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**THE ANTI-POLITICS OF PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP:
JIMMY CARTER AND AMERICAN JEWS**

by

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A Senior Thesis presented to the
Faculty of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and
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Bachelor of Arts.

12 April 1985

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. B. ...', written in a cursive style.

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I would like to thank Hal Saunders at the American Enterprise Institute not only for giving me the opportunity to speak to principal actors in the Carter Administration, but also for treating me with remarkable intellectual and personal respect. I only hope this thesis advances his efforts as much as my internship at AEI did mine. The librarians at the Columbia Oral History Project were very helpful in guiding me to material essential to my thesis I would have otherwise missed. Finally, I would like to thank my faculty adviser at Princeton, Professor Fred Greenstein, for helping me to ask the right questions and keep an eye on the big picture.

To Woody Allen, who taught me to laugh at my own absurdity.

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"If after the inauguration you find a Cy Vance at Secretary of State and Zbigniew Brzezinski as head of national security, then I would say we failed. And I'd quit. But that's not going to happen. You're going to see new faces, new ideas."

-- HAMILTON JORDAN IN JANUARY 1976

"I don't have much time with you. I wanted to talk soberly and frankly tonight. I don't care whether you applaud or not. I didn't come up here to waste my time. I have had a long week."

-- JIMMY CARTER

INTRODUCTION:

JIMMY CARTER, AMERICAN JEWS,
AND THE ART OF PRESIDENTIAL PERSUASION

In American politics, the relationship between a domestic constituency group and the president often oscillates between states of harmony and discord. Pressure from a domestic group, whether it touches on foreign or domestic policy, forces the president to confront two basic imperatives. On one hand, the president, as a politician and leader of a political coalition, often feels beholden to a group that has provided electoral, financial, and organizational support for the president's battles. On the other hand, as chief executive he normally attempts to pursue policy consonant with the national interest as he defines it. Periodically, presidents are likely to sense discrepancies between what each of these aims calls for. Managing such discrepancies is at the heart of presidential leadership.

Successful presidents are usually adept at forging some accommodation between private and public interests. Few can afford to entertain a Madisonian revulsion for faction that disregards the promptings of close supporters. Even if the president thinks the private and national interests coincide, he must still actively take up the task described by Richard Neustadt over 20 years ago: he must persuade those over whom he has no formal power, but on whom he depends, that his policy serves their interests. His future power, his chances for reelection, and, in general, his capacity to lead depend on how well his talent as a politician meshes with his skill as a policymaker.

This thesis is an examination of a president's failure at the art of persuasion. It looks at Jimmy Carter's steady alienation of American Jews, who supported Carter overwhelmingly in the 1976 campaign.

The loyalty of the American Jewish community and its leaders to the Democratic Party has been a dependable element of the coalition of groups that have voted disproportionately for the party's candidates in the post-war period. Along with other minority groups (especially blacks) and the labor movement, Jews have proven stalwart Democrats. Democratic White Houses, as well as congresses, have benefited from Jews' consistent loyalty to the party line. Presidents Truman, Kennedy and Johnson -- as well the subject of this study, President Jimmy Carter -- and Democratic contenders Adlai Stevenson and Hubert Humphrey were all perceived by Jews as sympathetic to their interests; they all were the recipients of substantial financial and electoral support from a range of American Jewish leaders.

Much of that loyalty stems from Jewish support for the liberal social agenda advocated by the dominant Eastern wing of the party, thus behaving contrary to standard assumptions about increasing affluence being accompanied by a shift to the G.O.P.¹ Though most Jews were never single-issue voters, a prerequisite for their support -- and that of their

¹ Alan Fisher, "Jewish Political Shift? Erosion, Yes; Conversion, No," in Party Coalition in the 1980s, Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1981), pp.328-329, 339-340.

leaders, on whom this study focuses -- usually was the candidate's unreserved support for Israel.² As Stanley Kelly has noted, the considerations that go into voters' decisions are not easily documented or simplified.³ In this case, both major parties are strong supporters of pro-Israel measures -- and thus their respective Mideast planks cannot be determinative in explaining Jewish party affiliation. If the Democrats' social welfare agenda was the primary attraction for American Jews to the Democrats, it is also clear that Democratic support for Israel had to precede and undergird that allegiance.⁴

Since 1948, Democratic presidents and nominees have all been firmly committed supporters of Israel. In the past, president and constituency rarely disagreed with regard for support for Israel. Little persuading was needed simply because the president already endorsed a pro-Israel stance; the most likely possibility for conflict with Jewish leaders would have been if the president had chosen to pressure

2 Fisher, pp.328-345.

3 See Stanley Kelly, Interpreting Elections (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp.3-9.

4 There is very little current data on the attitudes of Jewish voters, particularly on the relative importance of Israel-related issues in voting considerations. Based on qualitative evidence I have gathered (in the form of interviews with Jewish leaders and Carter administration members), and assertions in recent scholarly literature, a basic assumption of this study is that support for Israel was a key consideration in voting decisions and political attitudes for many Jews. This is asserted by Fisher, as well as by other relatively current examinations of Jewish voting and political behavior: Stephen D. Issacs, Jews in American Politics (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), see chapter one. Also, Wm. Ray Heitzmann, American Jewish Voting Behavior: A History and Analysis (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1975), p.83.

Israel into coming to the peace table. Before the presidency of Jimmy Carter, however, no Democratic president or leading contender for the nomination had ever advocated applying such pressure. In short, Democratic presidents and nominees who would have been president would not likely have felt a substantial tension between the promptings of Jewish leaders regarding support for Israel and their own perception of the national interest. For whatever reason -- whether political motivations or honest policy judgements -- the party's leaders had consistently declined to pressure Israel.

The relationship between Jimmy Carter and the American Jewish community marked the first time that the Democratic occupant of the White House alienated, and broke with, the leadership of the American Jewish community. Capturing 75% of the Jewish vote in 1976 and a strikingly low 47% in 1980, Carter came to be viewed by American Jewish leaders as a man not to be trusted to support Israel.⁵

Even his great triumph at Camp David and the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel -- arguably the greatest achievement in Middle East diplomacy since the 1949 armistice that brought Israel into existence -- could not dispel Jews' distrust. Many had been alienated by policy decisions in the two years preceding the meeting Camp David in September 1978; others were reassured by Camp David, only

⁵ Again, I do not assume a direct causal link between Jewish perceptions of Carter's position on Israel and the drop in support at the polls. However, I do show later, based on qualitative evidence gathered from interviews and from Fisher, that the issue was significant in many Jews' voting decisions.

to be alienated once again by clumsy political maneuvering after the signing of the peace treaty in March 1979.

In explaining the growing rift between Carter and the Jewish community, Jewish leaders typically point to Carter's hostile attitude toward the Begin government and his less-than-subtle efforts to force Israel to negotiate. It was the substance of Carter's Mideast policy, they argue, that brought a confrontation with the American Jewish community. There is certainly some truth to this analysis. Many Jews were infuriated by Carter's decision to sell F-15 fighter planes to Saudi Arabia and his perceived overtures to the Palestinian Liberation Organization, to give just two examples. This thesis argues that the real roots of Carter's alienation of the Jewish community lay as much in style than substance. Simply put, Carter certainly would have caused some discontent among American Jews purely by virtue of the confrontational policy he followed. The hostility was exacerbated by an inept domestic liason apparatus within the White House that largely failed to seek out the support of American Jews. He proved unable and, at times unwilling, to seek out a powerful constituency group and persuade them that his perception of the U.S. interests in the Mideast was

consistent with theirs.⁶ This study, then, focuses on the philosophical underpinnings, organizational structure, and political style of Jimmy Carter and his administration and how they needlessly eroded Jewish support that had never been strong.

The argument thus does not employ normative judgments about Mideast policy decisions themselves. I do not argue that American Jews, if properly persuaded, would have approved of every initiative Carter made in the Middle East. They would not have. Nor do I assume that American Jews based their approval of Carter purely on his handling of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Like other Americans, they were concerned about economic, social, and other foreign policy issues.

Another disclaimer: Carter was not entirely inept at seeking Jewish support. At various points in his administration, Carter was able to bring Jewish leaders back

⁶ The term 'American Jews' is used here and throughout the analysis as shorthand, referring to the attitudes of the leaders of the major American Jewish organizations (delineated in Chapter One). I recognize that use of this term inherently simplifies the more complex reality of aggregate Jewish attitudes. Though leaders cannot be said to represent the attitudes of all Jews and though they had major disagreements among themselves, a case can be made that there is at least some basis for both treating them as a unit and as a reflection of general Jewish attitudes. First, the leaders, as will be shown, tended to have closely parallel views concerning basic issues about Israel -- ie. security, strength, hostility to the Palestinian Liberation Organization. When the leaders are more unified, most Jews are probably in line with their thinking. When the leaders were divided or ambivalent, I will indicate those disagreements and not suggest that they reflect an "American Jewish view." (See Alan Fisher, "Realignment of the Jewish Vote" Political Science Quarterly, Spring 1979;)

into his camp. Indeed, his occasional substantial skill makes the extraordinary ineptitude he showed on other occasions stand out in bold relief. Nevertheless, American Jews were excessively alienated by an administration that did not display the political skill to solicit advice consistently and earnestly, respond to objections, or simply consult with Jewish leaders before arriving at policy decisions. In addition, the analysis points to general flaws in Carter's political style manifested in his handling of domestic Jewish supporters -- flaws which suggest a broad-based critique of Carter as a politician.

Two basic sets of questions, one factual, one interpretive, guide the analysis. First, what was the structure of the relationship between Jewish political support groups and Carter's White House staff and how did it change over time? Who did American Jewish leaders talk to and under what circumstances? Were their views given much weight? To what extent did Carter's calculations change as his political fortunes soured?

The second line of emphasis is an examination of why the relationship deteriorated from one of lukewarm support to general distrust. What was it about Carter and his organizational structure that exacerbated his problems with Jewish supporters? When were there lapses in political judgement, personality flaws, and organizational mistakes that heightened this distance? What were the flaws in the White House organization and the way Carter's mind worked

that sheds light on the broader inadequacies of the Carter administration in dealing with pressure groups and Capital Hill?

The thesis follows a chronological approach, beginning with Carter's early run for the White House in 1974, and ending with the large-scale defection of the Jewish vote in 1980 to John Anderson and Ronald Reagan. Chapter One describes Carter's pursuit of the White House in 1976 and and the start his problems with the Jewish community. It provides the background to Carter's trouble with the community's leaders once in office. It calls attention to Jews' traditional support for the Democratic standard bearer and their critical role in Carter's victory over Gerald Ford. Behind the victory in November lingered a very tenuous vote of confidence and an equally short history of Jewish support for the Carter campaign. Jewish attitudes evolved from extreme skepticism in the primary season to guarded support as Carter defeated more desirable candidates. After describing the evolution of this marginal modus vivendi, I point out features of Carter campaign style and strategy that appear to have predisposed the campaign not to seek a closer relationship with the Jewish community even though it knew Jewish support to be weak. The chapter is meant as background to give a point of reference for the subsequent deterioration in Carter's relationship with the Jewish community. It shows how his base of Jewish support was less unified and committed than that usually bestowed on

Democratic standard bearers and how Carter perceived his base of support differently than "traditional" Democratic candidates.

Chapters Two and Three are the heart of the thesis, and are based primarily on interviews with senior members of the Carter administration and with leaders of the American Jewish community. Chapter Two looks at the evolution of the Jewish-White House relationship up to the time of Camp David in September 1978. In this period, Jewish pressure groups and prominent individuals in the community had substantial access, but little influence in the policy discussion. Both organizational structure and political style militated against the president's serious consideration of Jewish leaders' concerns. These difficulties also point to Carter's overall inability to adequately "touch base" in all policy areas with potential supporters before embarking on major initiatives. Also, in this period we see how Carter's insensitivity to domestic politics meant that some controversial decisions were made -- and were made in ways that inflicted incalculable political damage. This result is especially true for Carter's decision to sell advanced fighter planes to Saudi Arabia in the spring of 1978, which many in the Jewish community came to view as the president's rubicon.

Chapter Three first provides an account of the period from Camp David in September 1978 and the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in March 1979 to the

irrevocable unraveling of Jewish support by late 1980. In this period I focus first on a remarkable absence of attention to domestic political considerations and of consultation with political advisers that preceded Carter's decision to risk his political reputation on such an uncertain set of negotiations. Up until the signing of the treaty, there was continued disregard for domestic political damage. Second, I examine Carter's surprise at not regaining Jewish support after the peace treaty and his subsequent political re-education -- his belated effort to effect a rapprochement with the Jewish community. This effort was hampered both by Carter's personal distaste for, and ineptitude in, politicking skillfully and by events beyond his control that sealed his fate with the Jewish community (Andrew Young's meeting in August, 1979, with an official of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, for example). Finally the chapter summarizes the extent of the erosion of Carter's support in the community, presenting electoral data that show that Jewish voting behavior in 1980 should be interpreted as an anti-Carter statement, not a pro-Reagan statement.⁷

⁷ These two chapters, which form the bulk of the thesis, are the product mainly of original research based on interviews with principal decisionmakers in the Carter White House, those privy to the decisionmaking process, liasons to the Jewish community, and American Jewish leaders. The bibliography lists these interviews, but backgrounds on lesser-known subjects are found in these chapters, as they are introduced. It is important to note, however, that my conclusions are based greatly on the impressions of these key actors. Written material on this topic is not abundant on this topic, nor is it generally as insightful, in my view, as the comments of the participants themselves.

Chapter Four offers a critique of Carter's political style, summarizing the basic flaws in Carter's method of decisionmaking that were in evidence in his handling of domestic Jewish groups. Pointing to established patterns of behavior from his pre-presidential days and to his political style in other policy areas, the chapter argues that Carter's political ineptitude on the Mideast question is indicative of a more general failure. That is, the analysis of his relationship with domestic Jewish groups points to flaws in Carter's decisionmaking style that would hamstring any attempt to actively sell any policy either to Congress or the electorate. This last chapter goes on to argue that Carter's rejection by Jewish constituency groups at the polls in 1980 can be interpreted as a defeat for his novel populist political philosophy, which sought to circumvent traditional notions about coalition politics in the United States. As for interest group power, the Carter record seems to confirm and disprove certain generalizations about the influence of powerful lobby groups. On one hand, Carter showed that as president he had considerable latitude to pursue policy as he wished; not once did Jewish political influence deny Carter from following his generally combative course -- contrary to popular notions that Jewish political influence can effectively "control" policy towards Israel. On the other hand, Carter's failure to regain support among Jewish leaders and the subsequent electoral defection of the Jews show that interest groups are capable of appealing to a

definite constituency and making politicians pay a price for their policy. In short, Carter's notion that the age of interest groups had passed in favor of some undifferentiated, non-coalition form of Democratic politics did not seem to be confirmed.

CHAPTER ONE

JIMMY CARTER AND AMERICAN JEWS:

THE 1976 CAMPAIGN AND THE ILLUSION OF HARMONY

American Jews have figured prominently in Democratic coalitions since at least the 1930s.¹ Jewish support for Jimmy Carter in 1976 proved to be no exception, as the community voted overwhelmingly in Carter's favor (close to 75%) and helped provide the margin of victory in a very close race. Though he could not match Lyndon Johnson's or Hubert Humphrey's level of Jewish support (LBJ won 90% in his landslide, while Humphrey still got 81% in his close loss to Nixon), Carter attracted enough Jewish supporters to leave the impression that he was very popular in the community. That impression was buttressed by a high level of Jewish financial support for the Carter campaign. Indeed, a cursory glance of the November numbers later in this chapter offers no trace of the doubts the Jewish community still harbored about Jimmy Carter. It does not show evidence of the awkward distance that still existed between the Carter campaign and the Jewish community. Furthermore, the results of the general election gave no indication of the uniqueness of Carter's path to the White House -- and the implications that path had for the way Carter's administration would relate to traditional elements of the Democratic coalition who were latecomers to the Carter camp.

This two-part chapter focuses on Carter's troubled relationship with American Jews in the nomination, election, and transition periods. The first part provides a general

¹ See Stephen Issacs, Jews and American Politics (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), Chapter One; pp. 150-155.

account of the scope of Jewish political and partisan influence in the United States and then an analysis of how Carter's support among Jews differed radically from the Democratic tradition, despite appearances to the contrary. Second, an examination of Carter's political strategy and the populist philosophy manifested in his campaign shows that Carter was not inclined to reach out to skeptical Jewish voters after his victory. Put simply, Carter acted as if he felt there was little he could do to make himself acceptable to the Jews that he hadn't already done. He appeared to feel that he didn't necessarily need Jewish approval to be successful either as a candidate or as president. Of course, Carter's appeal to members of the Jewish community was not completely negative (he made enough pro-Israel statements before and after his nomination to at least assuage much of the uncertainty Jewish leaders felt about Carter's stance). Yet, Carter was not successful at winning Jews unreserved support. When the Carter campaign team entered the White House, the Jewish community's attitude had evolved from one of distrust to guarded support -- and that is where it stood. This chapter provides a basis for understanding the principal analysis in Chapters Two and Three; it gives a frame of reference for sensing both the extent of Carter's alienation of the community while in office and why the community was an important group to hold on to.

JEWISH POLITICAL POWER. The most apparent manifestation of American Jewish power is the community's voting behavior -- a clear partisan preference coupled with a demographic imbalance that magnifies their influence. In 1976, there were approximately 5.8 million Jews in the United States, the largest Jewish community in the world. Though a small (2.7%) percentage of the total U.S. population, their high turnout at the polls (according to some studies, over 90%) makes them about 5% of the electorate.² If Jewish communities were spread out over the nation, a 5% voting bloc would translate into little clout. But Jews are concentrated in a small number of states and thus can provide the margin of victory in close election. In fact, Jews are the most urbanized ethnic group in the United States, with 66% living in communities of one million or greater.³ The Jewish communities of Los Angeles and New York make up 60% of the total Jewish population, for example. The Jewish population of New York State, at about 2.1 million in 1976, made up 12% of the state population and close to 25% of the electorate; it would make up an even higher percentage of the vote in the Democratic primary, normally considered more important than the general election

2 Calculated from figures in M.S. El Azhary, Political Cohesion of American Jews in American Roles (Washington: University Press of America, 1980), p.27. Also see Albert Hunt, "Pivotal Jewish Voters are Down on Carter," Wall Street Journal, September 22, 1980, p.1.

3 Robert Trice, Interest Groups and the Foreign Policy Process: U.S. Policy in the Middle East, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976, p.53.

in that state. Other key states with substantial Jewish swing votes are: New Jersey, 12% of the electorate; Florida, 10% of the electorate; California, 6%; Pennsylvania, 7%; and Ohio, 3%.⁴ Jews also account for 4.5% of the population in Maryland and about 3% in Illinois.⁵

These percentages would be meaningless if it were not for Jews' longstanding support of the Democratic presidential nominee. It was not certain until Franklin Roosevelt's third term that Jews were a predictable element in the emerging Democratic coalition. While most white ethnic groups and other religious groups (Catholics, for example) no longer vote the Democratic line and divide roughly evenly between the major parties in presidential elections, Jews have retained their loyalty to a much greater extent.⁶ Though their growing affluence and accompanying economic conservatism has caused some defection to the Republican Party, Jews have generally not fulfilled

⁴ Morton Kondracke, "Who's got the Jews," The New Republic, September 6 & 13, 1980, pp. 10-12.

⁵ American Jewish Yearbook 1979, "Jewish Population in the United States," (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1978), p.179. No figures could be found on their percentage of the electorate.

⁶ Alan M. Fisher, "Jewish political shift? Erosion, yes; Conversion, no," in Party Coalitions in the 1980's, Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies 1982), p.328. I rely on Fisher heavily for survey data on American Jews because his is by far the most current, and seems the most reliable, of studies. His methods for determining voting behavior and political leanings was to average findings of seven different major polls: Gallup, Harris, New York Times/CBS News, ABC, NBC, Center for Political Studies, and California Field. He weighted these polls for sample size and overall accuracy. I can find no recent study that takes as comprehensive an approach as this one.

expectations by some analysts of a massive party defection. Though they were already the most affluent sub-group in the U.S. by the 1950s, Jews continued their party affiliation because they were attracted to the Democrats' social liberalism. Table 1 illustrates the wide gap between the Democratic candidates' percentage of the popular vote and that of Jewish voters in the general election.

TABLE 1-- DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE⁷

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>PCT. OF JEWISH VOTE</u>	<u>PCT. POPULAR VOTE</u>
1948	75	49.5%
1952	64	44.4
1956	60	41.9
1960	82	49.7
1964	90	61
1968	81	42.7
1972	65	37.5

Clearly, Jews were pivotal to Democratic victories in 1948 and 1960, while the tallies from the other years indicate that loyalty to the party nominee remained strong even in years with substantial Republican victories: 1952, 1952, and 1972.

⁷ Sources for Jewish voting behavior are from Stephen Issacs, Jews and American Politics (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), p.152; the national figures were calculated from results published in Eugene H. Roseboom & Alfred E. Eckes, Jr., A History of Presidential Elections: From George Washington to Jimmy Carter, (New York: Macmillan, 1979).

It is often argued that Jews are not unlike any other voting bloc in providing a margin of victory in a close contest. That is, in a close election, any voting bloc can be said to be pivotal. However, while it is true that the Jewish vote alone can propel no man into the White House, this reasoning ignores what is special about Jewish voting behavior. First, it is one of the few sub-groups in society that can truly be said to coalesce around a small number of issues, including concern for Israel. Just how important is difficult to gauge. It seems clear, however, that any apparent equivocation on a pro-Israel stance is enough to push Jewish voters in the opposite direction. Contributions by Jewish-backed political action committees in congressional campaigns, for example, are distributed on the basis of the candidate's position towards Israel.⁸ Thus Jews are not reliable coalition members in the sense of being blind, axiomatic voters; rather, it is their close concern for a range of issues and their identification of those issues with the Democrats that made them a "reliable" bloc vote. Without considering their additional assets to a campaign, the Jewish vote can be "counted on" more than most voting blocs (the black vote is also a reliable bloc, for example) to provide the margin in an otherwise equal race.

