

# The U.S.-Israeli Relationship During the Bush, Obama, and Trump Administrations.

*A Qualitative Case Study of the U.S.-Israeli Relationship Using Realism,  
Liberalism, and Constructivism Theories.*

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# Abstract

For many years the U.S. and Israel have enjoyed very close relations. The relationship between the United States (U.S.) and Israel is characterized by deep-rooted political, cultural, and religious ties that date as far back as 1948. For all the controversy that surrounds Israel, Americans largely support Israel as the U.S. places considerable emphasis on relationships with Israel in its overall Middle East foreign policy. However, some in the United States question this relationship particularly on the levels of aid and general commitment to Israel. What is noticeable, is that since the genesis of the relationship, U.S. influence on Israel's behavior increased, and so did Israel's tendency to exercise self-restraint in consideration of U.S. interests. This study tries to understand the relationship further by using a Descriptive Case Study Design to analyze the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations through the lenses of classical theories of international relations - realism, liberalism, and constructivism.

The study findings have highlighted key aspects that nurtured this relationship. From a realist point of view, the United States is Israel's most important ally, and Israel is America's essential security partner in the Middle East. Thus, the U.S.-Israel relationship is a mutually beneficial partnership that reinforces America's moral values and strategic interests and promotes peace and stability. The Bush, Obama and Trump administration's relationship with Israel were not deviant from their predecessors. However, each had its uniqueness based on priorities in the strategic interests of both states. For Bush's, the 9/11 attack shaped his administration's alliance with Israel to advance the war on terror agenda in the Middle East. Unlike the common trajectory in the relationship, Obama went with another route in regard to the U.S-Israel relationship. His administration chose the route of balancing out the relationship with the Middle East and not having favorites. In Obama's eyes, a more balanced relationship from the United States side, Israel and Palestine would be able to produce a peace settlement. Under Donald J. Trump the relationship was more reinforced compared to Bush and Obama administrations. This was reflected in Trump's policies including recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving America's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, defunding NGO's funding such as UNRWA and USAID which undermined their operations in Palestinian territory, withdraw from UN bodies that accused hostile towards Israel and recognizing Israel's sovereignty over Golan Height. Based on the theoretical framework, it can be concluded that for the U.S., realism is embedded in its relationship with Israel compared to Liberalism and Constructivism. The U.S.-Israeli relationship has embraced many core realist theoretical precepts during Bush, Obama and Trump administration given that over the years both countries constantly sought to achieve relative gains within the Middle Eastern region.

**Key words:** U.S, Israel, Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, National Interest, Military power, balance of power, democracy promotion, interdependence, regional cooperation, identity, ideas, shared norms, Palestine conflict

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# Acronyms

U.S	United States
NGO's	Non-Governmental Organisations
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
UN	United Nations
VEOs	Violent Extremist Organizations
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
BSF	Binational Science Foundation
BARD	Binational Agricultural Research and Development
BIRD	Binational Industrial Research and Development

FMF	Foreign Military Financing
ESF	Economic Support Funds

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# Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides a general introduction to the study; it delineates the background of the research problem based on the political history of America as a driving force in its relationship with Israel; the mutual interests upon which the relationship is hinged; political and diplomatic strategies upon which US-Israel relationship is constructed; and the nexus between the thematic areas of focus. Thus, the ingredients of the U.S relationship with Israel are linked to the theories, underpinning the mutual interests, and political and diplomatic strategies of the two countries.

*“U.S.-Israel relations display one of the most complex sets of bonds between any two countries in the post-World War II world, as they comprise not only diplomatic and economic ties, but also religious (both Jewish and evangelical Christian), legal, military, and strategic ties as well as a close commonality of values, particularly democracy”*  
(Freedman, 2013:1)

As asserted by Freedman (2013) in the extract above, the complexity of the relationship between the United States and Israel calls for much scholarly attention. Before understanding the intricacies that depict this relationship, one has to first understand the historical ties between the U.S and Israel. Thus, the history of the U.S.-Israel relationship is intertwined with the emergence of Israel as a state. America was the first country to recognize the State of Israel and support the Jewish state while the vast majority of the countries in the world were opposed to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine (Ovsienko, 2016). It was in 1948 when the U.S. President Harry Truman first recognized Israel as an independent nation and America was able to establish a very close alliance with Israel, a dynamic that continues today. Understanding the U.S.-Israel relationship is important as it influences American policies toward the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and broader relations with Europe and Russia. During the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, there were both cold and limited relations. However, the atmosphere improved under John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. It was not until Nixon's administration that the extensive ties visible today began to develop. The two countries' relations improved considerably after Israel supported the United States' ally Jordan when the Soviet ally Syria invaded Jordan in 1970. Furthermore, Israel and the United States deepened their ties after 9/11, when both nations were facing jihadist inspired terrorism (Ibid).

The complex partnership between the United States (U.S.) and Israel is characterized by deep rooted political, cultural, and religious ties that date as far back as 1948. For all the controversy that surrounds Israel, Americans largely support Israel as the U.S. places considerable emphasis on relationships with Israel in its overall Middle East foreign policy. The two nations have maintained strong bilateral ties to date (Sharp 2019:1). With relatively new leaders on both sides eager to assess its overall impact on the region, we can say that the U.S.-Israel relationship is faced with new opportunities and challenges. With their bipartisan, bicameral, AIPAC-crafted Middle East policy, Congress and the white house have done little to challenge Israeli policy that allows Israel to treat the Palestinians with indifference (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007:10). Moreover, the relationship between a superpower and a smaller state is very different from that between the U.S. and Israel. The relationship is more like that of a client-customer relationship, characterized by common political, ideological, security, and strategic interests. Several informal political and military alliances exist as well as reciprocal relationships, including routine exchanges of tangible and intangible goods and a belief that the relationship benefits both parties (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1998:232).

Against this background, the controversy of the U.S-Israel relationship still lingers. Some in the United States question the levels of aid and general commitment to Israel and argue that a U.S. bias toward Israel operates at the expense of improved U.S. relations with various Arab states. Others maintain that democratic Israel is a strategic ally; they further argue that U.S. relations with Israel strengthens the U.S. presence in the Middle East (Clyde, 2005:5). What is noticeable, however, is that since the genesis of the relationship, U.S. influence on Israel's behavior increased, and so did Israel's tendency to exercise self-restraint in consideration of U.S. interests.

Despite the special patron-client relationship, the two sides' occasionally divergent interests were not entirely compatible and indeed never could be (Ibid). This study uses the International Relations theories to try and understand the relationship further in order to avoid generalizing from observations made in the past. The study will analyze the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations using the classical theories of international relations - realism, liberalism, and constructivism to highlight the complex nature of the relationship over the years.

## 1.1 Research Problem

For many years the U.S. and Israel have enjoyed very close relations. Lewis (1999:364) argues that U.S.-Israel relations stand apart in their complexity, tenacity, and domestic political significance among all the alliances and special relations that pepper America's foreign policy around the globe. Moreover, the relationship between Israel and the U.S. has attracted many academic and professional interests. For instance, historians have detailed the relationship between both countries and U.S. foreign policy in general, regional relations, the Oslo Accords, and the American involvement in the region from 1947 to the present. Historians have also examined the Israel-U.S. relationship through the lens of the countries' political histories. When commenting on the surveys that were taken during the Carter administration, Seymour Lipset in his article 'Carter Vs Israel' in 1997 argues that it wasn't until the outbreak of the Six-Day War in June 1967 that a groundswell of sympathy for Israel among the American public emerged (Lipset, 2015). Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) agree arguing that the perceived American and Israeli commitment to the alliance developed gradually over time. They also analyze the role of the Israel Lobby and its increasing importance in shaping U.S. policy on Israel asserting that in addition to influencing what presidential candidates say during campaigns, the lobby has a great deal of influence on American foreign policy, specifically in the Middle East (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007:5).

Furthermore, America's relationship with Israel is characterized by an uncritical and uncompromising attitude. For instance, the U.S. has been seen standing alone with Israel at the United Nations and other international forums when objections are raised over ongoing Israeli violations of international law (Zunes, 2020). Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) add that despite the moral case for Israel's existence, there are many good reasons for the United States to support Israel in times of crisis. However, moral considerations might suggest that the United States pursue an even-handed policy toward Israel and Palestinians, given Israel's brutal treatment of the Palestinians in the occupied territories (2007:5). With such unusual behaviour by the U.S., it is necessary to look at this relationship more closely. This study examines the factors that have influenced the relationship over time, considering the political history of America and how it shaped relations with Israel, the mutual interests shared by both countries and controversies thereof, and the political and diplomatic strategies through which the relationship is expressed, and in doing so, highlighting the main actors and the roles they play. While a lot of research has been

carried out on the relationship between the U.S. and Israel, it is still a complex one and at times contentious. Using the international relations theories to try and understand this relationship is necessary to avoid generalizing from observations made in the past and in turn reaching would be erroneous conclusions.

## 1.2 Aim and Research Questions

The study aims to examine the U.S.-Israeli Relationship during the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. The main goal is to understand the alliance of the U.S.-Israeli relationship using realism, liberalism, and constructivism theories. In this study an effort will be made to link the theories to the nature of the relationship. The study will highlight how the different administrations approached and nurtured this relationship, and it will also draw on the extensive experience of scholars who have researched the U.S.-Israel relationship in order to provide an alternative view of the relationship. The following research questions will be addressed: -

1. How does realism explain the relationship between Israel and the United States?
2. How does liberalism account for the relationship between America and Israel?
3. How does constructivism enhance our understanding of the US-Israel relationship?

## Chapter Two: Theory

This chapter reviews the theoretical frameworks that guided the study. The theoretical framework adopted by the study is informed by three theoretical constructs: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism. Therefore, the chapter includes a presentation of and a discussion on the U.S-Israel relationship since 1948, theories and previous research related to the study.

### 2.1 Previous Research

For decades, the close relationship between the United States and Israel has been one of the most salient features of U.S. foreign policy. The US relationship with Israel is marked by profound ideological, political, economic and military links. Most historians will agree that President Harry

S. Truman's decision to recognize Israel in 1948 was a major turning point in the history of the state of Israel (Benson, 1997; Rubenberg, 1989; Gilboa & Inbar, 2008; Mearsheimer & Stephen, 2007; Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, 1998; Clyde, 2005). Since 1917 the year in which the Balfour Declaration was issued promising British support for the creation of the Jewish homeland in Palestine, the Zionist idea and their longing for a Jewish state have enjoyed a great deal of support by many US government officials.

Many scholars have written about the U.S-Israel relationship, but this study will borrow extensively from the works of Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, who authored the book entitled "*The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*" describing the lobby as a "loose coalition of individuals and organizations who actively work to steer U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction"; Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov of the book "*The United States and Israel since 1948: A Special Relationship*"?, highlighting how U.S. foreign policy shapes events in the Middle East; Kenneth N. Waltz of "*The Theory of International Politics*", Bilel Kriaa – "*Trump's Legacy in the Middle East: Strategic Shift and the Geopolitics of American Foreign Policy in the Region*", Walt – "*It's Time to End the 'Special Relationship' With Israel. Foreign Policy*"; Freedman – "*Israel and the United States: Six Decades of Us-Israeli Relations*", Benson; Rubenberg and Gilboa & Inbar among others. Prior to reviewing the works of these scholars in relation to the current study, the U.S-Israel Relations since 1948 to date is summarized in order to provide the foundation for review and analysis.

