

Does the president's perception matter when it comes to Israel?

A case study on the effect of a US president's foreign policy beliefs on US-Israel relations



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2. Introduction

“The remarkable alliance between Israel and the United States has always been above politics. It must always remain above politics. Because America and Israel, we share a common destiny. A destiny of promised lands that cherish freedom and offer hope. Israel is grateful for the support of America’s people and of America’s presidents from Harry Truman to Barack Obama.” -Benjamin Netanyahu (2015).

The relationship between the United States of America and Israel has always been remarkably close. On May 14th 1948, the then-leader of the World Zionist Organisation David-Ben Gurion proclaimed the declaration of the establishment of the state of Israel, shortly before Great-Britain’s mandate over the area expired. US president Harry Truman formally recognized the state of Israel only eleven minutes after its proclamation (Truman Library, n.d.). Since then, the United States has been supportive of Israel. With the sole exception of the Suez crisis, the United States always sided with Israel when it was involved in military conflicts with other nations. The Jewish state has also been the greatest benefactor of American foreign aid (Sharp, 2020). Israel also receives diplomatic support from the US, resulting in many United Nations declarations condemning Israel’s behaviour regarding the Palestine conflict being vetoed by the United States.

The consistent long-term support of the United States for Israel has made it an interesting subject voor academic research. However, because of this consistency an important factor which influences American foreign policy is often overlooked when it comes to Israel: the role of the president of the United States.

Considering the fact that after Truman, all twelve presidents which have occupied the oval office can be regarded as generally supportive of Israel, it may seem logical to ignore this factor (Malka, 2011, p. 1). But these presidents most certainly did not all have the same approach to foreign policy in general. They had many different beliefs towards how the United States should approach foreign policy which influenced their administration. A marking example of how an individual president’s foreign policy beliefs can influence US foreign policy can be found in the 1940s. In the early twentieth century, many people in the United States supported an isolationist approach to international affairs. President Franklin D. Roosevelt however was a supporter of more American commitment to international affairs. As a results, In the early days of WWII (before Pearl Harbor shifted American’s opinions on

involvement) he was able to secure US support for the nations targeted by the axis powers, despite the objections of many isolationists politicians (FDR Library, n.d.).

The fact that the foreign policy beliefs of the president can influence US foreign policy makes the stability of America's relation with Israel even more interesting. Is the relationship between the two nations so strong that the perceptions of the president do not matter? Or can the foreign policy beliefs of the president influence the relationship between these nations? To answer this, the research question is as follows: to what extent do the foreign policy beliefs of the US president have an effect on US-Israel relations?

In this research, American presidents with different foreign policy beliefs will be measured against their policy regarding Israel. If their beliefs do reflect the way they are managing Israel, it can create grounds to say that even in the case of Israel the president's beliefs on foreign policy are an important factor to take into account.

The first part of this research details what factors influence the relationship between the US and Israel as well as how powerful the US president is in determining America's foreign policy. After this part, a theory for determining a president's foreign policy beliefs will be discussed, followed by the methodology section. I will analyze two American presidents with different foreign policy beliefs, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, on their policy towards Israel. In the analysis, the foreign policy beliefs of both presidents will first be established. Then their policy towards Israel will be compared against each other to determine whether different foreign policy beliefs affect their Israel policy. The results will be discussed in the conclusion.

3. Literature review

3.1 History of US-Israel relations

When Truman recognized Israel in 1948 he did so despite the objections of his advisors, who warned him of the strategic consequences it might have for US interests in the Middle East (Truman Library, n.d.). Shortly after the end of WWII, US policy in the Middle East focused on maintaining a good relationship with the Arab nations and those nations were hostile to the new state of Israel. As a result, in the early days of Israel's existence, American support for their state was limited (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1998, p. 233). With the cold war brewing, the United States wanted to limit Soviet influence in the region and they feared that aligning themselves too close with Israel would push these Arab states into the Soviet sphere of influence. They declined Israel requests for arms sales and even declined Israel's offer to build American military bases on their soil (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1998, p. 234). Despite US efforts, In the 1960s several Arab nations (such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq) established closer ties with the Soviet-Union and as a result saw their relationship with the United States deteriorate. The United States in response established closer ties with Israel and started providing them with weapons (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1998, p. 236). In the following decades, America's support for Israel escalated. Nowadays, the United States provides Israel with billions of dollars in foreign aid, mostly for military equipment. Roughly three-quarters of that money is re-invested in American produced military equipment (Malka, 2011, p. 1). In addition to the military and financial aid, the United States also gives Israel high-level diplomatic support. They help integrate Israel in international institutions and use the veto power that they have in many of those institutions, most notably the United Nations security council, to block anti-Israel resolutions. This overwhelming support from the US has made them very influential in Israeli decision making, and US-Israel relations are mostly steered by how the United States chooses to approach Israel (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1998, p. 232).

3.2 Reasons for US support

Despite the end of the cold war and Israel's ongoing tensions with other countries in the Middle-East, America's support for the Jewish state remains high.

The reasons for America's continued support of Israel after the cold war have been subject to much academic debate. There are however four main reasons that are most discussed: US strategic interests, the presence of an Israel lobby, the fact that their countries share common values and a shared historical narrative (Saltzman, 2017, p. 51).

