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Friendly Restraint: U.S. – Israel Relations During the Gulf Crisis of 1990 - 1991

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This article examines the U.S. policy of restraining Israeli action against Iraq during the 1991 war, both before and after Iraq fired missiles at Israeli population centers. It analyzes the motives, methods and success of the American effort, as well as the factors sharping Israel's policy and cooperation. Policymaking factors as well as interests were an important part of these events.

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> -A senior State Department official recalling U.S. efforts to restrain Israel during the Gulf Crisis. (1)

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> -Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.(2)

Throughout the 1990-1991 Gulf Crisis, Israel was never far from the minds of top U.S. decisionmakers. From the standpoint of U.S. policymaking, U.S.-Israel relations, and Middle East international relations, the U.S. handling of Israel's role in the war over Kuwait remains a very interesting case study.

"[As for] the problem of keeping Israel out of the war, there were few things the President and his top aides worried about more," explained one White House advisor in retrospect. (3) The U.S. decision to sideline and restrain Israel was successful due to a balanced strategy of positive and negative inducements. It was carefully crafted and executed by President George Bush and his most senior advisors. (4)

U.S. policy was derived from the assumption that Israeli involvement in the conflict might increase Arab support for Iraq and even lead to some Arab states leaving the coalition. At the same time, Israel was ambiguous on whether it wanted to become involved directly in the war. As the introductory quotations show, at times the United States may have overestimated Israel's desire to act. Ironically, while Israeli ambiguity did earn the country some material benefits, it ultimately backfired and placed severe limits on Jerusalem's range of policy options.

Although outside observers may consider that the issue of Israeli involvement was resolved at the outset, in fact, U.S. policymakers viewed developments as a sequence of influence encounters. There was not a single "moment of truth" engagement, but rather of series of diplomatic exchanges in which the United States and Israel would debate the strategic and political merits of restraint. Particularly after fighting began in January 1991, U.S. officials operated under the assumption that all Israeli decisions on restraint were reversible.

America's restraint policy rested on an integrated strategy of positive and negative political, security, and economic

inducements. While there was wide consensus among Bush and his advisors on the need to restrain Israel, serious disagreements did develop at the operational level. Personal world views and bureaucratic politics had a demonstrable impact on implementation. Though the strategic and political assumptions on which U.S. policymakers based their decisions were ultimately never tested, the restraint policy on its own terms proved an unmitigated success.

This study examines both policy formulation and implementation. It begins by defining the key decisions taken by U.S. policymakers. Then, it assesses how and why decisionmakers developed the restraint policy. What were their priorities? What factors did they ignore? What were their fundamental assumptions? Next, it describes how the restraint policy was operationalized and the factors influencing implementation. Finally, it identifies three points that most contributed to the success of American policy.(5) This study also represents an attempt to bridge the fields of diplomatic history and international relations, two disciplines that have increasingly (and unfortunately) grown apart in recent years.

TWO MOMENT OF TRUTH DECISIONS

Well before Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's 2 August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Iraq and Israel had been locked in their own tense standoff. In 1981, Israeli jets bombed the Iraqi nuclear facility at Osirak. At the time, Iraq was fighting a war with Iran, and Baghdad did not retaliate against Israel.

When the Iraq-Iran war ended in 1988, however, it did not take long for Saddam to threaten Israel as well as Kuwait. By spring 1990, Baghdad was threatening Israel explicitly. "We will make the fire eat up half of Israel," Saddam pledged, alluding to Iraq's proven chemical weapons capability.(6) Also, Saddam's deployment of Scud missiles in western Iraq was well known to officials in both Israel and the United States. Therefore, following Iraq's early August invasion of Kuwait and President Bush's subsequent decision to deploy U.S. troops to the region, there was "an instant realization" in Washington that Israel's involvement could somehow escalate and widen the incipient U.S.-Iraq confrontation.(7)

While the United States built an international coalition against Iraq, policymakers in Washington wanted Israel to maintain a low-profile. In the early months of the crisis, U.S. officials feared that Israel, as mandated by its traditional strategic doctrine, would take preemptive action against Iraq.(8)

A senior Israeli military official told his U.S. counterparts that two factors would affect Israel's response to the Iraqi threat: how the United States responded, and the extent of the threat posed to Israel.(9) During this first phase of the restraint policy (Fall 1990) the preeminent U.S. concern was to prevent Israel from taking preemptive action. While Israel kept its ultimate plans ambiguous, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir did pledge to President Bush in December that Israel would not take such a step.(10)

