



The American-Israeli Dialogue at the Start of the First Lebanon War

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In their meeting a few weeks after the start of the First Lebanon War (June 1982), Prime Minister Menachem Begin and US President Ronald Reagan focused on the military conflict underway. Given the disturbing images on television of the destruction caused by Israeli attacks in Lebanon and the many demonstrations around the world protesting Israel's acts in the war, President Reagan was obliged to express his criticism regarding Israeli activity in Lebanon. However, the criticism was moderate, and included a clear message that the administration was eager to overlook the existing disputes in order to reach understandings that would serve the strategic interests of both countries. Prime Minister Begin, however, decided to expound on the justice of Israel's activity in Lebanon, which necessarily focused most of the discussion on the war, and largely diverted attention from the need to utilize this important meeting to realize the overall interest of both sides—to intensify strategic cooperation between the two countries. The stances of both leaders in the meetings between them contain important lessons for contemporary times as well.

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A few weeks after the start of what came to be known as the First Lebanon War, Prime Minister Menachem Begin visited the United States for a meeting with President Ronald Reagan that had been arranged prior to the outbreak of the war. The difficult images of the war on televisions across the US naturally created an unfavorable atmosphere regarding Israel's military action in Lebanon. To his credit, Prime Minister Begin warned President Reagan about the problematic timing of the meeting in view of the serious tension in the north. The complex dialogue that took place between Israel and the United States during the period preceding the war and during its first stages, including the meetings between Begin and Reagan, is documented in archival documents in Israel and in the United States. This record provides noteworthy perspectives regarding the special nature of relations between the two countries and offers important lessons for contemporary times as well.

At the government meeting on June 5, 1982, Prime Minister Begin told the ministers that he had received a letter from President Reagan, in which he asked Israel not to take any action that could worsen the situation in the Middle East. Begin clarified that under the circumstances, Israel could not accept President Reagan's request. He again noted that the aim of the action was just 40 kilometers, and that as soon as Israeli forces reached that goal, Israel would cease its fire. The government approved Begin's proposals. A short time thereafter, Israel launched the First Lebanon War, originally named the Peace for Galilee War.

The Start of the War and the Dialogue with the US Administration

On June 3, 1982, Palestinian terrorists who were members of the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) attempted to assassinate Israel's Ambassador to Britain, Shlomo Argov. The ambassador was critically wounded in the assassination attempt. The following day, President Reagan

sent Prime Minister Begin a letter in which he used harsh language to condemn the "cowardly and unconscionable attack" (Reagan, 1982b). Secretary of State Alexander Haig was also quick to send Begin a letter condemning the "criminal act" against the ambassador. However, he also expressed his hope that the attack would not lead Israel to deviate from its joint efforts with the US to build a world of peace. It was clear that this was a strong hint to Israel to avoid any broad military response (Haig, 1982).

Israel did not respond positively to these demands. Despite the fact that there had been relative quiet along the Lebanese border in the months prior to the war, and although the attack on the ambassador was carried out by a group that was opposed to the PLO, the government decided to implement plans to attack Lebanon, which had been formulated long before. The following day, the government authorized an attack on 11 terrorist targets in Lebanon—two in Beirut (one was an ammunition warehouse that was hidden underneath the seats of a sports stadium), with the others in southern Lebanon. Begin's assessment was that the terrorists would almost certainly respond with a massive attack on communities in Israel's north, and that in such a case, Israel would need to debate whether to embark on a larger campaign in Lebanon. As expected, the PLO responded with massive Katyusha rocket fire toward Israel's northern communities (Naor & Lamprom, 2014).

In the explanatory notes for the decision to attack, Begin and Sharon clarified that the action would be up to a line about 40 kilometers from Israel, and that it was not planned against Syria. The IDF would not attack the Syrian army deployed in Lebanon but would return fire if the Syrians attacked first. During the government discussion, Prime Minister Begin stressed that this period was an opportune time for launching the attack in Lebanon, and that Israel must not miss it. "Neither the US President nor Secretary of State Haig," said Begin, "asked us to hold back. The Western countries are busy with the

Falklands War between Britain and Argentina, while Iran and Iraq are fighting each other” (Naor & Lamprom, 2014).

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On June 6, 1982, President Reagan sent another letter to Prime Minister Begin. In view of the increasing tension and the assessment of upcoming all-out conflict between Israel and the PLO in Lebanon, President Reagan made one final effort to prevent this serious development, clarifying to Begin that the United States was acting together with other countries in Europe and the Middle East to prevent deterioration in the situation. Therefore, he asked Prime Minister Begin to consider seriously avoiding military steps that would increase tension. President Reagan wrote that it was the common aim of both Israel and United States to bring calm and stability to the region. President Reagan ended his letter with the hope that the violence that had developed in Lebanon recently would not escalate (Reagan, 1982c).

Within a short time, Prime Minister Begin responded to President Reagan with a message that clearly indicated Begin’s desire to create legitimacy for a far-reaching military campaign in Lebanon. Begin opened by describing Ambassador Argov’s critical condition. Since the assassination attempt, Begin emphasized, the northern communities had been under harsh shelling from the PLO that aimed indiscriminately to kill Jews. No country in the

world would tolerate such a situation without response. As proof, Begin noted that Britain was engaged at that time in a campaign over the Falkland Islands, thousands of kilometers from its home territory. The Israeli government was resolved to put an end to this intolerable situation, and the IDF had received instructions to push the terrorists to a distance of 40 kilometers from the border. Begin emphasized that Israel had no claim to Lebanese territory, and that it wanted a peace agreement with the Lebanese government. Begin ended his letter by expressing the hope that President Reagan would show understanding for Israel’s motives in this serious campaign, for which Israel was not to be blamed (Begin, 1982b).

Early in the campaign, Israel sent a message to Syria through the US administration stating that if Syria would avoid action against IDF forces, Israel would not act against it. In his meeting with American envoy Philip Habib on June 8, 1982, Prime Minister Begin asked him to convey to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad the following message: “a. We do not want a war with your army. b. Please instruct your army not to attack our soldiers. If our soldiers are not attacked, they will not attack your army. c. Pull your army back from west to east and from south to north to the starting point at which they were stationed before the campaign started. d. Instruct the terrorists to retreat 25 kilometers northward” (Naor & Lamprom, 2014).

