

Bush, Clinton & the Jews

A Debate

Daniel Pipes/Martin Peretz

Last month, we presented a debate between a supporter of Bill Clinton (Richard Schifter) and a supporter of George Bush (Thomas Sowell) on the question of whether the Democratic party has now freed itself from the leftist forces whose accession to power in 1972 drove away many traditionally Democratic voters. Among these voters were the intellectuals who came to be called the neoconservatives and the ethnic groups from whose ranks were drawn what came to be known as the Reagan Democrats. The Schifter-Sowell debate focused mainly on the issues which concerned these two groups.

Now, continuing our discussion of this year's presidential campaign, we shift the focus to another ethnic group which was disaffected (though to a lesser extent) by the leftward drift of the Democratic party—the American Jewish community.

Having in previous years been almost entirely committed to the Democratic camp, Jews in 1972 began voting in relatively substantial numbers (between 30 and 40 percent) for Republican presidential candidates. In 1992, however, the Jewish vote for George Bush is widely expected to fall from this level, and perhaps even to resume its pre-1972 pattern of overwhelming support for the Democratic candidate. The main reason is that the President and former Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d are perceived by many Jews as hostile to Israel.

According to DANIEL PIPES, director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute and its Middle East Council, this perception is belied by the actual record of the Bush administration, while a Clinton administration is in his judgment likely to fall under the influence of forces truly hostile to Israel. On the contrary, says MARTIN PERETZ, editor-in-chief of the New Republic, the perception of hostility to Israel is fully justified by the Bush administration's record; he expects an administration headed by Bill Clinton and Al Gore to be as friendly to Israel as Israel's most ardent friends could wish.

Daniel Pipes: If there is agreement on anything this election year, it is that friends of Israel should not vote for George Bush. The mere mention of his name in Jewish circles evokes strong disappointment, even anger.

This reaction is unjustified. While there have been tensions over the past four years, a close review of the Bush record reveals a complex but consistent pattern of getting the tone all wrong but doing the right things. More: on the basis of its history, there is reason to expect that the Bush administration will do better for Israel over the next four years than the seemingly attractive but actually quite alarming prospect of a President Clinton.

THE many unpleasanties during the past year have all involved words, not acts. Several of them resulted from Israel's request for a \$10-billion loan guarantee to build new housing, the issue which riled U.S.-Israel relations for a full year. Most memorably, it

prompted the President's appalling comments of September 1991, when he spoke of himself as "one lonely little guy down here" and referred to his being "up against some powerful political forces." The same tensions also explain former Secretary of State James Baker's alleged vulgarity ("F—— the Jews"). Clearly, Bush and Baker felt as much exasperation over the loan-guarantee issue as did Jewish leaders.

But not all problems resulted from the loan-guarantee issue. Twice in recent months the State Department initiated gratuitous and nasty efforts harmful to Israel, leaking a false report to the effect that Israel had transferred American arms to China; and endorsing (out of absolutely nowhere) a Palestinian right of return. Even for those favorably disposed to Bush, it felt at moments like U.S.-Israel relations had dropped to their lowest point since the 1950's.

Nevertheless, the administration's actions contradicted this impression.

Start with Operation Desert Storm. The war on

Iraq not only destroyed the offensive capabilities (tanks, missiles, chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, etc.) of Israel's second most dangerous enemy, but it assured that Iraq would not threaten other states again so long as Saddam Hussein remains in power. Diplomatically, the U.S. government put together a *de facto* coalition between Israel and Saudi Arabia which lasted through all the ups and downs of the Kuwait crisis, then held firm even after fighting ended (as Prince Bandar proved when he turned up at the Madrid peace conference).

The war also vastly enhanced the U.S. government's reputation in the Middle East. Building on this new stature, Baker devoted himself to launching an Arab-Israeli peace process which imposed not a single precondition on Israel. More impressive yet, he pressured the Arabs to accept virtually every condition of the Likud government.

Thus: points of reference for the talks contained nothing about Jerusalem or about land for peace. Palestinians had no choice but to be folded into the Jordanian delegation. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Palestinian expatriates, and even Palestinian residents of Jerusalem could not participate. European states and the United Nations came not as participants but as observers. The U.S. government promised not to involve itself directly in the bilateral negotiations unless asked to join by both Israel and its Arab interlocutor.

In a word, Baker put together Israel's dream negotiations, the ones it had sought since 1948.

BUSH and Baker helped Israel in a variety of other ways, too. In 1985, as Vice President, Bush had played a personal role in "Operation Joshua," the airlift which brought 10,000 Jews out of Ethiopia. Then, again in 1991, when Bush was President, American help played a critical role in "Operation Solomon," the escape of 14,000 more Ethiopian Jews. Baker devoted surprisingly large amounts of his time with Hafez al-Assad to the subject of Syrian Jews; the reward came earlier this year, when Damascus began permitting them to leave. On a smaller scale, American good offices helped in getting Jews out of Yemen. Most dramatically, Bush got the United Nations to rescind its 1975 "Zionism is Racism" resolution, something that Ronald Reagan never even attempted.