The most common argument of US support for Israel is based on the fact that their support further American foreign policy goals. The Middle East has always been a region of interest to the United States, in a great part because the area produces enormous amounts of oil, which is of great value to the United States' economy. In addition to the cold war, an undisrupted oil flow was also part of the reason that America's relationship with Israel remained low-key, as they did not want to upset the other oil producing nations in the region (Malka, 2011, p. 4). But as their relationship with most nations in the region deteriorated anyway during the cold war, the US turned to Israel. For Israel, establishing a close diplomatic relationship with the United States was always considered a key objective (Malka, 2011, p. 7). As such, Israel takes US strategic interests into consideration when formulating their course of action, even if it clashes with their own policy objectives (Saltzman, 2017, p. 12). So in exchange for maintaining support for Israel, the United States ensures itself of a loyal ally in this important region. However, not all scholars agree that US support for Israel is justified on these strategic grounds. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt claim that the reason behind American support for Israel is the influence that pro-Israel lobbying groups exert on politicians to maintain a favorable foreign policy. In their article, they even go as far as to say that America's support for Israel contradicts America's own interests, but is maintained by a powerful lobbying effort (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006, p. 34). While the existence of pro-Israel lobbying groups is not in question, their impact is debated. With regard to Walt and Mearsheimer, most of their claims can be challenged from an analytical point of view (Lieberman, 2009, p. 250), making the case that the lobby is the primary source behind America's support for Israel an unlikely one. It is more generally believed that Israel's willingness to actively promote American interests has given The US many strategic benefits in the region; making this strategy seem justified (Roth, 2009, p. 380).

Another well-discussed explanation for America's support is their cultural resemblance to Israel, namely their common values and a shared historical narrative. From a cultural perspective, Israel is much closer linked to the western world than to the Arabic world. A liberal state with a democratically elected proportional parliament, there are not many cultural barriers for dealing with western nations. The argument here is that because Israel upholds western values the United States is inclined to aid them and that without this conception their partnership with the US could come to an end (Malka, 2011, p. 34). An example which supports this theory can be found when president Truman decided to recognize Israel. He partly based his decision on their perceived common values. He believed that the two countries shared Judeo-Christian values as well as a belief in liberty and democracy (Malka, 2011, p. 3). These western-oriented values set Israel apart from its neighbouring countries. In addition to their common values, the two countries seem to share a historical narrative, which causes a lot of Americans to sympathize with Israel. Their shared historical narrative is based upon the assumption that Americans compare the story of Israel's emergence with that of their own country:

‘Many Americans viewed the return of the Jews to their historical homeland and the creation of Israel as reminiscent of the American historical experience since the first pilgrims arrived at Plymouth.’ (Saltzman, 2017, p. 64).

The two countries shared historical narrative and common values are important factors that influence the American popular opinion of Israel. Historically, United States citizens have had a very favourable opinion of Israel, especially among conservatives and Christians (Malka, 2011, p. 47). These high favourability numbers can have an indirect impact on the diplomatic relationship between the two nations, as public opinion also tends to influence the course of America's foreign policy (Powlick, 1991, p. 634).

3.3 The role of the individual

The aforementioned explanations for the close ties between the US and Israel attempt to explain a relationship which has persisted over a long period of time and therefore give little attention to the impact that an individual political leader (could have) had on this relationship. This phenomenon is not uncommon within the study of International relations. For a long time, the role of the individual has long been overlooked while trying to explain a state's

behaviour (Herman & Hagan, 1998, p. 124). Especially during the era of the cold war, scholars believed that an individual leader's options were limited by the bipolar United States-Sovjet Union dominated international system (Herman & Hagan, 1998, p. 125). This reasoning would seem logical during the cold war itself and in the early days of US-Israel diplomatic relations, the cold war was an important factor.

Since the end of the cold war, however, the impact of individual political leaders has come into renewed focus. Hermann & Hagan argue that with the end of the cold war period, and the uncertainty that replaced it, political leaders could have more impact on their nation's foreign policy: "In such an ambiguous environment, the perspectives of the leaders involved in foreign policy making can have more influence on what governments do." (Herman & Hagan, 1998, p. 125).

If an individual can influence policy then it is, with regard to America's foreign policy, necessary to put the focus on the president of the United States. The president of the United States has far reaching capacities when it comes to determining American foreign policy. For example, when Donald Trump was sworn in as president in 2017, he soon withdrew the United States from the Paris climate agreement, an action which fulfilled one of his campaign pledges. Trump claimed that the agreement was not in the best interest of the United States (Gervasi, 2019, p. 779). This opinion was a complete reversal from that of his predecessor, who had been a strong advocate for the agreement. It took the preferences of one individual to change America's position on this major issue.

The president derives his power on determining foreign policy from article II of the American constitution, which grants him the right to both appoint and fire US diplomats (Gross, 2014, p. 283). Next to the explicitly stated powers in article II, several presidents have invoked powers which were, according to them, derived from the expressed powers. This enabled them to exercise more influence in (inter)national affairs, even as its legitimacy is debated (Fisher, 2007, pp. 1-2). Furthermore, the president has the right to sign treaties on behalf of the United States with other nations. While this aspect of the president's power was originally meant to be checked by the senate, who must ratify the treaty with a two-thirds majority, the president can get around this check by enacting international agreements via executive order (Gross, 2014, p. 264). For example, Obama signed the United States on to the Paris agreement via this shortcut, as he lacked the senate majority to ratify it.

