the PLO in the peace process, the White House abandoned this possibility when Israel and its Washington lobby raised strong objections to any formal American contacts with the organization, which represented an essential precondition to the group's participation in peace negotiations. With Jordan unwilling to participate in the peace process without the PLO's direct involvement, and the administration refusing to have anything to do with the organization, there was no way that Hussein could meet Congress' condition that Amman enter into 'direct and meaningful' negotiations with Israel as a condition for approval of the Jordan arms sale package by lawmakers. Accordingly, Reagan had no alternative but to withdraw the sale since it stood no chance of approval by Congress. Reagan's decision to do so undermined the credibility of the United States as an honest broker in the peace process, since the President's action made it appear in the Arab world, whether correctly or not, that American policy in the Middle East was being dictated by the pro-Israel lobby and its allies in Congress.

## **AIPAC Announces Its Opposition to the Jordan Arms Sale Package**

On 27 September 1985, Reagan provided preliminary notification to Congress of his intent to conclude the Jordan arms sale package.<sup>3</sup> The sale would include 40 advanced fighter aircraft (either F-20As or F-16Cs), 12 Hawk surface-to-air missiles, mobile fire command posts and conversion equipment to make Jordan's 14 existing Hawk surface-to-air missiles mobile, and 32 Bradley cavalry fighting vehicles. The total cost of the sale would be \$1.5 billion if the deal included F-16s and \$2 billion if it involved F-20s.<sup>4</sup>

AIPAC immediately responded to Reagan's preliminary notification to Congress of his intent to conclude the Jordan arms sale package by mounting an intense, monthlong lobbying campaign designed to persuade Congress to block the sale. The campaign featured the dissemination by AIPAC of a stream of memorandums in which the interest group argued that the United States should not sell any advanced and sophisticated weaponry to Jordan until Amman entered into direct negotiations with Israel. AIPAC sent its memorandums to the White House, and undoubtedly to every member of Congress as well.

In a two-page memorandum entitled 'Hussein Avoids Direct Negotiations,' the interest group outlined its opposition to the deal. In its memorandum, AIPAC argued that Hussein was not committed to peace:

The United States has been waiting for years for Jordan to sit down face to face with Israel to make peace. But each time we have called on the King to deliver on his promise [to negotiate with Israel], he has slipped away to take refuge behind another complicated maneuver. Now, in his speech before the United Nations General Assembly on September 27, 1985, the King has said and done nothing new.<sup>5</sup>

AIPAC noted that instead of entering into direct negotiations with Israel, Jordan was committed to participate in peace talks with the Jewish state within the framework of an international conference: 'Jordan ... says that "direct negotiations between Jordan and Israel are

out of the question," in the words of a top Jordanian official, and proposes instead to lure the U.S. into the trap of an international conference under the control of the Soviet Union, Syria, and the PLO.' AIPAC quoted the official position of the Jordanian government with respect to the peace process as follows: 'It is Jordan's position that the appropriate auspice [for peace talks] is an international conference hosted by the Secretary General of the United Nations to which are invited the five permanent members of the Security Council and all the parties to the [Arab-Israeli] conflict.'<sup>6</sup>

However, AIPAC charged that an international conference would make no contribution whatsoever to advancing the peace process, but would instead serve as a propaganda forum in which the Soviet Union and its allies in the Arab world could publicly berate Israel before the world community.

An international conference would be yet another forum for the usual gang-up-on-Israel propaganda show, not a serious venue for peace negotiations. It would be a setting in which radical Arab and Communist forces would control events, and exercise a veto over actions that the moderates might otherwise take. It would be a vehicle to advance the goals of the Soviet Union, Syria, and the PLO, rather than peace between Israel and Jordan.

This is why the concept of an international conference originated in Moscow, and has been most ardently sponsored by radical allies of the Soviet Union like Syria and the PLO. It is also the reason that the forces of moderation in the Middle East — like Anwar Sadat, the government of Israel, and the Reagan Administration — have recognized the trap, and declined to be lured in it.

So when King Hussein insists upon an 'international conference' instead of direct negotiations, what he is in fact doing is moving away from peace and toward the position of the U.S.S.R. Indeed, the Hussein Plan of 1985 has less similarity to Camp David or the Reagan Plan than it does to the Brezhnev Plan of 1981. The King has still failed to take an irrevocable step toward peace.

The time is now for Hussein to stop all these maneuvers, and sit down with Israel face to face. Until he does, it is certainly not the time to give him lethal military equipment.<sup>7</sup>

## **AIPAC Presses Its Case Against Hussein**

AIPAC's strategy for persuading Congress to block the Jordan arms sale package essentially rested upon the interest group's determination to personally discredit Hussein's commitment to peace. To achieve this end, AIPAC sought to portray Hussein as a dishonest and duplicitous leader whose actions belied his stated public commitment to peace. In pursuit of its public relations campaign in Washington to discredit Hussein, AIPAC issued yet another two-page memorandum, 'Time for Peace — Not Maneuvers' on 1 October 1985, which questioned the King's commitment to peace: 'At the very time that America is looking to King Hussein to take the courageous step that is necessary for peace, the King is retreating behind positions designed to win support from Arab radicals, not peace with Israel. All this evasion has been deeply disappointing to people who sincerely care about peace.'<sup>8</sup>

AIPAC noted that Hussein's call for an international peace conference stood no chance of being realized, given the fact that the United States and Israel remained adamantly opposed to the convening of such a forum, insisting instead on direct negotiations between the Jewish state and its Arab neighbors.

Shimon Peres said of Hussein's approach: 'Let's start talking sense. Why all these maneuvers?' The international conference formula would be a 'beautiful trap' for Israel to 'fall into,' Peres added, but it will not.

Peres observed: 'The Jordanians are saying that time is running out, and this is the last chance. But if we follow the process they propose, it may take years and years before a meeting will take place.' On Sunday Peres added that these 'additional frameworks... only add more problems and result in ever lasting delays.'

Why does Hussein propose to give the Russians what Ronald Reagan called 'a stranglehold on negotiations' and 'a calling card for inserting themselves more deeply into the Middle East?' This is not in Jordan's interest, not in Israel's interest, and very definitely not in the interest of the United States.<sup>9</sup>

AIPAC noted that Hussein favored the PLO's direct participation in the peace process. However, AIPAC pointed out that the United States and Israel strongly opposed this, based upon their claim that the PLO was a terrorist organization:

Why does Hussein promote the PLO? As Ronald Reagan said, "They are terrorists, and should be identified as such. If others wish to deal with them, establish diplomatic relations with them, let it be on their heads. And let them be willing to pay the price of appeasement." Shimon Peres said this week, "The objection to the PLO has intensified further in recent days due to terrorist activities."<sup>10</sup>

AIPAC concluded its memorandum by supporting the Reagan Administration's position that peace can only be achieved through direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

George Shultz said: "The only way to achieve a genuine, lasting peace is through direct negotiations between the Arab states and Israel. No other procedures can substitute. No other approach will get anywhere. No further plans or preliminaries are needed. There is one, and only one, place to negotiate — at the table, face to face."

This is the heart of the matter, and the reason why friends of peace are insisting that the King stop maneuvers and start the negotiations.<sup>11</sup>

In pursuing its public relations campaign in Washington to politically discredit Hussein, AIPAC failed to address one critical question: If Hussein were in fact seeking to sabotage the peace process, as the interest group claimed, why was the Reagan Administration determined to proceed with the sale of up to \$2 billion worth of arms to Jordan? The administration justified the sale as essential to provide the American political support Jordan needed to continue its diplomatic initiative to advance the peace process.

AIPAC found it convenient to quote from the public remarks of Reagan and Shultz to support the interest group's contention that Hussein was creating obstacles to peace. However, AIPAC failed to note that both Reagan and Shultz believed that Hussein was playing a constructive role in the peace process and had approved the Jordan arms sale package in order to encourage the King to continue his peace efforts. Reagan and Shultz may have shared AIPAC's views concerning the PLO and the appropriate framework in which to pursue the peace process, but the two American leaders did not agree with the interest group's view that Hussein was not committed to peace; rather, they strongly supported the King's peace initiative and saw the sale as a means to encourage the monarch to continue the constructive role they believed he was playing in advancing the cause of peace.

## **AIPAC Advances a New Argument Against the Jordan Arms Sale Package**

AIPAC's initial strategy to persuade Congress to block the Jordan arms sale package rested on the interest group's claim that Hussein was not committed to peace. However, even if Congress accepted this argument, there was a possibility that lawmakers still might approve the sale. Jordan remained a long and valued ally of the United States, and Congress may have been reluctant to reject the sale, since such action was sure to disrupt Jordanian—American relations.

Rather, Congress was only likely to block the Jordan arms sale package if AIPAC could make a credible case that the deal posed a threat to the security of Israel. The United States maintains a longstanding commitment to the security and survival of Israel as a primary goal of American policy in the Middle East, and it would have been inconceivable for Congress to approve the sale if lawmakers had concluded that the deal endangered the Jewish state. Jordan's refusal to enter into direct negotiations with Israel might not have been a sufficient basis for Congress to block the sale, but concerns that the deal posed a threat to the security of Israel would cause lawmakers to seriously question whether the agreement should be approved.

To strengthen prospects for the defeat of the Jordan arms sale, on 2 October 1985 AIPAC issued its second memorandum in two days — a two-page document entitled 'The Threat of Jordanian Arms.' For the first time, AIPAC alleged that the sale posed a threat to the security of Israel:

This so-called air defense package threatens the very basis of Israel's security by providing Jordan with the offensive weapons that undermine the cornerstone of Israel's security, its air superiority. . . . The proposed arms package gives Jordan weapons that can weaken Israel's air force, and its capability to defend Israel's borders. Without adequate air support, Israel's front line ground forces could be overwhelmed by numerically superior Arab armies.<sup>12</sup>

## **AIPAC Synthesizes Its Arguments Against the Jordan Arms Sale Package**

In its initial memorandums, AIPAC based its argument against the Jordan arms sale package on the claim that Hussein was not committed to peace. In its 2 October 1985 memorandum, AIPAC introduced a new argument against the sale: that it posed a threat to the security of Israel. On 3 October AIPAC issued its third memorandum in as many days — a two-page document entitled 'Arms vs. Peace' — which combined those two arguments in attempting to make a persuasive case against the sale.