Jewish influence, moreover, does not stop at the ballot box. Voting power is supplemented by substantial organizational and financial resources. Jews make up almost

⁸ The Wall Street Journal, February 26, 1985, p.1;p.16.

20% of the activists in the Democratic Party -- the footsoldiers who staff campaigns and solicit contributions and petition signatures. This does not include the substantial number of Jewish advisers on Congressional staffs. Jews were also highly placed in the party organization in the mid-1970s. Robert Strauss and Mark Siegel, the chairman and executive director of the Democratic National Committee in 1976, respectively, are Jews with a wide range of connections to the community. In individual campaigns, there were a disproportionately high number of Jews as volunteers, speechwriters and strategists.

Furthermore, longstanding ties between the Jewish community and the Democratic Party are reinforced by a web of interconnections within Jewish organizations: over 2/3 of all Jewish leaders belong to five or more organizations (not including local synagogues). This allows for enormous fluidity of information and support within the community, making it easier for a candidate to become known and target a wide cross section of Jewish leaders as a base of support.⁹ (The lobbying and information-dissemination structure of the Jewish community is examined in the next chapter.) The interconnected nature of the community provides remarkably easy access to both lesser-known candidates seeking exposure and familiar politicians seeking

⁹ See Melvin I. Urofsky, "American Jewish Leadership," in American Jewish History, June, 1981, p.405; & The Wall Street Journal, March 2, 1978, p.1.

financial support; no one has to make luncheon speeches before each of the some 300 national Jewish organizations to become known.

Although the scope of Jewish organizational connections in American politics is impressive, even more significant is Jewish financial involvement. Jews are the most affluent group in American society. They are also the most professional (20% of all lawyers are Jewish, 9% of all doctors, though Jews are less than 3% of the population).¹⁰ Three-quarters of all Jewish males are employed in white collar jobs, as opposed to 35% for white males in general. This considerable accumulation of wealth is accompanied by a general desire to be involved in public affairs. A full 80% of all major gifts to the Democratic Party are given by Jews. In Michigan, for example, a state with 90,145 Jews (1% of the state population), over 90% of all major gifts received by the state Democratic Party were from Jewish contributors.¹¹ Individual campaigns have also been heavily dependent on "Jewish money." Henry Jackson, for example

¹⁰ The Wall Street Journal, March 2, 1978, p.1.

¹¹ Interview with Mark Siegel, Columbia University Oral History Project, "Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy," interview dated May 9, 1978, p.112 of transcript. I view Siegel as a very reliable source for these figures for a number of reasons. First, as executive director of the Democratic National Committee under Robert Strauss from 1972-1976, he was intimately involved with fundraising activities for the party. Siegel, a former staffer for Hubert Humphrey, had extensive ties to Jewish backers all over the nation, and knew quite well the scope of Jewish financial support. Also, the thoughts expressed in this oral history were consistent with those expressed to me in my recent interview with Siegel, who is now directly involved in fundraising activities for a major Jewish political action committee which he founded.

received close to 90% of his early money (ie. his financing for the 1976 primary season) from Jewish sources.¹² Morris Udall and Jerry Brown also had substantial ties to Jewish financial benefactors.

CARTER'S JEWISH SUPPORT. The foregoing account of general Jewish political involvement was background against which I examine the nature of Jews' support for the Carter campaign. Jimmy Carter's support among American Jews in the November 1976 election was consistent with the general pattern contemporary Jewish voting behavior. The best estimates show that Carter received between 70-73 % of the Jewish vote, while Ford tallied 26-28%, and 1-2% voted for Eugene McCarthy and other left wing candidates.¹³ This compares with Carter's winning margin of 50.1% of the popular vote to Ford's 48.0%. If Jewish voters had mirrored the national trend and only slightly favored the Democratic ticket, Carter would probably have lost the following states: New York (41 electoral votes, won by a margin of 51.9% to 47.5%); Ohio (25 electoral votes, won by 48.9% to 48.7%); Pennsylvania (27 electoral votes, won by 50.4% to 47.7%); and Maryland (10 electoral votes, won by 52.8% to 46.7%). Patrick Caddell told Carter on election night that if Jews had voted like other American whites, "Carter would

¹² Interview conducted with Mark Siegel, former deputy to Hamilton Jordan and former executive director of the Democratic National Committee; in Washington, D.C. on 31 July 1984.

¹³ Alan Fisher, "Realignment of the Jewish Vote?" Political Science Quarterly, Spring 1979, Vol. 94, No. 1, p. 109. of

have lost 103 electoral votes. New York alone would have made the difference."¹⁴ Carter's narrow electoral margin of 297 electoral votes to Ford's 240, would have become landslide defeat in the electoral college: 194 votes to 343 for Ford. Carter, then, not only received a disproportionate share of the Jewish vote in November, he knew on election night that they had been essential to his narrow margin of victory. (Again, the point here is not that Jews were the only pivotal, or disproportionately Democratic, group in the election. They weren't, as a survey of black voting data alone, would show. But they did prove more reliable than several other traditionally Democratic subgroups, such as Catholics or union households, and their responsiveness to a clear set of issues, meant that they could have been moved as a bloc away from Carter.¹⁵) Thus, at minimum, they had to be viewed as a key element in a larger coalition.

In addition to their support at the polls, Jewish constituency groups provided Carter with an impressive 63% of his total contributions by November 1976. Mark Siegel informed Carter of this key fact in January 1977 in a lengthy memorandum on the importance of the Jewish community.

¹⁴ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984. All figures above of margins of victory in individual states are taken from: America Votes 12: A Handbook of Contemporary American Election Statistics, Richard M. Scammon & Alice V. McGillivray, eds., (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1977), p.15.

¹⁵ A good account of the group breakdown in the 1976 election is found in Richard Wirthlin, "The Republican Strategy and Its Electoral Consequences," Party Coalition in the 1980s, Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1981), pp.257-258.

in American politics.¹⁶ At the time, Siegel was working in the administration as Hamilton Jordan's deputy for policy analysis. Prominent members of the Jewish community also joined the Carter campaign organization, notably Harriet Zimmerman, a leader in the Atlanta Jewish community, who would serve as a bridge from the candidate's power base in the South to the northeast-based leadership of the Jewish community. Edward Sanders, a former president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (the principal Jewish lobby on Capitol Hill) and a future adviser to Carter in the White House, also signed onto the campaign. Zimmerman led Carter's post-convention "Jewish Desk," holding the title of National Director of Community Affairs. Sanders and United Jewish Appeal President Paul Zuckerman served as advisers to the campaign staff.¹⁷

SIGNS OF A TROUBLED RELATIONSHIP. Despite the appearance of a committed bloc of Jewish supporters, fissures of discontent and bitterness were by no means absent from the Carter victory in November. The level of Jewish support in the post-convention campaign concealed from most political observers the depth of the uncertainty that lingered specifically over Carter's commitment to Israel. The full record of Carter's campaign shows that Jewish voters and contributors were among the last to join the Carter bandwagon, and most of them held their noses

¹⁶ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

¹⁷ Milton Ellerin, "Politics and Intergroup Relations," American Jewish Yearbook 1978, (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1977), p.82.

while doing so -- their votes in November were less votes of confidence than of provisional approval.

Carter had a dismal record of support among Jews during the primary season. The November election was the only time in 1976 that Carter won a majority of the Jewish vote in a race with a serious opponent. In the three primary victories where Carter did win a plurality of Jewish support, there were extenuating circumstances. In Indiana on May 4, he won 60% of the Jewish vote to Henry Jackson's 30% -- normally it would be seen as a major upset, but Jackson had withdrawn from the presidential race a week earlier. In the North Carolina primary he won a meager plurality of 35% of the tiny Jewish vote (less than 12,000 in the entire state) in his political backyard). He won 47% of the Jewish vote in Illinois, a race that did not pit Carter against either Henry Jackson or Morris Udall -- candidates consistently favored by Jews and Carter's principal early rivals for the nomination.¹⁸ Table 2 shows Carter's percentage of the popular vote in primaries he won, alongside his consistently lower percentage of Jewish voters in that state.

¹⁸ Fisher, Political Science Quarterly, p.107.

TABLE 2-- CARTER'S JEWISH SUPPORT IN PRIMARY VICTORIES

<u>STATE</u>	<u>PCT. JEWISH VOTE</u>	<u>PCT. TOTAL VOTE</u>
FLORIDA 3/9/76	22%	34.5%
MICHIGAN 5/18	29%	43.3%
NEW HAMPSHIRE 2/24	0%	28.3%
OHIO 6/8	23%	52.3%
PENNSYLVANIA 4/27	19%	36.9%
WISCONSIN 4/6	7%	36.6%

Source: Alan Fisher, Political Science Quarterly, p.107., & America Votes 12, Scammon, ed., p.28.

In states with large Jewish populations which Carter lost, the same pattern is repeated, only to a more extreme degree. In New York, the acknowledged Jewish capital in the U.S., Carter received 3% -- to Jackson's 63%. In California, he won only 13%, while only 4% of Massachusetts Jewish voters gave Carter their support. By May, when Carter had become the most popular choice among non-Jewish Democrats, he trailed California Governor Jerry Brown, Rep. Morris Udall, and undeclared candidate Hubert Humphrey in Jewish support. He ran even with Sen. Frank Church, who was only starting his effort.¹⁹ Jews preferred choice at this stage was still Humphrey: the only national politician whose pro-

19 Fisher, Political Science Quarterly, p.108.

Israel credentials could match Jackson's, and who appealed to Jews as a traditional liberal spokesman.

It could be argued that the Jewish vote was not so much anti-Carter as it was pro-Jackson. It is certainly true that Jackson was the clear favorite of Jewish voters. And indeed, much of Carter's failure to attract Jewish supporters must be attributed to Jackson's longstanding ties to that community. As Hyman Bookbinder noted on the Today show in August 1976, Carter had run against candidates who were simply better known to the community and Carter was an unknown quantity. But Jews also had serious reservations about Carter and they did not rush to embrace him after his capture of the nomination.

Specifically, Jews were concerned about Carter's fundamentalist religiosity and their implications for the sincerity of Carter's pro-Israel statements. James Reston reflected these fears when he wrote that Carter "identified with many members of his church who have a long record of anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Communism."²⁰ A group of important fundraisers in Los Angeles told Carter in late May 1976 they were concerned about his stand on Israel and that his faith might affect adversely his view towards Israel. In the Florida primary, Carter spoke to a Jewish group in Miami Beach, but did not seem to make any inroads; "His words about Israel are about as strong as those of Scoop Jackson, but somehow, with this constituency, Jimmy

²⁰ The New York Times, June 6, 1976; Quoted from American Jewish Year Book 1978, p.64.

Carter does not make it,"²¹ observed Washington Post reporter Martin Schram in his coverage of the Carter campaign. Before the Democratic convention, he received less than 20% of his contributions from Jewish sources, a very low figure for Democratic nominees, before it shot up to 63% by November. In August, a Lou Harris poll showed that the intensity of support for Carter was weaker among Jewish than non-Jewish voters.²²

This distance between Jews and Carter persisted despite the fact that the candidate had made all the politically correct statements regarding Israel. A typical example was Carter's speech on the Mideast in Elizabeth, New Jersey, on June 6 before Jewish leaders, drafted explicitly to shore up support among the community: "A real peace must be based on absolute assurance of Israel's survival and security. As President, I would never yield on that point. ... it is a moral imperative.." Carter was sufficiently vague on the Palestinian question, saying "they have rights which must be recognized in any settlement" but assured that any resolution of the conflict, any agreement in the area would be made "not at the expense of Israel, but in the interest of all countries involved."²³ Despite his assurances, Carter never could put Jewish supporters at ease. In late June, after it became clear Carter would get the nomination,

²¹ Martin Schram, Running for President 1976: The Carter Campaign, (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), p.80.

¹⁹ Harris Poll, August 19, 1976.

²³ The Presidential Campaign, Jimmy Carter, Volume One, Part One, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1978), pp.219-220.

Harriet Zimmerman, a leader of the Georgia Jewish community and of the Carter "Jewish desk," put together a meeting with Carter in Atlanta attended by Jewish leaders from around the nation. Again, Carter encountered skepticism, Mark Siegel recalls:

He said all the appropriate things but no one got a sense he understood the issues nor did he show an intense deep feeling about the issue. Obviously, he had been primed to say (certain key buzzwords). You start talking about "the one democratic strategic ally" -- like reading from a blueprint.²⁴

Carter held a meeting in Boston attended by Jewish leaders after he won the nomination, and it was clear that Carter didn't "feel comfortable around Jews. I don't think he ever had that much contact with Jews as he went along," AIPAC director Morris Amity observed.²⁵ Though these perceptions may not have matched Carter's true conviction on Israel, it was the perceptions -- whether real or not -- which formed the basis of Jewish leaders' action regarding Jimmy Carter. What is perceived as real is acted on as if it is real.

Jimmy Carter received only half-hearted support from American Jews, many of whom were attracted to other Democrats, many of whom were wary of a born-again fundamentalist from the Deep South. The pre-presidential relationship between Carter and the Jews was never terribly friendly. Though he captured nearly three quarters of the

²⁴ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984. Siegel, who was present at the meeting, was not yet a member of the Carter team, but was still executive director of the D.N.C. and had close ties with most Jewish leaders attending the meeting.

²⁵ Interview with Morris Amity, 28 February 1985.

Jewish vote in November, this concealed a rocky and uncertain start between the community and the Carter camp. While Jews looked to Carter with high hopes and seemed confident enough about his intentions to vote for him, they were not yet won over. Even in victory, Carter could not count the Jews as part of his camp.

POLITICAL STRATEGY AND CAMPAIGN PHILOSOPHY

As has been often told, Jimmy Carter's run for the presidency began in September 1972, shortly after the Democratic convention had nominated George McGovern. At the convention, Carter had offered himself for the vice-presidential spot on that ill-fated ticket. McGovern's managers -- including Pat Caddell, who would later be Carter's pollster -- had not taken the outgoing Georgia governor seriously. Carter had had absolutely no national exposure and very few contacts with the Democratic establishment. In late 1972, Carter pondered his political future. Under Georgia law, he could not run for a consecutive term as governor. His advisors, led by his executive secretary Hamilton Jordan, told him that the national mood and the structure of the Democratic Party made a successful run in 1976 a distinct possibility.²⁶

Jordan saw the close of the Vietnam War and McGovern's candidacy had wrought substantial change on the American political landscape. The end of the war would shift attention back to domestic issues. At the same time, the

26 Betty Glad, Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), pp.210-213.

federal government was increasingly perceived as incapable of solving problems. Thus, Jordan reasoned, "someone outside of Washington and outside the Senate, a governor who had proved that problems could be dealt with effectively, could win."²⁷ For all its weaknesses, McGovern's candidacy showed there was a need for moral leadership, that a disillusioned public was tired of "pie in the sky" rhetoric and government secrecy. There was a need for "somebody to stand up and tell the American people to do the things that were unpopular, a feeling that if politicians dealt more openly with the electorate that they would respond well."²⁸

Here were the beginnings of the so-called "weirdo factor" that Jordan perceived in politics in late 1972, the unconventional campaign strategy and political philosophy that the electorate would find so appealing in the 1976 campaign. Jordan felt that a candidate in 1976 would have to run against the conventional image of an experienced 'insider' politician running for president -- to cultivate the image of a maverick, or "weirdo," to use the term adopted by the Carter strategists -- because the public would be thirsting for moral leadership after Nixon. Writing in 1972, Jordan could not foresee that this sentiment would be greatly magnified by Watergate and public reaction to President Ford's pardon of Nixon. Carter's seemingly apolitical moral message, coupled with a strategy of

²⁷ Quoted in Jules Witcover, Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency, 1972-1976 (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 109.

²⁸ Witcover, pp.110-111.

striking quickly in the primary season and not appealing to familiar coalition politics would allow the ex-governor to get within striking distance of the nomination without relying on Jews, big labor, and other traditional Democratic supporters.

Carter's strategy was predicated on gaining name recognition, establishing ties with the establishment, and then using those ties to assemble an anti-establishment political army. He would seek to capture the nomination over the objections of the Democratic establishment; while he would appeal to power brokers for support, his strength would lay in his public perception as an outsider to the power structure. Carter began a quiet effort to manipulate the Democratic leadership while still protecting his image as a non-politician.

Carter began to make contacts with members of the Democratic establishment and the media who were, in Jordan's view, vital contacts if Carter were to have credibility as more than a regional candidate, a southern alternative to George Wallace. He joined the Trilateral Commission in 1973, the organization founded by David Rockefeller to foster interaction between prominent figures in developed nations around the world. It was here that Carter met future members of his administration: Zbigniew Brzezinski, the director of the commission; W. Michael Blumenthal; Harold Brown; Walter Mondale; Cyrus Vance; Paul Warnke; and Leonard Woodcock. The commission made Carter more conversant with international

affairs. He supplemented this with the establishment of Georgia trade missions abroad -- at Jordan's recommendation -- "for the purpose of traveling to each of the continents of the world."²⁹ Carter could thus convince the public that he was worldly enough to be President by ticking off the places he had been with these missions: Paris, Bonn, Brussels, Tokyo, and Sao Paulo, for example.

The effort to change his image by reaching out to the Democratic intelligentsia was matched by a more pragmatic goal of touching base with the national Democratic Party. In early 1973, Carter told Robert Strauss of his wish to become involved in the 1974 campaign. Carter became the head of the Democratic National Committee's campaign committee -- the party's main apparatus for assisting individual races around the nation. Jordan left the governor's mansion to become executive director of the campaign committee. The DNC leaders had inklings of Carter's aspirations, but they either didn't take him seriously or they didn't think they were handing him any great opportunity: "... we wanted someone who was high profile who would have the time. And he was a lame duck governor of Georgia. We knew he was thinking of running for president, but we didn't particularly care as long as he gave us what we needed. If he got from us what he needed it was a fair deal."³⁰

²⁹ Witcover, p.115.

³⁰ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

The idea of a Carter candidacy was still absurd in late 1973. In addition, since Carter lacked the backing of Strauss and other party leaders, he stood little chance of making inroads with party power-brokers across the country. But Strauss didn't understand how Carter would use the post. First, Carter achieved his minimal goals of gaining recognition among the traditional Democratic camp. He met with labor leaders, political strategists, spokesmen for various liberal interest groups. In addition, through six regional seminars held in 1973, he met party leaders from around the country and offered his services. But second, and more important, Carter touched base with the young activists in 32 states he visited -- those who would become part of his campaign team.³¹

NON-EASTERN MONEY, Carter's early money, the funds that had to sustain him until the bandwagon effect of initial primary victories brought in more funds, came from non-northeastern and non-Jewish sources. Thus in addition to building an organization that had no official ties with the Washington establishment, Carter was neither restrained by financial dependence on traditional Democratic sources during his fight for respectability. Carter met his fundraising goal of \$850,000 for 1975 without taking large contributions from individuals or special-interest groups. Most of that figure came from within Georgia, but relatively little support from the active Atlanta Jewish community;

³¹ Witcover, p.118.

unlike his predecessor, Gov. Carl Sanders, Carter had established few strong ties to the community in Atlanta, which had considerable financial means.³² In the fall of 1975, he used rock concerts as benefits, raising some 400,000 this way. He qualified for federal matching funds by raising \$5,000 in each of 20 states. By the end of 1975, he had amassed a warchest to take him through the early season: the Iowa caucuses (Jan. 1976), the New Hampshire (February 24) and Florida (March 9) primaries.

The sources of Carter's early money contrasted sharply with those of the leading contenders at the time, Henry Jackson and Morris Udall. Jackson drew heavily on his connections with the Jewish community, who contributed the bulk of Jackson's warchest (over \$1.1 million by January 1975), the second largest of the early campaign behind George Wallace.³³ Udall also had considerable support from Jewish backers, which would increase after Jackson dropped out of the race. Before he had captured the nomination -- received less than 20% of his money from Jewish sources, a very low figure for a serious Democratic candidate.³⁴

Carter's campaign, as Jordan intended, was predicated on quick victories early in the primary season. The image conveyed by the media was crucial to this strategy. Major news organizations helped portray an image of momentum in

32 Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Nov. 29, 1975, p.2613. & Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

33 Witcover, p.158.

34 Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

the way they ran their stories about Carter's "surprise victories" in Iowa and New Hampshire. After Iowa, Carter had interviews with the CBS Morning News, the Today Show on NBC, and ABC's "Good Morning America." The New York Times declared Carter a "major contender" while the Miami Herald said he was "the Man to Beat."³⁵ His victories in New Hampshire and Iowa gave his effort considerable credibility, while his defeat of George Wallace in the Florida primary left no doubt that he was the dominant contender from the South.

CARTER FELT NO DEBT. Virtually his entire primary campaign was viewed with hostility by the Democratic establishment in Washington. By late spring, after Jackson had dropped out of the race and Udall was floundering, the primary race had evolved into a stop-Carter movement. He achieved the nomination without feeling beholden to the Democratic Party, and he certainly did not feel indebted to traditional members of the Democratic coalition such as big labor or the Jewish community. Before late June, Carter had received few endorsements from national politicians, and none from prominent Jewish leaders. Carter understood he did not "need" the Jews to win the nomination. He said as much after his victory in Pennsylvania in late April: "We don't want to offend anybody. I don't want any more statements on the Middle East or Lebanon. Jackson has all the Jews anyway.

³⁵ Glad gives a very good description of the image painted by media sources following Carter's early victory, pp.239-241.

It doesn't matter how far I go. I don't get over four percent of the Jewish vote anyway, so forget it. We get the Christians."³⁶

While Carter understood that Jewish support began to firm up after the nomination, his frustration over his initial failure must have stayed with him. If he was going to feel indebted to a constituency group it was not likely to be one that had resisted his nomination until all alternatives were exhausted. When Carter entered the White House, he clearly knew of his limited appeal to American Jews and he might have reasoned that it was a waste of time to actively allay their fears. In short, from a practical standpoint Carter probably thought he had little to gain from lobbying American Jews energetically, since they were not a part of his loyal early coalition and an unwilling member of his November coalition.