Building on the argument that an individual can have a lot of impact on his country's position in the international community, especially the president of the United States, it is worth looking at what drives someone's political behaviour. From political psychology research, several factors have been suggested to drive this political behaviour. These factors include leadership style, motivations for seeking leadership positions, reactions to pressure and stress and their political beliefs (Hermann, 2013, p. 4). Of these arguments, political beliefs are the most straightforward way of analyzing political behaviour of individuals, as those beliefs influence the goals and strategies that political leaders have while in office (Abelson, 1986, p. 121).

Over the years, many researchers have designed frameworks in order to determine one's political beliefs. George Alexander was one of the first authors who designed such a framework. He proposed an "operational code" which consists of ten questions, five on philosophical beliefs and five on instrumental beliefs (George, 1969, p. 199). The aim of his operational code was to determine how these actors view political reality.

For the purpose of analyzing foreign policy specifically, authors like Eugene Wittkopf and Ole Holsti have composed a typology which measures one's foreign policy beliefs via two dimensions: militant internationalism (reflecting a willingness to use troops abroad) and cooperative internationalism (emphasizing a general willingness to cooperate with the rest of the world). This typology shows that both political elites and masses can be categorized in four types of foreign policy beliefs: accommodationists, isolationists, internationalists and hardliners (Wittkopf, 1986, p. 428).

As the political beliefs of an individual leader can influence his country's actions, and taking into account the authority that the president of the United States has on determining his country's foreign policy, one could wonder whether or not this means that the relationship between the United States and Israel is also subject to the president's foreign policy beliefs. If arguments such as strategic interests, common values or an Israel lobby provide the explanation for America's commitment to Israel, then it would be expected that whatever the president's beliefs on foreign policy are, they do not impact the two nations diplomatic relationship. On the other hand, if their diplomatic relationship does change depending on the foreign policy beliefs that a president has, it could mean that even when regarding the United States "unique" relationship with Israel, the president wields a lot of influence.

4. Theory

The aim of this research is to investigate whether or not an American president's personal foreign policy beliefs can influence his country's relationship with the state of Israel. For this purpose, it is necessary to define properly what constitutes someone's foreign policy beliefs. As mentioned before, Eugene Wittkopf (among other authors) has devised a framework in order to classify four categories of foreign policy beliefs. This classification is based upon one's position on two statistically independent (but substantively related) dimensions of internationalism: cooperative internationalism (CI) and militant internationalism (MI) (Wittkopf & Maggiotto, 1983, p. 290). People who identify as militant internationalists tend to support strategies which involve the use of the United States' military forces abroad, whereas cooperative internationalists "take a more accommodating view of the types of actions that are appropriate for activity outside U.S. borders" (Chanley, 1999, p. 25). Various analyses of surveys have supported Wittkopf's classification system and found that placement on the CI and MI scale has proven a reliable predictor for someone's stance on a wide array of international issues, both during and after the cold war (Holsti & Rosenau, 1993, p. 237; Wittkopf, 1994, p. 398). Via survey questions, Wittkopf determined someone's position on the CI dimension based upon three indicators: America's sense of global responsibility, an emphasis on cooperation with other nations and a detente towards the Soviet Union. For the position on the MI dimension, he used again the indicator of America's sense of global responsibility, as well as indicator of willingness to use troops abroad and the level of threat that communism poses to the United States (Wittkopf & Maggiotto, 1983, p. 294).

As the two dimensions are independent of one another, it is necessary to determine a respondent's position on both dimensions of internationalism to define his category. The results produce four types of foreign policy beliefs: Accommodationists (who support CI but oppose MI), Hardliners (who oppose CI but support MI), Internationalists (who support both kinds of internationalism) and Isolationists, who oppose both kinds of internationalism (Wittkopf & Maggiotto, 1983, p. 296).

Table 1. Foreign policy beliefs model

	Oppose MI	Support MI
Support CI	Accommodationists	Internationalists
Oppose CI	Isolationists	Hardliners

Building on Wittkopf's and Holsti & Rosentau's findings, it can be said someone's position on the CI and MI dimension are reliable indicators of their stance on international issues. Therefore, it would be expected that if two individuals fall in a different foreign policy belief category (meaning a difference in at least one dimension), it would lead to a difference in their foreign policy preferences. In the case of two American presidents, it might then reasonably be expected to alter the US foreign policy output of their administration, considering the authority that they have in that area. In his research, Wittkopf looked at the foreign policy beliefs of two groups in the American population: The political elites (e.g. political officeholders) and the masses (the general public). He found that someone's foreign policy beliefs remain stable over a period of time and that there are significant differences in how they are distributed among the four foreign policy beliefs. On average, the mass public is relatively evenly spread among the four categories of foreign policy beliefs, whereas the political elites tend to disproportionately support both cooperative and militant internationalism, classifying them as internationalists (Wittkopf, 1986, p. 429). In addition, later research by Wittkopf found that political ideology is an important predictor for someone's foreign policy beliefs. It is found that liberals are generally supportive of cooperative internationalism but opposed to militant internationalism, whereas with conservatives the exact opposite is the case (Wittkopf, 1986, p. 324). What indicators are used to determine someone's position on the MI and CI dimension have varied somewhat over time. For instance, an indication of someone's fear of communism is not useful anymore for determining their position on the MI scale, even though it was during the cold war. In a more recent study, James Guth has used the Wittkopf/Holsti/Rosenau framework to determine the differences in foreign policy beliefs of various religious groups in the United States. Guth classified CI as an emphasis on international cooperation, the role of international institutions and the welfare of people globally (Guth, 2016, p. 319). MI is classified as a willingness to use force in international affairs (to reach foreign policy objectives), a desire for a strong military, and to what extent someone thinks foreign actors (state and non-state) can pose a danger to the United States (Guth, 2016, p. 319).

