

# “Just a Damned Nuisance”

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## New Zealand’s Changing Relationship with Israel from 1947 until May 2010

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 1955, Mr Linton, the Israeli Minister accredited to New Zealand, sent an angry cable home decrying how the New Zealand government seemed to view Israel as if it “were just a damned nuisance, involving New Zealand in complex debating with a certain amount of expenditure within a sphere remote from Dominion interests and apprehensions.” Despite this early criticism from the Israelis, there has been an ongoing level of interest within New Zealand towards the Jewish state that goes beyond what should be expected as the cultural, economic, historic and diplomatic ties between New Zealand and Israel are relatively insignificant.

Degrees of closeness between the two states have fluctuated dramatically, from New Zealand’s strong political support of the creation of Israel at the United Nations in 1945, to an adoption of Israel’s *kibbutzim* model in the 1970s, and culminating in the extraordinary cutting of diplomatic ties in 2004. What explains these dynamic shifts in attitudes? Why has the relationship seen such dramatic shifts throughout the last fifty years? What explains this intense interest from consecutive New Zealand governments, diplomatic staff and the New Zealand public?

In this thesis I explore how the relationship is generally shaped by the interest-motivated hand of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, punctuated every now and then by a well-placed individual responding to instinct or passion. I also explore the role of external influences on the relationship, examining how trade concerns with Arab states in the Middle East affected the relationship, and examining the effect of international left-wing discomfort towards Israel.

New Zealand’s relationship with Israel is a dynamic but woefully underexplored history that deserves greater attention and analysis. This thesis tells that story.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Writing the acknowledgment section for this thesis is a task I have looked forward to immensely, ever since I began my first day searching through the dusty Foreign Affairs archives, sneezing, cursing my life choices, and eagerly anticipating the day that I could wrap up this project. However, very quickly I began to uncover the extraordinary array of information about this relationship, began to discover a dynamic and tension-fuelled past, and began to talk to well-informed New Zealanders about their perceptions of the relationship. This project consequently morphed from an isolated dust riddled paper-hunt to a dynamic people-centred examination that has been truly rewarding and a real joy. Many people have accompanied me on this journey and I could not have completed this thesis without them.

A very special first thanks is due to my supervisor, Dr. David Capie. David's support was invaluable during this process as a mentor, a supporter, and a well-considered critic. He urged me to seek interviews with people I never would have thought would want to talk to a mere Master's student, inspired me to investigate events that remain murky in the public eye, and offered me valuable learning tools and insights for future research. I was incredibly lucky to have such a patient and supportive supervisor, whose interest in this project at times rivalled my own.

I would like to thank my thirty-four interviewees, all of whom offered frank and candid interpretations of the relationship from their personal experiences and perspectives. Many of these people are extraordinarily busy and sought-after individuals, and I was deeply humbled by their readiness to provide me with their time, knowledge, and insights. Special thanks are due to my first two interviewees, Russell Marshal and David Zwartz for their enthusiasm, knowledge, and connections. This thesis would have been a dull shadow without the fascinating contributions of the disparate collection of individuals who allowed me to interview them.

The staff at the Parliament Library, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade research division, Archives New Zealand, the National Library, and the Wellington Jewish Archives all deserve thanks for their patient and professional support of my many information requests. Many of these people went beyond the call of duty to help me track down information or offer suggestions about further research avenues.

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When I was nearing completion of this thesis I put out a call for proofreaders expecting that I would need to bribe and beg people for their services. Instead an intrepid bunch of people stepped up, each of whom deserves thanks: Noel Ballantyne, Lucy Mitchell, Stephen Wenley, Hugh Eldred-Grigg, and Robert van Voorthuysen.

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## **“Just a Damned Nuisance”: New Zealand’s Changing Relationship with Israel from 1947 until May 2010**

### **INTRODUCTION**

New Zealand’s foreign policy is frequently described by its leaders as bipartisan. The current Prime Minister John Key, for example, claimed in 2008 whilst Leader of the Opposition that New Zealand’s foreign policy:

...does not belong to any individual political party. It does not belong to any Prime Minister or any government. Foreign policy belongs to the public of New Zealand and should, as far as possible, be driven by a considered evaluation of their evolving international interest and not by perceptions of narrow domestic political advantage.<sup>1</sup>

In some ways this statement is a true reflection of New Zealand’s foreign policy. In the case of the relationship with Israel, consecutive New Zealand governments from the left and right have retained a formal official policy of ‘even-handedness’ throughout the Israel’s existence. In later years the words ‘balanced and constructive approach’ were added to help steer New Zealand’s responses towards the Israel-Palestine dispute. However this rhetorical stability in official policy obscures an interesting and dramatic story of shifting attitudes, tones and nuances, which have redefined and refocused the relationship since it began in 1947 when New Zealand fought tenaciously for Israel’s establishment under the United Nations Partition Plan.

For supporters of Israel, the election of John Key as Prime Minister in November 2008 heralded an opportunity to amend a relationship that many felt had fallen into considerable disarray under the previous Labour Government. For many commentators, Helen Clark’s administration had been hostile or unsympathetic to Israel, a feeling that was exacerbated by the 2004 Mossad Passport Scandal and subsequent freezing of diplomatic contact between the two countries. According to these supporters, including the then Honorary Consul of Israel,

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<sup>1</sup> John Key, Speech to the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, (Wellington, 8 August 2008)

David Zwartz, New Zealand's professed policy of "even-handedness" had been used by the Clark Government to "turn away from former friendly relations with Israel."<sup>2</sup>

This thesis examines the veracity of this claim by tracing the changing attitudes of successive New Zealand Governments towards Israel, from its formation as a state until the presentation of credentials in Wellington by a new Israeli Ambassador in May 2010. It argues that sympathy towards Israel has indeed declined since 1945 due to a number of material and ideological factors, not least, a concern over Israel's actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The focus of this research is a timely one. Israel reopened its Embassy in Wellington in May 2010 after an eight-year hiatus. Less than one month after the presentation of credentials to the Governor General of New Zealand, the new Israeli Ambassador Shemi Tzur was called into the Beehive to explain the policies of the Israeli Government regarding the storming of an aid flotilla heading to Gaza to break the blockade. A New Zealand citizen, Nicola Enchmarch, was one of the activists on the flotilla who was subsequently arrested and deported from Israel. Foreign Minister Murray McCully released not one, but two statements about this issue on the same day. The first condemned the storming of the flotilla and the second explained the New Zealand response. According to this second press release McCully conveyed the Government's "concern" over the incident to the Ambassador as well as communicating the feeling that the blockade of Gaza was "unsustainable and there should be an intensification of the effort to find a solution."<sup>3</sup> The careful attention the new National government gave to the issue reflects the very high level of public interest in ties with Israel. In some ways this interest is surprising, given that the relationship between New Zealand and Israel is not a significant one in strategic, economic, cultural or even historical terms.

What explains this intense interest on the part of New Zealanders? Why has the New Zealand-Israel relationship seen such dramatic ups and downs over the

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<sup>2</sup> David Zwartz, 'Israel's Birthday an Occasion Worth Celebrating', *New Zealand Herald*, (May 13 2008)

<sup>3</sup> Murray McCully, 'Israeli Ambassador Called In', *Beehive Press Releases*, (June 1 2010)

course of the last fifty years? This thesis argues that the absence of major economic material links combined with periodic bursts of intense public interest in Israel has created a relationship whose tone is shaped by the calm but critical hand of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). MFAT's interest-based approach however, has been punctured every now and then by the actions of a well-placed individual acting as a result of passion or instinct, or responding to international trends. I argue that this dynamic between critical institutional stability and individual manoeuvring has reshaped the relationship in a remarkable way over the years. This thesis seeks to tell that story.

### **Examination of the literature**

Unlike Australia and the United States, the history of New Zealand's foreign affairs has not been subject to great academic debate. This is in part a reflection of New Zealand society, as elections are rarely decided upon foreign policy concerns and there is little interest in international issues amongst a significant section of the population. Of the literature that does exist, there has been a fair amount of research conducted into the foreign policy outlooks of the Labour Party but much less attention has been paid to the National Party. There has been a notable focus on New Zealand's so-called search for 'independence' in foreign policy, a formulation which tends to obscure the reactive and pragmatic qualities of New Zealand's foreign affairs. Some academics have advanced theories comparing National to Labour Governments in terms of the traditional international relations paradigms of realism and liberal internationalism, but this seems to simplify a complex series of events and policy choices and ignores phenomena which do not fit the paradigms.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there is almost a

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<sup>4</sup> One theorist to advance such arguments is David McCraw in his piece 'New Zealand's Foreign Policy Under the Clark Government: High Tide of Liberal Internationalism', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 2, 2005. McCraw claims that Labour Governments tend to fit into a paradigm of liberal internationalism while National Governments are more inclined to follow realist models of behaviour. In reality however, the real story of New Zealand's international affairs is one of continuity over change between administrations. McCraw also overstates the idealistic component of Clark's foreign policy which obscures the fact that she was in fact a very pragmatic leader. Michael Bassett in a response to this piece argues that: "The trouble with such categories is that objects in real life don't always fit their boxes. ... A more convincing analysis of



complete absence of material on the New Zealand-Israel relationship and, as we will see, of the literature that does exist much of it is transparently partisan.

Former diplomats have written much of New Zealand's diplomatic history and there is a relative lack of historiography and more of an emphasis on descriptive accounts based on personal experience. Not surprisingly, many of these accounts focus on the role of New Zealand in the shaping of world events, and in doing so they sometimes neglect the impact of world events on New Zealand. While valuable and interesting, they largely recount of historical events rather than addressing broader patterns in the country's international relations. The most important exception to this trend is Malcolm McKinnon's *Independence and Foreign Policy*.<sup>5</sup> McKinnon argues that New Zealand's early foreign relations were mediated through the Commonwealth and consequently independence in New Zealand's foreign relations tended to fall into two categories: vigorous assertion of local interests and independence expressed as a form of loyal dissent.

Assertion of interest is explained by McKinnon essentially as a form of "speaking up" especially regarding the economic and strategic concerns of the country despite the interests of other Commonwealth countries, or later other UN member states.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the relationship with Israel, interest would compel New Zealand in the late 1970s to move to develop economic links with Arab states and minimise the importance of the Israel relationship.

More commonly utilised in the early period of New Zealand's relations with Israel was the second form of independence: the idea of loyal dissent. McKinnon's concept comes from the British parliamentary system where an opposition was conceived not as seditious but loyal. This notion of independence was a "progressive critique of an existing pattern, which did not,

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New Zealand's foreign policy would argue that both parties have always contained realists and idealists. National generally has had more of the former, Labour of the latter. But what ultimately determines the country's foreign policy are the individuals in the ascendant at a particular moment." Michael Bassett, 'New Zealand's Security Blanket', *Foreign Policy*, Issue 135, Mar/Apr, 2003, p. 87

<sup>5</sup> Malcolm McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy: New Zealand in the World Since 1935*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1993)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

however, challenge its underlying structure.”<sup>7</sup> Loyal dissent was envisaged as a means to direct Britain or other states within the Commonwealth to more enlightened purposes.<sup>8</sup> There are several examples of this form of independence in the early relationship with Israel, probably most noticeably when Prime Minister Peter Fraser’s deep personal concerns for the Jewish people led him to support Partition, despite British objections.

As mentioned earlier, New Zealand has always officially expressed a stated aim of acting in an even-handed way towards Israel, the Arab states and Iran. It has always supported a two-state solution. It has always recognised Tel Aviv as the capital of Israel rather than Israel’s self-declared capital of Jerusalem. New Zealand has been a core funder of the United Nations (UN) programme for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) and remains committed to providing aid for this cause. It does not recognise territory acquired in war, including the land acquired after the 1967 Six-Day War, and consequently does not recognise the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. MFAT proudly proclaims that its “carefully balanced position is consistent with New Zealand’s international reputation for fair-mindedness. It reflects the value we, as a small country, place on the international rule of law.”<sup>9</sup> However, the veneer of stability in official policy conceals a changing and dynamic relationship that has undergone significant shifts in tone, nuance, and political support within New Zealand.

This thesis identifies two themes as key factors explaining the changing tone and nuances in the relationship. The first concerns the dynamic between the institutional preferences of New Zealand foreign ministry and the role of key individuals in the shaping of the relationship. It argues that certain Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers have had opportunities to influence the bilateral relationship more so than may have been the case with other

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘Arab-Israeli Conflict: New Zealand Position’, *New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, (Wellington, 4 August 2009), available from <http://mfat.govt.nz/Foreign-Relations/Middle-East/2-Arab-Israeli-conflict.php>, accessed 15 June 2010

countries, in part because of the lack of material repercussions in changing policy.

The second theme is the impact that wider global trends and events have played in shaping the New Zealand – Israel relationship. I argue there are two parts to this international influence: the first is linked to changing material incentives, particularly the growing importance of Arab oil from the 1970s onwards. The second is an ideational influence, specifically the way the Palestinian issue came seen as a key social justice concern for parties of the left internationally from the 1970s on. Israel went from being a leftwing cause, to a situation where it became a state more likely to receive political support from centre-right elements in New Zealand, in accordance with wider global trends. This theme acknowledges and attempts to contribute to recent reinterpretations of New Zealand history that question the uniqueness or distinctiveness of the New Zealand experience arguing instead that “events in New Zealand have their origins beyond New Zealand’s shores.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite the remarkable amount of ink spilled about Israel and Palestine both within New Zealand and internationally, the bilateral relationship between Israel and New Zealand has escaped significant scholarly attention. Within broader studies of New Zealand history and in several political biographies of notable New Zealanders there are fleeting mentions of Israel but no major study of the bilateral relationship exists. One of the few works produced by an academic is a paper by Stephen Rainbow entitled, “The Changing Attitude of New Zealand Towards Israel from 1948-1993.” A founder of the New Zealand Green Party, Rainbow was moved to write this piece after he became disillusioned with what he perceived to be the fickle nature of leftwing politics and, in particular, the steady movement away from Israel towards the embracing of Palestine.<sup>11</sup> Whilst Rainbow offers an invaluable analysis of the relationship and the beginnings of a historiography, he focuses too much on the changing attitudes of Labour Governments and consequently downplays the

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<sup>10</sup> Giselle Byrnes, ‘Introduction: Reframing New Zealand History,’ in Giselle Byrnes (ed.), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia and New Zealand, 2009), pp. 1-18

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Stephen Rainbow, Author, Auckland, (10 April 2010)

material motivations for policy change that occurred under the Muldoon Government. Also, by focusing on the alienation of the left from Israel, Rainbow seems to imply that even-handedness is only achieved by enthusiastically supporting Israel.

Another exception to the lack of material on the relationship is an article written for *The Round Table* journal by Jacob Abadi entitled “New Zealand-Israel Relations: The Political and Economic Imperatives”.<sup>12</sup> Abadi is a prolific commentator on Israel who has published several articles on Israel’s bilateral relations, including analyses of its relationship with Turkey, Sweden, and Britain. However, in his article on New Zealand, Abadi relies extensively on somewhat dubious source material including multiple references from the conservative Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post* and makes several factual errors including the misspelling of former New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser’s name. His work does offer, however, a useful source for understanding Israeli attitudes towards the relationship based on his interviews with former Israeli Ambassadors to New Zealand and a small quantity of archival research within Israel.

A final source of secondary material for this thesis came from various works by pro-Palestinian advocate Ron McIntyre from Canterbury University. McIntyre gathered together a cluster of academics and activists who worked with him on the *New Zealand Aotearoa Palestinian Review* that lobbied politicians throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. His work offers a useful explanatory basis for New Zealand’s relations with Middle Eastern countries in general, but his observations on Israel tend to advocate only the Palestinian perspective with such minimal consideration of the Israeli perspective that his conclusions can sometimes be dismissed as partisan. Other scholars working on the Palestinian New Zealand relationship include Nigel Parsons from Massey University, although he tends to focus his research more on the Israel-

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<sup>12</sup> Jacob Abadi, ‘New Zealand-Israeli Relations: The Political and Economic Imperatives’, *The Round Table*, No. 351, 1999

Palestinian dispute rather than attitudes directed towards Israel or Palestine from within New Zealand.

The dearth of secondary material has meant this thesis has had to draw at length on primary resources. Much of the pre-Lange material has come from archival investigations at Archives New Zealand. The main archival collections utilised were the records from New Zealand's Permanent Residence in the UN, archives from other New Zealand missions abroad, Cabinet Paper archives, and finally records from the Department of External Affairs/Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Wellington.<sup>13</sup> Post-Lange information has come predominantly from material requested under the Official Information Act and interviews with key individuals. Approximately thirty-five people were interviewed in a semi-structured fashion within New Zealand and Australia. The interviewees ranged from former Prime Ministers, current and former Foreign Ministers, Members of Parliament (MPs) from most New Zealand political parties, former diplomats, the Israeli and Palestinian ambassadors to New Zealand, academics, journalists, Jewish community representatives, business representatives, activists and interest groups. Other material came from Labour Party remits, UN voting statements, and news sources.

It is readily acknowledged that the focus of this thesis is a narrow one. Several important and relevant aspects of the bilateral relationship have not been pursued in this research. The thesis focuses on the government-to-government relationship and emphasises diplomatic rather than people-to-people connections, with slight concessions to the role of public opinion in shaping New Zealand's foreign relations. The concluding chapter of this thesis will consequently discuss some of these neglected elements as possible avenues for further research.

### **Outline of the Argument**

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<sup>13</sup> The Department of External Affairs became the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1970, then the Ministry of External Relations and Trade (MERT) in 1988, and finally changed again to its current name of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) in 1993.

This thesis explores the changing New Zealand – Israel relationship in a chronological fashion, examining how the two themes discussed earlier are apparent across four distinct periods. The first period starts with the Labour Government of Peter Fraser and ends with the short-lived Walter Nash Labour Government (1957-1960). It argues that this was a golden age in the relationship when Israel was regarded with a strong degree of romance and fascination by Labour Governments. The conservative Holland Government (1949-1957) which fell between these two left wing governments was not as enamoured with Israel but was content to allow relations to remain close. Holland himself was not interested in foreign affairs and left the running of such matters to his Ministers and officials, many of whom, like UN representative Sir Leslie Munro, were strong supporters of the Jewish state. McKinnon's notion of a foreign policy outlook organised along the Commonwealth model is applicable to this period. Israel, due to its ongoing flouting of international law, came under ongoing criticism from the Department of External Affairs in this time as the fledging organisation sought to establish its identity as an actor that preferred a rules based order over realpolitik. This chapter ends with a discussion of the extent to which individuals were able to influence the relationship more profoundly than became the case in later eras. I conclude that when passions or prejudices are strong in political leadership, individuals can greatly impact on the tone of the relationship.

The second chapter examines the relationship from Holyoake to Rowling. Keith Holyoake was the first New Zealand conservative leader who demonstrated a sympathy towards Israel, something that would not be seen again from a leader on the political right until the Bolger years. Norman Kirk was the last Labour Prime Minister to enthusiastically support Israel. I argue that Kirk held an image of Israel that located it in the context of its socialist roots and shadow of the Holocaust. Kirk's appreciation for the early efforts of the Jewish people in their socialist experiments of communal living on the *kibbutzim* even led him to attempt to repeat the experiment in New Zealand. However, the New Zealand model, the *ohu* scheme, never really took root and was largely a failure.

External events transpired to change the bilateral relationship when the first oil shock in 1973 pulled the Kirk Government and later the Rowling Government towards a position of more genuine even-handedness in the Middle East. For the first time in its history, New Zealand established diplomatic representation with Arab states and Iran, and sought to strengthen these trading relationships to help secure the economic security of New Zealand. This chapter ends with a discussion of the evolution of the policy of 'even-handedness'.

The third period under consideration begins with the conservative Muldoon Government, moves through the tumultuous Fourth Labour Government, and finishes with the end of the National led Bolger/Shibley administration. This period sees two important external influences on New Zealand policy. First, the Muldoon Government was forced to respond to the security and economic implications of the second Arab Oil Boycott, a response which also impacted on the bilateral relationship with Israel. Second, shifts within the Labour Party led to a change of policy, taking it closer to positions adopted by social democrat countries. This second international intrusion is explained in greater detail in the final chapter. Chapter three ends with the decade of rule in the 1990s by the National Government which represents a period of limited and somewhat disinterested reconciliation with Israel. Once relations were mended early on in the administration, Government attention quickly turned to more pressing matters elsewhere in the world.

The fourth and final chapter discusses the relationship as it evolved under the Labour led Clark Government (1999-2008) and the current National led Key Government (2008-). This chapter explores in detail a one year period between 2004-2005 when relations between the two states reached their nadir. High-level diplomatic contacts were frozen after Mossad agents were caught in New Zealand attempting to fraudulently obtain New Zealand passports. In many respects this incident presents a snapshot of the broader relationship under Helen Clark's leadership and provides a telling indictment of the attitudes of other political parties towards Israel. It also underscores the extent to which individuals can impact the relationship, with particular attention paid to Clark

and Phil Goff, her foreign minister and successor as Labour leader. The chapter again seeks to contextualise the relationship and the passport scandal in particular by examining against a broader international backdrop. It argues that New Zealand's relationship with Israel has, to a large extent, been influenced by a global shift away from Israel by centre-left governments and an inclination from centre-right governments to offer more support. Although these broad trends are disrupted periodically by the actions and personal beliefs of individuals, the thesis argues that New Zealand is very much connected to currents of international opinion, particularly since the end of the Cold War. Thus, New Zealand's attitudes, whilst interesting and informative, are not unique or exceptional and certainly should not be viewed as such for domestic political score settling.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Recognition and Redirections**

“Whatever can be done to help the persecuted Jewish people shall and must be done to the utmost ability of all right-thinking men.”



This chapter traces the development of the New Zealand-Israeli relationship from shortly before New Zealand's formal recognition of the state of Israel until the end of Walter Nash's single term Labour Government in 1960. This early period is characterised by a strong degree of romantic attachment to the young Israeli state, a continued attachment to the British Empire, concern from New Zealand diplomats over post-war security and a corresponding shift towards Southeast Asia as the strategic operating theatre. This was also a period when New Zealand's fledging diplomatic corps was finding its feet amid the disorder of the post-war world. This group was anxious to assert the right of New Zealand, despite its small size and isolation, to have a more independent voice in global affairs. But as McKinnon notes this sense of independence in foreign policy was a limited one. Fundamentally it remained within the Commonwealth model of consent-based diplomacy.

In many ways the period from 1948-1960 represents a time of unsurpassed warmth in the New Zealand-Israel relationship. There was widespread admiration and sympathy for the fledging Jewish state. This support was especially strong from Labour Party members, many of whom had personal ties to individual Israelis through connections like the International Labour Organisation.<sup>15</sup> Labourites saw Israel as a "small, pioneering and egalitarian society" much like New Zealand, and viewed the political aspirations of the Zionist movement with sympathy.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, anti-Semitism was a comparatively insignificant issue in New Zealand due mainly to the small size and assimilative qualities of the local Jewish community, as well as real feelings of guilt and horror once the terrors of the Holocaust became known.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Thomas Enright, *New Zealand's Involvement in the Partitioning of Palestine and the Creation of Israel*, (Otago: University of Otago Press, 1982), p. 112

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Rainbow, *The Changing Attitude of New Zealand Towards Israel from 1948-1993*, (Palmerton North: International Pacific College, 1997), p. 8

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

In 1941 David Ben-Gurion, Israel's future Prime Minister, visited New Zealand en route to the United States. He received a very favourable welcome, including the unexpected attendance of Prime Minister Peter Fraser at one of his speeches.<sup>18</sup> The inaugural issue of the *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle* reported that Fraser gave a speech at this event which was praised as "an understanding and thoughtful address."<sup>19</sup> Ben-Gurion spoke highly about his trip through the antipodes remarking that "there are not many countries in the world where one would encounter such warmth and informality."<sup>20</sup> Stephen Rainbow argues, although without much evidence, that this favourable reception made Ben-Gurion seek a more radical programme than he originally intended: the Biltmore Programme which "featured as its core the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine".<sup>21</sup>

Fraser had many close Jewish friends in Wellington and was sympathetic to the goals of the Zionist movement.<sup>22</sup> This attitude was recognised and valued by some in the international Jewish Diaspora. For example in May 1947 Fraser was sent a letter by Mr Louis Phillips on behalf of the Zionist Council of New Zealand and the Jewish congregations of Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch. He listed various New Zealand personalities considered to be compassionate supporters of the plight of the Jewish people. Of Fraser, Phillips said "you have been outstanding and your name is honoured among Jews everywhere because you have shown such sympathy and understanding."<sup>23</sup> This admiration was reciprocated: in 1945 Fraser wrote to the Zionist fundraising organisation Keren Hayesod to congratulate it for its "magnificent service to Palestine where again as in biblical days desert places have been made into pleasant land and where the children of Israel enjoy health and happiness."<sup>24</sup> He also wrote to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, Vol. 1, No. 7/8 April/May, 1945, p. 155

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Abadi, 'New Zealand-Israeli Relations: The Political and Economic Imperatives', *The Round Table*, 1999, No. 351, p. 463

<sup>21</sup> Rainbow, *Changing Attitudes*, p. 12. The Biltmore Programme was a commitment to establish a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine, which was a departure from previous Zionist aims.

