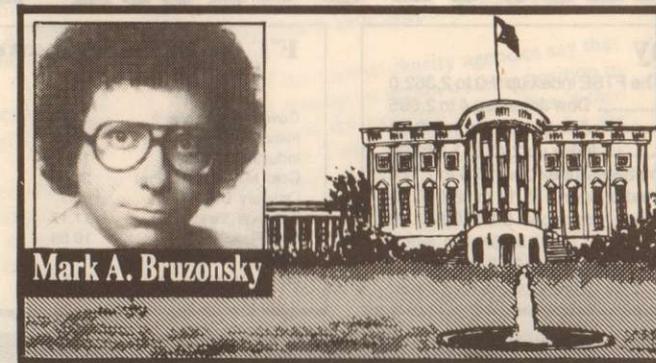


Like a cat, Israel has nine lives in its dealings with America. Those who want to see an eventual, real and just peace between Israel and the Palestinians should realise that this is the time to keep building the pressure on the Americans.

From



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Washington

US-Israel relations: strong, becoming brittle

FORCES of change are building here — slowly, minutely, sometimes nearly imperceptibly — in regard to the “Special Relationship” that for so long has bound the US with Israel.

Just as geological structures grind and scrape against each other for many years before a measurable seismic shifting of ground that we call an earthquake; so too political structures can go through a period of scrapping up against each other in opposing directions before the political ground irrevocably is forced to shift.

But just as with seismic earthquakes, predicting political ones is far less a science at this point than an art. Just when and why and of what magnitude are impossible to pinpoint. All we can really be sure is that major forces of change are building causing ever greater pressures that in the future are likely to result in an eventual quake.

Before saying more, it is necessary to say clearly that even with the pressure building as they are, there should be no doubt that “Special Relationship” Israel enjoys with the United States continues to have great strength. Like a cat, Israel seems to have nine lives in its dealings with America.

Indeed, over the past two decades — and especially during the post-Camp David decade dominated by the Reagan/Bush Administration — this alliance has come to be a major cornerstone of American foreign policy. The relationship seemingly survives — even feeds upon — just about any and everything.

Spies like Jonathan Pollard, the Irangate and Contragate period, Israel's nuclear weapons programme, the assassination of PLO officials, the Israeli-South African connection, the continual territorial expansion of the Jewish state even in the

face of Palestinian recognition — the US government gives the impression of remarkable tolerance, but in most cases is actually in bed with the Israelis in what they do.

And yet there is a growing brittleness to the hardness, an escalating decrease in flexibility, if you will, that allows more and more for cracks and less and less for strains.

There is as well a growing confusion in public opinion about Israel; an escalating polarisation between Israel's supporters and detractors; and a growing divergence between what the public thinks and what the American government does.

Two months ago I mentioned the unique new pamphlet just published by The Jewish Committee on the Middle East — JCOME. Written by one of the country's most eminent legal scholars — Charles L. Black, Jr., Sterling Professor of Law Emeritus at Yale University Law School — this pamphlet is in itself an omen of the political earthquake which seems to lie somewhat ahead, eventually, in US-Israel relations.

That such an essay would be written by such an established personality, and that it would be published by a new organisation of American Jews which includes American Jewish professors at over 125 universities all around the country who have themselves been calling for an end to the “Special Relationship” with Israel — this is truly an unprecedented situation.

Furthermore, this is precisely how political earthquakes begin — pressures from below that build and build until those on top have to respond, until the structures of the past cannot be sustained in the future.

Just consider some of Black's thoughts:

He begins by saying very boldly, “I believe that

the so-called ‘Special Relationship’ now assumed to connect the United States and Israel ought to be radically re-thought, in all its aspects and clear down to its deepest foundations. I believe such a re-thinking would sooner or later put an end to this ‘Special Relationship’ in anything at all like its present form.”

“This relationship,” Black continues, “as it now functions *de facto*, is sweepingly and grossly incompatible with our country's supposed dedication to the cause of human rights throughout the world. It poisons the sheer basic honesty of that dedication, and must more and more be seen to do so, by ourselves and by the whole community of peoples and nations. I have no illusion that our extrication from this involvement, this visibly and invisibly ‘entangling alliance,’ will be easily or soon accomplished — or even that it is certain of accomplishment at any time. but that depends, after all, on the possibility of change in the knowledge and conscience of the whole American people, and we can't begin to know about that until we try.”

There are those, of course, who seriously challenge this analysis and who do not foresee any major changes in the US-Israel “Special Relationship.” These persons usually conclude that the Israeli/Jewish lobby is simply too powerful, the Arabs just too weak, “the Jews” just too much in control.

But someone like myself has watched a lot of change here in Washington just in the past two decades.

I can remember when the Taiwanese lobby was so powerful that there was no Chinese Embassy in Washington nor even any diplomatic relations with the most populous country on earth! The opening

of the huge Connecticut Avenue Embassy in the 70s came as quite a surprise to many here.

And, of course, we all remember how the US spilled its blood and money in a false crusade in South-East Asia that was said to be crucial to the American national interest one year, and practically forgotten a few years later.

The dominant international reality as we go into the 1990s is that major political and economic changes are quite literally all around us. The 1990s are likely to see an entire re-ordering of world society with Europe coming of age, Japan the financial superpower, the Soviet Union and the East undergoing their own version of a “New Deal”, and the US fighting against lengthening odds to hold its own.

And with the remarkable East-West rapprochement now underway the last thing leaders in either the Kremlin or the American capitol want to see is an explosion in the Middle East that might threaten the entire new construction of positive relations between Moscow and Washington.

Those who want to see an eventual real and just peace between Israel and the Palestinians should realise that this is the time to keep building the pressure on the Americans. Washington is the address for change at this particular time in history, at least in regard to Israel and Israel's role in the Middle East.

There have already been tremors of change; but the “big one,” the major American policy shift, is still down the road not yet quite visible but building under the surface. Just how far away it really is and just what form it will take when it comes are specifics impossible to predict. But change is in the air. This is not a time for total despair; it's a time for hard work and serious rethinking.