
Interacting imaginaries in Israel and the United States

Lorenzo Veracini

In his commentary on the second Intifada Edward Said repeatedly argued that a shift in US perceptions had become a necessary prerequisite for change. Quoting Nelson Mandela, he specifically advocated a struggle capable of affecting ‘the imagination and dreams of the entire world’, and referred to the struggles of black South Africans and how they had ultimately received the support of US public opinion: ‘Uninformed and yet open to appeals for justice as they are, Americans are capable of reacting as they did to the ANC campaign against apartheid, which finally changed the balance of forces inside South Africa.’

His suggestion that South African struggles against apartheid be used as a reference for Palestinian resistance underscores an awareness of the need to interact with US founding mythologies: if Israel could count on automatic US identification and support, Palestinians should rely, for example, on the availability and mobilisability of civil rights images and agendas.

The first section of this chapter reviews a recent debate on the role and influence of the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. Moving beyond understandings of Israeli–US relations based on such notions as ‘ally’, ‘client state’ or ‘powerful lobby’, the second section suggests that this relationship is better understood if framed in the context of an isopolitical interaction (a circumstance in which two separate polities maintain a shared ideological framework and allow citizens to enjoy rights and move seamlessly across jurisdictions). The third section analyses how perceptions of Israel in a number of strategically located constituencies in the USA fit within shared settler colonial narrative regimes. In this section a shared settler colonial matrix of perception is used to explain an

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1 Said, ‘America’s last taboo’, p. 52. See also Said, ‘The only alternative’.
2 Of course, an awareness of how narrative informs perception had been a long-lasting feature of Said’s interpretative approach.
apparent ideological intimacy.³ Although this analysis is suggestive more than
exhaustive, an exploration of intersecting settler imaginaries, their resilience and their
circulation can help an understanding of US policies vis-à-vis the Israeli/Palestinian
civil war.

**Powerful lobby and receptive constituencies**

An authoritative study compiled by distinguished academics John Mearsheimer and
Stephen Walt dealing with the pro-Israel lobby’s role in shaping US foreign policy
(initially published in March 2006 by the John F. Kennedy School of Government as a
working paper and later, in a summarized version, by the *London Review of Books*)
recently reignited an important debate.⁴ While Mearsheimer and Walt had concluded that
US generosity towards Israel ‘cannot be fully explained on either strategic or moral
grounds’, the discussion that followed their essay was perhaps intensified by the fact that
these scholars are distinguished figures of a ‘realist’ approach to international relations
studies.⁵

Immediate accusations of presenting unsound or partisan research were
compounded by a recurring allegation of anti-Semitic bias (their paper had expected this).
On the other hand, Noam Chomsky polemically responded by suggesting that the
conclusions of their work (that ‘the Lobby’’s activity endanger real US foreign policy
objectives with its implications that the ‘tail is wagging the dog’) are misguided. In recent
history, Chomsky argues, the USA has supported many compromised regimes and their
proxy actions elsewhere.⁶ Others have also criticised Mearsheimer and Walt’s findings:
Joseph Massad emphasised how their argument risks exonerating US governments from
responsibility by blaming the influence of the pro-Israel lobby instead; Christopher
Hitchens reaffirmed US autonomy and noted that Turkey and Pakistan, for example,

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³ On Israeli and US perceptions of settlement activity in Occupied Palestinian Territories, see, for example,
Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire*.
⁴ Mearsheimer, ‘The Israel lobby and US foreign policy’. See also Mearsheimer, ‘The
Israel lobby’.
⁵ Mearsheimer, ‘Unrestricted access’. See also Mearsheimer, ‘Letters’.
⁶ Chomsky, ‘The Israel lobby?’
despite questionable records, have received ongoing US support without needing ethnic
lobbies to support their case.7 Tony Judt in the New York Times noted that ‘it will not be
self-evident to future generations of Americans why the imperial might and international
reputation of the United States are so closely aligned with one small, controversial
Mediterranean client state’, while Benny Morris’ intervened in the New Republic; all
elements of a multifaceted controversy.8 As a postscript, Haaretz’s US correspondent
Shmuel Rosner sorrrily concluded: ‘Walt and Mearsheimer have won this round of the
battle. They wanted to make a national debate of the issue, and to some extent they
succeeded.’9 (An aftermath of this affair was when Judt was effectively boycotted in
October 2006 from discussing Israel and the Lobby by the intervention of the Anti-
Defamation League and the American Jewish Congress.10)