The State Department, not known for pro-Israel attitudes, significantly improved under James Baker, as two examples from the past year indicated. First, when the Syrians made their attendance at a Turkish-sponsored meeting on water resources conditional on Israel's not being present, Foggy Bottom made U.S. attendance conditional on Israel's being present. (As a result, the meeting was cancelled.) Second, American diplomats worked behind the scenes to help Israel expand

its international ties, an effort which culminated earlier this year in the establishment of official relations between Jerusalem and both China and India in the space of a single week.

Less publicly, strategic cooperation between the U.S. and Israel has evolved from an abstraction to a military reality during the last four years. It now includes the pre-positioning of American materiel in Israel, American purchases of some \$300-500 million a year in military equipment from Israel, combined military exercises, and joint development of the Arrow anti-missile program. The two sides also installed a military hotline during Desert Storm. And there may be more that is not visible: according to the *Washington Post*, what is publicly portrayed as merely the pre-positioning of American equipment in Israel actually constitutes a loan to Israel "for military research and development."

Thanks in large part to American actions, Israel today faces fewer threats of war than at any time in its history. Only Syria is in a position to initiate an attack on Israel, and it is very unlikely to do so while participating in American-sponsored peace talks.

As for the loan-guarantee imbroglio, it sorely needs to be seen in perspective. The conflict was not as bad as it appeared, for the following reasons:

- Israel's survival has always been the central issue in U.S.-Israel relations; in this light, the loan guarantee was tangential, a minor concern compared to the tensions in past years (as when Dwight D. Eisenhower forced Israel out of Sinai, Gerald Ford denied the delivery of fighter planes, and Jimmy Carter ignored Egyptian treaty violations).

- Washington never refused to make the loan guarantee, but conditioned it on a cessation of new Jewish settlement activities in the West Bank. The Shamir government rejected these terms. The Rabin government accepted them and got the administration's approval for the money. In the end it was Israelis who decided whether or not they would accept American terms, and not the reverse.

- The administration can hardly be accused of penny-pinching with respect to Israel, or of adding unreasonable conditions. Every year, it unconditionally supported \$3 billion in aid to Israel, much the highest per-capita aid to any country. In 1991 it also backed a \$400-million supplement for housing and \$650 million in cash for damages suffered during the Gulf war.

All this said, doing *without* the loan guarantee probably would have served Israel's long-term interests. To absorb immigrants, the country needs growth, not aid. Yet by permitting Israeli politicians to defer the hard decisions, American handouts permit Israel's dinosaur socialist institutions to limp along. The prospect of no loan guarantee compelled the Israeli government to

get serious about economic reforms, privatization in particular. Conversely, its granting may have unfortunate consequences. For example, those major corporations on the block for privatization—the telephone exchange, the state chemical manufacturer, the state shipping line—may now remain under government control.

Israelis themselves, in a development with far-reaching implications, increasingly doubt the value of aid. Just a year ago this view was restricted to a small band of believers in the free market; now it echoes from all parts of the political spectrum.* For example, David Boaz, a former state budget director, has openly aired his fears that the loan guarantee might foster an “easy money” atmosphere which could result in an expansion of government funding and subsidies. The economics editor of the daily paper, *Yediot Achronot*, has worried that it might turn into “a kind of opium”; feeling \$10 billion richer, the government could allow difficult reforms to go unimplemented. An economic correspondent for another daily, *Ha'aretz*, has suggested that “now that we have [the funds], I don't think we should use them. It will cause more harm than good to the Israeli economy.”

While it was not for Israel's benefit that the Bush administration withheld the loan guarantee, this was the inadvertent effect.

IF THE Bush administration has done so much good for Israel, why do Israel's supporters not give it credit? The answer in part has to do with George Bush's own inconsistencies. But it mostly results from his style. Appreciating the importance of style in U.S.-Israel relations requires an understanding of the uniqueness of this bilateral tie, so I will take up this topic before moving on to the matter of Bill Clinton and the Democratic party.

U.S.-Israel ties are the family relationship of international politics—more intimate, more intense, and more interfering than any other. As already noted, per capita, the U.S. government gives by far the largest amounts of aid to Israel; correlatively, Jerusalem votes Washington's way at the United Nations 88 percent of the time, substantially more often than does any other state. The first free-trade zone in American history came into existence in 1985 with Israel; only later did the second come into existence with Canada (the third, with Mexico, is now being debated). And of all the ambassadors in Washington, Israel's consistently enjoys the best access to the Oval Office.†

As in a family, each side baldly interferes in the other's business. Israelis effectively exploit their influence with Congress and with the American Jewish community. By the same token, leading American figures call on their government to “save Israel in spite of herself” (a phrase made famous by George Ball) and the White House

transparently provokes elections in Israel, always favoring Labor over Likud. Washington pressures Israel not only on external issues but also on domestic ones, such as its economic structures.