Under the administration of President Eisenhower, 1953-1961, he tilted U.S. foreign policy decisively toward the Arab states (and Iran), which he saw as potential allies in the Cold War and economically vital to an expanding U.S. economy. Israel seemed, if anything, an obstacle to achieving U.S. aims (Ben-Zvi, 1993). Thus, the Eisenhower administration opposed Israel in decisive ways (chiefly after the joint Israeli-British-French intervention in the Suez, in 1956), but also behind the scenes, the U.S. supplied Israel with less than \$1 million in military aid during Eisenhower's eight years in office, and economic assistance to Israel fell from over \$50 million in 1954 to under \$20 million by 1959 (Hahn, 2004). The United States under President John F. Kennedy, the maintained a favorable status amongst most of the states of the Greater Middle East. However, in November 1963 when President Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the presidency, after

President Kennedy's assassination, U.S. foreign policy took an egregious shift in favor of the Israeli state. Consequently, the Western superpower became highly distrusted by Islamic countries within the Middle Eastern frontier. This marked a monumental turning point in regard to U.S.-Israel relations and U.S.-Arab relations (Freedman, 2013; Lenczowski, 1990; Rubenberg, 1989).

In 1969-1974 and 1974-1977 under the administration of President Nixon and President Ford, the favorable status the United States imposed upon Israel reaped immediate benefits in regard to intelligence operations (Fawcett, 2009; Freedman, 2013; Rubenberg, 1989). As President Gerald R. Ford sat in office in 1974, the 1973 Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) embargo, which was imposed against the United States because of its alliance with Israel during the war, ceased to exist. The United States and Israel experienced an unprecedented relationship, when President Ronald W. Reagan assumed office, which was exemplified by joint military, economic, and security cooperation. These two countries shared similar perspectives on terrorism and Soviet influence within the Middle East (ibid).

The beginning of President George H. W. Bush's sole term in office (1989-1993) could be categorized as one that engulfed anti-Israeli sentiment. In 1989, the United States and Israel disagreed over the latter state's interpretation of a plan to hold elections for a Palestinian peace conference delegation. In 1991, President Bush claimed that East Jerusalem was occupied territory and not a sovereign part of Israel. The Jewish state was not particularly fond of this newly created U.S. stance toward its strategic position within the region. These incidents were significant because they symbolized a shift in the opposite direction from previous pro-Israeli sentiment (Freedman, 2013; Peleg & Waxman, 2011; Quandt, 2001). In January 1993, when President William J. (Bill) Clinton took office, Israel and the PLO exchanged letters of mutual recognition. Also, both entities signed the Declaration of Principles, in which Palestinian political rights and security were legitimized via proper Israeli recognition. Toward the end of 1995, President Clinton attended the funeral of the recently deceased Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who had been assassinated by a religious Zionist. Following a visit to Israel in 1996, he offered \$100 million in aid for antiterror activities, \$200 million for anti-missile deployment, and roughly \$50 million for an antimissile laser weapon.

In January 2001, when President George W. Bush came to power, the United States and Israel continued to abide by a cooperative principle. However, this would prove to be very short-lived. After Al Qaeda's terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, new Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon accused President Bush of appeasing Palestinians at Israel's expense. Prime Minister Sharon believed that the United States was trying to obtain Arab support for an anti-terror campaign within the region. President Bush became infuriated by this reckless mindset and sentiment. Rather than apologize, Prime Minister Sharon claimed that the United States failed to understand the Jewish position. The Western superpower began to criticize the popular Israeli practice of assassinating Palestinians who were labeled as perceived terrorists. Many Israeli citizens accused the United States of hypocrisy because this criticism was seen as contradictory in regard to its dead or alive policy that pertained to Osama bin Laden. This display of altered egos indicated that both countries were preoccupied and fearful about another era of terrorism unfolding within the Middle East (Gilboa & Inbar, 2008; Peleg & Waxman, 2011; Quandt, 2001). Two years later, in 2003, the U.S.-Israeli relationship shifted into a positive direction. On the heels of the second intifada and a sharp economic downturn, the Western superpower provided Israel with \$9 billion in conditional loan guarantees that were made available through 2011 (Gilboa & Inbar, 2008; Peleg & Waxman, 2011; Sharp, 2010).

After President Barack H. Obama took office in January 2009, the U.S.-Israeli relationship was challenged and this culminated in noticeable discord and diplomatic friction but even so, the relationship was neither transformed nor affected in any way that changed its status from special to normal (Ruebner, 2014). President Obama made achieving a peace deal between Israel and Palestine his top priority in Middle Eastern affairs. In fact, he instantly placed insurmountable pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was now in his second term, to ponder the existence of an independent Palestinian state via mutual negotiation. In accordance with U.S. demands, Prime Minister Netanyahu imposed a ten-month freeze on settlement construction within the West Bank. Due to the continuous building operations that occurred in East Jerusalem, 3,000 pre-approved housing units that were already under construction, and failure to dismantle previously built Israeli outposts, Palestine considered this outcome to be inadequate. President Obama immediately began to develop a strong resentment toward Israel (Fawcett, 2009; Freedman, 2013; Peleg & Waxman, 2011).

In August 2019, President Donald Trump declared himself “history’s most pro-Israel U.S. president” and called Democrats radicals seeking to destroy the special relationship between the US and Israel, argues Gilboa (2020). He continues to assert that in January 2020 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Trump as “the best friend Israel has ever had in the White House” and on a number of critical security, diplomatic and political issues, Trump reversed longstanding US policy in favour of Israel. For instance, Iran's nuclear agreement, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Israel's treatment at the UN, and Jerusalem's and the Golan Heights' status to mention a few (ibid).

The summary of the U.S-Israel relationship is indicative of a complex mixture of causal factors and incorporates historical memory, religious values, societal ties, considerations of regional stability and American national interest. Domestic politics within the United States have been a significant contributory factor, and the choices of individual leaders in Washington or Jerusalem can and do impact significantly. Personal relationships do matter, as evident, for example, in the exceptional rapport that developed between President Clinton and the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, or the lack of confidence and barely suppressed antagonism between President George Bush and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir or President Clinton and Prime Minister Netanyahu. But, at least over the course of the past half-century, it is these longer-term causes that ultimately have come to matter most in shaping the relationship and the course of American policy toward Israel. According to Mearsheimer & Walt (2007), the United States has over the years played an increasingly important and steadily growing role in Middle East security issues, first due to oil and then due to anti-communism, and later due to its growing relationship with Israel. Moreover, Hudson (1996) also asserts that there is no doubt that American policy toward the Middle East has been based primarily on maintaining economic, political, and strategic objectives and in particular securing Israel and the region's energy resources. Furthermore, Goldman (2009) claims that the United States and Israel might have had a special relationship in the past because there was a moral basis for it. When the British defeated the Turks in Palestine in 1918, several Congressmen characterized the victory as confirmation and fulfilment of a biblical prophecy. He adds that in their belief that Christianity, which was founded on Judaism, many Americans of that time considered themselves indebted to Jews - a debt that could be settled by supporting the

establishment of a “Jewish National Home” in Palestine. Through centuries of prejudiced violence, including the Holocaust, the Christian West created the Jewish state. Even though the moral argument was compelling, it could only be valid if one disregards the consequences for Arabs who have been living in Palestine for centuries and if one believes that Israel shares the same values as the United States. Despite being "the only democracy in the Middle East," Israel was not a liberal democracy like the United States, where all races and religions are supposed to have equal rights (Walt, 2021).

Despite popular perceptions, Israel's major great power partner was not always the United States writes Heller (2019). He argues that as the United States applied an arms embargo to both sides in the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, it was the Soviet Union that provided critical, albeit brief, support to help keep the Jewish state afloat. He also indicates that when the Soviet Union turned hostile to Israel in the 1950s and early 1960s, and the United States remained indifferent, it was France that became Israel's great power patron. American leadership and public opinion did not recognize the convergence of interests and values between the US and Israel until after 1967 and especially after 1973 (ibid). Moreover, in recent years things have changed, as evidenced by Beauchamp (2021) as he cites the rising discontent of progressive Democrats in Congress toward Israel as one of the signs. He contends that the left-wing Democrats lead among whom are Sen. Bernie Sanders, New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Michigan Rep. Rashida Tlaib, who is of Palestinian descent, have consistently panned Israel calling it an "apartheid state. In contrast to the traditional fundraising structure of US politics, younger newcomers are motivated more by concerns about Israeli treatment and policies towards Palestinians in Gaza, West Bank, and in Israel (Roberts, 2021).

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

Competing Paradigms	Theory		
	Realism	Liberalism	Constructivism

Theoretical Definitions	Military resources should be used if needed. Ones' interests, morality and security goals are crucial to whether one is using military resources or not. Security should be guaranteed. Actors should defend themselves. Survival is the central theme within each state	Humans are free, rational and egoistic. They have their own interests. The Human is always the most important one, Democracy results in peaceful states and international arena.	Different ideas, values and rules that actors act upon. Accepted by the actor and are guiding the way in which the actors behave Can come in different types. Based on norms and identifies the actor on the international arena. The central concept on how the actor will create its Foreign Policy
Main theoretical prepositions	Self-interested states, Compete constantly for power or security	Concern for power overridden by economic/political considerations (desire for prosperity, commitment to liberal values)	State behavior shaped by elite beliefs, collective norms and social identities
Key Components	National interest, Military Power, Balance of power	Democracy promotion, interdependence, regional cooperation and Trade/Aid	Ideas, Identity formation, Shared norms
Main Instruments	Economic and especially military power Hard power-coercion	Varies (International institutions, economic exchange, promotion of democracy)	Ideas & Discourses
Main limitation	Stresses that the possibility of peaceful change or any type of change is limited	Tends to mind less on the role of hard power in shaping the norms and rules of international order.	Better at describing the past than anticipating the future.
Empirical focus	National interests to fight terrorism – Israel as an ally in the Middle East Harmonizing on the Israel-Palestinian conflict – Hegemonic mediation role of the U.S	Enhancing Peace between Israel & Palestine Lobbying for American Jewish influence; Influence on Israel settlement policies U.S pro-Israel policy; election donations in	Israel enemies are U. S's Share norms and moral responsibility on democracy, mutual experience in fighting for freedom
	U.S pro-Israel policy on military support – balance of power in the Middle East	return to the protect – Israel's interest common ideas	

## 2.2.1 Realism

Realism is essentially grounded in an inevitable struggle for power and security or survival among states. Power and security are at the core of realist theory. Therefore, the three major components

of realism are national interest, military power and balance of power. Due to the inherent nature of a self-help system, states relentlessly pursue power and security. Realists would say we seek security, prestige, and most of all autonomy, because we don't want to be interdependent in a world where we can never trust anyone. Mearsheimer (1995) argues that, from a realist perspective, states in the international arena usually seek ways to take advantage of each other and thus, there is little to no trust among states. While states' power competition may not always be about war, he argues that the threat of war remains in their minds. As a result, an arms race and security dilemma ensue. Mearsheimer maintains that no amount of cooperation can eradicate this (Mearsheimer, 1995: 9). Furthermore, Smith et al., (2016) contends that realism is the progenitor of the state, and the conceptual foundation of statecraft while to Morgenthau (2005), states have objective and universal laws that are based on national interest. ‘‘Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature. In order to improve society, it is first necessary to understand the laws by which society lives. The operation of these laws being impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure’’ (Morgenthau, 2005:1).

