

Comparing the Anglo-American and Israeli-American Special Relationships in the Obama Era: An Alliance Persistence Perspective

Abstract

The Anglo-American and Israeli-American security relationships have proved to be unusually close and have confounded expectations that they would wither away with the changing international environment. In order to explain this, the article proposes a theory of ‘alliance persistence’ that is based on reciprocity over shared geostrategic interests, sentimental attachments and institutionalized security relations. The article employs this theoretical framework to explore how Anglo-American and Israeli-American relations have developed during the Obama administration. It argues that the Anglo-American relationship has been closer because of the two countries’ shared strategic interests, whilst the Israeli-American relationship has experienced divergences in how the security interests of the two sides have been pursued. The article concludes by assessing how the two relationships will fair in the post-Obama era and argues that there are numerous areas of tension in the US-Israeli relationship that risk future tensions.

Keywords: Alliance, US-UK, US-Israel, Special Relationship, Obama

Introduction

The US has multiple ‘Special Relationships’ by virtue of the fact that it is a global superpower and its interests overlap with those of many countries around the world. The term ‘special relationship’ has been overused: so far US Presidents have acknowledged twenty

nine special relationships between their country and other states.¹ Amongst this range of special relationships, the ones with the United Kingdom (UK) and Israel are seen as particularly special. President John F. Kennedy once proclaimed that ‘The United States has a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East, really comparable only to that which it has with Britain over a wide range of world affairs’.² Not only have the Anglo-American special relationship (AASR) and Israeli-American special relationship (IASR) been given rhetorical prominence by US Presidents but they have also been characterised by unique practical cooperation: in the fields of conventional military affairs, nuclear weapons and intelligence sharing. Nevertheless, these two special relationships are qualitatively different in terms of their levels of security cooperation, thereby meriting a detailed comparison in this article. Surprisingly, there has so far been little dialogue between scholarship of the AASR and the IASR. This article seeks to bridge that gap.

Both special relationships exist largely outside formal treaty arrangements. The US-UK relationship is part of the Washington Treaty of 1949 that created the multilateral framework of NATO, but their bilateral relationship has flourished outside this treaty structure. The US-Israeli relationship has not been codified into a formal treaty relationship and the countries are not joint members of any overarching multilateral alliance. In 1987, as part of the National Defence Authorization Act, the US Congress designated Israel as a major non-NATO ally, thereby authorising consultation and cooperation across multiple fields of activity.

¹ The American Presidency Project, ‘Public Papers of the Presidents’, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php>>.

² Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, ‘The United States and Israel since 1948: A “Special Relationship”’, *Diplomatic History* 22/2 (1998), 231.

Both special relationships have confounded the expectations of those that thought they would fade over time. In the case of the AASR, it survived during the Cold War and adapted afterwards to a range of contemporary international challenges, including transnational terrorism, nuclear proliferation and state failure. As regards the IASR, there has been a heated debate over what factors have contributed to its durability since the end of the Cold War. Mearsheimer and Walt advanced four main arguments:³ mutual strategic advantage;⁴ the US's sense of moral responsibility; the identification of the American people and the political elite with Israel⁵ and the influence of the Israel lobby. This article argues that none of these four arguments alone can explain adequately the continuing relationship.

This article seeks to explain the continuities and changes in the AASR and the IASR since President Obama took power in 2009. It proposes a theory of alliance persistence in order to account for why these two relationships have endured and remained special. It demonstrates that while both relationships are special, they differ in the degree of their intimacy. The article concludes by assessing how the AASR and the IASR may fair in the post-Obama era.

Why do alliances persist?

Attention has traditionally been devoted to how alliances, or alliance-like relationships, are created. Relatively limited attention has been paid to theorising and explaining their

³ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, 'Is it Love or the Lobby? Explaining America's Special Relationship with Israel', *Security Studies* 18/1 (2009), 73.

⁴ For arguments in support of Israel as a strategic asset for the US, see Robert D. Blackwill and Walter B. Slocombe, 'Israel: A Strategic Asset for the United States', The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2011, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/Blackwill-Slocombe_Report.pdf>; Michael Eisenstadt, and David Pollock, 'Asset Test: How the United States Benefits from its Alliance with Israel', The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2012, <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/StrategicReport07.pdf>>.

⁵ For arguments in support of Americans' strong identification with Israel, see Jerome Slater, 'The Two Books of Mearsheimer and Walt', *Security Studies* 18/1 (2009), 4-57; Michael J. Koplow, 'Value Judgement: Why Do Americans Support Israel', *Security Studies* 20/2 (2011), 266-302; Jonathan Rynhold, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

continuation.⁶ Realist scholarship leads to the expectation that alliances will break up after the reason for their creation has ended and selfish interests return to the foreground. This has resulted in expectations that an organization like NATO is doomed in the long term. In contrast, institutionalists and constructivists have come to challenge neorealist understanding of alliance behaviour: institutionalists argue that high levels of institutionalization can help to explain the persistence of NATO after the Cold War⁷ while constructivists argue that collective identity is a key factor.⁸

Jae Jeok Park puts forwards a new theoretical framework in explaining the persistence of the US-led alliances in the Asia-Pacific region. His chief argument is that an alliance persists when it functions to 'insure an existing order against an unfavourable long-term security trend to their members'.⁹ However, his theoretical framework has limited utility in relation to the AASR where a weakened Russia can make trouble in Europe, as it has done in Ukraine, but it is not powerful enough to challenge the overall status quo. Similarly, it cannot explain the persistence of the IASR where although Iran seeks to challenge the American-dominant order in the Middle East, Israel stands in opposition to US policies towards Iran.

It is argued here that there are three main factors determining the persistence of an alliance. The first factor is the extent to which allies share a reciprocal relationship, with each of them providing some utility that is indispensable to advance their shared geostrategic interests. Current scholarship of both Anglo-American and Israeli-American relations emphasizes the

⁶ Robert McCalla, 'NATO's Persistence after the Cold War', *International Organization* 50/3 (1996), 445-75.

⁷ John S. Duffield, 'NATO's Functions after the Cold War', *Political Science Quarterly*, 109/5 (1994), 763-787; Robert B. McCalla, 'NATO's Persistence after the Cold War', *International Organization*, 50/3 (1996), 445-475; Celeste Wallander, 'Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War', *International Organization* 54/4 (2000), 705-735.

⁸ Thomas Risse Kappen, 'Collective Identity in a Democratic Community: The Case of NATO', in Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 366-367.

⁹ Jae Jeok Park, 'The Persistence of the US-led Alliances in the Asia-Pacific: An Order Insurance Explanation', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 13/3 (2013), 348.

importance of shared interests. However, shared interests do not necessarily strengthen their relationship if there is no reciprocity in advancing such interests. Reciprocity is a key element of a persistent alliance. As will be explained in the next section, a lack of reciprocity between Israel and the US has weakened their relationship during the Obama era, despite these two countries having many interests in common across the Middle East.

A state's utility may take a number of different forms: it may be geography, they may share a common adversary or a stronger country may see its ally as a buffer against an enemy's expansion. The stronger power may be able to offer protection and security, without which the survival of the weaker state could be endangered. The weaker state may add a small but significant capability that makes a difference to a larger ally. The degree of utility a state can offer determines whether it is considered by its ally as a strategic asset, a strategic irrelevance or a strategic liability. A state is a strategic asset if it helps its ally to achieve foreign policy goals. By contrast, a state is a strategic liability if it serves as a hindrance to its ally's foreign policy goals or as a strategic irrelevance if it proves to be neither useful nor harmful.

