



POLICY

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THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

16 November 1981

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ISRAEL

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: US-Israel Strategic Cooperation (U) -- DECISION  
MEMORANDUM

(S) Last Thursday we met with Israeli General Tamir and his small team; JCS and State representatives joined us.

(S) As previously agreed, we were in a listening mode and did not convey any of our tentative positions. General Tamir, as I informed you, stressed that Minister Sharon expects to initial a "Memorandum of Understanding" during his visit. The Israelis provided us with a preliminary draft, a document that is too ambitious from our point of view (TAB A). We, of course, did not enter into discussions of their draft. I advised Tamir that we were confident that we could move forward on several mutually beneficial areas, but that I could not yet give him a decision regarding the form (such as an MOU) of an agreement. I also advised him we would make every attempt to provide the US position to him in 10 days.

(S) State, as you know, recommends we agree to some three or four generic areas of cooperation and to a written MOU.

(S) US-Israeli bargaining is getting into high stakes. The Begin Government shows much nervousness, coupled with a tendency to act rashly. The situation in Lebanon, which is genuinely unstable, could give the Israelis the reason -- or the pretext -- for taking major military action. This could precipitate wider Mid-East fighting at a time when our effort to strengthen our position in SWA has only started. We are, as Ambassador Sam Lewis put it to me, skating on thin ice with regard to the future of the autonomy talks and the follow-up to the April deadline for Sinai withdrawal.

(S) We want to encourage the Israelis to work with the United States on the delicate and protracted search for peace. We have to use the strategic cooperation talks as a leash, to hold back irresponsible Israeli behavior. On the other hand, we don't want "strategic cooperation" to be misused for driving a wedge between us and the moderate Arabs, or to be misperceived by the Arabs as directed against them. You will have to walk a narrow line, indeed, in your negotiations with Sharon.

(S) To simplify the problem, we ought to separate the substantive aspects of "strategic cooperation" from the appearance or political symbolism.

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(8) On Substance: Based on ISA assessments and Service inputs, five areas of "cooperation" could help strengthen our military position in Southwest Asia, without significantly damaging our relations with the Arab nations.

- (1) Directed depot maintenance by Israeli firms during combat contingencies;
- (2) Naval exercises, ASW support, and maritime surveillance;
- (3) Use of Israel's combat air umbrella in the Eastern Mediterranean;
- (4) Use of Ben Gurion airport for emergency B-52 operations, and perhaps upgrade of Nevatim airport for heavy transport and KC-135 operations;
- (5) Medical facilities and supply planning.

(9) Other cooperative areas suggested by Minister Sharon do not fit our current strategic planning (e.g., major end item prepositioning ashore), can be accomplished under existing agreements (cooperative R&D and defense procurement), must be deferred now for political reasons (long-reach forces and real-time early warning cooperation), or amount to a request for the US to fund Israeli defense production or infrastructure programs (a new naval base, or funds for Merkava tanks in exchange for storing US-origin Israeli M60 tanks)

(10) JCS representatives initially seemed to agree to these substantive areas but are now expressing serious reservations. You will, of course, be receiving the Chiefs' views separately. Their reservations seem to be based mainly on a political judgment, i.e., the concern that such agreements with the Israelis could cause us trouble with the moderate Arabs. We in OSD share this concern; but we also have to look at the downside in the other direction: the political repercussions -- if we are too negative on "strategic cooperation" -- for our relations with Israel and our ability to influence the Israeli Government.

#### The Appearance and Format

(11) There are different options for handling the Israeli insistence on a signed document.

Option I: We could propose our own version for an overall MOU, for you and Sharon to initial. This would turn out like a document of several pages. Most of this MOU would be secret (at least for some time); its existence, however, would be public.

Option II: We could negotiate (1) a brief and "harmless" partial agreement, signed by you and Sharon, to be released to the

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press (the Israelis would call it an "MOU"), plus (2) one or several secret memoranda (either to be initialled or left unsigned).

(8) I like the second option better, because: (1) it takes care of the press briefing and increases the chance that the confidential parts will not become public (at least for a while); and (2) it permits us to break up the Israeli MOU ambitions into separate pieces, more manageable to agree on or to agree to defer.

(8) I will submit to you within a day or so drafts for either of these options. I would welcome receiving your initial reaction and guidance meanwhile.

*Fred*  
Fred C. Ikle

*Fred - Generally I like option 2  
Except for secret counts.*

Office of the Secretary of Defense  
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