The principal themes and underlying philosophy in Carter's campaign also militated against any major overtures to prominent constituency groups such as the Jews. Carter was known less for his specific positions than for the moral tone that his campaign struck. Tagged an economic conservative and a social liberal, Carter emphasized a small number of issues: the need for government reorganization and efficiency, reductions in defense spending, tax reform, welfare reform and the need for a national energy policy.

³⁶ Witcover, p.321; Schram, p.136. Carter denied the exact wording of this quote in his November 1976 Playboy interview, but did acknowledge that he had expressed disappointment in not gaining substantial Jewish support.

But beyond that, Carter correctly perceived that the public was more interested in personal qualities and style of leadership than specific policy positions. His dissociation from tainted Washington politics, became tied to a moral, rather than substantive, campaign: "I'll never tell a lie. I'll never make a misleading statement. His pledge was simple and seductive to an electorate searching for "a government as good and honest and decent and compassionate and filled with love as the are the American people."³⁷ The nonideological nature of his appeal allowed Carter to seem at once liberal, conservative, and moderate; he would offer individual positions on issues, but it was not wrapped in a familiar political framework. Since his appeal was directed not so much to constituency groups as it was to individuals and families, Carter had no reason to feel beholden to leaders still operating according to the old rules of Democratic politics. The Jews, much like other Democratic groups, were dealing with a president elected by an alien conception of politics.

Carter was no doubt inspired by the belief that the rules of politics had permanently changed somehow in the late 1970s. The secret to Democratic victory was no longer an appeal to discrete, but disparate, blocs of voters, but a broad-based appeal to people in general, who were longing for competent, honest government. Carter, in fact, was building on a sentiment that traditional politicians had

³⁷ Quoted in Roseboom, pp.319-320.

already acknowledged. In November 1975, politicians and theorists organized a National Democratic Issues convention in Louisville that questioned the future political appeal of "big-government liberalism." Democrats talked of a country moving beyond "the industrial era" and said "the cornerstone of all Democratic thinking -- our fundamental belief that the federal government could do all things for all people, at all times, has cracks in it."³⁸

New Deal politics certainly were not dead in 1977, and Carter did his share of appeals to labor leaders, Jewish leaders, and other power brokers in the Democratic Party. But, of all the Democrats seeking the presidency, he most embodied the attempt to shift away from coalition politics, from a pattern of politics that seemed to have lost its appeal among the electorate and belonged to a different era. Carter's political strategy and philosophy thus marked him as less susceptible to pressures from the Jewish community and as less inclined to seek out their approval. As Chapter Two notes, based on the insights of key actors inside and outside the White House, the organizational structure of the White House and Carter's style of decisionmaking would push Carter further along the same tack. Jews would have considerable access to the administration, but their concerns would not be taken seriously by a White House that was ill equipped to incorporate domestic considerations in

³⁸ Quote of Barbara Jordan in Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, "Democrats question the New Deal Tradition," November 29, 1975, p.2617.

foreign policymaking or by a president who was not inclined to "play politics as usual."

CHAPTER TWO

**THE WIDENING CONFLICT:
JANUARY 1977 - MARCH 1978**

As Jimmy Carter entered the White House in January 1977, many leaders of the American Jewish community had high hopes that this unknown quantity from rural Georgia would follow through on his campaign pledges to support Israel. Though wary of Carter's unfamiliarity with foreign affairs in general, and the Middle East in particular, Jewish leaders were optimistic that the president would continue to punctuate his calls for a peace agreement with assurances that an accord would never be imposed on Israel by the United States. Even if Carter were inclined to pressure Israel, Jewish leaders felt secure that any president's political horsesense would not let him stray too far from the Democratic trail.

In retrospect, it seems evident that Jewish leaders placed an old Democratic label on a man who could not be categorized in those terms. The first year of the Carter administration was marked by increased concern and anxiety in the community over Carter's evolving Mideast position. By late spring in 1978, the hopes of American Jewish leaders were transformed to despair and hostility. With the sale of sophisticated fighter planes to Saudi Arabia in May of that year, the burden of proof shifted -- irrevocably, as it turned out. Jimmy Carter would have to prove his loyalty to Israel, prove that he was worthy of Jewish support as he turned toward personal involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. His effort toward this end culminated in his summit at Camp David in September 1978. The intervening

months between the inauguration and and the Senate battle over the sale of jets to Saudi Arabia in May 1978 exhibit a gradual alienation of most of the Jewish community's leaders by an administration unable and often unwilling to allay their fears.

In this early period of the Carter presidency, a pattern emerges in the relationship between the administration and the Jewish community: the president oscillates between long periods of inattention to the domestic politics of his Mideast policy and brief efforts at damage control, when Carter would suddenly seem to don his political thinking cap and seek Jewish support for his initiatives. There are a number of reasons for Carter's inattention to growing political problems with Jewish leaders. I have noted Carter's belief that his victory opened the door to a non-coalition type of Democratic politics endured beyond the campaign season. This anti-interest group philosophy meshed with a second factor: Carter's often-noted personal style as a decisionmaker. Supremely self-confident and disinclined toward compromise, Carter did not take easily, or well, to conventional political lobbying; he proved far more adept as a campaigner than a coalition-builder once in office. Equipped with the analytical proclivities of an engineer and a moral imperative to evaluate solutions purely on their merits, Carter was not easily prodded into openly wooing Jewish support. Third, Carter's needlessly confrontational style

was accompanied by an organizational structure in the White House that allowed the administration's political wing only occasional influence on the policy wing. I also show that Carter's occasional efforts to woo Jewish support were often half-hearted, and occurred only after serious political damage. For all of his mistakes, Carter's overall pattern indicates that he learned little from them. For most of the administration, Carter would look at his difficulties with the Jewish community as a manageable political problem -- solvable mainly through changes in the process of decisionmaking. Little was done to alter the president's style of confrontation, of not touching base. Though upset by substantive points in the Carter policy, Jewish leaders' disapproval stemmed more from the administration's style than substance. The image of unresponsiveness and deliberate confrontation projected by the White House exacerbated community leaders' sense of foreboding.

Before treating the development of Carter's policy during this period, three background elements must be examined to give a frame of reference to the subsequent analysis: (1) the structure of the White House organization in January 1977, (2) the structure of the Jewish lobby in Washington in 1977, and (3) Carter's perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict as he took office. Once establishing who spoke to whom, the logistics of how those views were communicated to the president, and the influences on Carter's initial perception of the problem, I then focus on

how organizational and personal factors worked to exacerbate relations as the administration's policy unfolded.

WHITE HOUSE ORGANIZATION: SPOKES ON A WHEEL. The structure of the White House in 1977 reflected Carter's belief that no one aide should control access to the Oval Office or determine what papers reached the president's desk. Reacting strongly to the two previous administrations' practice of establishing a powerful chief of staff who would stand as a gatekeeper to the president, Carter opted strongly for what became known as the "spokes on a wheel" concept. A wide range of advisers, each responsible for a particular issue or administrative task, would have access to the president -- each would be an individual spoke connected to the hub of the Oval Office. Carter thus reasoned that he could never be sheltered from a particular point of view.¹

On paper the principal "spokes" were: Hamilton Jordan, assistant to the President; Jody Powell, press secretary; Stuart Eizenstat, assistant for domestic affairs; Robert Lipshutz, counsel to the president; Jack Watson, secretary to the cabinet and assistant for intergovernmental affairs; Frank Moore, assistant for congressional liaison; Midge Costanza, assistant for public liaison; Zbigniew Brzezinski, assistant for national security; and Vice-President Mondale. Jordan and Powell, by far the closest to Carter and his most

¹ R. Gordon Hoxie, "Staffing the Ford and Carter Presidencies," Presidential Studies Quarterly, Summer 1980, pp.384-386.

trusted political advisors, quickly emerged as the chief spokes. His role ill-defined, Jordan became the resident grand strategist, mapping out tactics for legislative efforts and policy initiatives. Working with the range of White House assistants, Jordan performed a balancing act for the president, supplying advice based on his involvement with different actors. Jordan became the unofficial authority for assistants with such disparate responsibilities as Appointments Secretary Tim Kraft and liason Frank Moore.

As more memorandums were routed through his office and his reputation as the chief political advisor grew, Jordan also became a key bridge for support groups outside the White House, including leading Jewish organizations.² Powell, while never a principal conduit for Jewish contact, was perhaps the adviser most sensitive to the president's political fortunes; as such he became a principal in discussions about the Middle East as it became a focus of the president's attention in the middle of 1978. As is noted below, however, the political wing of the White House only had intermittent involvement with foreign policy questions during the early period.

On the surface, Jordan's role as master strategist seemed to provide a sense of coherence to an administrative network that could lack coordination. His growing role was

² See Haynes Johnson, In the Absence of Power (New York: Viking, 1980), Chapter One. Also, Interview with Morris J. Amitay, former executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee; 28 February 1985, Washington, D.C.

seen as a counterweight to the danger that the President might receive an impressionistic smattering of advice or could not coordinate different arms of the White House. As Carter's first year of domestic policy bore out, however, coordination was hardly the watchword at the White House -- as the administration aborted initiatives on government reorganization, tax reform, welfare reform, to name just a few. But matters were even worse for Mideast questions, which remained almost completely outside Jordan's purview. For most of 1977, Jordan received little, if any, of the paper flow from Brzezinski to Carter; he did not even sit in on many foreign policy discussions. Jordan's involvement in Mideast policy was minimal at the outset and only increased after Carter had suffered political damage in the community. Thus, the president's chief political advisor at the outset had to play a reactive, not predictive, role on the political handling of Mideast questions; even though he became a chief conduit for Jewish leaders, he remained only peripheral to the process for most of the first year. Thus Jewish leaders were able to have access to the inner circle of presidential advisors and still have remarkably limited

influence on the formation of policy.³ This dichotomy of substantial outside contact but little inside influence (during the early period) carried over beyond Powell and Jordan. Prominent Jews in the Carter organization, who could have provided additional contacts to the community, were also shut out from the policy discussion. Eizenstat, respected as a brilliant domestic advisor and known to be a strong supporter of Israel in the administration, was consulted only intermittently by Carter during the early period.⁴ Lipshutz was not knowledgeable at all on Israeli affairs and was hardly ever inclined to use his potentially influential position to convey apprehension in the Jewish community. "He views the Jewish community and its problems

3 Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984, Washington, D.C. Siegel was Hamilton Jordan's Deputy Assistant for Policy Analysis -- his political deputy. He took on the additional role of liaison to the Jewish community after March 1977, and he resigned from the White House in March 1978 over disagreements concerning the proposed sale of advanced fighter planes to Saudi Arabia. I rely heavily on his insights for an inside view of the White House policy-making process. Despite the risk that his views may reflect those of a somewhat disgruntled and bitter adviser, I have chosen to accept most of his analysis because his assessment seems consistent with general descriptions of Carter's style as related by administration loyalists. Also, much of the factual information about the process inside the White House is not in written sources, and I assumed that on factual questions (ie. who spoke to whom, when did x meeting happen, what was Jordan's advice, etc.) Siegel's account could be trusted. Third, and perhaps most compelling, Siegel's insights in my interview are consistent by those in his interview with the Columbia Oral History Project, led by Dr. Judith Goldstein. Three out of the four of Goldstein's separate interviews with Siegel were made before he resigned -- and were barred from public viewing until the late 1990s. Mr. Siegel allowed me access to these records. Thus they bear out the same attitudes as those expressed to me -- and he was still a member of the administration.

4 Interview with Stuart Eizenstat, 11 August 1984, Washington, D.C.

very much like a southern Christian views the northeastern establishment. He has suspicions, he has a narrow, parochial, limited perception,"⁵ noted Rabbi Alexander Schindler, chairman of the President's Conference during Carter's period of intense involvement in the Middle East. noted. Also, Walter Mondale, an important connection to Hubert Humphrey's base of support in the Jewish community; by all accounts, seems to have been the most sensitive of any of Carter's high advisers to damaging support in the Jewish community. Though he overstated the dichotomy and meant it as a jibe to Mondale, Brzezinski noted in his memoirs that, "Carter rarely, if ever, thought of foreign policy in terms of domestic politics, while Mondale rarely, if ever, thought of it otherwise."⁶ However, at the outset, he, like Powell, had limited involvement on Mideast questions; in the pre-1978 period, he had a reputation for a willingness to criticize Israel, but this dissipated as Carter's problems with the community increased.

⁵ Interview with Rabbi Alexander Schindler, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, on December 22, 1977; by Dr. Judith Goldstein. Columbia Oral History Project, Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy. P. 21 of transcript. It should also be noted that the liason office itself in the White House, run first by Costanza, and later by Anne Wexler, were not involved with Jewish community affairs. Contacts with the White House were more informal, going through Mondale, Eizenstat, Jordan. Official Jewish liasons worked out of either Jordan's office (Mark Siegel) or maintained separate offices in the White House (Edward Sanders and Alfred Moses).

⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), p.35.

In addition to the general aloofness of the political wing from policy discussions, Jewish leaders also had to contend with an administration predisposed not to pay obeisance to traditional Democratic politics -- Carter's notion that his victory was a harbinger of a new Democratic coalition was clearly viewed in the White House as more than campaign rhetoric. Carter dismantled Gerald Ford's elaborate liason structure, arguing that his policies were going to be arrived at openly. "There was a deliberate decision not to have a Jewish desk as such, or any ethnic desk" early in the administration, Mark Siegel noted.⁷ Siegel, a former member of Hubert Humphrey's staff who was known to have the most extensive ties to the Jewish leadership of any senior advisor, was Jordan's political deputy but did not even deal with the Jewish community at the outset. "There were no ethnic desks at that point. An ethnic desk is not just a physical thing, it's a mind-set. So there wasn't even that mind-set."⁸

Carter's decision not to have an ethnic desk posed a severe problem for Jewish leaders seeking to influence the initial policy discussion: the lack of an obvious focal point for communicating the "Jewish view," however diverse the view, meant that no single advisor was getting an assessment of Carter's overall popularity in the Jewish community. Jewish leaders faced an ideological wall difficult to scale; their views were not taken as seriously

⁷ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984, Washington, D.C.

⁸ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

as they would have been by a more traditional politician. Organizational remedies would be attempted within the administration, but problems in communication and coordination would persist; rather than correct the root of the problem -- unnecessary confrontation -- Carter would adopt an easier, and less effective, "quick-fix" approach of tinkering with the flow chart of the decisionmaking process.

WHICH JEWISH LOBBY? The term "Jewish lobby" conjures an image of a unified structure in Washington representing the interests and views of all American Jews. Congressmen who have ever challenged Jewish activists on, for example, levels of U.S. aid for Israel, have often described the lobby as a monolithic, pervasive power that can coordinate a response from Jews around the nation.⁹ This description, however, is only partly accurate. While capable of remarkably coordinated action and connected to extensive grass roots organizations around the country, the lobby is hardly the unified behemoth described by its detractors. Nor can it be said to represent accurately the views of all of the nation's six million Jews. There are, in fact, some three dozen national Jewish organizations which spend at least some time lobbying on behalf of Israel-related issues. Fewer than ten people in Washington are formally registered

⁹ A good treatment of Jewish pressure on Congress during the early Carter administration is in The Wall Street Journal, "Israeli Lobby in U.S. gains repute for zeal and overzealousness," July 5, 1977, p.1. Also good is William Lanouette, "The Faces of the Jewish Lobby in America," National Journal, May 13, 1978.

lobbyists for Israel.¹⁰ Different organizations also represent a range of political views among Jews, from a very liberal, accommodationist view concerning Israel's peace efforts, to hard-line support reluctant to engage in any kind of criticism of Israel's policies. At the same time, the community is hardly atomized; umbrella organizations do provide opportunities for formal coordination of resources. Further, formal structures are not always necessary because organizations will often agree on positions without conferring. For example, on issues such as foreign aid, organizations need little formal consultation to agree on a common position.

Jewish organizations are separated by the focus of their activity: some concentrate their activities in Congress -- where aid levels are the central topic of debate -- while others target the White House, which centers more on resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. At the same time, no major Jewish lobbying organization limits its target completely. In short, an accurate picture of the Jewish lobby in Washington would show a multi-faceted, politically diverse, roughly coordinated body of activists who wield considerable influence in different segments of the Jewish community, and who can apply formidable pressure on a small range of basic points on which they agree. However, despite the community's diversity, it is possible to identify principal actors within the lobby. "Before we can

¹⁰ U.S. News and World Report, "Israel's Potent Lobby Faces Biggest Test," March 27, 1978, p.25.

examine the relationship between the community and the administration, we need a more specific sense of who in American Jewry did most of the talking.

The best known organized Jewish lobbying organization is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which concentrates its efforts on Capital Hill and the debate over aid levels for Israel. Led during the Carter administration by Morris J. Amitay, AIPAC nominally draws its strength from its 15,000 members (now over 50,000) and its budget of about \$750,000. However, much of its influence comes from informal contacts with Jewish leaders around the country and many non-Jews who are considered "friends of Israel."¹¹ They may be called on to contact representatives directly when important legislation comes up for vote. Within 72 hours, AIPAC can mobilize thousands of people to write telegrams or call key congressmen or the White House to pressure for the "right" vote or the "right" policy statement. As is noted later, this happened quite often at the Carter White House. In addition, AIPAC had close ties with an informal group of congressional staffers who were pro-Israel -- including top advisers to Senators Henry Jackson, (D-Wash.); Jacob Javits, (D-N.Y.); and Clifford Case, (R-N.J.); and of course, Hubert Humphrey, (D-Minn.). Because of the range of AIPAC's influence, Amitay also had easy access to senior advisers in the White House. Amitay's

¹¹ A good outline of the major Jewish lobbying organizations can be found in Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, "Israel Lobby: A Strong But Nebulous Force," August 30, 1975, pp.1871-1875.

principal contacts were Walter Mondale, Hamilton Jordan, Mark Siegel, and, later in the administration, Edward Sanders and Alfred Moses (liasons to the Jewish community).¹²

The most important Jewish lobbying organization to deal directly with the White House is the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, known simply as the Presidents' Conference. It was founded in 1955 in response to a request by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who did not have time to see leaders of individual organizations. An umbrella body of 32 of the leading national Jewish organizations, the Presidents' Conference was chaired by Rabbi Alexander Schindler during Carter's term. Schindler, the leader of the nation's Reform Jewish congregations, communicated to the White House policy statements approved by the entire conference, thus giving the president the unified view of many, if not most, leading Jewish activists.

The conference includes most of the principal national Jewish organizations: AIPAC, Bnai Brith and its Anti-Defamation League (500,000 members), Haddassah (the world's largest volunteer womens' organization), the conservative World Zioninst Organization, and the liberal American Jewish Congress. The chairman of the group communicates not views of individual members, but an agreed-upon policy approved by the collective body. Its chairmanship rotates among the

¹² Interview with Morris J. Amitay, 28 February 1985, Washington, D.C.

member organizations. During the Carter presidency, Schindler would acquire a reputation as a conciliator, someone who sought to soften occasionally harsh words from the White House while avoiding a showdown between American Jews and Carter.¹³

The last major Jewish organization with connections to the White House was the somewhat elitist American Jewish Committee. The committee, founded at the turn of the century by leaders of the affluent German Jewish community, is not a member of the Presidents' Conference. Its 40,000 members include wealthy lawyers, doctors, and businessmen. (Alfred Moses, Carter's liaison to the Jewish community late in the administration, was an officer of the AJC national board and a prominent lawyer in the Washington law firm of Covington and Burling.) Hyman Bookbinder, the Washington lobbyist of the AJC since 1967, said the group's independence gives it freedom of action; his ties in the administration were the same as those of Schindler and Amitay: Mondale, Jordan, Eizenstat, the successive Jewish liaisons, and occasionally Robert Lipshutz.¹⁴

¹³ William Lanouette, "The Many Faces of the Jewish Lobby in America," National Journal, 13 May 1978, pp.752-753. Also see Edward Bernard Glick, The Triangular Connection: America, Israel, and American Jews, (London: George Allen & UNWIN, 1982), pp.96-100.

¹⁴ Lanouette, National Journal, 13 May 1978, p.754. It is important to note the nature of the evidence that will be use to cite influence of the Jewish lobby. While such publications as the Near East Report -- AIPAC's official newsletter -- give are a convenient source for the public positions of a key pressure group, much of the communication between the lobby and the administration is private and informal. Therefore, much of my information is drawn from interviews and memoirs of the principal actors.

CARTER'S OPENING STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. The peculiar structure of the White House organization made it likely that Jewish leaders would have considerable access without necessarily having much influence. This problem might not have proved so worrisome to American Jews if Carter had firm pro-Israel leanings when he entered office or was at least conversant with Middle East affairs. As Georgia governor, however, Carter had very limited contact with Middle East affairs. While he said all the politically correct statements during his campaign, he entered the White House largely a "tabula rasa," as Mark Siegel described it. That tabula rasa would eventually be filled in largely by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who would become Carter's chief educator on Middle East affairs and, indeed, foreign policy in general. An examination of Carter's initial views on the Middle East gives a sense of the mind-set the Jewish lobby was up against at the very start of the administration, as well as the obstacles the political wing of the administration faced.