America's restraint policy toward Israel entered its second phase in early 1991. As the 15 January deadline approached, war became increasingly likely. When asked if U.S. military action would lead Saddam to attack Israel, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz replied, "yes, absolutely yes."(11) The Bush administration decided that in the event of hostilities, Israel must not become a co-belligerent, even if it was attacked by Iraq. The Administration's decision was based on strategic concerns about the stability of the U.S.-led coalition, and a desire to avoid actions that could escalate or widen the conflict. The United States sought to achieve its objectives through a strategy of coercive diplomacy, combining positive and negative inducements.(12)

CHOOSING RESTRAINT: INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

"Keeping Israel out of the conflict [was] a central strategic concern of our diplomacy," says Secretary of State James Baker.(13) The prevailing conventional wisdom among American policymakers was that any direct Israeli action against Iraq or indirect participation with U.S.-led forces would likely fray the multinational coalition.(14) A former Defense Department official stationed in Israel during the war played out the scenario as follows. If Israel took military action against Iraq, Arab members of the coalition--most likely Syria and Pakistan, and perhaps even Egypt and the Gulf emirates--would withdraw. This would have both strategic political and military implications for the United States, and also hinder Washington's operational capabilities in the Gulf. More specifically, an Israeli strike on Iraq could have a destabilizing effect on Jordan, possibly even drawing Iraqi forces to enter the Kingdom. Such a scenario threatened further escalation of the overall conflict, and offered additional uncertainties. In addition, America's diplomatic and political clout in the region would erode.(15)

According to U.S. News and World Report, Israel was "the unpredictable factor in the ever complicated diplomatic arithmetic."(16) If Saddam could draw Israel into the conflict, he could weaken the coalition. This was the fundamental assumption guiding America's restraint policy. Exactly how a weakened coalition translated into operational terms no one seemed to know. But specific contingencies were less important than the prospect of uncertainty. Throughout the crisis, U.S. policymakers were transfixed by the concept of a solid coalition, and feared any risk to its viability.(17)

But 'strategic' reasoning is by no means a self-evident truth. How did U.S. officials develop their strategic forecasts? The history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, signals from Arab leaders, and familiarity with Israel's strategic doctrine all led U.S. policymakers to translate their obsession with coalition stability into a policy of restraint toward Israel.

Decisionmakers relied on historical reasoning to build the assumptions that underpinned U.S. policy. But such historical reasoning can be awkward and imprecise.(18) For example, even though there was no precedent for the diplomatic arithmetic of the Gulf Crisis, U.S. officials could not help but draw assumptions from decades of Arab-Israeli tension. The twin images of Arab hostility toward Israel, and Israel's record of massive retaliation became a default mindset for American policymakers. Conflict escalation was considered an ever-present danger in the Arab-Israeli equation, particularly since most wars in the region had been fought on more than one front. U.S. officials were captives of their traditional view of Arab-Israeli relations as a zero-sum game. According to Gordon and Trainor, "It was possible the Americans had exaggerated the political risks of an Israeli strike, but nobody in Washington wanted to put that assessment to a test."(19)

Oddly, U.S. policymakers ignored a number of recent historical examples that could disprove the theory of escalation and inevitable conflict enlargement, like Israel's 1981 attack on the Iraqi nuclear facility, or its 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Instead, senior officials inside the Beltway were prone to broad, worst-case scenario reasoning. In planning military contingencies, policy planners traditionally seek to minimize uncertainty.(20) Decades of Arab-Israeli estrangement were sufficient to lead U.S. officials to craft the restraint policy as a strategy to minimize the uncertainty raised by possible Israeli involvement. Washington equated non-escalation on the Arab-Israeli front with keeping the U.S.-led coalition intact.

Second, the US strategic assumptions were also affected by signals from Arab states. Washington received 'feelers' from Arab capitals to the effect that Arab military forces could not be perceived as allied with Israel.(21) Even though "...the question [of Israeli involvement] was never posed directly," says a senior State Department official,(22) policymakers had a

solid sense that Arab leaders felt strongly that Israel should keep a low-profile.(23) These perceptions were reinforced by Saddam's own actions. First, he linked the Gulf Crisis to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and pursued an international diplomatic campaign to support the chimera of "linkage." Second, Saddam threatened and eventually did fire scud missiles at Israel. Finally, U.S. strategic reasoning was also influenced by a long-standing familiarity with Israel's strategic doctrine of preemption, self-reliance, and deterrence.(24)