On June 9, 1982, President Reagan sent a letter to Prime Minister Begin expressing a crisis of trust that was developing between the two countries. President Reagan expressed concern in view of the IDF’s advance into central Lebanon and regarding the increasing confrontations with the Syrian army. Already then, Reagan was critical of the fact that Israel had gone “substantially beyond” the 40-kilometer line that Prime Minister Begin noted in his June 6, 1982 letter. Moreover, Reagan tried to underscore that the war threatened the stability of the entire international system and presented a threat to US national security: “The tactical advantages

of this deviation,” Reagan wrote, “are not balanced against the risk of getting entangled in a war with Syria, and perhaps even with the Soviet Union.” Reagan noted that he received a letter from Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev warning the US against the development of an “extremely dangerous situation” due to the Israeli action in Lebanon. Reagan warned that an Israeli refusal of the request “would worsen the already serious danger to world peace, and the already existing tension in Israeli-American relations” (Reagan, 1982d; Naor & Lamprom, 2014). In parallel, the Soviet Foreign Ministry sent a serious warning letter to Israel regarding its activity close to Beirut and demanded that Israel stop its military action in the area. Any damage that would be caused, warned the Soviets, would be the responsibility of the State of Israel (Soviet Foreign Ministry, 1982).

At this point, US Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis wrote a letter to Prime Minister Begin, expressing the administration’s determination to intervene actively to end the military confrontation. The ambassador clarified that the administration demanded that Israel agree to a ceasefire the following day, June 10, 1982, at 6:00 am local time. A similar demand was sent to Syrian President Assad through US envoy Habib, and indirectly to the PLO as well. Ambassador Lewis clarified that the administration would ensure that Israel’s security interests would be maintained, inter alia, by casting a veto on proposed Security Council resolutions that were hostile to Israel. This carried with it an implicit threat to Israel if it did not accede to the administration’s demands. Ambassador Lewis emphasized that both President Reagan and Secretary of State Haig asked that Prime Minister Begin provide his answer as soon as possible (Lewis, 1982).

The text of the letter was resolute but lacked any concrete threat against Israel if it did not accept these demands. The administration almost certainly understood the chance that Israel would agree to a ceasefire at such an early stage, before it was able to realize even

some of its goals, was very low. Begin proposed that Israel announce that it would agree to the “concept of a ceasefire.” This meant that the timing and understandings involved in the ceasefire would be defined later, which would enable Israel to continue combat with the aim of coming to the ceasefire negotiations with a clear advantage. All of this, Begin emphasized, was on condition that the PLO pull its forces back 40 kilometers away from the Israeli border. Defense Minister Ariel Sharon opposed accepting the administration’s demands. In the end, the government approved the text presented to it by Prime Minister Begin.

During the government meeting, it was announced that Secretary of State Haig would arrive in Israel the following day. It was therefore decided to wait with the approval of the ceasefire until his arrival in order to reward him, a close friend of Israel, with a diplomatic achievement, while also giving the IDF an additional day of action. In his remarks to the cabinet on the five days of fighting, Begin praised the military operation up to that point. “It’s really one of the most impressive operations in Israel’s history... It’s an operation that is meant entirely to ensure the peace of our citizens... It’s not the conquest of territory, or even pushing back the enemy. It is to ensure the peace of our citizens. This is a very humane mission” (Naor & Lamprom, 2014).

These words are a strong indication of the high level of euphoria among the Israeli leadership during the first stages of the war. To a certain extent, it also indicates that the leadership was at least somewhat disconnected from the reality at that time, with a troubling ignorance of the difficult aspects of the combat that began to emerge already in the initial stages of the fighting. In the second week of the war, Menachem Begin still sounded enthusiastic about the campaign and its achievements. His comments again reflected a worrisome gap between the information he had and the situation on the ground.

However, by the cabinet meeting of June 15, 1982, Begin sounded more realistic about

the achievements of the war and the chances of bringing it to a swift end. Begin clarified that the war was not finished. "On the ground," he said, "there are still terrorists. There are cells of terrorists. There are still large concentrations of weapons and ammunition discovered each and every day." As such, even at this stage, Begin shook off the prevailing idea that Israel would act only within 40 kilometers from the border. "The statements as if we committed to wipe out terrorists only in a range of 40 kilometers have no basis. Are other terrorists, murderers of women and children, immune beyond the 40-kilometer limit?" (Naor & Lamprom, 2014).

On June 15, 1982, Israel's Ambassador to Washington, Moshe Arens, was called in for an urgent conversation with Secretary of State Haig, with a heavy sense in the administration that Israel was not providing truthful reports to the administration about the war and IDF actions. Haig relied on reports from envoy Philip Habib that he himself had seen the entry of IDF forces into western Beirut. However, even as part of this admonishment, Haig clarified that the administration was giving Israel time "to finish the job." According to the ambassador's report, Haig expressed the opinion that "we must allow the IDF to finish the job, but we cannot create the impression here that we are misleading the President." After requesting clarifications from Israel, Arens rejected the claims regarding the entry of IDF forces into western Beirut (Naor & Lamprom, 2014).

Israel and the United States: Between Agreement and Dispute

On June 21, 1982, a few weeks after the start of the war, Prime Minister Begin met with President Reagan at the White House. The meeting was preceded by an embarrassing diplomatic incident. When he arrived in New York, Begin was told by the media that the President had canceled the meeting with him. Apparently an announcement of this sort had been issued by one of the President's assistants, almost certainly without full coordination with the

President. It is very likely that the President's assistants wanted to convey the administration's displeasure with the campaign in Lebanon, hoping that the incident would put Begin on the defensive before the discussions with the President began. In response, Begin threatened to return to Israel immediately. Secretary of State Haig understood that such a reaction would lead to a deep crisis in relations between Israel and the United States, which would harm not only the interests of Israel, but also those of the United States. Haig's assessment, almost certainly, was that such a step would not deter Begin in his determination to bring an end to the violence against Israel by terrorist forces in Lebanon. He further estimated that the administration would be able to make more significant achievements through direct dialogue with Israel rather than through a policy of threats, punishments, and sanctions. Against this background, Haig quickly called Begin and clarified to him that the matter of the meeting with the President was arranged, after Haig hinted at the possibility that he would resign if his position was not accepted (Naor & Lamprom, 2014).

The talks Begin held with administration leaders were a clear reflection of the longstanding disputes between Israel and the United States concerning the justification of Israel's use of military force against Arab countries, disputes that began in the early 1950s, when the Israeli government under David Ben-Gurion adopted a policy of retaliation against infiltrations, which was a major threat to Israel at the time.