Jimmy Carter had been to Israel while governor of Georgia in 1973 and had met Golda Meir. Mark Siegel, then working at the Democratic National Committee, recalls that Carter came back from that trip extremely hard-line; he said Israel could never give up the Golan Heights and "he understood the security concerns of keeping the West Bank."¹⁵ Pointing to marginal Arab political strength in the

¹⁵ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

South and to Carter's religious affinity for the Holy Land, Hodding Carter noted that "like all Southern politicians, Jimmy Carter was 100 per cent on Israel."¹⁶ However it was clear to Siegel that these "were not long-held views," nor were they born of extensive exposure to the area. Jody Powell agreed that the trip to Israel had little bearing on Carter's long-range thinking; the trip was useful for a potential candidate because "it would be good to say you had been to Israel" but the trip was sponsored by pro-Israel supporters in the U.S. and "anybody in public life tends to be wary of sell jobs."¹⁷

Carter himself dates his public position on the Middle East to May or June 1975, when he made a speech at a public meeting in Tokyo. Touching on the need for respect for Palestinian rights, he "made a very strong statement basically along the lines that I adopted when I was in the White House."¹⁸ However, Carter's views remained largely unsettled in his mind until after his victory in November, when he decided that the Mideast would be an area of primary concern to his administration. Carter's assertion of pro-Israel support during the campaign was born of limited knowledge about the issue; he was simply following standard Democratic rhetoric. There was little passion to his remarks; indeed, the only passion in Carter's platform

¹⁶ Interview with W. Hodding Carter III, 27 July 1984; American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷ Interview with Jody Powell, 14 August 1984; Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ Interview with former President Jimmy Carter, 22 October 1984; Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.

seemed to be in his human rights policy, which would come into conflict with Carter's initial, but vague, perceptions about the Arab-Israeli conflict.

As Jimmy Carter began to formulate a substantive policy on the Mideast, he supplanted this superficial assessment of the conflict with a reasoned, scientific analysis. His style of decisionmaking -- a cold, rational, problem-solving approach. Through this approach to problems -- usually devoid of political calculations -- Carter came to largely accept the views of his chief educator on the Mideast question, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Carter took to the problem the way a former engineer from the Navy would (Carter's training and its influence on his political style is treated in the last chapter). He described his method of attacking difficult problems:

The exact procedure is derived to some degree from my scientific or engineering background. I like to first study all the efforts that have been made . . . to bring together ideas from as wide or divergent points of view as possible, to assimilate them personally or with a small staff . . . I make a general decision about what should be done involving time schedules, necessity for legislation, executive acts, publicity to be focussed on the issue. Then I like to assign task forces to work on different aspects of the problem, and I like to be personally involved so that I know the thought processes that go into the final decisions...."¹⁹

Carter, was obsessed with understanding the details of a problem, paring it down until the bare bones of the issue lay before him -- and then proposing sweeping changes, not

¹⁹ Laurence E. Lynn, Jr., and David deF. Whitman, The President as Policymaker: Jimmy Carter and Welfare Reform, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), p.262.

incremental reforms. No where in his thinking did he make a point of selling it to specific groups of supporters. Rather, he felt most comfortable evaluating a problem in private, finding "the" answer, and then letting the plan sell itself through its own common sense and rightness. Much of his wariness of interest groups lay in his very affinity for "comprehensive solutions" -- a familiar phrase in the Carter vocabulary. (During the campaign, Carter repeatedly expressed his preference for an "overall settlement rather than resume Mr. Kissinger's step-by-step approach."²⁰); only overall solutions served the public interest in Carter's view and they were inevitably opposed by private interests with more limited concerns and desires to deflect public awareness.²¹ Paired with his inclination not to woo interest groups, Carter's methodical decisionmaking style beckoned for a clear, seemingly-nonpartisan analysis of the conflict conveyed by a trusted, dispassionate educator (in the sense of not being wedded to a special interest). He found his mentor in Zbigniew Brzezinski, whom he had met during their days on the Trilateral Commission in 1973. It was Brzezinski, far more than Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who influenced Carter's thinking on the issue.²² More importantly, Carter's confrontationalist style was taken from Brzezinski, who was known to favor applying "U.S.

²⁰ U.S. News and World Report, 26 July 1976, p.18.

²¹ Jimmy Carter, Why Not The Best?, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1975), pp.89-92.

²² Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984. Also interview with Hodding Carter, 27 July 1984; Washington, D.C.

leverage" to foster a peace settlement, and was continually advising Carter to display toughness and resoluteness, above all else.²³ The document that shaped Carter's early thinking was a Brookings Report on the Arab-Israeli conflict, "Toward Peace in the Middle East," authored principally by Brzezinski and William Quandt in 1975, along with prominent American Jews. The report argued for a Palestinian "entity" on the West Bank in affiliation with Jordan, with assurances for Israeli security. Palestinian rights had to be respected and fulfilled, the document wrote, noting that this stability was in Israel's long term interest. Finally, the document concluded an "activist" U.S. foreign policy was necessary to bring a "comprehensive solution" to the conflict.²⁴ Consistent with study's recommendations, Carter would seek a reconvening of the Geneva Middle East Conference started by Henry Kissinger during his shuttle diplomacy after the October 1973 war. "The Brookings study became Carter's bible for the Middle East in the early part of the administration... he read it before January 1977,"

23 Alexander Schindler recalls Brzezinski justifying the imposition of a peace agreement on governments too weak to accept them: "(He said) if a government is too weak to effect its good judgement for domestic reasons, then we have to impose and give that country's leadership the excuse which they need in order to sell a program to their people." Quoted in interview with Schindler, Columbia Oral History Project, p. 10 of transcript.

24 Specifically, the report said: "We believe that, in exchange for the assured establishment of peaceful relations with its neighbors and suitable security arrangements, Israel should and would agree to withdraw to the June 5, 1967 lines, with only such minor modifications as might be mutually accepted." Quoted in The American Jewish Year Book 1979, (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1980), p.121.

recalled Eizenstat, who was Carter's Issues Coordinator during the presidential campaign.²⁵ This growing belief in a need for Israeli withdrawal, subject to several preconditions, meshed with Carter's human rights ideas; "his own civil rights and human rights concepts were stirred on the Palestinian situation. He had a sensitivity to the underdog and their disenfranchisement."²⁶ As Carter wrote in his memoirs, "To deny these rights was an indefensible position for a free and democratic society, and I promised to do my best to seek resolution of problems like these, no matter where they might be found."²⁷

After digesting the Brookings report in late 1977, Carter seems to have begun a slow change in his tone in evaluating the problem. While during the campaign he stressed the need for Israeli security, this would be supplanted by language more "even-handed" -- the latter term is a State Department buzzword interpreted by most Jewish leaders to mean a tilt away from support for Israel. Israeli withdrawal to pre-1967 borders "with minor modifications" and recognition of Palestinian "legitimate rights" was necessary -- less emphasis was placed on a need for "defensible borders" or acceptance of U.N. Resolution 242 by the P.L.O.

²⁵Interview with Stuart Eizenstat, 16 August 1984; Washington, D.C.

²⁶ Interview with Stuart Eizenstat, 16 August 1984; Washington, D.C.

²⁷ Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President, (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), p.277.

"as a basis for future negotiations."²⁸ In this murky area of diplomacy, the choice of words sends tremendously powerful signals to all the major actors. It was more a change of emphasis than a change in policy that upset Jewish leaders. While Jewish leaders might have been upset by the report's language, its notion of withdrawal from territory in exchange for peace was consistent with U.N. Resolution 242 which Israel accepted. Carter had made little, if any, substantive change in previous U.S. policy that would alienate the community. But it was that subtle shift toward a combative vernacular that would court confrontation with the Jewish community in 1977. Carter's belief that he had found the right way to view the problem, his disregard for interest groups, and his distaste for politics would encourage a stylistic change that discouraged Jewish leaders. Thus in January 1977, the strong, but amorphous Jewish lobby in Washington had to contend with an administrative structure that militated against their having influence, as well as a President who was being educated to

²⁸ Resolution 242, passed in the Security Council after the cease fire of the Six Day War in 1967, calls for "termination of all claims on states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace with secured and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force." It also calls for withdrawal from "territories occupied" by armed forces -- notice it doesn't say "the territories," thus leaving open the option of boundary adjustment. In any case, the Resolution stands as an implicit recognition of the right of the State of Israel to exist. At the moment the P.L.O. had not accepted the document; the second article of the Palestinian National Charter (the P.L.O.'s constitution) calls for the destruction of Israel.

portray a style that would needlessly heighten tensions with the Jewish community. These two elements were central to the way policy unfolded in Carter's first year.

AN UNCERTAIN START: JANUARY-MARCH 1977. Carter wasted little time in sending conflicting signals to Jewish leaders. Cyrus Vance, in leaving for the Mideast in late January, made a moderate statement urging a return to Geneva and restating U.S. refusal to speak with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (P.L.O.) as long as it didn't recognize Israel or accept Resolution 242. However, Carter made a number of provocative moves. On Feb. 17, he cancelled the sale of 250 CBU-72 cluster bombs which had been promised to Israel, arguing that the weapons were too extreme to be sold. A week later, he blocked the sale of Israeli-made Kfir C-2 fighter planes to Ecuador (the U.S. had the right to do so because the Kfir's engine was American-made). At the same time, Carter approved an increase in aid to Israel by \$285 million. However, the State Department in mid-February publically rebuked Israel on the eve of Vance's arrival for drilling for oil in the Gulf of Suez. There were also leaks of reports that Israel had illegally acquired American uranium to develop nuclear weapons.²⁹ Jewish leaders, pleased by Vance's statement and the aid decision, attributed these more disturbing statements as a sign of bureaucratic resistance; the Near East Report, AIPAC'S

²⁹ For a good account of principal events in Mideast policy, see American Jewish Year Book, an annual volume. See section entitled "United States, Israel, and the Middle East."

newsletter, noted that the questionable decisions occurred because "U.S. policy in the Middle East seems to reflect lower-level decision-making without sufficient input from the top. ... We hope that the new leadership will take up the reigns of government more firmly -- the sooner, the better."³⁰

It was much too early in the administration for Jewish leaders to become concerned by these minor incidents. Two developments in March 1977, however, stirred serious concern and reveal much about Carter's attitude domestic politics. First, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin met with the president early in the month, and reiterated Israel's pledge to incorporate "territorial compromise." Carter, to the approval of Jewish leaders, called for "defensible borders" as part of any agreement. However, following the meeting, leaks to the press were made by "sources close to the president" saying the meeting had gone badly, and were very disparaging towards Rabin; the "source" of the comments was Brzezinski, according to Siegel.³¹ Shortly after the meeting, Carter backtracked on his "defensible borders" statement and called for only "minor adjustments" in the 1967 borders; he also went on to describe the extent of Israeli presence in a future West Bank entity after "substantial withdrawal." Israel was greatly upset by the statement because it viewed it as an undermining of their bargaining position. In the parlance of Mideast diplomacy,

³⁰ The Near East Report, editorial; February 16, 1977, p.25.

³¹ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

this subtle change in wording, coupled with the leaks about Rabin, marked the beginning of Jewish apprehension about Carter's Mideast course.³²

The next serious jar to Jewish confidence in the Carter policy came on March 16, 1977, when the president, at a town meeting in Clinton, Massachusetts, called for a "homeland" for the Palestinians, recognizing the "legitimate rights" of the Palestinian people. While this statement was no different from what Carter had been saying during the campaign it was the first time a president had called for a "homeland." The very term was a buzzword for "state" and leading members of the Jewish community were extremely upset. "There was a real uproar in the Jewish community about this first endorsement by an American president for a Palestinian state. ... People understood it as a Palestinian state, which would be a threat to Israel."³³

Carter's initial policy seem to have been born of an intention to challenge the accepted limits of debate -- his actions cannot be attributed to unintentional political insensitivity. Powell says Carter wanted to "shake things up" at the beginning of his term, and that the "homeland" reference was part of that effort³⁴ -- that the president made his remarks at the same time that the P.L.O.'s ruling body, the Palestine National Council, was meeting in Cairo was not seen as accidental. Brzezinski had told Carter that

32 Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

33 Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

34 Interview with Jody Powell, 14 August 1984; Washington, D.C.

the President's first year affords him the the most leverage for new initiatives in the Middle East. Carter, at this point, acceded to the idea that confrontation and forcefulness would advance the peace process; as far as can be gathered, he either did not think of domestic reaction to his shake up, or didn't care.

In any case, he made no effort to "retract" the reference or its perceived implication. A prominent Jew, Rita Hauser, a supporter of Ford in the 1976 election and a co-author of the Brookings Report, recalls telling Brzezinski in late March that American Jews might look on continued homeland-type rhetoric as a prelude to a betrayal. Brzezinski said the president would prefer not to challenge American Jews, but would accept a confrontation. Told that a confrontation was in the offing if the president did not consult more with Jewish leaders before issuing policy statements, Brzezinski responded that "if there was a confrontation, Carter was prepared to face it down, and that he would go to the whole American people and explain the American interest and the Jews had to understand that."³⁵

Though Carter seemed to lean toward confrontation, following the fallout after the "homeland" reference, he appointed Siegel the official Jewish liason for the administration. "Carter at that point said that he realized the Middle East was a domestic political issue ... that if

³⁵ Interview with Rita Hauser, 27 January 1978; by Dr. Judith Goldstein. Columbia University Oral History Project, "Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy," pp.24-25 of transcript.

he was going to succeed on the Middle East he was going to have to have a close and informed dialogue with the American Jewish community.... He wanted the community to understand his policies. He kept stressing that he was a friend, ... a friend of the Jews and he wanted to be trusted."³⁶ Having been told by Jordan of his political problems in the community, Carter seemed at this point ready to consult, or at least touch base, with the community. However, despite the fact that Carter responded to Jordan's political assessment, despite his belief that Jews would support him if they "understood" his policies, he reverted to a confrontational style after March 1977. Furthermore, Siegel's new position -- nominally a two-way channel between the White House and the community -- would become a vehicle for selling Carter's policy, not consultation. Jordan still remained outside the Mideast policy loop, thus limiting Siegel's ability to flag potential disturbances in the relationship before they developed.

Carter's apparent mid-course correction of appointing Siegel as liaison to the Jewish community was at least a recognition of his growing political problems. However, what did this recognition consist of? It didn't mean that Carter would incorporate advice from Jewish leaders into his thinking. It didn't mean that Carter would try to reform his style to assuage Jewish fears. The appointment of Siegel was not an acknowledgment of faulty packaging, and it certainly

³⁶ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

was not an apology for using the "homeland" reference. In fact, its meaning was much more limited: simply, Carter thought that if he explained his policies -- rationally laid them before the community -- Jewish leaders would not dwell on matters of style or language because it would be understood that Carter was not an enemy.³⁷ In short, Carter did not learn from this first encounter with Jewish disapproval that he had to package his initiatives properly so as not to alienate leaders of the Jewish community. Once again, his style, coached by the ever tough-minded Brzezinski, would turn combative.

In early April, Carter met Anwar Sadat for the first time, and became convinced that the Egyptian leader was willing to be flexible in negotiations. In his memoirs, Carter makes a point of his willingness to forego political obstacles for the sake of peace: "I tried to convince (Sadat) that I was willing to face any political risks to reach a settlement."³⁸ Though this could have been simple posturing, Carter might have been moved to this view by two perceptions. First, he detected a dichotomy between private and public statements of Jewish leaders, citing their willingness to discuss terms for peace and accommodation behind close doors³⁹; no doubt this sense of division would

³⁷ Siegel, and others, notably Eizenstat and Powell, have repeatedly observed that Carter's moves at correcting misperceptions were done despite an abiding dislike for politics; the point here is that even when Carter seemed to be acting politically, his aims and motives were hardly political in a traditional sense.

³⁸ Carter, Memoirs, p.284.

³⁹ Carter, Memoirs, pp.286-287.

have given Carter reason to not be as sensitive as he might to Jewish fears since they wouldn't reflect a firm, vigorous apprehension. Second, Carter continued to operate on the notion that his electoral coalition was different from traditional Democrats'; in May 1977, Caddell sent the president a memorandum outlining a novel political strategy. Caddell wrote that a new white collar, college educated middle class was the largest rising group in the population; thus traditional blue collar working class politics would no longer be effective. Carter came to view politics as a matter of seeking general public and congressional support for issues like controlling inflation and energy policy, and no longer a matter of building alliances "with a coalition of politically mobilized social groupings."⁴⁰ AIPAC'S Morris Amitay observed that Carter's unconventional populist philosophy was believed, wrongly, to be simple campaign rhetoric: "What we didn't realize is how untraditional a Democrat Carter was. So that even though we had a lot of access ... there was very little influence because he just wasn't listening to traditional people with experience in (the Mideast). He just seemed to go off on his own particular tangent."⁴¹

In any case, Carter did not make a serious effort to rebuild his political bridges after Clinton. He shook hands with the P.L.O. representative at a reception at the United

⁴⁰ Amitai Etzioni, "The Domestic Carter: Avoiding Interest Groups," Current, February 1979, p.27.

⁴¹ Interview with Morris J. Amitay, 28 February 1985; Washington, D.C.

Nations the day after the town meeting -- a breach of U.S. protocol. After his desultory meetings with Rabin back in March, and hopeful meetings in April with Sadat and King Hussein of Jordan, and Syria's Hafez al-Assad in early May, Carter seemed to raise fears in the community about the possibility of an imposed settlement on Israel. Just before the meeting with Assad, Carter told European journalists: "I would not hesitate if I saw clearly a fair and equitable solution to use the full strength of our own country and its persuasive powers to bring those nations to agreement."⁴² Secretary Vance told reporters in early May that the U.S. would make "suggestions on all the core issues," noting that there was little difference between a U.S. peace plan and "suggestions": "Whether you want to call it a comprehensive plan or not is a question that gets into semantics. We will have suggestions on all the core issues."⁴³ Despite disclaimers that these remarks did not portend an imposed settlement, Jewish leaders were not moved. AIPAC's Morris Amitay wrote that "such denials are not all that convincing, given the contrary impression left by the original expressions"; he cited further evidence of a pro-Arab tilt in a May national security (Brzezinski) memorandum recommending that Israel no longer be a preferred nation eligible to receive advanced U.S. weaponry -- the president would have to approve a waiver for significant arms sales to

⁴² Near East Report, May 11, 1977, p.73.

⁴³ Near East Report, May 11, 1977, p.73.

Israel on a case-by-case basis.⁴⁴ In this climate Walter Mondale's speech in late May to Jewish leaders in San Francisco to allay their fears failed. Though he assured leaders that the U.S. will not impose a peace, he was criticized for his description of Brzezinski's thesis that "security arrangements" would be separated from "recognized borders" and allow Israel to withdraw to pre-1967 borders. The very mention of U.S. preferences was seen to undercut Israel's bargaining position and compromise the U.S. role as an honest broker.⁴⁵ The growing threat of an imposed settlement represented another example of the President's style stirring anxiety in the Jewish leadership unnecessarily. It was not necessary for the U.S. to publically announce that it would have its own suggestions for a peace agreement; and if they had announced it, they could have at least couched in rhetoric stressing Israeli security. In short, alienation of Jewish leaders did not come from any quantum leap in policy, but from an ignorance or an inattention to the effects of its combative, activist style. What Carter saw as leverage through forcefulness, the Jews saw as a real tilt in basic tenets of U.S. policy in the region.

June also brought new cause for worry. In a news conference on May 26, Carter raised the idea -- long presumed defunct -- that Palestinians should be "compensated for losses they have suffered," and mistakenly argued that

⁴⁴ Near East Report, May 11, 1977, p.73.

⁴⁵ American Jewish Year Book 1979, p.136.

U.N. Security Council resolutions mention compensation and the need for a Palestinian homeland; though clarifications by State retreated from this position, Carter's revival of even the very idea of compensation "must be viewed as a blunder of major proportions. The Israeli public, already justifiably worried over the dangerous inconsistencies in U.S. policy, fears a return to the one-sided, 1957-style pressure tactics,"⁴⁶ Amitay wrote. In late June, the State Department issued a disturbing clarifying statement on U.S. policy in the Middle East. Emphasis was placed not on Israeli security, but on the need for withdrawal: Resolution 242 "means withdrawal from all three fronts in the Middle East dispute ... the exact borders and security arrangements being agreed in negotiations ... without preconditions from any side. (To exclude territory) strikes us as contradictory to the principle of negotiations without preconditions."⁴⁷ Though a seemingly innocuous statement changing little, it was interpreted as further sign of an impending imposed settlement -- purely because of the kind of language used. Again, if the political wing had had greater access to developments in foreign policy, these difficulties might have been flagged down before it was made public. However, Carter continued to be resistant; furthermore, as is noted later, foreign policy staffers -- Brzezinski, especially -- entertained a certain hostility toward the political

⁴⁶ Near East Report, June 1, 1977, p.87.

⁴⁷ American Jewish Year Book 1979, pp.136-137.

strategists. It was only after Jordan's insistence much later in the year that political aides had greater input.

As Carter prepared to meet the newly elected Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin, in mid July, he once again sought to rally Jewish support to his cause. Aware of his political problems in the community, he sensed that his success in assuaging Jewish anxiety would help smooth relations between himself and the right-wing Begin. "I had to repair my damaged political base among Israel's American friends," he wrote.⁴⁸ Carter the politician now convinced Hubert Humphrey in early June to support the administration's policies: "It was necessary for someone outside my administration to give me public support. There was one man who was trusted by everyone as a friend of Israel, whom I knew to be wise and knowledgeable about the controversial issues in the Middle East. ... Hubert Humphrey."⁴⁹ Carter invited Rabbi Schindler and 40 other American Jewish leaders to the White House on July 6. He made impassioned pledges that any Middle East peace would not threaten Israel's security and that the U.S. would never impose a settlement.⁵⁰ The meeting capped a month-long effort by Carter, Mondale, Lipshutz, Eizenstat and Siegel, who met with Jewish leaders around the country, to sell the administration's policy; Carter had not retracted the basic line of his policy. He was simply changing the language --

⁴⁸ Carter, p.290.

⁴⁹ Carter, p.288.

⁵⁰ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

he thus effected a merely stylistic change, indicating that his position, if presented properly, would not have been rejected by American Jewish leaders. "We've talked too much about borders and haven't talked enough about peace," a White House aide said.⁵¹ Schindler, who saw the meeting as a success, wanted to avoid creating a spirit of confrontation on the eve of Begin's meeting with Carter, as well as counter efforts to divide the Jewish community before Begin's arrival: "We had heard that there might be some attempt to splinter the Jewish community, to find Jews who agreed with them ... You can't (splinter the community)."⁵² By July 1977, then, Jewish leaders had begun to sense the administration's confrontational style and believe that it was emanating not from faceless bureaucrats at State, but from the inner circle of the White House and the president himself.