So routine is American intrusion that Israelis have come to accept it and no longer even express resentment. In July 1989, for instance, as the Bush administration pressured Labor to stay in a coalition government with Likud, an Israeli official commented that “because of the intensity of the relationship between our two countries, we have gotten used to such intervention and do not see it as meddling.” What other foreign government would say this?

The involvement goes beyond governments. American Jews have interceded in Israel's domestic politics, most memorably in 1988, when one American faction (the Lubavitcher Hasidim) instigated a tightening of Israel's who-is-a-Jew regulations, only to be foiled by the intervention of other (non-Orthodox) American factions. More American journalists live in Israel than in any other foreign country except the United Kingdom. (And many London-based correspondents cover the Continent, too, whereas those in Israel rarely leave the country.) Though Israel exports no petroleum, oil companies pay it enormous attention. Israel is the only country to which tens of millions of Americans (eschatologically-minded Christians) look for portents of Judgment Day.

For their part, Israelis look to the United States for nearly everything: popular culture, intellectual fashions, United Nations vetoes, and military support. New York fads hit Tel Aviv before reaching many parts of the United States. And the relationship is literally family; many Israelis have relatives in the United States.

Unlike other diplomatic bonds, which pivot on such factors as trade and security interests, the U.S.-Israel relationship has an emotional base. Feelings, not a cool assessment of interests, drive its every aspect. Tone, style, mood, and perception often matter more than hard facts. Hence an issue like the loan guarantee gets freighted with a significance far greater than the practical issues involved. This also explains why American Jews seek out politicians who personally identify with Israel and show their concern for Israel's long-term security. George Bush is not one of these: he does not treat Israel like family. He and Baker retain the kind of stiffness appropriate to conventional diplomacy but alien to this special bond.

* The following quotes come from the *Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 1992.

† And not just ambassadors and not just the Oval Office. President Lyndon B. Johnson struck up a friendship with Ephraim Evron, then the number-two diplomat in Israel's embassy, unique in the annals of diplomacy. Johnson consulted privately with Evron and sometimes invited him to the Texas ranch for a weekend.

IN CONTRAST, Ronald Reagan's Secretary of State, George Shultz, fully understood the bond. Hence, when addressing the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in 1987, he departed from his written text to ask this large and avidly pro-Israel audience if it thought the PLO was qualified to enter negotiations with Israel. "No," it boomed back. Shultz answered: "Hell, no! Let's try that on for size. PLO?" "Hell, no!" the crowd echoed. "You got it!" the Secretary of State replied.

Not surprisingly, Shultz's rapport won him the permanent affection of Israel's supporters. But style is not substance, as Shultz proved just a year later when he opened official U.S. relations with the PLO. Though most friends of Israel dreaded this step, they raised hardly a word of protest. Pro-Israel credentials gave Shultz virtual freedom of action.*

Conversely, when Bush and Baker closed down Shultz's dialogue with the PLO, they won very little gratitude from American Jews. They improved in other ways as well on Shultz's policies—his peace process meant just Israelis and Palestinians, theirs included no fewer than eleven Arab states—yet they earned few credits from American Jews. Thanks to Bush's tin ear and Baker's verbal reticence, they could do nothing right in American-Jewish eyes. Harsh words got endlessly repeated, while friendly acts immediately got discounted.

Arabs, it is worth noting, have not fallen into this trap. Unmoved by the emotional dimension of U.S.-Israel relations, they tend to ignore Washington's tough-sounding tone, and instead dwell on a few key facts: Israel won peace negotiations on its terms, the U.S. government did finally approve the \$10-billion loan guarantee, and President Bush reconfirmed his opposition to a Palestinian state. Worse, Bush staged war against one Arab state (Iraq) and imposed sanctions on another (Libya). A newspaper cartoon last April captured the prevailing Arab view: Uncle Sam salutes Yitzhak Shamir and reports: "We've blockaded Libya, whom would you like next?"

In an unusual acknowledgment of the emotional basis of U.S.-Israel ties, President Bush recently observed:

I have come to believe that the measure of a good relationship is not the ability to agree, but rather the ability to disagree on specifics without placing fundamentals at risk. We do this all the time with Britain; we should manage to do it with Israel.

The President concluded by noting that "historians will look at today's controversy and wonder what much of the fuss was about." He was right: Israel's supporters need to go beyond tone and style and recognize a positive record for what it is.

Simultaneously, Bush and Baker need to un-

derstand the critical role of feelings in U.S.-Israel relations—and there is some evidence that they have finally gotten the message. Indeed, Bush's remarks after hosting Yitzhak Rabin at his Kennebunkport summer house showed a new level of warmth. The U.S.-Israel relationship is, the President said,

based on a shared commitment to democracy and to common values, as well as the solid commitment to Israel's security, including its qualitative military edge. This is a special relationship. It is one that is built to endure.