Realists believe that the international system is anarchic by nature and thus States are the major actors in world affairs, and they behave as a unitary and rational agent. In fact, realists think states are self-interested actors, pursuing their own interests irrespective of any other actor's. A state in anarchy is dominated by power and security, so they are predisposed to conflict and competition, and often fail to cooperate despite sharing common interests (Waltz & Walt, 2018).

The tenets of Realism according to Morgenthau (2005) are – National interest, military power and balance of Power. Military power is viewed as the most important tool, and national security as the dominant objective. The theoretical review in the subsequent sections follows.

#### 2.2.1.1 National Interest:

In realism, States are self-contained entities defined by an internal logic and their interactions with other states. States are considered to be the most significant and influential players in an international system. They act as intermediaries between regional actors and global players and are the only entities with enough resources and manpower to direct the flow of the global economy.

They act as both the main influencers and the main sources of conflict. They have the ability to shift the balance of power in both traditional and non-traditional ways, thereby raising and lowering the incentives and risks faced by other states.

The concept of national interest is key to the traditional realist theory. For Morgenthau (2005), national interest is synonymous with power and, as such, both a proper object for foreign policy as well as the best measurement of a country's ability to achieve its goals. In reference to the U.S. and Israel relations, both states are among the leading actors in the international system and possess the capability to dictate much of the game. On the other hand, one has the ability to coordinate actions and forms of threat that affect the state, while the other state is hampered from carrying out any meaningful or comprehensive policies that might take away the other state's power, influence, and interests. Thus, if the U.S and Israel cannot "put their differences aside" and focus on cooperation and non-coercive methods, one of them will inevitably feel "threatened." And the international system will become an arena for clashes, with both states feeling that they must make progress in one or the other way.

As Thornley (2011) indicates, the realist conceptual framework posits an 'international' populated by functionally similar sovereign authorities (nation-states) that can be modelled and analyzed as if they were "unitary rational actors, carefully calculating costs of alternative courses of action" in the, "pursuit of divergent 'national interests'" in a timeless and permanent condition of anarchy (Keohane, 1986:165; Rosenberg, 1994:9). Unlike the division of labour facilitated by the mediating and pacifying state of the domestic polity, Realists argue that the absence of overarching world-state means that states must be functionally alike and provide for themselves fully, i.e. the 'international' is a self-help system: "The international imperative is 'take care of yourself!'" (Bell, 2002:228; Waltz, 1979:107). However, given the background of the relationship between U.S and Israel, this was not the case. Mearsheimer & Walt (2007:51) stress that when Israel was founded in 1948, U.S. policy makers did not consider it a strategic asset. The new state was regarded as weak and potentially vulnerable, and American policy makers recognized that embracing Israel too closely would undermine the U.S. position elsewhere in the Middle East. However, this view had eroded by the early 1960s, and the Kennedy administration concluded that Israel deserved more support in light of growing Soviet aid to Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Israeli leaders repeatedly

emphasized their potential value as an ally, and their stunning victory in the Six-Day War in 1967 strengthened these claims by offering a vivid demonstration of Israel's military prowess. This potency that was stressed by Israel fits into the realist tradition of international politics regarding the primacy of questions of security and power in the relations between states, and the dangers of allowing what it regards as Utopian ideas about reform of international politics to intrude into the rational calculation of state interests.

#### 2.2.1.2 Military Power:

Realism assumes national interests are defined as power. In an anarchic system, power is unequally distributed. Since the government has no higher authority, there is a security competition. For instance, ‘‘under Vladimir Putin, himself a product of the Soviet security apparatus, Russian foreign policy employs coercive instruments like the military and its energy resources to wield power over neighboring states...’’ (Alden & Aran, 2016:2). The International systems are perceived as an arena of brutality, in which states seek out ways to take advantage of each other, and for this reason, have little reason to trust one another. There is a struggle for power in the daily life of most states, as each seeks not only to become the most powerful actor in the system but also to prevent others from achieving that position argues Mearsheimer (1995).

Power and security are at the core of the realist theory. Due to the inherent nature of a self-help system, states relentlessly pursue power and security. Realists would say that they seek security, prestige, and autonomy, because they don't want to be interdependent in a world where we can never trust anyone. Unlike liberalists, realists tend to be very skeptical about interdependence.

‘‘Realism's identification of the relative gains problem for cooperation is based on its insight that states in anarchy fear for their survival as independent actors. According to realists, states worry that today's friend may be tomorrow's enemy in war, and fear that achievements of joint gains that advantage a friend in the present might produce a more dangerous potential foe in the future’’ (Grieco, 1988:487).

Moreover, Morgenthau (2005) contends that states are either indulged in war, recovering from war, or preparing for war. A state that builds up its military forces would be felt as a threat by the other possibly smaller state, which would then respond with its own military forces. Consequently, if

there are two states at odds, we have a security competition that may lead to war. Since power is at the core of international relations, actions may be understood in different ways. If one state tries to weaken another, one can be said to be gaining power or increasing its security and influence, while the other is exercising power or increasing its security and influence. In such a power competition, the loser will feel threatened and will then draw stronger defenses and rely more upon its military. The conflict will then intensify. Due to the potential expansion of NATO, Russia views the U.S. as an existential threat, which is why Russia is at war with Ukraine now.

This collision between the U.S and Russia was bound to happen.

The concept of power is very central in realism. According to Dahl (1957) Power is basically one's ability to affect the behaviour of others to get what one wants. The essence of power in realism is forcing people to do something they don't wish to do. In other words, it is coercion. The term power first gained currency in the 1930s, but the Cold War further elaborated on its application. Applying power effectively requires that one be prepared to use force. The military use of power is the use of force against an enemy. The military use of power can be applied in two directions: (i) coercive force against the enemy to change their behaviour; and (ii) force of peaceful persuasion. The difference between the two is that in the former, an aggressor has to act with the intention of establishing dominance, whereas in the latter, a weak power acts with the intention of making its enemies weaker, thereby granting it some strategic advantage. Looking at the U.S. and Israel now none of their actions constitute the use of force against each other.

Although the U.S. has a military presence in many countries, lately it is either reluctant to use force to dominate other countries or the occupied countries such as Afghanistan have managed to resist U.S demands for domination. On the other hand, however, the Israelis have used force and military power to maintain their dominance of many countries and to expand their hegemony in the Middle East. Furthermore, looking back at the 9/11 attacks, we can see that even a strong nation like the U.S. can be attacked by a weak nation like Afghanistan. A realist approach, however, could not be useful at this point since military intervention by the U.S. had no ability to prevent this attack.

### 2.2.1.3 Balance of Power:

The core concern for all states is their survival. States amass as much military power as possible in order to ensure their chances of survival (Morgenthau, 2005; Waltz, 2001). This implies that realism is based upon the premise that a person's best interests are served by living in harmony with one's neighbours and that war is neither a constructive way to resolve conflict nor a viable substitute for other forms of peaceful conflict resolution (Mearsheimer, 2022). The U.S. and Israel relationship fits this type of relationship. For example, Israeli expansionism is on full display throughout the region, while the U.S. refrains from forceful and constant intervention to prevent this. In addition, the U.S. regularly threatens to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities but maintains its peace agreement with Israel to ensure that it won't be militarily threatened.

### 2.2.2 Liberalism

Unlike realists, Liberals see the state as embodying society's demands and values through formally institutionalized arrangements. The liberalist theory upholds the importance of the individual and its freedoms. The liberalist theory also determines the importance of a stable democracy, which ensures freedom for its citizens and ensures human rights (Smith et al., 2016:90).

According to Meiser (2018), liberalism is a defining feature of modern democracy, illustrated by the prevalence of the term 'liberal democracy' to describe countries with free and fair elections, rule of law and protected civil liberties. However, liberalism, when discussed within the realm of International Relations theory has evolved into a distinct entity of its own (ibid). Liberalism contains a variety of concepts and arguments about how institutions, behaviours and economic connections contain and mitigate the violent power of states. When compared to realism, it adds more factors into the U.S-Israel relations field of view. Most notably, liberalism has been the traditional foil of realism in International Relations theory as it offers a more optimistic world view, grounded in a different reading of history to that found in realist scholarship.

Two assumptions liberal theory makes are the assumptions of anarchy (just as realism) and rationality. Specifically, states (or other political actors) exist in an anarchic environment, and they generally act in a broadly rational way in making decisions. The anarchy assumption means that political actors exist in the distinctive environment of international politics, without a world

government or any other authority with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. They must engage in self-help. The rationality assumption means that state leaders and their domestic supporters engage in foreign policy for the instrumental purpose of securing benefits provided by (or avoiding costs imposed by) actors outside of their borders, and in making such calculations, states seek to deploy the most cost-effective means to achieve whatever their ends (preferences) may be. Liberal theory shares the first (anarchy) assumption with almost all international relations theories, and it shares the second (rationality) assumption with realism and institutionalism, but not non-rationalist process theories (Moravcsik, 2010). The liberal assessment of U.S-Israel relationship hinges on the two assumptions cultivated in the four tenets of liberalism; democracy promotion, interdependence, regional cooperation and trade/aid.

#### 2.2.2.1 Democracy Promotion.

Democracy can be defined as a set of political procedures involving participation and competition, but liberalism is a political philosophy that is based on the principle of individual freedom. As one scholar puts it, "liberalism's ends are life and property, and its means are liberty and toleration" (Owen, 1994). Liberalism calls for guarantees of the rights of the individual, including freedom from arbitrary authority, freedom of religion, the right to own and exchange private property, rights to equal opportunity in health care, education, and employment, and the rights to political participation and representation (Doyle, 1986). Only the last category of rights is necessarily guaranteed in polities that meet the procedural definition of democracy.

Most democracies are liberal democracies to some degree. The Western industrial countries combine procedural democracy with guarantees of civil liberties. Any state that embraces liberal principles is likely to become a democracy, because political participation, competition, and accountability are perhaps the best guarantees that individual freedoms will be preserved. Thus the terms "liberal" and "democracy" often go hand in hand (Holmes, 1993).

#### 2.2.2.2 Interdependence

Central to much of the literature on interdependence and conflict is the long-standing claim that open international markets and heightened economic exchange inhibit interstate hostilities. Liberals have been the most forceful advocates of this thesis and have stressed a variety of different

causal mechanisms in developing it (Doyle 1997; Keohane 1990; and Stein 1993). One argument—cast primarily at the level of the nation-state—is that economic exchange and military conquest are substitute means of acquiring the resources needed to promote political security and economic growth (e.g., Staley 1939). As trade and foreign investment increase, there are fewer incentives to meet these needs through territorial expansion, imperialism, and foreign conquest (Rosecrance 1986). Conversely, barriers to international economic activity stimulate conflicts of interest that can contribute to political-military discord (Viner 1951, 259).