The meeting did reassure many Jewish leaders, but also cultivated an image of a president who would respond to pressure: Sol Linowitz, a prominent Democratic Jewish lawyer, told Vance that "the word is out in the Jewish community that if they press hard enough, the president will yield."⁵³ This was far from the image the president wished to project; while he wanted to enlist Jewish support, he saw himself as merely explaining his own policies, not backtracking on existing policy. In fact, at the same time

⁵¹ Newsweek, "Jimmy woos the Jews," July 18, 1977, p.22.

⁵² Interview with Alexander Schindler, Columbia Oral History, p.23 of transcript.

⁵³ BRZEZINSKI, p.97.

as Carter's meeting with Jewish leaders, the president was also contemplating the effects of a possible break with the Jewish community; he concluded that it would be too divisive and "was not necessary at this stage."⁵⁴ Around the same time, he also remarked that he "was willing to lose the presidency for the sake of genuine peace in the Middle East, and I think he was sincere," Brzezinski wrote.⁵⁵

Once again Carter had given in to pressure to reach out to the Jewish community. But, again, this effort did not endure past the rather harmonious Begin meeting in late July. Carter's commitment to moving on the Mideast problem and his disdain for couching his rhetoric behind the appropriate buzzwords put him on a collision course with American Jews once again. He was no doubt encouraged by his perception -- an accurate one, too -- that American Jews were themselves very uncertain about Menachem Begin's settlement policy in the West Bank and support for Israel seemed less firm than usual for Israeli-Diaspora relations. "The settlements policy," Siegel said, "is seen as an irritant and an obstacle and that Israeli's white hat is slowly turning at least grey and maybe black. I have told (Jordan and Carter) that in the American Jewish community there is great ambivalence and differing views on the settlements policy."⁵⁶ The route that summer toward the next

54 Brzezinski, p.97.

55 Brzezinski, p.97.

56 Interview with Mark Siegel, Columbia Oral History Project; interview dated 8 February 1978, by Dr. Judith Goldstein. P.13 of transcript.

political blunder, the October 1 communique with the Soviet Union, indicated that the President was still unwilling to play "traditional politics." As Eizenstat observed, "We didn't factor in the politics of his actions except in his last year, to the extent that one would think a president would or should. Carter had a disdain for politics. He almost felt that the process of decision-making was sullied by politics and were right-and-wrong decisions."⁵⁷

American-Israeli tension grew over the summer as Begin endorsed the building of settlements on the West Bank. Carter said the construction caused "deep concern" to the government and had "always been characterized by our government, by me and my predecessors, as an illegal action." Extention of economic and social service to the West Bank also brought a harsh U.S. response: the State Department said these "unilateral illegal acts in territories presently under Israeli occupation create obstacles to constructive negotiations."⁵⁸

These statements, while causing foreboding among American Jews, probably were inevitable sources of conflict for the U.S. and Israel; it was however, Carter's choice to communicate these views in public and not through a private backchannel. Still, Carter's statements cannot be faulted too much, since conflict with the community over the settlements was likely. Disturbing statements from Carter

⁵⁷ Interview with Stuart Eizenstat, 16 August 1984; Washington, D.C.

⁵⁸ American Jewish Year Book 1979, p.139.

came in the form of perceived overture to the P.L.O. Carter said he "would immediately commence plans" to talk with the P.L.O. if it recognized Israel's right to exist. Deliberately vague in the past about U.S. reaction to a change in the P.L.O.'s official pledge to destroy Israel, the new clarity was interpreted as a dangerous signal -- that Carter was actually flirting with the P.L.O.⁵⁹

OCTOBER 1977: THE AUTUMN OF DISCONTENT. The major political blunder regarding American Jews in Carter's first year was the announcement of a joint Soviet-American communique on October 1, 1977, following meetings in New York at the beginning of the General Assembly's session. Innocuous enough on its face, the communique called for the resumption of joint superpower efforts to get back to Geneva and identified key issues for the conference: "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in 1967 conflict; the resolution of the Palestinian question, including insuring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people; termination of the state of war and establishment of normal peaceful relations."⁶⁰ Worst of all, the communique made no mention of Resolution 242 as a basis for the Geneva talks -- this omission was deemed not just a breach of protocol, but a sign of an impending swing in established U.S. policy.

The communique, to the surprise of the administration, caused an uproar in the Jewish community with an intensity

⁵⁹ Near East Report, August 10, 1977, p.131.

⁶⁰ American Jewish Year Book 1979, p.144.

not yet seen during Carter's tenure. Jews were first of all outraged by the prospect of bringing the Soviets into a veto position over the conference. Second, leaders were distressed by a subtle shift from the mention of supporting the legitimate "interests" to the "rights" of the Palestinian people; and an invitation to "all parties in the conflict" to participate at Geneva -- giving an option to radical states such as Syria to come to the bargaining table. AIPAC mobilized Congressional supporters to lobby the administration, while the White House received 3500 telegrams within three days of the statement.⁶¹ Schindler said the communique seemed "an abandonment of America's historic commitment to the security and survival of Israel," "a shocking about-face" to the President's pledge to seek a settlement that recognized Resolution 242 as its basis.⁶² Everyone from AFL-CIO chief George Meany to Senators Dole, Jackson and Moynihan issued public protests; Jackson even hinted that the agreement might lead to the stationing of Russian troops in the region. Mark Siegel sees this act as the catalyst for sincere distrust of Jimmy Carter's ultimate goals:

From this point on Jimmy Carter was going to be badly distrusted in the Jewish community. The burden of proof had shifted to Jimmy Carter to prove that he should be trusted again. And he never could. No matter what he did, he could not regain that trust and confidence. Bringing the Soviets back into the process, giving radical states like Syria effective veto power, boxing

⁶¹ Interview with Mark Siegel, Columbia Oral History Project, p.33.

⁶² American Jewish Year Book 1979, p.145.

moderate states like Egypt by bringing the radicals at the same table -- all of that, one, made people think the president was incompetent, and two, distrust his motives.⁶³

The political fallout from the communique produced another alteration in the White House organization. "It established Hamilton Jordan as an integral part of the foreign policy loop.... Suddenly all foreign policy had to looped through Hamilton. And that became very important as we went through Panama, SALT, the entire Middle East process."⁶⁴ Finally, the White House had established not only a liason to the community, but a mechanism for anticipating crises. Siegel notes that there were ways of selling the communique to the President's conference, if they had been brought in a few days before it was announced: "If you had to sell it after it hit in a very negative way, you couldn't sell it. There were some, I suppose, positive things you could say about it and we tried. But after the fact, it was useless."⁶⁵

What did the change in the organization mean? Again, there was less than met the eye. It meant that inadvertent political blunders -- as the communique seemed to be -- would be caught in time. It did signal a period of greater attention to domestic political support. But this interval did not last long. First, hostility from the foreign policy wing worked against the political wing's complete

63 Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984; Washington, D.C.

64 Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984.

65 Interview with Siegel, 31 July 1984.

involvement.⁶⁶ Second, there was a growing sense in the administration that conflict with the community was inevitable and that it was useless to appease them -- this sentiment emerged in early 1978, when the jet sale to Saudi Arabia was proposed.

CARTER RETREATS, BUT DOESN'T REGROUP. Carter was taken completely by surprise by the uproar in the Jewish community and no one in the political wing knew about the communique -- not Siegel, not Jordan. In an effort to repair what had clearly become a statement far more important than it was intended to be, the administration issued a retraction or "clarification" of the communique jointly with the Israeli government a few days later. Following Carter's speech at the U.N. on Oct. 4, a joint statement noted that Resolutions 242 and 338 remained the basis for Geneva and that "acceptance of the joint U.S.-U.S.S.R. statement of October 1, 1977 ... is not a prerequisite for the reconvening and conduct of the Geneva Conference."⁶⁷ In addition to the clarification, Secretary of State Vance organized a meeting of Jewish leaders for mid-October; Vance tried to play down

⁶⁶ Siegel tells of a confrontational meeting between Brzezinski, Jordan, Eizenstat, himself, and Israeli ambassador Simcha Dinitz after the communique came out. The meeting was confrontational, but not with Dinitz on one side and the administration on the other. "The confrontation was Simcha, Hamilton, Me, Stu (Eizenstat) versus Brzezinski. A good deal of the administration was lining up with Israel in outrage about (the communique)." Also, following Sadat's trip to Jerusalem in November, Brzezinski was reportedly outraged that the political wing was even invited to a meeting to discuss the policy implications of Sadat's visit. Interview with Siegel, 31 July 1984.

⁶⁷ Quoted in American Jewish Year Book 1979, pp.146-147.

the significance of communique, pointing out that the Soviets had already been involved in the peace process. In any case, Jewish leaders saw the meeting as another sign that the administration could be pressured: "The political arm said to the foreign policy arm, 'You are not handling the Jewish community right, you'd better explain things to them, you've got to sell your program.'"⁶⁸ Though the clarification reassured the Israelis of American intentions, American Jews were not completely put at ease. Carter continued to talk of the need for a Palestinian "entity" on the West Bank, raising fears once again that he would countenance formation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank. The State Department asserted that there was more than a semantic difference between "state" and "entity," but Jewish lobbyists continued to remain skeptical in light of Carter's record; the Near East report noted that Carter's call for a homeland back in March had been followed by declarations for an "entity," as well as brief flirtation with the P.L.O.⁶⁹ In any case, Jewish leaders remained very skeptical into late 1977.

Carter saw Geneva slipping away. He was incredulous about the community's reaction to what he saw as a rather routine document containing little that was new. Yet, despite his political difficulties, Carter still was slow to admit that his approach to the Mideast had not been

⁶⁸ Interview with Alexander Schindler, Columbia Oral History Project.

⁶⁹ Near East Report, October 19, 1977, p.179.

politically astute. His diary records his frustration over politics obstructing the peace process: "Senator Byrd called, concerned about the Middle East question being a partisan issue and not having enough support for my position. He told me there was a lot of quiet majority support, and I told him my problem was that it was too quiet!"⁷⁰ At a meeting in late November between Carter and Jewish leaders, it was clear that the president was firm in adhering to his public criticism of the settlement policy, and those attending came away satisfied that Carter would at least talk to Jewish leaders on the subject.⁷¹

SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM. The road to Geneva took a sharp and irrevocable detour in November 1977, when Anwar Sadat travelled to Jerusalem, thus paving the way to bilateral talks between Egypt and Israel. Though at first unsure of whether the Sadat trip was a positive development, by late December, the U.S. had decided to abandon Geneva in favor of encouraging the new peace talks. Mindful of Begin's intransigence on the settlement question as well as his formidable skills as a negotiator, Carter no doubt realized that the American Jewish community could be useful in mollifying Begin, lobbying for moderation, in short conveying U.S. intentions through a friendly and trusted channel. In short, given the tenuous nature of the Egyptian-

⁷⁰ Quoted in Carter, Memoirs, pp.295-296.

⁷¹ The dinner included the president of Bnai Brith, Ed Sanders, then president of AIPAC, and future senator Frank Lautenberg, from the United Jewish Appeal. Interview with Siegel, Columbia Oral History Project, p.21 of transcript.

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Israeli talks, Carter would have done well to woo domestic Jewish support not only to add strength to his bargaining position with Israel, but also to smooth the negotiations themselves. Instead, Carter embarked on a course that alienated the Jews to a point beyond recovery.

SAUDI ARABIA AND THE FIGHT FOR F-15s. The proposal to sell advanced fighter planes to Saudi Arabia had been on the drawing board since May 1977, but Carter decided in late 1977 to push ahead on the sale of the F-15, the most advanced offensive fighter plane in the U.S. arsenal, to the Saudi kingdom. The Saudis were using the jet sale to test American seriousness about wanting closer ties; Carter also felt that the Saudis could use their financial clout to help broker a Mideast peace agreement. Powell said the help of the Saudis was crucial to achieving an overall settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Carter's view, and thus the president would brook no opposition to this seemingly unnecessary sideshow -- which would certainly court opposition.⁷²

Siegel, the liason to the Jewish community, was not informed of the decision to sell the planes until early February 1978. He submitted a "political memo to Hamilton and got a merit memo back"; that is, he described the potential for political fallout in the community and got back a justification for the need for the sale. Jordan said that the sale could not be delayed, though the president is

⁷² Interview with Jody Powell, 16 August 1984.

"abstractly aware of some of the potential political risks." Siegel was incredulous: "Why on earth, if I was so specific, why is he abstractly aware of some political risks. There was no answer to that." The president, once again, was willing to accept political damage, damage that Siegel had told the President was inevitable if he pushed for the sale. "They have touched the rawest of all nerves and that is the basic security of Israel. They are arming Israel's enemies flat out. I don't think (the damage between the President and the Jewish community) is reparable."⁷³

The sale of advanced planes to Saudi Arabia marks a crucial turning point for the Carter administration in two different respects. First, it marked an almost complete breakdown in friendly communication between the leaders of the Jewish community. Never again would relations be comfortable; even after the communique, leaders were still inclined to at least trust the president not to endanger Israeli security. For Jewish leaders, the F-15 sale was Carter's rubicon. In a move that only heightened the hostility, Carter announced in late February that he would withdraw proposed sales of F-16s and F-15s to Israel if congress blocked the sale to the Saudis. AIPAC'S newsletter summed up the sentiment of Jewish leaders: "... the United States is backing away from an earlier commitment to Israel. How can the Carter administration expect Israel to trust future U.S. assurances when past ones are so easily

⁷³ Interview with Mark Siegel, Columbia Oral History Project, Interview dated 8 February 1978, pp.31-32.

repudiated."⁷⁴ Though it eventually passed over stiff opposition in Congress -- with some leading supporters of Israel, such as Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (D-Conn.), voting for the package -- the sale symbolized a permanent distance that now lay between Jewish leaders and the administration. "It showed you were putting your money on the Saudis, your giving the best of American technology,"⁷⁵ Amitay observed.

The second significant development was an apparent change in the basic political calculations of Carter's close advisers. Throughout most of 1977, the administration had been careful to reach out to the community, convinced that it would win their support if sufficiently lobbied. The jet sale seems to have marked the point where the administration all but gave up any real hope -- until after the spring of 1979 -- of courting the Jewish vote. As is noted below, Carter used Siegel to explain the sale to the community, but within the White House, key advisers were doubtful if Jews were ever going to go back to the Carter camp. As Siegel told an interview confidentially in February 1978: "Now the President and Hamilton might determine very soon that the community is 'farfaln' to use the Yiddish word. That is irreparable, that it is lost, that we don't have to start servicing them." In his memo to Jordan, Siegel warned that reaction in the community was so intense that "an aggravated coalition coalescing around anybody because they have had it with Carter." Jordan's response, as related by Siegel, was

⁷⁴ Near East Report, March 1, 1978, p.33.

⁷⁵ Interview with Morris Amitay; 28 February 1985.

quite revealing, in that he in effect said Carter did not need Jewish support: "His response is if we have brought peace, 1980 will not be a problem. If the economy is good, it will not be a problem."⁷⁶ On the Jewish community, Jordan was blunt in early February (according to Siegel): "In many ways the Jewish community is probably lost to Jimmy Carter politically until there is peace in the Middle East. And when there is peace in the Middle East, they will see that Carter was responsible and they will give him much of the credit back home."⁷⁷ Jordan was not the only one to have basically written off Jewish support until a major breakthrough; Powell also notes that the loss of Jewish support was not viewed with much concern: "...without the hostages and the economy going to hell, it wouldn't have mattered. If we had known we were going to run for reelection with those two things on our back ... additional problems would have weighed more heavily on us then. We considered it to be a manageable political problem."⁷⁸

Carter once again sought to use Siegel as an apologist for his policy after it was publicized -- with one small modification. Apparently, Siegel himself was misled as to the true nature of the aircraft. Asked to go around the country to promote the idea of a sale to the Jewish

⁷⁶ All the quotes above are from an interview with Siegel by the Columbia Oral History Project, "Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy," dated 8 February 1978, p.42

⁷⁷ Interview with Siegel, Columbia Oral History Project, 9 May 1978;p.114 of transcript.

⁷⁸ Interview with Jody Powell, 16 August 1984; Washington, D.C. Emphasis mine.

community, he had been provided with information from the State Department describing the F-15 as a defensive aircraft; "I was being told it was a purely defensive weapons system that had no offensive capabilities." Siegel was at once challenged on his facts at a speech at a United Jewish Appeal dinner in Washington. Siegel called the Pentagon, and without asking why, asked a top official to describe the capabilities of the F-15. "And I said, 'would it be fair to characterized this as a defensive weapon system' They started laughing. They said this is the best offensive aircraft we have." Siegel recalls the day as Feb. 28, when he decided to resign. He submitted his letter to Carter the next day. According to Siegel, his last discussion with Carter seems to support the thesis that key political players in the administration had begun giving less weight to wooing Jewish support. Siegel told Carter that the decision-making process was still closed, that the political staff was not being allowed to fulfill its function as a periscope for the President: "(political consequences) should be part of his information base in making decisions... On the (jet sale), my views, the views on the impact on the Jewish community, the political impact of all these things, I was channeling to Hamilton and I assumed that it was getting to him. He said 'no' at that point, that he had never seen anything -- all those memos I had written."⁷⁹

79 Interview with Siegel, Columbia Oral History Project; interview dated 9 May 1978. Emphasis mine.

At the same time that Siegel was out trying to sell the planes, Brzezinski was still following the administration's confrontationalist style. At a luncheon at the White House on Feb. 24, they had invited key people from the United Jewish Appeal from the ten major cities -- key fundraisers in the Democratic Party -- specifically so that Brzezinski and Mondale would reassure them. However, Brzezinski started his talk by referring to the "special relationship" (words long used to describe the Israeli-American ties) between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. As Siegel describes it:

He actually used the term "special relationship" You heard a gasp in the room. And then I remember the head of the L.A. U.J.A. got up and basically gave a rational dissent to the Arms sale. ... And Zbig's response was "I've heard all your arguments before and I reject them." People in the room used the Yiddish term "favissina" ... that is, a deep seething. That is what they saw coming from him. A deep seething hatred."⁸⁰

As Mark Siegel left the White House, relations between the community and the administration stood at their lowest point since Carter entered office. Carter's political style, infused with views shaped largely by Brzezinski, had now pushed matters beyond simple confrontation. No longer could Carter have any illusions about have courted Jewish disapproval. In fact, Carter's decision to pursue the sale of F-15s at the moment he did reflected a belief that the shortcomings of temporary alienation would be supplanted by eventual success on an overall peace settlement. The organizational structure of the White House -- affected both

⁸⁰ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984; Washington, D.C.

by hostility from the policy side and paper flow problems and jurisdiction problems on the political side -- militated against Carter taking political factors sufficiently into account. But above all, the first 15 months of the administration is a testimony to the peculiarly resilient will of Jimmy Carter. Stubborn, proud, disdainful of politics, Carter was actually sincere when he said he would accept political damage to achieve peace in the Middle East. Part of that stubbornness, clearly, stems from his belief that peace in the Middle East would bring Jews back to his camp anyway. But, also, Carter simply did not want to let political factors cloud his judgement. Suspicious his entire life of special interest groups, he never realized that much of the alienation he caused was not inevitable, but born of his political incompetence. On one hand, it was inattention to packaging and image-making. On the other, it was poor timing of decisions that were unavoidably denounced by the Jewish community.

By the late spring of 1978, the various flaws in the administration's political strategy had succeeded in alienating much of the Jewish community leaders. The political wing, though it had increased access to the foreign policy discussion after the communique, still had to struggle with hostility directed by the foreign policy staffers and Carter's own disdain for politics. Carter's combative, non-compromising political style -- his belief that a comprehensive solution would bring both peace and his

own vindication for American Jews -- were reinforced by political assessments by his close aides that the Jewish community was at once divided over Israel and irrevocably hostile toward the administration. He would then be even more predisposed to pay less deference to the community, since only a peace settlement would be enough to assure them of his motives. The next chapter details the practical results of this belief: Carter would make his most ambitious ventures in Middle East policy with shockingly little attention to domestic politics -- born both of his innate distrust for playing politics and his belief that an agreement was his only way to prove his loyalty.

LEADERSHIP AND INTEREST GROUP POWER: GENERAL CONCLUSIONS. A number of general observations concerning Carter's overall prowess as a politician and the dynamic of interest group politics can be made at this point in the analysis. First, the organizational and personal factors which led to Carter's political problems in the Jewish community are indicative of the larger political difficulties experienced by the administration. On the organizational side, the relative lack of political strategic thinking in the decisionmaking process and the inability of key players outside the administration to gain access to policy discussions was commonplace. Carter's energy package -- the primary domestic legislation pushed during the first half of his presidency -- was prepared in a virtual vacuum. Industry representatives were not even

consulted. Key committee members in the congress were not consulted either. Carter simply presented the package to Congress -- where it was effectively defanged by members of the president's party, who had had little to do with the bill's preparation. Carter also announced he would veto a bill for the construction of eight water projects in several Western states, which outraged senators from the region; he expended considerable political capital stubbornly pushing for action on a bill of minor importance and certain to court a public fight between the executive and legislative branches. In general, the congressional liason office of the White House became infamous for not keeping in close contact with the Hill leadership, and thus the president would habitually present major legislative initiatives to congress without advance notification.