Begin arrived at the meeting with an ordered and fully formulated agenda concerning Israel's security situation and what measures were required to be undertaken from the point of view of the State of Israel to preserve and enhance its security. The talks he held with administration leaders were a clear reflection of the longstanding disputes between Israel and

the United States concerning the justification of Israel's use of military force against Arab countries, disputes that began in the early 1950s, when the Israeli government under David Ben-Gurion adopted a policy of retaliation against infiltrations, which was a major threat to Israel at the time. The US administration rejected the retaliation policy in principle. It demanded that Israel view infiltrations as a criminal phenomenon, and that it deal with them as it would have dealt with routine criminal events within Israel. If Israel were to use military force in any case, argued the American administration, it must emphasize a defensive campaign, and in any case its responses must be proportional and balanced relative to the attack against it (Shalom, 1996).

From the administration's point of view, the war in Lebanon was one of many expressions of the prevailing tendency of Israeli governments to adopt narrow-minded thinking regarding suitable measures to be undertaken in the struggle against strategic threats. Within this thinking, the military-security aspect was dominant over the diplomatic and political component. The administration, however, contended that Israel's policy must be more inclusive and reflect a broad comprehensive strategy. That strategy should integrate with the prevailing American view that it was important to ensure the establishment of pro-Western Arab regimes that would help push the Soviet Union out of the region and enhance the United States' position in the Middle East.

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inclusive and reflect a broad comprehensive strategy. That strategy should integrate with the prevailing American view that it was important to ensure the establishment of pro-Western Arab regimes that would help push the Soviet Union out of the region and enhance the United States' position in the Middle East. "President Reagan's administration," wrote Avraham Ben-Zvi, "had the goal of deterring and containing the 'Soviet evil empire,' and added a more ambitious goal of winning the Cold War" (Ben-Zvi, 2011), and saw the State of Israel as an important layer in achieving this goal. Therefore, it made sure to emphasize (in September 1981) that, "the United States will remain committed to Israel's security and well-being. We will work together... to counter Soviet aggression in the Middle East" (Remarks of the President and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel following their meetings, 1981).

In any case, the administration claimed, regimes with a pro-Western orientation would work toward establishing a situation of security, calm, and economic prosperity—objectives that Israel also wanted to see realized. The realization of these goals would make it necessary for those states to suppress the terrorist organizations that were threatening not only Israel, but also like-minded Arab regimes. Thus, with a far-reaching view, Israel would, according to the American view, be able to achieve its true goals, even if in the immediate period it would need to restrain itself and sustain a painful price. If it would carry out a military campaign against the terrorist organizations at this time, it might achieve short-term tactical goals, but it would necessarily weaken those regimes while causing long-term damage on the strategic level.

Indeed, the campaign in Lebanon was launched just a few years after the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was signed. The US administration almost certainly hoped that following the peace treaty with Egypt, the Lebanese government would see fit to sign a peace treaty with Israel as well. However, the violent events along the northern border,

mainly the repeated attacks against Israel from terrorist groups operating in Lebanon, intensified the tension. Israel's infiltration of Lebanon abolished any hope of a peace arrangement between the two countries and worked in the completely opposite direction. It also weakened the American position in the Middle East. The main asset that the administration had in its relations with the Arab world was its argument that only Washington had the ability to restrain Israel and make it avoid steps that would harm the essential interests of Arab states. Now, following Israel's military action, the Arab states would understand that there was no basis to this presumption on the part of the administration. Israel was acting callously against United States interests and positions, and against its own essential interests as seen by the administration. As President Reagan told Prime Minister Begin in his opening remarks, "Your actions in Lebanon have seriously undermined our relationships with those Arab governments whose cooperation is essential to protect the Middle East from external threats and to contain forces of Soviet-sponsored radicalism and Islamic fundamentalism now growing in the region" (President Ronald Reagan's meetings with Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel, 1982; hereafter Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

The US administration repeatedly emphasized that it was not ignoring the murderous nature of the terrorist organizations. It was well aware of the intensity of the terror operations they were carrying out against the State of Israel and recognized Israel's right to defend itself against them, including through military means. However, Israel must understand that its actions are inextricably linked to the main goal: turning Lebanon into a strong, stable, and pro-Western state. When this goal is achieved, it is clear that the war against the terrorist organizations would be much easier. The Israeli government led by Menachem Begin paid no heed to this advice. It seemed to the Israeli leadership that these

words reflected unrealistic wishes that could not be fulfilled in the Middle East reality.

Israeli governments encountered similar positions later on as well. During the second intifada, the US administration worked to prevent Israel from acting aggressively against the Palestinian Authority under Yasir Arafat. The argument was that all in all, the Arafat regime was committed to a political arrangement, contrary to more extremist Palestinian organizations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and others. A serious operation by Israel against the Palestinian Authority, it was argued, would lead to the collapse of the Arafat regime, which was working toward an arrangement, and the rise of extremist terrorist organizations that rejected any arrangement with Israel.

During the Second Lebanon War, heavy pressure was exerted on the Olmert government to avoid Israeli strikes against national infrastructure in Lebanon. Here too, the main argument was that responsibility for belligerent actions in Lebanon was placed on Hezbollah, which was a negative factor from the standpoint of the Lebanese government. Attacking Lebanon's national infrastructure—fuel, electricity, and transport—would harm the moderate and pro-Western Lebanese government. The Olmert government essentially yielded to this pressure and focused its responses against Hezbollah. This policy, to some extent, contributed to the lack of decisive victory in the war.

The Israeli government is currently encountering a similar phenomenon in its relations with Hamas. Despite the sporadic rocket fire toward Israel, Hamas repeatedly argues that it has no interest in such fire toward Israel, and that it is not responsible for it. The rocket fire, Hamas claims, is carried out by "recalcitrant" terrorist organizations, mainly Islamic Jihad, and Hamas does not have the power to completely prevent such fire. The Israeli government does not accept this logic. It makes sure to adhere to the principle that Hamas is the sovereign power in the Gaza

Strip, and that Israel views it as the party responsible for attacks on its sovereignty. However, in practice, when the information in Israel's possession tends to validate Hamas's arguments, and when it turns out that Hamas is indeed acting to prevent rocket fire toward Israel, it shows a clear tendency to moderate its military response in Gaza.

The Begin government acted on the basis of an assessment that the lack of a determined response to provocations from the Arabs would be interpreted by Arab states as weakness on Israel's part, and would only encourage Arab countries to escalate their actions against Israel. Beyond this, the Israeli government did not accept the argument regarding the division of Lebanon between "good" and "bad," which presented the Lebanese government as being the "good guys." It seemed to Israel that the Lebanese government was not making a sufficient effort to change the situation in which the terrorist organizations were acting from within its sovereign territory, and that it was evading responsibility with the argument that it could not control them.