Another liberal argument cast largely at the level of the country-pair, or dyad is that economic intercourse increases contact and promotes communication between private actors in different countries, as well as between governments. Rising contact and communication, in turn, are expected to foster cooperative political relations (Doyle 1997, chap. 8; Hirschman 1977, 61; Stein 1993; Viner 1951, 261). Still another theme stressed by many liberals is that commercial openness generates efficiency gains that, in turn, render private traders and consumers dependent on foreign markets. Because political antagonism risks disrupting economic relations among participants and jeopardizing the gains from trade, these actors have reason to press public officials to avoid military conflicts. For their part, public officials—who rely on societal actors for political support and have an interest in bolstering their country's economic performance—have reason to attend to such demands.

Largely, the core argument of liberalism is that concentrations of unaccountable violent power are the fundamental threat to individual liberty and must be restrained. The primary means of restraining power are institutions and norms at both domestic and international level. At the international level institutions and organisations limit the power of states by fostering cooperation and providing a means for imposing costs on states that violate international agreements. Economic institutions are particularly effective at fostering cooperation because of the substantial benefits that can be derived from economic interdependence. Finally, liberal norms add a further limitation on the use of power by shaping our understanding of what types of behaviour are appropriate. Today, it is clear that liberalism is not a 'utopian' theory describing a dream world of peace and happiness as it was once accused of being. It provides a consistent rejoinder to realism, firmly rooted in evidence and a deep theoretical tradition (Meiser, 2018).

### 2.2.3 Constructivism

There has been a growing body of literature in recent years which examines the impact of norms, ideas, and identities on international relations. Generally referred to as constructivism, this body of literature does not ignore the role of material or strategic interests, which have historically been central to international relations theory. Rather, constructivism holds that interests are influenced by norms, ideas, and identities. In the field of international relations, constructivism is a theory derived from sociological theory. International relations are characterized as social processes where state and non-state actors shape and are shaped by international "society." The structure of the international system is seen to be produced, reproduced, and transformed through the interaction of state agents (Wendt, 1999 & Rane, 2009). In constructivism, states understand and respond to their situations based on how ideas and identities are created, formed, and evolve.

#### Identity

The constructivist theory, mainly seen as the most significant challenge to rationalist dominance, argues that the theoretical framework focusing on the concept of state identity can provide an important alternative and option to rational choice theory. State identity is mainly about the nonmaterial factors such as values, culture, norms, ideas etc, studied by the constructivist scholars (Hurd, Reus-Smit & Snidal 2010; Behraves, 2011; Drouin, 2011). The term Constructivism was adopted by Onuf (1989) and introduced as "people and societies construct or constitute each other". The main assumption of constructivists is that the fundamental structures of international politics are social and these structures shape actors' identities and interests. Therefore, the world is structured by both knowledge and material factors, according to constructivists the main important relation is between agents and structures. Moreover, constructivists adopt a common concern when understanding and explaining how international structures are defined by ideas and how identities and interests of the states and non-state players are influenced by the structures.

#### Ideas.

Constructivists argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted, which implies that structures influence agency and that agency influences structures. Whereas realism and liberalism tend to focus on material factors such as power or trade, constructivist approaches emphasize the impact of ideas. Instead of taking the state for granted and assuming that it simply seeks to survive, constructivists regard the interests and identities of states as a highly malleable product of specific historical processes. They pay close attention to the prevailing discourse(s) in society because discourse reflects and shapes beliefs and interests and establishes accepted norms of behaviour. Consequently, constructivism is especially attentive to the sources of change, and this approach has largely replaced Marxism as the preeminent radical perspective on international affairs (Little & Smith, 2005).

America and Israel see themselves as doing some extraordinary historical biblical duty to redeem land and people while freeing themselves from the undemocratic background of their historical origins (Heller, 2019). For example, from the 17th to 19th centuries, building "the New Jerusalem" was a popular religious theme in the United States, similar to the secular Zionist view of redeeming the Jewish people as a millenarian theme (ibid). The constructivist approach has been productive in this area because of its focus on the social content involved in the production of international relations, including state interests. While most scholars now acknowledge that state interests are at base ideas about needs, many non-constructivists maintain that the content of those interests is for practical purposes unchanging and includes some combination of the desires for survival, power, wealth, and security (Hurd, Reus-Smit & Snidal, 2010). They contend that the socially constructed nature of interests does not alter the fact that the primary interests that drive states are prefigured by the material resources and situation of the states, and so states are either constructed by material forces or can be treated as if their construction is irrelevant to their interests and behavior (e.g., Brooks and Wohlforth 2007).

# Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology used in this thesis. It answers the question “how the study was conducted”. In so doing, the research philosophy and study design is explained with subsequent materials used.

## 3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is concerned with the nature of knowledge, and how knowledge is created by finding solution to the problem or addressing the gaps identified by the study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The study adopted a rationalist philosophical perspective that is oriented towards interpretivist or qualitative research. Consistent with the qualitative perspective, the U.S-Israeli Relationship during the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations involved interpretation of various activities underpinning each of the administration towards Israel. Thus, from an interpretive perspective, since the information or data being sought by this study is grounded in particular foreign policy experiences by the three presidents; it is subjective and bound to the natural contexts in which this occurred and is thus ontologically relativist (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Greene, 2010).

In terms of the study’s strategy, the attention is drawn to the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the study. Ontology refers to the theory or nature of reality being studied; while epistemology is the theory of knowledge or what constitutes valid knowledge, and how valid knowledge can be obtained (Glattfelder, 2019; Creswell, 2014). Within the context of qualitative research, ontology is discussed in terms of beliefs about the existence of some “universal truth” and about objectivity. At one end of the spectrum is a belief that reality is objective and that there are universal truths about reality that can be known. At the other end is a belief that reality is subjective and contextual, and a universal understanding of psychological experiences cannot be obtained because they must always be understood within the contexts within which they are embedded (Hays & Singh, 2012). Given this explanation, assessing the complex partnership between the United States (U.S.) and Israel from the lenses of realism, liberalism and constructivism theories required more of subjective analysis.

As noted by Tulach and Foltin (2019), interpretivism dimension holds that a social phenomenon is created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors. As such, this has been useful in understanding the U.S-Israel relationship from a constructivist perspective where by the activities that transpired within the three administrations under study were determined by the legitimate actors in both countries, whose justification is detailed by the study. The detailed exploration and analysis of the problem under the study was enabled by the qualitative approach adopted by the study. The qualitative approach allows for in-depth study and deeper understanding of the problem being studied.

### 3.2 Research Design: Descriptive Case Study

The study utilized a descriptive Case Study Design to review selected studies related to the subject under inquiry. It can be considered a robust research method particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required. Recognized as a tool in many social science studies, past literature reveals the application of the case study method in many areas and disciplines. Among them include natural examples in the fields of Sociology (Grassel & Schirmer, 2006), Law (Lovell, 2006) and Medicine (Taylor & Berridge, 2006). For this study, studies that were conducted about the U.S-Israel relationship will be reviewed to ascertain their view on the nature of the relationship underpinning the IR theories.

According to Yin (2009), a case study is defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009:18). Thus, the case study is a form of empirical inquiry that enables the in-depth examination of a particular phenomenon, issue or object in real life situations. Generally, case studies are the preferred method when it comes to answering questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’, when there is little control over events. In this respect, the case study approach will permit the in-depth examination of the findings from different scholars and content from different sources.

One of the primary strengths of employing the case study, as opposed to other research strategies, pertains to its ability to provide an in-depth analysis of a particular context, or setting, as well as greater explanatory power to quantitative data. By taking an inductive, iterative and exploratory

stance, the case study approach enables researchers to use ‘soft’ (qualitative) data to explain the nature of relationships often hidden within ‘hard’ (quantitative) data (Mintzberg, 1979). Ironically, the strength derived from this ‘softer’ stance can be a source of weakness if not applied in a methodical manner.

Foreign relations are a phenomenon that cannot be easily distinguished from context in real-life, and a case study represents the most relevant method of investigation. According to Stakes, the crucial point in case study research is the object of study itself: “As a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used” (Stake, 1994:236). In this study, United States – Israel relations is an individual case constituting three units of analysis; the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations. A comparative analysis using the theories as lenses to study the relationship between the U.S. and Israel will be applied. Of much interest is the nexus between realism, liberalism and constructivism and how these explain the US-Israel relationship. These cases will be scrutinized in the theoretical context of foreign policy and international relations.

Case studies offer a prospective study, the ability to obtain rich data with high validity whilst situating and interpreting data within their wider context. As such, case studies provide important study settings from which conclusions for this relationship under scrutiny will be premised. While some studies are critical about the reliability of this method, such criticisms overlook the notion that the case study inferential mechanism relies upon the ‘strength of the theoretical reasoning’ rather than the typicality or representativeness of the case. Case studies are common in international and comparative politics, where the focus is on one country or bloc of countries”. This method will enable the study to draw comparison between political and diplomatic strategies upon which US-Israel relationship is constructed (Mitchell, 1983).

When assessing U.S.-Israel relations, case study analysis provides substantial evidence. A variety of books and website articles are used to demonstrate the political, economic, and security related motivations that characterize the relationship. This form of methodology is used to assess the extent to which American policies reflect the core principles of realism, liberalism, and constructivism. The thesis will assess each theory in regard to the case study in turn.

### 3.3 Case Selection

First, the case study of the relationship between the United States and Israel assesses how realism explains the relationship between Israel and the United States. In so doing, the extent to which both states have favored international policies that promote their own national and regional interests is explained.

Second, the case study of the relationship between the United States and Israel assess how liberalism explains the mutual interests between America and Israel that underlay their relations. This examines the degree to which these contrasting states initially engaged in a relationship that was defined by similar goals and aspirations. In addition, it determines whether an emphasis on relative rather than absolute gains is emblematic of U.S.-Israel relations and their individual foreign policy agendas. Third, the case study of the relationship between the United States and Israel is examined by constructivism identifying how the concern for power is overridden by economic/political considerations (desire for prosperity, commitment to liberal values) through democracy promotion, interdependence, regional cooperation and Trade/Aid.

In review the cases, the focus was on the three US Administration; Bush, Obama and Trump administration as they were inspired by their difference in foreign policy considerations towards Israel. Although George W. Bush memorably declared, "I'm the decider," as president he was remarkably indecisive when it came to U.S. policy toward the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Zoughbie, 2014). His administration's policymaking featured an ongoing clash between moderate realists and conservative hard-liners inspired by right-wing religious ideas and a vision of democracy as cure-all. Riven by these competing agendas, the Bush administration vacillated between recognizing the Palestinian right to self-determination and embracing Israeli leaders who often chose war over negotiations.

During the second term of President Barack Obama, US-Israeli relations sharply deteriorated. After a positive visit by President Obama to Israel in March 2013, major disagreements erupted over the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, over the nuclear deal with Iran and, especially, over the

construction of Jewish settlements in the Israel occupied west bank. Making matters worse, personal recrimination crept into the Israeli-American dialogue on the disputes.

The Trump administration maintained constructive relations with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who managed to stay high atop the president's short list of favorite allies during his term of office. After having been not only a conspicuous beneficiary of U.S. diplomatic bounty throughout Trump's tenure, in December 2017, Trump extended official U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and in May 2018, a new U.S. Embassy was unveiled in the city. In 2019, Trump signed a presidential proclamation affording recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo signed a declaration that the "establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law."

These three foreign policy dimensions make it interesting to further study and make a debate from the perspectives of the main International Relations theories (Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism).