This debate and its terms of reference are certainly not new; indeed, despite the
intensity of the debate, the Mearsheimer–Walt piece fits in a long tradition of
interpretation regarding US–Israeli engagements.11 In the early 1990s Abraham Ben Zvi,
for example, had published a book on Israeli–US relations outlining how what he
described the ‘National Interest Orientation’ and the ‘Special Relationship Paradigm’ had
interacted with each other since the establishment of the Israeli state.12 Yet these
contestations might not be asking the right questions. Despite an extraordinary variety of
voices, this controversy ultimately revolves around four critical issues: whether ‘the
Lobby’ controls US foreign policy or, conversely, whether Israel is ultimately providing

7 Massad, ‘It’s US policy that inflames the Arab world’; Hitchens, ‘Overstating Jewish power’.
8 Judt, ‘A lobby, not a conspiracy’; Morris, ‘And now for some facts’.
9 Rosner, ‘The unappreciated love of Walt and Mearsheimer’.
10 See Stoll, ‘Poland abruptly cancels a speech by local critic of the Jewish State’, Goldstein, ‘A right to
11 On the US–Israel alliance see for example Mansour, Beyond Alliance; Cockburn, Dangerous Liaison;
and Tillman, The United States and the Middle East.
12 Ben-Zvi, The United States and Israel. For earlier works on this topic see Tivnan, The Lobby; Lilienthal,
The Zionist Connection; and Chomsky, Fateful Triangle. Denunciations of the role of the pro-Israel lobby
in American politics are also not new. A 1980s study by Rubenberg, for example, had concluded that ‘the
power of the Israeli lobby over the formation and execution of US Middle East policy has become a virtual
stranglehold’ (Rubenberg, Israel and the American National Interest, p. 375).
valuable support to US activities and whether or not this is a desirable circumstance.\(^{13}\)

The pro-Israel lobby is capable of producing a concerted effort to inform or stifle public debates and perceptions regarding Israel and the Israeli/Palestinian struggle; what is remarkable (and has not yet been satisfactorily explained, besides references to strategic location and practically unlimited resources) is that its effort can be so effective.\(^{14}\)

On the issue of the pro-Israel lobby’s capacity for distorting American interests, David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, recently commented matter-of-factly on what he called a ‘misconception’: ‘By placing those arguments into the free marketplace of ideas (that is at the center of democratic political life for all to debate) and by using their legitimate democratic rights to transform those arguments into policy, pro-Israel advocates have prevailed. Further, American support of Israel is also a reflection of the depth of the support that Israel has among the general voting public who have also been convinced by those arguments.’\(^{15}\)

The pro-Zionist Saperstein has an interest in deflecting attention from the Lobby, yet he may be right in suggesting that Mearsheimer and Walt’s causal order be reversed and ideological identification emphasised. As the lobby’s power may be one result of its ascendancy more than its cause, its pervasiveness should be explained otherwise.\(^{16}\)

In another context, Australian academic Ghassan Hage has suggested that the notion of a controlling lobby does not satisfactorily explain political overlap: ‘I think

\(^{13}\) Particularly enthusiastic about automatic identification are neoconservative foreign policy advisors Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, Paul Wolfowitz, etc. Advocates of ‘realist’ approaches have consistently supported a more flexible approach. Aaron David Miller, for example, was quoted in an August 2006 article pointing out the danger inherent in a situation where ‘there is no daylight whatsoever between the government of Israel and the government of the United States’ (Stolberg, ‘Bush’s embrace of Israel shows gap with father’).

\(^{14}\) For a documented and convincing description of the pro-Israel lobby’s effectiveness, see Massing, ‘The storm over the Israel lobby’. On the other hand, debate in France during presidential candidate Ségolène Royal’s tour of the Middle East in December 2006 involving CRIF (Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France) confirms the comparative lack of influence of another pro-Israel lobby. See ‘Mme Royal critiquée à Paris, bienvenue au Proche-Orient’, and Ben Simon, ‘A snub from Segolene Royal’.

\(^{15}\) Rosner, ‘Rosner’s guest’.