<sup>22</sup> Enright, *New Zealand's Involvement in the Partitioning of Palestine*, p. 111

<sup>23</sup> Louis Phillips, 'Letter to Mr Fraser from Louis Phillips', 2 May 1947, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA 277/5/2 Part 5

<sup>24</sup> Peter Fraser, 'Letter from Prime Minister to Kerjessod Jerusalem', 19 September 1945, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA277/5/2 Part 2, NB the Keren Hayesod was the

Nahum Goldmann, Head of the Jewish Agency for Palestine to assure him that New Zealand felt that “the problem of the Jews in Europe cannot be divorced from the problem in Palestine” guaranteeing that “the New Zealand Government will do what it can to assist in reaching a decision which will do justice to the Jewish people and bring peace and progress to Palestine.”<sup>25</sup> Officials sometimes felt Fraser need to be constrained. In 1948 during the heated debate over Israel’s recognition, Alister McIntosh, one of Fraser’s most senior officials, attempted to stem what he called the Prime Minister’s “Zionist exuberance” and Fraser was reluctantly forced by Cabinet to delay New Zealand’s *de facto* recognition of Israel at the request of Britain.<sup>26</sup>

Within New Zealand’s defence community warm relations had developed between the *yishuv* (small Jewish communities) and New Zealand soldiers serving in the two world wars in Palestine and the broader Middle East.<sup>27</sup> Official New Zealand historian and Brigade Major C. Guy Powles described the *yishuv* encountered in the Sinai and Palestine with warmth and admiration. He described several “happy meetings with English speaking Jewish Colonists”, including Jews who had immigrated from Australia and New Zealand, and commented at length on the modernity, beauty and lushness of the Jewish settlements.<sup>28</sup> These views stood in stark contrast to what was for many New Zealand troops an explicitly anti-Arab attitude. As Powles put it: “the Arab Mahomedan [sic] is without humour, sympathy or the elements of cleanliness; and his only smile is one of deceit.”<sup>29</sup> The Arab states’ refusal to recognise the creation of Israel in 1948 did little to change this widely held view. In fact, the Arab attitude was so uncompromising that according to historian and former

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fundraising organisation responsible for sending Jewish immigrants to Israel, or Palestine – as it was then known.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Fraser, ‘Letter from Mr Fraser to Mr Goldman’, 15 May 1947, *Department of External Affairs files*, EA 277/5/2 Part 5

<sup>26</sup> Alister McIntosh to Carl Berendsen, in Ian McGibbon (ed.) *Undiplomatic Dialogue: Letters Between Carl Berendsen and Alister McIntosh 1943-52*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1993), p. 165

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Levine, ‘New Zealand’ in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 12, 2007, p. 1130

<sup>28</sup> C. Guy Powles, *The New Zealanders in Sinai and Palestine*, (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1922), pp. 154-155

<sup>29</sup> Enright, *New Zealand’s Involvement in the Partitioning of Palestine*, p. 72

diplomat Malcolm Templeton “New Zealand tended to overlook the fact that they had a case”.<sup>30</sup>

Generally within the Labour Party at this time there was a sense of sympathy and romance towards the nascent socialist state of Israel. In many of the official speeches and early documents on Israel, biblical imagery was evoked to describe the actions of the Jewish population, with references made to blooming deserts and water brought forth from the rocks.<sup>31</sup> Many New Zealand Labourites saw similarities between the two states including their small size, democratic tradition, reliance on agriculture, and the desire to create a better society. There was also an attraction felt by Labour leaders for a country “born of the same European socialist heritage as the New Zealand Labour Party.”<sup>32</sup> Abba Eban, Israel’s first Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), reinforced this perception, explaining in his memoirs that New Zealanders were “endemically pro-Israel, as though an understanding of our enterprise came to them from the very air of their pioneering experience.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the post war guilt felt for Jewish victims of the Holocaust was compounded by knowledge that New Zealand’s immigration policies during the war had been unnecessarily restrictive. Officials had limited the number of Jewish refugees from Europe because as one report put it, “there is a major difficulty of absorbing these people in our cultural life without raising a feeling of antipathy to them.”<sup>34</sup>

Fraser was fascinated by international affairs and kept up his knowledge of global issues by relentlessly following international newspapers. After Michael Savage’s death in 1940 he became both Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs. Fraser emphasised the importance of an independent foreign policy, however paradoxically this could sometimes involve closer cooperation with

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<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Templeton, *Ties of Blood and Empire: New Zealand’s Involvement in Middle East Defence and the Suez Crisis 1947-57*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994), p. 5

<sup>31</sup> Walter Nash, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, Second Session, 31 Parliament, Vol. 308, 1956, p. 615

<sup>32</sup> Rainbow, *Changing Attitudes*, p. 5

<sup>33</sup> Abba Eban quoted in Abadi, *New Zealand-Israeli Relations*, p. 463

<sup>34</sup> Walter Nash to J. Thorn, ‘Letter’ 26 April 1939, cited in Ann Beaglehole, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand 1936-46*, (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1988), p. 16. It is very curious that Walter Nash was able to hold such a view on Jewish immigrants as Minister of Customs while retaining such a positive image of Israel.

other states, particularly within the Commonwealth.<sup>35</sup> McKinnon explains this paradox as a notion of acceptable independence where New Zealand preferred to operate in a realm of consensus within the Commonwealth and other multilateral bodies rather than a world where power politics or coercion were the norm.<sup>36</sup> This desire to avoid power politics was coupled with a strong degree of internationalism and a global awareness from the political left, which had been brought into sharp relief by the two World Wars and their aftermath.<sup>37</sup>

Fraser is one of the few New Zealanders who has been recognised as an international statesman, a reputation that is probably overstated but largely attributable to his role at the 1945 San Francisco conference, which established the UN. At the conference he was applauded for taking a principled line in discussions as he sought to defend the rights of small states by opposing the imposition of Great Power veto.<sup>38</sup> It was also here that Fraser made an impassioned speech in support of a Jewish state in Palestine invoking romantic imagery typical of socialist supporters of Israel. He declared that “everyone living in Palestine would naturally benefit from what the Jewish people have made out of a land which was once a desert, until the desert bloomed as a rose.”<sup>39</sup> Fraser’s support for Israel can be seen in the context of his general foreign policy ideology: a strong belief in a rules based international order system which promoted the UN as “the best means of securing universal peace and justice and placing the fullest insistence on its organs for the solutions of international problems.”<sup>40</sup>

In 1947, New Zealand joined with Australia, Guatemala, the Soviet Bloc and Uruguay to support the creation of the state of Israel under UN Resolution 181, which proposed Partition. Britain abstained. Shortly before the vote Fraser sent

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Ashby, ‘Fraser’s Foreign Policy’ in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Peter Fraser: Master Politician*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1998), p. 169

<sup>36</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 8

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11

<sup>38</sup> Michael Bassett and Michael King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song: A Life of Peter Fraser*, (Auckland: Penguin, 2000), p. 296

<sup>39</sup> Enright, *New Zealand’s Involvement in the Partitioning of Palestine*, p. 112

<sup>40</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 58

an urgent and top secret request to British Prime Minister Clement Attlee seeking clarification on the position Britain was to take in the vote. Fraser explained that, “though I naturally cannot promise support in advance, I am anxious that our delegation should not through ignorance of your objectives in Palestine take a line which would embarrass the United Kingdom delegation.”<sup>41</sup> However it was not any lack of consultation that convinced New Zealand to refrain from following the British line on Partition, but rather the result of individual passions within New Zealand’s young Department of External Affairs. Abba Eban later reported how New Zealand diplomats “fought tenaciously against any step which might prejudice the establishment of a Jewish state.”<sup>42</sup>

Of particular importance in this regard was New Zealand’s representative at the UN, Sir Carl Berendsen. Berendsen was a conservative who emphatically believed in the importance of collective security and adamantly opposed use of the veto in the UN Security Council. Asserting New Zealand’s right to participate in a global organisation despite its small size, he said “[i]f blood, tears, anguish and sacrifice, are the price to be paid for our proportionate voice in the world today, then we in New Zealand have paid that price.”<sup>43</sup> Of the veto he described how New Zealand and Australia’s attempts to prevent its inclusion were met by the Great Powers “with that kind of friendly and patronising tolerance that adults show to a fractious child.”<sup>44</sup> He viewed the Palestinian issue as an important first test in collective security for the budding UN and was dismayed to see it fail under repeated Jewish and Arab flouting of the UN mandate.

In 1966 an External Affairs background paper prepared in advance of New Zealand’s term on the Security Council described New Zealand’s position on Partition. It noted that the feeling at that time was that the Israel-Palestine conflict was “one between two nationalisms, and Partition was the only means of granting each an expression. Impartial as this conclusion may have appeared;

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<sup>41</sup> Peter Fraser, ‘Personal for Mr Attlee from Mr Fraser’, 17 September 1947, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA 277/5/2 Part 6

<sup>42</sup> Abadi, *New Zealand-Israeli Relations*, p. 463

<sup>43</sup> Ashby, *Fraser’s Foreign Policy*, p. 181

<sup>44</sup> Hugh Templeton (ed.), *Mr. Ambassador: Memoirs of Sir Carl Berendsen*, (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington Press, 2009), p. 172

it in fact involved a basic acceptance of Jewish claims.”<sup>45</sup> Berendsen supported this statement in his memoirs explaining how “[t]he Arabs had a case that no power, great or small, had a right to give away land that had been Arab for centuries. The Jews had a case, essentially weaker, in the Balfour Declaration, with its concept of a National Home.”<sup>46</sup> He explained how “in this unhappy situation, Partition provided the best solution available at the time.”<sup>47</sup> By supporting Partition, and consequently allowing for the formation of a Jewish state despite the relative weakness of the case, New Zealand was effectively favouring the Jewish people.

Partition divided the territory in a jig-saw like fashion into seven parts, three each for Israel and Palestine with Jerusalem reserved as an international zone and with inter-state connection through economic union. Berendsen’s major concern with Partition was the failure of the UN to enforce it. Despite this, when Partition seemed to be in danger of becoming an American led Trusteeship proposal a few months later, he furiously charged that “if partition with economic union was right in November it is right today.”<sup>48</sup>

The plan was immediately rejected by five neighbouring Arab nations who invaded Israel in May 1948. Israel’s counter attack not only re-conquered the lost territory but also secured large tracts of land designated for the Arab state.<sup>49</sup> After the war, Berendsen maintained that “having departed from the path of principle, the Assembly now found itself floundering in the mire of expediency” referring to the failure of the UN to ensure compliance with the plan.<sup>50</sup> Looking back on this tumultuous period, Berendsen noted that “[n]ever did a people get a more rapid and humiliating defeat at the hands of an apparently weaker foe” but added that “the Arabs had thrown away their

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<sup>45</sup> Department of External Affairs Wellington, ‘Security Council Background Paper’, Wellington, 15 March 1966, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/1/1 Part 1

<sup>46</sup> Templeton, *Mr Ambassador*, p. 202

<sup>47</sup> Department of External Affairs Wellington, ‘Security Council Background Paper’, Wellington, 15 March 1966, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/1/1 Part 1

<sup>48</sup> Templeton, *Mr. Ambassador*, p. 283

<sup>49</sup> Templeton, *Ties of Blood and Empire*, p. 34

<sup>50</sup> Department of External Affairs Wellington, ‘Security Council Background Paper’, Wellington, 15 March 1966, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/1/1 Part 1

sympathy” by choosing war.<sup>51</sup> The most fundamental outcome of the conflict was that it made the implementation of Partition impractical.

At the end of the fighting Israel declared independence. This claim was almost immediately accepted by the United States to the great surprise of New Zealand’s diplomats. Berendsen described it as a “totally unexpected move” that “cut the Gordian knot” on the standoff over recognition as well as putting an end to the Partition plan.<sup>52</sup> Israel sought recognition from New Zealand on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1948. Britain attempted to prevent New Zealand doing so, believing that recognition of the Jewish state would tarnish Britain’s reputation within the region, and as Alistair McIntosh admitted, “they [Britain] have played their hand very cleverly and succeeded so far.”<sup>53</sup> Fraser was keen to recognise Israel immediately but was overruled by Cabinet, and forced not to move until Britain did. McIntosh, in a letter to Foss Shanahan explained the dynamics of this highly unusual action by Cabinet:

The Prime Minister has been somewhat put out but has played along very loyally with the United Kingdom. His attitude has been helped by that of his colleagues in Cabinet, who are 80 percent of them opposed to recognition. Fraser and Nash are the only two who want to go ahead. The Prime Minister is very annoyed about this and threatened to regard an adverse vote as a mark of no confidence in himself.<sup>54</sup>

Other groups within New Zealand also diverged from the attitude of the Prime Minister. Jacob Abadi claims the National Party was much less sympathetic towards the creation of a Jewish state because of National’s closer identification with Britain.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, much of the conservative press was highly critical of the Jewish community’s desire for a state because of ongoing acts of Jewish terrorism against British officials in Palestine. A particularly grievous incident which received a lot of commentary in New Zealand newspapers, was the

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<sup>51</sup> Templeton, *Mr. Ambassador*, p. 204

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Alistair McIntosh to Foss Shanahan in Ian McGibbon (ed.) *Unofficial Channels: Letters between Alistair McIntosh and Foss Shanahan, George Laking and Frank Corner 1946-66*, (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999), p. 64

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Abadi, *New Zealand-Israeli Relations*, p. 463



hanging of two British sergeants in 1947 by the infamous Stern Gang.<sup>56</sup> However despite this attitude, these same conservative groups were often ambivalent or disdainful towards the Arab nations. As the conservative *Evening Post* noted, “no great amount of sympathy need be wasted on the Egyptians.”<sup>57</sup>

For New Zealand, recognition was complicated by the fact that Israel claimed Jerusalem as its capital during the Arab-Israeli war. This move was illegal under UN Resolution 181 which had designated Jerusalem an international zone because of its unique position as a Holy Place for Jews, Muslims and Christians. Several states, notably Australia, were not troubled by the failure to internationalise Jerusalem and Berendsen was highly critical of their attitude. In a private letter to Foss Shanahan he fumed that “[t]he complete irresponsibility, not only of the Australians, but of the 30 odd members that supported this ridiculous proposal leaves me sick with apprehension and I am agonised by the stupidity of the Jews in publicly announcing Jerusalem as their capital.”<sup>58</sup> Other New Zealanders agreed. Cabinet Minister Robert Semple opposed recognition fearing that it would involve New Zealand in “another bloody war”, but McIntosh privately stated in a letter to Shanahan that his attitude was in fact based on anti-Semitism rather than anti-war motivations.<sup>59</sup> The decision not to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel became an integral part of New Zealand’s policy that remains in place today, and New Zealand, like many other states, chooses to recognise Tel Aviv as the capital of Israel instead.<sup>60</sup>

New Zealand accorded *de facto* recognition to Israel simultaneously with the United Kingdom on 29 January 1949 with an implied reservation about Jerusalem, refugee resettlement, borders and the protection of Holy places.<sup>61</sup> In May 1949 shortly after New Zealand’s *de facto* recognition of Israel, the UN General Assembly voted to grant Israel UN membership. New Zealand

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 68

<sup>58</sup> Carl Berendsen to Alister McIntosh, *Undiplomatic Dialogue*, p. 195

<sup>59</sup> McIntosh to Shanahan, *Unofficial Channels*, p. 64

<sup>60</sup> Perhaps in recognition of the awkward legal status of their capital city, Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs is located in Tel Aviv, but most other Government institutions are in Jerusalem.

<sup>61</sup> Department of External Affairs, ‘Memorandum for Cabinet: De Jure Recognition of Israel’, Wellington, 21 July 1950, *Cabinet Office Files*, CAB 303/10/1

supported the resolution along with thirty-seven other countries. Twelve states voted against Israel's membership including Burma, India, Pakistan and the Arab states and there were nine abstentions including the United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark and Sweden.<sup>62</sup> In casting New Zealand's vote Berendsen explained that his Government would expect Israel to duly respect the decisions of the UN and "particularly those contained in the UN Resolutions of last December with reference to refugees and an international regime in Jerusalem."<sup>63</sup> This concern with refugees became a defining feature of New Zealand's stance towards Israel from this period on and would later become an irritant between New Zealand and Israel, but its resolution has remained an integral component of New Zealand's perspective on the Middle East conflict.<sup>64</sup>

The Israeli Government's disregard for the caveats expressed by New Zealand upon recognition would be an ongoing source of contention for New Zealand's officials serving at the UN throughout the Holland to Nash period. Niggling criticisms of Israel's behaviour were repeatedly sent back to Wellington in confidential memos. Berendsen, for example, was explicitly opposed to *de jure* recognition, explaining in a letter to the Department of External Affairs that it would be wise for New Zealand to delay such recognition in order to apply pressure "(1) on both Israel and Jordan to come to some reasonable arrangement in respect of Jerusalem; (2) on Israel concerning Arab refugees; (3) on all parties concerned in the Middle East to accept a peaceful solution of local difficulties".<sup>65</sup> These attitudes eventually became apparent to Israeli officials, especially within the UN. One noted that New Zealand was obsessed

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<sup>62</sup> Department of External Affairs, 'Memorandum: Israel - Developments Since Recognition', 17 June 1949, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA 277/4/4 Part 1

<sup>63</sup> Department of External Affairs, 'Memorandum for Cabinet: De Jure Recognition of Israel', Wellington, 21 July 1950, *Cabinet Office Files*, CAB 303/10/1

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Paul Morris, Professor of Religious Studies Victoria University of Wellington, (Wellington, 4 June 2010). This record on the Palestinian refugee issue is very much tied into New Zealand's commitments to international law more broadly, especially the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention.

<sup>65</sup> Berendsen to Wellington, 'Memorandum', 15 May 1950, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA 277/4/4 Part 1

with the issue of refugees and accused the Dominion of “becoming difficult, petulant and unhelpful.”<sup>66</sup>

New Zealand’s *de jure* recognition of Israel was delayed due to the Jerusalem issue even though Britain accorded such recognition in 1950. A letter from diplomat Malcolm Templeton to the High Commission in Australia explained that, “at the present time, when Israel and Jordan are both openly flouting the Assembly decision on Jerusalem, recognition is quite inappropriate.”<sup>67</sup> However, after a call by Mr Linton, the Israeli Minister in Australia, it was made clear that “New Zealand is one of a small and diminishing number which have not taken this step.”<sup>68</sup> The decision was then taken by the new Holland Government’s Minister of External Affairs Frederick Doidge to accord *de jure* recognition to Israel immediately to avoid the difficulties of being “caught up in some crisis [...] and when we are not being subjected to any obvious pressure in regards to Palestine.”<sup>69</sup>

New Zealand accorded *de jure* recognition on the 28 July 1950 and received a letter of thanks from Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Sharett soon after. The Prime Minister recalled “the sense of high moral purpose and the forthrightness with which New Zealand participated in deliberations attending the establishment of the State of Israel and the unfailing friendship between the two countries”.<sup>70</sup> There was a proviso from New Zealand however that such recognition did not extend to “the boundaries between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Syria and the Lebanon.”<sup>71</sup> Furthermore *de jure* recognition was awarded “without prejudice to decisions which have been or may be taken by the U.N. in regard to Jerusalem” allowing New Zealand to uphold its preferred ideologies of collective

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<sup>66</sup> Abadi, *New Zealand-Israeli Relations*, p. 465

<sup>67</sup> Malcolm Templeton, ‘Letter to O. Paul Gabites from Malcolm Templeton’, 6 June 1950, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA 277/4/4 Part 1

<sup>68</sup> Department of External Affairs, ‘Memorandum for Cabinet: De Jure Recognition of Israel’, Wellington, 21 July 1950, *Cabinet Office Files*, CAB 303/10/1

<sup>69</sup> Department of External Affairs, ‘Memorandum: Israel – Developments Since Recognition’, 17 June 1949, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA 277/4/4 Part 1

<sup>70</sup> Moshe Sharett, ‘Letter from Moshe Sharett to Frederick Doidge’, 10 August 1950, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA 277/4/4 Part 1

<sup>71</sup> Department of External Affairs, ‘Security Council Background Paper’, Wellington, 15 March 1966, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/1/1 Part 1

security and commitment to international law whilst not sliding into a minority of world opinion.

This early period of the bilateral relationship is marked by an important dynamic between the Prime Minister and his External Affairs officials. The increasingly antagonistic attitude of the officials towards Israel can largely be explained by their preoccupation with international cooperation through a collective security organisation, which was viewed as the best means of protecting New Zealand against external aggression. Fraser meanwhile remained a staunch supporter of Israel, despite British unease. McIntosh describes how Fraser was “inclined to be very critical of [British Foreign Minister] Bevin for listening to Foreign Office officials” and was “of the opinion that the British have blundered badly, and are still blundering [in Palestine]”.<sup>72</sup> Fraser’s support of recognition, in the face of British opposition, is illustrative of Malcolm McKinnon’s notion of independence as “a progressive critique of an existing pattern, which did not, however, challenge its underlying structure.”<sup>73</sup>

Fraser’s influence highlights another important theme in the changing attitudes towards Israel: the pivotal role of individuals. Though a number of Labourites may have felt some sympathy towards the Jewish state it is very clear that it was one of Fraser’s passions. He had a deep understanding of the suffering of the Jewish people and felt a sense of obligation to help them. He exercised the same character traits with regard to the issue of displaced Palestinians, helping to ensure the refugee problem would become a cornerstone of New Zealand’s policy in Israel and Palestine. As his biographers explain, “Fraser intervened several times in [United Nations] debates and spoke strongly in favour of international assistance to settle the 800,000 refugees displaced by the creation of Israel.”<sup>74</sup> Because there were few trade and economic interests at stake, and after the Suez Canal Crisis little in terms of a strategic interest in the Middle East, attitudes towards Israel and the Arab states were shaped in important ways by the passions and prejudices of key individuals. Fraser’s romantic and

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<sup>72</sup> McIntosh to Berendsen, in McGibbon, *Undiplomatic Dialogue*, p. 164

<sup>73</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 3

<sup>74</sup> Bassett and King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 331

idealistic attitude towards Israel can be explained by the context in which he viewed the new state: as a socialist community of industrious people working cooperatively to build a new nation from the ashes of the Holocaust.

## Holland

### **Suez and the Old Lion with the “mighty roar and a sharp claw”**

“There is a note of exasperation in New Zealand utterances, as if Israel were just a damned nuisance, involving New Zealand in complex debating with a certain amount of expenditure within a sphere remote from Dominion interests and apprehensions<sup>75</sup>

Cable from Mr Linton, Israeli Minister accredited to New Zealand, to Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1955

Sidney (Sid) Holland, the National Prime Minister who took office after Fraser’s defeat in the November 1950 election and remained there for the next seven years, had no interest in foreign affairs and took a parsimonious approach when it came to diplomacy. Bruce Brown argues that Holland was “something of an ignoramus in international affairs” and recalled that there was a very uncomfortable relationship between the highly respected and long serving diplomat Alister McIntosh and the Prime Minister.<sup>76</sup> Malcolm McKinnon suggests this ambivalence towards foreign affairs was not unusual among National Party politicians, arguing that attempts to forge an independent foreign policy were viewed as wasteful, radical and disloyal to Britain.<sup>77</sup> Holland elected to take the Finance portfolio rather than External Affairs, as had previously been the case for Prime Ministers, and he rarely intervened in international matters. When he did, he frequently made gaffes, much to the embarrassment of External Affairs officers.<sup>78</sup> On one occasion he revealed the

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<sup>75</sup> Israeli Ambassador to New Zealand quoted in Abadi, *New Zealand-Israeli Relations*, p. 466

<sup>76</sup> Bruce Brown, ‘Holyoake’s Precursors’, in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Holyoake’s Lieutenants*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2003), p. 14

<sup>77</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 114

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

existence of ANZAM in parliament, a secret contingency planning organisation involving Australia, New Zealand and Malaya, whose mere name was top secret.<sup>79</sup> In another incident he offered all of New Zealand's meat to Britain for free.<sup>80</sup>

This ignorance and disinterest from the Prime Minister meant the formulation of foreign policy was left largely in the hands of his officials, especially his successive Ministers of External Affairs: Frederick Doidge, Clifton Webb and Tom McDonald. In this period "New Zealand tended to come down on Israel's side" because it "accepted the right of a small nation established by a decision of the UN to live in peace with its neighbours", although this support was not as uncritical as the quote above suggests.<sup>81</sup> New Zealand was quick to defend Israel against Arab-Soviet threats in the UN throughout this period. MacDonald stated in 1956 for example that "[w]hatever her transgressions, Israel is a State, a Member of this Assembly, virtually the creation of this Assembly, whose extinction this Assembly cannot and, I believe, will not tolerate."<sup>82</sup> The National Government also recognised that Israel was a powerful regional ally helping restrict Soviet influence in Egypt, Syria and Iraq.<sup>83</sup> A National Party publication from 1955 explained that the "Government has continued to give special attention to developments in the Middle East, the security and stability of which are vital to the free world."<sup>84</sup> Israel became increasingly important as Cold War boundaries were established, and the Jewish state flipped from being a partner of the Soviet Union to become an ally of the United States.