### 3.4 Data Collection

This study reviewed different documents, publications and recorded facts which are situated within a theoretical frame of reference to U.S-Israel relations and foreign policy underpinning the three theoretical constructs (realism, liberalism and constructivism) in order that the content is understood. A number of researchers such as Bailey (1994, 1982); Polit and Hungler (1991), Treece and Treece (1982); and Webb et al., (1984) stated that document research includes institutional memoranda and reports, census publications, government pronouncements and proceedings, diaries and innumerable other written, visual and pictorial sources in different forms, among others. The study will utilize all the relevant literature from the sources mentioned and reflected in the analysis of the study findings.

A comprehensive search strategy will be designed in order to identify all relevant studies. Data bases will be searched to retrieve articles and abstracts by matching key words and the criteria into

the search data base. The search for literature material will be done through online data bases: Web of Political Science; Google, e-Libraries like Z-Library, UPEACE and others to identify books and relevant studies published in peer-reviewed journals by the year 2021. All publications on the U.S-Israel relationship will be identified, and duplicates removed. Potentially relevant studies will be sorted out and topics that are not relevant removed. At this stage, full manuscripts will be obtained and exclude those with topics not directly related to the study. Those in line with the four research questions will be include. Additionally, this study uses the Intra-Action Review (IAR) which involves an interactive, structured methodology using user-friendly materials and interactive facilitation techniques. Many sources, include policy briefs and blog posts written by academics, think tanks, and international organizations, based on assumptions derived from Foreign Policy and International Relations studies. Finally, studies that will be included in the review of this research will be extracted. The list of citation for included studies that are eligible studies, will be reviewed and analyzed. Manual searches will also be conducted. References of included studies will be searched for additional references. Other checks include references of published systematic reviews related to this study topic.

### 3.5 Reliability and Validity

One of the essential aspects in research is to ensure that the conclusions drawn are verified in terms of plausibility, reliability and validity which makes it truthful and transparent. Reliability is a concept that refers to that the study's results can be reproduced by other researchers at other times (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:263). According to Bryman (2012), "Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept" and "Validity refers to the issue of whether an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept" (ibid 168, 171). For a study to be reliable, it must be credible, transferable, and contains an opportunity to substantiate and confirm the results (ibid). The credibility that measures the thesis reliability can be measured by the language being adapted. Similar results should be reproducible if the study were to be redone. The philosophical foundations of this study have been elaborated to an extent possible that warrants reliable sources and analysis. Additionally, the theoretical constructs upon which the U.S.-Israeli relationship is being studied are renowned theories in international relations. Thus, their usability as delineated in the theoretical framework intertwined with the methodology denotes that when the study is done again in a similar fashion, the same findings can be achieved.

For example the the concepts of national interests, and balance of power under realism theory have been discussed in reference to the three administrations of Bush, Obama and Trump. The findings reliably reveal that these administrations followed a realistic stance in their relationship with Israel and if different philosophical strategies are used to assess these concepts, the findings will be similar.

Validity of this study is attested by the credibility of secondary sources reached. Based on the criteria developed by Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001), the authenticity of the selected sources is reflected by the efforts made to acknowledge all the sources referenced in this study. The criticality subjected to analysis of the U.S-Israel relationship based on the theoretical constructs considers the historical context as well the conceptual background. Additionally, the research questions and the data used were found to provide relevant answers for the theories used in the analysis, indicating validity. The study has also been delimited in order to reach a result that is useful. Without a boundary, it can be difficult to get a generalizable result.

### 3.6 Limitations and Delimitations

This study is limited to George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump. The delimitation is due to the research objective, examining the US-Israel relationship by studying only these three administrations, but also previous studies on the US-Israel special relationship have already been done. The delimitation for this thesis also represents certain restrictions. Limitations that will be a disadvantage of the following case study will be that this can become largely time consuming. There is a lot of literature to be studied and analysed plus a lot of online research is involved which takes a lot of time. Also, there is a risk of false information since some of the findings are found on the internet.

## Chapter Four: Findings

The findings of this study are presented based on the theoretical framework explained in chapter two. U.S – Israel relationship during Bush, Obama and Trump administration is discussed and

analysed concurrently under the three theoretical constructs; realism, liberalism and constructivism. In each instance, the major components of the theories are discussed.

## 4.1 Realist Perspective:

There are four primary propositions that makeup the Realism theory, but only three are used for the subsequent post regarding U.S.-Israel relations. These are; national interest, military power and balance of power. In line with the first proposition, states have a tendency to pursue their self-interests, and this was assessed to determine which interests make the relationship between the U.S. and Israel special. Secondly, interests have been discussed comparatively with power maximisation of the two states given that the core concern of all states is survival making national security a priority. States amass as much military power as possible in order to ensure their chances of survival (Morgenthau, 2005; Waltz, 2001).

### 4.1.1 National Interests

A realist interpretation of national interest is the pursuit of the state's territorial, economic, and military interests while ensuring the state's survival as the underlying priority. This is the rational choice of a unitary actor (Stephens, 2006). A strong military, diplomatic leadership, and effective intelligence are all prerequisites to achieving all other U.S. international goals as outlined in the U.S. Department of State Performance Plan on National Interests for the years 1999-2000 (*U.S. State Department, Official Web Site*, 1999). Traditional defensive alliances and state-to-state relations remain priorities. Defense of U.S. interests, however, may compel action to prevent, manage, and resolve ethnic conflicts, territorial disputes, civil wars, and destabilizing humanitarian disasters anywhere on the globe.

Like all U.S presidents, the Bush (2001-2009) administration sought to impress his own character and ideas into America's foreign policy (Crockatt, 2003). Regardless of his impact on American foreign policy, President Bush represented a nation with long-established institutions and policies, which serve a national interests and which cannot be altered. However, it should be recognised that it is in a matter of degrees that U.S. presidents have differed in their strategies and their use of power, means, and influence for the purpose of pursuing U.S. interests (Al-Kuaileet, author's interview, 2005). Comparatively, unlike the first President Bush, who viewed himself as a neutral

arbiter in the delicate politics of the Middle East, George W. Bush saw his role through the prism of the war on terror.

During the 1990s, the battle against terrorism consolidated the US-Israeli relationship by providing a mutual enemy and a coalescence of interests in collaborating against terrorist organisations. This was one area where Israel's experience proved particularly valuable because, unlike Israel, which has been a constant victim of terrorist attacks since its creation in 1948, the United States has only experienced terrorist activity on its soil once, with the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York. Though far less devastating than the 9/11 attack, as a result Islamic terrorism became an increasingly important factor in US policy calculations in the Middle East. Given Israel's experience in defending the state against terrorism, Jerusalem became a natural ally in what Washington saw as an American led battle to defend the world. Reports in early 2001 that Osama bin Laden had begun to target Israel as well as the US only underscored the opportunities for collaboration (United States Senate, 2009). The 9/11 attack shaped Bush's foreign policy and led to an immediate US reaction, opening a "global war against terror" and reconstructed a new institutional order that influenced the entire globe (Ben-Eliezer, 2012). In this endeavour, the U.S essentially allied with Israel to advance this agenda in the Middle East. Given the terror attack, America's foreign policy at the time reflected the national interest – to keep American secure. This is a traditional view of foreign policy which is often associated with realist perspective (Webber & Smith 2002:11-15). National interest remains the main reason for countries to involve in international relations and have international cooperation with other countries.

However, citing Moshe's memoirs, Israel's foreign minister from 1988 to 1990, and secretary of state James Baker, Bar-Siman-Tov (1998) argues that the relationship between the two countries experienced perhaps its most significant challenge during the Bush (Jr) administration to the extent that Israel was often perceived as a strategic and political burden (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1998:255-256). Peace, the Persian Gulf War, and the conditions of Israel's request for loan guarantees worth \$10 billion for the purpose of absorbing Soviet immigrants were among the points of disagreement (ibid). For in the aftermath of the Cold War, Washington's strategic and geopolitical priorities had shifted, and perceptions of the national interest were subject to re-evaluation. Thus this coalescence of interests proved to be somewhat superficial. As during the Gulf War, when America acted to

defend its vital interests, Israel was sometimes seen as a hindrance rather than a help. In retaliating against the terrorist attacks on the WTC and Pentagon America sought to marshal the support of the Western and Muslim worlds. In so doing, Washington relied on Britain rather than Israel to act as its foremost ally. Meanwhile, in the guise of assisting Washington, Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, exploited the situation for Israel's advantage. By describing Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat as Israel's Osama bin Laden, Sharon tried to win American acquiescence in Israel's reoccupation of Palestinian land from October 2001. In so doing, Israel inflamed regional tensions, further alienating Arab and Muslim opinion at a time when America sought their support (Stephens 2003:349).

The U.S – Israel relationship under Barack Hussein Obama reflected more of a continuity of the previous administration's foreign policy towards the Middle East than real change. Obama fully accepted the basic realist premises informing American foreign policy; while shifting his approach significantly from Bush's ideology of proselytizing about democracy and the liberal deployment of force in world politics. According to Gerges (2013), Obama's foreign policy was more cautious than transformational and therefore refrained from challenging the predominant narrative in Washington. Beginning with his Cairo speech in 2009, he adopted a centrist realist approach to the region, consistent with the dominant US foreign policy approach.

"I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles -- principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings." -President Obama, Cairo, June 4, 2009.

Throughout his presidency, Obama aimed at retaining the status quo with a few minor corrections (Erges, 2013:300). Common security interests, partnership, and multilateralism in international relations became the principles of his pragmatic, realistic foreign policy. While Obama was reticent about declaring a doctrine in his name, his National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2010 called for a rebalancing of America's global commitments away from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that had distracted the country from its more pressing twenty-first-century challenges in the Asia–Pacific region (Ibid:302)

As early as 2006, Obama stressed that he was a realist, not an idealist like his Predecessor (Lizza, 2011; Haas, 2015). Obama struck a more realist tone than previous administrations in his dealings with Tel Aviv, seemingly recognizing that unconditional support for Israel, and its continued occupation and settlement expansion of the West Bank, is not in the US's national interest. Seeking to pursue a more even-handed approach to the peace process, Obama pressured and cajoled the Netanyahu government to abandon its continued construction of illegal settlements. Such constant US pressure mounted on the reluctant Israeli prime minister has seen relations between the two heads of state sink to a surprising low over the past year (Bettiza, Gregorio and Phillips, 2010).

President Barack Obama made the choice of changing the relationship with Israel. While George W. Bush saw Israel as a country that was a great ally for America, Obama went with another route in regard to the relationship. Obama and his administration chose the route of balancing out the relationship with the Middle East and not only Israel. In his eyes, a more balanced relationship from the United States side, Israel and Palestine would be able to produce a peace settlement. Being that he also wanted to reach out to other Middle Eastern states, a back-up plan was also set in place. If President Barack Obama's efforts of building a relationship with other Muslim countries failed, his hope was on the Israel and Palestine peace settlement (Freedman, 2012:57). Moreover, Obama's support for UNSC resolution 2334 appears to demonstrate his support for the Palestinian strategy of imposing a solution on Israel from the outside, using international pressure in a bid to circumvent bilateral negotiations stipulated in the Oslo Accords (Spoerl, 2016:69).