IMPLEMENTING THE RESTRAINT POLICY

Phase I: Pre-War
While Bush assembled an international coalition against Iraq during the autumn of 1990, Saddam Hussein countered by linking the Kuwaiti occupation to Israeli and Syrian occupations on the Arab-Israeli front. Saddam hoped his strategy would win Arab support and hinder U.S. efforts to gain Arab participation in the coalition.(25) At this juncture, particularly during several weeks in late September and October, the United States intensified its efforts to reject Saddam's linkage while seeking to distance Israel strategically and operationally from events in the Gulf. The United States led diplomatic efforts at the UN to reject Iraq's linkage between Kuwait and other issues. At the same time, Israel accepted the strategic wisdom that its interests were best served by maintaining a low profile and not allowing Saddam to draw it into a confrontation.(26)

Even though Israel had decided against preemptive action, senior officials in Jerusalem remained acutely aware of the Iraqi threat. Defense Minister Moshe Arens pressed Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney for operational coordination and real-time satellite intelligence of Iraqi deployments. Arens claims Cheney felt "unease" regarding the requests.(27) Bush and his top advisors decided early in the Gulf Crisis not to share

the full range of U.S. intelligence information with Israel.(28)

U.S. officials did conclude, however, that positive measures were necessary to reassure Israel. For example, the Administration decided to establish a secure communications link between Israeli and American defense officials.(29) Since Israel was not under direct Iraqi attack during this period, U.S. objectives were relatively easy to achieve. Also, at this time it was relatively easy for Israeli leaders to see the benefits of restraint.

Once war became inevitable, following the 9 January Baker-Aziz meeting in Geneva, U.S. officials began to place greater importance on restraining Israel. Even before Scud missiles fell on Tel Aviv, U.S. efforts to restrain Israel rose to a fever pitch. On 12 January, Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleberger, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and senior National Security Council staffer Merrill Ruck went to Israel in an effort to secure a pledge of Israeli restraint.

The very prominence of the mission and its members was viewed as a positive sign by Israeli leaders, who had felt diplomatically ignored since the Gulf Crisis began.(30) The delegation brought a full package of positive incentives.

They assured Israeli leaders that the United States could eliminate Saddam's Scud capability within the first 24 hours of hostilities and offered to station Patriot anti-missile batteries in Israel.(31) U.S. assistance was offered unconditionally and it was not contingent on an Israeli pledge of restraint.

What Eagleberger did not provide was the full range of intelligence data Israel was requesting, including real-time reconnaissance information on western Iraq. (32) The Eagleberger mission had limited goals. The team was instructed to obtain an Israeli commitment to consult with Washington before taking military action. While continuing to maintain an ambiguous posture regarding retaliation, Israeli leaders reiterated their earlier promise to consult

with the Administration before any use of force.(33)

Phase II: War

Once the war started and Scud missiles began to fall, the Israeli leadership came under increasing pressure from top government and military officials to retaliate. Some members of the Israeli cabinet, as well as the Air Force chief of staff, lobbied Prime Minister Shamir to take military action.(34) Shamir was also under the pressure of precedent -- Israel had never before stood idle while under attack.

On several occasions during the first days of the war, Defense Minister Arens demanded that Secretary Cheney either provide IFF codes ("friend or foe" identification to distinguish aircraft), or order U.S. forces to "stand down" while Israel acted against targets in western Iraq. Each time, Cheney deferred. He would advise Arens the decision could only be taken by Bush, who would then call Prime Minister Shamir and stridently urge Israel not to act.(35) After one Scud attack, Bush asked Shamir to contact him personally if Israel sustained substantial casualties or suffered a non-conventional attack.

During the war, America's strategy of coercive diplomacy relied on five positive inducements and one negative measure:

First, "Hammer Rick", the secure communications link, was used both for quick consultations and to provide early warning of Scud attacks.

Second, President Bush sent Eagleberger and Wolfowitz back to Israel for a second visit. The "hand-holding" mission was intended to demonstrate solidarity and also to maintain pressure on Israeli leaders not to retaliate.(36)

Third, U.S.-operated Patriot anti-missile batteries were rushed to Israel. The United States also sent emergency military supplies, pre-positioned additional material and encouraged Germany and the Netherlands to be more forthcoming with financial assistance to Israel.

Fourth, the U.S. sought to compensate Israel for its losses with several hundred million dollars in increased financial aid, on top of the annual $3 billion aid outlay.