To a great extent, it was argued, this situation was quite convenient for the Lebanese government. On the one hand, it enabled Lebanon to present itself as a state committed to the "Arab cause." By enabling the Palestinians to act against Israel from its territory, Lebanon removed itself from the image of a government that relies on Western powers and serves their interests, which run counter to those of the Arab world. On the other hand, Lebanon did not have to pay what from Israel's point of view was an intolerable price. As Israel began to attack Lebanon, the United States and other Western countries would take Lebanon's side and work to restrain the State of Israel. The way to change this equation, in the view of the Israeli government, was for the Lebanese government to actually realize its sovereignty and forcefully prevent the terrorist organizations from carrying out violent operations against Israel.

The Lebanese government, according to Israel, would act this way only if it became clear that it would have to pay a heavy price for terrorist operations against Israel from its territory. The situation was parallel to Jordan's. For years, terrorist organizations operated against Israel from the Jordanian border. The United States as well as other Western countries warned Israel to refrain from carrying out painful operations against Jordan, which was always considered a major pro-Western state in the region. Israel indeed made the utmost efforts to restrain itself. However, as the threats against it escalated, Israel eventually decided to heighten its response and launched major attacks against Jordanian economic and security targets. These actions forced the Hashemite kingdom to act violently against the terrorist organizations in September 1970, which led to prolonged calm along Israel's border with Jordan. It was assumed that a similar development might well take shape in Lebanon if Israel acted determinedly against Lebanon and the terrorist organizations.

Finally, Begin again emphasized that his overall commitment was first and foremost to protect the security of the State of Israel and its citizens. Based on this commitment, Israel launched its campaign to extract them from a mortal danger. This, Begin stressed, is how the United States and any other country in the international system would act. President Reagan's administration presumably understood Begin's arguments, and in closed meetings may have even justified the Israeli government's steps. However, officially, in front of assistants and advisors from both sides, the Reagan administration had no real choice but to clarify to Israel that it could not accept its arguments.

In addition, the military campaign revealed Israel's strategic weakness. The ongoing attacks by Palestinian organizations against Israel's civilian population reflected clearly that the IDF did not succeed in establishing deterrence against the terrorist organizations in Lebanon.

The continued fighting in Lebanon a few weeks after the outbreak of the war, notwithstanding Israel's overwhelming military superiority over the terrorist organizations, indicated failed IDF performance. Public opinion in Israel and abroad inevitably recalled Israel's stunning and rapid victory over three Arab states in the Six Day War, and thus necessarily prompted the question as to why the IDF was hard-pressed to bring the confrontation to a quick conclusion given that the warfare was against relatively inferior terrorist organizations. Moreover, the disturbing pictures of the Israeli attacks in Lebanon and the suffering of the civilian population that accompanied the campaign in Lebanon made it very difficult for the administration to avoid open protest against Israel's actions during the war. Under these circumstances, the administration found it difficult to accept Israel's arguments that only someone in tangible day-to-day danger of death could understand the nature of the dangers that Israel was facing, and that it was neither correct nor fair to give advice to Israel from the calm and safety of Washington.

The Meetings between President Reagan and Prime Minister Begin

The first meeting between President Reagan and Prime Minister Begin took place with both ambassadors in attendance: US Ambassador to Israel Lewis and Israeli Ambassador to the United States Arens. President Reagan opened the meeting, based on written remarks he held in his hands, with the message that in view of the difficult circumstances under which the visit was taking place, he had to give it a formal, somewhat rigid, and less friendly nature: "I am delighted to see you here," the President told Begin, "though I wish very much the circumstances could be different. I had originally hoped that we would discuss the many common problems we face in the Middle East and beyond. However, events have occurred such that we are now forced to focus our attention on the grave risks and

opportunities that your operation in Lebanon has created" (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

Such an unfriendly international atmosphere, with the gloomy military situation on the battlefield, would presumably lead Israel to understand that the US administration's maneuvering room was quite narrow at the time and required the administration to show a very critical posture toward Israel's activity in Lebanon. These circumstances could have led the Israeli government to understand that the timing of Begin's visit to the US was not suitable and should have been postponed.

Indeed, under the circumstances, the President essentially had no choice other than to focus on the IDF action in Lebanon. It was clear from the outset that any such discussion would heighten the disputes between the two countries regarding the circumstances that would justify Israel using its military power against Arab states. International sentiments toward Israel were extremely critical, and no US president, however friendly toward Israel, would be able to ignore them. Many countries in Europe had called on Israel to retreat from Lebanon right at the start of the action, and later, a number of countries, including Britain, contemplated the use of punitive measures, mainly economic. In addition, the possibility of an arms embargo against Israel was considered (EC Actions Against Israel, 1982).

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at that time was certainly ample reason to delay the visit, and this would likely have been accepted with understanding by the United States administration. However, it is not known whether such an option was even considered by the Israeli leadership (Naor & Lamprom, 2014).

Prime Minister Begin decided to adopt an opposite approach that was very daring, given the overwhelming asymmetry in the balance of power between the two states. He elected to proceed with the visit and jump straight into the lion's den precisely at this difficult time, and to clarify to the US administration in quite a scathing way, likely unprecedented, that the administration was in no way morally justified in preaching to Israel how to ensure its security. Israel alone would decide on the means to ensure the safety of its people. In his memoirs the President himself summarized the Prime Minister's position toward the administration with these words: "Mind your own business. It is up to Israel alone to decide what it must do to ensure its survival" (Reagan, 1990, p. 419).

Begin's response was quite brazen. Over the years, even during serious disputes with the US administration, Israeli leaders acted with honor, dignity, and respect toward the President of the United States as the leader of the American people. Indeed, Israel was overwhelmingly dependent on the United States in various fields crucial to its very survival and could not afford to offend or embarrass the President, even if he adopted positions that Israel deemed harmful to its interests. One famous exception to this norm was Prime Minister Netanyahu's decision in 2015 to address the United States Congress to oppose the nuclear agreement formulated by President Barack Obama. This reflected a trend that was similar to that of Begin, and to a certain extent even more serious: a Prime Minister coming into the President's backyard in front of the entire world (contrary to Begin, who did it in a small, closed group) to level harsh criticism at his strategic decision, i.e., the nuclear agreement with Iran. At the same time, however, Netanyahu sought to insist that

he was maintaining the honor of the President, and took pains to praise the President for his actions on behalf of the State of Israel.