The second factor is the extent to which allies share sentimental attachments. This refers to a state's favourable feelings or affection towards its ally at both the societal and the elite level. The extent of the sentimental attachment determines the strength of collective identity between them. Identity is a socially constructed phenomenon and helps to shape how policymakers see the world and who they regard as like-minded partners. It not only defines who we are, but also delineates the boundaries against the others.¹⁰ Collective identity is

¹⁰ Thomas Risse-Kappen, 'Collective Identity in a Democratic Community: The Case of NATO', in Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 366-367.

important, because it is ‘the sense of us’ that enables states to define their common interests in a particular manner.¹¹

Collective identity can derive from a number of sources. It can arise from a sense of shared heritage and historical experience, from common language, cultural affinities or religion. Alternatively, it can develop from shared political attributes such as democratic systems of government or market economies. Usually, for a strong bond to develop between two countries, a mix of factors overlap with one another. In addition, patterns of cooperation are vital contributors to a strong collective identity between states. Wendt uses the term ‘cooperative acts’ to describe the influence of behavioural practice on the formation of collective identity. He argues that repeated cooperative acts have two effects on the formation of collective identity. First, ‘By showing others through cooperative acts that one expects them to be co-operators too, one changes the intersubjective knowledge in terms of which their identities are defined’.¹² Second, through repeated cooperative acts, ‘Actors are simultaneously learning to identify with each other — to see themselves as a “we” bound by certain norms’.¹³

Collective identity helps to build patterns of understanding and trust that undergird the relationship and give it durability during times of tension. It creates an expectation that the other side can be relied upon. It demarcates allies that can be trusted from enemies that need either to be deterred or confronted. In the words of Barnett, there is ‘...an important

¹¹ Justin Gibbins, *Britain, Europe and National Identity: Self and Other in International Relations* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 4.

¹² Alexander Wendt, ‘Collective Identity Formation and the International State’, *American Political Science Review* 88/2 (1994), 390.

¹³ *Ibid.*

relationship between identity and the construction of threat'.¹⁴ Allies have a key part to play in helping to address these threats and provide a coalition of like-minded actors. It also helps to shape behaviours in alliance relationships, to ensure predictability of action that fosters trust.

The third factor is the extent to which a security relationship is institutionalized. Current scholarship of Anglo-American relations and Israeli-American relations pay relatively little attention to this factor. Institutionalization refers to the presence of organizations, formal or informal rules or agreements, which reinforce norms, routinize practices and differentiate functions of the involved actors.¹⁵ It leads states to act together in regularised patterns of behaviour and confers predictability and strength upon their relationship. Institutionalization involves linking together a multiplicity of government departments, transnationally. The various security agencies of the two states share planning, threat assessments and insights. Bringing together such a range of actors plays an important part in ensuring the longevity of a bilateral relationship, because it creates a range of stakeholders with a vested interest in its continuation. This increases the chance that periodic tensions between political elites from the two countries will not undermine the entire relationship. In the words of Walt, 'The greater the level of institutionalization within an alliance, the more likely it is to endure despite an extensive change in the array of external threats'.¹⁶

Institutionalization makes cooperation between allies path-dependent. Path-dependence creates inertia or 'stickiness', encouraging allies to maintain the momentum of their

¹⁴ Michael Barnett, 'Identity and Alliances in the Middle East', in Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 408.

¹⁵ Robert Keohane, 'Alliances, Threats and the Use of Neorealism', *International Security* 13/1 (1988), 174; McCalla, 'NATO's Persistence after the Cold War', 462; Stephen Walt, 'Why Alliances Endure or Collapse', *Survival* 39/1 (1997), 166.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

cooperation in a particular direction.¹⁷ An institutionalized alliance is more likely to persist, because it is easier and more cost-effective to adapt existing institutions than create new ones, especially when the old institutions still deliver benefits for those involved.¹⁸

Institutionalization also helps to solidify mutual trust. High-level institutionalization can only be achieved when there is considerable trust between the parties as it involves exposing the workings of one's own government to the other side. In return, practical interactions become underpinned by routinized practices and norms.¹⁹ Since personnel, especially government officials, interact with each other regularly throughout their lifetime, they are more likely to build durable personal relationships that help to sustain cooperation.

It is argued here that institutionalization and collective identity are important factors in contributing to alliance persistence but they are not sufficient in themselves. Only when reciprocal cooperation advances the geostrategic interests of the states concerned will an alliance persist. For the purposes of this analysis, the three factors have been separated out, but in reality they are woven together and mutually reinforcing. Reciprocity provides a motivation for states to continue and expand their cooperation and this reinforces both collective identity and patterns of institutionalization. Since their relationship is mutually beneficial, states are willing to maintain old institutions as well as adapt them to new purposes. Institutionalization contributes to close personal relationships between security actors and this feeds a sense of collective identity.

¹⁷ Paul Pierson, 'Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics', *American Political Science Review* 94/2 (2000), 252.

¹⁸ Walt, 'Why Alliances Endure or Collapse', 166; Celeste Wallander and Robert Keohane, 'Risk, Threat, and Security Institutions', in Helga Haftendorn, Robert O. Keohane and Celeste A. Wallander, ed., *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33.

¹⁹ John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 16-17.

The value of this theoretical approach of alliance persistence lies not in advancing new concepts but in drawing together and combining already well developed approaches in international relations. Of these three factors, the reciprocity in advancing shared security interests is the most important factor in keeping an alliance persistent. The weakening of reciprocity in advancing shared geostrategic interests leads to the weakening of both the sentimental and institutional aspects of the two countries' relations.

Reciprocity within the AASR and IASR: Strategic asset or strategic liability?

The AASR and the IASR are both relationships founded upon security considerations.²⁰ This makes them inherently special because security is related to national survival and is the most sensitive issue between sovereign states. The degree of reciprocity in security cooperation between countries determines the significance they attach to each other. This section explores whether the Obama administration considered the UK and Israel to be strategic assets and whether their value increased or diminished during this period.

The US and the UK have continued their reciprocal cooperative relationship since 2009. In spite of the gap in resources between them, the UK has shared America's sense of being a global power with responsibility for maintaining international order. The UK remains the fifth largest economy in terms of nominal GDP, with the fastest growth rate in the Group of

²⁰ See David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-1941: A Study in Competitive Cooperation* (London: Europa Publications, 1981); Kathleen Burk, *Old World, New World: Great Britain and America from the Beginning* (London: Little Brown, 2007); Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, 'The United States and Israel since 1948: A 'Special Relationship'', *Diplomatic History* 22/2 (1998), 231-262.

Seven leading industrial states.²¹ The UK has actively sought to support and contribute to the maintenance of American leadership; seeing that as of benefit not only to the world as a whole, but also to Britain's own influence within it. This is exemplified by the fact that the Anglo-American voting partnership within the UN has much stronger than that between the US and any other permanent members of the Security Council.²² In addition, the UK's intelligence agencies have been valuable partners of American agencies with a similar global outlook.²³

The UK has been willing to back its commitment to the US with hard power. As the fifth strongest military power in the world, the UK has sought to remain America's most important partner and has provided valuable military capabilities when the US has gone to war. As a reflection of the alignment of their geostrategic interests, they have worked together in a series of military operations. The UK was the second largest military contributor, after the US, to the military operations in Afghanistan (2001-2014) and Iraq (2003-2011).²⁴ There were tensions between London and Washington over the speed of the UK's withdrawal from southern Iraq but these had abated by the time Obama was President. In the case of the drawdown from Afghanistan, the two countries coordinated their activities. In other operations the Cameron government pushed the US to support the 2011 military campaign against Gaddafi in Libya. In spite of Obama's strategy of 'leading from behind', the US remained a key player in the NATO-led military intervention in Libya with the UK the third

²¹ A recent report from the Centre for Economic and Business Research (CEBR) predicts that the UK will surpass both Germany and Japan to become the fourth largest economy in the world in 2030s. See Kedar Grandhi, 'UK Tipped to Become World's Fourth-Largest Economy in 2030s', *International Business Times*, 26 December 2015, <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/uk-tipped-become-worlds-fourth-largest-economy-2030s-1534942>>.