Fifth, and most important, U.S.-led coalition forces carried out dozens, perhaps hundreds of Scud-hunting missions over western Iraq.(37) Bush told Shamir that in light of the coalition's Scud-hunting missions, there was nothing Israel could do that the United States was not able to do with less risk to the integrity of the coalition. These positive inducements were intended to help 'enlarge Shamir's space' and provide him with sound justification for not retaliating.(38)

The sixth instrument U.S. policymakers used in their strategy of coercive diplomacy was negative. Washington continued to withhold key operational intelligence information the Israelis needed to carry out their retaliatory plans. Without such information, Israel would not be certain its planes could identify and avoid coalition forces. The United States also refused Israel's offer for close operational coordination between Israeli military planners and U.S. forces in the Gulf.(39)

Just as in the pre-war stage, the key U.S. objective was to gain an Israeli commitment to consult with Washington before taking any military action.(40) U.S. policymakers used this commitment to consult as a trip-wire mechanism that offered an additional opportunity to convince Israel not to retaliate. Once consulted, the United States argued that Israel would be no more effective at Scud-hunting than U.S.-led coalition forces.(41)

Furthermore, the United States made the point that Israeli actions would complicate Arab participation in the coalition.(42) In addition, U.S. policy relied on Bush's personal appeals to Shamir for Israeli restraint. Throughout the war, the White House used a carefully crafted public formula whereby Washington acknowledged Israel's right to self-defense, but strongly encouraged Israeli leaders not to exercise that right.(43)

ACHIEVING RESTRAINT: KEY FACTORS

While the fundamental assumptions behind America's restraint policy were based on purely strategic thinking, implementation was not. America's restraint policy was operationalized on the basis of strategic, bureaucratic and individual factors. Implementation: Iteration and Ambiguity

In his memoirs, Secretary of State James Baker offers two seemingly contradictory recollections of American policy toward Israel during the Gulf Crisis. He reaffirms the strategic assumptions outlined above and acknowledges Israel's long-standing deterrence policy. Though Baker claims, "Shamir made the strategic choice before the war not to retaliate," he also claims the U.S. "refusal to give Israel the (IFF) codes was critical."(44)

If U.S. policymakers knew Shamir had made the political decision not to strike Iraq, then why so much concern over Israeli restraint? What Baker seems to acknowledge implicitly--and what other officials acknowledge explicitly--is that American policymakers operated under the assumption that Shamir's decision was reversible. "With each new Scud attack, all bets were off," a senior State Department official said.(45) Israel's deliberate ambiguity helped fuel this perception.

Once Scud missiles began to fall on Israel, U.S. policymakers believed retaliation was a strong possibility since Israeli leaders had kept a deliberately ambiguous posture. Since U.S. policymakers understood Israel's self-reliance and deterrence doctrine they had strong reason to believe Israel might retaliate.

According to Eagleberger, with each new Scud attack, Israeli and U.S. policymakers would re-enact the same discussion on retaliation.(46) Shamir's ultimate decision for restraint was not made once but many times. The U.S. role was to provide the Israeli leadership with sufficient justification to ensure that the restraint decision was maintained each time it was reassessed.

Since the United States used a combination of positive and negative inducements it is difficult to isolate one factor as being decisive. Still, Baker underemphasizes the positive instruments (i.e., Hammer Rick, Patriots, Scud-hunting, Eagleberger missions), and reinforces the view that the Israelis were trigger-happy.

A careful reading of Israeli decisionmaking does not confirm Baker's assertion. Even if the IFF codes were passed to Israel, it is likely that restraint would have remained Shamir's policy. The benefits of international aid, as well as the coalition's systematic campaign to neutralize Iraq's ability to threaten its neighbors were too good for Shamir to jeopardize with an Israeli retaliatory strike.

Furthermore, Baker's comment does not fully acknowledge that Israel was sowing the seeds of uncertainty in a bid to increase its leverage over the United States, and maintain a modicum of justification if a decision was taken to strike Iraq.(47) Ironically, this deliberate uncertainty led U.S. policymakers to develop the six-pronged inducement strategy. While Israel successfully used ambiguity to gain positive material and strategic assistance from the United States, this strategy partly back-fired since it also led to negative American measures.(48) In this respect, Israel overplayed its cards.

There has also been some speculation that America's restraint policy was shaped by U.S. expectations for post-Gulf Crisis diplomacy. It has been asserted that Arab participation in the U.S.-led coalition and Israel's war-time experience of vulnerability and dependence would create the proper setting for a renewed U.S. peace initiative.

This theory, supported most notably by Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, contends that the United States deliberately sought to weaken Israel so it would be more willing to enter into peace talks after the war.(49) However, they provide little credible evidence beyond the fact that the United States carried out far fewer Scud-hunting missions than officials have claimed.(50)

Rather than planning for post-crisis diplomacy, a look inside the Washington policymaking process explains more about the shaping of U.S. decisions.