\(^{16}\) Israel, of course, means remarkably different things to a variety of different people. For a bewildering array of identitarian possibilities, see for example Dershowitz, *What Israel Means to Me*. 
there have been a lot of anti-Semitic modes of explaining this, saying Jews are controlling American politics and this is why you see Americans acting in this way or that way. But I think it has nothing to do with who’s controlling anything! It’s just a structural correspondence between two modalities of being generated by two societies structured along similar warring principles.¹⁷

The following section explores a ‘structural correspondence’.

**Isopolitical relationships**

‘Convergence’ (alternatively translated as ‘alignment’) remains a current affair in Israel. However, the dynamics of internality and externality involved in this metaphor better describe the association that has developed between Israel and the USA than the uncertain prospect of separation between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. There is a remarkable coincidence in the narrative and language utilised to discuss terrorism: while security-speak in the USA resounds with Israeli usages and informs an increasing number of public domains, proposals to erect a security fence ‘slightly longer than the Israeli version’ at the Mexican border and to use the Israeli ‘fence’ as a template, for example, fit well in a pattern of securitarian identification between two constituencies.¹⁸ Converging debates, however, do not only involve a shared ‘security speak’, or the constraints of what Hage defines as ‘warring societies’ (i.e. a focus on targeted assassinations, on comparative anti-insurgency outlooks, on the admissibility of torture, etc.). Israeli unemployed workers forcibly re-entering the workforce in a work for the dole privatisation program have done so according to the ‘Wisconsin Plan’, for example, and an Israeli privatisation of the prison system was enacted in mid-2006 (after

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¹⁷ Hage, ‘Warring societies (and intellectuals)’, p. 43. The Australian government’s ‘Israel-first doctrine’ confirms how an effective pro-Israel lobby may find an especially sympathetic reception in settler-determined political context. While in July 2004 Australia voted with the USA, Israel and heavyweights Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau against a UN resolution condemning the security wall being constructed in the West Bank, in November 2006 it did the same on a similar condemnation of Israeli bombing of civilian areas in Gaza. On Australia’s pro-Israel lobby, see Loewenstein, *My Israel Question*. ¹⁸ See CNN/Associated Press, ‘Israeli fence is example for US’, and Rosner, ‘Israeli advice on the Mexico fence: Be ruthless’, which reports former California Governor Pete Wilson citing the West Bank wall as a model for the construction of a proposed US ‘barrier’ along the Mexican border.
the prison privatisation law passed in 2004) in accordance with a Texas template.19 Public agendas in the two contexts resonate in ways that need explanation.

Parallel to public discourse, convergence is also operating in unprecedented ways in the international arena.20 The Hezbollah/Israeli war in Lebanon during the summer of 2006 provides a privileged starting point for an outline of an unprecedented dynamic in the close relationship between US and Israeli geopolitical strategy.21 Commenting on the war, former Israeli negotiator Daniel Levy lamented a US position undistinguishable from the Israeli one and its consequences:

Witnessing the near-perfect symmetry of Israeli and American policy has been one of the more noteworthy aspects of the latest Lebanon war. A true friend in the White House. No deescalate and stabilize, honest-broker, diplomatic jaw-jaw from this president. Great. Except that Israel was actually in need of an early exit strategy … The American ladder had gone AWOL … Israelis have grown used to a different kind of American embrace—less instrumental, more emotional, but also responsible. A dependable friend, ready to lend a guiding hand back to the path of stabilization when necessary.22

Veteran left-wing Israeli politician Yossi Beilin also remarked an unprecedented lack of US influence in the area:

The magnitude of the present folly is reflected in one of the US secretary of state’s recent visits to the region during the course of the second war in Lebanon.

Condoleezza Rice was very eager to help end the war in the region, both in the

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19 The Israeli consortium of companies who won the tender hired Texas-based private prison operator Emerald Correction Management for professional consulting. See Galnoor, ‘From Texas to Be’er Sheva’.
20 See Cooley, An Alliance against Babylon. During his time as prime minister, Ariel Sharon went to see George Bush no less than eight times, possibly an all-time record. In an expression of isopolitical ties Sharon used to call Bush the ‘best president Israel has ever had’ (Marcus, ‘Walking on eggshells’).
21 On the two-way dialogue between Israeli and US military approaches, see Hersh, ‘Watching Lebanon’. One could also argue that serious debate in the USA regarding Israeli contribution as an ally following Mearsheimer and Walt’s work might have contributed to a propensity for military adventurism against Hezbollah in Lebanon.
22 Levy, ‘Ending the neoconservative nightmare’. 
Gaza Strip and in Lebanon, but she was unable to meet with the Hamas representatives because the US is boycotting them, she could not visit Syria, because the US is boycotting Assad, she could not speak with Hezbollah representatives, whereas the Lebanese government was unwilling to meet with her because of the Israeli bombing that caused many civilian casualties in Qana. In the end Rice met with the Israeli leadership and returned home.23