In pursuing its lobbying campaign against the Jordan arms sale package, AIPAC had sought to avoid any direct criticism of the Reagan Administration, despite the fact that the White House strongly supported the deal. Recognizing that the administration remained a staunch friend and ally of Israel, AIPAC wanted to avoid antagonizing the White House by issuing any direct criticisms of Reagan for his decision to strongly support the sale. Rather, AIPAC was intent on confining its criticisms against the sale to Hussein, who the interest group viewed as an enemy of Israel.

However, in pursuing its lobbying campaign against the sale, AIPAC found that its efforts to politically discredit Hussein would not serve as a sufficient basis to persuade Congress to block the Jordan arms sale package. Rather, AIPAC would also have to challenge the arguments the Reagan Administration had made on behalf of the sale if the interest group was to have hope in persuading Congress to block the deal. Accordingly, the memorandum AIPAC issued on 3 October 1985 contained the interest group's first pointed criticism of the administration for its strong support of the sale.

The memorandum challenged the Reagan Administration's argument that the Jordan arms sale package was essential to encouraging Amman to continue its commitment to advance the peace process:

The administration is describing the Jordan arms package as an 'integral part' of the peace process, and putting out the line that a congressional vote against it would 'almost certainly spell failure' to produce direct negotiations between Jordan and Israel.

But the truth is the very opposite. The arms sale is not part of the peace process, but the antithesis of it. Rejection of it by Congress will not impede the peace process, but may indeed be a necessity if the peace process is to have any prospect of success.<sup>13</sup>

## **AIPAC Takes On the Reagan Administration in Its Fight Against the Jordan Arms Sale Package**

On 8 October 1985, AIPAC issued its longest memorandum on the Jordan arms sale package — an eight-page document entitled 'The Jordan Arms Package: Responses to Administration Claims' — which directly challenged all the major arguments the Reagan Administration had put forward on behalf of the deal. This latest memorandum reflected AIPAC's recognition that only by launching a full-scale political assault against the administration could the interest group have any hope of persuading Congress to block the sale. Accordingly, the memorandum signaled AIPAC's decision to abandon its previous policy to avoid direct criticism of the administration, and instead launch an all-out political war against the White House in a final desperate effort to defeat the sale in Congress.

In the memorandum, AIPAC quoted each major argument the Reagan Administration had used on behalf of the Jordan arms sale package. AIPAC then followed the quote with its own refutation of the administration argument. The first quote was the administration's claim that 'Jordan has taken significant and courageous initiatives to advance the cause of peace.' AIPAC responded with a refutation of this claim.

The position the King is now taking is actually a step backward from the position he took earlier this year. Consider the record:

1. In August 1982 the King privately assured the administration that he was approaching a decision to enter negotiations with Israel.
2. In January 1983 the King told the United States that he had taken a decision to meet with Israel — provided he could get a green light from Arafat.
3. In April of 1985 the King told the administration that a green light would not be enough — Arafat would have to approve individual Palestinians who would participate in negotiations. In September 1985 Hussein told the United Nations that Arafat designees would not be enough. The PLO itself would have to be a party at the table.
4. In September 1985 Hussein told the President that the Soviet Union would have to be a full party to the process as well via an 'international conference.'

What has happened is that, instead of making the hard decision to sit down with Israel, and buck the rejectionist opposition, Hussein has progressively moved back to take refuge behind positions that will be acceptable to the rejectionists. No one has been more enthusiastic about the 'international conference' formula, which Hussein now calls his own idea, than the PLO, Syria, and the U.S.S.R., which have been pushing it for years.<sup>14</sup>

The second quote taken from the Reagan Administration's defense of the Jordan arms sale package also pertained to the peace process: 'Approving the package will not guarantee the success of the peace process; but denying it almost certainly spells failure.' AIPAC responded by flatly rejecting this argument.

This argument concedes that the administration seeks and expects nothing from Jordan in terms of the peace process in exchange for this arms package. Denying these weapons will in fact help the peace process. The arms sale is not a part of the peace process, but the antithesis of it. It focuses on the instruments of war, rather than on peace.



The arms sale should not proceed for several reasons. First, a military buildup in Jordan will have an adverse effect on Jordan's willingness to move forward in the peace process. For peace talks to begin, King Hussein must break with radicals, and agree to sit down with Israel. Instead, he is insisting upon positions that will be acceptable to the radicals. If, under these circumstances, Jordan is provided with these deadly weapons, the United States would have made it clear that Jordan can stand still in the peace process, and still get the arms it wants.

Second, supplying these weapons will erode Israel's margin of security, thus increasing the importance of the strategic depth offered Israel by the West Bank. It will also weaken the government of Israel, and its ability to accept the risks in the peace process. This air defense package will increase Jordan's offensive capabilities by providing them with the means of countering the cornerstone of Israel's defense — its air superiority.<sup>15</sup>

The third quote taken from the Reagan Administration's defense of the Jordan arms sale package represented another attempt to justify the deal as necessary to advance the peace process.

Arms for Jordan and their implicit political and security support can improve the conditions and the atmosphere for the [peace] process, but cannot determine the results. We learned this during the Camp David negotiations. Despite the impetus provided by President Sadat's dramatic, and politically risky, visit to Jerusalem, and the strong U.S. backing for the overall peace effort, the road to peace proved long and hard, and at times appeared destined for failure. This situation did not prevent the United States from agreeing to supply necessary defense weapons to Egypt, including fifty F-5E air defense aircraft, prior to the convening of the peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel at Camp David.<sup>16</sup>

AIPAC countered this point by noting that

At the time the U.S. offered to sell Egypt those aircraft, Israel and Egypt were already involved in direct and public negotiations. President Sadat had traveled to Jerusalem, and the two countries were engaged in direct peace talks. The Camp David process concluded a process that was well underway.

In contrast, today King Hussein continues to decline direct and public negotiations [with Israel], and he appears determined to insist upon positions that will make such talks impossible.

To provide Jordan with arms today would be like having offered fighter aircraft to Egypt before President Sadat had gone to Jerusalem. The United States offered to provide Egypt arms only after the Egyptians were negotiating substance, not merely discussing process. We should defer sales of advanced arms to Jordan until after King Hussein enters into direct and public bilateral negotiations with Israel.<sup>17</sup>

The aforementioned three arguments the Reagan Administration made in defense of the Jordan arms sale package pertained to the peace process: specifically, the White House's claim that the deal was essential to encourage Hussein to continue to advance the cause of peace. AIPAC's response to those arguments was to reiterate its position that Hussein was not committed to peace and therefore was undeserving of the advanced and sophisticated American weaponry contained in the package.

## **The Power of AIPAC on Capitol Hill**

As we have seen, AIPAC issued five memorandums detailing its opposition to the Jordan arms sale package in the 11-day period following Reagan's preliminary notification to Congress of his intent to conclude the deal. All the memorandums were sent to the White House, and undoubtedly to every member of Congress as well. Indeed, AIPAC serves as a major source of information for members of Congress on Middle East politics, and the interest group has released a large quantity of documents on this issue, which the organization has been all too willing to share with lawmakers. As Findley reveals: 'AIPAC has the fastest handout in Washington. Any Representative or Senator who expresses any desire to know anything about the Middle East is

immediately flooded with "position papers" by AIPAC.<sup>18</sup>

AIPAC's eagerness to provide information to members of Congress on Middle East politics is confirmed by Charles McC. Mathias of Maryland, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee during the Reagan Administration, who explained that

When an issue of importance to Israel comes before Congress, AIPAC promptly and unfailingly provides all members with data and documentation, supplemented, as circumstances dictate, with telephone calls and personal visits. Beyond that, signs of hesitation or opposition on the part of a Senator or Representative [in supporting Israel] can usually be relied on to call forth large numbers of letters and telegrams, or visits and phone calls from influential constituents.<sup>19</sup>

One member of Congress who benefited from AIPAC's commitment to provide lawmakers with a generous supply of information on Middle East politics was Frank Church of Idaho, who served as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the 96th Congress. In 1982 Church candidly admitted, 'When I need information on the Middle East, it was reassuring to know that I could depend on AIPAC for professional and reliable assistance.'<sup>20</sup>

As a leading interest group representing the Jewish community, AIPAC obviously does not provide objective and accurate information on Middle East politics, but rather presents the Israeli viewpoint on issues of that region. This is clear from the memorandums AIPAC issued opposing the Jordan arms sale, which represent the Israeli position on this issue, rather than a fair and dispassionate analysis of the subject. The fact that many, perhaps most, members of Congress rely upon AIPAC as a major source of information on Middle East politics means that lawmakers make their decisions on American policy in the region based not upon objective and reliable knowledge of the area, but on pro-Israel propaganda. As Findley puts it,

The problem with depending on AIPAC for information is that the information is certain to contain only Israel's point of view. Its publications tend to such scholarly titles as *A U.S.-Israel Free Trade Area: How Both Sides Can Gain*, and they are filled with footnotes and citations to academic works. But no reader can escape the fact that they are strictly aimed at promoting Israeli interests.<sup>21</sup>

Members of Congress are certainly aware that the information received from AIPAC represents the Israeli perspective on Middle East politics. Ordinarily this fact would undermine the credibility of this information and weaken AIPAC's influence over congressional decision making relating to the Middle East. This is true since members of Congress generally seek objective and reliable information on political issues and are skeptical of basing their decisions on blatant propaganda of the kind AIPAC routinely produces.