An early matter in Holland's Prime Ministership was the 1951 Huleh Valley issue. This was a lake and swamp area within the demilitarized zone that Israel had drained for agricultural purposes, despite the fact that this meant infringing on Arab owned land and over the objections of the UN mediator, General Riley.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Templeton, *Ties of Blood and Empire*, p. 6

<sup>82</sup> Tom MacDonald quoted in Leslie Munro, 'Statement on the Middle Eastern Question', 17 January 1957, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA 277/5/9 Part 5

<sup>83</sup> Ron Macintyre, 'New Zealand and the Palestinian Question', in *New Zealand/Aotearoa Palestine Review*, Vol. 1 April 1989, p. 4

<sup>84</sup> The New Zealand National Party, *The National Government 1949-1954*, Wellington, 1955, p. 29

One New Zealand diplomat took particular offence at Israel's actions, writing that "Israel needs to be pulled up with a sharp jerk ... their flouting and defiance of that authority [the UN] are flagrant."<sup>85</sup> While New Zealand diplomats refrained from the anti-Semitic language used by some of their Australian counterparts, one of whom declared that "[i]t is historically characteristic of Jewry, that, if need be, they will crucify any individual [Riley] to achieve their own ends..." it is clear that New Zealand's officials were privately scathing of Israel's failure to respect UN authority.<sup>86</sup> It is unclear the extent to which these attitudes were shared more widely in Holland's Government, but they were likely to be expressed in a more muted fashion if they did.

In 1952 the ANZUS Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States came into force. Holland had been told in 1950 that Britain could no longer come to the defence of New Zealand if another war was to break out. Consequently, part of the initial justification behind the signing of ANZUS was to allow New Zealand's troops to be freed up to fight in the Middle East with Britain in the event of another global war, rather than being confined to the Pacific. As McKinnon notes, in the early 1950s this was not an abstract scenario as British friction with Egypt and Iran "took the Commonwealth to the brink of war."<sup>87</sup> However, signing ANZUS did eventually shift the focus of New Zealand's defence activities away from the Middle East, and the pursuit of a close security relationship with the United States soon became of paramount importance to Wellington. This was strengthened in the next few years as Holland was obliged to send troops in 1952 to the Korean War and in 1954 New Zealand signed the Manila Pact, which further entrenched the strategic shift away from the Middle East.

New Zealand's commitment to collective security led it to take a seat on the UN Security Council from 1954-55. Leslie Munro, New Zealand's representative on the Council was "keen to make a splash" and consequently espoused a more

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<sup>85</sup> Cecil Day to Secretary of External Affairs, 'Israel-Syrian Affair: Lake Huleh', 12 April 1951, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Head Office Files*, 471/2/1 Part 1

<sup>86</sup> O.C.W Fuhrman quoted in a Departmental Dispatch, 'The Israel/Syrian Dispute,' Australian Legation Tel Aviv, 4 June 1951, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Head Office Files*, 471/2/1 Part 2

<sup>87</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, pp. 121-22

pro-Israeli line than the government's advisers had wanted.<sup>88</sup> He was deeply critical of the Soviet Union which he saw as obstructing progress on the Palestinian question in the Security Council through their use of the veto, and he defended Israeli retaliation, saying "we have been well aware of the continuous strain and provocation to which Israel has been subjected."<sup>89</sup> Munro was popular in the United States and his UN speeches were sometimes reported verbatim in the *New York Times*. Munro was later presented with a "facsimile of an autograph ... in the handwriting of Ferdinand de Lesseps setting out his device '*Aperire Terram Gentibus*'" by the Israeli statesman, Abba Eban, to thank him for his efforts while on the Council.<sup>90</sup>

It was during Holland's time as Prime Minister that one of the more significant incidents in New Zealand's post-war involvement in the Middle East occurred: the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis. The Crisis was sparked by Egypt's non-observance of an earlier UN resolution to allow Israel unimpeded access through the Suez Canal.<sup>91</sup> Many members of Holland's Government, including Holland himself, were returned soldiers who carried with them anti-Arab biases. These were reflected in their interpretation of the unfolding emergency. For example, Clifton Webb, by this time High Commissioner in London, described the Egyptian President Colonel Nasser a "power-drunk boulder" although he had not met him personally.<sup>92</sup> The Crisis occurred after Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal to the displeasure of Britain and France. Without New Zealand's knowledge, London and Paris secretly colluded with Israel in an attempt to overthrow Nasser and restore the canal to international control. Their plan was

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Leslie Munro, 'Statement on the Middle Eastern Question', 17 January 1957, *Department of External Affairs Files*, EA 277/5/9 Part 5

<sup>90</sup> Abba Eban to Sir Leslie Munro, 'Letter', 25 January 1955, *New York Permanent Mission files*, NYP 3/11/13 Part 2. Ferdinand de Lesseps was the French developer of the Suez Canal who created the motto for the Canal as '*Aperire Terram Gentibus*' which means 'open the lands to the people'. Eban had written that Israel was one of the gentiles referred to in this motto, implying that the opening of the Suez Canal would lead to freedom of passage for Israel.

<sup>91</sup> Templeton, *Ties of Blood and Empire*, p. 6

<sup>92</sup> Macintyre, *New Zealand and the Palestinian Question*, p. 3



to support an Israeli attack on Egypt and use it as a pretence to send in their own troops to 'secure the peace' and gain control over the canal.<sup>93</sup>

However the United States, under Eisenhower, was firmly opposed to the illegal moves and condemned the three countries in the UN. Besides Britain, France and Israel, the only countries to vote against cease-fire resolutions in the General Assembly were New Zealand and Australia, something that was a source of deep embarrassment to foreign affairs officials.<sup>94</sup> Further complicating matters was the presence of a New Zealand ship in the area, the *Royalist*, which had been conducting exercises with the British Mediterranean Fleet. This ship was only released back to New Zealand at the last moment after the crisis broke, narrowly avoiding implicating New Zealand as a belligerent party.<sup>95</sup>

The Leader of the Opposition, Walter Nash, retained Labour's traditional romantic view of Israel in his speeches to Parliament throughout the crisis and argued for its defence. He described how the Israelis had

...brought water out of the rock and oil out of the ground. They have made vegetables grow where none grew before. They have taken water to places that were previously barren and arid. They have done all this cooperatively and it has been a magnificent job.<sup>96</sup>

This support was tempered with the recognition that Israel's conduct had not been entirely satisfactory, particularly in regard to the ongoing issue of resolving the plight of the Palestinian refugees, but Nash was still adamant that Israel should not be left alone in the face of Egyptian nationalism. He argued that "to abandon them to the Arabs ... would be the greatest betrayal in

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<sup>93</sup> Templeton, *Ties of Blood and Empire*, pp. 52-3

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>95</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 137

<sup>96</sup> Walter Nash, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, Second Session, 31 Parliament, Vol. 308, 1956, p. 615

history”<sup>97</sup> and made it clear that his loyalty to Britain was still intact: “we’ll not criticise the old country.”<sup>98</sup>

The effect of Suez on the diplomatic service was profound. According to Berendsen, the Department of External Affairs was “very sick about the line we have taken. Needless to say, our name stands fairly low in the U.N.”<sup>99</sup> While some emphasis was placed upon securing the Middle East, in reality, as recognised by External Affairs in their confidential files ten years later, “it was the British entreaties for support which were decisive in inducing New Zealand, for the first time in its history as a member of the UN, to support an action, which, according to New Zealand’s customary standards, was flagrantly defiant of the [UN] charter.”<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, when it came to voting on the solution to the problem, the creation of a UN force, New Zealand had to reluctantly abstain due to its prior vote against the ceasefire. When it offered troops for the force, these were rejected by the Secretary-General, a decision “determined by the position New Zealand had adopted on the Suez question”, which was a deep blow for the so-called champion of collective security.<sup>101</sup>

Despite the uproar within External Affairs, on balance it seems the Suez crisis did not affect the bilateral relationship between New Zealand and Israel in any substantial way and actually may even have improved it slightly. Indeed, in an interview with Malcolm Templeton, author of *Ties of Blood and Empire*, he stated that “the Suez Crisis was a bit of an irrelevance to this I think because it was supporting Britain rather than Israel, but it so happened that Israel was on the same side as us.”<sup>102</sup> The relationship that did suffer in the crisis was that with Washington. The Holland Government viewed the United States as almost

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 611

<sup>98</sup> Bruce Brown, ‘The Middle East after the Cold War’, *New Zealand International Review*, Vol. 14, No. 5, Sep/Oct 1994, p. 16

<sup>99</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 139

<sup>100</sup> Department of External Affairs, ‘Security Council Background Paper’, Wellington, 15 March 1966, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/1/1 Part 1. The UN at this point had only been in existence for eleven years, and it is perhaps important to recognise the penchant for diplomats to over-inflate their own position in world events. This crisis can therefore be viewed as an interesting chapter in New Zealand history, but probably not one of any great consequence to the event itself.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Malcolm Templeton, Historian and former Diplomat, Interview, (Wellington, 20 January 2010)

treacherous, seeing “the American role in the Suez crisis as a betrayal of its closest and most faithful ally.”<sup>103</sup>

Reporting from the UN shortly after the crisis, Frank Corner said that Israel, whilst perceiving itself in a position of strength, had received “a terrible shock”<sup>104</sup> over American policy after Suez. Until then it had “believed that however recklessly they behaved the US would, in the last resort, support them and pull them out of any mess they created.”<sup>105</sup> In his view, the response to Suez had forced Israel not to push its policy to extremes again for a significant period of time, evidently something Corner found satisfactory. Labour politicians minimised their imperial rhetoric and attempted to distance themselves from the debacle, while conservative New Zealand was generally disillusioned about the UN which it held to have ‘failed’ Britain. One concrete outcome of the Suez Crisis for the bilateral relationship with Israel was that New Zealand, which as noted earlier had been re-evaluating its strategic interests before Suez, emphatically refocused its attention to Southeast Asia rather than the Middle East as an area of strategic concern.<sup>106</sup>

One small area where the Middle East remained important for New Zealand involved the modest contingent of New Zealand troops serving in the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO). Initially created to supervise the truce following the 1948 War, the mission spread over five states in the Middle East in an attempt to calm hostilities. In the absence of a resident representative in Israel-Palestine, these troops were sometimes a useful source of information for the Department of External Affairs who collected their letters and conducted interviews with returning servicemen. One of these troops was Captain C. Fanselow who visited the Department of External Affairs in February 1957 to report on his impressions of the peace process. On his views of Israel, Fanselow was “very impressed with the tremendous spirit in the country”

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<sup>103</sup> Templeton, *Ties of Blood and Empire*, p. 189

<sup>104</sup> F.H Corner to Wellington, ‘Memorandum’, 10 July 1958, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 1

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Templeton, *Ties of Blood and Empire*, p. 188

explaining how it had “a high degree of public discipline and a great willingness for self-sacrifice amongst the people. They have a first-class army.”<sup>107</sup>

## **Walter Nash**

### **Short-lived International Idealism**

When Walter Nash, close to eighty years old, became the new Prime Minister at the end of 1957, he took the External Affairs portfolio as Fraser had done. He was well known, and indeed sometimes ridiculed, for his extensive overseas travel as part of this portfolio. As his biographer Keith Sinclair explains “it rapidly became clear to Nash’s colleagues that his great passion was now international affairs.”<sup>108</sup> He aspired to be recognised as a statesman of the calibre of Peter Fraser and was indeed partially successful in this. The British High Commissioner George Mallaby, for example, noted how he “spoke with authority and other world statesmen were ready to listen; his views were well informed and liberal and, although occasionally he seemed to be lost in visionary speculations, he arrived in the end at a practical, hard-headed and courageous attitude.”<sup>109</sup> He had a comprehensive knowledge of foreign affairs issues that harked back to his period as New Zealand Minister in Washington during the Second World War and extensive travels on behalf of New Zealand.<sup>110</sup>

During the short-lived Nash years New Zealand began to concentrate its resources on improving its image in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, as well as strengthening its regional security relationships through ANZUS and SEATO. Nash’s interpretation of the appropriate positioning of foreign policy was one determined by moral considerations: his greatest concerns in this period were disarmament, the Colombo Plan, South African Apartheid, global poverty,

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<sup>107</sup> Department of External Affairs, ‘Notes taken during the visit of Captain Fanselow to the Department’, 21 February 1957, *External Affairs Files*, EA 277/5/9 Part 5

<sup>108</sup> Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1976), p. 320

<sup>109</sup> George Mallaby, quoted in Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, p. 321

<sup>110</sup> Diplomatic representatives were sometimes referred to as ‘Ministers’ rather than ‘Ambassadors’ in this period.

recognition of Communist China, and Southeast Asia. After colonialism had sounded its death knell in the UN, New Zealand began to divest itself “of its colonial relationships and image in the South Pacific” and pursue closer ties with its regional allies.<sup>111</sup> However, whilst Walter Nash was known to be sympathetic towards Israel and admired its endeavours as demonstrated by his speeches in Parliament while in Opposition, this period of the relationship between Israel and New Zealand otherwise offers very little material for analysis. New Zealand’s foreign policy concerns and resources during this time were elsewhere.

Even the officials with External Affairs serving in the UN were concerned about other matters during this period and it represented an unusually quiet period in Arab-Israeli relations. The only issue pertinent to Israel was the ongoing problem of Palestinian refugees displaced by Israel’s independence. New Zealand’s interest in this issue is longstanding. It was a core funder of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) and makes an annual contribution to the organisation which it has continued to pay to date. The resettlement of refugees was one of the implied reservations on recognition in 1950 and remained a point of contention between Israel and New Zealand especially after the rise of the PLO in the 1970s. Israel initially expected neighbouring states to subsume the Palestinian territories and refugees, something that ran counter to New Zealand’s preference for a two state solution. Officials were not impressed with Israel’s limited compensation to refugees as they were “related to securing a comprehensive peace settlement which would require the refugees to be integrated into the Arab world.”<sup>112</sup> New Zealand officials would later criticise Israel for failing to recognise that the “idea of incorporating Palestinian territories into Jordan is dead, as is (despite Israeli

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<sup>111</sup> Templeton, *Ties of Blood and Empire*, p. 188

<sup>112</sup> Department of External Affairs, ‘Security Council Background Paper’, Wellington, 15 March 1966, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/1/1 Part 1

insistence) the concept of a peace conference in which their interests could be represented by the Arab states.”<sup>113</sup>

### **Consensual Diplomacy and Individual Passions**

This chapter highlights three themes that are significant not only to the New Zealand-Israel relationship, but which also reflect broader trends in New Zealand’s foreign relations. The first such theme is the influence of individuals on foreign policy. Due to the lack of a significant trading interest with Israel and after 1956 decreased strategic concerns, the early character of this relationship was readily shaped by individuals acting as a result of their personal passions, instincts or prejudices. This is perhaps more likely to be the case in a relatively insignificant relationship like that between New Zealand and Israel than would be the case where institutional attention and multiple interests work to encourage more debate, direction and attention to the development of the relationship.

Attitudes shaped by instinctual notions can work both ways to influence the nature of bilateral ties: they can either be strengthened considerably or they could be open to dismissive nonchalance or even hostility. In the case of Israel, this chapter demonstrates how the collective efforts of individuals like Fraser, Berendsen, Nash and Munro combined to result in a positive and friendly relationship. The Labour Party under Fraser and Nash viewed Israel with sympathy, fascination and romance. There were a lot of perceived similarities between the two states including their commitment to socialism, small size, significant agriculture sector, and there also were significant interpersonal links from within the International Labour Organisation and Socialist International. The disinterest of leaders also opened space for others with strong feelings to fill. Holland was profoundly uninterested in foreign affairs and his bungling of the Suez Crisis reflects this disconnect. As Stephen Levine explains “he wasn’t a

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<sup>113</sup> New York to Wellington, ‘UN General Assembly 31: Item 29: Middle East (Israeli Draft)’, 7 December 1976, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 16. Parenthesis in original.

deep thinker [and was] not very subtle in his thought processes.”<sup>114</sup> Accordingly Munro had much more of an influence on foreign affairs in the UN and consequently the Palestinian problem throughout the mid-1950s. Munro wanted to make an impact in the UN and consequently espoused a more pro-Israeli position than his government may have wished.

Certainly New Zealand’s role in the establishment of Israel through the UN went far beyond its immediate material, economic or strategic interests. The early attention to Israel from New Zealand officials at the UN, as well as the early Labour leaders, explains why the country took such a sustained interest in the refugee question to the puzzlement of Israeli officials. Having been involved since the beginning, this small group of individuals committed to the successful resolution of the issue and felt entitled to comment on something they had helped create.

It is difficult to judge the extent to which New Zealand’s young diplomatic service was in fact as antagonistic towards Israel as the archival material, like Berendsen’s comments, suggests. A great deal of the material viewed was written confidentially and meant for the eyes of people within the Ministry only. Certainly, the New Zealand representatives at the UN would have been much more engaged with this issue than most New Zealanders as various aspects of the Israel-Arab or Israel-Palestine dispute were constantly raised in the UN year after year. It seems likely that this increased engagement with the issues created a sharper sense of antagonism towards Israel, especially given the concerted campaigns from the Afro-Arab bloc to isolate Israel within the UN. There was also a deep sense of distaste for a state that was perceived to flout international law. For New Zealand diplomats who conceived of themselves as operating for the most part within a consent-based realm where power politics was to be minimised and international law elevated, this was something that significantly limited the potential warmth of the relationship.

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with Stephen Levine, Professor of Political Science, (Wellington, 25 May 2010)

## CHAPTER TWO

### Inching Towards 'Even-handedness'

This chapter covers the period from the election of National Prime Minister Keith Holyoake to Labour Prime Minister Bill Rowling, a fifteen year period of considerable change in New Zealand's foreign relations. The efforts of New Zealand's diplomatic service in the UN and other international fora had ensured that New Zealand had an identity of its own, albeit one that was most comfortably expressed within the Commonwealth. The 1960s and 1970s was a time of massive global upheaval which resulted in a plethora of new African states and general decolonisation throughout the world which impacted on voting trends in the UN. Despite niggling feelings of dissatisfaction within the Department of External Affairs, among New Zealand politicians there was a strong degree of support for Israel. This support remained strong from Labour. Even at the end of this period Bill Rowling felt it necessary to defend New Zealand's new diplomatic ties with Arab states by emphasising their lack of impact on the Israeli relationship. As he noted, several of his colleagues "had visited Israel and they had great sympathy and understanding of the efforts undertaken by the Israeli people."<sup>115</sup>

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Holyoake was also sympathetic to Israel in a distinct departure from popular conservative attitudes in earlier years. This can partly be explained by a renewed recognition from his Government of the strategic imperatives in supporting Israel as a bastion against Soviet incursions into the Middle East. Kirk too was strongly supportive of Israel whose *kibbutz* movements he found deeply impressive. As Prime Minister he even aspired to create a similar experiment in New Zealand called the *ohu* scheme. Kirk laid the groundwork for the first Israeli Embassy in New Zealand which was eventually opened under his successor. However, by the end of this period New Zealand's previously unquestioning support had been challenged, both materially through

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<sup>115</sup> J.V. Scott, 'Note for file: Visit of Israeli Charge D'Affaires: Interview with the Prime Minister', 24 October 1974, *Head Office Files*, 61/277/1 Part 1



the Arab Oil Boycott and ideologically due to both the beginning of increased public sympathy and awareness of the Palestinian cause and the election of a rightwing government in Israel. Consequently, this is the period where “even-handedness” was first developed as a careful policy marker.

### **Holyoake and the Six Day War:**

#### **“A little less David and a bit too much Goliath”?<sup>116</sup>**

As had been the case until Holland took power, National Party leader Keith Holyoake chose the External Affairs portfolio when he was elected Prime Minister in 1960. He kept the portfolio for the following twelve years, making him New Zealand’s longest serving Foreign Minister. However, as McKinnon argues, Holyoake like Holland “had no particular interest in foreign affairs and in this respect he was a characteristic conservative New Zealand Prime Minister”.<sup>117</sup> Barry Gustafson suggests that Holyoake was “an instinctive and reactive politician rather than an intellectual and innovative one” who avoided controversy and attempted to “act in conformity with what he perceived as the views and interests of the majority of New Zealanders.”<sup>118</sup> His Government accepted that New Zealand had an “international personality” but as would be the case with future National Governments it was “more likely to link diplomacy to commerce rather than ideology” particularly in regard to protecting New Zealand from Britain’s attempts to join the European Economic Community (EEC) which eventually occurred in 1973.<sup>119</sup> However, according to his officials, Holyoake did recognise, possibly after the success of Nash, that “with changing

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<sup>116</sup> David Cohen, ‘When ‘Sorry’ Isn’t Enough’, *The Jerusalem Report*, August 9 2004

<sup>117</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 149

<sup>118</sup> Barry Gustafson, *Kiwi Keith: A Biography of Keith Holyoake*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), p. 176

<sup>119</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, pp. 148-49

times a New Zealand Prime Minister by making an impact on the world stage enhanced his stature at home.”<sup>120</sup>

Unlike Fraser or Nash, Holyoake had no special interest in Israel initially, although once he became accustomed to his portfolio he was to periodically intervene in issues to make sure his sympathies were understood. Frank Corner was eventually appointed as New Zealand’s first full-time Permanent Representative in the UN where issues concerning Israel were most likely to arise.<sup>121</sup> Corner was perceived by the British to be “a somewhat prickly character” under whom “the New Zealand delegation [have a] passion to show how independent-minded they are.”<sup>122</sup> Corner’s appointment was opposed by the British as they felt he had a “partiality towards the Afro-Asian members” over the ‘old’ members of the UN.<sup>123</sup> Throughout this period both the UN and the Commonwealth were undergoing significant changes with sweeping decolonisation that resulted in the accession of a whole host of new African and Asian members to these organisations. Holyoake, following the precedent set by Nash, was a strong supporter of decolonisation but focused his attention mainly on the South Pacific. Despite the pressure of the Afro-Arab bloc in the UN to frame the Israel-Arab dispute as a decolonisation issue, Israel was not viewed in this way by either Corner or Holyoake, and indeed the diplomatic team rigorously defended Israel from such accusations.

In a comprehensive background paper in preparation for a stint on the Security Council, a New Zealand official was asked to assess how New Zealand had interpreted the Arab-Israeli dispute historically. In their view, the dispute originated from Arab humiliations in war, resentment over Israel’s development and a sense of injustice arising from territory taken in 1947. Israel was described as a state unwilling “to make any significant concessions for the sake of a settlement ... She has proceeded on the assumption that offence is not only the best form of defence, but also the only argument the Arabs will

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<sup>120</sup> George Laking quoted in Gustafson, *Kiwi Keith*, p. 169

<sup>121</sup> Gustafson, *Kiwi Keith*, p. 178

<sup>122</sup> Sir Patrick Dean quoted in Barry Gustafson (ed.), *Kiwi Keith: A Biography of Keith Holyoake*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), p. 178

<sup>123</sup> Gustafson, *Kiwi Keith*, p. 178

understand.”<sup>124</sup> However, the assessment was still marginally in Israel’s favour as it maintained that “the present degree of political unreason prevailing in the Arab world cannot be ignored.”<sup>125</sup> In this way the critiques coming from External Affairs can be viewed a sort of concerned criticism that recognised an imperfect friend, but retained a loyalty and sympathy to Israel’s situation.

As has been demonstrated, a major theme running through the archived materials from the Department of External Affairs was dissatisfaction with Israel’s record of abiding by UN Resolutions. However when Israel did follow UN procedure during this period, officials were quick to offer their praises. On an Israeli complaint against Syria for example they noted that “it is commendable that Israel should seek the Council’s assistance rather than take the law into its own hands”.<sup>126</sup> It is clear that Israel was still very much considered a friend of New Zealand, albeit a friend capable of “brutal action”, and there was much concern that its support base was being eroded by Arab and African efforts. It was noted that in any dispute to come before the UN “the Israelis lose ground because the Arabs can wring support out of their African brothers because of the argument that Palestine is a colonial problem and because of back-biting and blackmail about oil”.<sup>127</sup> New Zealand felt it was safe to criticise the Arab Bloc because “we were not rrp [sic] not obliged to be as sensitive as other Western countries to the state of our relations with the Arabs.”<sup>128</sup> Indeed it was only after the oil shocks that New Zealand began to foster diplomatic relations with the Arab states, the first Middle Eastern embassy opening in Iran in 1975.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Department of External Affairs, ‘Security Council Background Paper’, Wellington, 15 March 1966, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/1/1 Part 1

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Wellington to New York, ‘Confidential Memorandum: Israel-Syria’, 14 October 1966, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/2/2 Part 1

<sup>127</sup> New York to Wellington, ‘Middle East Crisis’, 31 May 1967, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 1

<sup>128</sup> Wellington to New York, ‘Middle East for Corner from Laking’, 30 June 1967, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/2/4 Part 1. The use of ‘rrp’ refers to a shortened form of ‘repeat’.

<sup>129</sup> Iran is not an Arab state, but it is often included within this conceptual category when considering Israeli related issues to simplify matters. A more correct form would be ‘Iran and the Arab states’.

In 1966 New Zealand once again took a seat on the Security Council. During its membership of the Council New Zealand was required to vote on an aspect of the Israel-Palestine dispute: Resolution 228 which 'deplored' and 'censored' Israel for an attack on the southern Hebron area of Jordan. New Zealand felt that although the attack by Israel "could not be condoned and that the council was bound to condemn it" the Council was ignoring the deteriorating situation in the region that had led to the attack.<sup>130</sup> Consequently New Zealand abstained on this vote, and was the only country to do so, because it maintained that "a condemnation of one party [Israel] without attempt to remove the underlying causes of the tension could not be considered an adequate response on the Council's part."<sup>131</sup> This was clearly intended to be read as a sympathetic action towards Israel, and New Zealand continued throughout its time on the Security Council to support Israel in the debates.