Contrary to what could be intuitively expected, US unquestioning identification and ‘lack of involvement’ are reciprocally supporting. As these commentators have perceived, undistinguishable stances ultimately prevent effective support.24

Available analytical methods cannot satisfactorily account for this degree of isopolitical interaction and identification. This section argues that there is a better way of framing Israeli–US relations and contends that although it is not a client state, by virtue of representing a US national epic, Israel and its settlement enterprise can be seen as forming an isopolity with the USA: an ‘imagined community’ that operates according to a specific cluster of what cultural theorists Stuart Hall and Paul de Gay call ‘practices of subjective self-constitution’ (imagined communities can be non-national communities).25

Isopolitical relationships are not difficult to envisage, especially if one considers that, besides US Jews routinely being conferred Israeli citizenship rights in accordance of the Law of Return, it is estimated that there may currently be 650,000 Israelis residing in the USA, an astounding statistic, both in absolute and relative terms.26

Yet it is at the imaginative level that the notion of an isopolitical relationship could be most useful in describing a special relationship. A related pattern of perception can explain for example the strong feelings raised by the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in the

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23 Beilin, ‘The clash of civilizations’.
24 The May 2006 AIPAC backed Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act was so sweeping a move that the Bush administration ended up opposing it. As a result, important segments of American Jewish public opinion initiated a campaign to institute an alternative and more moderate pro-Israel lobby.
26 Identification between Israeli and American constituencies is also emphasised by the fact that victims of Palestinian resistance have often been Israeli and American, as in the cases of Leonard Klinghoffer, victim of the Achille Lauro hijacking in 1985 (also a television movie with Burt Lancaster and Eva Marie Saint), and kidnapped soldier Nachson Wachsman in October 1994.
USA, where the dispute ceases being a foreign policy issue and becomes critically embedded in domestic debate, and where the struggle of an isopolitical constituency displaces other concerns. When affect is projected on to the Israeli/Palestinian dispute, what is at stake are ultimately contrasting visions of social order. As psychoanalytic practice suggests, displacement is often one result of contradictory impulses: recurring proposals for legislation enacting political supervision for Middle East studies programs across the USA, for example, also arise from a perception of anti-Israel advocacy as unacceptable and dangerous to national security. The currency of these demands can be understood only in a context in which anti-Israel discourse is also (and especially) anti-American discourse (it worked in similar ways during the McCarthy period, when communism was anti-American; a McCarthy-like demand for political oversight over academic institutions could be formulated only in such a context).[^27] In the end, anti-Israeli advocacy can be credibly represented as ‘anti-American’ because, according to a particular and prevailing ideological configuration, Israel and the USA form an isopoly in which what is successfully labelled ‘anti-Israel’ is also and ipso facto ‘anti-American’.[^28]

It does not seem a coincidence that different US institutions represent a cluster of isopolitical relationships. Whereas Congress is better able to represent a constituency that directly falls (because of isopolitical ties) within its mandate, the Department of State finds it much more difficult, and the presidency occupies an intermediate position.[^29] Newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, for example, could immediately access the President. The modality of this meeting, however, suggests an intimate

[^27]: *Columbia Unbecoming*, for example, a documentary film presenting allegations against Columbia University Professor Joseph Massad, fuelled a debate that went beyond issues of academic freedom and protocol. See Freedman, ‘Keeping things in perspective’, p. 29.
[^28]: For arguments highlighting a structural similarity between anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism, see Rosenfeld, *Anti-Americanism and Anti-Semitism*, and Markovits, ‘European anti-Americanism (and anti-semitism)’.
[^29]: More than a hundred members of the US Congress and the mayor of New York visited Israel in the summer of 2003. While this is a traditional period for US representatives to get in touch with their constituencies, it can be assumed that travelling to Israel is one very effective way to respond to the concerns of an anxious electorate. See Lis, ‘New York Mayor Bloomberg visits bombing site, victims’. 
relationship that goes beyond public diplomacy between allies: Bush and Olmert could be
represented as not needing to talk about politics; they were seen as jointly articulating a
shared narrative, a circumstance confirming isopolitical links.30