However, AIPAC closely monitors congressional votes on Middle East issues; any lawmaker who takes positions contrary to the interests of Israel is sure to incur the wrath of the interest group. AIPAC closely follows congressional decision making on the Middle East through its newsletter the *Near East Report*. Findley notes that

AIPAC ... oversees the *Near East Report*, a weekly newsletter that goes to about 60,000 persons, and is sent free to all members of Congress, high-ranking government officials, academics, and many media representatives. Although the newsletter is legally separate from AIPAC, it was founded by Sy Kenen, one of AIPAC's founders, and it strictly follows Israel's policy line. It regularly prints stories about legislators' voting patterns, thereby alerting lawmakers that their votes are being noted, and the disposition of new legislation affecting Israel.<sup>22</sup>

How is it that AIPAC is able to run perhaps the most effective lobbying operation on Capitol Hill? The answer lies in the fact that AIPAC substantially enhanced its lobbying capabilities following the AW ACS debate of 1981, in which the pro-Israel lobby suffered the worst political defeat in its history. Despite mounting a massive lobbying campaign to persuade Congress to

block the AW ACS sale, AIPAC found itself outmaneuvered by Reagan, who successfully convinced the Senate to approve the deal.<sup>23</sup>

The Senate's approval of the AWACS sale represented an enormous psychological defeat for AIPAC, since the deal signified that the interest group could no longer take congressional support for Israel for granted. As David Howard Goldberg notes,

AIPAC had set as its principal objective congressional passage of the resolution of disapproval [of the AW ACS sale]: the failure to achieve this goal was a major defeat for the American Zionist movement (approximating a situation of least influence for AIPAC). It was also a clear and unambiguous message to American Jewry that 'victory is no longer automatic when it comes to maintaining U.S. support for Israel.'<sup>24</sup>

AIPAC responded to its defeat on the AWACS issue by investing substantial amounts of financial resources to significantly improve its lobbying operations on Capitol Hill. As Findley notes, 'Since the AWACS defeat, AIPAC has completely overhauled its operation and expanded greatly.' Hedrick Smith, a journalist for the *New York Times*, reported in 1988 that AIPAC's 'budget shot up eight-fold [to \$6.1 million] in nine years, its membership multiplied from 9,000 households in 1978 to 55,000 in 1987, its staff grew from twenty-five to eighty-five. By the mid-eighties, its membership was steering roughly \$4 million in campaign contributions to friendly candidates and punishing political foes.'<sup>25</sup>

Commenting on the massive growth in the lobbying power of AIPAC since its defeat on the AW ACS issue, Dine remarked, 'We lost the vote, but won the issue.'<sup>26</sup> Perhaps a better way to rephrase Dine's comment was that AIPAC lost the battle, but won the war: while the interest group lost the AW ACS battle, the organization won the war to assure that the United States maintained its pro-Israel policy in the Middle East.

Recognizing that it could not afford another political loss comparable to its defeat on the AW ACS issue, AIPAC went to work to substantially strengthen its lobbying power in order to assure that the interest group would prevail in future votes on Capitol Hill affecting the interests of Israel. AIPAC's intense effort to persuade Congress to block the Jordan arms sale package represented the most effective lobbying campaign ever waged by a Jewish organization. As we have seen, the campaign featured AIPAC's issuance of a stream of memorandums to members of Congress, which explained why they should block the deal. The debate over the sale provided AIPAC the opportunity to test the effectiveness of its newly developed lobbying operations, which relied upon an expanded range of political and financial resources acquired since the conclusion of the AWACS debate. As we will see, AIPAC's newly developed lobbying operations proved to be extremely effective in influencing congressional disposition of the Jordan arms sale package, providing the interest group far more persuasive power on this issue than the earlier debate over the AWACS deal.

## **Congress Passes Senate Joint Resolution 228 by a Near- Unanimous Margin**

On 21 October 1985, Reagan formally notified Congress of his intent to conclude the Jordan arms sale package.<sup>27</sup> Opponents of the sale in the Senate responded by introducing Joint Resolution 228 the following day. The resolution would block the sale—but only before 1

March 1986. Reagan would have been free to formally notify Congress of his intent to conclude the sale beginning on that date. Reagan would not have been permitted to proceed with the sale before that date 'unless direct and meaningful peace negotiations between Israel and Jordan are underway.'<sup>28</sup> On 24 October 1985, the Senate passed the resolution by the near-unanimous margin of 97 to 1, with Christopher Dodd of Connecticut casting the lone vote against the measure.<sup>29</sup> On 12 November the House followed the lead of the Senate and passed the resolution by a voice vote.<sup>30</sup>

On 25 November 1985, Reagan signed Senate Joint Resolution 228: he had no other choice but to do so since Congress could have easily overridden a presidential veto of the measure, which commanded the support of a near-unanimous majority of lawmakers. By signing the resolution, Reagan hoped to preserve the option of resubmitting the Jordan arms sale package to Congress on 1 March 1986 or thereafter. Indeed, Reagan implicitly expressed his intent to resubmit the sale to Congress at a later date in a statement he issued announcing that he had signed the resolution.<sup>31</sup> Congress would have been less likely to approve the sale if Reagan had antagonized its members by vetoing the resolution, especially in light of the fact that lawmakers were sure to override any such veto. Since such a veto was sure to represent an exercise in political futility, Reagan found that he would gain more by signing the resolution, rather than making a fruitless attempt to kill it through the exercise of his veto power.

Senate Joint Resolution 228 was designed as a face-saving measure to shield Reagan from the humiliating rebuke which would have come had the measure permanently blocked the Jordan arms sale package. By allowing Reagan to make another attempt to conclude the sale after 1 March 1986, practically all members of Congress, who opposed the deal, wanted to signal their strong opposition to the agreement without completely foreclosing the option of allowing the President to conclude the accord at a future date. Members of Congress feared that a resolution which permanently blocked the sale would undermine Reagan's authority as foreign policy leader of the United States, especially in the Middle East, and damage the credibility of Hussein, whose leadership since his ascension to the throne in 1953 had been firmly based upon maintaining strong relations between Washington and Amman. Members of Congress also feared that such a resolution might deal a fatal blow to the Jordanian—Palestinian peace initiative which was under way at the time. The Jordan arms sale package was designed to encourage this initiative, but Amman's commitment to pursue its peace efforts would have been dealt a fatal blow without the American support the deal was intended to provide to the Hashemite monarchy, as the Reagan Administration maintained.

In explaining why Congress preferred to block the sale until before 1 March 1986, rather than to do so permanently, Lugar declared that completely killing the deal 'would have been adverse to the King, adverse to the President, adverse to the peace process.' However, members of Congress hoped that the existence of near-unanimous opposition to the sale among lawmakers would serve notice on Reagan that the deal had no chance for approval by lawmakers — unless the President presented the agreement to Congress after Israel and Jordan had entered into direct peace negotiations, a prospect which remained out of the question. By serving notice that the Jordan arms sale package had no chance of passage, members of Congress hoped that Reagan would spare himself further damage to his authority as foreign policy leader of the United States by shelving the deal, rather than reintroducing it to lawmakers on 1 March 1986 or thereafter, as Senate Joint Resolution 228 allowed him to do.

Hussein responded angrily to passage of Senate Joint Resolution 228, charging that Congress had decided to withhold approval of the Jordan arms sale package in order to exert undue

pressure upon Jordan to enter into direct negotiations with Israel: 'One wouldn't want to use the word blackmail but it [Senate Joint Resolution 228] is totally unacceptable.<sup>32</sup> Obviously it is not a way to deal with problems among friends.'<sup>33</sup> Hussein saw the resolution as consistent with 'the peculiar and indefensible American commitment to Israel's security alone, a commitment that seems to equate security with conquest.' Crown Prince Hassan attacked the resolution in even more blunt terms, vowing that Jordan would not give in to congressional pressure that Amman enter into direct negotiations with Israel as the price the Hashemite monarchy would have to pay in order to obtain advanced and sophisticated arms from the United States: 'Jordan is determined not to make the acquisition of armaments subject to the whims, desires, or approval of Israel and its American supporters. This is not a question of injured dignity, but one of principle. Our independent sovereignty and territorial integrity should not be — and we will not allow it to be — secondary to that of Israel.'<sup>34</sup> Hussein's and Hassan's attacks against the resolution made it clear that Jordan would prefer to forego the purchase of the advanced and sophisticated weaponry contained in the Jordan arms sale package if it meant that Amman would have to enter into direct negotiations with Israel as a condition for approval of the deal in Congress. Hussein's and Hassan's angry responses to passage of the resolution made it clear that Jordan would not enter into direct negotiations with Israel at any time in the near future.

With Congress refusing to approve the Jordan arms sale package until Amman agreed to enter into direct negotiations with Israel, and Hussein and Hassan making it clear that they would not accept this condition as the basis for their approval of the deal, no prospect existed that Congress would ever permit Reagan to conclude the agreement. Accordingly, on 3 February 1986, Shultz wrote to the Chairmen of the foreign relations committees of the Senate and House — Richard Lugar and Dante B. Fascell, respectively — informing them that Reagan had decided to indefinitely postpone his plan to conclude the sale. Members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee responded to Shultz's letter the following day by dropping their plan to introduce Joint Resolution 428, which would have permanently blocked the sale if Reagan had resubmitted the deal to Congress on March 1 or thereafter, when he would have been free to do so.<sup>35</sup> Congress would have been certain to pass the resolution by a near-unanimous margin. Shultz's letter effectively drove the final nail into the coffin of the ill-fated Jordan arms sale package.

## **AIPAC Takes Full Credit for the Defeat of the Jordan Arms Sale Package in Congress**

AIPAC was quick to take full credit for the defeat of the Jordan arms sale package in Congress. AIPAC's claim of responsibility for the defeat of the sale came in remarks delivered by Dine before the interest group's twenty-seventh annual policy conference, held in Washington on 6 April 1986. In his remarks Dine thanked each member of AIPAC and their principal allies in Congress for the work they had done to persuade lawmakers to block the sale during the organization's month-long lobbying campaign, which ended with Senate passage of Joint Resolution 228 on 24 October 1985.

The real story of last year was the one each of you was personally involved in. I want to pay special tribute tonight to you, to Congress, and to our guest speakers tomorrow night and Tuesday morning — Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and John Heinz (R-PA), and Congressman Larry Smith (DFL). Together you blocked the Jordan arms sale! Together you set the pursuit of peace

above the sale of arms as this nation's priority [in the Middle East],

The message was loud and clear: First send in the peacemakers, not the arms merchants. As Senator Heinz put it, 'Selling advanced weapons prior to direct negotiations between Israel and Jordan is premature and unwarranted.'<sup>36</sup>

Dine noted that AIPAC had mounted an intense lobbying campaign in order to persuade Reagan to refrain from submitting the Jordan arms package to Congress. AIPAC's primary argument against the sale was that it would deprive Jordan of incentives to enter into direct negotiations with Israel.

Our strategy, frankly, was to convince the administration not to push for the arms sale until King Hussein had taken an irrevocable step toward peace. Our goal was to see him seated across the negotiating table from the Prime Minister of Israel. If we have learned anything it is that arms sales to Israel's enemies are no incentive for peace. On the contrary, when we withheld weapons, as we did with Egypt in the mid-1970s, we witnessed progress toward reconciliation [between Israel and Egypt]. This was clearly the view of overwhelming majorities in both parties and both houses of Congress.<sup>37</sup>

Dine noted that Reagan failed to heed AIPAC's pleas not to submit the Jordan arms sale package to Congress. This left members of Congress no alternative but to pass a resolution blocking the sale.