After casting its vote of abstention on this Resolution, Holyoake wrote a lengthy personal letter to Abba Eban, the Foreign Minister of Israel. In this letter he noted that his Government considered Arab sponsored terrorism to be a fundamental cause of the tensions in the region and agreed that the Arab states had made insufficient attempts to renounce the actions of the terrorists. He also noted that "no responsible Government can readily accept sustained loss of life and damage to property" and reminded the Israeli Prime Minister that New Zealand had always "defended the right of Israel to freedom from fear of attack by whatever means and from whatever quarter."<sup>132</sup> However, he did retain reservations about the retaliatory acts by Israel against Jordan saying New Zealand could not condone them. Holyoake finished by saying that "You may be assured that New Zealand will make special efforts to ensure that its voting position should be in the interests of peace and security between Israel and its neighbours."

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<sup>130</sup> Department of External Affairs, 'Israel and the Arabs: The Palestinian Question', August 1966, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 1

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Keith Holyoake, 'Message from Keith Holyoake to Abba Eban', 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1966, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/12 Part 2

Holyoake was rewarded for New Zealand's actions in the Security Council when he received a personal letter from the Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol who first congratulated him on his election victory and then expressed:

...the gratitude felt by the people of Israel for the courageous stand of the New Zealand delegate in the recent Security Council discussions on the Israel-Jordan border incidents. His insistence that Israel's action could not properly be treated in isolation and independently of the circumstances to which it was a response, reflected and was a tribute to New Zealand's sense of fairness and justice. On behalf of my countrymen, my colleagues and I wish you and the people of NZ all happiness and prosperity in the years to come.<sup>133</sup>

The unusual length taken by Holyoake to ensure Israel understood the actions of New Zealand is interesting. The extent to which this is indicative of his personal attitudes towards Israel or his commitment to preserving New Zealand's reputation at the UN is not overly clear. His biographer does not mention any particular affinity with the Jewish state but it is possible to deduce from the archived material that Holyoake was indeed very sympathetic to Israel.

The Six-Day War of 1967 involving an invasion by Egypt, Jordan and Syria against Israel was perceived by many New Zealanders as another test for a small state constantly under attack from its neighbours. For some commentators the aftermath of this conflict, where Israel claimed swathes of land designated for the Palestinian state, was also the beginning of New Zealand's shift away from Israel due to the perception that Israel was no longer a small vulnerable state subject to Arab aggression.<sup>134</sup> David Cohen for example notes how the some New Zealanders began to feel that "perhaps Israel was getting a little less David and a little bit too much Goliath for comfort".<sup>135</sup> However, while this perception may have been true in some sense and perhaps especially so within the Department of External Affairs, this seems to be an overstatement in regard to popular opinion and perceptions from the political parties. As Russell Marshall, Labour Party member at the time and future

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Stephen Rainbow in *Changing Attitudes* and David Cohen in *When 'Sorry' Isn't Enough* both argue this point.

<sup>135</sup> Cohen, *When 'Sorry' Isn't Enough*

Foreign Minister explained in an interview, feelings of antagonism towards Israel from within the New Zealand Labour Party did not come until much later.<sup>136</sup>

Whilst New Zealand did not get involved militarily in the Six-Day War, an External Affairs file from the time explains that the response of the Wellington Jewish community was to create a body called the 'Israel Emergency Committee' and send volunteers to undertake 'non-combat duties' in the *kibbutzim*. There was an implied suggestion that these volunteers may not restrain themselves to strictly non-combat duties, but the volunteers were permitted to go to Israel, even though passports could have been revoked, because as the file noted "there is of course a good deal of sympathy for the Israeli cause."<sup>137</sup> This sympathy was to be demonstrated in the UN through voting support and limited speaking support although officials were warned not to become too involved in the debates as "there seems no rrp no justification in terms of the real degree of our national interest involved for NZ to attempt any task of holding possible waverers in line."<sup>138</sup>

Within External Affairs however, there was a degree of antipathy towards Israel's actions after the ceasefire which again related back to international law. Suspicions that Israel had deployed their troops after the ceasefire to secure the territorial gains they had made were quickly confirmed. One files notes how "[t]he feeling has become widespread among those who traditionally have sympathised with the Israeli position that they have in the last few days overplayed their hand..."<sup>139</sup> New Zealand was annoyed that Israel had "embarrassed their friends" by moving towards "formal full annexation"<sup>140</sup> of Jerusalem, contrary to Resolution 242. However, expressing this criticism was

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with Russell Marshall, Minister of Foreign Affairs 1987-1990, (Wellington, 24 July 2009)

<sup>137</sup> Wellington to Canberra, 'Jewish Volunteers for Israel', 9 June 1967, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 3

<sup>138</sup> Wellington to New York, 'Confidential: Prime Minister Secretary for External Affairs', 30 June 1967, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/2/4 Part 1

<sup>139</sup> New York Permanent Mission to Wellington, 'Middle East Crisis', 12 June 1967, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 3

<sup>140</sup> Wellington to New York, 'Middle East for Corner from Laking', 30 June 1967, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL305/2/4 Part 1

overruled and Wellington instead proposed a strategy to “concentrate on desirability of some sort of international presence in Jerusalem ... rather than on rights and wrongs of Israeli annexation” which consequently avoided a direct criticism of Israel in the General Assembly.<sup>141</sup>

There were also criticisms over the use of disproportionate force in Jordan and a speech was drafted to condemn the “brutal actions”<sup>142</sup> which Wellington toned down to “extreme” so as to give “a slightly more sympathetic reference to Israel’s impossible position”.<sup>143</sup> Thus Holyoake evidently retained his support for Israel in the face of External Affairs dissatisfaction. He was responsible for New Zealand not co-sponsoring a post conflict resolution as he felt that “even in its present form, the draft places too much stress on Israeli withdrawal independently of a general solution.”<sup>144</sup> After the cease-fire he wrote to Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol saying, “[i]n this period of stress may I reiterate New Zealand’s longstanding support, since the time of Israel’s foundation, for Israel’s right to live free from external pressures and enjoy freedom of trade.”<sup>145</sup> Other diplomats expressed jubilation at Israel’s win, including the New Zealand representative in Rome who reported how “the Israeli triumph and the bitter humiliation of the Arabs has been a remarkable spectacle.”<sup>146</sup>

In July 1967 there was a vote called in the UN related to the territory Israel had gained after the Six Day War. New Zealand characterised itself as belonging to group that could be “described as pro-Israel, although its advocates would describe it as balanced: those not prepared to condemn Israel nor call for unqualified withdrawal.”<sup>147</sup> One major point of difference with Israel was over the question of refugees which New Zealand thought should be repatriated back

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<sup>141</sup> Wellington to Washington, ‘Middle East’, 18 September 1967, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 5

<sup>142</sup> Wellington to New York, ‘Israel/Jordan’, 17 November 1966, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/12 Part 2

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Wellington to New York, ‘Middle East for Corner from Laking’, 30 June 1967, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL305/2/4 Part 1

<sup>145</sup> Keith Holyoake to Levi Eshkol, ‘Letter’, 9 June 1967, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 3

<sup>146</sup> Rome to Wellington, ‘Memorandum’, 21 June 1967, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 3

<sup>147</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Vote on the Middle Eastern Question in the General Assembly’, 4 July 1967, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 1

to the occupied areas. Wellington wrote to its diplomats in New York that “we see no rrp [sic] no reason why NZ should oppose reasonable pressure on Israel to permit return of all refugees to occupied areas.”<sup>148</sup> Israel had wanted a large percentage of the refugees repatriated to other Arab countries and complained about New Zealand’s “obsession” with the problem.<sup>149</sup> New Zealand explained that its main goal for the region was a peace settlement and rather than approving Israel’s tendency to “wait like a prickly hedgehog until the Arab’s become ‘reasonable’ again... Israel should, if need be, be ready to go more than half-way to create the conditions for settlement.”<sup>150</sup>

This basic sympathy continued until the early 1970’s and was recognised and valued by Israel. In a conversation with the Israeli Permanent Member of the UN Mr Cahana, the New Zealand equivalent recorded how Mr Cahana had remarked that “New Zealand, because of its consistent support for Israel, was at the top of Israel’s short list of friends here. If New Zealand was to show any indifference in its attitude, this would be regarded very seriously by Israel.”<sup>151</sup> However as New Zealand diplomats were becoming increasingly aware, “Israel’s position in the UN, and indeed in the international community, is not an enviable one. Within the Assembly, Israel walks a lonely path.”<sup>152</sup> Israel’s isolation in the UN was compounded by the pressures imposed by the Arab Oil Embargo, which New Zealand gradually succumbed to under Kirk, explaining that they were “concerned to retain the benevolence of the Arabs” and by growing attention to the Palestinian cause and the problems of refugees.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, from New Zealand’s end there was “a hint of dissatisfaction” on

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<sup>148</sup> Wellington to Washington, ‘Middle East’, 18 September 1967, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 5

<sup>149</sup> Abadi, *New Zealand-Israeli Relations*, p. 466

<sup>150</sup> G. R Laking, ‘Notes prepared for the Prime Minister for a call by the Israeli Ambassador, Mr Simcha Pratt’, 13 June 1969, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 8

<sup>151</sup> A.V. Stokes, ‘Note for File’, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1970, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 9

<sup>152</sup> New York to Wellington, ‘Commentary No. 2: Middle East’, 18 December 1973, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/14 Part 14

<sup>153</sup> New York to Wellington, ‘Commentary No. 7: The Middle East’, 14 December 1971, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/14 Part 11



Israel's attitude towards human rights within the Occupied Palestinian Territories.<sup>154</sup>

## **Norman Kirk**

### **Idealism in a Cold War World**

Upon assuming office the new Labour Government under Norman Kirk proclaimed that its foreign policy would be to “find, and hold to, a firm moral base for foreign policy ... to base our foreign policies on moral principles is the most enlightened form of self-interest.”<sup>155</sup> This commitment was not simply rhetoric. Within two weeks of becoming Prime Minister, Kirk recognised the People's Republic of China and announced a withdrawal of the last New Zealand troops from Vietnam. He was committed to an independent foreign policy as a necessary precondition towards the evolution of national identity and believed there was an important place in the world for small powers.<sup>156</sup> He believed that small powers, through their dependence on international law would be able to succeed in “encouraging the great powers to relinquish strength and to seek justice, better relationships, and peace through cooperation and through a common community dedicated to the advancement of the human family.”<sup>157</sup>

Like Nash and Fraser, Kirk was considered a “friend of Israel” who had visited the country several times including a visit whilst Leader of the Opposition and was deeply impressed with what he saw. <sup>158</sup> He was instrumental in the appointment of an Israeli Jew named Zvi Harmor as the personal secretary of Bill Rowling. Kirk and Harmor had met through the Socialist International organisation and were close friends – Kirk even gave him his favourite watch

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<sup>154</sup> Canberra to Wellington, ‘Visit of Israeli Counsellor: Middle East Situation’, 16 February 1970, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/14 Part 8

<sup>155</sup> Tony Garnier, *The Hunter and the Hill: New Zealand Politics in the Kirk Years*, (Auckland: Cassell New Zealand, 1978), p. 123

<sup>156</sup> David Capie, ‘Constructing New Zealand in the World’, in Raymond Miller and Michael Mintrom (ed.), *Political Leadership in New Zealand*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006), p. 22

<sup>157</sup> Norman Kirk quoted in Capie, *Constructing New Zealand in the World*, p. 22

<sup>158</sup> Rainbow, *Changing Attitudes*, p. 9

when Hamor's broke.<sup>159</sup> The Rowling government, which succeeded the Kirk government following Kirk's sudden death in 1974, promoted Kirk's *ohu* scheme, loosely based on the Israeli *kibbutz* model. This was a type of idealistic rural farming community, which Kirk had experienced firsthand in Israel and felt would be an antidote "to the ills of modern society, as well as a means of showing people the virtues of a simpler life."<sup>160</sup> Unfortunately the *ohu* scheme failed due to poor choices of land for the communities and a lack of sustained interest in the projects. However, despite these deep and personal connections to Israel, the oil shocks eventually forced the Third Labour Government to begin to rethink their position in the Middle East.

The first oil shock occurred in 1973 after Israel's victory in the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent Arab oil embargo. Rising oil prices and their perceived effect on national security began to transform the political landscape and it became increasingly important to have "friends in the right places".<sup>161</sup> However, the rising price of oil also created an increased ability of various Arab nations to purchase imports and New Zealand perceived a distinct opportunity to capitalise on this. In 1974 the Kirk Government organised a 'goodwill mission' to the Middle East led by J.V Scott, the Deputy Secretary of Foreign Affairs. They visited ten Middle Eastern states in twenty-two days including Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq but did not visit Israel.<sup>162</sup> Following the goodwill mission New Zealand became accredited to Egypt in 1974 through its Embassy in Rome. This was also the first year that even-handedness was explicitly pushed "in the interests of building up our relations with the Arab States."<sup>163</sup>

This eventually led to the opening of the first New Zealand Embassy in the Middle East in January 1975. It was decided to open this Embassy in Iran as it was "the country in the area which offered the most important export prospects

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<sup>159</sup> Margaret Haywood, *Diary of the Kirk Years*, (Wellington: Reed Publishing, 1981), p. 41

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., p. 173

<sup>161</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 221

<sup>162</sup> Sally Washington, 'The Impact of the Oil Crisis on New Zealand's Foreign Policy and Trade Initiatives Towards the Middle East', in Ron Macintyre (ed.), *New Zealand and the Middle East: Politics, Energy and Trade*, (Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 1987), pp. 68-70

<sup>163</sup> Frank Corner to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 'Relations with Israel', 28 June 1974, *Head Office Files*, 61/277/1 Part 1

for New Zealand.”<sup>164</sup> This was followed in quick succession by an Embassy in Iraq (1976) and a Consulate-General in Bahrain (1977). When Kirk was criticised for forsaking a ‘moral’ foreign policy by the Leader of the Opposition, Robert Muldoon, in parliament and for his decision to “kowtow to the Arabs”<sup>165</sup> he replied that the purpose of the mission was to clarify New Zealand’s policy of even-handedness as well as to “explore the possibilities in developing relations both politically and in trade.”<sup>166</sup> This criticism by Muldoon is interesting as he was later to overtly emphasise his preference for the Arab states over Israel. Thus, rather than demonstrating any real conviction or concern, Muldoon’s objection should probably be read simply as parliamentary point scoring.

Israel’s major objective during the Kirk years was an attempt to get New Zealand to present its credentials to the Israeli Government and have either residential or non-residential representation in Israel. Israel had lost a great deal of support within multi-state institutions and around twenty African states had severed diplomatic relations following the 1973 October/Yom Kippur War. Given this context, as Secretary of Foreign Affairs Frank Corner noted, “it is understandable that they are anxious to strengthen the friendly links they still maintain with us.”<sup>167</sup> Israel also worked hard to get New Zealand to agree to an Israeli Embassy in Wellington. One New Zealand representative Mr Holloway, accredited to Egypt, was adamantly opposed to the establishment of an Israeli mission in New Zealand due to fears over oil but Kirk override such concerns and approved the opening in January 1973. He told the Israeli Ambassador in Canberra that “an Israeli post in New Zealand would be welcome. The question raised no problems whatsoever.”<sup>168</sup> This commitment was reconsidered following the 1973 war when it became clear that it was in New Zealand’s best

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<sup>164</sup> Richard Woods, ‘Notes for a Talk to Canterbury University Pols 303 Students’, Speech, 10 September 1991

<sup>165</sup> Robert Muldoon *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 1974 p. 2644 – a dubious statement for Muldoon to make given his later moves towards the Arab states when he took office

<sup>166</sup> Ron Macintyre (ed.), *New Zealand and the Middle East: Politics, Energy and Trade*, (Christchurch: University of Canterbury Press, 1985), p. 70

<sup>167</sup> Corner, Frank, to Minister of Foreign Affairs, ‘Relations with Israel’, 28 June 1974, *Head Office Files*, 61/277/1 Part 1

<sup>168</sup> Norman Kirk quoted in Ministry of External Affairs, ‘Israeli Representation in New Zealand’, 25 January 1973, *Head Office Files*, 61/277/1 Part 1

interests to defer the opening.<sup>169</sup> After a tenuous ceasefire had been established, the issue was raised once again. Frank Corner noted in a letter to Kirk that in his view the opening of an Israeli Embassy would be “politically acceptable in New Zealand where public opinion has always tended to support the Israeli cause.”

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There was a feeling amongst some of the officials in Wellington that even-handedness was not being properly exercised despite reassurances to the contrary from Kirk in parliament. In July, while Kirk was still Prime Minister, Corner advised him that after the Goodwill mission and accreditation to Cairo, “[t]he Israelis will soon be entitled to think that we are not as even-handed as we claim, if they do not think so already.”<sup>171</sup> However only four months later the new Secretary of Foreign Affairs J. V. Scott in a submission to the new Prime Minister Bill Rowling in October 1974 argued that it was much more difficult to justify an Israeli Embassy opening under even-handedness. He argued that “[i]f we had no doubts about the rights of the Israeli cause and felt we had a moral duty to support it, then in my view we should do so and risk the consequences. *But this is not the case*” [Emphasis mine].<sup>172</sup> In his view, the only acceptable way to exercise even-handedness would be to allow Israel to establish a mission only when Egypt was ready to do the same.<sup>173</sup>

Kirk died in office in August 1974 and Bill Rowling took over as Prime Minister. The Rowling Government oversaw the inclusion of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) into the UN as an observer. The Palestinian cause had been blown into global consciousness by a fatal attack on eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games carried out by a pseudo paramilitary arm of the PLO called Black September.<sup>174</sup> The decision by New Zealand to vote to

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<sup>169</sup> Corner, Frank, to Minister of Foreign Affairs, ‘Relations with Israel’, 28 June 1974, *Head Office Files*, 61/277/1 Part 1

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> J.V Scott to Prime Minister, ‘Israeli Representation in Wellington’, 14 October 1974, *Head Office Files*, 61/277/1 Part 1

<sup>173</sup> Macintyre, *New Zealand and the Middle East*, p. 70

<sup>174</sup> See Simon Reeve, *One Day in September: The Story of the 1972 Munich Olympic Massacre*, (London: Arcade Publishing, 2000). In the lead-up to the Olympics hostage drama, the PLO was

designate permanent observer status onto the PLO in the UN was a fairly uncontroversial one despite a heated parliamentary question session, as New Zealand's vote reflected the majority view within the UN, with 105 voting in the affirmative and only four negative votes.<sup>175</sup> Rowling contended that if the PLO were not granted the right to be heard in the UN, then it "might well have concluded that it had no alternative to a resurgence of violence and terrorism."<sup>176</sup> Yosef Hassin, the Israeli Charge d'Affaires met with Rowling to express Israel's discontent at this move saying that New Zealand had "sided with the opposition."<sup>177</sup> Rowling defended his position by saying that Israel had been in a similar situation in 1947 and it was now the Palestinians right to be heard too. He concluded by expressing disappointment at the disagreement saying "[w]e have known many of your people on a personal basis and we must be seen to be even-handed by others."<sup>178</sup>

At the same time diplomats did their best to ensure that Israel was not excluded from multilateral institutions in the face of considerable attempts from the Afro-Arab lobby to do so throughout 1975. Their strategy to prevent this happening in the UN and its various bodies involved a three-pronged attack: New Zealand's representatives in the UN lobbied their counterparts from Tanzania and Zambia, "the two Africans to whom we can probably speak most easily" to ensure that the Organisation of African Unity states did not resolve to exclude Israel from the General Assembly.<sup>179</sup> New Zealand officials in Kuala Lumpur were responsible for lobbying the Malaysians before the Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference in Jeddah. Finally, the Embassy in Jakarta was instructed to communicate to "the appropriate people in Foreign Affairs our

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also responsible for the 1970 hijacking of three jets in Jordan, and the 1972 Lod Airport massacre where Japanese Red Army members opened fire at the baggage terminal, killing twenty-six people.

<sup>175</sup> William Rowling, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 1974, p. 5467

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Scott, J.V., 'Note for file: Visit of Israeli Charge D'Affaires: Interview with the Prime Minister', 24 October 1974, *Head Office Files*, 61/277/1 Part 1

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Wellington to New York, 'Israel and the UN', 16 July 1975, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/16 Part 2

hope that no action will be taken at the [Non-Aligned] Conference".<sup>180</sup> These efforts were acknowledged by the Israeli representative in Canberra Hassin who phoned Foreign Affairs "with a special word of thanks from Tel Aviv" who interestingly also noted that the "Australians are still considering what they should do."<sup>181</sup> These diplomatic efforts were unsuccessful in that both the Non-Aligned and Islamic Foreign Minister's conferences declared a link between Zionism, imperialism and racism. Despite this, Israel remained a member of the UN.

In 1975, after years of behind the scenes pressure, the Rowling Government was instrumental in staging one of the more elaborate symbols of even-handedness by accepting the credentials from both an Israeli and Egyptian Embassy in Wellington on the same day. This was a deliberate move by the Rowling Government who had come under accusations of being 'over cautious' by Israel. Government files reveal that this decision was viewed with puzzlement by the two states: "both Israeli and Egyptian embassies at deputy level professed to be mildly put out".<sup>182</sup> But as External Affairs explained in an internal memo the decision was "a reasonably logical thing, in terms of need not only to be even-handed but to be seen logically to be so [sic]."<sup>183</sup> The diplomatic activities of these two embassies in the mid-1970s ensured that Middle Eastern issues were elevated within the popular consciousness of many New Zealanders during this period and well into the early 1980s.

By the end of the 1970's moreover, many Labour members were becoming increasingly disillusioned by Israeli policies towards the Palestinian people. This issue was made particularly problematic for many Labourites both because of changes within Israel which resulted in the election of the right-wing Likud party in 1977, the first rightwing government since Israel's inception, and because of Labour's commitment to indigenous people's self-determination.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Wellington to Jakarta, 'Israel and the UN: Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers Meeting, Lima', 25 August 1975, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/16 Part 2

<sup>181</sup> Canberra to Wellington, 'Israel and the UN', 23 July 1975, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/16 Part 2

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Rainbow, *Changing Attitudes*, pp. 10-11

Labour had taken an outspoken stance against South Africa's apartheid policies and would later be highly critical of the 1981 Springbok tour in New Zealand. This moral stance affected attitudes towards Israel because of military ties between South Africa and Israel, and because of a long-running campaign within the UN to link apartheid with Zionism.<sup>185</sup>

New Zealand had in fact abstained on the now notorious General Assembly Resolution 3379 condemning racism in the UN which it otherwise would have supported because the Resolution declared that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination."<sup>186</sup> The Resolution also linked Zionism, imperialism and colonisation with the statement that "the racist régime in occupied Palestine and the racist régimes in Zimbabwe and South Africa have a common imperialist origin".<sup>187</sup> Officials explained their decision to abstain because they had not wanted to "link issues which are not linked or to engage in an anti-Semitic witch hunt."<sup>188</sup> The controversial resolution was later revoked in 1991 through a campaign by US President George H.W. Bush, one of the few times this occurred in UN history. New Zealand along with seventy-seven other states cosponsored the repeal.

It is important not to overstate the shift away from Israel in this period. Rather than a shift away, the incremental changes to the relationship are perhaps better viewed as a pull towards the Arab states. Within the Labour Party, attitudes were beginning to change, but this was not reflected in the official bilateral relationship to the same extent that it would be in later Labour governments and any shift was explained relatively credibly within the parameters of New Zealand's even-handed policy. Officials retained their traditional unease towards Israel and were distinctively unimpressed with the diplomacy of various Israeli Embassy staff, both in Wellington and in Canberra.

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<sup>185</sup> See for example Ministry of Foreign Affairs, '31 Regular Session of the General Assembly of the UN 1976: Question of Palestine; The Middle East Situation', 27 September 1976, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP3/11/15 Part 16

<sup>186</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations, UN/RES/30/3379: Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, 1975

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> New York to Wellington, 'Commentary No. 2: Middle East', 18 December 1973, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/14 Part 14

However, they also kept track of public opinion in New Zealand and believed that this remained fairly supportive of Israel.

### **Even-handedness explained**

“From a moral as well as a practical viewpoint, New Zealand’s policy towards the Arab-Israeli dispute can only be one of even-handedness. Amidst all the emotion and bitterness there are genuine rights and wrongs on both sides and I see no moral grounds for lending particular support to either.”