Looking to the future, Bush promised neither to "impose our preferences on Israel" nor to link aid to policy questions.

If this tone is maintained, U.S.-Israel relations will prosper mightily during a second Bush administration; but even if it is not, the past four years give plenty of reason to expect things to turn out well.

WHAT about Bill Clinton? He has no record to judge from but he does have a fully articulated set of policies and they are certainly friendly to Israel. He opposes the creation of an independent Palestinian state, recognizes the value of Israel's 1981 strike on Iraq's nuclear reactor, and pays homage to the "genius of the people" of Israel. "A Clinton-Gore administration," his campaign literature assures us, "will never let Israel down."†

In a word, Clinton does understand the need for warmth toward Israel, and it wins him strong support. The *Forward*, a Jewish weekly, prefers Clinton on the grounds that he and the Democrats "have managed to articulate . . . a more impassioned sense than the Republicans of Israel's moral *raison d'être*." George Bush, who does not articulate an impassioned sense about anything at all, simply cannot compete on this level.

But, of course, it is not the crucial level. Clinton just might follow Shultz in establishing a strong rapport, and then exploit the consequent freedom of action to bludgeon Israel. Or, like Joe Clark of Canada in 1979, he might ditch his pro-Israel campaign promises soon after the election.** No one can predict how Clinton will act,

* They also won him a warm afterglow. Though now remembered as a high point in U.S.-Israel relations, the Shultz years contained plenty of strain and heartache, including the reaction to Israel's siege of Beirut, the Reagan Plan, the F-15 sales to Saudi Arabia, and State Department references to Jerusalem as "occupied territory."

† Al Gore is also strongly pro-Israel, but not more than Dan Quayle, making the vice-presidential race a wash on this score.

** As the Progressive Conservative party candidate for Prime Minister, Clark promised to move the Canadian embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. But shortly after his election, he reneged on that promise. The Canadian embassy remains yet in Tel Aviv.

but we do have some idea about the forces swirling around him in the Democratic party, and they inspire little confidence about policy toward Israel.

During the Jewish state's first twenty years, Democrats supported Israel far more than did Republicans. But in the wake of Vietnam and the Six-Day War of 1967, powerful elements in the Democratic party began characterizing Israel as the Palestinians' oppressor and as a tool of the U.S. government. The revulsion of many Democrats toward military spending, foreign arms sales, and the use of force also made them less than stalwart friends of Israel. In personal terms, Harry Truman gave way to George McGovern, Henry Jackson to Jesse Jackson, and Martin Luther King, Jr. to Andrew Young. The heroic Clark Clifford of 1948, who urged American recognition and support of Israel, became a bagman for (the anti-Israel) BCCI in 1988.

Hillary Rodham Clinton exemplifies the new mindset. Although primarily concerned with domestic issues, during the time she served as both a director and the chairman of the board of directors of the New World Foundation, that organization made a \$15,000 grant to Grassroots International which the latter passed on to the Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees and the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees. *Insight* magazine has reported that both these organizations fall under the supervision of the Palestine People's Party, a Communist faction associated with the PLO. The sum of money is small, but it unambiguously proclaims a state of mind.

Republicans also changed in the post-Vietnam period, but in the opposite direction. They came

to appreciate Israel as a staunch ally in a critical region. The oil perspective lost influence as big-business interests in the party gave way to a free-market approach. The Republican evolution is neatly symbolized by Senator Jesse Helms's complete change of heart about Israel. In August 1982, as the Israelis were besieging Beirut, he called for "shutting down" relations with Israel. Less than two years later, in June 1984, he called for the U.S. embassy to be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

More broadly, William F. Buckley, Jr.'s public soul-searching on the question of conservative anti-Semitism evoked little response among his Democratic counterparts on the far more worrisome phenomenon of left-wing anti-Semitism. Rogue elements also brought out the parties' differences. Despite his foul statements about Jews and Israel, Congressman Gus Savage prompted no denunciations in the Democratic party. But Republicans strongly repudiated David Duke.

In sum, a fundamental shift of attitudes has taken place in the two parties, with the Republicans emerging as the champion of Jewish interests, including Israel. This Republican move toward a pro-Israel stand represents an evolving long-term commitment. Though far from unanimous, the direction is clear. The Democratic position, in contrast, shifts opportunistically. At this moment, to be sure, forces friendly to Israel within the Democratic party can out-muscle the opposition. But watch out: just as soon as isolationist impulses grow stronger or Arab-Americans become better organized, the pro-Israel stand is likely to evaporate as quickly as ice on a summer afternoon in the Negev.