Quite surprisingly, the administration chose to contain Begin's provocative pronouncements and avoid escalating the confrontation with Israel. This suggests that despite the administration's criticism of Israel's military action in Lebanon, it viewed Israel as an important ally with which it must cooperate in advancing the strategic interests of both countries. Referring to the war in Lebanon, the President clarified his negative position toward the IDF action at the outset of his remarks. He defined the action as a "massive invasion" by Israel "into a country whose territorial integrity we're pledged to respect." He made it clear to the Prime Minister that the Israeli action was disproportionate to the provocations that preceded it. He further stressed that this was not an issue that concerned only Israel, Lebanon, and other countries in the region, but also US national interests, and therefore, the President was no less than "genuinely shocked" by the IDF action (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

The President subsequently sounded like someone trying to remove the administration's "mark of Cain" as if it gave Israel a "green light" to act against terrorist organizations in Lebanon: "You and I," the President told Begin, "have communicated personally about developments in Lebanon for more than a year. I tried to make clear that I share your concerns for the implications of the situation in Lebanon for your [Israel's] security, but repeatedly I've expressed the view that diplomatic solutions were the best way to proceed. I have said repeatedly that we would be unable to understand any military operation which was not clearly justified in the eyes of the international community by the nature of the provocation" (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982). In his autobiography, the President wrote, "I supported Israel's right to defend itself against attack. However, I asked them not to carry out a broad attack, unless it was provoked by its enemies with an attack that

justified its attack in the eyes of world public opinion” (Reagan, 1990, p. 419).

Perhaps in order to evince some kind of balance and latent understanding of Israel’s combat activity, the President condemned the criminal act against Ambassador Argov, and emphasized that there could be no justification for terrorism. He emphasized that he was not ignoring the continued terrorist activity by the PLO from the Lebanese border against Israel in the past year, which led to an “accumulation of losses” in Israel. However, according to the President, this did not justify the tremendous “death and destruction” that the IDF action brought with it. In his opinion, the assassination attempt on Israel’s ambassador and the PLO’s terrorist activity against Israel did not justify Israel’s destruction of Lebanon.

The President did not say so explicitly, but hinted that Israel had sought a pretext for exercising the strategic plan it had put together years earlier to bring about a change in the political situation in Lebanon. “At the beginning of 1982,” Reagan recounted, “we started to receive credible messages that Prime Minister Begin and Defense Minister Sharon were planning a wide-ranging infiltration of Lebanon, and were waiting for some opportunity that would justify the realization of such an action” (Reagan, 1990, p. 419). According to this plan, Israel hoped to link up with the Christian minority in Lebanon with the aim of putting a Christian at the head of the Lebanese leadership. This leader would work to expel terrorist organizations from Lebanon, and strive for cooperation with Israel, and even for an official peace treaty. Indeed, following the war, there were similar arguments in Israel regarding Israel’s military steps following the assassination attempt on Ambassador Argov. Claims were heard in many circles that this was a war of choice that was morally unjustified, because the State of Israel was not under immediate existential danger.

At this stage, it seems that the President apparently understood that his arguments had been exhausted and that there was no point

in continuing the reprimand. In any case, the impression gained was that this was a friendly admonishment, and not a heated rebuke. The President clearly showed an understanding of Israel’s intolerable situation, and it is doubtful whether he himself believed that it would be possible to restrain the terrorist organization’s actions against Israel through diplomatic means. President Reagan is known as among the most pro-Israel American presidents. In the reception for Prime Minister Begin on September 9, 1981 in the United States, President Reagan referred to the State of Israel as a “friend” and “partner” of the United States (Remarks of the President and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel following their meetings, 1981). In a letter to Prime Minister Begin in honor of Israel’s Independence Day, President Reagan said that the ties between the United States and Israel can never be broken, and that they are eternal bonds. Israel would always be strong and prosperous, and the United States will be its closest friend (Reagan, 1982a). Here too, from the June 1982 protocols, it is difficult to judge the severity that the President attributed to Israel’s actions, but the impression is that the words were spoken in a conciliatory rather than belligerent tone.

After finishing his criticism of Israel’s action, the President was quick to clarify that “what’s done is done,” and said he was determined to “salvage from this tragedy a new Lebanon which will no longer constitute a threat to Israel, and which can become a partner in the peace process.” “I know,” said Reagan, “that these are also primary objectives of yours [Israel’s].” At the same time, while trying to mollify the Israeli team, the President added a veiled threat: “If we work at cross purposes, Israel’s own interests will be damaged.” (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

Over the years, previous US administrations had made efforts to advance a peace process that would result in a kind of peace agreement between Israel and the Arab states. In most cases, these plans saw no significant achievements,

primarily because neither side had sufficient interest in concluding an agreement or was ready to pay the price entailed in such an agreement. The successes of the Nixon administration, Secretary of State Kissinger, and President Carter in formulating far-reaching agreements between Israel and Egypt were attributed to the traumatic effects of the Yom Kippur War. The war had extracted an extremely high price from both Egypt and Israel and pushed them to the conclusion that it would be in their best interest to reach an agreement that would end the conflict between them.

Thus, after finishing his admonishment, the President proposed a plan to solve the crisis in Lebanon, which would also serve Israel's interests. The current crisis, said the President, created an opportunity to work toward the establishment of a new government in Lebanon that would represent all of the major political and religious streams in the country, and would have the power to enforce its authority throughout Lebanon. Israel must help in realizing this process. In that context, almost certainly in view of information, Reagan clarified that the administration was well aware that Israel was acting to bring about a situation where a Christian leadership that was close to it would take control of Lebanon. The President stressed there would be no benefit to such a move since the new government in Lebanon would appear to be a surrogate. The President added that the current crisis was also an opportunity to expel foreign military forces from Lebanon, mainly Syrian and Palestinian forces. The Palestinian militias would need to be disarmed or evacuated from Lebanon, and the Lebanese government would need to decide the best way to do this. The Palestinians who decided to remain in Lebanon would need to live there in peace, with the understanding that they are subject to the authority of the elected government in Lebanon (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

The President continued that when the Lebanese government requested, Israel would

need to pull its forces back to 40 kilometers from the border. Thereafter, discussions could begin on a gradual withdrawal of IDF forces and the entry of UN forces that would maintain the calm until the consolidation of the Lebanese government. In parallel, a timetable would be set for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. A discussion was to begin immediately on the structure and composition of the UN separation forces.