Secretary of Foreign Affairs J. V. Scott to Prime Minister Bill Rowling, October 1974

It is perhaps important at this point to pause and reflect on New Zealand’s overarching Middle Eastern policy, that of even-handedness. Despite being a tried and tested approach within the UN for years, it was really only under the Kirk Government that even-handedness became the standard rhetorical phrase for Middle Eastern issues. The policy was confirmed at the start of Muldoon’s first term in office at the suggestion of his advisors. He retained the policy as it enabled New Zealand “to avoid an undignified flip-flop, if for example, the Arabs were to resort again to the oil weapon.”<sup>189</sup> The term itself implies a sense of impartiality which in reality has never really been exercised with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict. As Leslie Munro, New Zealand’s permanent ambassador to the UN, pointed out in a testy letter to Clifton Webb in 1954, “in practice ... [there] must be a decision to come down on one side or the other... In the Security Council even an abstention is a vote for one party[.]”<sup>190</sup>

According to Palestinian campaigner and Canterbury University Professor Ron Macintyre, in general even-handedness “amounted to a form of concerned neutrality, often expressed within the framework of wider Western/US

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<sup>189</sup> Mr Templeton to Mr Scott, ‘Extract: Personal and Confidential Letter’, 27 February 1976, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP3/11/15 Part 16

<sup>190</sup> Sir Leslie Munroe to Mr T. Clifton Webb. ‘Letter’, 16 February 1954, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Head Office Files*, 471/2/1 Part 3



interests in the Middle East”.<sup>191</sup> This became even more pronounced as this region was swept into the maelstrom of Cold War rivalries, and Israel turned from close ties with the Soviet Union to become an ally of the United States. In 1966 the New Zealand Department of External Affairs released an internal fact sheet explaining how even-handedness “was ostensibly designed to avoid a choice between them [Israel and the Arab states]” but which tended to come down on Israel’s side.<sup>192</sup> After the oil shocks, and especially during the fourth and fifth Labour Governments, this tendency was reversed, and according to Israel’s former Honorary Consul in New Zealand David Zwartz, began to be used against Israel. According to Zwartz, “if you’re even-handed with a country on the one side, and a group of people who want to destroy that country on the other side, what sort of even-handedness is it?”<sup>193</sup> He argues that even-handedness is “an attempt to create a moral equivalence which supporters of Israel say simply does not exist.”<sup>194</sup>

There are several UN Resolutions which are particularly important to New Zealand’s policy decisions in the Middle East. These include the 1947 Partition Resolution 181 and the November 1967 Security Council Resolution 242 after the Six-Day war. Other Resolutions of more contemporary importance that do not impact on even-handedness, but which are a result of its interpretation, include the decision by the Clark Government to uphold the ruling on the so-called security fence in the West Bank in 2003 and the decision by the Key Government to cast an affirmative vote to send the Goldstone report to the Security Council in 2010. The decision to support of a resolution is contingent on a number of factors: that it supports the two state solution, that it is balanced, that it upholds international law and previous Resolutions, and finally, whether New Zealand’s vote would be in ‘good international company.’ This last criteria has remained fluid and certainly in the post-Bolger years has

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<sup>191</sup> Ron Macintyre, ‘Working Paper’, *Australasian Middle East Studies Association*, (Christchurch, 1981), p. 5

<sup>192</sup> Department of External Affairs Wellington, ‘Security Council Background Paper’, 15 March 1966, *Kuala Lumpur High Commission Files*, KL 305/1/1 Part 1

<sup>193</sup> Interview with David Zwartz, Honorary Consul for Israel, (Wellington, 22 July 2009)

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

not included Australia or the US but rather European countries like Ireland and Italy as well as Asian states like South Korea.

The earliest comprehensive articulation of even-handedness was made by UN Permanent Representative Malcolm Templeton in November 1974. Looking back on it three years later the Ministry maintained in a confidential bulletin that it was a very forward-looking statement particularly in regard to its comments on Palestine. The statement recognised Israel's right as a sovereign independent state to live in peace and security as well as "New Zealand's unalterable opposition to the terrorism and violence" but iterated the need for Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967.<sup>195</sup> It emphasised the need for refugees to be either repatriated or compensated. It recognised the rights of the Palestinians, "including the right of self-determination and establishing an independent Arab state of Palestine if they so wish."<sup>196</sup> Regarding the PLO, it recognised that "the PLO has a role to play as a representative, though not the sole legal representative of the Palestinian people."<sup>197</sup>

This initial statement has formed the basis for defining New Zealand's policy in the Israel-Palestine dispute with slight variances in language and nuance representing the only significant change. It remains the official policy of New Zealand to support a two state solution, a just settlement and Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories. The only substantial elaboration to even-handedness is the addition of the need for a "balanced and constructive" approach with an emphasis on the promotion of dialogue.<sup>198</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade argue that even-handedness is underpinned through contributions to peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, particularly UNTSO and the Sinai Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) which was established in 1982. They also argue that even-handedness is concretely expressed through New Zealand's core funding of the UNRWA.

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<sup>195</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wellington, '34 Session of the UN General Assembly', 21 September 1979, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 19

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

Whether or not New Zealand is indeed even-handed is a matter of much contention for the various interest groups who campaign the Government on this issue. Observers of the relationship who emphasise a social justice approach to diplomacy like journalist Nicky Hager argue that “[i]t’s not even-handed. Even-handedness is biased if there is an injustice.”<sup>199</sup> When Malcolm Templeton was interviewed for this research he was asked whether or not he believed New Zealand was even-handed. His reply was that “I think it became more even-handed from that time onwards [after the UN speech in 1974]. Whether it was wholly even-handed is another question.”<sup>200</sup> Simon Murdoch, Secretary of Foreign Affairs from 2002-2009, explains that concepts of even-handedness run on a continuum of ‘fully even-handed’ to ‘not very even-handed at all’ but most New Zealand Governments have operated within a broad ‘middle’ position. He explains that there “will be one or two relatively minor positional interpretations; they will shift a bit depending on the issue. But basically I think the policy is pretty stable.”<sup>201</sup> Even-handedness will be further discussed in the final chapter of this thesis to argue that the Key Government will need to be vigilant in its recalibrations of the relationship not to overstep the traditional realms of the policy which until now has been remarkably successful in determining New Zealand’s position in the Middle East.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

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<sup>199</sup> Interview with Nicky Hager, Investigative Journalist, (Wellington, 26 January 2010)

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Malcolm Templeton, Author and former Diplomat, (Wellington, 20 January 2010)

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Simon Murdoch, Secretary of Foreign Affairs 2002-2009, (Wellington, 22 February 2010)

## **Muldoon to Bolger**

This chapter concentrates on a twenty-five year period of considerable disruption to the previously warm relations between New Zealand and Israel. The disruption was such that observers really began to feel that New Zealand's former close relationship with Israel was beginning to seriously dissipate. Things began to change under Robert Muldoon's National Government due to pragmatic concerns over economic security and it was exacerbated by the Fourth Labour Government's ideological shift away from Israel. Jim Bolger's election in 1990 marked a shift back towards the former closeness the relationship had enjoyed, but New Zealand-Israel ties did not recover the same degree of warmth that had existed previously. The atmosphere was one of benign friendliness or disinterested cordiality: attention was elsewhere, but there was an underlying sense from relevant New Zealand figures that Israel and New Zealand were still part of a community of like-minded states.

The shift in New Zealand policy paralleled broader international trends that influenced the tone of the relationship, particularly during the second term of the Fourth Labour Government. Politicians who had come to political consciousness whilst protesting issues like New Zealand's involvement in the Vietnam War were not prepared to view Israel through the same romantic lens that former Labour politicians had. Personal factors had also influenced the tone towards Israel from Muldoon's Government. As with many of Muldoon's views, his attitude towards Israel was largely borne out by his wartime experiences. This had created within Muldoon a strong distaste for Jewish terrorism against British officials and troops in Palestine which in turn influenced the way he viewed the newly established state of Israel. As well as these intangible instincts, external material factors resulted in a serious disruption to the relationship's former closeness. These factors will be examined in more detail in the conclusion of this chapter to argue that it was in

this period that the influence by the external became of paramount motivational relevance.<sup>202</sup>

### **Muldoon and the Middle East: A Grocer-Consumer Policy?**

“New Zealand was a small country far from the major scenes of international conflict such as the Middle East ... we tended to follow the positions adopted by other countries ‘like us’ in respect to such issues.”<sup>203</sup>

Prime Minister Robert Muldoon explaining his foreign policy in the Middle East.

Although Muldoon did not hold the Foreign Affairs portfolio officially, in practice he dominated it, just as he did most other parts of his Government. Gerald Hensley has described Muldoon’s approach to foreign policy as being “as scrappy, instinctive and matter of fact as the man himself.”<sup>204</sup> His “blunt, confrontational manner” led Muldoon to make a number of diplomatic gaffes which often left officials in damage control mode, the most infamous of which was when he labelled the US President Jimmy Carter a “peanut farmer from Georgia” and insulted his family.<sup>205</sup> He mistrusted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs whom he regarded as “a bunch of prima donnas and socialists”<sup>206</sup> and told a former staffer that he “did not particularly like the Foreign Ministry ... and he wouldn’t ‘take any nonsense’ from Foreign Affairs.”<sup>207</sup> This antipathy

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<sup>202</sup> ‘The primacy of the external’ is Roberto Rabel’s phrase for this kind of influence. This concept is articulated most clearly in his chapter entitled ‘New Zealand’s Wars’ in Giselle Byrnes (ed.), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 248. Rabel’s use of the term is surprisingly limited. This thesis would seek to elevate it to higher importance than has been ascribed to it previously with a slight modification. I argue that it is perhaps more accurate to label this phenomena the ‘manipulation by the external’ as events here were modified to better fit into global intangible and material patterns.

<sup>203</sup> D. Dunn of the American and Middle East Division to Mr Roberts and Mr McArthur, ‘Knesset Delegation: Call on Prime Minister’, 16 March 1979, *Head Office Files*, 56/277/3 Part 2

<sup>204</sup> Gerald Hensley, ‘Muldoon and the World’, in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Muldoon Revisited*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2004), p. 143

<sup>205</sup> Barry Gustafson, *His Way: A Biography of Robert Muldoon*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000), pp. 217-218

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215

<sup>207</sup> Simon Murdoch, ‘Muldoon in the World’, in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Muldoon Revisited*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2004), p. 155

was reciprocated, particularly by Frank Corner, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, who had been an advocate of Kirk's idealist approach to foreign policy issues and who felt "despair and frustration at the premature death of both Kirk and the policies he had initiated, pursued and come to symbolise in international affairs."<sup>208</sup>

Muldoon's mental map for making foreign policy decisions was based upon his wartime experiences and he had a deep sentimental attachment to Britain whom he continued to call the 'Mother Country' throughout his period as Prime Minister.<sup>209</sup> As Ian McGibbon explains, Muldoon's cabinet was the last to be made up of World War II veterans and it was notable for the way it "failed to perceive, indeed actively resisted, changing social attitudes."<sup>210</sup> Muldoon did not share the romantic fascination with Israel that his Labour predecessors held and moreover harboured a certain degree of prejudice against Israel due the Jewish terrorism against Britain in Palestine. He made a number of insensitive remarks about Israel and Jewish people in general, including an incident where he referred to Israeli President Menachem Begin as a "terrorist" shortly before the arrival of a new Israeli Ambassador to New Zealand.<sup>211</sup> The Ambassador made a vehement defence of his President on National Radio in response, which gave the issue an even greater public profile. Muldoon incurred the ire of the New Zealand Jewish community by imploring them to be more "objective" towards the Middle East dispute in an address on the Jewish New Year.<sup>212</sup> Finally, he was quoted in the *Evening Post* criticising US President Carter for "wooing" the Jewish vote and labelling the Israeli policies on Jerusalem as "very foolish".<sup>213</sup> This attitude was not shared by all National Party voters. One wrote to Foreign Minister Talboys to express grave concern that Muldoon was unsympathetic to Israel's security concerns. He asked how "New Zealand (a

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<sup>208</sup> Gustafson, *His Way*, p. 215

<sup>209</sup> Hensley, *Muldoon and the World*, p. 144

<sup>210</sup> Ian McGibbon, 'New Zealand Defence Policy' in Bruce Brown (ed.), *New Zealand in World Affairs: 1972-1990*, (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999), p. 114

<sup>211</sup> Ya'akov Morris, 'Morning Report Transcript', Date not Recorded, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 2

<sup>212</sup> J. Preston, 'Notes from Meeting Between Ambassador of Israel Mr Y. Morris and Secretary of Foreign Affairs', 10 October 1980, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 2

<sup>213</sup> *Evening Post*, 'Carter's 'wooing' of Jewish vote doesn't sit well with Muldoon', 29 October 1980, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 2

small country itself, although luckily not surrounded by fanatical neighbours) [could] wish to see Israel's borders reduced to a situation where she can no longer defend herself?"<sup>214</sup>

According to Simon Murdoch, Muldoon's foreign policy revolved around his "concerns and fears about the New Zealand economy and its future."<sup>215</sup> These fears were based largely upon the implications of Britain's accession to the EEC in 1973 which "necessitated a radical diversification of the New Zealand economy, export products and overseas markets."<sup>216</sup> They also revolved around the threat posed by the oil shocks. As noted previously, the first oil shock in 1973 had forced the Kirk Government to reach out diplomatically to various Middle Eastern states. The second oil shock occurred under Muldoon's Government in 1979 in the wake of the Iranian Islamic Revolution. After this, Foreign Minister Brian Talboys declared that "nothing is traditional anymore, we are on our own."<sup>217</sup> New Zealand began to cultivate a 'special relationship' with Saudi Arabia based on both import and export incentives.<sup>218</sup> This relationship was deemed so important that in 1980 New Zealand's state-owned Broadcasting Standards Authority refused to screen the British film *Death of a Princess* because of concerns that it would upset the Saudis. The film told the fictional story of the public execution of a Saudi princess and her lover after a charge of adultery and was based on the actual life of Princess Masha'il. The reason given by the Broadcasting Standards Authority was that "it was a distortion of Saudi values."<sup>219</sup>

To address these growing economic insecurities, Muldoon elevated increased and diversified trade as the core national interest to be pursued by the diplomatic service. In 1980 he declared that "[o]ur foreign policy is trade. We are not interested in the normal foreign policy matters to any great extent, we

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<sup>214</sup> P. P. Drucker to B. Talboys, 'Letter: re: Israel', 31 July 1980, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 2

<sup>215</sup> Simon Murdoch quoted in Capie, *Constructing New Zealand in the World*, p. 23

<sup>216</sup> Gustafson, *His Way*, p. 220

<sup>217</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 222

<sup>218</sup> It is important to view this relationship in the context of the close ties shared between Saudi Arabia and the United States, particularly as New Zealand National Governments have tended to seek closer ties with the allies of the United States.

<sup>219</sup> Abadi, *New Zealand-Israeli Relations*, p. 476

are interested in trade.”<sup>220</sup> This resulted in an uproar within Foreign Affairs as the new policy created deep cleavages between professional diplomats and their more trade focused colleagues. The Consul-General for Bahrain, George Horsburgh, in an exceptional move, even wrote to Wellington attacking the application of the policy in the Middle East. He questioned whether New Zealand had “jumped from the British frying pan into the Iranian fire?”<sup>221</sup> and furiously maintained that “we cannot build a Middle East policy on a grocer-consumer basis.”<sup>222</sup> The supremacy of the trade interest was further illustrated in 1980 when New Zealand not only refused to impose a trade embargo on Iran despite the request of the United States, whose embassy had been taken hostage by Iranian students, but also retained its embassy in Tehran which had opened in 1975.

The indirect effect of the trade policy on New Zealand’s relations with Israel was substantial. Trade with the Arab nations far surpassed trade with Israel, and the diplomatic relationship reflected this disparity. In 1977 in Cairo for example, Muldoon met with Mahmoud Riad, the Secretary General of the Arab League, who was “delighted to assist in arranging meetings with Arab leaders” to discuss increasing the trade connections but never sent any senior Ministers to Israel.<sup>223</sup> Seventy percent of New Zealand’s oil came from the Middle East and the region, especially Iran and Iraq, provided a market for forty percent of New Zealand’s meat.<sup>224</sup> New Zealand had several diplomatic missions in Arab states that lobbied Wellington to ensure that no moves were made to open New

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<sup>220</sup> David McCraw, ‘New Zealand’s Foreign Policy Under National and Labour Governments: Variations on the ‘Small State’ Theme?’ *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 1, 1994, p. 14. Sidney Holland had pursued similar policies, but it seems that Muldoon’s policies had a far greater impact on the New Zealand – Israeli relationship.

<sup>221</sup> New Zealand Consulate General Bahrain, ‘New Zealand and the Middle East: Do We Have a Policy?’ 29 July 1981, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 22

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Notes on Meeting: Muldoon meets with Secretary-General of the Arab League (Mahmaoud Riad) Cairo’, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1977, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 16

<sup>224</sup> Wellington to Washington, ‘Visit of US Congressmen: Sinai MFO’, 12 August 1981, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 22

It is also important to note that the US had a longstanding relationship with Saudi Arabia, Iran (until 1978), and Egypt. National Governments have consistently sought better relations with the US as a foreign policy goal, and to a limited extent, this desire may have influenced the selection of trading partners in the region. This concept will be re-examined later in this essay when the impact of the US on attitudes towards Israel is briefly discussed.



Zealand missions in either Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. The New Zealand Charge d’Affairs in Baghdad, I. G. Eskrigge, for example argued that “New Zealand needs better relations with the Arab countries than it does with Israel” and suggested that a better move would be to make a gesture to the Palestinians. As he explained, “they, after all, are the people in greater need of sympathy and practical help. That they are not receiving enough from their brother Arabs is all the more reason for countries like ours to encourage a fairer deal for them from the Israelis.”<sup>225</sup>

In 1979 an Israeli Knesset delegation visited New Zealand led by then Speaker and future Prime Minister Yitzchak Shamir. The delegation called upon Muldoon in his parliamentary office and were witnesses to a puzzling incident that succinctly illustrates his antipathy towards Foreign Affairs staff as well as his leadership style. Unable to remember New Zealand’s official policy towards the PLO, Muldoon asked the Israeli Ambassador, Yaakov Morris, to summarise it, despite the presence of a New Zealand Foreign Affairs official who would have been able to give a more than adequate answer.<sup>226</sup> Muldoon was able to discuss the state of the Israeli economy with a much greater level of confidence, noting how the war between Egypt and Israel had been very damaging to the economies of both states. The official record of the meeting notes that we went on to add that the peace accord between Israel and Egypt was a courageous move from Egypt’s President Anwar El Sadat “inter alia because the President was risking the loss of financial support from the other Arab states.”<sup>227</sup>

Ambassador Morris was a tenacious and outspoken advocate of Israel. He did not fit the stereotypical image of an Israeli diplomat as he was originally from Ireland and published a book of his poetry entitled *I Met Four Gulls*.<sup>228</sup> Morris

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<sup>225</sup> I.G Eskrigge to Secretary of Foreign Affairs Wellington, ‘Middle East: New Zealand/Israel’ 16 July 1979, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 2

<sup>226</sup> D. Dunn of the American and Middle East Division to Mr Roberts and Mr McArthur, ‘Knesset Delegation: Call on Prime Minister’, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1979, *Head Office Files*, 56/277/3 Part 2

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ya’akov Morris, *I Met Four Gulls and Other Poems*, (Wellington: New Zealand Jewish Chronicle Press, 1982). Some of the poems by Morris offer political commentary about New Zealand and New Zealanders. One extract from his poem ‘Kiwi Vacation’ reads: “In Wellington offices deserted, / In shops, but a few people show, / While the West is crisis alerted, / The Kiwis just don’t want to know. / Embassies are all in a flurry, / Urgent cables bombard from home, /

frequently appeared on the radio and in newspapers and was not afraid to make statements that embarrassed the New Zealand Government. One such incident involved directly criticising the New Zealand Government's policy on the PLO on National Radio. Officials raged against this "less than distinguished intervention", "total impropriety" and "infringement of the rules that govern diplomatic behaviour" and raised the matter with the Foreign Minister, Warren Cooper.<sup>229</sup> Morris also engaged in public spats with New Zealand University Students Association representative Don Carson who complained to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the "vitriolic attack" and engaged the help of a solicitor.<sup>230</sup> (Carson would go on to become the leading advocate of the Palestinian cause in New Zealand, eventually founding the Wellington Palestinian Group.) After the incident Morris received a phone call from the Foreign Ministry's Chief of Protocol "in which he was informed of our hope that situations of this kind could be avoided in the future."<sup>231</sup> Foreign Affairs officials in New Zealand were clearly exasperated by the diplomatic strategies of Morris with one unidentified staff member asking, "how much rope is to be given to this joker?"<sup>232</sup>

In a 1981 interview with Mohammad Salamawi, a journalist from the Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahrām*, Muldoon made the indiscreet comment that "our policy would be closer to that of the Arab world than it would be to the Jewish persuasion. And if you had to say which side, I think that would be the best analysis of it."<sup>233</sup> This attitude was borne out in practice, for example when it

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Seeking info and answers hurried, / But ministers and staff all roam / So diplomats have to be patient, / Play with stamps, golf, or try bowls, / Whatever their fate, they must hibernate, / Till the Kiwis return to their roles." Another poem derides the UN for its perceived failings. Entitled 'Lower than the Dead Sea' it reads: "There was nothing lower / On this earth / Than the Dead Sea / Until the world / Gave birth / To deliberations / Of the United Nations." The book of poetry was illustrated by the then Mayor of Wellington, Michael Fowler who was a close friend of Morris.

<sup>229</sup> Foreign Affairs staff, 'Scribbled notes on the transcript of a radio interview with Ya'akov Morris', 6 – 8 May 1982, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 3

<sup>230</sup> C.J Gosling to Mr. Talboys, 'Letter', 5 February 1979, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 2. The NZUSA stands for 'New Zealand Union of Student Associations'

<sup>231</sup> Secretary of Foreign Affairs to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 'Alleged Defamation of a Former Officer of NZUSA by the Israeli Ambassador', 27 June 1979, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 2

<sup>232</sup> J. Preston to Mr. Parkinson, 'Letter', undated, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 2

<sup>233</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Transcript of Interview between Mr Mohammed Salamawi and Robert Muldoon', 10 September 1981, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 22

came to organising official visits. In one incident in 1982, Foreign Affairs staff worried about a planned visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Shamir due to the concern that it would “tend to confuse public understanding of New Zealand’s interests in the Middle East.”<sup>234</sup> In any event, their concern was unnecessary. Shamir postponed the visit due to the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon.

Israel invaded Southern Lebanon in response to the PLO’s attempted assassination of the Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Shlomo Argov. Due to the high Lebanese civilian casualties in the conflict, Israel was strongly condemned for its actions in the UN. New Zealand officials in New York reminded Wellington that failure to make a strong statement in the UN would certainly be noticed, and commented that it would “accord with New Zealand’s traditional stand if we were to speak on behalf of a small country and its helpless population.”<sup>235</sup> The statement that was eventually made in June 1982 strongly condemned Israel. It maintained that “the scale of [Israel’s] response has been frighteningly disproportionate”, argued that a necessary precursor to peace was “realisation of the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestine people” and finally urged Israel to “live up to its responsibility to act as an acceptable neighbour.”<sup>236</sup> Only twenty years earlier this same language would have been used in Israel’s favour, but its use of force and its perceived unwillingness to follow international law had hardened diplomatic attitudes. The official response from the New Zealand Government was to give \$50,000 in aid, split between the International Red Cross and the UNRWA for Palestinian refugees.<sup>237</sup>

The invasion of Lebanon was also noted with dismay by members of the public, some of whom were moved to write to Cooper, Ambassador Morris and Muldoon. The majority supported the condemnatory tone the Government had taken against Israel, with a large number coming from religious groups like the

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<sup>234</sup> G.R Horsburgh, ‘Visit of Israeli Foreign Minister’, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1982, *Head Office Files*, 56/277/3 Part 2

<sup>235</sup> New York to Wellington, ‘Security Council: Israel’s Invasion of Lebanon’, 8 June 1982, *Head Office Files*, 277/2/5 Part 2

<sup>236</sup> New Zealand Statement to the UN, 26 June 1982, *Head Office Files*, 56/277/3 Part 2

<sup>237</sup> W. E Cooper, ‘Question for Oral’, 4 August 1982, *Head Office Files*, 277/2/5 Part 2

Quaker Society and the Young Women's Christian Association. A couple of the letter writers urged the Government to go further than it had by expelling the Israeli Ambassador. They noted that this would not be uncharacteristic from a Government who had expelled the Argentine Ambassador over the Falklands dispute. N.W. Nyer for example noted that the Falklands dispute had resulted in no civilian casualties or damage to property, whereas in the Lebanon war "thousands of civilians were killed, injured and made homeless [but] ... the Israeli Ambassador has remained in New Zealand and continues to use the local press for what can only be described as propaganda exercises in trying to justify the actions of his country's armed forces."<sup>238</sup> Based on the party's historic and ongoing activist tradition, there is not unreasonable to assume that many members of the Labour Party, although not identified in the letters, would have shared these anti-war sympathies.