²² Katie Lynch, 'China and the Security Council: Congruence of the Voting between Permanent Members', *China Papers*, 5 (2009), p. 9.

²³ Adam D. M. Svendsen, 'Strained Relations? Evaluating Contemporary Anglo-American Intelligence and Security Co-operation', in Alan Dobson and Steve Marsh, ed., *Anglo-American Relations: Contemporary Perspectives*. London (New York: Routledge, 2013), 213.

²⁴ ISAF, 'ISAF Placemat Archives', <<http://www.isaf.nato.int/isaf-placemat-archives.html>>; Brookings Institution, 'Iraq Index on December 11, 2009', <<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Centers/saban/iraq%20index/index20091211.PDF>>.

largest contributor.²⁵ In the case of Iraq, following the overwhelming support of the House of Commons on 26 September 2014, the UK has been an important participant in the American-led coalition air strikes and intelligence gathering against Islamic State (IS).²⁶

In contrast to the UK, Israel's formidable military forces have been of little strategic value to Washington. As former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas Freeman argues, '[Israel] is so estranged from everyone else in the Middle East ... (and) is therefore useless in terms of support for American power projection'.²⁷ Israel has never participated in a US-led coalition: for example, it did not send any troops to take part in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, as this would have risked alienating other actors.²⁸ Even in relations with a country like Turkey, hitherto willing to engage in structured cooperation with the Israeli government, tensions over the 2010 Gaza Flotilla incident and the subsequent conflict in Gaza have resulted in Tel Aviv's further isolation. Turkey has since refused to participate in training and arms procurement with Israel.

The US remains committed to the survival of Israel: its annual military aid of approximately \$3 billion a year has ensured Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME) over hostile Arab neighbours.²⁹ The US has also provided financial support for 'Israel's Iron Dome anti-rocket

²⁵ Matthew d'Ancona, *In It Together: The Inside Story of the Coalition Government* (London: the Penguin Group, 2013), 170; Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (London: Simon & Schuster UK, 2014), 375.

²⁶ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'The situation in Iraq and Syria and the response to al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq alSham (DAESH)', 27 January 2015, <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmdfence/690/690.pdf>>, pp. 35-36>.

²⁷ Chas Freeman, 'What's in it for America', in 'Israel: Asset or Liability', *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Washington DC, 2010, 13.

²⁸ Dov S. Zakheim, 'Mr. Oren's Planet: A Bogus Account from Israel's Man in Washington', *The National Interest*, 21 August 2015, <<http://www.nationalinterest.org/feature/mr-oren%E2%80%99s-planet-bogus-account-israel%E2%80%99s-man-washington-13648>>.

²⁹ In 2008 the US Congress passed a series of laws aimed at preserving Israel's QME. This compelled the Obama administration to provide generous Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and privileged arms sales. In December 2014 the US-Israel Strategic Partnership Act raised Israel's status from a major non-NATO ally to a major strategic partner, requiring 'frequent QME assessments and executive-legislation consultations'. See Jim Zanotti, 'Israel: Background and U.S. Relations', *Congressional Research Service*, 1 June 2015, <<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33476.pdf>>.

system and joint U.S.-Israel missile defence programs such as Arrow and David's Sling'.³⁰ Yet the US has been unable to draw on Israel's strengths against common enemies for fear of damaging coalitions that include Arab states. For example, the Israeli Air Force, which is recognized as amongst the best in the world,³¹ has played no role in operations against IS. The two sides also differ in the significance they attach to terrorist threats from the region. Israel views Hamas and Hezbollah as the primary challenges to its security whilst the US emphasises the risks emanating from Al-Qaeda and IS.³² In America's eyes, Hamas and Hezbollah remain terrorist organisations but Hezbollah's role in fighting IS forces in Syria challenges the old paradigm that it is entirely hostile to western interests.³³

During the Obama era, the strategic interests of the US and Israel have diverged. As Waxman argues, 'All too often, the United States and Israel have different priorities and favour different strategies'.³⁴ This was illustrated by the debate over Iran's alleged nuclear weapons programme. Whilst the UK was part of the P5+1 – the five permanent members of the UNSC, plus Germany – the Netanyahu government was steadfast in its opposition to the entire process. Israel advocated a military option to prevent Iranian nuclear proliferation.³⁵ The Obama administration sought to address Iranian nuclear ambitions through peaceful diplomatic means, underpinned by economic sanctions, and warned that an Israeli strike

³⁰ Ibid., 35-36.

³¹ Raphael Poch, 'Israeli Air Force Ranked Mightiest in the World', *Breaking Israel News*, 30 October 2014, <<http://www.breakingisraelnews.com/23511/israeli-air-force-ranked-mightiest-world/#dMDFz0k4EzrPKzMr.97>>.

³² John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 63.

³³ Giorgio Cafiero and Peter Certo, 'Hamas and Hezbollah Agree to Disagree on Syria', *The World Post*, 31 January 2014, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/giorgio-cafiero/hamas-and-hezbollah-agree_b_4698024.html>; Mariam Karouny and Dominic Evans, 'Iran, Hezbollah Join Russian Jets and Syrian Army in Attack on Islamic State', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October 2015, <<http://www.smh.com.au/world/syrian-army-russian-jets-attack-islamic-state-in-aleppo-as-us-urges-caution-20151016-gkbf06.html>>; Adnan Abu Amer, 'Fight against IS Draws Hamas, Egypt Closer', *Al-Monitor*, 1 July 2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/egypt-gaza-hamas-rapprochement.html#>>.

³⁴ Dov Waxman, 'The Real Problems in US-Israeli Relations', *The Washington Quarterly* (spring 2012), 74.

³⁵ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, 302.

would be ‘very destabilizing’.³⁶ US Defence Secretary Robert Gates rejected a request from Israel for bunker busting bombs and overflying rights of Iraq.³⁷ The US calculated that a military option was not feasible: Israel would only delay the Iranian nuclear programme and would simultaneously place US personnel in Iraq in peril. America feared being drawn into a war against its better judgement, in order to complete an operation that had been started by its ally. In private the US put intense pressure on the Israeli government not to attack Iran.

An agreement between the six powers and Iran was reached on 14 July 2015 and it stands as one of the major accomplishments of the Obama administration. Yet the Netanyahu government has continued to denounce the deal in spite of American offers to compensate Tel Aviv with greater levels of military support. Israel has long regarded a nuclear armed Iran as an existential threat that would promote a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and could even result in war.³⁸ Israel warns that under the terms of the deal Iran will not only preserve its nuclear infrastructure but it will be able to cross the nuclear threshold in a relatively short space of time. Furthermore, the lifting of economic sanctions will give the regime in Tehran the resources to fund terrorist groups committed to creating chaos in the Middle East. The US administration retaliated by refusing to share all of the details of the nuclear negotiations with Israel.³⁹ This demonstrates a degree of mutual suspicion that is highly corrosive in the relationship.

³⁶ Steven Simon, ‘An Israeli Strike on Iran’, *Contingency Planning Memorandum*, Council on Foreign Relations, no. 5 (November 2009), <file:///C:/Users/ldxrx/Downloads/CPA_contingencymemo_5.pdf>.

³⁷ Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (London: WH Allen, 2014), 328.

³⁸ Isabel Kershner, ‘Iran Deal Denounced by Netanyahu as ‘Historic Mistake’’, *The New York Times*, 14 July 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-deal-israel.html>>; Elie Leshem, ‘Netanyahu: Iran Deal Will Bring War, ‘Nightmare’ Atomic Arms Race’, *The Times of Israel*, 4 August 2015, <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-nightmare-iran-deal-will-bring-war-atomic-arms-race/>>.