5. Research design

5.1 Methodology

In order to determine the impact of the president's foreign policy beliefs on US-Israel relations, this research will compare President Donald J. Trump's foreign policy beliefs and his Israel policy against those of President Barack H. Obama.

The dependent variable is the US-Israel relationship which is, as mentioned before, heavily influenced by how the United States chooses to approach Israel. The independent variable is the foreign policy beliefs of the president (accommodationist/isolationist/hardliner/internationalist). As two cases will be analyzed in order to establish a link between a president's foreign policy beliefs and the diplomatic relationship between the countries, a small-N comparative research method will be used. In this method type, there are two different research designs to be considered: the most similar systems design and the most different systems design.

For this research, two cases are selected which are very similar with one another but differ in one key aspect: the foreign policy beliefs of the president. Therefore a most similar systems design will be used. A comparative case study has great benefit in that both a single topic can be studied in depth and that its findings can be broadened to more than just the researched case. A disadvantage of comparative case study is that there is always a danger of selection bias as the cases are not randomly selected (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 223).

The presidents that will be analyzed are Barack Obama and Donald Trump. These presidents are selected for several reasons. The first reason is that both presidents have dealt with the same Israeli regime. Prime Minister Netanyahu of the LIKUD party came to power in March 2009, a mere two months after Obama was inaugurated, and remained prime minister during both the Obama administration and the Trump administration. Therefore, a change in US-Israel relations would be unlikely to be explained by a change in Israel's position, as they retained the same government during both administrations. This links closely with the second reason, which is that since Obama and Trump served one after the other, they both served in a comparable historical timeframe. This (partly) controls for time-bound factors that could influence their foreign policy beliefs. The most important reason for their selection, however, is their expected difference in foreign policy beliefs. As someone's position on CI does not predict his/hers position on MI (and vice versa), a difference in one or both of the two

dimensions would place them in a different foreign policy beliefs category, which could lead to a difference in policy output.

And with Obama and Trump, there are indications that they differ in at least one of those two dimensions: cooperative internationalism. When speaking about globalisation, the process in which the whole world becomes increasingly interconnected, Barack Obama defended the process and said that continued cooperation with other nations is vital to the global economy (BBCnews, 2017). Donald Trump on the other hand can be characterized as a clear opponent of globalism. While still a presidential candidate he gave a speech where he ripped the political elites for preferring globalism over Americanism, claiming that the American people have suffered from it because of jobs being shipped overseas and trade deficits (Trump, 2016b).

A difference between the cases in either the CI or MI dimension (or both) will suffice because it would automatically put them in a different category of foreign policy beliefs. If their foreign policy beliefs were the same category, no difference should be observed, but when they are not in the same category it can be observed whether it impacts their US-Israel relations.

5.2 Operationalization

In the first part of this research, political speeches of both Obama and Trump will be analyzed on their support for or opposition to MI and CI in order to determine their respective foreign policy beliefs. The framework, as used by James Guth, will determine whether they are a supporter or opponent of cooperative internationalism. This will be measured by the emphasis they put on international cooperation, how important they deem the role of international institutions, and their interest in the welfare of people globally. Their support for/opposition to militant internationalism will be determined by looking at their willingness to use force in international affairs, their desire for a strong military, and to what extent they think foreign actors present a danger to the United States.

After their respective foreign policy beliefs are established, the second part of this research will analyze their administration's policies towards Israel in order to determine whether any perceived differences in the foreign policy beliefs of the president reflected their administration's policies towards the state of Israel. For cooperative internationalism, the amount of foreign aid the US gives to Israel as well as their diplomatic support will be

analyzed. This is because foreign aid and diplomatic support are the two main pillars of international cooperation between the two nations (Malka, 2011, pp. 1-2). Since international cooperation is a distinctive attribute of CI, foreign aid and diplomatic support are useful indicators for determining whether the perspective of both presidents on CI matches their policy output. For militant internationalism, the indicator of willingness to use troops abroad will be applied to the case of Israel. More specifically, whether Obama/Trump have indicated a willingness to use force to protect Israel if necessary. To determine this willingness, speeches will be used from both presidents regarding Israel, as well as secondary data such as reports on intelligence cooperation and defense treaties.