The President clarified that he was aware of Israel's opposition to UNIFIL forces fulfilling this role, and its preference for a multinational force. The President stressed that he prefers a reorganization of UNIFIL with a different composition than what is there instead of creating a new force. However, he is prepared to take heed of Israel's position on this matter (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982). Indeed, historical experience shows that UNIFIL forces, of any composition, are unable to prevent mutual belligerence between Israel and Lebanon. In a situation of mutual deterrence between Israel and Hezbollah, where both sides have an interest in maintaining calm, UNIFIL forces can play a positive role, mainly at the tactical level. Regarding UNIFIL's role years later, Assaf Orion writes, we need "a sober, balanced view of UNIFIL II" in the decade of its operation. Alongside a number of positive aspects relating to UNIFIL's contribution, Orion emphasizes that UNIFIL failed in fulfilling its major mission—perhaps inherently a "mission impossible: to support the Lebanese government and army in executing a move they had no intention of performing, namely disarming southern Lebanon, which in practice would have meant disarming Hezbollah" (Orion, 2016).

"Menachem," the President said to the Prime Minister, "our efforts to pursue new opportunities in Lebanon are consistent with our common goal of strengthening Israel's security. My commitment to Israel's security remains stronger than ever. Israel's qualitative superiority over its neighbors was shown in the battle in the Bekaa Valley." (The President

was almost certainly referring to the Air Force's successful destruction of Syria's surface-to-air batteries positioned in Lebanon, as well as dozens of Syrian Air Force combat aircraft in the early days of the war; Ivri, 2007). The President emphasized that the United States was committed to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge. Therefore, it was essential that Israel have confidence in the United States and in the objectives that it wanted to realize in the long term, first and foremost, ejecting the Soviet Union from the region and strengthening pro-Western regimes in the area. The President clarified that these regimes were now putting heavy pressure on the United States, demanding that it punish Israel for its combat actions in Lebanon. The United States' position in the Arab world was harmed as a result of the war in Lebanon. However, the United States was determined to maintain its relations with pro-Western countries in the region, primarily Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, and, if possible, even to improve relations with them (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

The President emphasized that he was ready to invest major political efforts to satisfy Israel's demands in Lebanon. This meant neutralizing heavy pressure from European states and the Arab world for a significant Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon: "I plan to also make tremendous efforts to establish a strong and stable government in Lebanon and an international policing force that will serve as a buffer between Israel and Lebanon until we can reach a comprehensive arrangement of the dispute." "However," he clarified to Begin, "I must have from you explicit commitments that Israel will take those steps necessary to achieve a breakthrough in the autonomy negotiations" (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

The autonomy plan proposed by Begin was intended to enable the Palestinians to manage their lives as independently as possible, though without sovereignty. Their areas of control were supposed to focus on internal issues such as education, healthcare, cultural life, and more.

The Palestinians did not accept this plan and made it very clear that they demanded an independent state with full authorities and sovereignty. Like other administrations that believed it was possible to bridge the differences between Israel and the Palestinians, President Reagan's hope was that pressure on Israel to make its positions more flexible would advance the autonomy discussions. This would lead to the completion of an Israeli-Palestinian arrangement that would weaken the enemies of Israel and the United States, and perhaps enable a breakthrough to peace in the region. Obviously, due to the huge gaps in the positions of the parties, this assessment was based on unfounded expectations. An arrangement regarding autonomy, the President stressed, would also make it easier to reach favorable arrangements with Lebanon (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982). Thus, as an aside, the President created clear linkage between resolving the Lebanese problem, the security threat to Israel, and the Palestinian problem. Unquestionably the President knew that making such a connection touched on very sensitive nerves of the Prime Minister.

Later, the President raised the issue of US weapons sales to pro-Western countries in the region, chiefly Jordan and Saudi Arabia. All of this was almost certainly in view of his concerns that Israel would try to use its lobby in Congress to block these deals, which were considered by the Reagan administration to be highly important for the United States. The President's words emphasize clearly the powerful image that the Jewish lobby had within the administration. The President first said that there may be differences of opinion regarding the steps that should be taken in this context, but these countries depend on the United States for their security. Selling weapons to them would strengthen their security and encourage them to take risks for peace. "I don't expect you to come out and approve this," the President emphasized, "but for heaven's sake don't oppose us. I want again

to stress my commitment to maintain Israel's qualitative edge. Our ultimate purpose is to create 'more Egypts' ready to make peace with Israel" (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

Overall, the meeting was highlighted by several salient points. First, the President leveled criticism at Israel's military action in Lebanon, but the criticism was couched in moderate language. The President gave the impression that his criticism was obligatory lip service, and that he genuinely believed it was worth focusing on the main strategic issues that are of concern to both Israel and the United States. Second, the President presented clear positions on the issue of Lebanon and the resolution of the Palestinian issue. Third, he was committed to maintain Israel's qualitative edge over the Arab countries, and to consult with Israel before formulating clear ideas for an Arab-Israeli arrangement. Under these circumstances, the Prime Minister would have done well to humbly accept the criticism of the world's largest superpower, whose good will and cooperation were critical to Israel. It was important for the Prime Minister to focus on the truly essential issues for Israel's national interests, chiefly, strategic cooperation with the United States to limit the Soviet Union and its allies in the Middle East, led by Syria and the terrorist organizations.

However, it appears that Begin seemed personally insulted by the President's criticism of the war in Lebanon. He came to the meeting prepared to refute the arguments against the offensive in the north, and to clarify to the administration the justness of the war at any cost. This required him to put the issue of the war at the top of the agenda, and basically to argue with the President of the United States. To what extent, if at all, this mode of action was beneficial for Israel's interests, is unclear. "I have listened to your words very attentively," the Prime Minister told the President. "There were many words of criticism...I must openly respond to them, as is necessary between good friends." Israel, Begin stated, had found ten

times as many Soviet weapons as they had thought existed in Lebanon, and that just a few days ago, Israeli forces had found a huge weapons storehouse in Sidon; Israel assessed that it would need ten large trucks working around the clock for six weeks to transfer the weapons to Israeli territory. Basically, Begin argued that this area of Lebanon had become a giant Soviet base that supervises Soviet activity in the region, that these bases house terrorists from other countries as well, and there is evidence of cooperation with terrorist organizations in various countries in the Soviet bloc (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