Martin Peretz: The Republicans have charged Hillary Rodham Clinton with many (mostly vague) transgressions against public morals, and they have also accused her of another, more specific, transgression which they believe will be particularly alarming to Jews: she is said to have trafficked with terrorists.

The gravamen of the case is this: while Mrs. Clinton served as chairman of the New World Foundation, that charitable endowment donated \$15,000 to Grassroots International, an *ad hoc*, Boston-based bank for various leftist causes—including, it will surprise no one, Palestinian Arab organizations affiliated with the PLO. If the names of these organizations—the Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees and the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees—evoke the image of front groups, that is exactly what they are. Or, to be more precise, they are instrumentalities of the (Communist) Palestine People's Party, a faction of the PLO.

I myself would not have given Grassroots a dime. Ditto for the National Lawyers Guild, William Kunstler's Center for Constitutional Rights, or the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)—all on the list of New World grantees. And although the chair does not vote on grants except to break a tie, I guess I do wonder how Mrs. Clinton feels about these successful supplicants for New World's largess. But, then, the foundation's charter also states an interest in the "relationship between the seen and the unseen."

MAYBE Mrs. Clinton should not have joined New World's board. Off the board, though, she would have had no warrant to aim its assets at problems of teaching disadvantaged children, her major concern at the foundation. With its help, by the way, she launched in rural Arkansas an innovative remedial-learning project called Home Instruction Programs for

Preschool Youngsters, otherwise known as Hippy. An import from abroad, Hippy comes direct from the education and social-work faculties of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which is where Hillary Clinton first met up with the venture.

Of course it was not New World's grant to Hippy which made ink in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Post*, the *Washington Times*, the *Forward*, etc. It was, rather, the Grassroots grant and what that grant was supposed to tell us about Mrs. Clinton—and, by inference, what it portends about Mr. Clinton. Here is what one GOP flak had to say: "When President Reagan and Vice President Bush were working to deny Yasir Arafat a visa to come to this country, Hillary Clinton was working to fund a PLO organization. When the blood of American lives was fresh on Arafat's hands, Hillary Clinton worked to put American money into his hands."

This is a hysterical effort to compensate for George Bush's shabby record on Israel. Still, it does suggest some comparisons, beyond that between a sitting President and the wife of his opponent. I would like to know, for example, how Grassroots' Palestinian friends differ from the West Bank and Gaza groups supported by the U.S.-government Agency for International Development through its chosen network of private voluntary organizations. I would bet one thing: the women helped by these organizations with U.S. tax dollars do not stay home to bake cookies.

But there are more apt comparisons, and one of these would be between George Bush's record on Israel and that of his predecessor. Ronald Reagan was not an especially subtle man and certain nuances no doubt eluded him. But he did understand the drama of history, and not only because he could imagine it on celluloid. This understanding is one reason why Reagan grasped that there was an evil empire and that it was worth a colossal effort to bring the saga of its cruel rule to an end. Such deep intuitive feelings are alien to Bush, a cold man with a cold heart. And even though he has the temerity to claim credit for the collapse of one Communist system (which, at the end, hoping against hope, he actually tried to prop up), he is still in personal and policy solidarity with the other such system and its aging despots.

Let us face it: Bush identifies with those in power. He has never encountered a central government he would not prefer to something messy and strange. This preference goes far to explain why, when their tottering artifice was already apparent to everyone else, the President was still muttering about the "territorial integrity" of Iraq and Yugoslavia. With these mindless mutterings he encouraged Saddam Hussein's Baath party and the Belgrade Serbs to think that we would avert our eyes as they perpetrated the horrors to which they were inclined. And thus we did, until the horrors were so awful that we could no longer

do so. By the time we noticed, however, it was too late for the Bosnians. As for the recent U.S. decision to provide some protection for that fragment of Iraq's Shi'a majority living in the marshes, that had to wait for permission from the Saudis. (Bush does nothing in the region without the assent of Prince Bandar.) The President must hope that this dispensation has not come too late to help his reelection campaign.

The desire to help his own campaign is also what motivated Bush's sudden discovery this past August that Israel is a strategic ally, after all. The same pressing concern also led him not to scrutinize too closely Yitzhak Rabin's building plans in the territories and, more significantly, given the President's previous obsessions, in greater Jerusalem. But, if he wins in November, his forbearance is not likely to last much past the end of the month.

THE fact is that, unlike Reagan, Bush has no special feel for Israel, either for the circumstances which made it a necessity for the Jewish people or for those which continue to imperil it. That is to say, he has a sense neither of the millennial dream nor of the millennial fears. One may wish, as I do, for Jewish national normality. But the perfervid hatreds which the Jewish nation and its state provoke among Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, indicate that this normality has been far from achieved. These are matters on which Reagan needed no lessons, and he was never lured by the great and distorting falsification of our time that all sides in all contests are morally equivalent.