5.3 Data selection

For analyzing their foreign policy beliefs, speeches will be used that were given by the presidents themselves during their tenure as president or as a presidential candidate regarding foreign policy topics. The transcripts of such speeches are derived directly from their respective white house archives (in the case of Obama) or from an online archive named Factbase (in the case of Trump). Factbase was founded to record everything Trump has said or tweeted during his political career, including all his speeches. In addition, their speeches regarding Israel specifically are transcribed and provided by the Jewish Virtual Library. For the analysis of foreign aid, an overview of yearly financial support from the US to Israel is provided each year by the congressional research service and an overview has been made available by the Jewish Virtual Library. Originally, foreign aid included financial support for both military and non-military purposes. Since 2008 however, the US stopped giving non-military (i.e. pure financial) aid to Israel. Therefore the total amount of foreign aid nearly equals the amount of money given for military purposes (a very small percentage is allocated to refugee resettlement) (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

It should be noted that even though the foreign aid for Israel consists almost exclusively of military aid, it will not be treated as an indicator for militant internationalism. This is because this military aid does not constitute military intervention on behalf of Israel. It manifests itself in the US granting Israel billions of dollars in foreign aid, which it in turn must use to purchase American produced military equipment (Malka, 2011, p. 52). It is therefore not a true military commitment, but rather a form of international cooperation.

For the measuring of diplomatic support, US voting behaviour regarding United Nations resolutions on the Palestine question will be analyzed. Whereas there are different ways in which the US aids Israel diplomatically, voting against or blocking critical resolutions has always been a prime example of this support. The United Nations have been historically critical of Israel behaviour regarding this matter. and the US has often voted in support for Israel with these resolutions.

6. Analysis

6.1 Determining foreign policy beliefs

6.1.1 President Obama

As outlined in chapter four, one's foreign policy beliefs can be identified by his support for or opposition to militant internationalism and cooperative internationalism.

During his presidency, Obama has emphasized many times the need for international cooperation, indicating his support of CI:

The United States stands ready to begin a new chapter of international cooperation -- one that recognizes the rights and responsibilities of all nations. And so, with confidence in our cause, and with a commitment to our values, we call on all nations to join us in building the future that our people so richly deserve. (Obama, 2009)

Obama claims that in order to solve the problems in the world, countries must come together and cooperate in order to deal with them. This emphasis on the need for multilateralism is partly because it marks a clear difference from the unilateralist approach of the United States under his predecessor, something Obama sought to move away from (Obama, 2009).

In addition to Obama's stand on international cooperation, he also stated in his address to the United Nations his commitment towards working with international institutions. This includes paying off America's membership dues to the UN and joining the United Nations Human Rights Council (Obama, 2009). Furthermore, over the course of his two terms, Obama repeatedly stressed the importance of the fight against extreme global poverty:

“America is committed to a development agenda that eradicates extreme poverty by 2030. We will do our part to help people feed themselves, power their economies, and care for their sick.” (Obama, 2014).

It is notable that these comments came in the aftermath of an economic crisis, which caused problems in the more developed countries, showing his commitment to the welfare of people globally. From his speeches it becomes clear Obama believes that wealthy nations have a

responsibility to take the lead in the effort to combat these problems and should provide aid to the less developed countries (Obama, 2014).

In terms of militant internationalism, Obama has shown a willingness to use force on foreign actors he thought posed a threat to the United States. During his time in office, Obama stated that America must be able to use force towards fighting terrorist groups (such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda) as he believed them to be dangerous to the United States:

We can't erase every trace of evil from the world, and small groups of killers have the capacity to do great harm. That was the case before 9/11, and that remains true today. And that's why we must remain vigilant as threats emerge. At this moment, the greatest threats come from the Middle East and North Africa, where radical groups exploit grievances for their own gain. (Obama, 2014).

Furthermore, in terms of supporting a strong military, Obama acknowledged the virtue of America's military apparatus and vowed to keep the American army strong. He claimed that it is the duty of the government to give them the tools they need to carry out their tasks and he praised his administration's investments in the military:

“We've continued to make historic investments in our military -- our troops and their capabilities, our military families and our veterans.” (Obama, 2012).

Given these considerations it can be implied that in terms of foreign policy beliefs president Obama falls in the internationalist category. He appears to be a clear supporter of cooperative internationalism, supporting international cooperation, placing an emphasis on international institutions and taking an interest in global welfare. In terms of militant internationalism, he still portrayed a willingness to use American troops abroad (while identifying hostile actors) and praised America's strong military. His foreign policy beliefs place him in the category where most of the political elites are found.

6.1.2 President Trump

Now that Obama's foreign policy beliefs are established, it is time to look at those of president Trump. Donald Trump's foreign policy beliefs have been subject to debate. For instance, while some media outlets claim that Trump is an isolationist (CNN, 2018), others sources say his approach is more conventional (Macdonald, 2018, pp. 403-404).

In terms of cooperative internationalism, it becomes clear that Trump is inclined to withdraw the United States from the international community as he focuses heavily on the principle of independence from other nations:

To unleash this incredible potential in our people, we must defend the foundations that make it all possible. Sovereign and independent nations are the only vehicle where freedom has ever survived, democracy has ever endured, or peace has ever prospered. And so we must protect our sovereignty and our cherished independence above all.
(Trump, 2018b)

Trump praises himself on the fact that he has withdrawn from or renegotiated many bilateral and multilateral treaties, claiming that other countries have taken advantage of America's willingness to cooperate with them. He emphasizes the virtue of American sovereignty and believes that the United States would fare best if it focused less on international cooperation and more on their own independence. His criticism on international cooperation logically connects to his criticisms on the role of international institutions. In his speeches, Trump has criticized the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the International Criminal Court. His criticism stems from a perceived lack of effectiveness of these organisations, as well as Trump's belief that American citizens should not be governed by "an unelected, unaccountable, global bureaucracy" (Trump, 2018b).