Beyond the need to justify the war, Begin's words were intended to instill in the Reagan administration the assessment that there was a clear confluence of interests between Israel and the United States, and that Israel's combat activity in Lebanon also served US interests and not just those of Israel. "Our military actions," Begin stressed, "removed the danger of death that threatened Israel's citizens in the north. At the same time, our action was of tremendous help to the United States and the free world as well. We managed to take a Soviet base and the command center of an international terrorist organization out of action. The terrorists are still in western Beirut, but they are in a state of confusion and retreat. There were a number of difficult battles. My heart is pained over every loss, whether Lebanese or Palestinian, but I am especially pained over the loss of Israeli soldiers. So far, we have 216 dead and over 1,000 wounded. For the Jewish people, who lost six million in the Holocaust, this is a heavy price. We did not want trouble with the Syrians and we tried to avoid it. But they insisted on joining the battle" (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

The Prime Minister then moved to explain the issue of the objectives of the war, which was a bone of contention between Israel and the United States, as well as among the Israeli public. In particular, he took time to explain going past the 40-kilometer boundary, which

aroused serious disputes both abroad and in Israel: “I understand,” he said, “someone told you that I had misled you. I am an old man, and in all my life, I never knowingly misled anyone. I would surely not deceive the president of the most powerful nation in the world. As far as the 40-kilometer zone which was actually our objective, we had to go well beyond it in order to assure we would not continue to be fired on from beyond the zone. These were purely military tactical moves which any army would have to do to assure the security of the 40-kilometer zone itself” (Regan-Begin meeting, 1982).

It is very doubtful whether these explanations were sufficient to convince the President, who clearly did not have the tools to judge the necessity of Israeli action beyond the lines to which the Israeli government had committed. His ability to be convinced by these arguments depended on the degree of personal trust he felt toward Begin. From this standpoint, the lengthy attention that Begin paid to the President’s comments concerning Israeli operations in Lebanon and his own attention to the details created the misleading impression of a significant disagreement between the two countries in this regard and increased the suspicion between them (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

Adding to these remarks, Begin gave the President many examples from US history to prove that the US acted in many instances similar to the way Israel was acting, again to prove the justness of the war. The Prime Minister then moved to criticize the President over the fact that he used the term “invade Lebanon”: “For god’s sake,” he said to the President, “we did not invade Lebanon; we were being attacked by bands operating across our border and we decided that we had to defend ourselves against them. What would you have done if Russia were still occupying Alaska and was permitting armed bands to operate across your border?... What we did was merely to defend ourselves” (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

The President stressed that the impression created in the United States was different, namely, that Israel blew up targets in Beirut after the attempt on Ambassador Argov’s life, and that the firing of missiles at Israel was in reaction to those attacks. “We must consider the picture seen by public opinion,” Reagan told the Prime Minister. “Our public saw destroyed buildings in Beirut and views your actions differently than what you expected.” In response, Begin claimed that the liberal media was biased against Israel, and that Palestinian losses reported in the media were highly exaggerated. Moreover, Begin told President Reagan, “your Jewish citizens are strongly behind us. There are millions of Christians in the US supporting us” (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982).

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Begin then again discussed the political aspect of the crisis. He expressed support for President Reagan’s announcement that Israeli forces would need to withdraw from Lebanon, but also that it would be necessary to prevent continued terrorist action against it. Israel proposed a 40-kilometer buffer zone where multinational forces would be stationed. He clarified that the United States had experience with multinational forces, and that the UN was belligerent toward Israel, which this was reflected in the fact that many delegations left the General Assembly hall before he began his speech there (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982). Begin did not completely reject the

option of positioning UN forces as a buffer, but his remarks clearly indicated a preference for American forces, perhaps in conjunction with other pro-Western countries. Such forces were positioned in Sinai as part of the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.

Following the broad forum, the two leaders conferred as part of a lunch with their teams. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger opened with a review of the American strategy in the Middle East. Begin expressed reservations regarding the trend outlined in these remarks; he apparently saw it as an attempt to strengthen the administration's relations with the Arab world at the expense of Israel. At this stage, Weinberger, who was known for his anti-Israel approach, interrupted and argued that the good relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia made it possible to press the PLO to accept a ceasefire with Israel (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982). The comment greatly angered Begin, almost certainly because its message was that Israel was in an inferior position to the PLO, which required it to "beg for its life" as it were, and to seek a ceasefire. Begin cut off Weinberger, stating that he was mistaken. According to Begin, it was Egypt, and not Saudi Arabia, that had exerted pressure on the PLO to agree to the ceasefire. Weinberger tried to defend and explain himself, but Begin would not let him continue, and said that the President gave him (Begin) permission to speak (Reagan-Begin meeting, 1982). During the cabinet meeting after his meeting with President Reagan, Begin said that there were two schools of thought in the American administration. One, led by Secretary of State Alexander Haig, was friendly toward Israel, and the other, led by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, was hostile (Naor & Lamprom, 2014).

Conclusion

The strategic dialogue between Israel and the United States prior to the outbreak of the First Lebanon War and during the early stages of that war reflects the beginning of a slow and

gradual change in US-Israel relations. This trend was not consistent, and featured ups and downs over the years. In the first decades after the establishment of the State of Israel, the emphasis in the administration's policy was based on the assumption that in the Arab-Israeli dispute, the national interest of the United States required it to support the Arab position almost entirely. This US stance was well reflected in the policy that the US adopted following the end of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the conclusion of the armistice agreements. Although the United States was a major player in formulating the processes to bring an end to the Israeli War of Independence and the signing of the armistice agreements, in practice it did not recognize the outcomes of the war. Throughout the 1950s, the United States demanded that Israel retreat from the status quo that was created after the war and officially agreed upon in the armistice agreements with regard to the following main issues: the validity of the armistice lines; the status of the Palestinian refugees, and Jerusalem. The administration's assumption was that Israel was almost completely dependent on the United States, and therefore it would have no wherewithal to refuse demands from the administration on issues surrounding Israel's security policy and its relations with the Arab world.

The heavy pressure accompanied by harsh threats applied by various presidents toward Israel regarding the advancement of agreements between Israel and the Arab states should be seen against this background. During the 1950s, the United States under President Eisenhower, in conjunction with Britain, formulated a plan for a diplomatic arrangement between Israel and Egypt (the Alpha Plan), under which Israel would need to withdraw from large parts of the Negev. The two powers threatened to apply serious economic sanctions against Israel if it refused to accept the proposal. In the end, the plan was shelved due to Egyptian opposition. Following the Sinai Campaign (1957-1956) the United States in conjunction with the Soviet

Union successfully applied heavy pressure on Israel to withdraw from Sinai.