³⁹ Adam Entous, ‘Israel Spied on Iran Nuclear Talks with U.S.’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 March 2015, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-spied-on-iran-talks-1427164201>>.

The Anglo-American security relationship has continued to provide mutual security benefits during the Obama era in spite of the drawdown of the major military operations in which they were engaged. In the case of the Israeli-American relationship, as Eisenstadt and Pollock have argued, the US has benefited from its cooperation with Israel in intelligence sharing, missile defence, counterterrorism and arm sales.⁴⁰ However, upon closer inspection, such benefits Israel has provided to the US are incommensurate with its status as an ally enjoying a special relationship. Israel has played only a minor role in advancing American geostrategic interests in the Middle East. Worse still, it has more often than not played a counterproductive role impeding American efforts, as in the case of the nuclear agreement with Iran – even to the point of becoming a strategic liability.

Sentimental attachments within the AASR and the IASR

The US, UK and Israel are liberal democracies with a shared commitment to universal suffrage, the rule of law, human rights and market economics. As two Anglo-Saxon countries with a common history and language, sentimental attachments have contributed to a strong Anglo-American collective identity during Obama's Presidency. Whilst America and Israel continue to celebrate the values that they have in common, their collective identity, reinforced by Jews living in the US, has shown signs of weakening during the last decade. In order to better understand the role of sentimental attachments within both relationships, it is useful to differentiate between the elite and the public level.

At the elite level, UK Prime Minister David Cameron built a warmer and more amicable personal relationship with President Obama than his predecessor Gordon Brown. Brown had sought to distance the UK from accusations of sycophancy that had plagued Tony Blair's

⁴⁰ Eisenstadt and Pollock, 'Asset Test: How the United States Benefits from its Alliance with Israel', 10-29.

dealings with President Bush. The sense of camaraderie engendered between the Obama administration and the Cameron government was temporarily strained in 2010 by the British Petroleum (BP) oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, but both sides made efforts to ensure that the incident did not cause lasting damage.⁴¹ Of greater threat to the relationship was the veto in 2013 imposed by the House of Commons on British military intervention in Syria. This came at a key moment for President Obama as it accused the Assad regime of crossing one of America's 'red lines' by conducting chemical weapon attacks against civilians. *The Sun* newspaper ran a front-page valediction for the Anglo-American special relationship⁴², arguing that failure to support American leadership would do irreparable damage, whilst *The Washington Post* declared the action to be the biggest rupture since the 1982 Falklands War.⁴³ Despite all of these warnings of impending doom, the elite level relationship emerged largely unscathed from these experiences. This was partly because public opinion within the US was against military intervention and the crisis was defused by the negotiated removal of the offending weapons from Syrian territory.

In contrast to the strengths of the AASR, the IASR has suffered from the poor personal chemistry between a Democratic President, Barack Obama and a right of centre Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who was dependent on religious parties to shore up his coalition. The Israeli Ambassador to Washington, Michael Oren, noted that, in addition to the President, many of the senior members of the Obama administration either expressed their dislike of the Israeli government or their intense disapproval of its policies. These included

⁴¹ Nicole Goebel, 'Obama Tells Cameron BP Criticism is not Anti-British', DW, 13 June 2010, <<http://www.dw.com/en/obama-tells-cameron-bp-criticism-is-not-anti-british/a-5679351>>.

⁴² *The Sun*, 'Death Notice: The Special Relationship', 30 August 2013, <<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/politics/5107363/France-takes-Britains-place-as-Americas-closest-ally.html>>.

⁴³ Anthony Faiola, 'British Prime Minister David Cameron Loses Parliamentary Vote on Syrian Military Strike', *The Washington Post*, 29 August 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/british-prime-minister-david-cameron-loses-parliamentary-vote-on-syrian-military-strike/2013/08/29/4fab080-10f7-11e3-bdf6-e4fc677d94a1_story.html>.

former White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel,⁴⁴ former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,⁴⁵ Vice President Joe Biden,⁴⁶ former Secretary of Defence Robert Gates,⁴⁷ former US Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice,⁴⁸ and former National Security Advisor Tom Donilon.⁴⁹ The policies that most frequently irked members of the US government related to the Israel-Gaza conflict in the summer of 2014 and the building of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In the eyes of the US administration, Netanyahu paid lip-service to the idea of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem but made little effort to realise that vision. This made it increasingly difficult for the US to defend Israeli policy within the United Nations.

In addition to these sources of tension between elites, the issue of the Iranian nuclear negotiations caused particular damage to the US-Israeli sentimental relationship. This was because the Obama administration perceived the Israeli government to be deliberately courting the Republican Party in an effort to undermine the talks. Prime Minister Netanyahu gave a speech on the subject of Iran to the American Congress on 4 March 2015, without an invitation from the White House.⁵⁰ That Netanyahu allied with the Republicans against Obama and the Democrats cast a shadow over the US's bipartisan support for Israel. The relationship between the two countries is 'especially threatened when an Israeli Prime

⁴⁴ Michael Oren, *Ally: My Journey across the American-Israeli Divide* (New York: Random House, 2015), 103, 140.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 134, 139.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 211, 368.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁵⁰ Chris McGreal, 'Netanyahu's Speech to Congress: Long on Terror, Short on Substance', *The Guardian*, 3 March 2015, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/03/binyamin-netanyahu-speech-congress-long-on-terror-short-on-substance>>.

Minister is seen as openly challenging the U.S President, asking the country and the Congress to side with a foreign Prime Minister over America's President'.⁵¹

At the public level, the trends in the two relationships have been more difficult to gauge. The American people have continued to have very strong, favourable feelings towards Britain (see Figure 1). There have been no signs of weakening in American affection towards the UK at the societal level: it has consistently been the second most favourable country, next only to Canada.⁵² Moreover, there have been no indications of a divide of American opinion towards the UK along partisan, religious or ethnic lines. This is in spite of the growing Hispanic population that is changing that country's demographic profile. According to a survey conducted by Chatham House, this US affection for the UK was reciprocated: the US ranked third among Briton's most favourable countries, both in 2012 and in 2014, behind only Australia and Canada.⁵³ The Pew Research Centre opinion polls also show that the British have continued to have favourable feelings towards the US since 2009 (see Figure 2). There was a surge in positive attitudes in 2009, demonstrating that President Obama was much more popular than President Bush, due to the latter's Iraqi policies. There existed anti-Bush sentiment in the UK before 2009, but by and large, there has remained no meaningful anti-Americanism.⁵⁴ Whilst public opinion does not drive national policy, it provides a cushion against periodic tensions within the relationship.

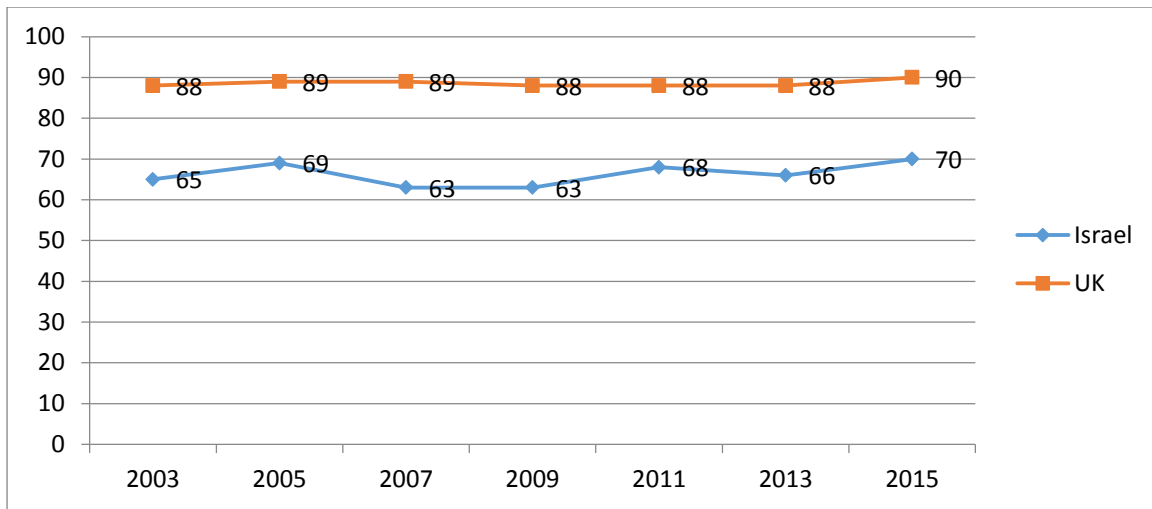
Figure 1. Percentages of American People's Very/Mostly Favourable Foreign Countries, 2003-2015

⁵¹ Mel Levine and Oded Eran, 'What Netanyahu Can Do to Save U.S.-Israel Ties', *Politico Magazine*, 16 February 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/02/benjamin-netanyahu-israel-congress-iran-115220_Page2.html#.VXFu7tJViko>.