During this period, the plight of the Palestinians was becoming increasingly publicised and Foreign Affairs noted that, "we and others are reviewing our attitude to the Palestinian problem."<sup>239</sup> Muldoon doubted the legitimacy of the PLO, as he was inclined to think them purely a terrorist organisation, but he conceded that "[t]hey've shot their way to respectability, like most of the others I suppose."<sup>240</sup> Foreign Minister Warren Cooper surprised many commentators when he made the first unofficial effort by a New Zealand Foreign Minister to engage with the PLO, meeting their Australian representative Ali Kazak in 1982. For veteran Palestinian campaigner Don Carson, this was a significant step towards adopting a more balanced position in the Middle East because it was "a conservative Minister in a Western Government meeting someone who was clearly a representative of the PLO ... [despite] a broad Western consensus that you don't have any association with the PLO because that would upset the Israelis."<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> N.W. Pryor, 'Letter to Mr Cooper', 5 July 1982, *Head Office Files*, 56/277/3 Part 2

<sup>239</sup> Wellington to New York, 'UN General Assembly: Plenary: Item 25: Middle East', 6 December 1979, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP 3/11/15 Part 19

<sup>240</sup> Mr Templeton to Mr Scott, 'Extract: Letter Personal and Confidential', 27 February 1976, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, NYP3/11/15 Part 16

<sup>241</sup> Interview with Don Carson, Founder of Wellington Palestinian Group, (Wellington, 26 January 2010)

In Opposition from 1975 to 1984, Labour had begun to formulate policies that increasingly shifted support away from Israel. One of these moves was a declaration in the Auckland Party Conference of 1983 to recognise the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.<sup>242</sup> In response to the decision, a Jewish Council pamphlet decried the move, saying it was voting for “violence and extremism” and expressing “grief that the long recognised values held in common between Jewish tradition and the Labour tradition - values of democracy, social justice, moderation, the seeking of rational solutions - seem to have been ignored.”<sup>243</sup> A strong pro-Palestinian lobby group was also forming in New Zealand, which found sympathetic ears within the Labour Party. This lobby was comprised of people like Don Carson who had a strong interest in Palestine since his days as a student representative at NZUSA. Another key figure, Canterbury University academic Ron Macintyre, edited the *New Zealand Aotearoa Palestine Review* and lobbied the Government about Palestinian issues. Several of Macintyre’s articles and commentaries were sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who kept copies in their archives. This shift within the Labour party, while initially only reflected in arcane party remits and resolutions would become much more important when Labour returned to office in 1984.

### **The Fourth Labour Government: The Mouse that Roared?**

“Well they don’t deserve uncritical support and they haven’t deserved it for a long time.”

Russell Marshall, former Foreign Minister, on Israel in an interview, 2009<sup>244</sup>

Muldoon’s Government, undone by its reluctance to make changes in domestic or foreign policy, paved the way for David Lange’s Labour Government to sweep into power in 1984. Lange was the first New Zealand Prime Minister who was

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<sup>242</sup> New Zealand Labour Party, ‘International Affairs Remits 23 and 24’, *Conference Report*, 1983

<sup>243</sup> New Zealand Jewish Council, ‘Statement of the Auckland Jewish Communities Response to the Auckland Regional Labour Party Conference Resolutions Concerning the PLO’, *Educational Papers*, No. 12, 1983

<sup>244</sup> Marshall, Interview

from the 'baby boomer' rather than the 'RSA generation'.<sup>245</sup> His image of Israel was consequently shaped, not by images of the Holocaust, but by the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the war in Lebanon, and a degree of awareness of the plight of the Palestinians. Upon coming to power the Lange Government minimised the relevance of the traditional connection to Britain but explained that they "did not want to replace it with dependence on the Americans."<sup>246</sup> This desire for a more independent path, culminated with the adoption of the nuclear free policy which put the government at odds with Washington. Indeed, as Malcolm McKinnon explains, in discussions of New Zealand's international affairs, the Fourth Labour Government's nuclear stance policy has often been treated as being almost synonymous with the achievement of independence in foreign policy.<sup>247</sup>

The Fourth Labour Government moved away from the emphasis the Muldoon Government had placed on trade and in doing so, Lange's Government was more in tune with the idealism of the Kirk years. Whilst in Opposition, Lange had derided Muldoon's policy towards the Middle East saying sarcastically in an interview with an American newspaper that New Zealand had become an "international harlot. We could do so much more business with the Arabs, therefore Arabs good, Israel bad."<sup>248</sup> Russell Marshall, Foreign Minister under Lange from 1987 to 1990, makes the point that Lange himself did not meet with any Palestinians and Stephen Rainbow also notes that "Lange was never anti-Israel."<sup>249</sup> The cordial relationship with Israel remained unchanged during the first term of the Labour Government, overseen by Foreign Minister Frank O'Flynn who was staunchly supportive of the Jewish state. However, during Labour's second term, Russell Marshall, a former Methodist Minister, took over the Foreign Affairs portfolio and set about recalibrating the relationship. According to Marshall, this shift received the support of the Foreign Ministry. As

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<sup>245</sup> There are exceptions to every generalisation. As already demonstrated, Muldoon who unlike Lange *was* of the RSA generation, did not harbour any romantic attachments towards Israel either.

<sup>246</sup> David Lange, quoted in Capie, *Constructing New Zealand in the World*, p. 27

<sup>247</sup> McKinnon, *Independence and Foreign Policy*, p. 278

<sup>248</sup> Evening Post, 'Carter's 'wooing' of Jewish vote doesn't sit well with Muldoon', 29 October 1980, *Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 2

<sup>249</sup> Rainbow and Marshall, Interview

he later explained in an interview: "I've always had the impression that Foreign Affairs had always wanted a more balanced stance towards Israel and that happened to coincide with my view."<sup>250</sup> Then Trade Minister Mike Moore explained the new position in an interview saying that, "from being too romantically in support of Israel, we went too far against, and then we fell back into a more so called even-handed approach. But the even-handed approach is basically what the UN says. The even-handed approach was always anti-Israel."<sup>251</sup>

By the time of Lange's second term the romance associated with Israel from within the Labour Party had largely dissipated. Marshall argues that this change was both fairly universal among Labourites but had come about incrementally, "unwittingly we'd come to a conclusion without even having talked about it particularly."<sup>252</sup> A degree of support for Israel remained from certain Labour members, notably the former Foreign Minister Frank O'Flynn and long-time party activist David Zwartz, but this was a minority view within a party which saw itself as progressive and consequently tended to side with the underdog, which had become Palestine.<sup>253</sup> During Labour's time in Opposition, a new generation of leaders had risen to the fore who were shaped by different experiences and held different perspectives from the older Labour generation. Whereas the older generation would associate Israel with the Holocaust and budding socialism, the baby boomers were more inclined to be influenced by the plight of the Palestinians and see Israel as a belligerent, as it had been in the war in Lebanon.

Generalisations obscure the complexities behind generational changes in attitude outlook, but Jock Phillips argues that certain grand trends can be drawn out to differentiate the baby-boomer generation from their predecessors. He argues that the shifting values between the old and new generation were influenced by urban culture and cosmopolitanism. Corresponding with the shift

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<sup>250</sup> Marshall, Interview

<sup>251</sup> Interview with Mike Moore, Former Prime Minister 1990 and Minister of Trade', (Auckland, 11 April 2010)

<sup>252</sup> Marshall, Interview

<sup>253</sup> Rainbow, *Changing Attitudes*, p. 3

towards urbanism, there was a rise in university education. The members of the Fourth Labour Government were the most educated government that had existed in New Zealand's history, comprising of several lawyers, three historians and many others of academic or professional backgrounds.<sup>254</sup> The backdrop of international student protest movements in the late 1960s and the shared experiences of protests against French nuclear testing created a new political consciousness that was enhanced by the rise of feminism. A feeling of anti-Americanism emerged, compounded by the Vietnam War, which was reflected in the attitudes towards Israel because "at that time, the US was about the only major party supporting Israel, so it was like an automatic carry-over to oppose Israel as well."<sup>255</sup> This generation was also more aware of racism, a prejudice that was fervently attacked during the 1981 Springbok Tour. Attempts to label Zionism as racism and to associate Israel with South Africa in the UN may have contributed towards critical attitudes towards Israel from many who "had come to political consciousness in the 1960's [and who] would be ministers in David Lange's Cabinet."<sup>256</sup>

New Zealand's staunchly anti-nuclear policy further undermined the bilateral relationship. There were strong suspicions that Israel was producing nuclear weapons. These were never confirmed by Israel but most of New Zealand's political circles assumed Israel had such weapons.<sup>257</sup> This issue became inflamed when Israeli nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu, who was about to blow the whistle on Israel's nuclear weapon activities in Dimona to London's *Sunday Times*, was kidnapped and forced back to Israel where he was imprisoned for treason.<sup>258</sup> The New Zealand anti-nuclear movement was vocal in its condemnation of Vanunu's arrest and imprisonment and remains so

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<sup>254</sup> Michael Cullen, 'Opening Remarks' in Margaret Clark (ed.), *For the Record: Lange and the Fourth Labour Government*, (Wellington: Dunmore Publishing Ltd, 2005), p.9

<sup>255</sup> Zwartz, Interview

<sup>256</sup> Jock Phillips, 'A Nation of Two Halves', *New Zealand Listener*, Vol. 204, No. 3452, 2006

<sup>257</sup> Foreign Minister Don McKinnon, explained in an interview that "we always assumed they did have that capacity."

<sup>258</sup> Duncan Campbell, 'The Guardian Profile: Mordechai Vanunu', *The Guardian*, Friday 16 April 2004, available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/apr/16/israel>, accessed 3 September 2009



today. Green MP Keith Locke has even suggested giving a New Zealand passport to Vanunu upon his release.<sup>259</sup>

Whilst the link between various international issues like apartheid, Palestine, nuclear weapons, de-colonisation and so on, may seem tenuous at first, these issues were connected in a complex and intangible way and are integral to understanding attitude formation within individuals motivated by social justice concerns. According to journalist and former anti-nuclear activist Nicky Hager, on any given protest march or rally, half of the people marching were there for other things too. Protests are an opportunity for likeminded people to discuss a plethora of other topics of interest in a charged political setting. In this way, people who were concerned about nuclear issues might well have been thinking about the treatment of Palestinians. As Hager explains, “if you try to pick [these issues] apart it doesn’t quite make sense, but if you see them as a cluster then there is a consistency there.”<sup>260</sup> These attitudes came through in concrete terms as remits from regional bodies to modify the foreign policy of the Labour Party. One such example was Remit 6.1.5 in 1989 that called for the Labour Party support at every opportunity of the “self-determination of the peoples of East-Timor, West Papua, Kanaky, Eritrea, South Africa and Palestine.”<sup>261</sup>

As noted earlier, an influential figure on Israel during the Lange Government’s second term was Foreign Affairs Minister Russell Marshall. Rainbow refers to “several diplomatic ‘incidents’” that occurred under Marshall which he argues “left no doubt, in the minds of the Israelis at least, that a qualitative shift had occurred in New Zealand’s traditional ‘even-handed’ approach in the Middle East.”<sup>262</sup> Ron McIntyre similarly makes a reference to “a certain measure of injudicious comment” towards Israel during the time of the Lange

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<sup>259</sup> Keith Locke, ‘Give Israeli Nuclear Whistleblower a Kiwi Passport’, *Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand Website*, 20 March 2005 <http://www.greens.org.nz/press-releases/give-israeli-nuclear-whistleblower-kiwi-passport>, accessed 3 September 2009

<sup>260</sup> Hager, Interview

<sup>261</sup> New Zealand Labour Party, ‘Remit 6.1.5’, *Conference Report 1989*

<sup>262</sup> Rainbow, *Changing Attitudes*, p. 1

Government.<sup>263</sup> One of these incidents was undoubtedly when Marshall was quoted in the *Evening Post* referring to PLO leader Yasser Arafat as “President Arafat.”<sup>264</sup> While Marshall maintains that it was “making a mountain out of a molehill”, for the New Zealand Jewish community it was a sign that New Zealand was moving away from its former friendliness towards Israel.<sup>265</sup> In 1989 Marshall met with Arafat at a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade, an encounter described as “friendly and cordial.”<sup>266</sup> When Israeli President Chaim Herzog visited New Zealand in 1986, he received a lukewarm welcome in comparison to the reception he had in Australia, then under the leadership of the explicitly pro-Israel Bob Hawke. Another incident involved the delaying of accreditations of New Zealand Ambassador Ken Cunningham to Israel, in response to the situation within the occupied territories in 1988.<sup>267</sup>

Stephen Levine, an academic and former editor of the *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, has claimed there was an informal boycott on ministerial visits to Israel during the Lange years.<sup>268</sup> According to Marshall this was not a formal policy, it was simply that “there was no particular reason to go” and there were other more important strategic states to visit.<sup>269</sup> The only Cabinet Minister to visit Israel during the six years of the Fourth Labour Government was Margaret Shields - a fairly junior Minister of Women’s Affairs. She went to Israel as part of a trip to meet with women’s groups that included travel to Europe and the United States.<sup>270</sup> However, the Government went to great pains to ensure the media understood that her visit would be used as an opportunity for New Zealand’s non-resident Ambassador to Israel, Ken Cunningham, to convey “fairly bluntly” a message of disapproval about the treatment of Palestinians.<sup>271</sup> Shields was heavily criticised by the *New Zealand-Aotearoa Palestinian Review*

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<sup>263</sup> Ron Macintyre, ‘New Zealand and the Middle East: Policy Evolution and War in the Gulf’, in Ron Macintyre (ed.) *New Zealand and the Middle East: Politics, Energy and Trade*, (Christchurch: University of Canterbury Press, 1985), p. 105

<sup>264</sup> Andrew Beach, ‘NZ-PLO Dialogue Boosted’, *Evening Post*, 20 June 1989

<sup>265</sup> Marshall, Interview

<sup>266</sup> Ron Macintyre, ‘Editorial’, *New Zealand/Aotearoa Palestine Review*, No. 2, 1989, p. 3

<sup>267</sup> Rainbow, *Changing Attitudes*, p. 6

<sup>268</sup> Levine, Interview

<sup>269</sup> Marshall, Interview. The example given by Marshall was the necessity to visit Europe each year for trade reasons.

<sup>270</sup> Simon Kilroy, ‘Visits to Israel Begin Again’, *The Dominion*, 11 May 1989

<sup>271</sup> Jacqui Lynch, ‘Palestinian Recognition Urged’, *The Dominion*, 21 June 1989

for her comments that her understanding of the conflict had taken a “quantum leap,” despite the fact that she had not met with any Palestinians.

Compounding the unease towards Israel felt by many Labourites was the presence of an antagonistic Israeli Ambassador in Wellington, Shmuel Ovnat. Personal relations between the ambassador and political figures were tepid at best. Shortly after the Labour Party lost the election, Marshall recalled an anecdote where, he claims, at a farewell to the Soviet Ambassador, the Israeli Ambassador almost spat on him and said “you, you anti-Semite!”<sup>272</sup> There was also no strong Israeli counter-narrative to offset Israel’s growing alienation in New Zealand. The Zionist lobby in New Zealand was described as “hopeless” by David Lange and the local Jewish population remained a quiet and relatively politically inactive community.<sup>273</sup> The *Jewish Chronicle* was one of the few vehicles for pro-Israeli dialogue and a 1989 editorial (written by Stephen Levine) entitled “A Spreading Stain” derided what it called the “fashionable disdain for Israel” and explicitly attacked Marshall for his views on Palestine describing them as “romantic attachments.”<sup>274</sup> In contrast, by this time a well-organised and vocal pro-Palestine organisation had developed with Canterbury University lecturer Ron Macintyre at its fore. This group used *The New Zealand/Aotearoa Palestinian Review* to lobby the government to give diplomatic recognition to Palestine, arguing that inequality of status had left Palestine in a much weaker negotiating position.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Rainbow, *Changing Attitudes*, p. 20

<sup>274</sup> Stephen Levine, ‘A Spreading Stain’, *The New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, August 1989

<sup>275</sup> Macintyre, *New Zealand/ Aotearoa Palestine Review*, No, 2, 1989

## **Bolger and McKinnon**

### **Open Political Dialogue**

At the time I was in power ... Israel had burnt off their friends. They seemed to do it with indifference.<sup>276</sup>

Jim Bolger, interview Wellington 24<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Jim Bolger's National Government, elected in 1990, quickly announced its aversion to the purportedly moral foreign policy espoused by the Lange Government. As Foreign Minister Don McKinnon put it, "we cannot afford to be hindered by a single ideological approach, to take the moral high ground on every international issue of the day, or feel we have some divine right to lecture the world."<sup>277</sup> In practice however, there was only minimal change: New Zealand's foreign policy was notable more for its continuity in policy rather than any major changes along ideological grounds. The outspoken criticism of Israel from Marshall disappeared under the Bolger Government, but the exercise of even-handedness did not change substantially.

The new foreign minister Don McKinnon, was initially unprepared for the role, having served as shadow Minister for Health during his time in Opposition. Consequently, he relied heavily on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for advice, particularly during the early years of his time as Foreign Minister. As he explained in an interview, "I was stepping into territory which I had really just no knowledge of" but "I was well trained by New Zealand Foreign Affairs officials."<sup>278</sup> As argued earlier, the goals of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were resolutely based on even-handedness, a preoccupation with international law, and the extension of New Zealand's trading interests. The Ministry encouraged McKinnon to exercise balance and maintain dialogue when dealing with the Middle East.

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<sup>276</sup> Interview with Jim Bolger, Prime Minister 1990-1997, (Wellington, 24 February 2010)

<sup>277</sup> Don McKinnon quoted in McCraw, *New Zealand's Foreign Policy Under National and Labour*, p. 23

<sup>278</sup> Interview with Sir Don McKinnon, Foreign Minister 1990-1999, (Wellington, 28 May 2010)

Bolger reiterated the argument that Labour Party attitudes had made an about face by the time he was in power: “there is no question that the Labour Party had been very sympathetic towards the Israeli position ... what they saw happening to the Palestinians made a lot of them move across.”<sup>279</sup> His Government attempted a nuanced change, in that it focused more on what he called an “open political dialogue” rather than open support for one side over the other.<sup>280</sup> In 1992 Don McKinnon made a carefully planned four-day visit to Israel to signal the new approach. It was the first visit by a senior member of the New Zealand Government to Israel in seventeen years. According to McKinnon, Foreign Affairs officials argued that a visit to Israel should be made about every five years. After the hold on visits throughout the Muldoon and Lange Governments, McKinnon suggested that, “Foreign Affairs was quite keen that we shake hands again.”<sup>281</sup> While in Israel he met with Prime Minister Shamir and Foreign Minister David Levy.<sup>282</sup> The Bolger Government retained the traditional support for a two state solution as part of an even-handed approach and as a means to resolve grievances throughout the Middle East. As McKinnon explained, “I am quite convinced that the existence of an active Palestinian state would take quite a lot of the angst out of the Middle East.”<sup>283</sup>

Jacob Abadi has suggested the Bolger Government’s concern to break away from Labour’s position on Israel was also influenced by the National Party’s desire to improve ties with the United States. Closer ties with Israel would help “promote Wellington’s standing in the eyes of the influential Jewish community in the United States.”<sup>284</sup> McKinnon rejects this, arguing that “it’s a pretty tenuous link” but there is no doubt that governmental statements on events in the Middle East were notably less strident compared with the statements of the Fourth Labour Government, which can be assumed to be at least partly a result of US lobbying. In 1993 Israel launched *Operation Accountability*, attacking Hezbollah fighters in Southern Lebanon. This caused the largest loss of life in

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<sup>279</sup> Bolger, Interview

<sup>280</sup> McKinnon, Interview

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> The Jerusalem Post, ‘Meeting with New Zealand’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 15 March 1992

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Abadi, *New Zealand-Israeli Relations*, p. 477

the region since the 1982 Lebanon War. McKinnon's press release simply argued that "[t]he New Zealand Government cannot condone indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas by Hezbollah or by the Israeli Defence Force in retaliation" rather than describing such attacks as disproportionate or singling out one side as culpable over the other as had been done in the past.<sup>285</sup> McKinnon also said that "[a]ggression, particularly against civilian targets, can only fuel bitterness and make a peaceful solution more difficult."<sup>286</sup> This rather bland rhetoric clearly did not carry the same diplomatic weight and levels of condemnation against Israel that the former government employed.

Bolger's government had the good fortune to be in office when viable peace deals were being forged in the Middle East, allowing them to be more genuinely even-handed than their predecessors. In October 1991 the United States and Soviet Union jointly sponsored the Madrid Conference which included delegates from Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. The outcome eventually led to peace deals between Israel and Jordan, as well as Israel and Palestine. In 1993 the Oslo Accords were signed between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin in the presence of US President Bill Clinton and two years later a more comprehensive agreement, Oslo II, was signed. Though the agreements disintegrated in the forthcoming years, tensions flared with Lebanon, and Palestinian suicide bombings increased, by this stage the attention of the New Zealand Government had been diverted to Asia and the Pacific. Israel was simply not a priority once McKinnon felt he had re-established a balanced approach to the relationship.

In 1998, as part of the new policy of supporting 'open political dialogue' McKinnon oversaw the appointment of New Zealand's first Honorary Consul in Israel, Gad Propper. McKinnon preferred the appointment of an Israeli with an interest in the position rather than an expatriate New Zealander, believing that a "local person will always have far more clout and influence than an expat New Zealander."<sup>287</sup> McKinnon says the appointment came about after a lobbying campaign in New Zealand: "we did have a community here who wanted us to

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<sup>285</sup> Office of the Prime Minister, 'New Zealand deplore escalation of violence in Lebanon and Israel', 29 July 1993, *New York Permanent Mission Files*, 3/11/14 Part 4

<sup>286</sup> Hank Schouten, 'Israeli Attacks Anger Local Lebanese', *The Evening Post*, 16 April 1996

<sup>287</sup> McKinnon, Interview

show more active representation with Israel. Geoff Braybrooke, the MP for Napier, he was very steeped in this.”<sup>288</sup> Braybrooke was the Chairman of the New Zealand-Israel Friendship Society in Parliament. The appointment of Propper as Consul provided New Zealand with a degree of representation in Israel to balance the numerous embassies in the Arab states and Iran. McKinnon also held low-key meetings with visiting PLO officials when they came to New Zealand. One such visit was with Farouk Kaddoumi, the PLO equivalent of a Foreign Minister who came to New Zealand and Australia shortly before the Oslo Accords in 1995. Press reports described Kaddoumi as “a significant spokesman for the Palestinian community” and reported that McKinnon “had had a ‘fruitful’ discussion with him on several issues.”<sup>289</sup>

One of the most significant foreign policy achievements during the Bolger years was New Zealand’s securing of a seat on the UN Security Council in 1993 and 1994. The Security Council frequently sees discussion of events concerning Israel and its neighbours, meaning that the Middle East began to get attention from New Zealand officials beyond what would be the norm. However, during these two years the Security Council was preoccupied with the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the genocide in Rwanda and other global crises. Unusually, the Middle East rarely appeared on the Council’s agenda. The tumultuous period of the first Intifada (spontaneous Palestinian uprising) had ended and relations between Israel and Palestine were in a period of détente. However, it is important to note that merely being voted onto the Security Council would undoubtedly have required a certain degree of diplomatic lobbying that would have involved discussions with Arab states whose main preoccupation was the Israel-Palestine dispute. However, given that files from this period remain closed, it is impossible to know if there was pressure on New Zealand from states to toe a particular line in exchange for votes.

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> The Dominion, ‘PLO’s Kaddoumi on Low-Key Visit’, *The Dominion*, 5 April 1995

## **New Zealand in the world, or the world in New Zealand?**

The first chapter in this thesis discussed the small role that New Zealand played in shaping world affairs in regards to the formation of Israel. This chapter moves beyond this to examine the role that developments outside New Zealand played in shaping this country's policies towards the Middle East. According to David Capie, a 'nationalist' tendency in the historiography of New Zealand's foreign relations from scholars like Keith Sinclair has resulted in a tendency to emphasise local factors and underestimate the importance of the external variables on foreign policy decision making.<sup>290</sup> This chapter consequently looks outwards, attempting to demonstrate how global economic realities as well as international human rights and social justice movements combined to refocus New Zealand's policy towards the Middle East.

In his study of New Zealand at war, Roberto Rabel coined the phrase the 'primacy of the external' to suggest that "[b]efitting its location on the geographic periphery of world affairs, New Zealand's participation in war has been reactive to developments abroad."<sup>291</sup> This notion of a reactive response to international conflict seems broadly applicable to New Zealand's response to the Middle East during the 1970s. New Zealand did not set about proactively developing a Middle East strategy before the Oil Shocks in the 1970s. The policy of 'even-handedness' was the only official position, but as was demonstrated in Chapter Two it had little success. Instead, the most significant change to New Zealand's policy in the region came about as a result of others' economic and security goals, Britain's attempts to enter the EEC and the effects of the Oil Boycott. New Zealand's reaction to these events was swift and dramatic and continued to shape the application of 'even-handedness' towards the Middle East from the 1970s until well into the Bolger years.

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<sup>290</sup> David Capie, 'New Zealand and the World: Imperial, International and Global Relations', in Giselle Byrnes (ed.), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press of Australia and New Zealand, 2009), p. 574

<sup>291</sup> Roberto Rabel, 'New Zealand's Wars' in Giselle Byrnes (ed.), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press of Australia and New Zealand, 2009), p. 248



Prior to the Oil Shocks, New Zealand policy in the Middle East was shaped largely by the actions of individuals with a passion for international issues and sometimes more particularly with strong feelings of support for Israel. There was no diplomatic representation in any Middle Eastern countries and to the extent that there was political attention or knowledge about the wider Middle East outside the Ministry of External Affairs, this was likely to be shaped by war time experiences. The Israel relationship was an exception to this because of strong Labour Party ties through the Socialist International and other international organisations, as well as a history of international involvement and participation through the UN. The twin oil shocks of the 1970s however changed this situation dramatically. As oil supplies shrank, governments across the world wrestled with policy responses. New Zealanders were not immune, suffering huge rises in petrol prices and, under Prime Minister Muldoon, the introduction of 'car-less days'. This insecurity quickly prompted New Zealand to look to develop significant diplomatic links with oil-producing Arab states and Iran and, as a result, to reduce the importance of the relationship with Israel. The shocks also created a wealthier market in the Middle East for New Zealand exports, something which helped strengthen ties considerably. Given that Muldoon's priority in foreign affairs was economic security, he set about obtaining this in the most pragmatic way possible, creating strong trade and diplomatic relations with the Arab states and Iran and neglecting Israel.