Indeed, Bush, not one to be emotionally enmeshed in the competing claims for justice in any other national or ethnic conflict—actually, not one to be enmeshed in anyone's claims to justice—has been unusually alert to the claims of the Arabs in this dispute. And indifferent to Jewish claims. Already in 1971, when there was barely a handful of settlements in the territories, and scarcely more settlers, Bush was speaking of them as if they were a greater threat to peace than the Arab *revanche* which had fueled the Six-Day War only four years earlier. The settlements, it turns out, are for Bush nothing less than an *idée fixe*. His old friend, Senator Phil Gramm of Texas, testified earlier this year that he has "known George Bush for 25 years and there is no subject he feels more adamant about than settlements." It is a strange passion for someone whose entire career has been virtually without any hint of conviction. But not, I suppose, if that someone is temperamentally disposed to be churlish toward Israel—which, on the record, Bush surely is.

This was already noticeable when the Iran-*contra* controversy burst into our politics in the late 1980's. George Bush was the single most notable figure in the Reagan administration fingering Israel, on very flimsy evidence, as the critical

and self-serving catalyst in that ill-fated enterprise, as if a great power bent on a very complex transaction would suborn its own interests to the concerns of a dependent client. Bush did this finagling in public and he did it in private, drawn reflexively to blame Israel first, perhaps in order to disguise what we have since learned to be the case: that he was no less enthusiastic about the escapade than those who have thus far taken the rap for it.

Even before Iran-*contra*, in 1982, during the Lebanon war, the then-Vice President caviled against Israel so relentlessly that the most guarded officials in our government would report his no-matter-what fault-finding. Now, Bush is not some delicate soul easily offended by the use of force. After all, by the end of the decade as President he would channel (and have his underlings lie about channeling) cash, arms, and other technologies of death to someone he would soon and rightly call a Hitler. Here is something truly worth the investigation of a special prosecutor.

If you want the real comparative measure of Reagan and Bush vis-à-vis Israel you have only to look at whom they chose as their Secretaries of State. Reagan appointed, first, Alexander Haig and, second, George Shultz. They were men of different dispositions and different gifts, but both understood that the real question in the Middle East was not whether Israel would give land for peace but whether the Arabs, separately and together, would (or could) give peace for land. Bush, by contrast, appointed his old pal James Baker to the post, putting the White House in perpetual perfect accord with Foggy Bottom. Israel, moreover, was at the top of the President's foreign-policy agenda, and at the top of the Secretary's, too. Not since James Forrestal was Secretary of Defense has there been someone in a Cabinet position whose views on the Jewish national restoration were so much an extension of his views on Jews generally. This is the James Baker, it is urgent to recall, of "f—the Jews" fame and other no less believable similar epithets and outbursts.

The proof is in the policy, and the unfriendly policy cannot be explained by the usual exculpations. Yes, it is true: Yitzhak Shamir was an obstinate man, small in vision, blunt to the point of oafishness, not deferential. He must be immensely irritating. Once, at a press breakfast, after I had asked him why the government of Israel had put through yet *another* (that is, redundant) law on Jerusalem, he came up to me and pressed his stubby index finger into my thorax: "From you, too, I need such questions?" Still, no one has yet contended that had Israel's Likud policies been presented by Moshe Arens, a very courteous man, or by Benjamin Netanyahu, as smooth as Shamir is loutish, the Secretary's attitude to Israel would have been at all different.

In any case, Baker's exquisite tolerance for

Saddam Hussein (up until August 1, 1990), and for Hafez al-Assad till this very day, cannot be justified by how civilized they are, for they are not civilized. Or by how cheap a deal can be struck with them. With Saddam Hussein, it turned out, no deal could be struck at all, while for sending some men wearing uniforms to the Gulf, Assad received Lebanon, *tout court*. But we already know that the only people whose self-determination carries any valence with this administration are the people of whom we would never have heard had they not entered history—and then only the day before yesterday—as enemies of the Jews. One might even speculate whether the Palestinians would have excited so much as a flicker of interest in James Baker's cool mind were it not for their unhappy begetting by Zionism. (As the old joke has it, Zionism was the creation of one people and the creator of another.)

In America we introduce foreign policy through calculated but plausibly deniable indiscretions, usually by second-echelon people or by unnamed senior officials. On the Middle East, such indiscretions have been legion during the Bush-Baker tenure. There was, for example, the revival—oh so casual, at a daily press briefing—of the "right of return" of Palestinian refugees. Was this really U.S. policy or was it "merely" a ploy to put pressure on Israel?

Nor was this the only gesture the administration made toward the Arabs which the Arabs have taken as a promise. It is perfectly clear, for instance, what the administration means by "land for peace" when it speaks of the Golan Heights: it means that Israel should hand them over to Syria. And as for the West Bank, since Jordan no longer claims it and the Republican platform avers that the Bush-Baker team opposes a Palestinian state, what exactly is the sovereignty to which the administration is seeking to return every inch of these territories, no doubt suitably "cleansed" of Jews? And why?