Carter's personal style, which had been chiefly responsible for alienating much of the Jewish community by the summer of 1978, also proved an obstacle to progress on other legislative fronts. His obsession with detail and disdain for the nitty-gritty of politics made him a very untraditional Democrat. Carter's focus on the microcosmic prevented Democrats in Congress and the electorate from getting sense of Carter's overall agenda, the set of values that guided his performance.⁸¹ He would not attend fundraisers for politicians -- indeed, by the end of 1978, with his popularity fading and the talk of a Kennedy

81 James Fallows, "The Passionless Presidency" in The Atlantic, February 1979, pp.28-37.

challenge becoming more serious, Democratic candidates did not want Carter to appear on their behalf, as his support became a political minus.⁸² He reluctantly signed on to "traditional" Democratic legislation, such as a job-creation bill pushed by Speaker O'Neill. Carter's victories of his first two years -- Camp David, the jet sale, creation of the Energy Department, passage of consumer legislation, approval of the Panama Canal treaties -- were won only after intense coordination with the capital leadership and often did not net him any growth in support from members of his party. His aloof, self-confident, ungenerous style led not only to alienation from his party, in spite of his success, but also to a series of legislative defeats: emasculation of his energy program, collapse of any meaningful effort at government reorganization and welfare reform, and secretive presentation and then embarrassing retraction of his tax reform proposals. Carter was simply viewed as a maverick, and his fellow party members on Capitol Hill never felt a part of the inner circle. Indeed, they felt like adversaries. Carter would often boast that he would "go to the people" if he was ever denied what he wanted, and had to be reminded by O'Neill that he lacked a substantial reservoir of support (that Carter had run behind most Democratic congressmen in their districts). His engineering approach to problems and his remarkable capacity for sustaining his own conviction were thus not trademarks of

⁸² Interview with Hodding Carter; 27 July 1984. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

his Mideast policy alone, but broader manifestations of a deep-seated shortcoming in his political style that made progress difficult on a range of policy fronts. To put it in Neustadt's terms, Carter refused to accept his role as chief persuader -- that lack of political instinct lay at the heart of the frustration of many of his legislative and lobbying efforts.⁸³

Carter's relationship with the powerful Jewish lobby also sheds considerable light on the potency of lobby groups and the nature of their influence. In the post-Watergate era, interest groups have increasingly focused their lobbying effort on the White House directly, preferring to augment their traditional routes through the party apparatus and congressional leaders. As national parties have become weaker and as the executive branch has concentrated its policy-making activities in the White House, the president has become the focal point for political coalition-building activity.⁸⁴ It is increasingly up to the president to perform political functions once the preserve of the national party; traditionally, the president has set up a highly organized liason structure to accommodate the growing list of groups who place demands on the executive. Scholars in the 1950s spoke of subgovernments to identify a hidden power elite that holds sway in political circles.

⁸³ A good account of Carter's poor bargaining style is found in Betty Glad, Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), pp.317-322.

⁸⁴ Joseph Pika, "Interest Groups and the Executive" in Interest Group Politics, Allen J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis, eds., (Washington: CQ Press, 1983), pp.301-302.

effectively placing governmental power in the hands of non-elected, nongovernmental elites.⁸⁵ Thus given the Jewish community's considerable access to key government figures and their ability to organize a lobbying effort, one might suggest that a president, if he is a politician, will find it hard to turn aside the prodding of a powerful group that is concentrating its efforts on the White House. As a part of the power elite in these president-centered times, the administration may well be guided -- consciously or not -- by the positions of this "subgovernment."

Jimmy Carter's performance in the first 18 months (as well as in the remainder of his term, serves to reject the thesis that interest group access is usually translated into tangible power, and even more so, control. Carter's decisionmaking process allowed substantial access to the White House inner circle, but very little influence. Furthermore, the lobby's powerful friends in Congress could not deny Carter his sale of F-15s to Saudi Arabia; indeed, Sen. Ribicoff, one of Israel's leading supporters in the Senate, led the fight for the plane deal. Despite their reputed control over Congress and access to the Carter White House, the leaders of the Jewish community were not able to deny Carter a single victory or alter his long-range strategy of pressuring Israel to agree on a comprehensive settlement. It is true the president issued retractions and

⁸⁵ See Ronald J. Hrebemar, Interest Group Politics in America (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1982), pp.12-13.

wooded leaders when tensions ran too high, but no deviation could be detected in Carter's basic approach. In short, the president's performance on this issue, opposed by a group with a reputation for enormous resources -- and an ability to focus them on a single issue about which few others feel as passionately -- is a testimony to the freedom of the presidency and his independence as an actor.

At the same time, the political damage Carter sustained from his go-it-alone style confirms a fundamental truth about interest group politics -- that Carter's notion that groupings of individuals around specific issues would be supplanted by a more undifferentiated electorate was misplaced. The populist philosophy which infused the Carter camp and underlied the administration's structure -- the spirit of which remained alive in Caddell's May 1977 memorandum -- suggested that Carter move to create a national consensus to replace the coalition politics against which he ran his campaign. Yet the potency of the Jewish lobby, matched by similar alienation among big labor, for example, indicates that groups of individuals would still tend to cohere around specific agendas. The fact that Carter was not able to replace his erosion among specific groups with a build-up of a more general core of support from a kind of "Silent Majority" is not so much indicative of Carter's failure to execute his philosophy. Rather his failure stands as a misreading of American politics, a naive belief that as a white-collar population came to dominate

the political landscape, old categories and issue-groups would simply fade away. In 1980, voters were of course concerned with the macrocosmic issues of inflation and unemployment, but substantial blocs -- especially within the Democrats' realistic base of support -- continued to rally behind specific issues. A campaign attuned to the unique political leanings of the American public in 1976 -- efficiency and integrity in government as basic goals -- could not reorient itself to a more traditional campaign in 1980, when Carter would find that he could not tap the same emotions (largely because they had lost their intensity over four years and could not be expected to be the glue to hold together a variegated and diverse political coalition.)⁸⁶

⁸⁶ This paragraph is loosely based on combined impressions drawn from interviews with Jody Powell, 16 August 1984; and Hodding Carter, 27 July 1984.

CHAPTER THREE

A BREAKTHROUGH WITHOUT VINDICATION:

SPRING 1978 - NOVEMBER 1980

In March 1978, the President's hopes for a Middle East peace seemed to be fading. The bilateral talks between Egypt and Israel were at a standstill. Egypt's President Anwar Sadat had broken the talks off in January, despairing of Israel's rigid positions on not only the West Bank, but on the status of Israeli settlements in the Sinai (Egyptian territory). Israel also had continued to build new settlements on the West Bank while the talks were in progress, an action criticized for undermining the spirit of the talks. At home, the President's support among American Jewish leaders, damaged by the October 1, 1977 communique, eroded quickly as the fight to sell fighters to Saudi Arabia intensified into the late spring. His year-long involvement in Mideast politics had brought him to an unavoidable crossroads. He could continue to pressure Israel to make concessions both with regard to Sinai and to other occupied territories -- since that was the only way to stimulate progress and to bring the Egyptians back to the negotiating table. On the other hand, he could disengage from intense personal involvement in the Mideast, perhaps reasoning that the chances for success were minimal and the balance of his political capital was needed for endeavors with more encouraging prospects.

In the early months of 1978, Carter decided to increase his personal involvement in the Middle East. The decision, which would yield the first peace treaty between Israel and an Arab nation in March 1979, was made in conscious

disregard for political risks at home. The efforts carried Carter's hope -- though by no means his dominant motivation -- that a true peace would bring the suspicious Jewish community leaders back to his camp. However, much to Carter's disappointment, Jewish leaders would never trust or support Carter to the same degree again. Not only were they wary of Carter's past record on the Middle East, events after Camp David and Carter's continued combativeness would rekindle their fears. In many ways, these developments counteracted the political boost Carter gained from Camp David and the peace treaty.

In large part, the conflict between Jews and Carter from the spring of 1978 until the end of the administration was unavoidable. Spawned by Carter's distress over Begin's settlement policy, administration pressure on Israel was bound to court Jewish disapproval. However, again, Carter's style and questionable political savvy during his period of deep involvement exacerbated these emotions. Had he employed greater subtlety, and less use of "open diplomacy" it is possible that Carter could have mollified the fears of many Jewish leaders, themselves ambivalent about Begin. Instead, Carter's style needlessly forced American Jewish leaders to make an open choice between the President and Israel. When Carter did disengage from the Middle East conflict -- after the signing of the peace treaty -- political considerations had finally become a principal element of his own internal calculus. However, by this time he had excessively alienated

many Jewish leaders and future mix-ups (such as Andrew Young's meeting with the P.L.O. representative in the U.N.) only reinforced previous fears. This chapter, then, is divided into two parts, the first examining Carter's intense involvement in the Middle East through March 1979 -- and identifies elements in Carter's pattern of decisionmaking that desensitized him to political dangers. The second part treats Carter's disengagement from personal diplomacy -- and the continued alienation of the Jewish community exacerbated by political mishaps.

POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES IN 1978. Before treating Carter's decision to invest his personal prestige in the Arab-Israeli conflict, one should note the precarious state of the president's political fortunes in general -- and the pressure it exerted on Carter to push for a breakthrough in the Middle East during his second year in office. Carter's travail in the Middle East was matched by larger doubts concerning the future of his presidency. At this point in his administration (spring 1978), Carter could only point to a record of largely frustration, devoid of any major achievement on the foreign or domestic front (with the exception of the politically costly Panama Canal treaty). His popularity among the general population now stood at just above 50%, down from a high of 77% at the start of his administration.¹ He had problems on nearly all major issues:

¹ Gallup Poll, January 1977; March 1978. The president's popularity was measured by responses to the question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Carter is handling his job as president?"

his energy proposal, presented in early 1977 without much consultation with legislators, was stalled in the House of Representatives. He had jostled with Congress over the approval of eight pork-barrel water projects in the West, which he had threatened to veto and then reneged when it became clear that Congress would put up a fight he could not win. Throughout 1977, his relations with Congress had deteriorated as he rarely consulted with its leadership and showed great reluctance to approve "traditional" Democratic legislation (such as a job creation bill). He was on the verge of retracting his proposal for a \$50 tax rebate, as increasing prices made it unsound economically. He had expended an enormous amount of political capital in Congress obtaining approval of the first Panama Canal treaty in September 1977. Negotiations with the Soviets over arms reductions appeared to be going nowhere. His image of honesty had been greatly damaged by the resignation of budget director Bert Lance after allegations surfaced concerning improprieties in his personal finances. On top of this, the economy had begun to falter -- the dollar hit an all time low in November 1977 and consumer prices -- which would race out of control in Carter's last two years -- began their steady climb upward. As Carter turned to save his Middle East policy, the dismal record of his first year no doubt weighed heavily on his mind, and it clearly heightened his determination that this was one issue he

would not let get away.² The unique element in Carter's judgement was that he decided to pursue a perpetually thorny issue whose resolution was by no means certain.

FEBRUARY - SEPTEMBER 1978: OPTING IN. In February 1978, the sale of F-15 to Saudi Arabia and less advanced aircraft to Egypt were still new items on the public agenda. They would eventually dominate the Mideast foreign policy debate for four months, blocking substantial American involvement on the Arab-Israeli negotiations until the early summer of 1978. However, in February, Carter already showed signs of wanting to increase his personal involvement in the Mideast and a growing willingness to force a showdown with Menachem Begin. Conflict stemmed principally from the continued settlement of the West Bank, as well as Begin's refusal to dismantle Israeli settlements in the Sinai, which Sadat wanted completely returned to Egypt. In the months leading to Camp David in September 1978 Carter followed a publically aggressive attitude toward Israel. However, before plunging again into an account of Carter's style in this period, we should note an important change in the volume of political advice that was reaching Carter's desk. He was confronted with a now cohesive group of domestic advisers opposing increased overt pressure on Israel -- since mid-term elections were approaching and Carter's own political fortunes were in doubt.

² Interview with Hodding Carter, 27 July 1984; American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, D.C.

At last a permanent part of the foreign policy loop, domestic advisers -- usually Powell and Jordan -- had begun to sit in at the weekly foreign policy breakfasts on Friday mornings since the fallout over the October communique -- from the start the breakfasts were run by Brzezinski with Vance, Mondale, and, of course, the president as regular participants.³ Over the first half of 1978, Jordan and Mondale were the principal advisers to counsel the president to avoid instigating a public fight with leaders of the Jewish community. But despite some minor attempts at seeking out Jewish support and allaying Jewish apprehension, the period between March 1978 and the signing of the peace treaty a year later shows the administration much less willing to woo Jewish leaders than it had been before the jet sale. Though he now consulted a wider circle of advisers who were conscious of domestic political realities, he matched that act of reaching out with a greater resolve to bring about solutions to the Mideast without considering political realities at home. As a result, Jimmy Carter continued a high-profile pressure campaign against Menachem Begin that would help snatch political defeat from the jaws of policy victory.

Carter's diary indicates that by early February the president had decided to become more deeply involved in the stalled peace process. He argued against his domestic

³ Brzezinski, p.68.

advisers, Mondale, and even Brzezinski about applying pressure on Begin to make concessions:

I think we ought to move much more aggressively on the Middle East than any of them (Brzezinski, Mondale, Jordan) seem to... The plan that we evolve has got to be one that can be accepted by Begin in a showdown if we have the full support of the American public ... I don't know how much support I have, but we'll go through with this effort.⁴

Carter's determination was soon matched by an equal resolution of purpose in Brzezinski. Never a believer in passive diplomacy, Brzezinski gave Carter a rather forceful political pep talk in his weekly report of February 24:

A President must not only be loved and respected, but also feared. I suggest that you try to dispel the impression that you and the administration are too cerebral by picking some controversial subject and acting with anger and toughness to demonstrate that no one can pick a fight with the U.S. If we do not do this soon, Begin, Brezhnev, Vorster, Schmidt, Castro, and Qaddafi will thumb their noses at us.⁵

Though it is not clear if the jet sale or the settlement issue was the "controversial subject" it is certain that Carter's combative position on those issues was consistent with Brzezinski's general advice. Though the next few months were marked by little progress in bringing the negotiators back to the tables, Carter continued to pursue an open diplomacy that was very critical of Israel and Begin's intransigence.

⁴ Carter's Diary, dated Feb. 3, 1978; Quoted in Carter, Memoirs, p.306.

⁵ Brzezinski, p.562; National Security Adviser's Weekly Report.

In mid-March Palestinian terrorists invaded Israel and killed 37 Israelis in a bus on a highway near Tel Aviv. In retaliation, Israeli armed forces invaded Lebanon and sent air strikes; casualties were sent to number in the hundreds. Rather than criticize the Palestinian raid alone or call on the Israelis to simply show restraint, the administration actually implied that Israel had violated its security agreement with the United States. (This also followed a very grim meeting with Prime Minister Menachem Begin in early March, in which Carter privately castigated the Israeli leader for his intransigence) In early April, Secretary Vance told Congress that Israel might be in violation of its arms sale agreement with the U.S. because its foray into Lebanon might not be considered legitimate self-defense -- the only condition under which the Israelis may use American equipment. This evoked a harsh response from AIPAC, which argued that Carter and Vance had originally supported the Israeli response and then reversed themselves -- implying an intention to punish Israel for its stubborn commitment to building settlements and giving a victory of sorts to the P.L.O.⁶

ANXIETY IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. The spring of 1978 was a time of great ambivalence for the Jewish community in the United States; properly treated, that ambivalence could have been parlayed by Carter into private support for pressure on Israel. However, by going public, Jimmy Carter forced Jewish

⁶ The Near East Report, April 12, 1978; p.59.

leaders to make an unnecessary choice of loyalty. Begin's intransigence on the settlement issue had angered such staunch supporters of Israel as Senators Javits and Case, who communicated their private endorsement of the President's course to Carter in late March, shortly after Begin's trip to the U.S.⁷ In mid-April, the so-called Committee of Eight -- the leaders of the three major diaspora-Israeli relations groups, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the Anti-Defamation League of Bnai Brith -- went to the Mideast to urge moderation from Begin on the settlement issue.⁸ By late May, the American Jewish Committee issued a public statement urging a pause in Begin's settlement building while negotiations with Egypt were in progress -- but they also criticized the administration for threatening to endanger Israeli security. Thus, Jewish leaders on the whole agreed with Carter about the objectionable nature of the settlements, but Carter's open pressure on Israel -- timed with his push for Senate approval of the jet sale -- in the spring forced them to adopt a public position in opposition to the administration.

On May 1, the anniversary of Israel's independence, Carter seemed to shift to a more accommodationist public stance, when he took pains to assure the Israelis that American commitment to Israel could not be questioned. But Carter's combativeness returned. He continued to press Begin

⁷ Brzezinski, p.246.

⁸ American Jewish Year Book 1980, p.103.

to stop building settlements on the West Bank. Following the passage of the jet sale legislation in mid-May, boasts were reported to come from the White House of "having broken" the Jewish lobby. Siegel, interviewed in May 1978 -- now as an outsider -- said the administration used the F-15 sale as a tool to show its toughness -- not too unlike Brzezinski's advice in February to show toughness. "I don't think it was in the administration's interest -- strategic in terms of their planned strategy -- to avoid a confrontation. They timed it, they called a confrontation. I think it was very important to get the headlines that they finally got, you know JEWISH LOBBY BEATEN BACK, or whatever."⁴ Whether real or not, Carter did little to dispel the notion that he had pitted American interests versus those of AIPAC and had come down the victor. In any case, the Jewish community reacted violently to the perceived wagons-in-a-circle attitude in the White House. The Near East Report reflected general Jewish revulsion to the idea that the lobby controlled congressional action. Carter had to cancel two major Democratic fundraisers in New York and Los Angeles in May because many Jewish party members -- the majority of the principal donors -- had cancelled their reservations.⁹ Despite assurances by Mondale and even Brzezinski that American intentions towards Israel would not be compromised, the jet sale proved the kind of emotional watershed that perpetuated anxiety despite the magnificence of Camp David.

⁹ Carter, Memoirs, p.313.

As Mark Siegel would note in November 1978, "The community is extremely suspicious of his motivations, and they are very cynical. They had such a bad experience for 22 months that they are wondering when the next shoe is going to drop."¹⁰ , "

DOMESTIC ADVISERS REGISTER OBJECTIONS. At the same time that Carter was stepping up his public attacks on Israel, his domestic staff was supplying him with reliable information on the severity of the political risk he was running by taking on Israel in public. Ed Sanders, an informal adviser since 1976 began making more trips to the White House that spring, and would join the staff as Senior Adviser to the President in August; a former president of AIPAC, Sanders was added it seems not so much to be an apologist to the Jewish community, but to help get a fix on the community's views on the issues.¹¹ Sanders was in the unique position of having offices both in the West Wing of the White House -- close to the Oval Office and Jordan's office -- and at the State Department. He was assured that he would be a principal member of the policy discussion. Around the time of treaty signing in March 1979, Sanders would be moved to the more remote East Wing, a geographical change that signaled a negative reassessment of Sanders' usefulness in selling the administration's policies to the

¹⁰ Interview with Mark Siegel; Columbia Oral History Project, interview dated 30 November 1978. P.239 of transcript.

¹¹ Interview with Edward Sanders, 27 July 1984; by telephone to Mr. Sanders's law offices in Los Angeles.

community. Mondale, though initially willing to countenance some pressure on Israel in the first year of the presidency, now expressed reluctance on pressuring Israel. Following a trip to Israel in late June with American Jewish leaders, Mondale had concluded that the "open diplomacy" needlessly dissipated the natural sympathy American Jews felt for Carter's private frustration and anger towards Menachem Begin. In fact, he recommended that the President distance himself personally from the conflict since his leverage on issue would be balanced by increased political damage as the months wore on.¹² Jordan, looking toward midterm elections in November, also was skeptical of taking a public high road against Israel. Even Eizenstat, not normally a participant in the foreign policy breakfasts, sought to have Carter adopt a more conciliatory stance. (Of Eizenstat's role, Carter noted: "Stu wasn't involved in the discussions, but he always let his views be known."¹³) He sought access to

¹² Brzezinski, p.249.

¹³ Interview with Jimmy Carter, 22 October 1984.

Interestingly, Eizenstat could prove remarkably effective in swaying Carter on Mideast question from time to time. Siegel points to a case shortly after the October 1977 communique, when a U.N. vote came up that was a particularly strong rebuke of Israel. Determined to vote in favor of the resolution, Carter was not swayed by his domestic advisers, until Eizenstat became involved. "Hamilton went in and tried to persuade the president and could not. I went in and could not. Stu said he wanted to go in and try.... He said 'I'm going to tell him I never thought I would live to see this action from an American president, no less one that I work for.' Ten minute meeting. He comes out and he reversed him. I don't know if he got him from a 'no' to an abstention, but he did it."-- Interview with Mark Siegel; 14 July 1984.

sensitive cables about Mideast policy from the White House Situation Room, but was denied access by Brzezinski.¹⁴

CARTER FORGES AHEAD. By Summer of 1979, Carter was determined to forge ahead with the peace process. He began discussions with his aides about the wisdom of his going to Camp David, and without exception, all the major domestic advisers and Mondale were opposed to Carter making the effort. Jordan and Powell both counselled Carter not to go to Camp David, as the President readily admits: "I don't think any of my advisers were in favor of going to Camp David."¹⁵ None of Carter's advisers suggested abandoning the peace process, but all felt that a public gamble such as Camp David would bring unnecessary political damage if it failed. As Powell noted "the discussion was not over what do you do about the thing, but how you do it. We never considered 'the chances of me being able to put this thing back together are pretty slim and may be should let the thing settle out for a while.' The discussion was tactical."¹⁶

In fact, the degree of Carter's distance from political calculations is borne out by the roots of his decision to go to Camp David. "This was a decision that my wife and I made basically by ourselves on a weekend.... Later, when we talked to my advisers, they thought it was a bad move. There was never a conversation about going to repair or damage

¹⁴ Brzezinski, p.239.

¹⁵ Interview with President Jimmy Carter; 22 October 1984.

¹⁶ Interview with Jody Powell; 16 August 1984, Washington, D.C.

political relationships."¹⁷ Virtually all key players in the discussions leading to Carter's invitation of Sadat and Begin to Camp David in September 1978 stress that Carter had discarded arguments ground in political calculations. Sanders, the official liason to the Jewish community, stressed that his discussions with Carter never focussed on the political, but invariably on the merits: "Carter didn't look at it in those terms, he wanted to do what was right. He threw the dice, and the down-side politically was tremendous. I don't think we ever sat down and talked of what the political implications were."¹⁸ Eizenstat and Powell both echoed the idea that political risk-taking did not seem to enter heavily into Carter's calculus -- even the "political up-side" was not a major factor. "By no stretch of the imagination were the political benefits of a Camp David a significant factor in the equation. Because all the advice he was getting was all to the contrary, that this would hurt him politically."¹⁹

If Carter did not weigh political factors in his decision to go to Camp David, he certainly expected a successful outcome to yield him the respect and trust of the Jewish community after months of doubt. Despite his combative style, Carter clearly never entertained serious thoughts of jeopardizing Israeli security for the sake of an agreement -- he never gave an indication that his pressure

¹⁷ Interview with Jimmy Carter; 22 October 1984.