Believing that peace in Israel/Palestine was essential for the US security interests in the Middle East, President Obama came to office with the goal of bringing about a peace deal between the Israelis and the Palestinians (Sciarco, 2016). From the start of his administration, Obama invested important political capital trying to help broker an Israeli–Palestinian peace settlement. Unlike previous U.S presidents, he recognized the centrality of the Arab–Israeli conflict to US relations with Arab countries and the greater Middle East, and he did not hide his feelings about it. Citing a Chicago-based activist and author Ali Abunimah, Ruebner (2014), claims that Abunimah heard the then senator Obama speak on several occasions to Palestinian- and Arab-American audiences,

in which Obama openly criticized US policy and advocated an equitable resolution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. He adds that, to confirm his position on this issue, one of Obama's first calls as president was to the Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, to whom he pledged that he would pursue an Israeli–Palestinian peace settlement and help bring about a Palestinian state. Moreover, Gerges (2013) asserts that Obama linked the establishment of a Palestinian state to US national security, thus elevating and prioritizing the drive for Arab–Israeli peace (Gerges, 2013:313). The heavy civilian death toll in Gaza in 2008, coupled with an outpouring of public outrage in the Arab and Muslim world at Israeli military action there, reinforced Obama's conviction that the Arab–Israeli conflict needed urgent attention.

Donald Trump on the other hand was a beacon of hope to Palestine for a short while before he turned pro-Israel. According to Kuttab (2017), Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas surprised many during his visit to Washington, DC by praising US President Donald Trump describing him as courageous and wise and praising his negotiating skills. In contrast, Trump made no mention of the two-state solution in his own public statement, and his vague statements about peace included not a hint about Israel's need to cease illegal settlement construction. In fact, Kuttab (2017) states that Trump often referred to both sides asymmetrically "*Israel and the Palestinians*" in his statements. According to him, Trump had given Palestinians reason to worry for a long time. Trump, for instance, discussed moving the United States embassy to Jerusalem during his election campaign and chided the outgoing Obama administration for abstaining from voting on UN resolutions denouncing Israeli settlements. Thus, Under Donald J. Trump 2017-2021 administration, America's foreign policy in Israel-Palestine conflict was depicted as biased towards Israel (Soekarno, 2019). This biased attitude was reflected in Trump's policies including recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving America's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Shalom & Michael, 2018), defunded NGO's funding such as UNRWA and USAID which undermined their operations in Palestinian territory (Deutsche Welle, 2018), withdraw from UN bodies that accused hostile towards Israel (Borger, 2018), also to recognized Israel's sovereignty over Golan Height (Romo, 2019). These attitude has certainly served Israel's interest. Trump's administration did not engage with the Palestinian or include Palestinian narratives when making regional decisions. In January of 2020, President Trump released his proposed

IsraelPalestine peace deal which disregarded decades of the U.S. commitment to a two-state solution and was quickly rejected by Palestinian authorities.

Climate Change (2021) reported that although the Trump administration failed to achieve its peace plan, the Abraham Accords between the UAE, Bahrain, and Israel negotiated through the Trump administration brought unprecedented peace to the region. Despite this being an important step forward, it is important to remember that no nation in the Abraham Accords was at war with another and that normalization simply formalized diplomatic relationships that had existed for years. In reality, the Abraham Accords further reduced the likelihood of a two-state solution, dimming Palestinian hopes of nationhood, undermining Israeli democratic values, and endangering U.S. interests in the region.

Conclusively, as Realists, Mearsheimer and Walt argue that the U.S national interest should be the main concern in its foreign policy. However, in the Middle East, they claim this has not been the case, as the focus of foreign policy has been centred disproportionately on Israel. They claim that it is not due to any moral obligation or Israel being a strategic asset and has resulted in the US setting aside “its own security in order to advance the interests of another state” (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006:1).

#### 4.1.2 Military Power

Several scholars including O’Neill and Schwartz (1987) have justified the use of military power at the global level. They stress that even if disarmament was possible, it would have the effect of destroying international relations. According to Bowie (1960), the minimum requirements to achieve limited objectives are stringent as he asserts that ‘no arms control plan can remain effective and dependable unless it continues to serve the national interest of each of the parties to it’ (ibid:720). According to Sharp (2022), nearly all U.S. aid to Israel is military related. Military relations between Israel and the United States have been consistently close in the past few decades, owing mainly to Washington’s role as Israel’s arms supplier. As a major purchaser and user of U.S. military equipment, Israel has built its defence industry resulting in the Israeli armed forces

becoming among the most technologically advanced in the world (ibid). Moreover, Israel's security and qualitative military edge over neighbouring militaries have been strengthened over the years by congress, and successive administrations have repeatedly reaffirmed the United States' commitment to strengthening Israel's QME (Wunderle & Briere, 2008).

As part of a second Memorandum of Understanding in 2007, the Bush Administration and the Israeli government agreed to provide \$30 billion in military aid for a 10-year period from FY2009 to FY2018. In that agreement, Israel was explicitly permitted to spend up to 26.3% of U.S. assistance on Israeli-made equipment (called Off-Shore Procurement or OSP). The agreement stated that it was assumed that U.S. foreign assistance would continue at adequate levels (Nehme, 2007). It can also be considered marketing and advertising for U.S. weapons since their use by Israel can also be viewed as weapon testing.

Apart from military equipment, the United States works closely with the Israeli military on a range of security issues. According to David (2015), these include joint maneuvers, the development of the Arrow and Iron Dome missile defense systems, and the creation of the Stuxnet cyberwarfare worm used against the Iranian nuclear program. Therefore, while it is true that Israel produces some of its own arms, it cannot produce top-of-the-line aircraft or missiles, and what it does manufacture often uses American parts. During the Obama administration, the U.S offered Israel a consolidated aid package that essentially guaranteed expanded top-line funding from State Department and Pentagon accounts each year for the next decade, starting in 2018 (Ibid). David (2015) points out that the package, which followed on the \$30 billion, 10-year MEMO signed during the Bush administration in 2007, gave Israel some more leeway - including the option to reprogramme. He also claims that Obama's commitment to realism cast doubt on the vital support Israel receives from the United States. Moreover, none of the three reasons that underlie American support for Israel - the strategic importance of Israel, the U.S and Israel's shared values, and the purported influence of the Israel lobby, realistically justify the extraordinary level of support for Israel provided by the United States.

A realist case can be made for Israel providing strategic benefits for the United States, but it is not nearly as strong as it once was. As a powerful, dependable ally in a turbulent and vital region,

Israel is the “unsinkable” aircraft carrier that America can rely upon to protect its interests. It is significant that major American support for Israel began in 1970, when Israel proved its strategic worth to Washington by quickly and effectively responding to an American request to protect Jordan from a Syrian invasion (ibid). Thereafter, Israel has assisted American efforts by providing intelligence across a wide range of areas including Soviet weapons systems and terrorist groups. The backing of Israel, however, is a two edged strategic sword, complicating American efforts to befriend the Arab world, contributing to making the United States a target of terrorist groups, and tarnishing America’s reputation through its steadfast support for Israel. Moreover, with the end of the Cold War, Israel’s intelligence help regarding Soviet weapons systems and providing a bulwark against communist expansion are no longer relevant.

The Trump administration saw the biggest ever military aid to Israel compared to previous administrations. According to Cortellessa (2019), the Trump administration allocated a \$200 million increase in defense assistance to Israel than compared to years prior. During the campaign, Trump described Israel as “our great friend and the one true Democracy in the Middle East”, and frequently declared –with perhaps debatable accuracy– that his predecessors were not supportive enough (Trump, 2016). The foreign policy of the Trump administration displayed a considerable amount of continuity with the foreign policy initiative of the Obama administration. Donald Trump himself stated during his campaign that he sought "peace through strength" and that "in a Trump administration, his actions in the Middle East will be tempered by realism" (Pagliarulo, 2017).

## Balance of Power

As a mechanism for maintaining peace in the Middle East and countering any threat that could harm the interests of the United States or its allies, the balance of power is vital. According to Dekhakhena (2021), the United States attempts to maintain its military dominance by developing defensive and military systems that guarantee control and neutralise the military capabilities of other major powers. When it comes to the US - Israel relationship, the US’ primary interest is to prevent a foreign hegemony in the Middle East while at the same time striving to contain the influence of Israel in the region. A regional hegemon in the Middle East would have global repercussions. Additionally, the U.S. not only seeks to contain the influence of Israel but also to keep the current dominant regional power and military power, namely Iran. ‘What really concerns the United States is to neutralise its rival powers in areas of international conflict, as it did when

it laid red lines on some areas of international competition between it and the Soviet Union in the past. So is its policy in the Middle East ‘’(Ibid:165).

The balance of power in which the U.S is interested is the balance between Israel and the Arab states, which the U.S is committed to maintaining in favour of Israel. In contrast, Bush openly favoured the creation of a viable Palestinian state. This move was to contain Israel’s advantage over Palestine and among his recommendations was the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005 and the restriction of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). ‘’At the same time the Bush administration was working closely with the European Union, Russia, and the UN to fashion a "Road Map" leading to a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians’’ (Ibid :212). This reflects the inherent need for the balance of power within the middle east which has since remained a shadow in the previous U.S administrations. For instance, President George H. W. Bush’s formation and direction of an international coalition to drive Iraq out of Kuwait in 1990 and 1991 had the trappings of both unilateral determination and multi-lateral cooperation. In his victory speech of 6 March 1991, Bush called for a “new world order” that would enable the United Nations to fulfill its obligation to provide for the collective security of the weaker nations, and for a U.S. program that would assist in stabilizing the Middle East.

Bush’s statement generated much discussion in the months thereafter, but skeptical voices were quickly heard. Henry Kissinger, commented on President Bush’s building of a coalition to defeat the Iraqi aggression, but he disapproved the notion of a new world order indicating that the problem with such an approach is that it assumes that every nation perceives every challenge to the international order in the same way, and is prepared to run the same risks to preserve it. Yet, the new international order will see many centers of power, both within regions and among them. The power centers reflect different histories and perceptions. In Kissinger view, the essential thrust of the new American approach should be the recognition of regional balances of power to establish order based on two roads to international stability: domination or equilibrium (Nehme, 2007).

The Obama administration on the other hand wanted to be seen as a more pragamatic actor. If anything realism does not reject pragmatism and in realism today’s ally can be the enemy of tomorrow. Under Obama, U.S.’ priority was to build regional stability so that other actors in the Middle East will want to collaborate rather than go to war with each other. As far as its relationship

with Israel was concerned, Obama indicated that regional stability was more important than maintaining the balance of power between Israel and its neighbours. ‘‘Rather than deploying the military to dominate the region, the U.S. instead seeks to forge pragmatic, functioning relations throughout the region to maximize its flexibility’’ (Marashi, 2015). It seemed that Obama’s strategic objective was neither to promote Israeli nor Saudi dominance of the Middle East, but to ensure that no regional power cements political, economic, or military dominance and thus being branded a ‘‘shrewd pragmatic realist with Nixonian echoes’’ (Gregorio, Bettiza And Phillips, 2010). In his remarks at the UN General Assembly in 2009 he said that ‘‘No balance of power among nations will hold’’ (Obama, 2013). Obama apparently wanted a Middle East without strong neighbours with hegemonic tendencies and an Israel-Palestine that could exist in peace and security.