Despite all the warnings [from AIPAC], the administration sent its \$2 billion jets-and-missiles package for Jordan to Capitol Hill on October 21. Twenty-four hours later nearly three-quarters of the U.S. Senate introduced a resolution to disapprove that arms sale. This was followed a few days afterward by a ninety-seven-to-one vote in the Senate (and later unanimously in the House) shelving the sale for another 120 days [until before March 1, 1986], or until 'direct and meaningful peace negotiations between Israel and Jordan are underway.' As the March 1, 1986 deadline approached, as congressional opposition continued to grow and was strong enough to override the President's veto, with still no sign of progress in getting King Hussein to the [negotiating] table, the administration reluctantly announced it was indefinitely postponing its arms proposal.<sup>38</sup>

Dine noted that Reagan had decided to abandon his intent to conclude the Jordan arms sale package because he fully recognized that the deal stood no chance of approval in Congress. Dine claimed that AIPAC's intense lobbying campaign was responsible for its defeat in Congress. Addressing members of AIPAC, Dine noted that

This [the defeat of the sale] did not happen by accident. It came because you and thousands like you all around this country worked very hard. You spoke, and wrote, and phoned, and visited your Representatives and Senators. You let them know clearly how you felt about selling advanced fighter jets and missiles to a country still at war with Israel, which shares her longest hostile border. Your message, in the words of one Congressman, was 'no peace, no planes!'<sup>39</sup>

On 19 February 1986, Hussein announced that he was abandoning his peace initiative, which involved the convening of an international conference to be attended by all parties to the Arab—Israeli conflict, with the Palestinians to be represented by a joint Jordanian—Palestinian delegation. Hussein revealed that the major stumbling block to the convening of such a conference was Arafat's insistence that the United States recognize the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination as a condition for Palestinian participation in any peace negotiations with Israel. However, the Reagan Administration rejected Arafat's demand, resulting in the collapse of Hussein's peace initiative. Hussein angrily blamed Arafat's intransigence for the collapse of the King's peace initiative.<sup>40</sup>

Dine cited the collapse of Hussein's peace initiative as evidence that Jordan remained adamant in its refusal to enter into peace negotiations with Israel: 'By withdrawing the package, even the administration conceded that there had been no progress on the peace front. Even King Hussein acknowledged this when he finally blamed the breakdown of his peace initiative on Yasser Arafat.'<sup>41</sup>



Dine paid tribute to the members of AIPAC for their success in having persuaded Congress to block the Jordan arms sale package:

You shaped the debate by demanding that major arms sales [to Arab nations] be predicated on a viable peace process. You articulated your views in an effective manner to your elected officials. That is the essence of the democratic process, and it is the essence of AIPAC. It is the essence of America. That is what we are all about. You made the decided difference. I salute you.<sup>42</sup>

Dine concluded his remarks on the Jordan arms sale package by claiming that the existence of near-unanimous opposition to the deal in Congress served as irrefutable proof that AIPAC had succeeded in building almost total and absolute support for Israel among lawmakers: 'It is clear that we have grounds for great satisfaction. We have succeeded in building extraordinary support for Israel in Congress.'<sup>43</sup>

## **AIPAC Emerges as a Dominant Actor in the Making of American Policy in the Middle East**

Dine's claim that AIPAC had 'succeeded in building extraordinary support for Israel in Congress' is an understatement. In truth, the existence of near-unanimous opposition to the Jordan arms sale package in Congress reveals that AIPAC had emerged as a dominant actor in the formulation and implementation of American policy in the Middle East. The Jordan arms sale package represented an essential element in the Reagan Administration's commitment to strengthen Jordanian—American relations. Jordan represented a key moderate Arab nation which had long served as a critical source of stability in the Middle East. Since Hussein's ascension to the Hashemite throne in 1953, Jordan had served as a key ally of the United States. Since its acceptance of an American-brokered cease-fire with Israel in 1970, Jordan had maintained peace along its border with Israel — the longest such border between Israel and its four Arab neighbors. Given the critical contribution Jordan had made to preserving a semblance of peace and stability in the Middle East, the United States needed to forge stronger ties with Amman in order to encourage the Hashemite monarchy to continue to exert a moderating influence in the Middle East — a region which has traditionally served as a bastion of political extremism. The Jordan arms sale package represented a perfect vehicle to achieve this end.

AIPAC had raised two central and overriding arguments against the Jordan arms sale package: first, that it would deprive Jordan of incentives to enter into direct negotiations with Israel; and second, that it represented a threat to the security of the Jewish state. Both arguments are groundless. Jordan had no grounds to enter into any negotiations with Israel because no conflict existed between the two nations. The decision of the Arab heads of state at their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974, and reaffirmed at a subsequent conference in Fez in 1982 — to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians — effectively relinquished the territorial claims Jordan had previously exerted over the West Bank. Henceforth, the Palestinian residents of the West Bank could only be represented in negotiations with Israel by the PLO, not Jordan.

Congress' insistence that no advanced and sophisticated American weapons systems could be delivered to Jordan until Amman entered into direct peace negotiations with Israel represented a questionable effort by lawmakers to subvert the Rabat and Fez decisions. One can legitimately



argue that Congress had no right to undertake such action. The Arab world, not the United States, had the right to designate a party to represent the Palestinians in peace negotiations with Israel, and since 1974 the Arab heads of state had made it clear that that party would be the PLO, and not Jordan. Congress' insistence that Jordan must enter into direct negotiations with Israel as a condition for its approval of the Jordan arms sale package represented a dubious effort by lawmakers to interfere in inter-Arab affairs regarding which party would represent the Palestinians in the peace process. Jordan could not enter into such negotiations, even if Amman wanted to do so, because such action would violate the Rabat and Fez decisions.

By refusing to approve the Jordan arms sale package until Amman had entered into direct negotiations with Israel, Congress was attempting to pressure Hussein into subverting the Rabat and Fez decisions by designating Jordan as the representative of the Palestinians in such talks. Had Hussein given in to this congressional pressure, it would have resulted in Jordan's isolation from the rest of the Arab world, which adamantly opposed any alternative to the PLO in representing the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. Hussein had legitimate grounds not to give in to such pressure, and the King decided to forego his request for advanced and sophisticated American weapons systems rather than be used by Congress as a tool to thwart the Rabat and Fez decisions.

AIPAC's second major argument against the Jordan arms sale package — that it represented a threat to the security of Israel — was not credible. Jordan could not use the weapons contained in the package against Israel, except as part of an Arab—Israeli war. However, such a war required Egyptian participation: neither Jordan nor Syria were willing or able to go to war against Israel unless led by Egypt, by far the most militarily powerful nation in the Arab world. However, in 1979 Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel which effectively eliminated Egypt as a confrontation state against Israel.

With Egypt withdrawing from the Arab—Israeli conflict, both Jordan and Syria lost the capacity to make war against Israel, and both nations have maintained a state of non-belligerency with Israel since the last Arab—Israeli war in 1973. Moreover, in 1994 Jordan negotiated a peace treaty with Israel in order to support the Oslo peace process between the Jewish state and the PLO. The Jordanian—Israeli peace treaty provides irrefutable evidence that Amman remained willing to negotiate a peace settlement with Israel once the Jewish state committed itself to enter into peace talks with the PLO, which Tel Aviv did under the leadership of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1993.

The military conflict between Israel and Jordan ended in 1970. By 1985, when Reagan formally notified Congress of his intent to conclude the Jordan arms sale package, the two nations had enjoyed 15 years of relative peace. As his decision to negotiate a peace treaty with Israel in 1994 proves, Hussein was clearly committed to negotiating with the Jewish state under the right circumstances as early as 1985, when the King opened his peace initiative. Congress had no basis to block the sale on the groundless fear that the deal represented a threat to the security of Israel. Had Congress approved the sale, Jordan would not have used the weapons contained in the sale to threaten the security of Israel for the simple reason that no military conflict between the two nations had existed since 1970.

No basis existed for Congress to block the Jordan arms sale package: Congress' decision to withhold its approval of the deal in order to pressure Jordan into entering direct negotiations with Israel represented a questionable attempt by lawmakers to meddle in inter-Arab affairs, while the agreement posed no threat to the security of Israel. By positioning itself to block the sale, Congress delivered a stinging rebuke against Jordan, which has served for the last half-century as

a key ally of the United States and a critical moderating influence in the Middle East — the most violent and unstable region in the world. Why did a unanimous majority in Congress take the politically dubious action of positioning itself to block the Jordan arms sale package, a deal which was vitally important to the national security interests of the United States in the Middle East? The answer remains that Congress was responding to the intense and vociferous pressure of AIPAC, which was determined to kill the sale.

As we have seen, AIPAC disseminated a stream of memorandums outlining its case against the Jordan arms sale package, which were distributed to the White House and undoubtedly to every member of Congress. As Dine revealed in his remarks delivered to the twenty-seventh annual AIPAC policy conference on 6 April 1986, many, if not most, of the 55,000 members of AIPAC lobbied their Senators and Representatives in Congress to oppose the sale. AIPAC's month-long lobbying campaign on Capitol Hill resulted in the development of near-unanimous opposition to the deal in Congress.

AIPAC succeeded in persuading members of Congress that they should not approve the sale until Jordan entered into direct negotiations with Israel. Not a single member of Congress pointed to the fact that Jordan had no authority to represent the Palestinians in negotiations with Israel, given the decision made by the Arab heads of state at their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974 — and reaffirmed at a subsequent conference in Fez in 1982 — that the PLO constituted the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Even the Reagan Administration, which represented virtually the sole source of support for the sale in Washington, failed to point out this fact. The administration refused to have anything to do with the PLO, and hoped to use the sale to induce Jordan to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. The administration's own rejection of the Rabat and Fez decisions fueled Congress' determination to withhold approval of the sale until Jordan entered into direct negotiations with Israel. This guaranteed defeat of the sale in Congress, since Jordan could not enter into such negotiations, even if Amman wanted to do so. The Reagan Administration's refusal to acknowledge that Jordan was in no position to enter into such negotiations gave members of Congress the excuse they needed to withhold approval of the sale until the commencement of peace talks between Tel Aviv and Amman. By joining Congress in insisting that Jordan agree to represent the Palestinians in such talks, the administration unwittingly conspired with lawmakers to kill the sale based upon Amman's continued refusal to enter into such negotiations.