Over the years, American administrations came to recognize that despite Israel's heavy dependence on the US in a wide variety of areas, the United States could not force Israel to adopt positions that were contrary to Israel's vital interests. Eventually, American administrations gradually realized that they were acting within a power structure of different and sometimes conflicting interests that did not allow them to apply their full enforcement capabilities on Israel. Those factors included the White House, Congress, the judicial system, public opinion, the media, ethnic and religious groups such as the Evangelists, various lobbying groups, and more.

A clear expression of the limits of the administration's power came during the difficult struggle between the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations against the continued development of an Israeli nuclear option. Immense pressure was applied on Prime Ministers Ben-Gurion, Eshkol, and Meir to halt this strategic project. Eventually, it became clear to the United States that this was a supreme Israeli national interest and that Washington would do well to come to agreements in this context on the terms and ways it should continue to operate instead of unsuccessfully trying to stop such activity completely. On issues such as the status of the territories, the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria, and Jerusalem, there has also been a marked change over the years in the American position to Israel's benefit. On all of those issues, the American stance was initially almost absolutely opposed to Israel's positions. All US administrations since the end of the Six Day War, in different levels of intensity, argued that Israel should basically agree to withdraw to the June 5, 1967 armistice lines, and that settlements in the territories were an obstacle to peace.

This change in US positions in this regard was evident in a letter from President George W. Bush to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (Bush, 2004),

in which he stipulated that it would be necessary to demarcate a border that would recognize the demographic situation created over the years in Judea and Samaria, with the construction of large settlement blocs in parts of that area (Shalom, 2010). Another tangible expression was provided by the Trump administration with the transfer of the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the recognition of the application of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and the declared support for Israel's positions concerning the Palestinian issue (Yadlin, 2017). There is a real possibility that before the end of his first presidential term (November 2020), President Trump may recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley.

The minutes of the meeting between President Reagan and Prime Minister Menachem Begin examined in this essay show that the Reagan administration clearly recognized the limits of the administration's power over Israel in the early stages of the First Lebanon War. On the one hand, the President felt bound to express his anger over Israel's military action in Lebanon, which harmed US interests, and particularly its ties with the Arab world. On the other hand, the way he expressed his position indicates his understanding that Israel's action was necessary in order to defend the State of Israel and its citizens, and that in any case the US was limited in its ability to force Israel to end the war without assuring Israel that the threats from Lebanon would be removed. A hidden component in formulating the US position regarding the campaign in Lebanon was the fact that the IDF did not fulfill the administration's expectations to tap its absolute military superiority in order to bring the campaign to a quick end with minimal harm to the civilian population. This undoubtedly contributed much to the weakening of the Israeli position vis-à-vis the US. A similar phenomenon repeated itself during the Second Lebanon War and during Operation Protective Edge, when following weeks of fighting, the IDF did not succeed

in attaining a victory over either Hezbollah or Hamas, even though the administration supported Israel's right to defend itself and granted it broad freedom of action (Shalom, 2014; Shalom & Hendel, 2007). It is very clear that had the IDF succeeded in achieving a decisive victory in Lebanon within a short time and with minimal harm to the civilian population, the Reagan administration's position toward the campaign would likely have been very different.

This insight remained relevant in other confrontations, and it will remain relevant into the future. Since the First Lebanon War, Israel has engaged in a number of military confrontations with its enemies, chiefly Hezbollah and Hamas. None of those confrontations ended rapidly, and certainly not with a decisive victory. In all of the confrontations, the dilemma of extracting a heavy price from the enemy versus the knowledge that such an action would necessarily involve harm to the civilian population surfaced repeatedly. In view of the massive media presence in these confrontations, it is quite clear that any confrontation would necessarily lead to damage regarding Israel's position in global public opinion. Future military confrontations will also likely place Israel in similar dilemmas. The basic assumption is that the harsh pictures that flood television screens will also force countries that are friendly toward Israel to protest its military actions, and this in turn will naturally narrow Israel's maneuvering room. Therefore, Israel's ability to bring about a rapid end to a future military confrontation with minimal loss of life to civilians takes on critical importance.

The Reagan-Begin meeting contains important lessons in the context of Israel's relations with the United States, for our time and for the future. Under the circumstances created with the opening of the campaign in Lebanon, and in view of the increased protests surrounding Israel's military action as the war proceeded, it should have been considered carefully whether the timing of the meeting was proper. A meeting between an Israeli Prime

Minister and a US President must be held at a time convenient to both sides, which helps ensure its success. In such a critical issue to the State of Israel, extraneous risks should not be taken.

During the meeting, the Prime Minister left much room for a confrontation with the President and his staff surrounding the administration's criticism of Israel's military actions. There is no great advantage to a confrontation over criticism from a friendly power such as the United States regarding Israel's military actions, especially since this criticism seemed to be very moderate, almost as if obligatory. The Israeli reaction just sharpened the dispute between the states and did not contribute to strengthened bilateral ties.

Beyond that, during the meeting Prime Minister Begin showed an exaggerated tendency to oppose President Reagan, while frequently presenting events from American history that ostensibly revealed political hypocrisy. This undoubtedly created embarrassment within the American administration, but it is unclear how it served Israel's national interests. Prime Minister Netanyahu was forced to adopt a contrarian approach to the US when he decided to speak before Congress and level public criticism at President Obama over the nuclear agreement with Iran, which Netanyahu saw as a tangible threat to Israel's security. Although the Obama administration drew no satisfaction from this show of strength in its backyard, it did not react with any substantial harm to Israel's important interests. During Obama's term, the strategic ties between Israel and the US grew significantly tighter.

Any Israeli leadership must clearly recognize that the relationship between the two countries is asymmetrical, and there is no point in demanding equality in the attitudes toward the two countries' military actions. Under the circumstances in which the meeting between President Reagan and Prime Minister Begin was held, the disputes should have been minimized as much as possible,

and the discussion should have focused on gaining far-reaching understandings with the administration surrounding ways in which Israel needed to act in order to minimize the threats it faced. However, the impression gained from the minutes of the meeting is that the Reagan administration apparently realized that Menachem Begin was a “different species” of prime minister. This was a leader who carried with him the tragic history of the Jewish nation over thousands of years, and the need that burned in his bones to emphasize the justice of Israel’s path against other nations. Under these circumstances, the administration understood that it should not expect that traditional diplomatic niceties would be binding on him. Netanyahu also tends to weave Jewish and historic motifs into his remarks. It seems that the inclusion of such motifs has contributed to his international standing.

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