As a result, Israel’s rhetoric and practice of unilateral disengagement from
discussions with Palestinians is mirrored by a broad consensus in the USA that Israel
retains a moral right to decide its borders without coordination with an indigenous polity.
That isopolitical reciprocity acquires further significance if it is contrasted with an
aggressive Israeli reaffirmation of a sovereign right to exclude international negotiating
contributions. It is symptomatic that the isopolitical relationship become especially
apparent as regards Israel’s occupation of Palestinian Territory (i.e. a settler colonial
polity’s moral superiority in relation to invaded indigenous locales and population).
When it comes to other arenas, US and Israeli policy can diverge, as they sometimes do,
for example, in relation to sales of military technology to third parties.

The fact that there is a growing distinction between Israeli and US Jewry and a
parallel convergence between US and Israeli constituencies also confirms an isopolitical
situation in which two social bodies continuously redefine a particular relationship.31
Recurring contestations regarding the possibility of Jewish life in the diaspora mirror
increasing concerns. Although he was forced to apologise for his remarks, Israeli author
A. B. Yehoshua’s May 2006 attack on Jewish life in the USA (and the scandalised
denials that followed) highlighted how an automatic identification with Israel based on
shared ‘Jewishness’ may have become increasingly difficult.32 In this context, the
ascendancy of US evangelical influence reconfigures in specific ways a longlasting

30 ‘The intimate meeting on the porch, part of which was conducted as a man-to-man talk, and during part
of which Aliza Olmert participated as well (Laura Bush was out of town), was devoted mainly to bonding.
They spoke about their families, their children, sports and politics’ (Benn & Rosner, ‘A push from Bush’).
Olmert’s triumphant reception at a joint session of both houses in Washington a month earlier stands in
marked contrast with a June 2006 London meeting with a group of members of parliament attended by
about sixty representatives, ‘far less than the 200 to 300 that had been expected’ (Benn, ‘Olmert to British
MPs’).
31 See for example Moore & Troen, Divergent Jewish Cultures.
32 See Garber, ‘A promised land of their own’.
tradition of Israeli–US identification, a bond progressively more settler and less Jewish.\textsuperscript{33} The establishment of a super-Christian pro-Israel lobby, for example, ‘even stronger than AIPAC’, was recently promoted by televangelist John Hagee (‘Christians United for Israel’ should represent 40 million US evangelical Christians and target congressmen and senators while coordinating a network of key activists).\textsuperscript{34} Concurrently, besides growing support for Israeli control over the whole of biblical Palestine, and a consequent identification with the politics of occupation, sections of the same milieus are attempting a blurring of the distinctions between evangelical Christianity and Jewry. The effectiveness of these activities should not be measured by a limited capacity to actually convert the individuals they target but by their contribution to an increasing identification with Israel. A similar trend is confirmed by an increasing number of messianic Jews (i.e. Jews who believe in Jesus Christ as the messiah; a movement also known as Jews for Jesus) applying for Israeli citizenship by means of the Right of Return law.

In an article dealing with the support for Israel of Jewish Americans, and with the ‘Franklin affair’, in which a Pentagon official was accused of having provided classified material to the pro-Israeli lobby AIPAC, \textit{Haaretz} journalist Eliahu Salpeter noted that the ‘American Jewish media is at pains to remind those who may have forgotten that in discussing the issue of “dual loyalty,” Israel and the United States are not the same country’. The article reported on a case in which an Israeli citizen was appointed in New Jersey to a state homeland security adviser position despite the fact that as a foreign national he could not receive classified information, and on the announcement that the former Israeli consul general in New York was to be appointed CEO of the American Jewish Congress.\textsuperscript{35} Only in an isopolitical context in which allegiance is attributed to a \textit{relationship} and not to one or another entity in an exclusive fashion, dual allegiance is a non-issue. This distinction is important because it allows an understanding of the Israeli–US relationship that goes beyond traditional formulations of Israeli–US relations. In the


\textsuperscript{34} Shamir, ‘New Christian pro-Israel lobby aims to be stronger than AIPAC’.