Trump has at various times provided statements which emphasize such issues as global welfare. An excerpt from Trump's speech to the UN clearly indicates that the US should give aid based on strategic reasons (those who have something to offer to the US) instead of humanitarian ones:

We will examine what is working, what is not working, and whether the countries who receive our dollars and our protection also have our interests at heart. Moving forward, we are only going to give foreign aid to those who respect us and, frankly, are our friends. And we expect other countries to pay their fair share for the cost of their defense. (Trump, 2018b).

The sum of these speeches paint a picture of a president who is opposed to cooperative internationalism, as Trump emphasizes independence over cooperation, criticises international institutions and intends to make foreign aid only available to who the US considers as friends.

In terms of militant internationalism, Trump has given mixed signals during the course of his political career. Trump has repeatedly stated that American troops should be brought home (Trump, 2016a). Despite this rhetoric, Trump has portrayed a willingness to use force in international affairs with regard to ISIS, which Trump claims to be completely defeated since he took office (Trump, 2017b) and towards North Korea. In the case of North Korea Trump clearly states that if the United States would have to defend itself they ‘‘will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea’’ (Trump, 2017b).

In addition, Trump clearly demonstrated his desire for a strong military. He increased the military budget during his time in office and takes credit for having restored the army:

‘‘We are once again investing in our defense -- almost \$700 billion, a record, this coming year. We are demanding extraordinary strength, which will hopefully lead to long and extraordinary peace.’’ (Trump, 2017b)

In summary, Donald Trump’s foreign policy strategy clearly puts the focus on America’s domestic affairs over international involvement. This results in him being a clear opponent of cooperative internationalism. With regard to militant internationalism, Trump, despite some rhetoric about not using America’s military power abroad anymore, can be seen as supportive. He has shown a willingness to use American military forces abroad and is a

strong proponent of a powerful American military. Trump's opposition to CI and support for MI places him in the category hardliner. This foreign policy beliefs category is less common among political elites, making Trump an exception to this trend.

6.2 US-Israel policy differences

6.2.1 Military support

The first thing that should be noted when analyzing the military relationship between the US and Israel is the lack of formal defense treaties between the nations. This does not mean however that these countries are working together in this area. Cooperation between the Israeli army and the US army goes a long way back (Malka, 2011, pp. 9-10)

Because Obama and Trump can both be considered supporters of militant internationalism, it is expected that there are no significant differences in how willing they are to support Israel militarily if the situation asks for it. This situation is a hypothetical because to date the United States never fought formally for Israel in any of their wars. Therefore, speeches will again be used to measure how willing both Obama and Trump are to protect Israel's independence and guarantee its safety.

President Obama has stated numerous times that the United States are committed to preserve Israel's independence in the region:

“And as I've said repeatedly, the security of Israel is one of my top foreign policy priorities. And that has expressed itself not only in words, but in deeds.” (Obama, 2015)

President Trump seems to share Obama's willingness to protect Israel. He has stated on multiple occasions the United States' commitment to Israeli defense. In one of his speeches he remarked that as long as he is president, Israel will be safe:

“ ISIS targets Jewish neighborhoods, synagogues, and storefronts. And Iran's leaders routinely call for Israel's destruction. Not with Donald J. Trump, believe me.”(Trump, 2017a)

It is clear that both presidents are outspoken in their commitment to defend Israel if needed. In addition, during their respective administrations there were high levels of military cooperation between the two nations. During a summit in 2015, Obama again stressed this cooperation:

We have closer military and intelligence cooperation than any two administrations in history. The military assistance that we provide we consider not only an important part of our obligation to the security of the state of Israel, but also an important part of U.S. security infrastructure in the region (Obama, 2015).

President Trump has made similar statements when he was in office:

“We are very close on trade deals. We are very, very close on military and terrorism and all of the things that we have to work together on.” (Trump, 2018a)