IMPLEMENTATION: BUREAUCRATIC TURF WARS

Rather than a plot to purposely weaken Israel, the overstated Scud-hunting claims are better explained by examining the U.S. decisionmaking apparatus. U.S. civilian defense officials and the commanders in the field strongly disagreed over targeting plans. Cheney wanted more aggressive Scud-hunting than General Norman Schwarzkopf was willing to provide.

U.S. military planners did not adequately factor in the political necessities of ensuring Israeli restraint when they devised their day-to-day operational designs. U.S. military brass was more focused on what they considered the strategically more important Kuwaiti theater of operations (KTO). Also, communication between civilian and military officials was less than perfect. A senior State Department official said Eagleberger was surprised to discover during his second mission to Israel that the coalition forces were doing far less than he was promising the Israelis at the time, thus undermining his bargaining position.(51)

Colin Powell served as a critical intermediary for resolving the targeting disagreements that arose between Cheney and Schwarzkopf. In addition, Cheney himself was wary of the precedent set by LBJ's micro-management of the Vietnam war and ultimately deferred to his field commanders' judgment regarding the scope of Scud-hunting efforts.(52) For his part, Schwarzkopf made 'hard' military decisions designed to concentrate as much of his forces as possible on the KTO. Israeli leaders were apparently unaware of the Cheney-Schwarzkopf row.

Despite the less than promised effort, U.S. restraint policy was helped by the steady reduction in the number of Scud attacks on Israel.(53) Also, the perception of a "Great Scud Hunt" had a strong

psychological effect and further reinforced the Israeli public's support for restraint. As a democratically elected leader with a very narrow parliamentary majority, Shamir could not ignore strong public sentiments.(54) In addition, Freedman and Karsh (1992) rightfully point out that Prime Minister Shamir was a leader predisposed to caution and inaction rather than dynamic proactive decisionmaking. (55)

Personal Factors & the Irrelevance of Domestic Politics Even though the negative features of U.S. policy--withholding intelligence information and IFF codes--was primarily dictated by strategic considerations, individual perceptions also had a demonstrable impact. At the very outset of the Gulf Crisis, there was a palpable lack of trust between U.S. policymakers and their Israeli counterparts. Well before the Gulf Crisis, the Bush Administration had serious disagreements with Shamir's government over a 1989 peace initiative.(56) Also, the 1986 Pollard espionage affair continued to weigh on the minds of many U.S. officials.(57) Though these factors were not decisive, they did serve to reinforce policy assumptions and decisions already taken.

While domestic sources have traditionally played a center-stage role in U.S.-Israel relations,(58) during the Gulf Crisis domestic determinants were forced to the margins. As James Rosenau has observed, explicit links between domestic sources and foreign policy outcomes are difficult to reveal.(59) Rarely, if ever, will a senior policymaker explain a foreign policy decision in terms of particular preferences of an interest group, or an upcoming election.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the well-organized Israel lobby chose not to engage the Bush Administration on the restraint policy. A top pro-Israel Washington lobbyist said American Jewish organizations were wary of taking too strong a public stance on the Gulf Crisis. This was partly due to the accusations of Pat Buchanan and others that pro-Israel groups in the United States were stoking the flames of war only to serve particular Israeli interests.(60)

Though the major pro-Israel groups believed the United States should have shared intelligence data and IFF codes with Israel, they chose not to pursue the issue vigorously with the Administration. Instead, through public campaigns, these organizations tried to build sympathy for Israel's plight. They also sought to quietly build justification for possible Israeli retaliatory action.(61) There is no evidence that the Israeli government turned to pro-Israel groups in the United States to compensate for its own inability to obtain real-time intelligence data, the IFF codes, or increased operational coordination.

Furthermore, most leaders of the Jewish and pro-Israel community themselves believed in the merits of restraint and felt the trajectory of American policy in the Gulf would inevitably benefit Israel's interests.(62) Granted, Bush was a Republican and did not rely heavily on the pro-Israel community for political support. Even so, the insignificance of domestic factors had more to do with the rally-around-the-flag phenomenon so typical of crisis periods, and the fact that the organized pro-Israel lobby supported the broad outlines of American policy.(63)

WHY THE RESTRAINT POLICY WORKED

U.S. policymakers never had to test their strategic assumptions. Throughout the Gulf Crisis, from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August to the end of the war in early March, Israel did maintain a low-profile and did demonstrate restraint in the face of Iraqi Scud missile attacks. The scenario of Israel disrupting the coalition and widening the conflict will forever remain in the realm of the counterfactual. Nonetheless, available evidence strongly demonstrates that the success of America's restraint policy was due to three factors.