⁵² Gallup, 'Country Ratings', 2015, <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/1624/perceptions-foreign-countries.aspx>>.

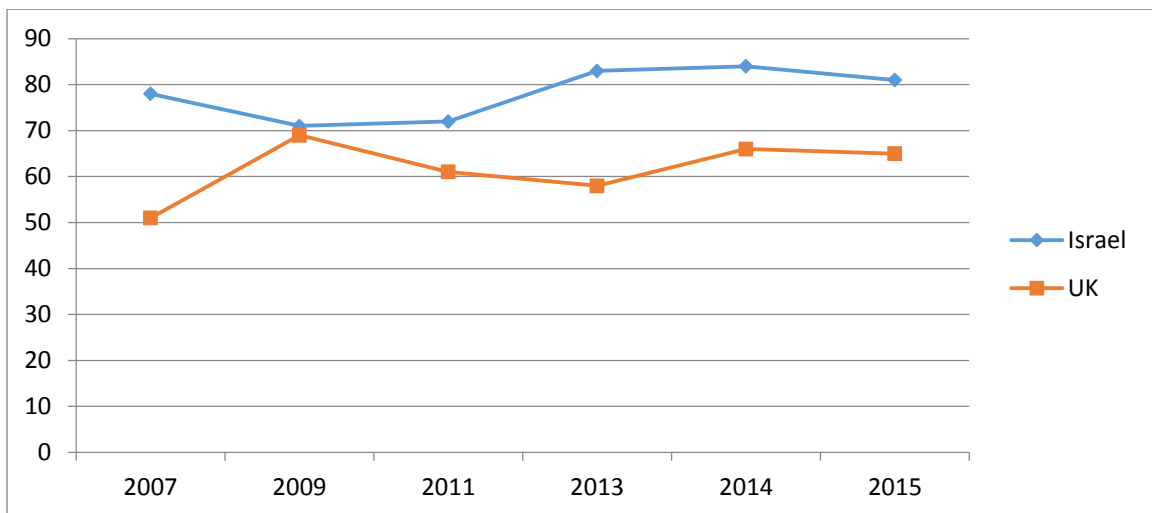
⁵³ Thomas Raines, 'Internationalism or Isolationism? The Chatham House-YouGov Survey: British Attitudes towards the UK's International Priorities', 30 January 2015, <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150130Raines.pdf/>.

⁵⁴ John Dumbrell, 'Hating Bush, Supporting Washington: George W. Bush, Anti-Americanism and the US-UK Special Relationship', in John Dumbrell and Alex R. Schäfer, ed., *America's 'Special Relationships': Foreign and Domestic Aspects of the Politics of Alliance* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 45-59.



Source: Gallup, 'Country Ratings', 2015, <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/1624/perceptions-foreign-countries.aspx>>.

Figure 2 Percentages of the UK and Israel's Favourable Views towards the US



Source: Pew Research Centre, 'Global Indicators Database', <<http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/1/survey/1/>>.

As shown by Figures 1 and 2, there has existed a strong sentimental attachment between the publics of the US and Israel since 2009. In fact, according to a 25-country poll conducted by the BBC World Service in 2013, the US was the only country that held favourable views of Israel: 41% positive and 33% negative. All other major Western countries held

predominantly negative views of Israel, including Germany (77%), France (66%) and the UK (65%). The surveys conducted by Greenberg Rosner Quinlin Research for the Israeli Project and by the Anti-Defamation League also reveal the sharp divide of views between the US and other Western countries.⁵⁵ The fact that Israel is the only liberal democracy in the Middle East is not a decisive factor in eliciting strong support from the American people. Rather, there are particular factors in the US that help to account for its support for Israel: an affluent and influential Jewish community which is a vocal constituency in American domestic politics⁵⁶; the religiosity that leads Evangelical Christians to support the state of Israel⁵⁷ and, lastly the pro-Israel lobby in Washington DC, spearheaded by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). There have been great controversies over the influence of AIPAC, as evidenced by varied responses⁵⁸ to the book by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, but its influence and uncritical support of the Netanyahu government has been evident during the Obama era.

Unlike the US's attachment to the UK, US public opinion towards Israel has become increasingly divided. There are more American people questioning the wisdom of unqualified support for Israel and critical of the Netanyahu government's policies, especially related to Palestinian issues. Whilst Republicans and conservatives have expressed their support, Democrats and liberals have increasingly berated Israel's policies. Other sources of criticism have arisen from mainstream Protestant churches as well as from younger, non-Orthodox Jews.⁵⁹ Against this background, 'J Street' was founded in April 2008 and has since become

⁵⁵ Rynhold, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture*, 22.

⁵⁶ Lee Marsden, 'US-Israel Relations: A Special Relationship', in John Dumbrell and Alex R. Schäfer, ed., *America's 'Special Relationships': Foreign and Domestic Aspects of the Politics of Alliance*, (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 194.

⁵⁷ Rynhold, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture*, 114; Koplow, 'Value Judgement: Why do Americans Support Israel?', 279.

⁵⁸ Jerome Slater, 'The Two Books of Mearsheimer and Walt', 4-57.

⁵⁹ Rynhold, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture*, 184-188.

a rising star among Israeli lobby groups.⁶⁰ Unlike AIPAC, J Street has opposed many of the actions of the Netanyahu government, for instance, it was at the forefront of support for the nuclear agreement with Iran.⁶¹

Institutionalization of the AASR and the IASR

Contacts between the US, British and Israeli security institutions are both multi-levelled and extensive. Their national security staff, ministries of defence, armed forces, intelligence agencies and defence contractors are drawn together in a complex web of interactions. The conduct of this regular interchange and the embedded nature of personnel within these organisations results in a set of relationships that are highly institutionalized. Within the three main spheres of these institutionalized relationships – namely, intelligence, nuclear cooperation and contacts between their armed services – the degree of specialness differs. In the case of the IASR, the process of institutionalization only became formalised in the 1988 Memorandum of Agreement on Security Cooperation. The AASR has been in existence for longer: for example, the UK-USA Agreement on intelligence sharing was reached in 1946 whilst the Mutual Defence Agreement (MDA) on nuclear sharing was signed in 1958.

In the intelligence domain, the Obama period has witnessed a deepening of the relationship with the UK. Its intimacy is attested to by the fact that the chief of the London station of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) attends the weekly meetings of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), the UK's most senior intelligence coordination body.⁶² Signals intelligence

⁶⁰ Mark Rosenblum and Dan Fleshler, 'The Quest for Impact: Lessons Learned from the American Jewish Peace Camp', in Robert O. Freedman, ed., *Israel and the United States: Six Decades of US-Israeli Relations*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2012), 273.