If the Jordan arms sale package were to have any hope of approval in Congress, the Reagan Administration would have had to excuse Amman from any obligation to enter into direct negotiations with Israel based upon the fact that the Arab world remained adamant in its insistence that the PLO, and not the Hashemite monarchy, constituted the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. However, the administration refused to do this, insisting instead that Jordan must agree to represent the Palestinians in such negotiations. The administration's determination to exercise the Jordanian option in advancing the peace process played into the hands of AIPAC: it gave the organization a credible basis to argue before Congress that Jordan had failed to fulfill its obligation to enter into such negotiations, and that lawmakers should respond to Amman's intransigence in the peace process by rejecting the sale. Congress, by a near-unanimous margin, complied with AIPAC's demands. Through its own mishandling of the Jordan arms issue, the administration inadvertently handed AIPAC a major political victory in defeating the sale in Congress and only succeeded in strengthening the stranglehold the organization exerted over American policy in the Middle East.

The defeat of the Jordan arms sale package in Congress represented the final act in AIPAC's

emergence as a dominant actor in the formulation and implementation of American policy in the Middle East. Referring to AIPAC as a 'super-lobby,' Smith noted that

AIPAC gained so much political muscle that by 1985, AIPAC and its allies could force President Reagan to renege on an arms deal he had promised King Hussein. By 1986, the pro-Israel lobby could stop Reagan from making another jet fighter deal with Saudi Arabia; and Secretary of State George Shultz had to sit down with AIPAC's Executive Director —not congressional leaders — to find out what level of arms to the Saudis AIPAC would tolerate.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

The Jordan arms sale package represented a vital element in the Reagan Administration's commitment to advance the peace process. The administration hoped to use the sale to induce Jordan to enter into direct negotiations with Israel. However, the administration failed to see that this was impossible, given the decision of the Arab heads of state at their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974 — and reaffirmed at a subsequent conference in Fez in 1982 — recognizing the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The administration's efforts to exclude the PLO from the peace process fueled false hopes on Capitol Hill that Jordan could be induced to represent the Palestinians in negotiations with Israel. Members of Congress were determined to withhold approval of the sale as a means to pressure Jordan into entering into such negotiations. However, recognizing that giving in to such pressure would result in its isolation from the rest of the Arab world, Jordan adamantly refused to enter into such negotiations, resulting in Congress' decision to position itself to block the sale.

The defeat of the Jordan arms sale package in Congress reflected the growing power of AIPAC and its success in emerging as a dominant actor in the formulation and implementation of American policy in the Middle East. AIPAC mounted an effective lobbying campaign to persuade Congress to block the sale, citing Jordan's refusal to enter into direct negotiations with Israel as the basis for such action. The Reagan Administration inadvertently contributed to the growing power of AIPAC by agreeing with the organization that Jordan must consent to represent the Palestinians in such negotiations. This gave political credibility to AIPAC's argument that Congress must withhold approval of the sale until Jordan entered into such negotiations. With the Reagan Administration serving as an unwitting ally of AIPAC in its efforts to destroy the political credibility of Jordan as a serious participant in the peace process, the organization had no problem mobilizing a near-unanimous majority in Congress to make it clear to Reagan that they were prepared to block the sale.

By 1985, AIPAC had emerged as a dominant actor in the formulation and implementation of American policy in the Middle East because its argument that Jordan, not the PLO, must agree to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel received uncritical acceptance from the White House and Congress, effectively preventing any transfer of advanced and sophisticated American weaponry to Amman until it entered into direct negotiations with the Jewish state. This essentially gave AIPAC the power to define the terms in which the peace process should go forward. When Jordan refused to follow the script AIPAC had written, which defined the critical role Amman would play in the peace process in serving as representative of the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel, the interest group persuaded a near-unanimous majority in Congress to punish the Hashemite monarchy by passing Senate Joint Resolution 228, which for all intents and purposes blocked the Jordan arms sale package. To be sure, the resolution only blocked the

sale before 1 March 1986, after which Reagan was technically free to reintroduce the sale. However, by passing the resolution by a near-unanimous majority, Congress made it clear that its members would take action to indefinitely block the sale, should Reagan pursue his effort to conclude the sale 1 March 1986.

The only condition under which Congress was prepared to approve the Jordan arms sale package was if Jordan agreed to enter into direct negotiations with Israel—which Amman made clear it would not do even if this cost the Hashemite monarchy access to advanced and sophisticated American weaponry of the kind contained in the sale. Recognizing that the sale stood no chance of approval in Congress, Reagan had no alternative but to withdraw the deal. As in the case of the Reagan Plan, the President participated in the death of the Jordan arms sale package because he refused to challenge the pro-Israel lobby concerning how the peace process should go forward. Reagan was too closely identified with the interests of Israel and its Washington lobby to build the strong relations with moderate Arab states such as Jordan, which remained essential to the pursuit of a credible and effective American policy in the Middle East.

## Chapter 5

# Reagan's Lasting Legacy on U.S. Policy in the Middle East

The evolving strategic alliance between the United States and Israel was particularly enhanced by President Reagan's... perception of Israel as a 'unique strategic asset.'<sup>1</sup>

—Naseer H. Aruri, political scientist

When one thinks of Presidents who made a substantial contribution to the creation of American policy in the Middle East, Ronald Reagan's name would be at the bottom of the list. Reagan made no lasting contribution to the peace process; there were no 'breakthroughs' in the peace process which rival even the limited diplomatic accomplishment of the Camp David peace treaty negotiated under Jimmy Carter's leadership, or even the more modest step-by-step initiatives undertaken by Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. As Quandt notes in a very incisive remark quoted in [Chapter 2](#), 'the Reagan period produced little in the way of tangible progress toward Arab-Israeli peace.... On balance, Israel and its neighbors were no closer to agreement in 1988 than they were in 1980.' Quandt attributes the lack of progress in the peace process during the Reagan Administration to the President's own disinterest in the Middle East: 'It is hard not to conclude that Reagan's disengaged style, his lack of curiosity, and his passivity on issues related to the Middle East were impediments to creative U.S. peace diplomacy.'<sup>2</sup>

## **The Historical Significance of Reagan's Policy in the Middle East**

Making tangible progress in advancing the peace process would ordinarily be, as Quandt suggests, the standard measure by which the Middle East policy community would assess the significance of any President as an influential actor in the formulation and implementation of American diplomacy in the region. And by that measure, Reagan would certainly fall at or near the bottom of the list of modern Presidents in terms of their Middle East diplomacy. As Quandt aptly notes, Reagan made no tangible progress in advancing the peace process.

However, contrary to the notion that Reagan had no lasting impact on American policy in the Middle East, this book argues that he is unquestionably the most influential President in the history of American diplomacy in the region — even more so than Carter. To be sure, Reagan does not appear on the surface to have made any remarkable or exceptional policy initiatives which represent a sharp break in the conduct of American policy in the Middle East as it evolved since either the Yom Kippur War of 1973 or the Six-Day War of 1967, or stretching back even earlier to the creation of Israel in 1948 — which would distinguish him from other modern Presidents in the minds of members of the Middle East policy community.

However, Reagan made his mark on American policy in the Middle East in a much more subtle way, which has escaped the attention of the Middle East policy community. Reagan's great contribution to that policy — whether for good or ill, depending on one's perspective on the Arab

—Israeli conflict — was to move the United States away from representing itself, however disingenuously, as an honest broker in that dispute, as was essentially the case during the 1970s, to being an open, unbridled, and unapologetic supporter of Israel in its rivalry with the Arab world. Put another way, Reagan moved the United States from pursuing a fraudulent, 'evenhanded' policy, designed to conceal its support for Israel, and placed Washington openly, squarely, and unabashedly as an enthusiastic backer of the Jewish state. How was Reagan able to accomplish this task? The answer is through the AWACS sale. By placing the Persian Gulf under the protective military umbrella of the United States, the sale eliminated the threat of another Arab oil embargo. That threat is what drove Nixon, Ford, and Carter to pursue the empty and meaningless diplomatic initiatives associated with step-by-step diplomacy, in which the three Presidents managed to bluff the Arab oil sheiks into believing that the United States would serve as an honest broker in achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

But to quote the title of Naseer H. Aruri's aptly named book, the United States has remained a 'Dishonest Broker,' more an advocate for Israeli interests than a fair and impartial mediator of the Arab—Israeli conflict.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Nixon, Ford, and Carter succeeded in falsely representing the United States as an unbiased mediator in the peace process through the feverish and frenetic shuttle diplomatic missions undertaken by Henry Kissinger in the Middle East, followed by the dramatic summit meetings between Carter, Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and President Anwar Sadat at Camp David. The idea behind step-by-step diplomacy was to create the illusion, rather than the reality, of a diplomatic momentum toward peace.

Nixon, Ford, and Carter were playing for time, hoping that they could create the illusion of a peace process, which would allow them to avoid having to adequately address the core issue of the Arab—Israeli conflict — the Palestinian problem — without antagonizing the Arab oil sheiks in the process. The problem is that at some point the United States would have had to deliver the goods to the Arab world in the form of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East which would adequately address the plight of the Palestinians, which Washington remained unprepared to do. Absent some change in the strategic dynamics of the Persian Gulf, the United States would have been caught between a rock and a hard place — between having to deliver to the Arab world on the Palestinian problem, which would have infuriated Israel and its Washington lobby, or having the peace process exposed for what it was and remains to this day — a dubious exercise.

As luck would have it for the United States, a change did occur in the strategic dynamics of the Persian Gulf which relieved Washington of the need to move the peace process beyond the limited treaty negotiated between Israel and Egypt. With the Persian Gulf consumed by the wave of political instability which followed the overthrow of the Shah, Saudi Arabia was driven to forge a strategic alliance with the United States in order to assure that Washington could fill the power vacuum left by the demise of the Iranian monarchy. With the monarchies of the Persian Gulf operating under the protective cover of the American military, the Arab sheiks were not about to impose another oil embargo against the nation to whom they owed their existence — the United States. As a result, Reagan and his successors were now free to address their domestic political imperative to pursue a strong and unswerving, and more importantly an open, honest, and explicit, pro-Israel policy in the Middle East in order to satisfy the demands of organized American Jewry and build support within the Jewish community.

Ironically, Reagan's success in persuading the Senate to approve the AW ACS sale was interpreted at the time as a defeat for the pro-Israel lobby. This is understandable since organized American Jewry mounted an all-out, non-stop lobbying campaign to persuade Congress to block

the sale. However, while Senate approval of the sale represented a defeat for the pro-Israel lobby in the limited sense that organized American Jewry lost the AW ACS battle, the sale still provided invaluable benefits to the interests of Israel. By relieving the United States of the threat of another Arab oil embargo, it left Washington free to pursue the staunch and unequivocal pro-Israel policy in the Middle East which organized American Jewry has long championed.