First, the U.S. strategy of coercive diplomacy made effective use of both positive and negative measures. Policy compliance was achieved through an integrated strategy.(64) Without positive inducements, it is highly unlikely that the United States could have convinced Israel to set aside its long-standing doctrinal mandates.

Of equal importance were the negative measures (denial of IFF codes and unwillingness to "stand down" coalition forces). Negative inducements were crucial in gaining an Israeli pledge to consult before taking action, therefore providing U.S. policymakers with a critical trip-wire mechanism to reassure Israeli leaders and lobby yet again for restraint. The negative measures also provided further guarantees that visceral impulses to retaliate would not overwhelm Israeli decisionmakers.(65) The integrated U.S. strategy successfully foreclosed many Israeli policy options, leading Shamir to reflect afterward that Israel "had no alternative other than to work within the framework proposed by the (Bush) Administration."(66)

Second, 'chance' played a significant role. Human and material damage inflicted on Israel during five weeks of intermittent Iraqi Scud attacks did not itself provide Israeli leaders with sufficient justification to retaliate. Few injuries were recorded (only one direct death), and property damage was not catastrophic.(67)

Since the Patriot anti-missile systems proved decidedly ineffective, it was sheer luck that the Scuds did relatively little damage, particularly considering the high population density of many impact sites. If the death toll had been substantially higher or if unconventional warheads had been used, U.S. policymakers would have had an infinitely more difficult time selling the restraint policy to Israel.

Indeed, every government official interviewed for this study has acknowledged that if chemical weapons were used against Israel, Washington and the other coalition members would have acquiesced to Israel's decision to retaliate.(68) As luck would have it, American policymakers never faced such a scenario.(69)

Third, there was much popular support in Israel for restraint. This support grew stronger as Operation Desert Storm

unfolded and Israelis saw a coalition led by their strongest ally disarm one of their fiercest enemies.(70) Even from the outset of the Gulf Crisis, some in the Israeli leadership saw restraint as generously serving Israel's interests. They were willing to suspend Israel's traditional strategic doctrine in exchange for the destruction of Iraq's war-making machine. Restraint was a mature and sophisticated decision that broke with decades-old doctrines of preemption and massive retaliation, thereby creating an alternative model for future Israeli policymakers.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring Israeli restraint never ceased to be a top priority for U.S. policymakers throughout the Gulf Crisis. Colin Powell refers to the issue as "the supersensitive need to keep Israel out of the fight."(71) The fundamental assumptions that shaped U.S. policy were based on strategic factors.

These assumptions were the product of historical reasoning, signals from Arab leaders and familiarity with Israel's strategic doctrine. When it came time to implement U.S. policy and achieve restraint, strategic considerations partially gave way to bureaucratic and personal factors. America's restraint policy was successful, foremost because it relied on a combination of positive and negative inducements.

As the 1990s comes to a close, and the U.S.-Iraq confrontation enters its ninth year, it is instructive to revisit and reexamine the 'restraint' policy, as American and Israeli policymakers could easily find themselves facing similar circumstances in the very near future.

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NOTES

1. Senior Middle East advisor to Secretary of State James Baker, confidential interview by author, 30 June 1997, Department of State, Washington DC.
2. Yitzhak Shamir, Summing Up (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1994), p. 224.
3. Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, The General's War (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1995), p. 231.
4. There is considerable debate regarding US objectives during the Gulf Crisis. For the purposes of this paper, I rely on the following stated US objectives: 1) to liberate Kuwait; 2) to contain and disarm Iraq; and 3) to ensure a safe and reliable supply of Persian Gulf petroleum to world markets.
5. Since most official documents on this period remain classified, this paper relies heavily on news reports, narrative books, and primary source materials - including both memoirs and personal interviews.
6. US News and World Report, Triumph Without Victory (New York: Times Books, 1992), p. 17; Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, The Gulf Conflict (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 28, 103.
7. Senior advisor to Defense Secretary Richard Cheney, confidential interview by author, 26 June 1997, Washington, DC.
8. Shai Feldman, "Israel's Grand Strategy," paper presented at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 7 May 1997; and interview by author, 19 May 1997, Cambridge, MA.
9. Freedman and Karsh, p. 106.
10. Shamir, p. 221; Triumph Without Victory, p. 130; and Gordon and Trainor, p. 71.

11. New York Times, 10 January 1991; Moshe Arens, Broken Covenant (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 170.