⁶¹ Avi Lewis, 'J Street Defends Iran Deal in Full-page NYTimes Ad', *The Times of Israel*, 23 July 2015, <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/j-street-defends-iran-deal-in-full-page-nytimes-ad/>>; Elise Labott, Deirdre Walsh and Sunlen Serfaty, 'Washington Battle Rages over Iran Nuclear Deal's Fate', 3 August 2015, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/03/politics/aipac-iran-nuclear-deal-congress/>>;

⁶² Jeffrey T. Richelson, and Desmond Ball, *The Ties That Bind: Intelligence Cooperation between the UKUSA Countries—the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1990), 153; Michael Herman (former JIC Secretary), interview by author, 17 November 2014.

(SIGINT) cooperation has continued with regular personnel exchanges between America's National Security Agency (NSA) and the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ).⁶³ This has become closer than ever, as evidenced by their expanding cooperation on internet surveillance programmes, such as 'PRISM' and 'Tempora', which were revealed by whistle-blower Edward Snowden in 2013. In return for a significant financial contribution, GCHQ has continued to have privileged access to the valuable data gathered by the NSA's SIGINT satellites since cancellation of its 'ZIRCON' project.⁶⁴ In turn, the NSA invested at least £100 million in GCHQ between 2011 and 2013, demonstrating their belief that their ally has valuable expertise from which the US can benefit.⁶⁵

Cybersecurity has become a new area of intelligence cooperation between the UK and the US. When President Obama visited the UK in May 2011, he affirmed his country's desire to work together on cybersecurity issues⁶⁶ and this was endorsed during Prime Minister Cameron's return visit to the US in January 2015. For example, GCHQ and the domestic intelligence service MI5 are currently working with their American counterparts to establish a joint cyber cell, with an operating presence in each country.⁶⁷

In comparison to AASR intelligence cooperation, IASR cooperation is less institutionalized. Even though they have worked together for some years, there still exists mutual distrust between their intelligence agencies. The CIA's Near East Division reportedly considers Israel

⁶³ NSA, 'New UKUSA Agreement – 10 May 1955', June 2010, <https://www.nsa.gov/public_info/_files/ukusa/new_ukusa_agree_10may55.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Adam D.M. Svendsen, *Intelligence Cooperation and the War on Terror: Anglo-American Security Relations after 9/11* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 14.

⁶⁵ Nick Hopkins and Julian Borger, 'NSA Pays £100m in Secret Funding for GCHQ', *The Guardian*, 1 August 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/aug/01/nsa-paid-gchq-spying-edward-snowden>>.

⁶⁶ The UK Government, 'UK-US Co-operation on Cyberspace', 25 May 2011, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-us-co-operation-on-cyberspace>>.

⁶⁷ White House, 'FACT SHEET: U.S.-United Kingdom Cybersecurity Cooperation', 16 January 2015, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/16/fact-sheet-us-united-kingdom-cybersecurity-cooperation>>.

as its foremost counter-intelligence threat,⁶⁸ whilst an NSA document leaked by Edward Snowden in 2014, ranked Israel as the third most aggressive intelligence service after China and Russia.⁶⁹ What further illustrates the deep mutual distrust between the two sides is that the US found out about Israel's spy operation against the US-Iran secret nuclear talks, through espionage conducted against Israel.⁷⁰ Yet despite this pattern of competition, areas of cooperation also exist. During Obama's period in office, the NSA has shared significant amounts of signals intelligence with its Israeli counterpart, the SIGINT National Unit (ISNU, also known as Unit 8200). In many cases, the NSA and ISNU work cooperatively with other spy agencies, such as the UK's GCHQ and Canada's Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC).⁷¹ Unlike NSA and the ISNU's close partnership, the CIA and its Israeli counterpart Mossad have an ambiguous relationship which remains plagued by the Jonathan Pollard case, a US intelligence officer who was jailed for passing secrets to Israel and was released on parole in November 2015.⁷²

In the nuclear field, Anglo-American cooperation embodies institutionalization unparalleled anywhere in the world. The 1958 MDA was renewed in 2014 for a further decade, formalizing the regular exchange of nuclear information, nuclear technology cooperation as well as the transfer of nuclear warhead-related materials.⁷³ There are a series of Joint Working Groups (JOWOGs) through which the main patterns of cooperation are conducted

⁶⁸ The Associated Press, ' Hamas Kills Islamic State Supporter in Gaza Crackdown', *The New York Times*, 2 June 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/06/02/world/middleeast/ap-ml-palestinians-gaza.html?_r=0>.

⁶⁹ Glenn Greenwald and Andrew Fishman, ' Netanyahu's Spying Denials Contradicted by Secret NSA Documents', 25 March 2015, <<https://firstlook.org/theintercept/2015/03/25/netanyahus-spying-denial-directly-contradicted-secret-nsa-documents/>>.

⁷⁰ Adam Entous, ' Israel Spied on Iran Nuclear Talks with U.S.', *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 March 2015, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-spied-on-iran-talks-1427164201>>.

⁷¹ *The Guardian*, ' NSA and Israeli Intelligence: Memorandum of Understanding – Full Document', 11 September 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2013/sep/11/nsa-israel-intelligence-memorandum-understanding-document>>.

⁷² Ephraim Kahana, ' Mossad-CIA Cooperation', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence* 14/3 (2001), 409-420.

⁷³ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Global Security: UK –US Relations* (London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2010), Ev87.

and these are supplemented by sub-JOWOGs as well as other specialized forms of collaboration.⁷⁴ The 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement (PSA) provided the basis for the UK to acquire the American Trident D5 missile system, to which it fits its own warheads and produces its own submarines. The Cameron government re-affirmed the Blair government's decision to renew Britain's nuclear deterrent by purchasing a successor missile system from the US.⁷⁵ In expectation of that development the decision was announced to invest £500 million in upgrading the nuclear submarine facilities on the Clyde.⁷⁶

In comparison, it is much harder to discuss IASR nuclear cooperation because it remains shrouded in secrecy: Israel maintains a policy of neither confirming nor denying its nuclear status. The fact that the US assisted the Israeli nuclear programme in the past and made available its test facilities makes it reasonable to suppose that collaboration has continued. With American support, Israel has managed to maintain its nuclear weapons without them being placed under scrutiny by the international community. The Obama administration has prevented Israel from being pressured to accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and place its nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.⁷⁷ For instance, in the UN conference on the NPT in May 2015 the USA blocked an Egyptian-led drive on a possible Middle East nuclear weapons ban, which aimed at pressuring Israel.⁷⁸ However, the covert nature of Israel's weapons establishment means that there is no equivalent of the shared delivery systems that exist between the US and the UK,

⁷⁴ House of Commons, 'Official Report', Column 1149 W, February 27 2009, <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090227/text/90227w0011.htm>>.

⁷⁵ The Trident Commission, 'Concluding Report', July 2014, <<http://www.basicint.org/publications/trident-commission/2014/trident-commission-concluding-report>>.

⁷⁶ *The Economist*, 'A Political Torpedo', 5 September 2015, <<http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21663231-chancellor-launches-well-timed-announcement-two-political-foes-political-torpedo>>.

⁷⁷ Fredrik Dahl, 'U.N. Nuclear Assembly Rejects Arab Bid to Pressure Israel', *Reuters*, 25 September 2014, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/25/us-nuclear-iaea-israel-idUSKCN0HK14C20140925>>.

⁷⁸ Louis Charbonneau, 'Israel Thanks U.S. for Stand on Mideast Nuclear Arms Ban at U.N.', *Reuters*, 23 May 2015, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/23/us-US-israel-un-nuclear-idUSKBN00800320150523>>.

with all the associated industrial collaboration that accompanies them and the operational cooperation between the two militaries.