\textsuperscript{35} Salpeter, ‘The Jewish world’.
end, a longlasting and intractable problem (a recurring suspicion and related accusations of dual allegiance) became an asset.\textsuperscript{36}

\textbf{Israel-in-the-story}

How is an isopolitical relationship (the ‘special relationship between two countries’, the ‘sharing the same values and the same strategic goals’) consolidated? Perhaps Mearsheimer and Walt’s portrait of ‘the Lobby’ should be integrated with an appraisal of the cultural imaginary underpinning isopolitical relations, so that the role of shared narratives can also be added to the interpretative frame. Any account of Israel’s extraordinary capacity for ‘fitting in’ with US public discourse should appraise a set of pre-existing and readily available narratives.\textsuperscript{37} Overlapping narratives may include: the use of biblical imagery, being a ‘fragment’ of Europe outside Europe, a tradition of representation based on being a locale for refuge, shared histories of immigrant integration, parallel theories of exceptionalism (being a ‘city on the hill’, a ‘light unto the nations’), and parallel endeavours to appropriate the memory of European Jewry’s destruction.\textsuperscript{38}

In an isopolitical context, narrative, representation and perception become crucial.\textsuperscript{39} Ella Shohat’s seminal work on ‘the symbiotic geopolitical and cultural discursive links between Israel and the US’ has already perceptively emphasised how settler colonial narratives had ‘specific echoes in the US’ and touched ‘some sensitive historical nerves within “America” itself’. Shohat was aware of a representational shift whereby the Jewish image in American perception had ‘altered after the establishment of Israel from

\textsuperscript{36} Ganin’s \textit{Uneasy Relationship}, for example, deals extensively with the evolving political nature of American Jewry’s perceived ‘dual loyalty’. Initial concerns that Israel and the USA would conduct conflicting policies (as it happened in the Suez crisis is 1956) was eventually resolved by reframing ‘dual loyalty’ in the context of a ‘special relationship between two countries sharing the same values and the same strategic goals’ (a definition that epitomises isopolitical ties). See also Sarna, \textit{American Judaism}.

\textsuperscript{37} Historian (and fervent Zionist) Barbara Tuchman, for example, defends Israeli settlements in the West Bank by noting that ‘Israeli settlements in occupied territory have been virtuously denounced by Americans with short memories of how Texas was settled and then annexed’ (Tuchman, \textit{Bible and Sword}, pp. xi–xii).

\textsuperscript{38} See Little, \textit{American Orientalism}.

\textsuperscript{39} See for example Philo & Berry, \textit{Bad News From Israel}; Christison, \textit{Perceptions of Palestine}; and Aruri, \textit{Dishonest Broker}.\textsuperscript{36}
that of diaspora victim and refugee to the heroic and overpowering Israeli sabra, the
fighter for Jewish liberation. “Israel” thus made possible the media transmogrification of
the passive “Diaspora victim” into the heroic Jew best exemplified in Paul Newman’s
incarnation of the Israeli in *Exodus*.40 But this transmogrification cannot be fully
understood in its US tradition of perception without reference to representations of
American regenerative frontiers.

As a product of schizophrenic master narratives, colonial settler state on the one
hand and anti-colonial republic on the other, ‘America’ has been subliminally more
ready for Zionist nationalist discourse than for Palestinian nationalist discourse.
The image of the sabra as a new (Jewish) man evokes the American Adam … The
classical images of sabra pioneers as settlers on the Middle eastern frontiers,
fighting Indian-like Arabs, coupled with reverberations of the early American
biblical discourse encapsulated in such notions as ‘Adam’, ‘(New) Canaan’, and
‘Promised Land’ facilitated the sympathetic reception of Zionist nationalism in the
US.41

On the other hand, Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens have noted how reality
in Palestine was often reduced to a simple ‘binary system’:

On one side stood the gallant Zionists who were like ‘us’, on the other a mass of
undifferentiated natives with whom it was impossible for ‘us’ to identify. With the
Zionists there came to be associated not just the good, the true and the beautiful, but
a definite human image of the White settler hewing civilization out of the
wilderness, an image that itself drew upon cultural sources in American Puritanism
(with its strong philo-Semitic biases), in the nineteenth-century adventure
narratives by Europeans about Africa and Latin America, and in the great modernist
epics of the self-made or self-fashioned hero … The story of Zionist achievements