According to Cavari (2022), Trump changed U.S. priorities in the region and improved ties between his administration and the Israeli government soon after he took office while Renshon & Suedfeld (2021) claim that Trump operated well within the guard rails of America’s foreign policy traditions just like George Washington and Jackson who put America First, and realists like Teddy Roosevelt and Richard Nixon who played the great power game of balancing power. During his presidency, Trump prioritized the defence of the United States and its allies, rather than the interests of regional powers. They assert that the Trump administration believed that undercutting support for the Palestinian Authority would create more pressure for Palestinians to come to the table and thus announced it would cease funding UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees), which was unprecedented. Accepting Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, as well as shifting the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was a sidliner stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict, tipping the balance of power in favour of Israel - a direct violation of long-standing US policies. Underwood (2018) argues that this move was a huge victory for the Israelis and essentially ended the prospect of a Palestinian state.

## 4.2 The Liberal Perspective

By tracing the tenets within the liberal construct, this section aims to demonstrate the perspective that liberals take on the U.S.-Israel relationship. Emphasizing the fact that liberalism seeks to limit

and check political power, the analysis is based on the activities that occurred between U.S. and Israel during the second Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. Based on the liberal values presented in the theoretical framework, the U.S.-Israel relationship will be examined by examining democracy promotion, interdependence, regional cooperation, trade/aid, and lobbying by the Israel Lobby.

#### 4.2.1 Democracy Promotion

The spread of democracy is one of the key liberal concepts in Western policy circles and it is argued that prosperous democracies do not fight each other (Mearsheimer, 1995). It is crucial that the institutions that have served the West so well over the years are redesigned to include Eastern Europe as well (ibid). Furthermore, the US-Israel enhances Israel's democratic strengths in an otherwise authoritarian Middle East, yet Israeli public opinion of the United States in contrast to Arab state public opinion is favourable, and the alliance is based on people-to-people as well as government-to-government relations (Byman & Moller, 2016).

Despite Bush (Jr)'s desire to encourage democratization among its autocratic partners in the Middle East, his initiative was hampered from the start by the inescapable fact that he still needed their close cooperation on several fronts, including antiterror, oil access, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Carothers, 2007). In Israel's case, the sentimental attachment many liberals have for Israel made it paramount to leverage the support of the already established democracy and according to Zunes (2002), Americans often identify with Israel's internal democracy, progressive social institutions such as the kibbutzim, the relatively high level of social equality, and its role as a sanctuary for oppressed minorities who spent centuries in exile.

During a wide-ranging policy address on the Middle East and North Africa, President Obama reaffirmed U.S. support for the reform-minded democratic movements reshaping the region and pledged support for Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts (Omestad, 2011). As president, Obama inherited a democracy promotion policy badly damaged by the Bush-era association with regime change, the loss of America's reputation as a global symbol of democracy and human rights, and concerns of a global democratic recession. Thus, he first attempted to recalibrate U.S. democracy policy through softer rhetoric—emphasizing universal rights and principles, rather than the

imposition of American-style democracy—along with diplomatic engagement with countries like Iran and Russia (Carothers, 2007).

As part of the 2016 electoral campaign, Donald Trump said the essence of America's foreign policy problems was the dangerous idea that America could make Western democracies out of countries with no experience or interest in becoming such democracies (Saunders, 2017). Under President Trump, democracy promotion was not a priority like under his predecessors, and he indicated that under his watch, the United States would not attempt to impose its values or system on other countries, suggesting that the growth and consolidation of democratic systems will not be a priority. However, on his first trip overseas as president, Trump made his first visit to Israel to reaffirm the two nations' relationship. According to Cavari (2022), After recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moving the US Embassy there, Trump also recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, withdrew from the Iran Nuclear Deal, took unilateral support measures at the United Nations, and released his vision for Israeli-Palestinian peace, known as the "Vision for Peace," wherein the United States recognized Israel's right to annex parts of the West Bank. Additionally, he orchestrated the Abraham Accords, normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab nations. Trump's method of peace promotion could be beneficial to Israel, but it had the potential to destabilize and even exacerbate tensions between Israel and its neighbours. 'President Trump made no similar efforts to reach out to Palestinians' (ibid:158). In the end Israel dropped in its democracy ranking index (Parmeter, 2020).

#### 4.2.2 Interdependence

The US-Israel relationship has been built on the notion of close military ties, intensive bilateral relations in the military and intelligence sectors and political-military cooperation. According to Bar-Siman-Tov (1998), Israel is the number one recipient of US foreign aid and U.S. support for Israel has been central to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East for decades. Furthermore, the US foreign policy on terrorism, which encapsulates the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is another example of the US-Israel interdependence. The threat of radical Islamist terrorism, in its many forms, continues to pose an immediate threat to the safety and security of the U.S. as well as its allies.

Middle East is a complex region with a number of actors at odds with one another over a variety of issues (Zaman, 2015).

During George W. Bush Jr.'s administration, interdependence was evident through financial and military aid such as in establishing the goals for the 2003 Iraq invasion, the US support of Israel during the invasion of Lebanon and the Gulf wars. Bush clearly worked hard to eradicate all extremist groups that got in its way. As the most advanced military power in the region, the U.S. relies a lot on Israel which has proven capable of countering the influence of these terrorist groups (Dicter & Byman, 2006). Moreover, with the Iranian nuclear threat, when it comes to the violent actions of terrorist groups compared to the resolution of Israel-Palestine conflict, the latter became secondary in the face of a greater threat to the region. In this matter, the U.S. has clearly sided with those who benefit them the most, Israel. Therefore U.S. policy concerning the region is to ensure Israel's safety which further impacts U.S. interest in that region.

Citing Thrall (2016), and Elgindy (2017), Mohamed (2018), contends that Obama didn't leave any legacy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, unlike any of his predecessors. In his view, Obama failed to make any constructive plan to advance the peace process, and whatever measures his Administration has taken were merely formal diplomatic procedures without any real substance. In addition, he claims that a widely accepted interpretation of US-Israeli relations implies that it was a primary reason for peace failure (see Khalidi, 2013; Thrall, 2016; Ruebner, 2016). As a matter of fact, this structure exemplifies the blurring of domestic and foreign policy, with the Jewish lobby playing a major role in dictating the US peace policy. Scham (2014), for instance, claims that domestic dynamics in American politics play a major role in keeping Obama's Administration from pressuring the right-wing government of Israel in the peace process despite the fact that the Jewish community grew more divided than ever before on the subject.

### 4.2.3 Regional Cooperation

The U.S. have been providing Israel with Migration and Refugee Assistance which varies from \$12 million to \$80million each year. U.S. also provided loan guarantees for Israel to maintain Israel's economic stability even in unpredictable conditions such as wars, natural disasters, or economic crises (Zanotti, 2022). Congress has funded the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad

program as part of the overall Development Assistance appropriation to USAID for academic institutions and hospitals in Israel (USAID, n.d.). U.S. also provided Israel with huge amount of funding in joint cooperation in business, energy sector, as well as 494 cybersecurity (Sharp, 2019). The U.S. has also backs and protects Israel in international arena. Washington has provided consistent diplomatic and political support to Israel. Until today, the U.S. has vetoed over 40 UN Resolutions condemning Israel's behavior towards Palestinian. The Israeli indifference and lack of any regard of world opinion was the direct result of its reliance on a super power and a conviction that United States would always come to rescue and bail Israel out even from the most difficult situations (Osgood, 1970).

The U.S.-Israel economic and commercial relationship is strong, anchored by bilateral trade of close to \$50 billion in goods and services annually. According to the U.S. Department Of State (2021), U.S.-Israel bilateral economic relations are codified in a number of treaties and agreements, including the 1985 U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the Agreement on Trade in Agricultural Products. Since signing the FTA in 1985, U.S.-Israel bilateral goods and services trade has grown eight-fold, making the United States Israel's largest trading partner. U.S. goods exports to Israel in 2019 were \$14.7 billion, with \$19.6 billion of imports in 2019. U.S. exports of services to Israel were an estimated \$5.7 billion in 2019, with imports of \$7.4 billion. The United States and Israel also coordinate scientific and cultural exchanges through the Binational Science Foundation (BSF), the Binational Agricultural Research and Development Foundation (BARD), Binational Industrial Research and Development Foundation (BIRD) and the U.S.-Israeli Education Foundation. To facilitate economic cooperation, the two countries convene a Joint Economic Development Group each year to discuss our economic partnership and possible initiatives for the coming year.

Currently, Israel receives \$3 billion annually in US assistance through Foreign Military Financing (FMF). Seventy-four percent of these funds must be spent on the acquisition of US defense equipment, services, and training. Thus, "United States military aid to Israel is seen by many as a subsidy for U.S. industries", according to Pollack (2003). Foreign Military Financing (FMF) is intended to promote US national security by contributing to global stability, strengthening military support for democratically elected governments and containing transnational threats, including terrorism and trafficking of weapons. According to the United States Department of State, these

grants enable US allies to improve their defence capabilities and foster closer military relationships between the US and recipient nations.

The Obama administration presented a bold vision for future US policy toward the Middle East in 2011. He stressed the need to encourage reforms throughout the region and contribute to democratic transitions while addressing the State Department (Obama, 2011). Obama raised expectations for a progressive approach toward democracy in the region in conjunction with his 2009 Cairo speech, in which he lay the groundwork for a new relationship between the United States and the Arab world. Dunne (2014) argues that the administration's support for democratization and political change in the Middle East was driven off course by frustrating events, new challenges, and stubborn behaviour based on keeping existing relationships at the cost of reform. Moreover, diplomatically, the United States provided a political shield against the attempts of Israel's enemies to isolate, sanction, and otherwise punish it in international fora. Additionally, the relationship with the United States was not only instrumental in reducing hostile actions against Israel; Israel's ties with and influence in the United States induced some third parties to cultivate closer ties with Israel, hoping that somehow that would lead to a more positive reception in Washington. Moreover, from Israel's perspective, the United States has served as the most reliable mediator in efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an agenda item for most presidents of the last 40 years. (Heller, 2019).

#### 4.2.5 Israel Lobby

*If neither strategic nor moral arguments can account for America's support for Israel, how are we to explain it? The explanation lies in the political power of the Israel lobby. Were it not for the lobby's ability to work effectively within the American political system, the relationship between Israel and the United States would be far less intimate than it is today. It is one of the most influential internal factors of the U. S.'s pro-Israel policy (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007).*

Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) indicate that the lobby is primarily composed of individuals and organizations aiming to influence U.S. policy in favour of Israel. The group has a number of activities ranging from supporting pro-Israel candidates to making election donations to safeguard Israel's interests. The U.S. has a polarized government, which provides a wide variety of

opportunities to influence policy and as a result, interest groups such as the Israeli lobby can shape policy in many different ways: lobbying elected representatives and members of the Executive Branch, making campaign contributions, voting in elections, moulding public opinion, etc. Israeli lobbyists use several strategies to promote U.S. support for Israel, but there are two main ones. The first one is exerting a strong influence in Washington, influencing both Congress and the executive branch in favour of Israel; the second way is through its efforts to present a positive image of Israel in the public discourse, repeating myths about Israel and its founding, as well as by promoting Israel's interests in policy debates today. The goal is to prevent critical commentary about Israel from getting a fair hearing in the political arena (ibid).