This team's map of the occupied territories also explicitly includes East Jerusalem, in which there now live, in a handful of densely-inhabited neighborhoods, some 150,000 Jews. Is the administration signaling that these Israelis are to plan a move to Tel Aviv, or that they will live under some jurisdiction other than Israel? Or does it envision serpentine frontiers following the alleys and lanes of the city, cutting Jewish Jerusalem from its heart? This is very explosive material indeed, and it will not do to assume that its handlers do not understand it. They do, as they understand the effect of every escalation in their criticisms of Israel for actions that go altogether unnoticed when committed by less faithful allies.

FOR the moment, the Bush-Baker administration has ceased its criticisms of Israel. But the serenity of Yitzhak Rabin's visit to Kennebunkport and of the period immediately

following derives from the fact that Israel's new Labor government gave Washington all it could prudently exact in the midst of a heated campaign. For its part, Labor forswore asking for anything beyond the loan guarantee. It knew that the cartography in the heads of Bush-Baker was essentially that of 1967. No reason to incite a breach when new actors may be less committed to the old lines, and also less invested in the peace process as presently configured.

In short, it cannot be denied that James Baker has had his way, extracting many laden concessions from Israel without wresting so much as one concession from any of the Arab parties. Yes, there will have to be some give among the Arabs. But in the latest round of talks the starting point for the Israelis has been not where they were but where they had been made to come by Baker. He does not even pretend to be evenhanded.

Robert W. Tucker recently observed in the *New Republic* that "one year after the end of the Gulf war, the American government was intent on removing from power the governments of Iraq, Libya, and Israel." In the case of the first two countries, it is not clear exactly how committed the Secretary of State was to this goal. But he certainly threw himself into the struggle against the government of the third. There is, indeed, something supremely ironic in the enthusiasm of a U.S. Secretary of State for the unseating of a democratically elected government—I say this even though it is my view that Israel is finally more secure under Rabin than under Shamir.

With Baker, or for that matter with his boss, a democratic society seems to have no more moral authority than a despotism. Although both John Foster Dulles and Jimmy Carter managed to maintain a certain neutrality between dictators and democrats (especially when the democrats, as in the instance of Israel, were Jews), walking a *via media* between accountable government and tyranny is a relatively new departure from American habits. In this, George Bush and James Baker are out of sync not only with the American mainstream but with the mainstream of their own party. This is not how Dan Quayle feels about Israel, or how Jack Kemp, William Weld, William J. Bennett, or even Dick Cheney feel about it, either, just to cite those already mentioned by the great mentioner for 1996. But these gentlemen will not be running American foreign policy if Bush is reelected; Bush and Baker will.

And that is not all they will be running in tandem. From all accounts it seems that George Bush wants James Baker to serve as his co-President on everything. This is not a happy choice. Baker's managerial skills will not suffice when public policy requires choosing real norms and real values in education, in science, in health care, in the structures of work and welfare. Baker's instincts are all wrong, as can be seen by the moral and political disaster of the Republic conven-

tion, the first great spectacle under his tutelage.

It is not only the multiculturalists and diversity-mongers who would welcome a *Kulturkampf* in America; Jim Baker apparently would, too. He has no compunctions about using God as a mantra, at drawing lines between "us" and "them." At the convention, Baker's lead-off point man was Pat Buchanan, who seemed to want to import ethnic cleansing from Bosnia. Now, it is true that this time Buchanan left the Jews out of his harangue, focusing instead on feminists and homosexuals, and it is also true that his critics rightly responded to the themes he exploited in Houston. But it should not go unnoticed that on the opening night of the convention the Baker management agency put forward as one of its stars a certified anti-Semite. In Baker's world, which is also Bush's, anti-Semitism disqualifies one from nothing.

A wise old wag was once asked whether Bush was anti-Semitic. "No," he said, "just allergic." I do not really know what lurks in his heart, but all of us can see who lives in the political universe he has constructed. It is not one in which Jews are welcome. Probably not since Herbert Hoover has there been an administration with so few Jews at or near the top. It is already two generations since a Jew sat on the Supreme Court. I am not arguing for affirmative action for Jews: meritocracy will have its day once more. And of course I know all about the four Jewish flunkies who write the sharp memos on how to cut Israel down to size. But they and a few other individuals notwithstanding, Jews are sparse in this administration, not because there are no Jewish conservatives but because most Jewish conservatives are not country-club conservatives.

I disagree with many conservative Jews, lawyers and scholars and businessmen, but I recognize them as serious, as idealists in their way. That is something you would never say of Bush or Baker. Nor would you ever think of them as learned or even eager to learn. They are too anti-intellectual, which is one reason they have nothing to say right now. Having failed palpably at home, and now recognizing that they have also failed abroad (who can stand to look at what they call the New World Order?), they are not open to fresh ideas or to ideas at all. What they want is a few new tricks.