That policy is the reason why Reagan and his successors have failed to sustain even the illusory momentum toward a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East — as dubious as it may have been — which existed in the period immediately following the end of the Yom Kippur War. Such a settlement requires that the United States serve as an evenhanded mediator in its efforts to resolve the Arab—Israeli conflict.

However, since 1981 American policy in the Middle East has been anything but evenhanded. Rather, the United States has acted as an unabashed and unapologetic supporter of Israel. This has obviously made a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East impossible, since neither Reagan nor any of his successors have been willing to even consider pressuring Israel to make the political and territorial concessions required to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region. Accordingly, the stalemate in the peace process which has prevailed since the signing of the Camp David peace treaty has continued over more than the last two decades, with no signs of ending through the foreseeable future. During the 1990s, it appeared that the moribund peace process had been revived through the Oslo Accords, but hopes that the spirit of Oslo would lead to the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East were dashed by the eruption of the Palestinian Intifada on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2000, which continues to this day.

## **Reagan Engineers a Sharp Detour in American Policy in the Middle East**

With the United States poised to suffer the devastating economic effects of the Arab oil embargo which followed the end of the Yom Kippur War, in October 1973 Nixon and Kissinger committed the United States to pursue a diplomatic initiative to break the stalemate in the peace process which had existed since the Six-Day War. The United States fully recognized that this effort would likely fail unless Washington applied pressure against Israel to make the political and territorial concessions to at least keep the peace process alive, if only barely. Accordingly, when a breakdown occurred in the peace process in 1975, Ford threatened to 'reassess' American policy in the Middle East in light of the intransigent position the United States believed that Israel had adopted in negotiations with Egypt to conclude a second disengagement agreement on the Sinai Peninsula. Ford's threat to 'reassess' American policy in the Middle East established the firm precedent that the United States would consider imposing sanctions against Israel, including either a substantial reduction or suspension of American foreign aid, if a major disagreement between the two allies arose over the peace process. Ford's threat no doubt induced Israel to adopt a more flexible position in the peace process, resulting in the negotiation of a second disengagement agreement on the Sinai Peninsula in 1975, and eventually paving the way for the conclusion of the Camp David peace treaty four years later.

During the 1980 presidential campaign Reagan made it clear that he would abandon Carter's rhetorical and substantively disingenuous commitment to pursue an evenhanded policy in the



Middle East, consistent with the conduct of American diplomacy in the region since 1973. In contrast to Carter, who attempted to temper his support for Israel behind empty promises to ultimately address the plight of the Palestinians, Reagan pledged to place the United States firmly in support of Israel in its conflict with the Arab world. Reagan's most explicit commitment to pursue a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East came on 3 September 1980, when he delivered an address before the annual convention of B'nai B'rith International, a leading Jewish organization. In his address Reagan branded the PLO a terrorist organization — in contrast to Carter, who refused to do so. In conformance with Reagan's declaration of official American hostility toward the PLO, in 1986 Counselor to the President Edwin Meese III suggested that PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat was an international terrorist who should be imprisoned, or even assassinated.

By conveying unbridled hostility toward the PLO, Reagan made it clear that he would not deal with the organization and would work actively to exclude the group from the peace process, despite the decision made by the Arab heads of state at their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974 — and reaffirmed at a subsequent conference in Fez — which recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. By insulating Israel from having to deal with the PLO, Reagan assured that the Jewish state would avoid having to address the Arab demand that a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East must be based upon the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as such a state could only be governed by the organization. Israel was determined to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, retain control over substantial portions of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and marginalize the PLO as a factor in the peace process. Reagan's firm and unwavering stance against the PLO served Israeli interests, and it is little wonder that in the 1980 presidential election he received the largest share of the Jewish vote, a traditionally Democratic constituency, of any Republican nominee in recorded American electoral history.

Reagan was not in office for two weeks when he renounced well-established American policy, which branded Israeli settlements on the occupied Arab territories as 'illegal.' Though Reagan pledged to continue official American policy, which maintained that the settlements were an 'obstacle to peace,' he expressed his view that they were not 'illegal,' despite the fact that they were under any reasonable interpretation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

When Reagan entered the White House, he came to understand that his support for Israel had to give way to the reality that he needed to take action to restore security to the politically unstable but economically vital Persian Gulf. The overthrow of the Shah, the Iran hostage crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the outbreak of the Iran—Iraq War — coming as they did in rapid succession during 1979 and 1980 — underscored the political turmoil in the Persian Gulf. The political instability in the region was not just a foreign policy issue, but a domestic matter as well, insofar as the chaos in the region was directly responsible for rising international oil prices experienced during 1979 and 1980. Those rising oil prices wreaked havoc upon the American economy, fueling double-digit inflation and interest rates, respectively.

Reagan was elected to the presidency on a pledge to reverse the American economic and military decline suffered during the 1970s. Reagan fully recognized that American economic and strategic leadership in the international community required direct American action to restore security to the politically troubled, oil-rich Persian Gulf. The restoration of security to the region was vital to stabilize international oil prices, thereby curbing the rise in inflation and interest rates which afflicted the industrial world. The status of the United States as a global superpower required that Washington exercise the military power to protect the industrial world's access to

the vast oil reserves of the Gulf, which was vital to the economic survival of the developed nations.

Reagan's strategy to restore security to the Persian Gulf required that he strengthen the strategic partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The two allies needed to engage in the military cooperation necessary to preserve the security of the region. To achieve this end, Reagan decided to approve the AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia, an Arab nation with a long record of unrelenting hostility toward Israel. Charging that the sale threatened the security of Israel, organized American Jewry mounted an intense lobbying campaign to persuade Congress to block the deal. However, Reagan held the upper hand in his battle with the pro-Israel lobby over the sale. Warning that congressional action to block the sale would undermine his authority as the foreign policy leader of the United States, especially in the Middle East, the most economically and strategically vital region in the world, Reagan persuaded the Senate to approve the sale, albeit by a bare margin of four votes.

However, Reagan's 'victory' over the pro-Israel lobby in the AWACS debate did not come without political costs — specifically to his relationship with the Jewish community. Feeling that Reagan had betrayed them through his support for the AWACS sale, many Jewish leaders expressed dismay, and even disgust, with the President's handling of the debate. To compensate the pro-Israel lobby for its loss in the AWACS debate Reagan held a meeting with 34 prominent Jewish supporters at the White House following Senate approval of the AWACS sale. The meeting provided Reagan an opportunity to reassure his Jewish backers of his unwavering support for Israel and his intent to henceforth pursue a clear and consistent pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. For the most part, Reagan kept this promise during the remainder of his presidency.

To be sure, Reagan flirted with the idea of adopting an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, as he had briefly done during the AWACS debate, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Armed with almost total and absolute American support, Israel expected the Reagan Administration to back the invasion, which turned out not to be the case. Reagan recognized that he needed to send a clear signal to Israel that it could not take American support for granted, if for no other reason than to serve notice upon the Jewish state that future military actions, like the operation in Lebanon, which further undermined the fragile and tenuous political stability of the Middle East, would not be tolerated.

Pursuant to his newfound commitment to pursue an evenhanded policy in the Middle East, on 1 September 1982 Reagan delivered a nationwide television address in which he proposed a peace plan for the region. The Reagan Plan called on Israel and its Arab neighbors to make major concessions to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Israel's Arab neighbors would have to recognize the right of the Jewish state to exist within secure and recognized borders. In return, Israel would have to withdraw from practically, if not virtually, all occupied Arab territories. By attempting to achieve a fair and balanced approach to resolving the Arab—Israeli conflict, the Reagan Plan created a reasonable basis to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

## **Reagan Reverts to Pursuing a Pro-Israel Policy in the Middle East**

While Reagan was willing to propose a fair and balanced plan to resolve the Arab—Israeli conflict, he was unwilling to assure its implementation against Israeli opposition. Such opposition was inevitable, given Israel's refusal to make the political and territorial concessions to its Arab neighbors required under the Reagan Plan. Indeed, Israel immediately responded to the unveiling of the Reagan Plan by flatly rejecting it. In response to Reagan's demand for a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity, which the President issued during his nationwide television address on the Middle East, the Jewish state announced plans to construct dozens of new settlements in the occupied Arab territories in the months following the delivery of the speech.

Reagan could have threatened to impose sanctions against Israel if it persisted in its opposition to his peace plan, as Ford did in 1975 when the Jewish state showed similar inflexibility in the peace process. However, in repudiation of the precedent Ford established, Reagan was unwilling to even consider imposing such sanctions and quietly abandoned his peace plan in the face of Israeli defiance. In doing so, Reagan abrogated the precedent established by Ford — that the United States would consider imposing sanctions against Israel if a major disagreement ever arose between the two allies over the peace process, and that if such a dispute occurred it was the American, rather than the Israeli, position which would prevail. Rather, the new precedent Reagan established in the wake of Israel's flat rejection of his peace plan was that if such a disagreement arose it would be the Israeli, not the American, position which would prevail. Indeed, Reagan caved in to Israeli pressure and buried his peace plan in the face of Israel's defiant repudiation of his proposal. Rather than representing an exercise in diplomatic evenhandedness, the Reagan Plan had the unintended effect of veering American policy in the Middle East in an extreme pro Israel direction, given the willingness of the President to kill his own proposal in order to satisfy Israel's repudiation of his peace initiative.

Had Reagan followed the precedent Ford established, he would have granted serious consideration to recommending either a substantial reduction or suspension of America's generous program of foreign aid to Israel in order to moderate its hard-line position against his peace plan. Instead, Reagan did the opposite: he approved a substantial increase in aid to Israel, as provided for in the Foreign Aid Authorization Act which he signed in 1985, rewarding the Jewish state for its contemptuous dismissal of his peace plan. This came after AIPAC made an increase in aid to Israel a top priority on its legislative agenda for 1985. By increasing aid to Israel, Reagan and Congress drove the final nail into the coffin of the Reagan Plan, since such action inadvertently induced the Jewish state to maintain an intransigent position in the peace process, fully recognizing that the United States would impose no sanctions on Tel Aviv for doing so.

Israel's rejection of the Reagan Plan resulted in a catastrophic setback for the peace process, since the proposal served as the framework the President intended to use to create the momentum for peace. Israel's outright repudiation of the plan meant that it could not serve as a basis for peace negotiations, let alone a final settlement. No such settlement was possible without the acquiescence of Israel, which obviously represents a principal party in the Arab—Israeli conflict.