¹⁸ Interview with Edward Sanders; 27 July 1984.

¹⁹ Interview with Stuart Eizenstat, 14 August 1984.

campaign was a thinly veiled threat to the Israelis that they had better cooperate. Carter apparently reasoned that his single-minded pursuit of the "right" decision would be supported by the Jewish community because they shared the same basic long-term vision of American security relationships in the region (with Israel being the cornerstone of American influence). "He always thought he would be proven right. It was a messianic view in this area. And that all the people who were criticizing him now someday would say 'you were right, I was wrong.'"²⁰

JEWISH ATTITUDES AFTER CAMP DAVID: NO LAW OF RETURN.

The Jewish community certainly did praise Carter's achievement at Camp David -- but this did not translate into a restoration of complete confidence in Carter, much to the president's surprise. Most major Jewish organizations sent congratulatory telegrams to both Israeli and Egyptian teams, as well as the White House. Ed Sanders found his job at liason to the community a much easier task; Jewish campaign

²⁰ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984. The Camp David accords, signed on September 17, 1978, represented a true breakthrough in Arab-Israeli relations. While not a peace treaty, the accords embraced the following tenets: it set up a framework setting up a transitional governmental authority on the West Bank and Gaza -- with the final status of the territory subject to negotiations including Palestinian representatives. Second, on the bilateral level, a framework for a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was arranged. The pact endorsed the idea of a semi-demilitarized Sinai Peninsula returned to Egypt in return for Egyptian recognition of Israel and the establishment of full diplomatic relations. These two accords would be the foundation of the agreement ultimately signed on March 29, 1979 on the White House lawn. At Camp David, the negotiators had set a deadline of December 17, 1978 for putting a treaty together, but the talks stalled until Carter injected himself into the fray once again in the spring of 1979.

contributions to the Democratic Party were reported to be up substantially.²¹ From his West Wing office and his office in the State Department, Sanders was seen to have considerable input into the decisionmaking process, and his differences with Brzezinski and Vance were not perceived to be intense in the fall of 1978. Disagreements about the president's approach on the legality of settlements in the West Bank still persisted -- and Sanders never tried to sell the Jewish community on policies he found repugnant.²² But in immediate afterglow of Camp David, these differences were certainly downplayed.

Distress in the community, however, came to the fore again in late 1978, as the talks between American, Egyptian and Israeli negotiators stalled -- as Egyptian negotiators insisted that there be greater linkage between their peace treaty and autonomy talks for the West Bank. Impatient over the lag in progress, Carter once again, publically rebuked Israel for its intransigence. In December, he declared, "If the Egyptians and Israelis violate the three-month limit on negotiating this treaty, it will be a very serious matter." Israel was astonished by Carter's terming the December 17 "goal" a limit; what would happen, they reasoned, if Israel failed to meet a deadline for autonomy elections on the West Bank? At the same time, Secretary Vance said the Egyptian objections were reasonable and should be accepted by the

²¹ National Journal, "The Right Man for the Job," November 11, 1978; p.1827.

²² Interview with Morris J. Amitay; 28 February 1985. Washington, D.C.

Israelis. Finally on December 14, Carter said it was now up to Israel to move on the treaty.²³ Carter's open criticism had the effect of stiffening Israeli opposition; but it also reopened his conflict with the Jewish community, virtually wiping out most the good will inspired by Camp David. "In sharp contrast to his creative efforts at Camp David, President Carter's repeated expressions of impatience and frustration, either explicitly or implicitly addressed to Israel, have neither been appropriate nor helpful," the American Jewish Committee observed.²⁴ Schindler criticized the "dangerous and failed policy" of the administration "to buy off the Saudis with our weapons and to submit to Egypt's even harsher conditions for peace ... it is not a prescription for peace; it is an invitation to more war."²⁵ Thirty-three of 36 Jewish leaders who had counseled Begin to be moderate in early summer, cabled the president that his perceived one-sidedness was unacceptable. In short, Carter's policy of open diplomacy not only led Israel to dig its heels in more firmly, it scuttled any attempts by Sanders and other domestic advisers to bring about a rapprochement with the community.

By March 1979, Carter decided once again to become personally involved in the peace negotiations -- and at the same time, he was already receiving advice to disengage from

23 American Jewish Year Book 1980, p.113.

24 American Jewish Year Book 1980, p.113.

25 American Jewish Year Book 1980, p.113.

the process as soon as a peace treaty was signed.²⁶ Following a familiar pattern, Carter seems to have continued his deep involvement despite the political damage he would incur if he was perceived to be pressuring Israel: "I decided to move aggressively on (the Middle East) and not postpone difficult discussions, even though they were costly to us in domestic politics."²⁷ Brzezinski records Carter's resolve stiffening in late December 1978, with the President willing to brook political disaster: "I would be willing to lose my election because I will alienate the Jewish community, but I think it is important to prevent the Arabs from falling under Soviet sway. Thus if necessary, be harder on the Israelis. If there is a breakdown (in the talks) we will have to go with Sadat."²⁸

No doubt, much of the conflict with the Jewish community over Begin's policies was inevitable. There was a definite difference of opinion on the Israeli settlement policy between the administration and the community; there was little Carter could do to resolve the basic conflict since he viewed them as illegal, while American Jewish leaders defended their legitimacy. However, Carter's public rebuke of Israel alienated what few solid Jewish supporters

²⁶ Brzezinski told Carter in November 1978 that "We should either phase out our central role after the signing of the treaty or bring the West Bank issue to a head." (Brzezinski, p.562). By January 1979, Brzezinski seems to have arrived at the former alternative: "The Middle East will drag on unless we all make a maximum effort now through the late spring, with a gradual easing off during the second half of the year." (Brzezinski, p.564.).

²⁷ Carter, Memoirs, p.412.

²⁸ Brzezinski, p.278.

he had. His move into the Middle East in March 1979 resembled his push toward Camp David in that political calculations were not incorporated into his assessment. The difference is that by late 1978, Carter probably had despaired of regaining solid Jewish support -- though his hopes still lingered in March 1979, his disappointment following Camp David no doubt dampened his expectations.

AFTER MARCH 1979: OPTING OUT. Following the signing of the peace treaty, Carter decided that he could no longer continue to be personally involved in the peace process. Several factors influenced his decision to refrain from personal diplomacy to pursue an accord on the West Bank. First, his involvement in the Mideast had consumed so much of his attention that he had to get back to the business of being president. The final push on SALT, the fight for passage of the energy legislation in late 1978, the beginning of a new round of OPEC price shocks -- all these endeavors took a back seat to the Mideast negotiations. During Camp David and in March 1979, the federal branch would literally come to a halt while the president was immersed in this issue. "When he was at Camp David (and in March) a tremendous amount of business was piling up. I couldn't send any decision memos. Things came to a halt. When he came back, everybody said, 'You can't keep this up! You've got to pull back,'" Eizenstat recalled.²⁹ Second, Carter felt there was little more he could do substantially

²⁹ Interview with Stuart Eizenstat; 16 August 1984. Washington, D.C.

on a personal level this late into his first term; Brzezinski and Jordan said Begin would prefer Carter not to be reelected and thus would probably soft pedal on coming to an agreement on the West Bank before November 1980. Sadat also was probably not ready to commit himself to a president who was growing increasingly unpopular at home.³⁰

Political Realist. However, questions of tactics aside, Carter also was heavily influenced by the political advice of his close advisers that any additional close involvement would be politically disastrous in the Jewish community. Though the community had been supportive of Carter's monumental achievement at Camp David and in March, they had not forgotten Carter's exceedingly public threats and rebukes of Menachem Begin. As much as they were uneasy about Begin, they were even more uncomfortable with an American President who was not afraid to deal harshly with Israel on public record. In the end, such close involvement after the treaty no doubt would have require additional U.S. pressure to obtain an agreement -- since the West Bank issue was the thorniest one remaining, and Begin would be at his most intransigent. That the president wanted the issue to fade away politically is evinced in his decision not to let Vance continue to press for a settlement accord, but Robert Strauss, a prominent Democratic establishment adviser, who also happened to be Jewish and sensitive to the President's political difficulties in the community. As Brzezinski

³⁰ Brzezinski, p.279.

observed, from the beginning Strauss was particularly concerned with the domestic implications of our Middle East policy and he (along with Mondale) made it clear to Carter that any pressure on Israel would be politically damaging at home."³¹

The shift in Carter's political behavior -- his close attention to domestic politics after March 1979 -- should not be interpreted as a sudden onset of political realism supplanting Carter's naive. Of course, following the treaty, Carter would let domestic politics influence the level of his activity on the Mideast and certainly this reflects his growing realization that his political future was in doubt. But it is important to note that Carter was conscious of political realities all along -- he had just simply decided to ignore them up until this point. Thus, March 1979 was a turning point, but it does not mark some stunning transformation in Carter's thinking, as if something hidden was now apparent. Such an assessment yields a portrait of Carter's character that does little justice to his complexity and intelligence. Carter's policy of disengagement was a shift in his political calculus, not an adoption of one for the first time.

After his appointment as special negotiator in May 1979, Strauss was given increasing jurisdiction in the Mideast issue; the president was quite explicit in his objective. When Vance brought up the subject of settlements

³¹ Brzezinski, p.438.

in May, Carter stressed that Strauss should handle it and gave the clear impression he should handle it quietly. In early August, Vance again objected to Strauss's growing role; this time Carter was much more specific, as Brzezinski describes it: "(Vance said,) 'Mr. President I am not going to be a figurehead for you. If you don't want me to do (anything on settlements) I am going to resign.' ... Carter said, 'Cy, I don't want you to resign. I would rather drop the whole issue. But I do want Strauss up front because I need him as a political shield.'"³²

From late summer of 1979 until Carter's defeat in November the following year, no major effort was made to wring an agreement from the autonomy talks underway between Egypt, Israel, and the U.S. Ed Sanders left his post as liason in the fall of 1979, reportedly frustrated by what he perceived as his growing distance from the substantive policy discussion. Strauss was replaced by Sol Linowitz in October 1979, as the former went to manage Carter's reelection campaign; Linowitz continued Strauss' quiet style, and no major initiative was made during his tenure. Sanders was replaced by Alfred Moses in April 1980. Moses, a partner in the prominent Washington law firm of Covington and Burling, was on the board of the American Jewish Committee and had a reputation for being more willing than Sanders to be an apologist for the administration's policy

³² Brzezinski, p.439.

towards Israel.³³ However, Moses' brief tenure in the White House coincided with a rough campaign season and thus his role could not be expected to be comparable to that of Sanders or Siegel, who acted as liaisons during periods of Carter's intensive involvement in the Middle East. He had access to Mondale's office, but did not have Sander's initial entree to Jordan's office and to the Oval Office itself.³⁴ Moses, then, never seemed to have been a focal point for significant communications between the community and the White House.

Jewish Power or New Realism? The decision by the president to follow his political strategists' advice might stand as testimony to the resurgent power of the "Jewish lobby" in exercising influence on Carter's policy for the region. After all, Carter clearly was exhausted by the incessant jousting with Menachem Begin, and he at last seemed to respond to reports of severe political fallout in the Jewish community. To a great degree this seems to be an accurate analysis. Yet the cause for Carter's deference to political considerations does not lay in any new course of action taken by Jewish lobbyists themselves. Rather, it is a reflection of Carter's serious effort to re-mold his administration in the summer of 1979 more along the lines of a traditional Democratic administration. At a domestic summit meeting at Camp David on July 4-11 -- shortly before

³³ Interview with Morris J. Amitay, 28 February 1985; Washington, D.C.

³⁴ Interview with Morris J. Amitay, 28 February 1985; Washington, D.C.

the so-called "malaise" speech -- Carter abandoned the "spokes on a wheel" concept in favor of a centralized White House staff. Hamilton Jordan became the chief of staff, coordinating most major legislative initiatives and helping to rally the national Democratic Party structure. Carter, faced with a new low in the public opinion polls and the beginnings of a Ted Kennedy draft movement (the first Kennedy election committee was established in May 1979), seemed to effectively abandon the populist rhetoric of his 1976 campaign and took on the trappings of a coalition-style Democrat. He began attending fundraisers for local politicians, for example. In short, as Carter faced the major crises of his last 18 months in office -- severe inflation, oil price hikes, and the hostage crisis -- he was making an honest effort to be an "insider," and to mend fences with traditional pols. Thus, sensing that his political future was in serious jeopardy, the loud objections of the Jewish community no longer began to fall on deaf ears. Carter was now committed to covering his political trail as he faced a range of thorny difficulties on domestic and foreign fronts. But this new responsiveness was not aimed particularly at Jewish groups, but at all traditional Democratic support groups who had been shut out from the Carter inner circle at the outset.

However, the belated effort to be the insider pulling political strings did not succeed in bringing disgruntled groups back to the Carter camp. Buffeted by ambiguous

signals, ranging from outright confrontation to less-than-convincing accommodation, Jewish groups, as well as representatives of labor, education, womens' groups -- all major groups except blacks -- were wary of returning to the Carter fold. In any case, Carter success in assuaging the bruised attitudes of the coalition he desperately needed was predicated on an optimistic political calculation: that no major crisis, such as the hostage imbroglio, or economic distress, such as record inflation would cast further doubt on Carter's very competence in the job.³⁵ Furthermore, as far as Jewish groups were concerned, Carter had to make sure that nothing controversial would upset the community leaders, who still were wrestling with Carter's ambiguous record toward Israel and were privately hopeful that Sen. Kennedy would enter the race to save the Democratic liberal tradition.

THE JEWS LEAVE FOR GOOD. AUGUST 1979 - NOVEMBER 1980.

Despite a calculated effort to bring disaffected Jews back into the Carter camp, events beyond Jimmy Carter's control -- but identified as his fault -- made that rapprochement impossible. First, in a breach of U.S. protocol, U.N. ambassador Andrew Young met privately with the P.L.O. observer in August 1979. Though Young resigned, many Jewish leaders were uneasy about a Democratic administration in which its agents would even consider talking with the terrorist organization. In the minds of many Jewish leaders

35 Interview with Mark Siegel; Columbia Oral History Project, February 8, 1978.

and voters, Carter's disavowal of any approval for Young's action did not completely allay fears that the president might some day reach out to the P.L.O.

The Mideast took a back seat to the seizure of the American embassy in Teheran by late 1979; on the political front, Senator Edward Kennedy had declared his candidacy, and polled very well among American Jews. Hoping to quietly assure Jews of his faith to Israel, Carter was thwarted by a vote in the Security Council concerning the occupied territories in late March 1980. Assured that the resolution contained no references to Jerusalem, Carter authorized the U.N. envoy to vote in the affirmative (as a matter of standing policy, the U.S. will not vote on any resolution that contains a reference to the future status of Jerusalem). In fact, the resolution was filled with references to Jerusalem. The vote genuinely seems to be a mix-up in communications, but the Jewish community blamed Carter for breaking a solemn pledge to Israel. Acknowledging their error, the administration issued a statement -- just a few days before the New York primary against Kennedy -- saying that the vote was an incorrect reflection of standing U.S. policy. The damage had already been done, though, and Jews as well as other voters at once doubted the president's commitment to Israel and were disturbed by what seemed a rather overt politically-motivated retraction. Carter lost the New York primary to Kennedy by a 59% to 41% margin, but Jews had voted for Kennedy by an overwhelming 78% to 22%;

non Jews in New York State had actually supported Carter, voting narrowly for the president by a margin of 51% to 49%.³⁶

THE GENERAL ELECTION AND DEFEAT. Carter's campaign against Edward Kennedy brought to the fore the old reservations the Jewish community harbored toward Carter. Indeed, by election year, Jimmy Carter's policy towards the Middle East was the least popular of any American president among Jews since that of Dwight Eisenhower.³⁷ While they viewed Camp David and the peace treaty as positive achievements, they also remembered the jet sale, the communique, Andrew Young and the P.L.O., and the general campaign of chastising Israel. Emotions were to be heightened late in the campaign season, when Billy Carter, the president's brother, registered as an agent for the Libyan government. Billy Carter had been accused of uttering some anti-Semitic remarks back in January 1979, and his reemergence in August 1980 cast further doubt into Jews' minds; despite the president's denial of any association with his brother's alleged views and any control over his brother's actions, the community as a whole felt uneasy about Billy Carter's formal ties to a nation pledged to Israel's destruction.³⁸ Once Carter had captured the nomination from Kennedy, Jews thus did not automatically

³⁶ Alan Fisher, "Jewish Political Shift?" in Party Coalition in the 1980s, Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1981), p.332.

³⁷ Fisher, p.329.

³⁸ Fisher, p.329.

swing over to Carter's camp as they had done four years before. The community's distress over Carter would not dissipate; and the general election would show the first significant migration of American Jews from the Democratic presidential (not congressional) ticket. At the annual Bnai Brith convention in September 1980 -- an obligatory speaking engagement for all major presidential candidates -- the dominant mood was one of profound disappointment with Carter's performance in office. Though some of that distress stemmed from non-Israel related issues, there was a clear sense that Carter could not be trusted anymore regarding Israel: "He's pressing Israel to make concessions, but he's not pressing Sadat in the same way," observed a delegate at the convention who expressed a widespread feeling.³⁹

Jimmy Carter did not suffer a complete loss of Jewish support in 1980. In fact, Hyman Bookbinder of the American Jewish Committee and other prominent lobbyists in Washington campaigned for Carter against Reagan. But the dominant sentiment in the community was one of mistrust, where many leaders wondered what would restrain Carter from pressuring Israel, when he wouldn't have to worry about reelection. The election results show Carter winning 47% of the Jewish vote in 1980, compared with 34% for Reagan and 17% for John Anderson. The evidence suggests that this abandonment of the Democratic ticket by the Jewish constituency was an anti-

³⁹ Steven V. Roberts, "Jews at Bnai Brith Parley Voice Disappointment in Carter," The New York Times, September 6, 1980, p.12.

Carter statement not a pro-Reagan statement. Jewish voters seemed to have remained true to their liberal political leanings. That is not only measured by their massive support for Sen. Kennedy in the primary season, but also by their disproportionate support for Anderson; the independent candidate received only 6.6% of the vote nationwide, but did nearly three times as well among Jews. In an early Harris Poll, conducted in May 1980, when Anderson's campaign had greater credibility, a huge percentage of American Jews in the survey -- 59% -- said they would support him, compared with 23% for Carter and 19% for Reagan; this compared with nationwide figures of 22% for Anderson, 39% for Carter and 32% for Ronald Reagan.⁴⁰

The post-Camp-David Carter record on the Arab-Israeli conflict failed to bring skeptical Jewish voters and community leaders firmly back into the Carter camp. For the first time, Jewish votes for the Democratic ticket only outpaced the general electorate's tally by a few percentage points (Carter won 41% nationwide). The central question, of course, is: given Carter's chosen Mideast policy, how much of this deterioration of support was necessary? While it is difficult to gauge voters' motivations or impressions, the reactions of Jewish leaders to Carter's policies in the last half of his administration do suggest certain trends. First, that Carter had regained considerable credibility with the American Jewish community with the signing of the Camp David

⁴⁰ All results listed above are from Fisher, pp.332-333.

accords, and later with the peace treaty. The Jewish community leaders all praised Carter for his efforts at Camp David and recognized it as a giant leap in Mideast diplomacy. However, his inclination for combativeness in the period between Camp David and the treaty cancelled out much of this progress -- without achieving any progress toward an agreement. Carter's public rebuke of Israel was a continuation of an unnecessary style that did little to move the autonomy talks forward and did much to alienate a group that wanted desperately to support the president after Camp David.

However, following the peace treaty, Carter's alienation of the community seems to have stemmed not from a faulty political style, but from unfortunate events beyond his control. Carter's effective disengagement from the Mideast and the restructuring of his White House staff in the summer of 1979 signaled the end of the president's confrontational style towards Israel. The Arab-Israeli issue fell out of the limelight. If it weren't for the incidents mentioned above, it is quite possible Carter would have had the time to rebuild his bridges (there is little doubt that Carter's popularity with Jews at election time was higher than that at the time of the jet sale or the Young resignation, or in the rocky period between Camp David and the treaty signing.) As it was, Carter's confrontational style remained in Jews' consciousness.

It would not be justified, however, to blame Carter's failure to regain the confidence of Jewish leaders purely on luck; that analysis ignores a more meaningful assessment of Carter's shortcomings as a politician. It was Carter's stubborn self-confidence, his failure to contemplate the possibility of failure or political disaster, that left him so politically exposed in his last year as president. To paraphrase Mark Siegel, the president's style was predicated almost solely on the political "up side." He assumed that the peace treaty, though a product of U.S. pressure on Israel, would bring in Jewish votes and would not be hampered by accidental mix-ups that would perpetuate doubt. On a larger scale, Carter assumed that even if Jews remained disaffected, support from other quarters in the coalition would counteract his loss of support -- it seems no one considered that a disaster (like the 1979-1980 economy or the hostage crisis) would make Jewish voters a necessary part of Carter's bloc. In this sense, Carter's lack of political savvy for much of his administration and his lack of political preparation for his bad luck in the latter half are testimony to his naive or self-confidence as a politician. Though events may have been beyond his control, his poor political responsiveness and his inability to plan for crises made a bad situation worse. Luck may have been against Jimmy Carter in the last year of his presidency, but few presidents would have needlessly alienated key

supporters and counted on being vindicated at the polls to the degree that Jimmy Carter did.