Given that the main concern of liberalism is to construct institutions that protect individual freedom by limiting and checking political power and the importance of international relations to liberals, the liberalism focus on the U.S-Israel relationship seems to have little consideration by the three administrations (Obama, Bush and Trump). All these administrations have proposed road maps for a peace process that would result in two states, one Israeli and one Palestinian which have ended in vain. This perhaps indicates the complexity of the U.S involvement in IsraelPalestine and how all efforts to broker the peace processes under the three administrations have been more or less futile. For instance, Young (2020) indicated that the Trump plan would not bring peace because, in its essence, it was devised by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing extremists. The plan sought Palestinian submission and subjugation, not equality or international law. Similarly, he mentioned that in the past the question of stripping Palestinian citizens of their Israeli citizenship was never discussed, but was integrated in the plan calling for stripping as many as 300,000 Palestinian citizens of their Israeli citizenship and leaving the rest of the Palestinian population in Israel with an uncertain status.

While the Israel lobby proudly advertises its influence, it usually operates with impunity and will go to any length to control the discussion about Israel. Nevertheless, some resistance to the lobby and its agenda does exist. There is growing disenchantment among progressive Democrats in Congress toward Israel (Beauchamp, 2021).

## 4.3 Constructivism

Whereas realism and liberalism tend to focus on material factors such as power or trade, constructivist approaches emphasize the impact of ideas. Instead of taking the state for granted and assuming that it simply seeks to survive, constructivists regard the interests and identities of states as a highly malleable product of specific historical processes. They pay close attention to the prevailing discourse(s) in society because discourse reflects and shapes beliefs and interests, and establishes accepted norms of behaviour. The subsequent section assesses the major concepts of constructivism i.e Ideas, Identity Formation and Shared Norms in relation to U.S-Israel relationship.

### 4.3.1 Ideas

The most important ideational factors are those that are collectively held; these collectively held beliefs construct the interests and identities of actors (Finnemore, Martha; Sikkink, Kathryn, 2001; Barnett, Michael, 2018; Wendt, Alexander, 1999). The importance of ideas is owed to the fact that the world is constructed by individuals whose behaviour is modelled by their thoughts, which, in turn, are shared by members of a larger culture. ‘‘How individuals think about and talk about the world matters greatly in determining how states act in the international system’’ (Mearsheimer, 1995:40). From the late 1990s until the present, the U.S - Israel relationship has been characterized by common ideas and values, shared political interests and reciprocity among which are the need to prevent war, finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, stabilizing the Middle East against terrorism and radicalism, and ensuring Israel's existence and security. (Reich & Powers, 2016)

Despite many former presidents disapproving of Jewish settlement within the occupied territories, President Bush (Jr) argued that times had changed and many Israelis were already too established on Palestinian land. Israel and Palestine could only resolve the given dilemma on their own. These events, however, also revealed U.S. submission to Israel's interests and ambitions (Sharp, 2010). In 2005, President Bush (Jr) urged Israeli citizens to withdraw from Palestinian areas that were retaken during security operations. He insisted that the UN produce resolutions that were critical of both Palestinian and Israeli violence. President Bush wanted to see more balance in policy in regard to these adjacent territories. He supported Israel's disengagement from Gaza as a way to

possibly achieve peace. Within the same year, some Israeli citizens evacuated certain areas of Gaza and the West Bank. Although the Jewish state relinquished a little bit of sovereignty to meet U.S. demands, it still controlled the core of this relationship (Gilboa & Inbar, 2008; Peleg & Waxman 2011; Quandt, 2001). These developments shaped public debate and ideas as well as actual policy for the Obama administration.

### 4.3.2 Identity Formation,

Constructivism, in particular state identity approaches represented by Wendt (1999) and Katzenstein (1996), has become a part of the almost exclusively rationalist mainstream of international relations theory. These constructivist approaches, generally considered as the most serious challenge to rationalist dominance, claim that the theoretical framework based on the concept of state identity can offer a viable alternative to rational choice theory (Guzzini, 2000).

Absent that environment, it is doubtful whether any amount of activism by Jewish pro-Israel elements could have produced the kind of outcomes characterizing American policy over the past half-century. However, if that environment changes because of changes in the society and political culture of one or both countries, the narrative overlap could be put to a serious test.

The U.S has endowed Israel with many things, including the diplomatic support and international legitimacy that bestowed life itself. However, Israel is in the envious position of being considered both special and important by leading Washington officials and this has proved sufficient to prevent the relationship being determined unilaterally by the United States. Israel is also aware of the asymmetry in the relationship, and as a consequence, one constant theme has proliferated: the importance Jerusalem assigns to equating whenever possible what it sees as the best interests of Israel with those of the US. For example, following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in September 2001, Ariel Sharon, Israel's prime minister tried to generate a feeling of shared threat with the US by referring to Arafat as Israel's Osama bin Laden (Yusof et al.,2013) and highlighting Islamic terrorism as their mutual enemy. Despite great disparities in states power, the character of a special relationship cannot be imposed or determined unilaterally. Since it is not a divine gift bestowed by one party or a sacred right that a state can acquire. "It is a process - a process of interaction, laced with expectation (Stephens, 2003).

The U.S.-Israel relationship is a mutually beneficial partnership that reinforces America's moral values and strategic interests, and promotes peace and stability. This relationship with the only democracy in the Middle East is a key pillar of America's regional security framework. Thus, Israel is a beacon of shared interests and values in a critically strategic region. In any case, what seems to be unique about Israel and what explains the degree to which the message of its advocates resonates with the broader American public is the extent to which its story is seen to overlap America's own. Both countries see themselves as the executors of some exceptional historical mission rooted in biblical sources to redeem land and people while freeing themselves from the undemocratic background of their historical origins (Heller, 2019). During the Bush Jr administration, the position of a strong and indispensable ally was taken for granted as the general public accepted the strategic importance of such an association. However, the Obama administration, in its public pronouncements, was of the view that such an exclusive relationship should be moderated, and conditions should be introduced for the special relationship with Israel. Trump administration has followed the general path with the key line in its pitch for the right-wing government to which Israel is aligned through his comments in the UN and his references to Israel as a "vital" ally. While the Trump administration's isolationist rhetoric and policy on Iran should surprise no one, the simultaneous alignment with the Israelis, especially the latter's settlement policy, represents a dramatic shift and was a testament to the newfound political leverage it had in the region.

Like the United States, Israel is in large part an immigrant settler society based on an ethnonationalist structure, as defined both ideologically and institutionally. Despite Zionism's influence, Israel has welcomed newcomers. Israel, the historical homeland of the Jews, is the inspiration behind Zionism. According to Zanotti (2022), the United States has played a special role in assisting Israel with the complex task of absorbing and assimilating masses of immigrants in short periods of time. Following Israel's War of Independence, President Truman made a \$135 million loan to Israel to assist it in coping with tens of thousands of refugees from the Holocaust. Since 1989, Israel absorbed approximately one million Jews from the former Soviet Union. The United States worked with Israel to bring Jews from Arab countries, Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union to Israel, and has assisted in their absorption into Israeli society (Oren, 2008).

### 4.3.3 Shared Norms

American leaders have primarily explained the foundations of the U.S.-Israel relationship by properly citing “shared values”: the two countries’ common democracy, mutual experience in fighting for freedom, roots in Judeo-Christian culture and civilization, and commitment to the right of nations, large or small, to live in security while manifesting the will of the people (Blackwill & Solocombe, 2011). Shared values and moral responsibility—have been the pillars on which the United States has built a unique bilateral relationship with Israel that enjoys the deep, longstanding support of the American people, bilateral ties commonly described by a broad, bipartisan consensus of U.S. political leaders as “unbreakable.” Within the U.S. foreign policy, defense, and business communities, some leaders and analysts have traditionally viewed the U.S. relationship with Israel primarily as a one-way street, in which the United States protects Israel diplomatically (Oren, 2008).

Israel and the United States are both democracies that hold liberty in the highest regard. Moreover, Israel is the sole democracy in the Middle East. According to Oren (2008), the U.S. is the example of democracy throughout the world upholding the democratic values of peace, freedom, and justice. As democracies, both Israel and the United States are committed to freedom, equality and tolerance for all people regardless of religion, race or gender. Freedoms of conscience, speech, assembly and press are embedded in the fabric of both American and Israeli society (Ibid). In addition, Israel is an anchor of stability in a highly volatile region, embodying American values of democracy, pluralism and the rule of law. Israel is a reliable American ally, sustained by a robust judicial system, free and fair elections and full voting rights for all its citizens. The United States and Israel share interests in deterring war, promoting stability and creating lasting peace (AIPAC, 2022). Israeli technology and expertise help protect American airports, cities, cyberspace and other critical infrastructure from terrorist threats. Israel is the eyes and ears on the ground in an extremely dangerous region, and its military strength and geostrategic location help deter regional actors opposed to the United States. Invaluable bilateral intelligence cooperation helps secure Americans at home and prevent attacks against Americans abroad (Ibid).

## 4.4 Conclusion

This study sought to find out how realism explains the relationship between Israel and the United States. The findings reveal that realism is accepted by most as the dominant stance states take in national security, yet there are competing notions of constructivism and liberalism. The U.S.-Israel relationship according to the findings also based on diffused reciprocity. Whereas U.S. assistance to Israel has been an essential component of the relationship and is mainly tangible, Israel's returns are both intangible and tangible. Until Bush's administration, Israel's returns were intangible - self-restraint and compliance. Since the September 11, Israel's returns have been tangible as well. Israel's military superiority, control of the occupied territories, and open willingness to serve as a strategic asset were important in helping the United States to advance its interests in the region. The U.S.-Israeli relationship has definitely embraced many core realist theoretical precepts. Over the years both countries constantly sought to achieve relative gains within the Middle Eastern region. During the entirety of the Cold War, in comparison to Arab states within the region, Israel's primary goal was to establish and maintain military supremacy. The United States prioritized Israeli military dominance over particular Arab states such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, which were considered to be Soviet allies within the Middle East. Although a new international era has emerged since the Cold War officially ended in 1991, a parallel ideal to that of Cold War policy remains intact except for the recent Russia-Ukraine war developments.

Taking a constructivist viewpoint offers an interesting contrast to the realist theory previously discussed. Constructivists argue that the anarchical international system is socially constructed and so states only act competitively because they conform to this system (Wendt, 1992). Moving away from this belief would allow for the identities of states to dictate how they behave and so meaningful courses of action would be taken, rather than states acting to increase power for power's sake.

According to Lebovic (2004), Arab politics can be understood by looking at the relationships between identities, norms, and regional order throughout history. This suggests that imposing Western values, which the U.S. says it is doing, is actually detrimental to the development of Middle Eastern states. Moreover, Fritz (2015) posits that imposing democracy on states is highly unlikely to succeed and that economic and political stability should rather be achieved through the process of modernization. In support of this argument, examples from South Korea and South

Africa have shown that modernization has not led to democracy in these states. Thus, if Bush had accepted the cultural relativism that constructivism offers, the invasion of Iraq and the strategy of enforcing peace with military action in the Middle East may have been reconsidered. Rather, the region's states would have been left to develop into democratic societies on their own.

Many constructivists have criticized realism as being simplistic since it does not account for moral values that many states, particularly in the Middle East, hold. The U.S.'s national security policy is rooted in realism, and that isn't likely to change anytime soon. Taking a realist-constructivist stance, as recommended by Barkin (2003), may allow for a more rational approach to foreign policy that may be more flexible and beneficial to the US and Israel.

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