The military-to-military relationships within the IASR and the AASR have always been important and have remained so under the Obama administration. Although the personal chemistry between heads of state can fluctuate, the web of contacts between their respective armed forces provides a source of continuity. It is founded upon professional respect and it has the benefit of according each side insights into the threat assessments and strategic thinking of the other. The Anglo-American military relationship is underpinned by their membership within NATO. The UK holds many of the subordinate positions within NATO under US officers, most notably the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. Alliance operations, such as in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, have also served to strengthen the linkages between British officers and their American counterparts.

The US and Israel, as well as the US and UK, embed officers in the militaries of the other side; they send personnel to attend the other's academies and they conduct joint training and exercises.⁷⁹ According to Oren, 'In areas as diverse as weapons development, joint training .. and educational exchanges, the cooperation was superb'.⁸⁰ Both the Israeli Air Force and the **UK** Royal Air Force attend the Red Flag exercises in Nevada⁸¹; there are naval exercises such as 'Reliant Mermaid' in the Mediterranean and US land forces conduct joint training with their Israeli counterparts in the Negev desert. In terms of sheer size, the UK has the largest 'footprint' with over 800 of its personnel based in the US, whilst America has relatively few of its service men and women in Israel.⁸² The relationships between the militaries is supplemented and underpinned by the defence trade relationships with engineers and

⁷⁹ Eisenstadt and Pollock, 'Asset Test: How the United States Benefits from its Alliance with Israel', p. 14.

⁸⁰ Oren, *Ally: My Journey across the American-Israeli Divide*, p. 88.

⁸¹ Chris Wood, 'Military Exercise—Red Flag 15-3', Global Aviation Resource, 13 August 2015, <<http://www.globalaviationresource.com/v2/2015/08/13/military-exercise-red-flag-15-3/>>.

⁸² Gili Cohen Gili, 'U.S., Israel Kick off Joint Exercise to Train Troops in Battling Missiles', *Haaretz*, 18 May 2014, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.591253>>.

executives based in the allied country, guiding the purchase of defence equipment or working on joint ventures.

Where the AASR differs from the IASR in terms of military-to-military cooperation is that the UK interfaces with America across the panoply of strategic issues, whereas the US-Israeli relationship focuses exclusively upon the Middle East. This is a reflection of the UK's desire to be the partner of choice for the US globally. Commensurate with this aim, there are UK military representatives in all US strategic commands including Northern Command (NORTHCOM), Cyber Command (CYBERCOM), Pacific Command (PACOM) and Strategic Command (STRATCOM).⁸³ The largest contingent of around 50 British military officers, under a two-star general, is attached to US Central Command (CENTCOM) in Tampa, Florida, where operations for Iraq and Afghanistan were planned. Since 2009, three developments have enhanced the strategic relationship between the US and UK. First, the revival of the meetings of the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee who survey the full range of issues affecting both countries.⁸⁴ Second, the creation in May 2011 of the Joint Strategy Board to discuss and analyse key strategic challenges.⁸⁵ Last, in April 2012, the two sides brought into force the UK-USA Defence Trade Treaty, which will assist the UK in obtaining privileged access to the American defence market and smooth the exchange of sensitive defence technologies.

Unlike the US-UK defence relationship, there have been no new strategic level dialogues between the US and Israel over the last six years. The Joint Political-Military Group (JPMG) and the Joint Security Assistance Planning Group (JSAP) were both established in 1983, whilst the Defence Policy Advisory Group (DPAG) was created in the 1990s. The Strategic

⁸³ White House, 'Joint Fact Sheet: U.S. and UK Defence Cooperation', 14 March 2012, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/14/joint-fact-sheet-us-and-uk-defense-cooperation>>.

⁸⁴ UK Ministry of Defence, 'UK and US Service Chiefs Discuss Future Strategic Challenges', 28 March 2013, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-us-service-chiefs-discuss-future-strategic-challenges>>.

⁸⁵ The UK Government, 'The US-UK Joint Strategy Board', 25 May 2011, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-us-uk-joint-strategy-board>>.

Dialogue Group, which was created in 1999, remains the most senior, regular forum in which security issues are discussed. The worrying sign for the Israeli-American relationship was that the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government issued sharply different statements describing their strategic dialogue in 2014.⁸⁶ Another worrying sign was that the Obama administration did not renew the Emergency Oil Supply Agreement with Israel when it expired in November 2014.⁸⁷

What makes the IASR distinct from the AASR is that the American commitment to Israel's survival has been institutionalized by American legislation over the past decades. It has been within the US Congress, and particularly its Republican representatives, that support for Israel has been forthcoming, in contrast to the scratchy relationship with the Executive. This has been illustrated by the decision of the Congress to enact a series of laws aiming to preserve Israel's QME. These laws create powerful inertia to preserve the special relationship with Israel and the Obama administration has been compelled to provide generous Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and privileged arms sales. After the passage of the 2008 legislation, a bilateral QME working group between the US and Israel was created 'allowing Israel to argue its case against proposed U.S. arms sales in the region'.⁸⁸ The US-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of December 2014 elevated Israel's status from a major non-NATO ally to a major strategic partner.

The US-Israel and US-UK institutional relationships are a vital part of explaining the persistence of these special relationships during the Obama era. The AASR has adapted to an evolving strategic context and has deepened in important respects including intelligence collaboration, defence procurement and strategic military dialogue. The same cannot be said

⁸⁶ JTA, 'U.S., Israel Differ on Emphases in Strategic Dialogue', 14 September 2014, <<http://www.jta.org/2014/09/14/news-opinion/united-states/u-s-israel-differ-in-emphases-in-strategic-dialogue>>.

⁸⁷ Ran Dagoni, 'US Fails to Renew Emergency Oil Supply Pact with Israel', 16 March 2015, <<http://www.globes.co.il/en/article-us-fails-to-renew-oil-supply-agreement-with-israel-1001018925>>.

⁸⁸ Zanotti, 'Israel: Background and U.S. Relations', p. 31.

of the IASR. Divergences of interest have not significantly reduced the institutional relationship but they have constrained its development. Furthermore, competition and the pursuit of unilateral advantage, such as in the field of intelligence collection, have scarred the relationship and generated points of friction.⁸⁹

The prospects for the AASR and IASR after Obama

No inter-state relationships are immutable; they reflect the changing calculations of interest amidst an evolving external environment. The Anglo-American and Israeli-American relationships are faced with the prospect of a new President in January 2017. Beginning in 2011 Obama initiated an important shift in US foreign policy, a re-balancing towards the Asia-Pacific region.⁹⁰ He also accelerated the timetable for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and in 2014 pulled out combat forces from Afghanistan. By doing so he signalled that the US was no longer willing to commit large-scale ground forces to the Middle East and proceeded to use airpower and targeted drone strikes against IS and terrorist adversaries in Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and Yemen. Against such a backdrop, what are the prospects for the AASR and IASR after Obama?

America's pivot to Asia may weaken the strategic dimensions of the AASR to some degree, given the fact that the UK will have less to offer its ally in that region. Nevertheless, the UK has distinctive historical relationships in parts of Asia — including Australia, Hong Kong, India, Pakistan and Singapore — that put it at an advantage compared to the US. Its economic engagement with China will not prejudice the AASR because it will not weaken

⁸⁹ Glenn Greenwald and Andrew Fishman, 'Netanyahu's Spying Denials Contradicted by Secret NSA Documents', *The Intercept*, 25 March 2015, <<https://firstlook.org/theintercept/2015/03/25/netanyahus-spying-denial-directly-contradicted-secret-nsa-documents/>>.