CHAPTER FOUR

A CRITIQUE OF THE ENGINEER-PREACHER:

JIMMY CARTER'S POLITICAL STYLE

The genesis of the alienation between the Carter administration and Jewish leaders, as we have seen in the last three chapters, lay in a confluence of organizational, ideological, and personal factors, each with its own dynamic and degree of importance. The distance between the community and Carter, as we have seen, was then perpetuated by a series of political mistakes beyond Carter's control but within his responsibility. This chapter is a brief analysis of the primary factor that led Jewish leaders away from the Carter camp before Carter had disengaged from the peace process in March 1979. It is an examination of Carter's political style -- both as it relates to the Arab-Israeli conflict and to his larger shortcomings as a politician. It was the way he made decisions and sought to implement his policies that set the tone for his administration's response to overtures by a familiar element of the Democratic coalition. The administration's organizational flaws and its initial novel perceptions about the nature of its base of support were certainly instrumental in diminishing Carter's sensitivity to a powerful constituency. But to a far greater degree, the determining factor in alienating the community was, put simply, the way Carter did his job -- how he attacked problems, how he arrived at decisions, how he felt about alternative views once he had made up his mind, how he dealt with the opposition, how he viewed the interplay between interest groups and the decisionmaking process, and

how he worked to make his views both succeed and be deemed palatable.

This chapter is a brief analysis of Carter's style of decisionmaking, as loosely defined above. After identifying key flaws in that style which emerge from his handling of the Jewish community, it argues that these shortcomings were not issue-specific, but general flaws that resonate with similar problems that developed in many areas that Carter addressed. The focus on the president's performance on the Arab-Israeli question is thus a vehicle for identifying basic, deep-seated flaws in Carter the decisionmaker. These flaws are grouped into three general categories: 1) How he looked at problems: his focus on the microcosmic at the expense of the macrocosmic -- leading to a serious lack of strategic planning in gathering domestic support. Also treated here is Carter's basic lack of passion or clearly articulated values -- making it difficult even for supporters to sense a coherence in his policy and trust his motives. To use James Fallows' phrase, he never gave people and "idea to follow." 2) How he felt about his own decisions: his self-confidence and sense of righteousness that contributed to a tendency to be stubborn and to dig his heels in, especially when challenged; 3) finally, how he sought to implement, gather support for, his decisions: a disdain for politics that diminished his effectiveness in implementing his wishes. While an in-depth treatment of Carter's overall flaws as a decision-maker in all areas, or

an attempt at a psychohistory of the president, is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis, it is possible to suggest general consistencies in Carter's behavior across the issue spectrum. This critique of Carter's political style first identifies each category listed above as it relates to the Mideast issue, and then generalizes to describe basic trends in Carter's performance on a range of issues.

The second part of this chapter examines the relationship between Carter and the Jewish leadership as vehicle for understanding on the general role of interest groups in the decisionmaking process. Carter's record seems to both prove and disprove popular notions about powerful lobby groups in general and the Jewish lobby in particular. That is, contrary to some political analyses, the President did not find himself handcuffed by a lobby to a degree that it stifled his freedom of action. Indeed, during his immersion in Mideast questions, Jewish leaders' opposition did not deny him a single triumph: he continued to pressure Israel in public and was prepared to push Israel into a corner to get a peace treaty. He even sold advanced jets to nations still in a state of war with Israel. Though political considerations forced Carter to reevaluate his personal involvement in 1979, while he was committed to obtaining a peace, threats of Jewish defection did not seem to alter his basic course. On the other hand, his performance does bear out a basic truth about American

politics: that Carter's notion that traditional Democratic coalition politics was outmoded was very wrong. Politics still amounted to an effort to win the support of a range of groups with more or less defined interests; this equation was not supplanted by an appeal to a new white-collar rising middle class that did not identify with issue- or industry-specific goals, but valued efficiency, honesty, and abstract rationality -- and other motherhood values. In short, in being a true maverick in his dealings with interest groups, Carter paid a costly electoral price that was both a testimony to the cohesiveness of the Jewish lobby in particular and a rejection of the populist political philosophy with which he first entered the White House.

HOW CARTER LOOKED AT PROBLEMS: ON MICROCOSM AND THE LACK OF PASSION. Jimmy Carter's approach to tackling the Mideast problem reflected a fascination with detail and deep study, devoid of any central articulated value. From his careful reading of the Brookings report to his daily briefings with Brzezinski to his involvement on the drafting of the Camp David accords and the final peace treaty, Carter was directly involved in all phases of the negotiations. Carter became known for reading virtually all research memoranda, low-level intelligence analyses, and other documents which presidents leave to their staff to read and interpret. He never lost sight of his long run goal of achieving peace in the Mideast -- though he did settle for a bilateral, and not comprehensive agreement. However,

Carter's habit of evaluating individual decisions on their merits and in a virtual vacuum had two basic detrimental effects on his ability to gather domestic support for his policies. First, from a practical viewpoint, Carter never took care to strategically plan out the order of his decisions to suit his political needs. Thus he would consider the merits of selling jets to the Saudis without also considering that it was not wise to do so while the administration was urging Jewish leaders to help moderate Begin's views and bring him back to the negotiating table. In December 1978, he determined the jet sale to be sound policy -- but it did not occur to him that his timing for pushing the sale was regrettable. He would rebuke Israel in late 1978, and then seek domestic Jewish leaders' help in moderating Begin's views before Camp David. There was always a sense that Carter, despite his ultimate goal, never had a thought out political strategy -- of coordinating periods of wooing American Jews with public statements that were relatively mild toward Israel. As Eizenstat concedes, "There was not a lot of strategic thinking. Each issue was taken as an ad hoc issue. ... We didn't factor in the politics of his actions -- except in the last year -- to the extent that one would think a president would or should."¹

Carter's inclination to view individual steps in a general policy in a vacuum reflected the workings of a dry, dispassionate mind. Imbued with the conviction of a lay

¹ Interview with Stuart Eizenstat; 16 August 1984. Washington, D.C.

preacher with fundamentalist teachings, as well as the meticulousness of a navy-trained engineer, Carter had a natural inclination to examine each piece of a problem on its merits and defend his individual decisions with great vigor; it was never in Carter's nature to set out a list of strategically planned incremental steps to bring the peace process to a solution. He never had a grand strategy that accounted for the need to gather support for individual steps in his Mideast package that might court opposition -- or the need to stage these difficult steps at politically advantageous moments.² Carter, one had the sense, viewed his goal of achieving an agreement with great passion and even viewed this problem as a special moral burden in light of his own religiosity. However, his manner of examining each phase without a sense of the political signals it gave out meant that Carter would alternatively seem combative and conciliatory. He could call Jewish leaders to the White House and give impassioned pledges of support for Israel one month -- as he did in July 1977. Then he would issue a communique that seemed to question the American commitment to Israel. The public dichotomy stemmed from a decisionmaking style that evaluated each individual problem on its merits, but never communicated a coherent vision of what Carter thought peace should be. Without being specific, Carter could have still perpetuated a public position of

² Carter's stubbornness, religiosity, and lack of grand strategy are observations drawn from interviews with Jody Powell, 16 August 1984; and Hodding Carter, 27 July 1984.

unswerving commitment to Israel and still privately expressed dissatisfaction to Begin (not a man to bend to public rebukes anyway). Thus, Jewish leaders never had an "idea" to latch onto. They could never gauge the depth of Carter's commitment to Israel because he never conveyed conviction, but eclecticism.³

Carter as leader: the engineer-preacher. Carter's microcosmic method and seeming lack of passion is a familiar broad-based criticism leveled at his presidency. In the Atlantic Monthly, James Fallows, the former chief speechwriter for Carter, refers to the the "passionless presidency." Carter prepared his energy legislation in a vacuum, without consulting members of either the industry or even Congress. The same was true for his tax reform proposals, as was his decision to veto the construction of eight water projects in the western United States -- without reasoning that he would created too much bad will and expend too much capital in Congress trying to press for a relatively minor issue.⁴ Carter's immersion in details was legendary as was his inability to agree with a Democrat-controlled Congress on an agenda. Despite his moves on energy, welfare reform, government reorganization, and tax reform, legislators never had a sense of what Carter's priorities were or the basic values (social liberalism? economic conservatism?) he embraced. Carter, Betty Glad

³ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984. Washington, D.C.

⁴ James Fallows, The Atlantic, "The Passionless Presidency -- Part One," May 1979, pp.35-42.

wrote, "lacks it seems a well thought out conceptual framework to guide his political choices."⁵

The same devotion to detail is evinced in Carter's performance in the governor's mansion and as a state senator. In the legislature, Carter pledged to read every bill in detail (over 2,500 per session) and was a conspicuous critic of surrendering to special interests. As a governor, he had a reputation as a loner, who would seek "comprehensive" solutions and then not be prone to compromise. He seems to have had a fascination with the process of decisionmaking that diluted the substance -- he wanted to simplify things like the government bureaucracy, consumer protection laws, welfare systems, the budgeting process. He never conveyed a unified image of where he stood on the political spectrum; he seemed more the technocrat than the decisionmaker even in Georgia.⁶ Carter's training as an engineer in the Navy clearly was the dominant formative influence on his decisionmaking style. Immersed in details, Carter would show a commitment to a methodical process -- a perfectly valid approach for an engineer, but devoid of the normative judgements necessary for a politician who seeks support. Knott and Wildavsky aptly describe Carter's affinity to the details -- manifested so clearly in his decision making about the Mideast -- as a concern "less with particular goals than the need for goals, less with the

⁵ Betty Glad, Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), p.476.

⁶ Jack Knott & Aaron Wildavsky, "Jimmy Carter's Theory of Governing," The Wilson Quarterly, Winter 1977, pp.52-54.

content of policies than with their ideal form -- simplicity, uniformity, hierarchy, and comprehensiveness."⁷ Thus Carter could be very effective (and even emotionally gripping) private encounters and negotiations and still be unable to give his larger audience a sense of his ultimate goals because he fails to convey a coherent vision.

WHAT HE THOUGHT OF HIS OWN SOLUTIONS: CARTER'S SELF-CONFIDENCE & THE SIN OF PRIDE. Throughout Carter's focus on the Mideast question, he retained a sense of conviction and of hostility to compromise that alienated the Jewish community. As noted in previous chapters, Carter would solicit views of Jewish leaders, of his political advisers, but then would revert to a combative, overt castigation of Israel. Apart from the policy differences which would have brought inevitable conflict between Carter and Jewish leaders, Carter's combative style was instrumental in unnecessarily alienating a group that desperately wanted to help Carter moderate Begin's views and achieve a settlement. The evidence for his stubbornness and belief in his own views is found throughout the period: refusing to change the timing of the jet sale, refusing to change his rhetoric to accommodate growing Jewish fears, castigating Israel in the middle of the peace process, thus eroding what Jewish support he had built. Of course, he did his share of bridge-building and retractions (such as after the communique). But these were not changes in grand strategy or tone, but

⁷ Knott and Wildavsky, p.49.

temporary efforts at damage control -- they signalled no great shift in the way Carter attacked the problem. Carter's inclination not to give rival views sufficient merit was noted by Mark Siegel: "When he could not be swayed or deterred from a policy, he would let you know that you're wrong. Not he thinks you're wrong, but you're wrong. And he's right. He listened, always listened. Everything I wrote would come back and have an initial 'JC,' but there would never be a substantive comment.... He would never challenge your views."⁸

Carter's stubbornness no doubt enhanced his abilities as a negotiator. His drive to achieve a settlement at Camp David was the catalyst for an agreement. Thus it is not entirely just to fault Carter for being committed to a definite set of long-range goals. However, the same confidence which led to relentless pursuit of an agreement also led him not to solicit advice from Jewish leaders often; and when he did, it seemed to be lip service more than earnest consultation. The combative style of the Carter White House reflected the drive of a man ready to court confrontation with the Jewish community as well as Menachem Begin; that forcefulness reflected Carter's belief in the righteousness of his views and his belief that Jews would eventually return to his camp and concede the rightness of his course.⁹

⁸ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984; Washington, D.C.
⁹ Interview with Mark Siegel, 31 July 1984; Interview with Morris J. Amitay, 28 February 1985; both in Washington, D.C.

Carter's mark of stubborn self-confidence and unwillingness to compromise does not seem to have been confined to his performance on the Mideast question. The secrecy with which he handled his energy package -- prepared without any outside consultation --, resulting in a watered-down version that didn't even come close to meeting the president's expectations; his insistence on vetoing the eight water projects in the West, an act which led Sen. Byrd to term it the "stupidest" move made by a president early in his term, with a sitting majority of his party in congress; the basic lack of communication between the congressional liaison office run by Frank Moore and the congressional leadership, leading to lack of coordination and agreement on welfare policy, tax policy, and government reorganization.¹⁰ Carter would often tell O'Neill how he handled the Georgia legislature -- by appealing to the people directly -- and the speaker responded: "You have 289 guys up there who know their districts pretty well. They ran against the Administration, and they wouldn't hesitate to run against you. Carter said, 'Oh, really?'"¹¹ Byrd and O'Neill had to expend tremendous amounts of political capital to pass the energy legislation, his amnesty policy for Vietnam veterans, auto pollution. Carter would not help his case by

¹⁰ For a good general account of Carter's failure to deal with Congressional leaders and accept compromise, see Haynes Johnson, In the Absence of Power, (New York: Viking Press, 1980). A classic example of uncoordination is the B-1 bomber issue. Carter announced his opposition to the program only days after O'Neill had gone on record for it.

¹¹ Glad, p.420.

criticizing Democrats in the House for not letting some energy legislation out of committee, for example. In short, Carter, for much of his administration, would prove inept at soliciting support in the congress, at building a popular base of support before announcing major initiatives. Although communications improved after Carter's domestic Camp David summit of July 1979 and he became more involved in Democratic functions, by that time the economy's downturn had begun and the hostage crisis was only months away -- he never had the time to rebuild the bridges with his party that he had so carelessly destroyed for two-and-a-half years.¹² The above analysis does not deny that Carter had a number of legislative and executive successes during his tenure -- rather that they were overshadowed and sometimes diminished by excessive stubbornness and lack of political saavy.

HOW HE GATHERED SUPPORT: DISDAIN FOR THINGS POLITICAL.

As described in detail previously, Carter had a general disdain for letting political consideration enter into decisions concerning either the style or substance of his Mideast policy. It was not even until a major crisis ten months into his administration that domestic advisers became part of the foreign policy loop. But even their attendance at foreign policy breakfasts did not guarantee any substantial influence. During his period of intense involvement during the Mideast there is abundant evidence --

¹² A very good account of Carter's poor bargaining style is found in Glad, pp.420-427.

both from observations made by key players, such as Brzezinski, Eizenstat, Siegel, and Powell, as well as himself -- that Carter declined to let politics get in the way of making the right choice. Part of that inclination, of course, came from Carter's initial notion that his political legacy was not tied to a Democratic coalition. However, much of that disdain came from a longstanding mistrust of "special interests," which manifested itself not only in the White House but also during his tenure as governor. The inclination to eschew political factors -- which Carter abandoned towards the end of 1979, when he began participating in Democratic activities as the threat of a Kennedy challenge became a reality -- may have made for technically sound decisions. But they also eroded political support, reduced the likelihood of anything meaningful being passed by Congress, and invited a tougher battle on the next issue. "He enjoyed and understood electoral politics," Powell noted, "the legislative and bureaucratic politics less so. When he was campaigning, he was a campaigner. He would make the compromises; once elected, he was going to govern with as little of that as he could get away with."¹³

When Carter came into the White House, he boasted that he would treat the congress the same way he treated the Georgia legislature. That is, whenever he had an initiative on which legislators were being obstinate -- such as consumer legislation, or an alternative to forced bussing,

¹³ Interview with Jody Powell, 14 August 1984; Washington, D.C.

or zero-based budgeting -- Carter would "appeal to the people." The same style pervaded much of the early Carter White House. His inner circle of advisers included mostly Georgians -- indeed, Washington insiders, such as counsel Lloyd Cutler and Robert Strauss, would only become familiar faces in the White House in mid 1979 -- acquired a reputation for not being sensitive to complaints from the congressional leadership. He would refuse to attend Democratic fundraisers. He even declined to make appointments to minor posts in the bureaucracy as political favors -- he went so far as to make significant appoints for two Republicans from Massachusetts, irritating Speaker O'Neill. His brand of populism -- what Betty Glad accurately terms "pitting virtually the entire population against no one" -- had the effect of leaving Carter without a wide base of support. With the exception of American blacks, Carter could point to no one to whom he had consistently gave -- and received -- support.

INTEREST GROUPS AND PRESIDENTIAL FREEDOM. Carter's political style pitted him against one of the most visible and influential lobby groups in the United States. Like most powerful lobby groups, Jewish organizations draw their strength from abundant resources, commitment to a narrow range of issue on which few others will fight passionately against -- as well as substantial sympathy among non-Jews for the security of the State of Israel. Connected with influential staffers and congressmen, pivotal in electoral

coalitions for representatives, senators, and presidents, Jewish leaders have recently taken to boasting that they can elect or defeat candidates, that they have fashioned the most pro-Israel congress in post-war history, that they make members of congress think twice before opposing foreign aid levels for Israel. Their strength is augmented by the fact that one cannot lose votes in the United States by being pro-Israel. The Arab population is much smaller and less active than the Jewish population -- furthermore, they are not all Palestinian, and thus do not express the same loyalty and feeling of kinship with key issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict. For all of Jewish money and organizational and electoral activity, it would seem that these groups would be open to the criticisms that they have distorted the democratic process by handcuffing elected officials -- far out of proportion to the size of the community in the nation.

Jimmy Carter's tenure stands as a refutation to the idea that the Jewish lobby can call the foreign policy tune towards Israel when Democratic leaders are in positions of leadership. Carter was not denied a single victory because of Jewish opposition. Advanced jets were still sold to Saudi Arabia, and other jets to Egypt. Carter was prepared to force a showdown with Begin and clearly did not tailor his public image to allay Jewish fears. Of course, he did offer retractions in the face of unexpected developments -- such as the fallout after the October communique and the U.N.

resolution in March 1980 -- but these were more clarifications to allay fears that did not signal any fundamental reorientation in the Carter strategy.

At the same time, Carter did prove that his vision of a new Democratic coalition on the horizon was a mirage. Carter clearly felt that he was outside the Democratic tradition, and he certainly was reluctant to sign onto traditional Democratic legislation early in his term. While he turned to more traditional politics in late 1979 -- now that he was in control of the machinery -- the philosophy that had brought Jimmy Carter to the White House and which imbued the initial organizational structure of the White House was soundly defeated in 1980. One cannot point to the Jewish defection in 1980 as entirely the result of Carter's Israel policy; like everyone else, Jews were upset about Iran and the economy. Most of their voting can be explained by a general anti-Jimmy Carter sentiment. But while Jewish groups did not campaign for Reagan and some grudgingly supported Carter, the "word was out" in the community in 1980 that Carter could not be trusted on Israel, and that if reelected he would pressure Israel to give up territory against its will. Faced with that image, Jews preferred to go against decades of tradition and vote for the Republican candidate. Thus, if Carter showed that he had freedom of action from interest groups, he also showed that groups can still cohere around a set of issues and that a successful politician must appeal still to a society that is remarkably unified.

CONCLUSION

FREEDOM TO ACT, FAILURE TO PERSUADE

President Jimmy Carter never had a natural constituency in the American Jewish community. Concentrated in urban regions in the Northeast and the far West, committed to liberal social welfare agendas, most American Jews rightly perceived Carter as falling outside the familiar spectrum of Democratic politics. Most in the community were comfortable with "traditional" Democratic liberals, who not only had strong records on social welfare issues and Israel, but who also looked to the Jewish community, big labor, women's groups, and other interests as a natural base of support. Carter came from outside this tradition. Beyond substantive policy differences with the northeast liberal wing of the party, what set him apart was his aversion to coalition politics -- both as a campaigner and as president. Latter-day members of the bandwagon, Jewish leaders were never quite able to ingratiate themselves to a man who neither felt particularly beholden to them, nor was inclined to politick skillfully the way most Democrats would.

From the start of the administration to Carter's decision to cease his personal immersion in the Mideast in March 1979, organizational and personal factors effectively separated the decisionmaking process from the process of domestic political strategic thinking. The populist philosophy and the organizational exclusion of the domestic staff from policy discussions in the first 10 months or so worked to desensitize Carter to the political ramifications of his confrontational style. While these difficulties

eventually were corrected, it was Carter's style -- his stubbornness, pride, disdain for politics, and predilection for micro-management -- which led Carter to needlessly alienate Jewish leaders. His belief that a peace treaty would bring vindication from the Jewish community underestimated the degree of damage Carter had done to his image in community while pursuing incremental steps that led to Camp David and the treaty. Unforeseen political disasters in the last year of his presidency -- perhaps the only period in which political strategy was a constant and prominent element in his thinking -- kept him from rebuilding bridges he had carelessly burnt.

Carter's handling of the domestic political fallout from his confrontational -- but largely successful -- policies has shed light on an overall assessment of Carter the politician, as well as on the function of powerful interest groups in this president-centered age. His stubbornness and his willingness to court political disaster emerged quite clearly in his relationship with Jewish leaders, but also extended to many other struggles with a range of powerful groups and elected representatives. In reviewing a record filled with one bitter battle after another with members of his own party and traditional elements of the Democratic coalition, one recalls the assessment Richard Neustadt made two decades ago about the intangible quality to presidential power. Carter emerges as a man of superior intelligence, drive, and astonishing

commitment, but who never understood the need for compromise, and the need for a president to actively seek it. Though a master of detail, he never became the master of persuasion, which Neustadt astutely cited as the central role for any sitting president.

The relationship between Jimmy Carter and the American Jewish community thus is a useful vehicle for identifying larger shortcomings in the president's political calculations, as well as insights about the fragility of a president's freedom of action. It showed what happens to a president who is unwilling and unsuited to persuade his supporters. It also indicates that for all of his superb intellectual capabilities, for all of his diligence as president, Jimmy Carter was probably never comfortable with the political leg-work that was an integral part of his job. A man who often mistook stubbornness for conviction, meticulous analysis for political skill, and political strategy for insincerity, he was not able to accept the principle upon which incumbents can function and thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "R. B. ...", located at the bottom right of the page.

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