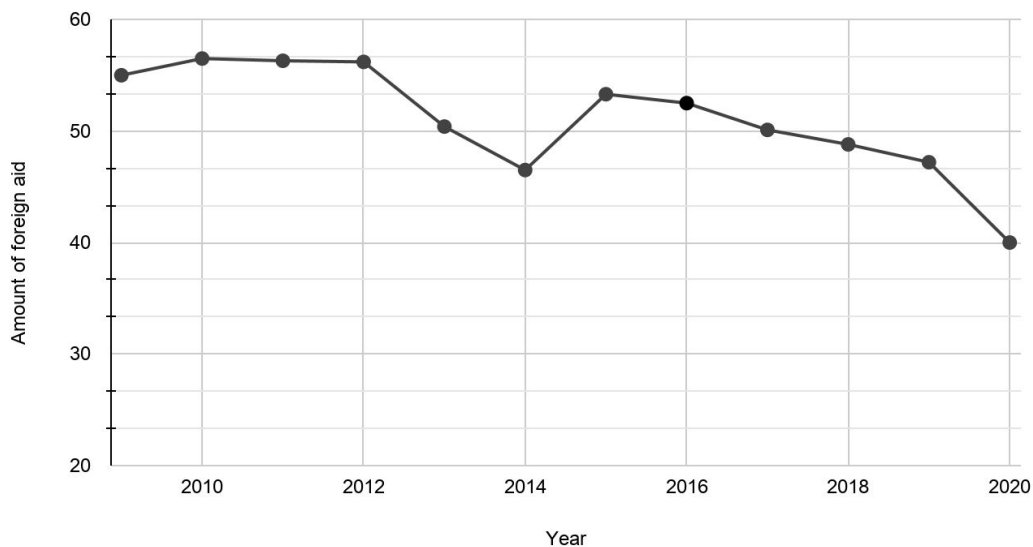
In summary, both president’s support on the Militant internationalism dimension reflects their administration’s approach towards Israel. Despite the lack of formal defense treaties in either administration both president’s have clearly indicated their commitment towards protecting the state of Israel and emphasized the cooperation between their military and intelligence agencies, in line with what would be expected from their foreign policy beliefs.

6.2.2 Foreign aid and diplomatic support

Because Obama and Trump differ on the CI-dimension (with Obama being supportive and Trump being opposed) America’s foreign aid flow and diplomatic support for Israel will be analyzed to determine whether this difference in foreign policy beliefs translates to their foreign policy output. In terms of foreign aid, a difference between an internationalist like Obama and a hardliner like Trump would be expected. It should be noted however that as foreign aid is part of the US budget, it needs to be approved by congress, giving the president somewhat less leeway than in other parts of foreign policy.

Trump, soon after taking office, indeed called for cuts to the U.S. foreign aid budget, a statement he repeated multiple times during his presidency (Harris, Gramer & Tamkin, 2017). Figure 1 presents the amount of money appropriated for foreign aid during each year of both the Obama and Trump administration, the data for the year 2020 is only an estimate as the final numbers are not yet finalized (USAID). As can be seen, there has been a gradual decline in the budget for foreign aid after 2016, Obama's last year in office (the fiscal budget for the year 2017 was not approved until Trump took office). With the exception of 2014, the Trump administration always appropriated less to foreign aid in their four years than Obama did in any year during his administration. This pattern in foreign aid spending is consistent with their diverging stance on cooperative internationalism. It should also be noted that the estimate for the year 2020 is based upon president Trump's request for foreign aid funding. In his presidential budget request, it is stated that the administration's goal is to make these nations more self-reliant, which again fits Trump's views on CI (Sharp, 2020).

Figure 1. United States total foreign aid (in billion US\$)



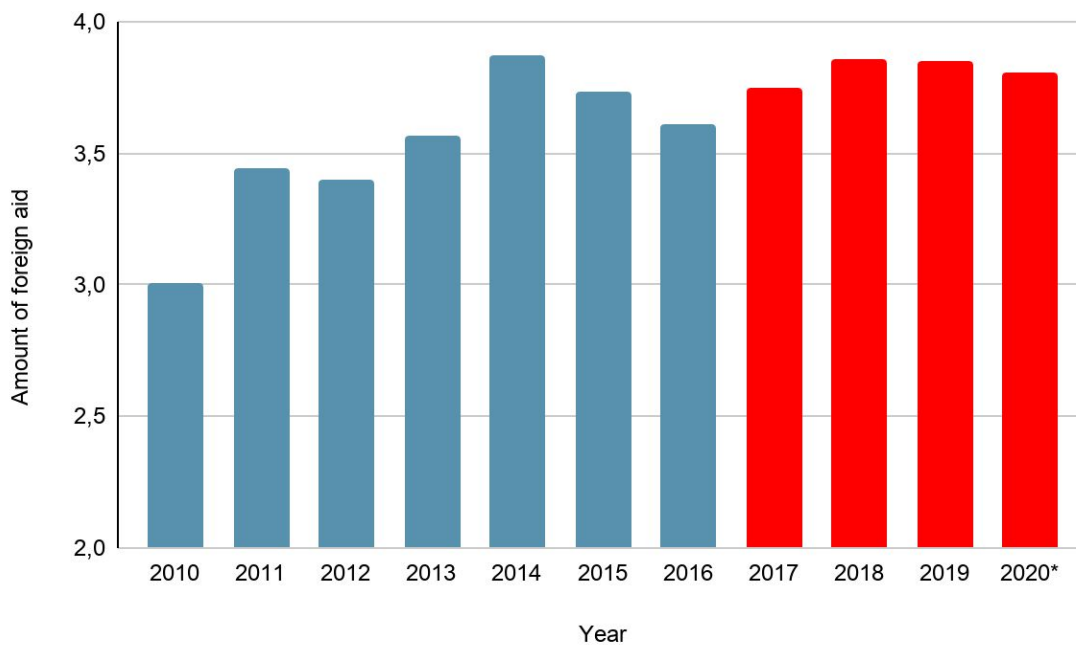
Source: USAID. <https://explorer.usaid.gov/aid-trends.html>

**the number for the year 2020 is an estimate*

When it comes to American aid to Israel however, the differences between Obama and Trump are more subtle. Figure 2 shows the annual total foreign aid from the United States towards Israel, with the Obama years in light blue and the Trump years in red.