ALL of this is reason enough to prefer Bill Clinton and Al Gore to Bush-Baker-Quayle. Not, let me add quickly, that the Democratic party is the chosen vessel for the hopes of mankind. But in putting forward Clinton and Gore (and not Clinton plus someone from the paleoliberal wing of the party), the Democrats have given us a message, as Hendrik Hertzberg has written, "of amplification and consistency." This year's ticket shows that the party has understood its own role in the disintegration

of the defining ethic which made America different.

That ethic, always in the process of developing, linked individual liberty with communal and cross-communal bonds. In that ethic, moreover, the idea of tolerance had real meaning and real authority—in contrast again to the Republicans who even as they fulminated in Houston against the corrosive trends in our society also exacerbated those trends with expressions of xenophobia and meanness. The fact is that the Republicans do not want a color-blind Constitution. Where it has suited them, as in the electoral process, they have manipulated racial and ethnic categories more deftly than the Democrats, doing more damage to the fabric of liberal society.

To Jews the more welcoming traits in the Democratic party are bound to be congenial. Their old political home is likely also to be the home of the new immigrants whose energy, discipline, respect for education, eagerness to work, and commitment to family make them the hope for a demographic balance which will keep our cities safe and our people industrious. From them and from their labors will come the tax base required by an expanding and progressive society. From them also will come the distinctive kind of immigrant patriotism and love of country so characteristic of American Jews and so alien to those assembled in Houston. This is the love for America of people who know in their bones what other places are like, how narrow and intolerant and closed. Indeed, I can testify that Clinton and Gore fully grasp, in this era of revived tribal hatred, the global significance, as model and as reproach, of thinking of ourselves once again as one nation.

I do not suggest that within the Democratic party the struggle for norms of tolerance and inclusiveness is over; far from it. The disunited of America think they have a stake in a Democratic victory, and perhaps they do. It was no less fraught with meaning that Jesse Jackson, another certified anti-Semite, drew cheers at the Democratic convention than that Pat Buchanan did so at the Republican. Still, the message from the top is different, and that message will be strengthened if constituencies which had deserted the Democrats or whose loyalties had been muted show that they welcome the difference and will give their ardors to it.

One more domestic issue carries special weight with Jews, and that is the place of education and science in our society. These are important not simply because for many Jews they have been the characteristic paths to mobility, work satisfaction, and acceptance, though that in itself is no small consideration for the future. Governor Clinton and Senator Gore are in this respect more than just adequate tribunes. They are exemplary tribunes. They know the language of education and science, and they know its meanings. They grasp the new paradigms and they grasp, too, the tech-

nologies which extend life, enhance knowledge, make information accessible, and create opportunities for the kind of expanding commerce without which complex societies wither. In their nostalgia for a yesterday which never quite was, George Bush and his partners are of the age of the Studebakers. The Democratic ticket is aimed at the next century.

AND about Israel? Here I write with some confidence and personal knowledge. Bill Clinton and Al Gore are more deeply and sensibly devoted to the Zionist dream and the Zionist reality than any President and Vice President have been since Harry Truman and Alben Barkley—both, by the way, also border-state Southerners. Maybe there is something about having read the Bible as children that makes them alert to the miracle of the ongoing Return, such worldly evidence as there is of the *mysterium tremendum* of the God of Israel. Moreover, as David Twersky wrote of Gore in the *Forward* (equally applicable to Clinton, I think), he is, unlike many other Democrats, “one who doesn’t have to reconfigure his general foreign-policy framework to accommodate his love of Zion.” I have talked about these matters with Clinton; and I have walked the streets of the faithful city with Gore and with Mrs. Gore, really from Dan to Beersheba, on ground where the patriarchs walked and Jesus, too, where history is immanent, where mankind’s boldest and subtlest convictions were born.

Clinton and Gore do not delude themselves about Israel’s neighbors and about the vast sea-change which is required in their political culture before real peace is possible. This is how they knew, when George Bush lacked a clue, that the Gulf war did not end last spring in a victory satisfactory to the demands of justice and decency. It is also how they know that peace between Arab and Jew will only be as stable as Israel itself is physically secure. They believe that, for the best of political and spiritual reasons, our democracy dare not leave another democracy, and especially not that lonely democracy, to the cruel caprices of the region.

With Clinton and Gore in office, the U.S.-Israel relationship may have its share of quarrels or spats, but no one will have reason to suspect malice, either toward Jews or toward the Jewish nation. Knowing the limitations of the Arab Middle East, and knowing how little eager Americans are right now to guarantee precarious agreements between hostile peoples, they will not undertake something the U.S. will be hard put to ensure.

Under the best of circumstances, Israel is doomed to live dangerously. Clinton-Gore would never worsen those circumstances. This is, alas, something which cannot be said for George Bush or for his true second, James Baker. The choice is clear.