40 Shohat, ‘Antinomies of exile’, pp. 121, 140, 132. The success of Leon Uris’ *Exodus* epitomises the
nature of the relationship between American literary taste and the Middle East. Douglas Little notes that
few ‘novels have sold 4 million copies faster while winning wide critical acclaim than *Exodus*’. A prequel
to *Exodus*, *The Haj*, also sold two million copies (Little, *American Orientalism*, pp. 29–32).
in Israel has a steady, reassuring pulse to it. It is continuous, it is peopled with recognizably human figures … it can have a universal validity imputed to or felt in it. The people who speak the narrative represent a world the average Westerner knows.42

In this context, as William F. Lewis noted in a seminal 1987 essay on President Ronald Reagan’s rhetorical performance, ‘narrative theory can provide a powerful account of political discourse’.43 Following his suggestion, Israel’s capacity of fitting in with different audiences, of successfully representing itself as victim even if it is the most powerful actor in the Middle East, and of erasing the distinction between support for Israel and support for its policies can be explained with reference to ‘a narrative logic that emphasizes the connections between character and action, not the rational logic that emphasizes the connections between problems and solutions’.44 To understand US perceptions of Israel one should refer to ‘Israel-in-the-story’ and to its consistency with ‘the historical world’ of US audiences.45 Lewis’ analysis of a specific narrative form could easily be applied to another: ‘When narrative dominates, epistemological standards move away from empiricism’: ‘Because his [Reagan’s] story is so dominant, so explicit, and so consistent, political claims are likely to be measured against the standard of Reagan’s mythic American history rather than against other possible standards … The meaning of the story was more important than the particular figure. If Reagan’s estimate erred by 10% or by 100% that would not affect the meaning of the story.’46

Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s Camp David offer, for example, clearly fits this narrative pattern. Whether he had offered 90 per cent of the West Bank, or less, or nothing, as it turned out to be, the myth of a ‘generous’ proposal remained intact.47

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42 Said & Hitchens, Blaming the Victims, pp. 5–6.
44 Ibid., p. 283.
46 Ibid., p. 289.
Lewis’s analysis of Reagan’s rhetoric is also fitting as regards the moral orientation of pro-Israel rhetoric:

Reagan characteristically justifies his policies by citing their goals, while critics of his policies characteristically cite problems of conception or implementation. Reagan’s moral focus has worked well because the shift of emphasis to ends rather than means pre-empts arguments about practicality and because it provides Reagan with a ready response by transforming opposition to policy into opposition to principle … The relationship between means and ends is skewed to an exclusive focus on goals as a means of judgement. If the move from practicality to principle is accepted, it makes the policy immune from most objections.48

In a similar fashion, criticism of Israel’s repressive strategies vis-à-vis Palestinian insurgency becomes a stand against a declared desire for ‘peace’ and ultimately a threat to the very principle of Israel’s existence. A specific narrative form creates a circumstance in which anti-Israel discourse must adjust to a narrative paradigm or it is likely to be effectively dismissed as insignificant, anti-Semitic or both.

An identification based on an isopolitical consciousness and a remarkable rhetorical capacity link Israel/Palestine and US suburbia in a very special way. A necessity of ‘redesigning’ the whole of the Middle East should be interpreted in the light of the extent to which a specific version of settler consciousness has become strategically located in US public perception. An unquestioning and automatic US support for Israeli actions in the Occupied Territories—‘America’s last taboo’, to use Said’s formulation—could then be seen as an outcome of a settler consciousness appeased by ‘frontier’ images of a pioneering enterprise.49 In this context, an ideological contiguity between the settlement enterprise in the West Bank and a specific US electoral constituency goes beyond a simple movement of political solidarity. After all, a preference for suburban sprawl and fenced-in properties, as opposed to the kasbahs of Gaza, Jenin and Nablus—clear examples of the ‘dark corners’ of Bush’s rhetoric—cannot fail to impress and inform American understandings. And while this identification is certainly not unprecedented,

this is perhaps truer now as the need to face indigenous insurgency allows a renewed
degree of identification. Not surprisingly, appeasing settler-related reflexes has proven to
be politically more rewarding than engaging in multilateral action.