As becomes clear in figure 2, US aid to Israel under president Trump slightly increased compared to the final years of the Obama administration. The trend of Israeli aid stands in contrast with the observed trend in total foreign aid as well as with what would be expected from both presidents given their foreign policy beliefs.

Figure 2. US Foreign aid to Israel (in billion US\$)



Source: Jewish Virtual Library. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-u-s-foreign-aid-to-israel-1949-present>

*The number for the year 2020 is an estimate

Diplomatic support

US Diplomatic support for Israel has always been of great importance for Israel especially as many countries in the international community disapprove of their handling of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The most clear way in which this support manifests itself is in Palestine-related UN resolutions which the United States had historically opposed, even if overwhelming majorities of the UN legislature approved them (Malka, 2011, p. 2). When a resolution comes up for a vote there are three options: to vote in favor, to vote against it or to abstain. The analyzed resolutions are issued by the general assembly and the security council. Because these motions are critical of Israel, it can be expected that they vote against all of these motions. Therefore any vote where the US votes against such a resolution can be seen

as a vote in support of Israel (The US is, unlike Israel, a permanent member of the UNSC, meaning that there will be motions where the US takes a vote and Israel does not).

Table 2: US voting record on the ‘Palestine Question’ 2009-2020

President	Total Palestina resolutions during administration	US vote in support of Israel	US vote not in support of Israel
Obama	35	34	1
Trump	16	16	0

Source : https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?ln=en&cc=Voting+Data&p=&f=&rm=&ln=en&sf=&so=d&rg=50&c=Voting+Data&c=&of=hb&fti=0&fct_8=PALESTINE+QUESTION&fti=0&fct_8=P ALESTINE+QUESTION&fct_9=Vote

It becomes clear from table 2 that there is little variation in the way the United States voted during both administrations. The Trump administration always votes with Israel, whereas only at one occasion the Obama administration diverted from this trend.

This one exception is a notable one, however. It was the sole vote the security council took on the Palestine question during Obama’s terms and the US surprisingly chose to abstain from voting rather than voting against and vetoing the motion, something the Israeli government was very upset about (The Associated Press, 2016). This example aside, it is clear that in terms of diplomatic support, there are barely any differences between the Obama administration and the Trump administration.

6.3 Comparing foreign policy beliefs with policy output

When both president’s foreign policy beliefs are compared towards their Israel policy, it appears that the impact of their foreign policy beliefs are rather limited. President Trump on all aspects seems opposed to cooperative internationalism, whereas for president Obama the opposite is true. Although both presidents are supportive of militant internationalism and hold similar views when it comes to protecting Israel, their clear differences in cooperative internationalism did not manifest itself in their policy output. The level of financial aid for Israel did not decrease under Trump compared to Obama, even though the total foreign aid did decrease. Whereas this decrease in total foreign aid is in line with what would be

expected from Hardliner Trump (especially compared to Obama), Israel seems to escape from this trend. In terms of diplomatic support, there is also little variation between the two presidents. This indicates that the level of cooperation between the countries was not affected by the difference in foreign policy beliefs between the presidents.

7. Conclusion

The research question of this paper is ‘‘to what extent do the foreign policy beliefs of the US president have an effect on US-Israel relations’’. By comparing two cases which had different independent variables (foreign policy beliefs), this research attempted to find if it had an effect on the dependent variable, which is US-Israel relations. First, the foreign policy beliefs of Obama and Trump were established, with Obama being labeled as an internationalist and Trump being labeled as a hardliner. This classification means that both presidents support militant internationalism but that they differ on cooperative internationalism (which Obama supports but Trump opposes). After this, both president’s policies towards Israel have been examined. The results show that despite the president’s differing positions on CI, it had no noticeable effect on their administration policies towards Israel. The conclusion which can be derived from these findings is that the president’s foreign policy beliefs do not have a noticeable effect on US-Israel relations. It is noteworthy that the foreign aid flow towards Israel went up under the Trump administration even though the total amount of foreign aid given dropped (which is in line with Trump’s opposition to CI). This may suggest that although the foreign policy beliefs of the president can influence his/her policies, Israel perhaps does have a ‘‘special’’ relationship with the US. However, there are limitations to how strong this claim is. As mentioned in chapter 6, the financial aid flow from the US to Israel is subject to congressional approval, perhaps limiting the personal influence the president has. In addition, the two cases were not selected at random, so it may be possible that in one or both cases deviated from a hypothetical pattern because their personal views on Israel were at odds with their general foreign policy beliefs, which could distort the results. In future research, analyzing a wider set of president’s could negate some of these problems. This would provide more data to analyze trends in diplomatic, financial and military aid and possibly tackle the problem of selection bias. In the end, while this case study on the relationship between US-Israel relations and the foreign policy beliefs of the president did not yield a significant relation between the two factors, it is an addition to the ongoing debate of what does and does not influence the remarkable alliance between the United States of America and the State of Israel. Which will, without a doubt, remain a well studied subject in the field of international relations.

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