12. Abraham Ben-Zvi, The U.S. & Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 194.

13. James A. Baker, The Politics of Diplomacy (New York: G. Putnam, 1995), p. 385.

14. Richard Cheney advisor interview; Baker advisor interview; James Chaney, former Department of Defense attach 'at the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv, interview by author, 11 July 1997, Washington, DC .

15. James Chaney interview.

16. Triumph Without Victory, p. 130.

17. Yitzhak Shamir writes that during his contacts with Bush during the Gulf Crisis, the President was obsessed with maintaining a viable and united coalition. See Shamir, p. 221.

18. See Ernest May and Richard Neustadt, Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers (New York: Free Press, 1988).

19. Gordon & Trainor, p. 231.

20. Barry Posen, The Sources of Military of Doctrine (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 45-51.

21. Shamir, pp. 221-22.

22. Baker advisor.

23. Whether or not U.S. policymakers posed the question directly to Arab leaders remains unclear. Schwarzkopf claims that in November, Secretary of State Baker posed the question directly to King Fahd - who responded that Saudi Arabia wanted Israel to stay out, but that "he could not expect Israel to stand idly by if attacked." [Norman Schwarzkopf, It Doesn't Take a Hero (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 373.] The General's account contradicts the position of the senior State Department official interviewed by the author and cited above. Since the diplomatic records of the period remain classified, these conflicting accounts are difficult to resolve.

Interestingly, former Department of Defense official James Chaney confirmed that Israel did send mine-clearing equipment to Saudi Arabia during the war. The U.S. transported the material directly from Israel to Saudi Arabia, and American military personnel did their best to conceal the country of origin. Nonetheless, Chaney said the Saudis knew where it came from and did not complain.

24. James Chaney interview.

25. Freedman and Karsh, p. 100-102.

26. William Quandt, Peace Process (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 395; Arens, pp. 152-58.

27. Arens, Broken Covenant.

28. Triumph Without Victory, p. 135.

29. Ibid, p. 135; Shamir, p. 222. The communication link was code named "Hammer Rick." The advisor to Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney interviewed by this author said the decision to establish the link led to heated debate within the U.S. defense and foreign policy community. Some officials believed the gesture would demonstrate a level of U.S.-Israeli coordination that could disrupt the coalition. Despite the rumblings of many mid-level officials, the White House made certain that the communication link was established without hesitation.

30. Freedman and Karsh, p. 244.

31. Triumph Without Victory, p. 209; Arens, pp. 173-74. The Israelis initially refused the Patriot offer since the batteries had to be operated by American military personnel. Defense Minister Arens decided he did not want to set a precedent overturning Israel's long-held doctrine of operational military self-reliance. However, once Iraq began firing Scuds (beginning the night of 17-18 January), Israeli leaders reversed themselves and accepted US operated Patriot batteries.

32. Arens claims in his memoirs (page 174) that Eagleberger revealed a fall-back position whereby if Israel was attacked, the U.S. was prepared to have its forces 'stand down.' However, this position is not recorded in any other source, and a senior State Department official who accompanied Eagleberger on this mission denies that such a position was ever communicated to the Israelis.

33. Baker, p. 390; Gordon and Trainor, pp. 194-96; Freedman and Karsh, p. 295.

34. See Arens, ch. 7 Passim; Freedman and Karsh, pp. 331-41.

35. Triumph Without Victory, pp. 247-48; Arens, pp. 178-79; Freedman and Karsh, pp. 331-41.

36. On this second mission Eagleberger reportedly felt so certain an Israeli military response was imminent, he wanted to abandon the restrain policy and instead seek to influence the retaliatory decision. Thus, he reportedly suggested to Israeli leaders that they retaliate with Jericho surface-to-surface missiles, thereby eliminating the possibly of a direct air force clash with Jordan or Saudi Arabia. However, Israeli leaders reportedly ruled out such a possibility since surface-to-surface missiles could not eliminate the Iraqi Scud threat - which was their primary concern once the war began. See Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, "The Test of Friends," Moment, April 1994, p. 83.

37. Richard Cheney advisor interview, Gordon & Trainor, p. 235.

38. Baker advisor interview; Freedman and Karsh, p. 336-37.

39. Arens, p. 182-84; Gordon & Trainor, p. 232. The advisor to James Baker interviewed by the author said the U.S. did agree to send a U.S. military official to Israel to discuss operational plans with Israeli military officers. The U.S. pledged to forward the information to US commanders in the Gulf, but it was either 'sat on in Washington' or disregarded by military officers in the field.