While rewarding Israel for its flat rejection of his peace plan, Reagan punished the PLO by going to extraordinary lengths to exclude the organization from playing any role in the peace process. This occurred despite the fact that the PLO had joined the other Arab nations in 1982 in introducing the Fez Plan, which implicitly granted recognition of the right of Israel to exist. Reagan's effort to exclude the PLO from the peace process represented an attempt to subvert the decision the Arab heads of state had reached at their summit meeting in Rabat in 1974 — and

reaffirmed at a subsequent conference in Fez in 1982 — which recognized the organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. However, Reagan rejected any role for the PLO in the peace process, and spent seven years, from 1982 to 1988, in a futile effort to enlist Jordan to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel before he finally bowed to reality and agreed to recognize the organization at the end of his presidency.

In 1975 the United States and Israel signed a Memorandum of Agreement in which Washington pledged not to open any formal dialogue with the PLO until the organization recognized the right of the Jewish state to exist and accepted Resolutions 242 and 338. Pursuant to the memorandum, the Ford and Carter Administrations refused to open such a dialogue, citing the PLO's failure to accept those two conditions as the basis for maintaining the prohibition against any formal American contacts with the organization. However, Reagan took American hostility to the PLO one step further by effectively sabotaging the peace process in order to guarantee that the organization would not have a seat at the peace table, something it is doubtful either Ford or Carter would have done.

In 1985 the Reagan Administration granted serious consideration to opening a formal dialogue with the PLO in order to assure the success of the Jordanian—Palestinian peace initiative launched pursuant to the 11 February agreement. However, the administration sabotaged the initiative when it rejected the PLO's demand that the United States recognize the right of the Palestinians to exercise self-determination as a condition for the opening of such a dialogue. This was an eminently reasonable demand, which George W. Bush had no problem granting when he made American support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state official American policy in 2002.

Reagan could have made the same official declaration in support of Palestinian statehood in 1985, as Bush eventually did in 2002, especially considering the fact that such action was essential to revive the moribund peace process. However, as the Reagan Administration was granting serious consideration to opening a formal dialogue with the PLO, Israel and its Washington lobby launched a public relations campaign against the PLO, warning against any American dealings with the organization. This persuaded the administration to abandon any intent it may have had to open such a dialogue, and the White House's rejection of the organization's demand that the United States support Palestinian statehood represented a convenient excuse to avoid any dealings with the PLO. The administration's refusal to deal with the PLO quickly caused the entire Jordanian—Palestinian peace initiative to collapse, destroying the last opportunity for any meaningful breakthrough in the peace process during the Reagan presidency.

The Reagan Administration's refusal to deal with the PLO was based upon its belief that it could ultimately persuade Jordan to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. This false hope not only destroyed the last chance for peace during the administration, but dealt a major setback to its effort to bolster Jordanian—American relations. Since Hussein ascended to the Hashemite throne in 1953, Jordan had acted as one of America's most valued allies in the Arab world and had played a key role in fostering a semblance of political stability and moderation in the Middle East. Pursuant to that role, in 1985 Jordan embarked with the PLO on a major push to advance the peace process by declaring their intent to establish a joint Jordanian—Palestinian delegation which would represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. To encourage Jordan to take the political risks its peace initiative required, in 1985 Reagan requested that Congress approve an arms sale package to Amman, which totaled between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion.

However, Reagan undermined his own arguments for the Jordan arms sale package when he agreed with AIPAC that Jordan, not the PLO, must act to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. Reagan's acquiescence on this point gave credence to AIPAC's argument that Congress must not approve the sale until Jordan entered into such talks. Agreeing with AIPAC, Congress balked at Reagan's request, demanding that Jordan enter into direct negotiations with Israel as a condition for approval of the sale. Jordan rejected this demand since it ran counter to the Rabat and Fez decisions. Instead, Jordan insisted that its participation in peace talks with Israel could only take place through a joint Jordanian—Palestinian delegation, which would include Palestinians affiliated with the PLO, and within the framework of an international conference.

In response to Jordan's refusal to accede to Congress' demand that Amman enter into direct negotiations with Israel as a condition for approval of the Jordan arms sale package, a near-unanimous majority of lawmakers let it be known that they would pass a resolution which would block the deal. Reacting to this congressional act of defiance, Reagan withdrew the sale in order to avoid a humiliating rebuke on Capitol Hill, dealing a fatal blow to the Jordanian—Palestinian peace initiative. Reagan must take full responsibility for this outcome since it was his insistence that Jordan must agree to represent the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel which led a near-unanimous majority in Congress to notify the administration of their intent to block the sale when it became clear that Amman would not enter into such negotiations. Reagan's effort to use Jordan as a substitute for the PLO in Arab—Israeli peace talks essentially led to the defeat of the sale in Congress and dealt a fatal blow to the President's commitment to provide critical support for the Jordanian—Palestinian peace initiative, which the deal was designed to achieve. Indeed, recognizing that he could not continue his peace initiative without the vital American support the sale would have provided him, Hussein responded to the defeat of the deal in Congress by terminating his diplomatic efforts to break the stalemate in the peace process two weeks after Secretary of State George Shultz notified lawmakers that the Reagan Administration was withdrawing the deal.

In addition to his effort to exclude the PLO from assuming a role in the peace process, Reagan is the only President to have explicitly rejected the establishment of an independent Palestinian state as a vital element in the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. Reagan announced his opposition to Palestinian statehood in his nationwide television address on the Middle East. Reagan's opposition to Palestinian statehood was designed to satisfy the desire of Israel, which has until very recently refused to accept the establishment of an independent Palestinian nation. In lieu of a Palestinian state, Reagan recommended the establishment of a self-governing Palestinian authority on the West Bank and Gaza Strip associated with Jordan.

However, Reagan's decision to make the rejection of Palestinian statehood official American policy represented an extreme act of deference to Israel's wishes which could not be sustained. In opposition to Reagan's uncompromising anti-Palestinian position, the two most recent Presidents have acknowledged the reality that no peace in the Middle East is possible without explicit recognition of the right of Palestinians to establish their own independent state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In repudiation of Reagan's strident opposition to Palestinian nationhood, in 2000 Bill Clinton privately proposed during negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that an independent Palestinian state be established on 95 percent of the West Bank and the entire Gaza Strip, which the Jewish state would be required to relinquish as part of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> In 2002 Bush took American recognition of

Palestinian nationhood one step further by becoming the first President to publicly announce support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Bush's open and unequivocal support for a Palestinian state represented a complete repudiation of Reagan's strident opposition to Palestinian nationhood. However, it remains to be seen whether Bush supports a Palestinian state in name only, with insufficient territory to be viable, or whether he supports a viable Palestinian state covering the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital. Bush's failure to explicitly define the borders of the Palestinian state he envisions suggests the more cynical view that he supports such a nation in name only — consistent with the continuing failure of the United States to adequately address the plight of the Palestinians, which has rendered the peace process meaningless and empty.<sup>5</sup>

Reagan's support for increased and substantial levels of aid to Israel despite its outright rejection of his peace plan, his refusal to recognize the PLO until he was about to depart the White House, and his insistence that Jordan must agree to represent the Palestinians in negotiations with Israel were designed to satisfy the wishes of AIPAC and other American Jewish organizations, which insisted that the President keep his 1980 campaign promise to rigidly adhere to a firm and unwavering pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. The existence of near-unanimous opposition to the Jordan arms sale package in Congress was the result of intense lobbying on Capitol Hill by AIPAC, which made the defeat of the deal the top priority on its legislative agenda in 1985.

Quandt is correct to argue that the peace process floundered during the Reagan Administration. However, the question remains why this was so. This book has attempted to provide the answer. The peace process went nowhere during the Reagan Administration because the President sabotaged and subverted his three major policy initiatives in the Middle East — his peace plan introduced in 1982, his aborted overtures to the PLO in 1985, and his \$1.5 billion—\$2 billion arms sale package to Jordan in 1985 — which, if successful, would have broken the stalemate in the peace process and moved it forward. Reagan buried those three initiatives when they met fierce resistance from Israel and its Washington lobby, and his subversion of his peace initiatives were designed to appease the Jewish state and organized American Jewry. No President would ever sabotage and subvert major policy initiatives designed to address a pressing problem unless he was attempting to appease a politically influential and well-organized constituency which was demanding such action. Reagan's fatal attacks against his own major policy initiatives were unquestionably designed to appease Israel and its Washington lobby, which strongly opposed the President's peace efforts, as the evidence contained in this book shows.

## **The Sources of Reagan's Pro-Israel Policy in the Middle East**

Why did Reagan steer American policy in the Middle East from at least appearing to practice, however disingenuously, evenhanded diplomacy in the region, which prevailed during the 1970s, to providing open, clear-cut, and one-sided support for Israel in its conflict with the Arab world? The answer lies in the AW ACS debate. Viewing the sale as a threat to the security of Israel, organized American Jewry mounted an all-out lobbying campaign to persuade Congress to block the deal. In the end, Reagan persuaded the Senate to approve the sale — but only by the bare margin of 52 to 48. Reagan only defeated organized American Jewry on the AW ACS issue

because he mounted perhaps the most intense and sustained presidential lobbying campaign in American history to persuade the Senate to approve the sale.<sup>6</sup> Absent this presidential intervention, the sale would have certainly gone down to a resounding defeat in Congress. As Spiegel puts it, 'The scales were tipped in favor of the AWACS sale by the President's forceful intervention. Without him, opponents of the sale would certainly have won.'<sup>7</sup>

The AWACS debate had cost Reagan vital support within the Jewish community. By opposing the AWACS sale in such an intense and vociferous manner, and mobilizing so much opposition to the deal in Congress, the pro-Israel lobby served notice on Reagan that he would suffer severe political costs if he ever again deviated from the clear and consistent pro-Israel policy in the Middle East the President had promised when he was elected. Reagan heard this message loud and clear: the firm and unwavering pro-Israel policy Reagan promised his Jewish supporters during their meeting at the White House on 19 November 1981 set a clear and consistent precedent for the continuation of such a policy by his three successors thus far.

Fearing the awesome power of the pro-Israel lobby, Reagan thereafter avoided confrontation with organized American Jewry and refused to challenge Israel when major disagreements between the United States and the Jewish state arose over the peace process. When such disagreements arose — as they did in 1982 over the Reagan Plan — Reagan caved in to Israeli defiance and refused to impose any punitive measures against the Jewish state over its unqualified rejection of his peace proposal. While the pro-Israel lobby lost the AWACS battle, organized Jewry won the war to steer American policy in the Middle East from a fraudulent, evenhanded 1970s-style policy designed to conceal American support for Israel through misguided diplomatic maneuverings to placing the United States in open, firm, and unapologetic support of Israel in its conflict with the Arab world.