Despite the presence of a forceful and vocal Israeli Ambassador, these economic pressures brought about a significant change in the relationship, and in the absence of a passionate or strong local advocate inside Government, began to dominate the formulation of New Zealand's Middle East policy. At the same time, this change of material circumstances was compounded by an ideological shift away from Israel on the part of many New Zealanders who perceived themselves as motivated by social justice concerns or internationalism. This was particularly the case on the left. Unease over Israel's actions in Lebanon was exacerbated by a concerted public diplomacy campaign by the PLO, which meant that Israel lost a significant proportion of its traditional Labour support base by the end of this period.

It was not only Labour voters who reacted against Israeli policies in the Lebanon and towards Palestine, but it was within branches of the Labour Party that these feelings were concretely expressed in Party Remits calling for more robust policies against Israeli actions. This theme is examined in greater detail in the next chapter, which explores how the left has steadily moved away from Israel since the mid 1970s, something that became starkly apparent during Helen Clark's fifth Labour government.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Competing notions of “even-handedness”**

This chapter addresses a period of considerable turbulence in the New Zealand – Israel relationship. It begins with an assessment of relations under the Clark Government and continues through until the presentation of credentials by the new Israeli Ambassador Shemi Tzur to the New Zealand Governor-General in May 2010, a development that occurred under the new National-led government of John Key. After the relative calm of the Bolger years, the stance the Clark Government took on Israel-Palestine issues, coupled with a serious breach of international law by Israel, convinced many observers that the relationship had reached its nadir. The election of Key’s conservative government in 2008 restored the relationship to something like the closeness it had enjoyed under the Bolger Government, but National also came under criticism for taking a soft approach to Israel.

A particularly interesting feature of this period is the concept of even-handedness. Both Governments claimed to be representing the ideal of even-handedness, yet both were periodically criticised by the Opposition for not being balanced or even-handed. An analysis of recent UN resolutions demonstrates the relative success of “even-handedness”, but I argue the degree to which its interpretation is debated and the microscopic attention paid to changes in tone or voting, is demonstrative of the fragility of this situation.

Unlike the previous chapters, official documents covering this period of the bilateral relationship remain classified and unavailable to researchers. Consequently, this chapter relies extensively on information gleaned from interviews conducted with well over thirty individuals ranging from former Prime Ministers, former and current Foreign Ministers, Members of Parliament from several political parties, former and current diplomats, historians, journalists, business representatives, lobbyists, Jewish community

representatives, activists and the Israeli and Palestinian Ambassadors.<sup>292</sup> Additional information was retrieved from requests lodged under the Official Information Act. Not surprisingly, the details of some events remain unclear, partly because of differing recollections, and sometimes because of ongoing political and diplomatic sensitivities. The account offered here is accordingly 'through a glass darkly' and will need to be revisited when the official archives are opened in a few decades time. Consequently, this chapter should be viewed merely as the first step towards a history of the New Zealand – Israel relationship during the Clark and early Key years.

## **The Fifth Labour Government**

### **Left-wing and Loathing?**

One of the things that attracts me to Israel is that it has retained its democracy. But that by itself is not sufficient. They also have to maintain their values and principles around international human rights.

Phil Goff, former Foreign Minister, Interview 2010<sup>293</sup>

For commentators who felt the relationship between Israel and New Zealand had reached a nadir under David Lange's fourth Labour Government, things only got worse during Helen Clark's fifth Labour Government (1999-2008). A number of events in the first two terms of the government stand out for special attention: the Mossad spy scandal, Foreign Minister Phil Goff's visit to meet Yasser Arafat, a proposed visit to New Zealand by Holocaust denier David Irving and the desecration of three Jewish cemeteries in New Zealand. Further compounding this sentiment was the marked absence of the Israeli Embassy in New Zealand. It had been closed in 2002 for financial reasons and because of

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<sup>292</sup> The Palestinian Ambassador is not officially recognised as such, but in practice operates as the representative of the Palestinian people and is invited to diplomatic events. The Palestinian representative to New Zealand is based in Canberra and also covers the Pacific Islands.

<sup>293</sup> Interview with Phil Goff, Minister of Foreign Affairs 1999-2005, (Wellington, 27 May 2010)

that, Israeli views on many of the key issues that came up during this period were not widely understood.

Things changed somewhat in Helen Clark's third term. After the 2005 election, Labour needed the support of Winston Peters' New Zealand First Party to remain in power. Peters joined the government on the condition that he was made Foreign Minister. He was a self-described supporter of Israel and worked to improve the relationship, but his efforts ultimately did not convince those members of the Jewish community who I interviewed that much change had been made.

As I have argued in the earlier chapters, when it comes to New Zealand's foreign policy towards Israel, the role of a small number of individuals explains more than grand concepts of generational difference or party ideology. This claim needs to be qualified somewhat when it comes to the case of the Fifth Labour Government. Merely focusing on the party leadership obscures what I argue were important dynamics within the Labour Party as a whole. These in turn need to be seen in the broader context of changing attitudes towards Israel among left wing parties globally.

Since the mid-1970s, liberal publications, both worldwide and within New Zealand, that had stridently supported the establishment of Israel began questioning its policies and actions.<sup>294</sup> Around the world, political leaders increasingly began to make critical statements within the UN about the situation in the Palestinian Territories. These sentiments were echoed by New Zealand representatives. In international socialist, student, or left-wing conferences and summits, criticisms of Israel became commonplace and these attitudes were reported back by participants to the New Zealand Labour Party. Respected international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) like Amnesty International, Crisis Watch and Oxfam also increasingly took a strong stance on various Israeli policies. Some supporters of Israel have denigrated these NGO reports, arguing that the organisations are one-sided. However, this

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<sup>294</sup> See for example, an analysis of the changing views of the American left-wing periodical *The Nation* in Ronald and Allis Radosh, 'Righteous Among the Editors: When the Left Loved Israel', *World Affairs*, Summer, 2008, pp. 65-75.

demonstrates an unwillingness to admit at least partial Israeli culpability in many events and is often in fact based on a misrepresentation of the reports.<sup>295</sup> These changing international attitudes combined to influence the New Zealand political scene to the extent that one Jewish Labour Party member in the mid-1970s was occasionally “attacked for his pro-Israeli views by those who considered these incompatible with active Labour Party membership.”<sup>296</sup>

As noted earlier, prior to the Six-Day War, much of New Zealand’s left-wing had a reflexive sympathy for Israel that was based on their perception of Israel as a small socialist state built on the back of a horrific tragedy. This perception began to change slowly after the war, particularly as the plight of the Palestinians became better known, and especially after the political makeup of Israel changed and a right-wing party, the Likud, was elected into government in 1977. To a large extent, this greater awareness about Palestine came about as a result of the technological changes in the media which made it easier for New Zealanders to observe and engage with events beyond New Zealand. Matt Robson, a former Labour, Progressive and Alliance MP, explains that “suddenly you have unfavourable footage of the Israelis ... [and] gradually it got harder and harder to have a unified picture of Israel as the victim, these other people as nasty aggressors.”<sup>297</sup> Israel was often in the news and unfavourable reporting began to cast doubt on the image many Labourites had instinctively held. While these trends were by no means unique to New Zealand, it is possible to argue

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<sup>295</sup> For an article that criticises the actions of such Non-Governmental Groups see Gerald M. Steinberg, ‘Soft Powers Play Hardball: NGOs Wage War Against Israel’, *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2006, pp. 748-768. Steinberg’s assertions are not always justified. See for example Human Rights Watch, ‘Statement to the Urgent Debate on the Raid on the Flotilla’, 2 June 2010, available from <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/06/02/statement-flotilla-attack>, accessed 20 June 2010. This statement records a ‘serious concern about the double standards of many of the member states that have called for this session. We are concerned not because they called for this session, but because many of them have opposed or argued against the Human Rights Council taking strong action in other situations where human life has been lost. Human rights violations are deplorable wherever they take place and whoever the perpetrator. We call on those states to honor the mandate of this body. The civilian lives lost in Thailand, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, Somalia, and many other places in the world also merit the council’s attention.’

<sup>296</sup> Ann Beaglehole, *Facing the Past: Looking Back at Refugee Childhood in New Zealand*, (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990), p. 245

<sup>297</sup> Interview with Matt Robson, Former MP Labour, Alliance and Progressives, (Telephone Interview, 24 July 2010)

that they may be slightly more important, given the absence of strong pro-Israel lobby groups to counter their effects.<sup>298</sup>

Although a certain amount of sympathy for Palestine was expressed in the speeches of earlier governments, the rising tide of international concern over Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories can be seen most clearly in the attitudes and statements of the Fifth Labour Government. A study of Labour Party Conference remits throughout the twentieth century outlines the steady growth of this sentiment. Labour's traditional policy towards Israel gradually began to shift in the mid-1970s and then changed sharply in the 1980s. One remit in 1975, for example, congratulated the Rowling government for its decision to vote to give the PLO observer status in the UN and accompanied this by urging the government to recognise the rights of the Palestinians to "independence and nationhood in their own country."<sup>299</sup> During the 1970s, these sentiments were still tempered by the personal ties that connected the Israeli and New Zealand socialist movements. Guests to the 1979 Labour Party Conference for example included visiting Israeli Labour Party members who spoke warmly of the "sympathy and support of our New Zealand friends" to the recorded acclamation of the conference.<sup>300</sup>

By 1983, however, conference participants had to be reminded by Rowling before discussing the proposed foreign affairs remits that "the Party has consistently taken a strong line on the sovereignty of the State of Israel" and that recognition of the PLO had historically been opposed due to their record of terrorism and failure to recognise Israel.<sup>301</sup> Rowling also raised the issue of the 1982 Beirut Massacre for which he stated "the Israeli military authorities must bear considerable responsibility, [and it] has reflected badly on the Israeli cause" but reminded delegates that "a great section of the Israeli people

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<sup>298</sup> This hypothesis was supported by Murray McCully who explained that in Australia and USA both major parties have been strongly supportive of Israel due to lobby and interest group pressure. These groups are minimal in New Zealand, allowing attitudes towards Israel to be differentiated much more clearly along ideological lines.

<sup>299</sup> New Zealand Labour Party, 'Remit 114', *Conference Report 1975*, p. 53

<sup>300</sup> New Zealand Labour Party, 'Fraternal Delegations', *Conference Report 1979*, p. 52

<sup>301</sup> Bill Rowling, 'Foreign Affairs: Introduction to Remits', *Conference Report 1983*, p. 23

themselves were outraged by that event.”<sup>302</sup> Rainbow argues that Rowling “spoke for the traditional Labour Party position on Israel, but his generation was in decline in the party.”<sup>303</sup> In any case, a relatively balanced remit was sponsored by Phil Goff that recognised Israel’s right to security, the rights of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to self-determination, and condemned Israeli colonisation [settlements] in the West Bank as an obstacle to peace.<sup>304</sup>

The firmest support for Palestine came at the end of this decade. Remit 231 in 1987 included eight specific clauses pertaining to Israel/Palestine. These included a call for human rights to be upheld, an end to deportations, an end to the harassment of Palestinian journalists and trade unionists, and denounced the “collective punishment” of citizens in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>305</sup> The following year the criticisms became more vociferous. The links between Israeli and South African nuclear cooperation were condemned alongside grave concerns expressed about the occupation of the Palestinian territories.<sup>306</sup> In 1989 support for Palestine came to its most concrete expression when the conference moved that the Labour Government “afford the State of Palestine full diplomatic recognition” – a remit that was duly carried, but not executed by the Government who lost the election the following year.<sup>307</sup> It should be noted however as a concluding caveat that the international relations remits were also focussed on many other international causes like Vietnam, Nicaragua, apartheid, nuclear weapons, Chile and East Timor – Palestine was by no means an exceptional cause within the Labour Party.

As was previously noted, Stephen Rainbow traces his conversion to conservatism predominantly to his passion for Israel. He grew increasingly concerned with how “fickle the left can be in its support for the latest underdog”

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Rainbow, *Changing Attitudes*, p. 11

<sup>304</sup> New Zealand Labour Party, ‘Remit 86’, *Conference Report 1983*, pp. 26-27

<sup>305</sup> New Zealand Labour Party, ‘Remit 231’, *Conference Report 1987*, p. 59. ‘Collective punishment’ remains the phrase used by MFAT to describe the current situation in the Gaza Strip.

<sup>306</sup> New Zealand Labour Party, ‘Remit 210’, *Conference Report 1988*, p. 37

<sup>307</sup> New Zealand Labour Party, ‘Remit 6.1.5’, *Conference Report 1989*, p. 35



when it began side with Palestine over Israel, or at least express a more forceful critique of Israeli policy.<sup>308</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly a left-wing tendency to support the underdog was forcefully critiqued by conservative sources interviewed for this thesis. A number of National Party representatives argued that left-wing movements support 'fashionable' social justice causes but do not understand the big picture, portraying them as simplistic and naive. The Chairman of the New Zealand Israeli Parliamentary Friendship Group, National MP Paul Hutchinson, stated for instance that he was "concerned that Labour's views, may not be all that sophisticated."<sup>309</sup> The current Foreign Minister Murray McCully similarly expressed the view that "a lot of these guys have been brought up attending Socialist International conferences and getting involved in fashionable Middle Eastern causes involving pro-Palestinian leanings. It's been a feature of the Labour Party of New Zealand."<sup>310</sup>

These charges are rejected by Labour Party MPs, several of whom have had a longstanding and professional involvement in the region. Grant Robertson, a former diplomat, for example explained that he understood "the nuance of the position and how you have to be careful about what you say. New Zealand has traditionally been in that kind of middle space and in my own view I would like to see a two state solution."<sup>311</sup> It was conceded however that Labourites generally tended to be more pro-Palestinian than their conservative counterparts. According to Robertson "within the Labour Party there is a strong support for the Palestinian cause – probably a stronger support for the Palestinian cause than there is for Israel if you want to put it in a kind of dichotomous sort of situation."<sup>312</sup> This was certainly recognised by the Palestinian Ambassador, Izzat Abdulhadi, who explained that "there is a bias at least from the Australian side, and in New Zealand now with the National government, it is also conservative. With the Labour Party it was different,

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<sup>308</sup> Rainbow, Interview

<sup>309</sup> Interview with Paul Hutchinson, MP National Party & Chairman New Zealand Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group, (Telephone Interview, 19 January 2010)

<sup>310</sup> Interview with Murray McCully, Minister of Foreign Affairs 2008-, (Wellington, 10 March 2010)

<sup>311</sup> Interview with Grant Robertson, Labour MP, (Wellington, 20 January 2010)

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

under Helen Clark. She was a very brave woman. She expressed her own ideas clearly.”<sup>313</sup>

In some ways, the criticism from the left can be seen as being partly in accordance with Malcolm McKinnon’s notion of loyal dissent. Precisely because of the early concern with and attention to Israel, many left-wing groups, including those in New Zealand, felt intrinsically involved in the small state’s politics. They wanted to see a state - which after all was perceived to come from the same ‘club of nations’ and more concretely, which belonged to the same regional Socialist Organisation - live up to its full potential as a responsible international citizen. Labour MP David Shearer argues that the Labour Party’s commitment to human rights and international law has dictated the position it has taken on the dispute rather than any sense of global politicking. He says that “as soon as you allow politics in, you either stand by international law and a set of rules, or you don’t. New Zealand benefits more as a small country if people adhere to international law”.<sup>314</sup>

Returning now to the specific analysis of the relationship under the Fifth Labour Government, I argue that by this point New Zealand had indeed become a “harsh critic of Israel” as former *Jewish Chronicle* editor Mike Regan asserts, but, when viewed in light of international and historic trends, this was hardly surprising. Colin James describes the foreign policy of the Clark government as an “accentuation of a multilateralist and activist foreign policy”.<sup>315</sup> Clark placed a strong emphasis on the promulgation of a rules-based order system with the UN and other international organisations at its centre. She explained that her objective as Prime Minister was “to see New Zealand positioned as a principled,

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<sup>313</sup> Interview with Izzat Abdulhadi, Palestinian Ambassador, (Canberra, 10 June 2010). This last point is interesting as supporters of Israel interviewed for this research argued that policies towards women in the Occupied Territories and Arab states more generally were abysmal and therefore argued that left-wing attitudes were simplistic and naive. This claim was firmly denied by the Ambassador and his female Deputy-Secretary, Suheir Gedeon. Their ideal concept of a Palestinian state was one that served as a progressive model for other Arab states to follow, especially on women’s issues. One of their key public diplomacy measures to counter a perception of Palestine as a backward state was to encourage student exchanges to foster more dialogue and understanding between themselves and other nations, particularly in the West.

<sup>314</sup> Interview with David Shearer, Labour MP, (Wellington, 25 March 2010)

<sup>315</sup> Colin James, ‘Norman Kirk, Robert Muldoon, David Lange, and Helen Clark – and John Key’, *Political Science*, Vol. 60, No. 2, 2008, p. 100

constructive, and engaged international citizen.”<sup>316</sup> Her practise of multilateralism did not always follow a strict model of international idealism, Clark was a highly pragmatic leader, sending troops to support the war in Afghanistan and forging bilateral free arrangements with a host of nations including China.

Paul Morris views the foreign policy of the Clark Government as a realignment based on Clark’s desires to forge an independent foreign policy. He stated that “it’s a very comprehensive package but curiously it doesn’t give us independence. It gives us independence from Britain, America and Australia. But it actually just aligns us with a set of equally rigid and dogmatic concerns.”<sup>317</sup> He argues that this realignment had implications pertaining to the stance Clark and Goff would take over Palestine, implying that they would be more unthinkingly pro-Palestine based on their stances with other political causes. In response to such claims, Colin James argues that alignment is in fact an integral part of forging independence, as societies are “not made resilient by self-absorption and turning inwards. ... That at most would be independence *from* the world which amounts to isolation, a negative.”<sup>318</sup> Clark’s preferences for multilateralism and international law created a logical support for the Palestinian cause due to its deep entrenchment within international law and its social justice implications.

It should be pointed out that the two main foreign policymakers in the Fifth Labour Government both had significant historic interests in Israel and Palestine. Clark had had a longstanding involvement in Palestinian affairs since her participation in the Labour Party Group on Palestine. Phil Goff, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had a fairly detailed understanding of Israel based on his long interest in the region, which dated back to the late 1970s when he, like many other young Labourites, stayed on Israeli kibbutzim.<sup>319</sup> His interaction with

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<sup>316</sup>Helen Clark, ‘New Zealand’s Foreign Policy’, Speech to the Oxford Union, University of Oxford, October 2 2007

<sup>317</sup> Morris, Interview

<sup>318</sup> James, *Norman Kirk, Robert Muldoon, David Lange, and Helen Clark – and John Key*

<sup>319</sup> Goff, Interview. Goff stayed on two Kibbutzim in the north of Israel: Rosh HaNikra and Kibbutz Cabri

Israelis through the International Union of Socialist Youth created a sympathy for a country whose people had “come through hell and had come together to try to create security for themselves with a strong spark of Western social idealism about the nature of the country they wanted to create.”<sup>320</sup> However, over time Goff’s views on the dispute began to change and he became concerned with Israeli policy, explaining that “while they’d suffered persecution, the Palestinians, who had become stateless, were the new underclass, the new persecuted, the people who had lost their rights of citizenship and who had lost the land that had been their homeland.”<sup>321</sup> This familiarity with Israel helped Goff take a strong stand on Israeli issues and meant he was not afraid to make controversial gestures.

In 2003 Goff visited Yasser Arafat in the West Bank. The visit was not well received by Israeli leaders and as a result Goff was denied access to certain high-profile Israeli politicians, notably Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. David Zwartz describes this visit as “a bit of bravado really” but something which the Jewish community found “unpleasant” due to Arafat’s terrorist policies against Israelis.<sup>322</sup> However, Goff justified the trip on the basis of both New Zealand’s right to determine its own foreign policy and a determination to maintain even-handedness in the region. He later said, “I could not allow one side to determine who I should or shouldn’t meet on the other side. That would be absolutely improper.”<sup>323</sup> David Shearer, who was working for the UN in Israel and Palestine at the time, accompanied Goff on his visit through the West Bank. He explained the rationale behind the visit: “[i]f you go there as a Foreign Minister and you are meeting Israelis then you also meet Arafat. Almost no visitor to that region would dare not to...”<sup>324</sup> He added that it had been the right decision at the time because if Goff had bowed to Israeli pressure not to see Arafat

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Zwartz, Interview

<sup>323</sup> Phil Goff, Interview

<sup>324</sup> Shearer, Interview

“basically our foreign policy is not our own anymore, we’re being dictated to.”<sup>325</sup>

The encounter with Arafat received a certain degree of criticism within New Zealand, especially from the right-wing Association of Consumers and Taxpayers (ACT) Party. Richard Prebble, an ACT politician and long time supporter of Israel, was furious about it, saying it was “yet another example of the Clark government’s incompetent, student-like, anti-American foreign policy.”<sup>326</sup> Another ACT politician, Rodney Hide went further, saying that the rationale behind the visit was simply that “Arafat’s sort of cool to lefties. He’s like Che Guevara.”<sup>327</sup> Goff later admitted that Arafat had come across as a somewhat tragic figure, someone who dwelt too much on history and seemed incapable of moving forwards. This recognition did not convince Goff that he had erred; he merely stated that he “came to the conclusion that [Arafat] was probably not a person with the ability to move the Middle East situation forward. He’d played an important role, he wasn’t purer than driven snow, but neither were the Israelis.”<sup>328</sup>

Another source of friction was the New Zealand government’s criticism of Israel’s ‘security wall’ in the West Bank, deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice. Goff described the erection of the wall as “tantamount to annexation.”<sup>329</sup> He added that, “the hardships experienced by Palestinians because of the wall were disproportionate to any benefit Israel received through protection of its citizens.”<sup>330</sup> New Zealand was in good company in declaring the wall illegal and calling for its demolition. When a vote was held in UN calling for its removal only six states voted against: Israel, the US, Australia and three small Pacific Island nations. Interestingly, there is a history of Pacific states supporting Israel within the UN, and Israel recognises their voting importance. According to Pasifika Labour MP Luamanuvao Winnie Laban,

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> New Zealand Herald, ‘Goff criticised over Arafat meeting’, *New Zealand Herald*, 27 May 2003

<sup>327</sup> Interview with Rodney Hide, Leader ACT, (Wellington, 31 March 2010)

<sup>328</sup> Goff, Interview

<sup>329</sup> Phil Goff, ‘NZ welcomes Court ruling on Israeli wall’, *Parliament Press Release*, 12 July 2004, available from <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/node/20299>, accessed September 1 2009

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

lobbying for votes is a political reality in the Pacific and Israel is one of many states that seeks support in the region: “at the end of the day countries get lobbied.”<sup>331</sup> The relationship with the Pacific Islands is one that Israel believes can be improved with the help of New Zealand. Paul Morris argues that one factor of importance in the New Zealand – Israel relationship is the ability of New Zealand to act as a gatekeeper to the Pacific as it “had influence and knowledge and could open doors in the Pacific.”<sup>332</sup> In a 2010 interview, the new Israeli Ambassador to New Zealand explained that he would eventually be seeking cross accreditation to several states in the Pacific including Tonga, Samoa, the Cook Islands and Niue.<sup>333</sup>

Despite the tensions discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the lowest point in the bilateral relationship undoubtedly came in 2004 when Mossad agents were caught attempting to fraudulently obtain New Zealand passports with the aid of a local Jewish man, Tony Resnick. One agent attempted to assume the identity of a quadriplegic man. This was not the first time Israel had been involved in passport fraud. In 1997 two Israeli agents had been caught with Canadian passports during an attempted assassination of a Hamas operative in Jordan.<sup>334</sup> Nicky Hager, an investigative journalist with extensive ties into the intelligence community speculated that the passports gathered from New Zealand were to be used in similar covert missions. He claims that Mossad was simply collecting resources in New Zealand to use elsewhere in future operations: “they wanted the capacity to kill someone in Lebanon, or track someone in Eastern Europe, [...] and having a New Zealand passport is a very useful thing to have.”<sup>335</sup>

Following an extensive investigation, New Zealand police arrested two agents, but two others, including the New Zealand citizen involved, Resnick, managed to flee the country. The two captured agents, Uriel Kelman and Eli Cara were tried in a New Zealand court and pleaded guilty to the charges of “dishonestly

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<sup>331</sup> Interview with Luamanuvao Winnie Laban, MP Labour and Vice-Chair of New Zealand Parliamentary Friendship Group, (Wellington, 11 February 2010)

<sup>332</sup> Morris, Interview

<sup>333</sup> Tzur, Interview

<sup>334</sup> Paul McGeough, ‘The Plot to Kill Hamas: How Canada Got Tangled in an Israeli Assassination Plan that Reverberates in the Mideast Still’, *The Toronto Star*, 28 February 2009

<sup>335</sup> Interview with Nicky Hager, Investigative Journalist, (Wellington, January 26 2010)

attempting to obtain a New Zealand passport” and for “participation in an organised criminal group”.<sup>336</sup> They were sentenced to six months in jail and ordered to pay the Cerebral Palsy Society \$50,000 in recognition of the people targeted in the operation. The fine was later paid to the charity organisation through the courts system.