Whereas an instinctive alignment with Israeli worldviews could also be related to a
Protestant notion that prosperity is a manifestation of grace—and Israeli settlements in
the West Bank are definitely more prosperous than the Palestinian towns and villages—a
capacity for projecting a specific worldview on to the conflict in the Occupied Territories
is key to understanding US sensitivities. A constituency’s ideological subservience to a
settler narrative can be related to the consolidation of a religious sensibility that draws on
a specific reading of the Old Testament and Exodus in conjunction with an embattled and
paranoid gaze, obsessed with security, racial profiling, aliens and, after September 11,
Arab ‘infiltrators’. Most importantly, this constituency’s idea of a ‘good’ community
amounts ultimately to a community of religious and individually armed settlers. Under
these circumstances, every attack against an Israeli settlement amounts to an attack
against the frontier mentality of this settler colonial constituency.

At times, President Bush’s rhetoric is especially attuned with this, his preferred
constituency: ‘There is nothing more deep than recognizing Israel’s right to exist, that’s
the most deep thought of all … I can’t think of anything more deep than that right.’
However banal and perplexing, this statement actually makes sense if one considers that,
contrary to President Bill Clinton’s aspirations for a post-colonial or neocolonial
resolution of sorts in Israel/Palestine, here Israel’s right to exist should be understood as a
right to exist as a settler society. An enduring contradiction in US policy vis-à-vis Gaza
and the West Bank should be interpreted in this light. The paradox of officially
preventing an annexation of parts or the whole of the Occupied Territories while
endorsing and ultimately financing the transfer of settlers and their defence can be finally
understood as one result of a political consciousness in which a Jacksonian ‘frontier’
ethos meets residual Wilsonian approaches to international legality.

From the point of view of settler colonialism, it is a process that has ultimately
come full circle: if it was ‘God’s American Israel’ that was founded by Puritans on
Massachusetts Bay, it is God’s Israeli America that a specific constituency is seeing

50 Quoted in Weisberg, More George W. Bushisms, p. 84.
founded on the hilltops of the West Bank.\textsuperscript{51} ‘Redesigning’ the Middle East is also one consequence of the successful activation of a settler consciousness in the USA, and one legacy of a history of colonial settlement and of the foundational mythologies that relate to it. Facing up to the intersections and entanglements of Israeli and US colonial traditions and imaginations is, then, a necessary step in an attempt to mobilise a once strong and perhaps still surviving anti-colonial and anti-racist rhetorical and narrative tradition in the USA.

During the 2006 US mid-term elections campaign concerns were expressed regarding Democratic support for Israel. This was a serious issue and was tackled with references to a Democratic record of consistent pro-Israel activity. While the expected level of support for Israel became an issue after the Republican Jewish Coalition argued that Democrats are weaker on Israel, eventually AIPAC determined that both parties are good for Israel. Yet, besides unquestionable bipartisan support from both parties, public opinion surveys have emphasised that ‘Democratic voters do not side with Israel at the same rate and with the same enthusiasm as Republican voters do’;\textsuperscript{52} that is, different constituencies interact with different foundational myths in different ways. It seems plausible that Israel as a settler society may mobilise Republican constituencies more effectively than Democratic ones (Israel as an immigrant, democratic and egalitarian society performed better with Democrats in past decades). A varied degree of identification with Israel flowing from different constituencies and their imaginaries determines a circumstance in which the pro-Israel lobby’s grip on political establishments may not faithfully reproduce its grip on public consciousness.

The only way of breaking an isopolity based on a specific narrative form is by displacing existing identitarian structures and recognise alternative creation stories and narratives of oppression and emancipation. Former US President Jimmy Carter’s recent book may be one step in this direction. While \textit{Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid} (2006) deploys the term ‘apartheid’ in its title, it also confirms that narratives telling the story of a struggle for civil rights are increasingly becoming a crucial reference in debates

\textsuperscript{51} This wouldn’t be the first time imperial imagination regarding Palestine and colonial circumstances have become entangled. See Hamilton, \textit{God, Guns and Israel}, especially pp. 17–101.

\textsuperscript{52} Rosner, ‘Kentucky notes’. 
surrounding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Said’s call for Palestinian rhetoric to proceed like South African denunciations of apartheid envisaged the necessity of finding a narrative form capable of ‘fitting in’ with American perceptions. He knew the power of narrative and rhetorical invention; he knew that people genuinely interested in addressing the conflict need to enunciate alternative narratives and shape different affective possibilities.

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