Henceforth, beginning with Reagan, American policy in the Middle East would be based upon the provision of strong and unswerving support for Israel. There would be no attempt to conceal this support behind empty and meaningless diplomatic dances to create the illusion that the peace process was moving forward. The United States would not have to pursue Kissinger-style step-by-step diplomacy and Carter-style summitry in order to appease the Arab oil sheiks. Through the AWACS sale, Reagan had effectively bribed the sheiks into supporting American interests in the Middle East by converting the Arab oil producing nations into American protectorates. Those nations would not contemplate brandishing their oil weapon against their American protector.

With the United States freed from the threat of another oil embargo, Reagan could be open in his support for Israel. He could back the Jewish state in ways that Nixon, Ford, and Carter could not — declaring the Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories to be legal, pursuing a policy of unbridled hostility toward the PLO, and making Israeli, not American, interests the foundation of American diplomatic initiatives to advance the peace process.

Nixon, Ford, and Carter were not pro-Arab; they were pro-Israel. But Reagan was so extreme in his pro-Israel sentiments that he made the pro-Israel proclivities of his three immediate predecessors appear tame by comparison. To be sure, Nixon, Ford, and Carter's pursuit of a disingenuous, 'evenhanded' policy in the Middle East did not derive from a moral commitment to address the plight of the Palestinians, but from a cynically manipulative effort to appease the Arab oil sheiks. Had the three Presidents been operating under the same strategic conditions which prevailed in the Persian Gulf during the 1980s and beyond, they may very well have adopted Reagan's unabashed and unapologetic pro-Israel policy in the Middle East as well.

Indeed, American support for Israel must be tempered by the need for the United States to retain access to Arab oil. Undoubtedly, Reagan would have been more careful, calculated, and



cautious in his support for Israel had he been in the White House during the 1970s, as was the case with his three immediate predecessors. It was ultimately the opportunity Reagan had to defuse the Arab oil weapon, by transforming the Arab oil producing nations into American protectorates, which allowed the President to bring American support for Israel out in the open and veer American policy in the Middle East further in favor of the Jewish state than Nixon, Ford, and Carter ever could. Nixon, Ford, and Carter were no less pro-Israel in their sentiments than Reagan, but it was Reagan who had the opportunity to fully translate those sentiments into practical policy in the Middle East.

Reagan pursued a steadfast pro-Israel policy in the Middle East not because he wanted to, but because he had to. The essentially fair and balanced peace plan Reagan presented in 1982 expressed the President's desire to pursue an evenhanded policy in the region. However, Reagan's own fierce battle with the pro-Israel lobby over the AW ACS issue served as a vivid reminder of the political firestorm which would have been provoked had he ever again deviated from the promise he made to his Jewish supporters following the conclusion of the AW ACS debate. The steady stream of memorandums and other position papers AIPAC distributed to the White House and every member of Congress during the controversies over American recognition of the PLO and the Jordan arms sales package in 1985 made it clear that the pro-Israel lobby stood ready to attempt to destroy any politician who dared question the basic underpinnings of American support for Israel.

Any attempt Reagan may have undertaken to use American foreign aid as leverage to force a moderation in Israel's hard-line position against its Arab neighbors would have provoked a political firestorm which would have dwarfed the AW ACS debate. Retention of occupied Arab territories, not blocking arms sales to Saudi Arabia, remained the top priority on Israel's national agenda, and the pro-Israel lobby would have waged an unrelenting campaign to destroy Reagan politically had he been serious in his declared aim, expressed in his peace plan, of achieving an Israeli withdrawal from possibly all occupied Arab territories. Reagan's policy in the Middle East was motivated by fear of the pro-Israel lobby, and what it could do to his presidency, if he failed to march to the tune of organized American Jewry.

To be sure, the pro-Israel lobby is not all-powerful: Reagan would have had to continue the 'evenhanded' policy in the Middle East his three predecessors had pursued during the 1970s had he, like them, faced the threat of another Arab oil embargo. However, Reagan removed that threat through the AW ACS sale. By placing the Persian Gulf under an American protective military umbrella, Reagan made the monarchies of the region dependent upon the United States for their very survival.

While organized American Jewry had lobbied hard to defeat the AW ACS sale in Congress, the ultimate irony is that Reagan's consummation of the deal left the United States free to pursue the strong and unswerving, and more importantly open, honest, and explicit, pro-Israel policy in the Middle East long championed by Jewish leaders. Reagan and his successors have been all too willing to accommodate the demands of the pro-Israel lobby for pursuit of such a policy, recognizing that the inability of the Arab oil producing nations to brandish their oil weapon against the United States meant that presidents could fulfill their domestic political imperative of satisfying the demands of organized American Jewry without fear that this would result in a loss of American access to Arab oil. The sale created the strategic conditions in the Persian Gulf for the American pursuit of a firm and unwavering pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, which organized American Jewry had failed to see when its members decided to mount their all-out and nearly successful effort to persuade Congress to block the AW ACS sale.

## Conclusion

This book has argued that the Reagan presidency represents the crucial watershed when the United States 'crossed the Rubicon' in veering from a dubious, evenhanded policy in the Middle East during the 1970s, which attempted to conceal American support for Israel, to one which has been openly, decidedly, and unabashedly pro-Israel. The critical event which caused this shift in policy was the AW ACS debate. Ironically, the AW ACS debate might be interpreted as providing critical evidence of the political weakness of the pro-Israel lobby; after all, organized Jewry, after mounting an intense lobbying campaign to defeat the AWACS sale, lost the battle over the deal to Reagan, who persuaded the Senate to approve the deal, albeit by a narrow margin. However, as we have seen, while the pro-Israel lobby lost the battle to block the sale, it won the war to assure that the United States would, after years of having pursued a policy designed to conceal American support for Israel by generating a false momentum toward peace through step-by-step diplomacy, move that policy in a decidedly, openly, and honestly pro-Israel direction. Despite its loss on the AWACS issue, the pro-Israel lobby had mobilized an impressive array of political resources to persuade Congress to block the sale, with the White House receiving letters of protest from leaders of virtually dozens of Jewish organizations, communications which no doubt went to lawmakers as well.

Indeed, each of Reagan's three successors have thus far pursued a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East, consistent with the basic approach to the region Reagan essentially followed during his eight years in the White House. The only aspect of Reagan's pro-Israel policy in the Middle East which his successors reversed was his firm opposition to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, the issue of Palestinian statehood represents the sole major exception to the adherence by Reagan's three successors to the same basic approach to the Middle East he inaugurated — based upon the provision of almost total and absolute support for Israel.

Far from leaving no lasting legacy on American policy in the Middle East, far from being an inconsequential figure in the history of Middle East diplomacy, as Middle East policy experts might assume, Reagan is the single most influential figure in the making of that policy. Reagan single-handedly steered American policy in the Middle East in a pro-Israel direction following his victory over organized American Jewry in the AW ACS debate, and that policy has essentially remained unchanged in the 14 years since Reagan departed the White House. For good or ill, depending upon one's perspective on the Arab—Israeli conflict, Reagan wedded American interests in the Middle East closely to those of Israel and cemented the close and deeply embedded relationship between the two allies which has lasted to this day.

Reagan cast a permanent, indelible, and dark shadow over American policy in the Middle East, affecting a possibly monumental shift in that policy which none of his predecessors or successors were able to do — a shift in favor of Israel which has satisfied its many supporters in the United States but has certainly complicated the peace process. Indeed, since Reagan assumed the presidency there have been no 'breakthroughs' in the peace process comparable to even the very marginal diplomatic accomplishments of the Camp David peace treaty or even the more minor achievements of Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy. The hopes raised by the Oslo Accords during the 1990s foundered with the eruption of the Palestinian Intifada in 2000, and America's failure to reinvigorate the currently almost nonexistent peace process is the result of the firm and unyielding pro-Israel policy in the Middle East Bush has diligently pursued in deference to the precedent Reagan established.

Precedents matter in the practice of American foreign policy. Nixon, Ford, and Carter set the precedent for the American pursuit of a dubious, evenhanded policy in the Middle East in which the United States was compelled by the threat of another Arab oil embargo to undertake step-by-step diplomacy. However, Reagan dispensed with the diplomatic niceties of appeasing the Arab world — as Nixon, Ford, and Carter felt forced to do by the strategic circumstances prevailing in the Persian Gulf during the 1970s. Instead, Reagan openly, honestly, and bludny tied American interests firmly to those of Israel in a way his three immediate predecessors would certainly have wanted to but could not; and this gave Reagan more political flexibility to veer American policy even further in favor of the Jewish state than had heretofore been the case.

Reagan set the precedent, followed by his three successors thus far, for the American pursuit of a strong and unswerving pro-Israel policy in the Middle East. The 'winners' of that policy turned out neither to be the United States nor the Arab world, but Israel and its Washington lobby. And the 'losers' of that policy were the same group which the United States has continually neglected in its pursuit of an empty and meaningless 'peace process' — the Palestinian people.

Whether for good or ill — certainly good in the opinion of Israel's many supporters in the United States, but ill from the perspective of backers of evenhanded American diplomacy in the Middle East — Reagan's profound impact on American policy in the Middle East is another reason why one cannot dismiss the enormous political significance of America's historically underrated fortieth President.

# Notes

## Preface

- [1](#) Ofira Seliktar, *Divided We Stand: American Jews, Israel, and the Peace Process* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), p. 81.
- [2](#) One may legitimately dispute the notion that Reagan's remark had anti-Semitic overtones, but many of the President's Jewish supporters and representatives of organized American Jewry firmly held this view and sent letters to the White House protesting his criticism of Israel. For an examination of this aspect of the AWACS debate, see Nicholas Laham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia: The Reagan Administration and the Balancing of America's Competing Interests in the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), pp. 124-38.
- [3](#) For an analysis of the AWACS debate, see Laham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia*.
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- [4](#) For an account of the peace plan Clinton privately presented during negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, see Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 371-72.
- [5](#) For a perceptive analysis of America's continued failure to adequately address the plight of the Palestinians in pursuing the peace process, see Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- [6](#) For an examination of the political battle between Reagan and the pro-Israel lobby over the AWACS sale, see Nicholas Laham, *Selling AWACS to Saudi Arabia: The Reagan Administration and the Balancing of America's Competing Interests in the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002).
- [7](#) Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 398.

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