⁹⁰ David Shambaugh, 'Assessing the US 'Pivot' to Asia', *Strategic Studies* 7/2 (2013), 10-19.

their security relationship. Washington is also mindful that in re-balancing towards Asia it cannot afford to neglect either Europe or the Middle East.⁹¹

Washington has been worried by the apparent desire of the UK to reduce its profile in world affairs.⁹² The Cameron government made swingeing cuts in UK defence spending following the global financial crisis⁹³ did not play a prominent role in dealing with the Ukraine crisis and has committed itself to holding a referendum on its continued membership of the European Union by 2017. In addition, it drew back from becoming involved in the conflict in Syria.

The UK was stung by the criticisms that its policies elicited from the US. In light of those criticisms the newly elected Cameron government expressed a determination to reassert its position in the world. In November, the UK produced its 2015 version of the SDSR in which it reaffirmed its sense of global ambition. There was a commitment to purchase a new maritime patrol aircraft, two Army strike brigades for expeditionary operations, new ‘Protector’ drones and additional funding for Special Forces and cyber capabilities. The growing threat from IS led the UK to overcome its earlier hesitation and participate in an American-led air campaign in Syria. This was endorsed with the overwhelming support of the House of Commons on 2 December 2015. There appears every prospect that instability in the world will reinforce the shared geostrategic interests of the two governments and preserve their alignment in the future.

⁹¹ The UK government, ‘Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee’s Eighth Report of Session 2013-14 (HC695)’, June 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/317431/40640_Cm_8876_Accessible.pdf>.

⁹² Anand Menon, ‘Littler England’, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/littler-england>>; Nick Cohen, ‘Britain Doesn’t Have a Foreign Policy’, *The Observer*, 16 March 2015, <<http://nickcohen.net/2015/03/16/britain-doesnt-have-a-foreign-policy/>>.

⁹³ The UK government, ‘Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review’, October 2010, <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62482/strategic-defence-security-review.pdf>.

In the case of the IASR, the outlook is more uncertain. On the one hand, the Arab Spring has resulted in the collapse of some of Israel's foremost adversaries, such as Syria. On the other, the diminution of traditional threats has rekindled expectations of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, as illustrated by the additional 28 countries that have recognized a Palestinian state during Obama's period in office.⁹⁴ In addition, a window of opportunity has been provided for adversaries of Israel, such as Iran, to assert their ambitions. American policy will be driven by the reality that Israel continues to feel vulnerable, despite becoming the strongest military power in the Middle East. Because of this insecurity, Israel is prone to over-react to external threats which, in turn, impacts negatively on American foreign policy in the region. By reassuring Israel with the provision of military aid and diplomatic protection, the US can encourage Israel to act with restraint in the face of security challenges.⁹⁵

As regards the sentimental dimension of the two special relationships, the decline of the Anglo-Saxon population in the US and the increase in ethnic minorities may weaken the sense of common bonds and shared culture between the US and UK.⁹⁶ Yet this is a long-term process that is unlikely to change their special relationship in the short to medium term. This contrasts with the prospect of preserving the sentimental attachment between Israel and the US. Whilst there will be strong and positive feelings expressed by Americans towards Israel, other parts of the US population are divided over its policies. The open fight between the Obama administration and the Israeli government with regard to the Iranian nuclear deal is over, culminating in the defeat of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his supporters in

⁹⁴ United Nations, 'State of Palestine Flag to Fly at United Nations Headquarters Offices, as General Assembly Adopts Resolution on Non-Member Observer States', 10 October 2015, <<http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/ga11676.doc.htm>>.

⁹⁵ Ariel Ilan Roth, 'Reassurance: A Strategic Basis of U.S. Support for Israel', *International Studies Perspectives* 10/4 (2009), 378-393.

⁹⁶ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Global Security: UK –US Relations*, p. Ev 107.

Washington.⁹⁷ But it leaves behind a legacy of mistrust that will be difficult to overcome. In addition, Palestinian issues will continue to plague the IASR and split American public opinion. It will be more difficult for Israel to enjoy bipartisan support in Washington on issues related to American vital interests, especially if Israel is only loved by half of the US.

Recent tensions such as these have exposed the immaturity of the IASR. In future, the US and Israel need to learn how to manage turbulence in their relationship and be more relaxed about criticism from the other side. Much will depend on who is the next US President. A Democratic successor would be likely to continue the direction of travel of Obama and exert pressure on the Israeli government over its policies. A Republican President, on the other hand, might be more forgiving of Israeli settlement building and might take steps to reverse the nuclear deal with Iran. Under such circumstances it is possible to envisage a less tense US-Israeli relationship and even the possibility of it improving.

As regards the future of the institutional dimension, it will continue to generate ‘stickiness’ within both special relationships. In the case of the AASR, the UK will have to work harder to preserve the intimacy that resulted from conducting military operations alongside each other in Iraq and Afghanistan. In order to prevent their militaries from losing this closeness and drifting apart, the UK will need to train and exercise with its larger ally and preserve the bonds of friendship that were generated in the recent past. In his memoirs, former Chief of the Defence Staff Sir David Richards recounts the efforts he made to keep close contacts with senior officers in the US military, journeying on one occasion across the Atlantic to attend the retirement of a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Tal Kopan, ‘Senate Democrats deliver Obama's Iran nuclear deal support’, CNN, 8 September 2015, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/08/politics/iran-nuclear-deal-richard-blumenthal-ron-wyden-gary-peters-obama-democrats/>>.

⁹⁸ David Richards, *Taking Command* (London: Headline, 2014), 305.

The institutional linkages between the US and Israel have continued to be robust despite the recent coldness of the political relationship. The US and Israeli armed forces have retained their close cooperation. For example, in June 2015, the US and Israeli air forces signed a strategic agreement entitled the 'Air Senior National Representative' (ASNR), that gathers together existing strands of collaboration.⁹⁹ Similarly, Israeli naval forces have a new round of training exercise in the Mediterranean with their US counterparts.

Conclusion

The fact that both the US-UK and the US-Israeli relationships are special is beyond question: the breadth and the significance of their security interactions are testament to their unique status. This article has analysed the continuation of these two special relationships during the Obama era by drawing on a theory of alliance persistence. There are three pillars underpinning the persistence of the AASR and IASR: reciprocity in advancing shared geostrategic interests; sentimental attachments and institutionalization of security cooperation. The three pillars remain strong in the AASR, but have been more under pressure and shown signs of weakening in the IASR.

Within persistence, relationships vary. It would be misleading to suggest that the AASR and IASR are equally close relationships and that neither had changed. The UK enjoys a closer relationship with the US than Israel and it has been subject to less deterioration over time. The UK's geostrategic interests remain closest to those of the US as they share the ambition to uphold a Western-led order. The security relationship between the UK and the US is based on a shared assessment of global security risks; itself the product of an intimate institutional dialogue between their defence and intelligence officials. The UK is eager to support the US's role as a provider of security and is willing to contribute, both materially and politically,

⁹⁹ Aryeh Savir, 'Israeli and US Air Forces Sign Historic Strategic Pact', *World Israel News*, 14 June 2015, <<http://worldisraelnews.com/israeli-and-us-air-forces-sign-strategic-pact/>>.

towards that goal. The UK will continue to behave as the US's foremost ally, in turn, benefitting from American practical assistance and from the leadership positions and resulting influence that the US confers.

In contrast, geostrategic factors have altered the IASR. Israel's relationship with the US has focused narrowly around the stability of the Middle East. As existential threats to Israeli security have diminished, the country has become less dependent on US guarantees and the provision of military equipment. This has resulted in an increase in Israel's freedom of manoeuvre and a corresponding loss in American leverage over its policymaking. There is now much more of an interdependent relationship between the two countries where Israeli actions could serve to drag the US into conflict. The strategic interests of the two sides have diverged, with the result that American policy is preoccupied with the goal of restraining Israel. The US will not abandon Israel, there are too many domestic pressures preventing this, but is likely to be more discerning in the future about the lengths to which it will go to support its ally.