40. Gordon & Trainor, pp. 194-95; Triumph Without Victory, p. 258; Melman & Raviv, p. 384.

41. In a letter Bush sent to Shamir in mid-February, the President said he could not see how Israel would be able to do anything about the Scud threat beyond what the U.S. was capable of doing. Baker advisor interview.

42. James Chaney interview; Freedman and Karsh, p. 335.

43. Baker advisor interview.

44. Baker, pp. 385-391.

45. Baker advisor interview, James Chaney also confirmed this view.

46. Freedman and Karsh, p. 337.

47. Richard Cheney advisor interview.

48. From the standpoint of American decision making - which is the focus of this study - Israel's strategy of measured ambiguity did appear to partly backfire. An examination of Israeli decisionmaking that further explores the issue of ambiguity would greatly contribute to understanding of the Gulf Crisis. Did Israeli leaders realize the risks involved in an ambiguous posture? Did they consider the costs it might exact?

49. Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, Friends in Deed (New York: Hyperion, 1994), p. 400. Melman and Raviv devise their theory by drawing upon US strategy in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. They argue that Bush and Baker were following Kissinger's strategy of allowing the 1973 conflict to take a substantial toll on all sides so that Egypt, Syria and Israel would be more willing to negotiate. However, they provide no substantive evidence beyond drawing the analogy.

50. Melman & Raviv, "The Test of Friends," p. 55. The claims of Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf that one-third of all allied air missions were devoted to Scud-hunting [Colin Powell, My American Journey (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 512; Schwarzkopf, p. 418] have been disproved by recent reports on the allied air campaign. No definitive number of sorties has been released, but all three government officials interviewed for this paper said the actual number was far below what top officials reported - possibly as low as 5-10 percent of the initial claims.

51. Baker advisor interview.

52. Ibid; Richard Cheney advisor interview; James Chaney interview; Powell, pp. 511-16; and Schwarzkopf, p. 418.

53. Freedman and Karsh, p. 311; According to James Chaney, the Department of Defense is still unable to document even one case of US forces destroying a mobile Iraqi Scud launcher. (James Chaney interview)

54. Freedman and Karsh, 107.

55. See Yehuda Ben Meir, "The Israeli Home Front in the Gulf War," in Joseph Alpher ed. War in the Gulf: Implications for

Israel, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992); Laura Eisenberg, "Passive Belligerency: Israel and the 1991 Gulf War," Journal of Strategic Studies 15:3, 1992, pp. 304-329; and David Welch, "The Politics and Psychology of Restraint: Israeli Decision Making in the Gulf War," International Journal 47:2, 1992, pp. 328-69.

56. Baker, pp. 123-32.

57. Richard Cheney advisor interview; Triumph Without Victory, p. 135; Freedman and Karsh, pp. 16-17.

58. See Quandt; and Steve Spiegel The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985).

59. James Rosenau, Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 2.

60. Buchanan made his initial accusation on the television show "The McLaughlin Group" on 24 August. He said "there are only two groups that are beating the drums of war in the Middle East - the Israeli Defense Ministry and its amen corner in the United States." Buchanan's remarks, which he repeated again in other forums, created a great deal of controversy played out on newspaper opinion pages. For original Buchanan quote and additional information on episode, see The New York Times, 14 September, 1990, A33 & 20 September 1990, A18.

61. Jess Hordes, director of government relations for the Anti-Defamation League, interview by author, 2 July 1997, Washington, DC. The ADL is a major American Jewish organization.

62. Ibid.

63. In the months following the war, when the US foreign policy process ceased being consumed by events in the Gulf, domestic forces were unleashed and the pro-Israel lobby chose to confront the Bush Administration on a series of issues, from loan guarantees to the Middle East peace process. For more on the irrelevance of domestic factors during crisis decisionmaking, see Quandt, pp. 179-180.

64. For more on mixing positive and negative policy tools and 'integrated strategies,' see David Cortright and George Lopez in Barnett Rubin (1998); and Daniel Drezner, University of Colorado (1998), unpublished paper.

65. Baker, p. 390.

66. Shamir, p. 224.

67. See Ben Meir and Eisenberg.

68. Baker advisor interview; Richard Cheney advisor interview; James Chaney interview.

69. Assuming that Iraq did have the capability to assemble and deliver chemical weapons against Israel, Saddam's decision not to take such action may have been an implicit acknowledgment of the U.S. and Israeli nuclear deterrents. During the Gulf Crisis, neither the U.S. nor Israel explicitly ruled out the possibility of using their nuclear arsenals. See Freedman and Karsh.

70. Freedman and Karsh, pp. 337-38.

71. Powell, p. 488.