According to Nicky Hager, Cara had a history of bungling spy operations and had been involved in a similar botch-up in Cyprus in 1998 when a local fisherman discovered an intelligence collecting operation Cara was leading. This caused a major scandal in Cyprus and led to the two agents being arrested with minor charges.<sup>337</sup> In the New Zealand case, despite pleading guilty, initially Cara and Kelman intended to appeal their sentence, but this plan was eventually abandoned.<sup>338</sup> Kelman and Cara were released after serving three months of their sentence, as is normal under New Zealand law. They immediately returned to Israel.

The political response to this incident was swift and dramatic. Prime Minister Helen Clark was reportedly furious at the assault on New Zealand’s sovereignty and froze high-level diplomatic contacts between the two states. A channel of communication needed to remain open in order to obtain an apology from Israel, but according to Simon Murdoch, the then Secretary of Foreign Affairs, the freezing of contact meant that “until we received what we regarded as a satisfactory accounting for what this had all been about from the Government of Israel, and a public expression of accountability and regret, we were simply not going to conduct business as usual with them.”<sup>339</sup> According to Paul Morris, Clark took this policy very seriously. He recalls a dinner in the Parliamentary restaurant Bellamy’s after the scandal, where Clark refused even to meet with a visiting Israeli official Morris had brought along as a guest. He explained that this attitude was “a visceral thing for her”, suggested that “it was pretty

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<sup>336</sup> Information obtained from Crown Law under the Official Information Act 1982, March 22 2010

<sup>337</sup> Nicky Hager, ‘Mossad Man’s History of Bungles’, *Sunday Star Times*, February 27 2005

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Murdoch, Interview

absolute and it was a very strong objection.” He suggested her reaction may have gone beyond the advice of her advisors or of MFAT.<sup>340</sup>

For some New Zealanders, the passport incident brought back memories of another incident of state-sponsored clandestine activity: the 1985 bombing of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland Harbour. David Shearer makes this point, saying the scandal “evoked kind of *Rainbow Warrior* [motifs]: foreign agents coming in .... it had all those magic ingredients which made it a fantastic political issue.”<sup>341</sup> The *Rainbow Warrior* analogy frames the New Zealand response as a small country, courageously standing up to a larger or more aggressive state. There were some similarities between the two incidents. In both cases, incompetence led to the agents getting caught. Indeed several interviewees suggested that for the Israel, the worst part of the Mossad scandal was not the passport fraud *per se*, but how poorly its agents performed. Former Foreign Minister Winston Peters, for example, joked how the whole thing was “deeply embarrassing to the Israeli government because it was so amateurish.”<sup>342</sup>

The Mossad scandal was clearly a gross violation of New Zealand sovereignty, and a breach of international law, but some saw a degree of hypocrisy in the New Zealand government’s response. David Zwartz recalled a similar case that involved the forging of passports by two Kuwaitis with a link to the Kuwaiti government. While this case appeared in the media, it did not achieve the same level of governmental or media frenzy.<sup>343</sup> Moreover, some accused Clark of taking the incident too personally.<sup>344</sup> Labour MP Shane Jones recalled that

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<sup>340</sup> Morris, interview

<sup>341</sup> Shearer, Interview

<sup>342</sup> Interview with Winston Peters, Minister of Foreign Affairs 2005-2008, (Auckland, April 12 2010)

<sup>343</sup> New Zealand Herald, ‘Refugees Jailed for Huge Passport Conspiracy’, *New Zealand Herald*, 21 December 2004

<sup>344</sup> Mike Regan in an interview stated that: “I have an image of Helen Clark getting off a plane and giving an interview for television after the so-called Mossad Spy incident, but her face was a picture of hatred. Three hours later the cemetery at Bolton St was defaced and destroyed. ... I see those desecrations as a direct result of Clark’s disapproval of Israel and the idiots who did it equated Israel to Jews because the grave sites have nothing what-so-ever to do with Israel. None of them have anything to do with Israel, except in their eyes they saw approval to do something against Israel.” Interview with Mike Regan, Editor of the *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle* 1998-2008, (Wellington, 28 January 2010)



before a 2006 visit to Israel, Clark “was at pains to remind me that they had done this to us” and “was obviously stewed up about it, there’s no doubt about that”. He conceded, however, “Helen was capable about getting fired up about all manner of bloody things. I wouldn’t single out the Israelis.”<sup>345</sup> It was not only Clark that responded strongly. National Party Foreign Affairs spokesman Lockwood Smith cancelled a planned trip to Israel. In his view, it was no longer appropriate for him to make the visit as a representative of the Opposition.<sup>346</sup> Moreover, at the international level there was considerable support for New Zealand’s strong stance. Shearer said that it “gave us a level of kudos around the world, again in diplomatic circles, that was never public, which certainly I picked up in Jerusalem talking to diplomats in the area.”<sup>347</sup> Explanations that attribute the tough line specifically to Clark, fail to acknowledge the wider political support for her decision at the time.

After the Mossad agents were jailed, Clark issued a statement condemning the actions of the Israelis in question, saying that the “New Zealand Government views the act carried out by the Israeli intelligence agents as not only utterly unacceptable but also a breach of New Zealand sovereignty and international law.”<sup>348</sup> She also said the case was a “sorry indictment” of Israel and an “unfriendly action” that had “seriously strained the relationship and it will remain strained for some time.”<sup>349</sup> The fact that Clark ‘outed’ the spies as members of an Israeli intelligence agency was noteworthy, as Israel maintained throughout the scandal that they were Israeli citizens rather than intelligence agents. Even in its apology, Israel only referred to acts committed by Israeli citizens rather than intelligence agents. Goff explained later that the government was “more than one-hundred percent sure [that they were Mossad]

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<sup>345</sup> Interview with Shane Jones, Labour MP, (Wellington, 10 February 2010)

<sup>346</sup> Colin Espiner, ‘Apology Not Enough for PM, Jewish Graves Attacked, Opposition Visit Off’, *The Press*, 17 July 2004

<sup>347</sup> Shearer, Interview

<sup>348</sup> Claire Trevett and Bridget Carter, ‘Angry Prime Minister Hammers Israel’, *New Zealand Herald*, 16 July 2004

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*

because I was contacted by agents of the Israeli Government to say would we back off and not embarrass them?”<sup>350</sup>

The day after Clark’s statement several graves in the historic Wellington Bolton Street Cemetery were desecrated, deeply alarming the New Zealand Jewish community. Tombstones were pushed over and Nazi symbols were daubed on the graves. This attack was followed a few weeks later by a larger desecration at Makara Cemetery, also in Wellington. David Zwartz immediately linked the Bolton Street vandalism to a television interview Helen Clark given the previous night where she had criticised Israel. He claimed that the Government’s response to the passport incident had “triggered the desecration of Jewish graves.”<sup>351</sup> Others agreed. Mike Regan, the former editor of the *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, saw the “desecrations as a direct result of Clark’s disapproval of Israel and the idiots who did it equated Israel to Jews”.<sup>352</sup> A former President of the Auckland Jewish Council spoke of the alarm felt from within the Jewish community and the fears that criticising Israel provoked anti-Semitism, saying that “although there’s no fire, there are little pockets of flames here and there. And they can be fanned.”<sup>353</sup>

The desecrations, according to Zwartz, compelled the Jewish community in New Zealand to become more politically engaged, overcoming a traditional view that it was “better in the interests of the Jewish community not to be involved in politics and to keep our collective heads down so to speak.”<sup>354</sup> At the time of writing, the perpetrators of this crime remain unknown, although police believe at least two people were involved in each desecration.<sup>355</sup> There were suspicions that the culprits belonged to a small local White Supremacist movement, although this was never confirmed, and the investigation remains open, due to

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<sup>350</sup> Goff, Interview

<sup>351</sup> Zwartz, *Israel’s Birthday*

<sup>352</sup> Regan, Interview

<sup>353</sup> Wendy Ross quoted in Graham Reid, ‘Jews uneasy as changes in attitude creep in’, *New Zealand Herald*, 1 August 2004

<sup>354</sup> Zwartz, Interview

<sup>355</sup> Information obtained from the New Zealand Police under the Official Information Act 1982, 5 May 2010

the refusal of the groups and individuals under investigation to cooperate.<sup>356</sup> Despite the accusations made by Zwartz and others, the police did not investigate any links between the Prime Minister's statements on the Mossad passport scandal and the attacks, and did not conclude whether or not the Bolton Street and Makara desecrations were linked.<sup>357</sup>

The acts of vandalism resulted in an outpouring of support for the local Jewish community. There was also a high-level political response to the attacks. Acting Prime Minister Michael Cullen put forth a motion in Parliament on the 10<sup>th</sup> August 2004 that expressed Parliament's "unequivocal condemnation of anti-Semitism, violence directed against Jews and Jewish religious and cultural institutions, and all forms of racial and ethnic hatred, persecution, and discrimination."<sup>358</sup> This motion was unanimously passed in the House. Cullen admitted that the anti-Semitic acts had been blamed on the Government's response to the Mossad scandal (among other things) but warned that "the danger of entering into that area is that it gives some kind of rationale to something that is both evil and irrational, though, sadly, deep-seated in European culture."<sup>359</sup> All seven New Zealand political parties made a comment on the motion, expressing deep sadness about the attacks.

Two of the smaller parties added comments to their formal statements that linked the attacks to Israel in some way. Matt Robson of the left-wing Progressives declared that "when the Parliament stands in solidarity against the hateful bullies and racists ... when there is an attack like this on people, whether they are Jews, Palestinians, immigrants, refugees, ... we will not be disconnected from our common humanity."<sup>360</sup> On the opposite side of the political spectrum, Rodney Hide, leader of the right-wing ACT Party, expressed concern at "the anti-Israel sentiment that is growing in the West. [...] As a democracy ourselves, we must support Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East. Sadly attacks

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Dr Michael Cullen, 'Motions – Jewish Graves and Chapel, Wellington – Vandalism', 10 August 2004, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 619, p. 14715

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Matt Robson, Ibid

on Israel have become another outlet for anti-Semitism.”<sup>361</sup> The Speaker, Jonathan Hunt, then took the highly unusual step of commenting on the resolution himself. He also sent it to the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset.

Around the time of the Mossad scandal and the cemetery desecrations, Wellington’s National Press Club had announced the visit of the controversial historian David Irving, best known for denying the Holocaust. Irving’s proposed visit was viewed with great trepidation by the local Jewish community and compounded the unease caused by the cemetery attacks.<sup>362</sup> When this visit was announced by the National Press Club, two of its members resigned in protest, including veteran peace campaigner Dame Laurie Salas.<sup>363</sup> Ultimately Irving was denied entrance by Immigration New Zealand after he offered a \$1000 reward for the discovery of the people responsible for the cemetery desecrations, coupled with remarks suggesting it was a Jewish or an Israeli act to deflect heat away from the Mossad scandal.<sup>364</sup> Clark said the immigration ban was being upheld because “you’d be asking the Government to take a deliberate decision to ride over the law in favour of someone whose views are damaging to good relationships in the community and that would be an extraordinary thing to do.”<sup>365</sup>

In June 2005, New Zealand finally received an apology for the Mossad Scandal from the Israeli Government. The New Zealand government’s press release explained that “Israel apologises for the involvement of its two citizens in the activities which led to their arrest and convictions in New Zealand.”<sup>366</sup> It also noted that “Israel regrets these activities and commits itself to taking steps to prevent a recurrence of similar incidents in future.” The sincerity of this apology has since come under question, particularly following the January 2010 Dubai assassination of Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, when Mossad agents

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<sup>361</sup> Rodney Hide, *Ibid*

<sup>362</sup> Reid, *Jews uneasy*

<sup>363</sup> Interview with Dame Laurie Salas, Peace Campaigner, (Wellington, 19 February 2010)

<sup>364</sup> Hal Levine and Michelle Geneztsvey, ‘The Wellington Cemetery Desecrations of 2004: Their Impact on Local Jews’, *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, Issue 4/5, Oct 2005-2006, p. 93

<sup>365</sup> New Zealand Herald, ‘Holocaust Denier Irving May Try to Enter NZ Next Week’, *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 2004

<sup>366</sup> Helen Clark, ‘NZ Receives Formal Apology From Israel’, *Beehive Press Release*, 26 June 2005, available from <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/node/23486>, accessed 6 June 2010

used passports belonging to British and Australian citizens.<sup>367</sup> Phil Goff for one doubted the sincerity of the apology. He said, it “was sufficient for us to say we’ll move forward, but was it genuine? No – when you look at what happened with the latest assassination and the misuse of British and American passports.”<sup>368</sup> In addition to the apology, Israel demonstrated its desire to make amends to New Zealand in other less public ways. To Helen Clark’s surprise, it supported her nomination to head the UN Development Programme in 2009. According to former Labour Foreign Affairs spokesman Chris Carter, this showed that the Israeli Government “clearly [...] felt that they needed to make a gesture”.<sup>369</sup>

In 2005, the New Zealand First party leader, Winston Peters, replaced Phil Goff as Foreign Minister. One of his priorities was to improve the relationship with the US that had suffered during the previous years, mainly due to Clark’s refusal to join the coalition forces in the 2003 Iraq War. Peters also claimed that he wanted to restore the relationship with Israel and in his view was successful in this endeavour. He conceded that New Zealand foreign policy, under Goff’s leadership, became unbalanced in the Middle East: “[t]hat’s the position I inherited and that’s the position I changed.”<sup>370</sup> At a 2006 New Zealand-Israel Trade Association Awards night, for example, he informed the crowd that Israel would be “most welcome” to reopen its Embassy in Wellington should it wish.<sup>371</sup> Peters considers himself a friend of Israel. He studied Hebrew at Auckland University as a language requirement for his law degree, and made a study tour to Israel shortly before becoming Foreign Minister. During this visit he spent time with important defence and political figures in Israel, as well as visiting former Israeli Ambassadors to New Zealand.<sup>372</sup> Interestingly though, according to Paul Morris, this feeling of amity was not reciprocated with much

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<sup>367</sup> Paul Maley, ‘Mossad Chief Expelled from Australia Amid Passport Alert’, *The Australian*, 1 June 2010

<sup>368</sup> Goff, Interview

<sup>369</sup> Interview with Chris Carter, Labour MP, (Wellington, 17 March 2010)

<sup>370</sup> Peters, Interview

<sup>371</sup> Winston Peters, ‘New Zealand Israel Trade Association Annual Trade Awards’, Speech, 17 February 2006, available from <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/node/24960>, accessed 3 May 2010. However, at this awards night Peters also declared that the Hamas election victory in the Gaza Strip was an “election result [that] reflected the will of the Palestinian people and must be respected.”

<sup>372</sup> Peters, Interview

zeal by the New Zealand Jewish community. This was apparently due to Peters' inflammatory comments about immigrants and ethnic minorities. Many New Zealand Jews viewed Peters as a rogue, and indeed a loveable rogue, but were wary, because "people who have displayed racial or ethnic prejudice don't stop when it comes to other races and ethnicities."<sup>373</sup> Whatever the views of the local Jewish community, Peters certainly had a more positive view of the New Zealand-Israel bilateral relationship than Clark or Goff.

### **John Key and Murray McCully**

#### **Conservative camaraderie**

The reason for trying to improve the relationship with Israel is because it was in a state of some disrepair relative to the common value sets that underpin our two societies. I felt that we had got off the centre line in terms of our view on the Middle East conflict, so we have had no bigger agenda than that.

Murray McCully, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Shortly before the 2008 New Zealand election, *The Jerusalem Post*, a conservative Israeli newspaper, published an article predicting victory for John Key. It might seem strange that a leading daily in a far off country would take an interest in a New Zealand election, but of particular interest to *The Jerusalem Post* was Key's heritage. The would-be prime minister was the son of Ruth Lazar, an Austrian Jew who escaped the Holocaust as a child by fleeing to Britain.<sup>374</sup> The *Post* proudly extolled the fact that Key was likely to become New Zealand's third Jewish Prime Minister, hinting that this would be beneficial for the New Zealand-Israel relationship. The extent to which Key's Jewish heritage has impacted on the relationship is debatable. In my view, it seems quite

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<sup>373</sup> Morris, Interview

<sup>374</sup> Jackie Len, 'New Zealand Gets Ready to Elect Third Jewish Prime Minister: John Key, Son of an Australian Jewish Woman, Enjoys Big Lead in Polls', *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 August 2008

negligible. When asked about religion, the prime minister's reply is that he is 'relaxed' about it, and if he does attend religious service, it is of Christian rather than Jewish persuasion. However, Key has also said that he felt as though he was part of the Jewish community because his mother had sometimes taken him to synagogue and had been an active community member. Key has never been to Israel although he maintained in *The Jerusalem Post* that he would be interested in going if he became Prime Minister. However, as political commentator Fran O'Sullivan has noted, if Key is to visit Israel he will need to ensure he is not cast "in the role of personally endorsing strategies that are leading many in the Western world to increasingly view Israel as an international pariah."<sup>375</sup>

John Key is of course leader of a centre-right coalition government. Recalling the earlier discussion about international trend for the left-wing to increasingly oppose Israeli Government acts, is it useful to comment briefly on the relatively new romance towards Israel from the political right. In New Zealand, the right is best represented by the ACT Party and by the centre-right National Party. The curious shift from Israel as a left-wing cause to a right-wing fascination is not limited to New Zealand but the New Zealand political right's admiration of Israel is something that has been neglected in previous academic pieces, which focus much more on, and critique, the left. This inattention can also partly be attributed to the relative shortage of scholarship on the attitudes or foreign policy of the National Party in New Zealand in general.

What explains this warmth? One factor is almost certainly a desire to forge a stronger relationship with the United States, although few explicitly frame their concerns in those terms. There are, however, often more complex, intangible, personal factors at play. ACT leader ACT Rodney Hide, for example, visited Israel in 1981 as a youth and was seriously impressed by its fighting spirit. He saw Israel as "an island of freedom and light in this big ocean of darkness and hostility" in the context of their "attitude to individual freedom, and civilised

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<sup>375</sup> Fran O'Sullivan, 'Israel Visit Prickly Issue for Key', *New Zealand Herald*, 5 June 2010

living, science and tolerance.”<sup>376</sup> He added that “it’s not really a thought-out process; it’s more of a gut instinct.”<sup>377</sup> There is also a religious component. The Christian Friends of Israel provide a significant body of support for Israel in New Zealand.<sup>378</sup> This religious dimension is an aspect of the relationship that can only be touched on here, except to point out the likelihood of transnational religious influence on the attitudes of several conservative MPs towards Israel. Attorney-General Chris Finlayson, for example has made several trips to Israel, including a study tour with Shane Jones. Finlayson, who is a devout Roman Catholic, argues that “anyone who is anti-Semitic as a Christian is ripping up the roots of their own church. It seems to me that it’s an absolute paradox that you can accept the Jewish God but deny the Jewish people.”<sup>379</sup>

If the precise nature of John Key’s influence on New Zealand’s Israel policy remains contested, few would deny the role played by Murray McCully in changing the nature of the relationship. Almost immediately after the 2008 election McCully began to recalibrate the tone of the relationship from the New Zealand end. He claimed that the Clark Government had “got itself into a one-sided, pro-Palestinian view of the Middle East” and consequently felt that “there was much need for a fairer, more balanced position to be adopted.”<sup>380</sup>

Undoubtedly many factors have shaped McCully’s views on Israel, among them a visit he made to the country as a Young National in February 1982. McCully was the first New Zealander to be sponsored to Israel under a scheme funded by the Israeli Government and administered by the Australasian Union of Jewish Students targeted at people “who are likely to have a lengthy involvement in politics in their countries”.<sup>381</sup> Other National Party members identified as supportive of Israel by members of the Jewish community who I spoke with include Finlayson, Defence Minister Wayne Mapp, and Trade Minister Tim Groser. Mapp has signified an eagerness to make an official visit to

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<sup>376</sup> Hide, Interview

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Tzur, Interview

<sup>379</sup> Interview with Chris Finlayson, Attorney General, (Wellington, 5 March 2010)

<sup>380</sup> McCully, Interview

<sup>381</sup> Murray McCully to Mr. Talboys, ‘Letter’, 24 September 1981, *Wellington Head Office Files*, 58/277/1 Part 3



Israel in his capacity as Minister of Science and approached MFAT for the purpose of broadening research sector contacts in science and technology.<sup>382</sup>

Like Don McKinnon before him, McCully made an official visit to Israel relatively early into his first term as Foreign Minister as suggested by MFAT. He also visited the West Bank and met with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad but did not request a visit to Gaza to meet with any Hamas representatives. Of his discussions with Fayyad, McCully explained that the Palestinian Authority had “microscopically watched the voting track record on various resolutions [...] and regarded us as fair-minded and balanced in our approach”.<sup>383</sup> He said that they distinguished New Zealand from countries who “have been simply pro-Israeli on everything.”<sup>384</sup> He also met with many high-ranking Israeli officials in government, including President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Leader of the Opposition. McCully acknowledged that these meetings were something Israeli leaders and officials “went out of their way to do as a demonstration of their appreciation”, and surpassed what might normally be expected for a visiting New Zealand Foreign Minister.<sup>385</sup> While in Israel McCully signed a working holiday scheme to allow Israeli tourists to work more easily in New Zealand and to encourage people-to-people links. This was publicised along with his meetings with Israeli leaders, but his visit to Ramallah was unreported in New Zealand and indeed many interviewees were unaware it had occurred.

Rachel Korpus, President of the Zionist Federation of New Zealand argues that conservative governments are more likely to be sympathetic to Israel because “they understand the bigger picture, the East meets West situation.”<sup>386</sup> Such strategic concerns were flagged in an MFAT brief to McCully and Key on the Middle East conflict. The paper argued that the Arab/Israel dispute was one of the main causes of instability in the Middle East, and thus “a significant negative

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<sup>382</sup> Information obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Official Information Act 1982

<sup>383</sup> McCully, Interview

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Interview with Rachel Korpus, President New Zealand Zionist Federation, (Auckland, 10 April 2010)

factor in wider Muslim perceptions of the West.”<sup>387</sup> It went on to argue that the dispute was exploited by Al Qa’ida “as a ‘legitimacy button’ – something to push that will resonate with a large percentage of Muslims as an example of western double standards and antagonism towards Muslims.”<sup>388</sup> Resolving the dispute would therefore help combat extremist forces. It also argued that Israel had become marginalised within international fora and stated that New Zealand felt that the high number of UN resolutions on the dispute was “unjustified, and should be rationalised.”<sup>389</sup>

These sentiments must be contextualised however. New Zealand’s voting record in the UN has not changed substantially despite McCully’s recalibration. According to MFAT officials, there are three voting camps within the UN. The first includes most Non-Aligned states as well as Arab and Muslim countries and considers most significant aspect of the conflict to be the plight of the Palestinians. A second camp is made up of a very small number of states who side with Israel and believe its security to be paramount. This group includes the United States, a scattering of Pacific Island states, and occasionally Australia and Canada. New Zealand belongs to the third camp whose goal is to promote “a middle ground dialogue” and negotiation as the means to achieve a two-state solution.<sup>390</sup> Despite the changes since 2008, New Zealand has not yet sought to reposition itself into the second group, and it seems unlikely that McCully would incrementally make this shift. In the 2010 vote on whether to send the Goldstone Report to the Security Council for example, New Zealand voted alongside many European states in the majority, rather than siding with Australia, the US and Israel. Indeed McCully later commented that “we sit probably more naturally with the Europeans on these matters.”<sup>391</sup>

The most fundamental change, described by MFAT as a “significant shift in our earlier approach” has been a strategy to “be more forthcoming with respect to

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<sup>387</sup> Information obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Official Information Act 1982

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Information obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Official Information Act 1982

<sup>391</sup> McCully, Interview

Israel's ambitions for membership of international bodies".<sup>392</sup> Israel was initially part of the group of Asian states within the UN but was disadvantaged in this group as a high number of member states sought to "frustrate its UN electoral ambitions".<sup>393</sup> It consequently joined the 'Western Europe and Others Group' in the UN on a temporary basis, and has also attempted to join "other like-minded groups".<sup>394</sup> New Zealand's recalibration strategy consequently includes a more proactive approach in supporting Israel's application to the OECD as well as a commitment to join any consensus formed about Israel's attempted membership to western consultative groupings including JUSCANZ.<sup>395</sup> This is a distinct departure in tone from the Clark government, which under Winston Peters blocked the addition of Israel to JUSCANZ in 2006 on the basis that a "genuine consensus" did not exist for such a move despite intense American, Canadian and Australian pressure.<sup>396</sup>

This recalibration of tone does draw the line on issues where like-mindedness is problematic. A submission to McCully in January 2009 noted that Israel's "non-membership of the Non-Proliferation Treaty puts them in a different camp on disarmament issues; and we have similar concerns in the human rights context."<sup>397</sup> The recalibration has also seen New Zealand vote against Palestinian attempts to enter certain international bodies such as the World Health Organisation. Resolutions in non-General Assembly bodies that deal with Palestinian issues were also voted against. Examples in this regard include a resolution in the UN Economic and Social Council on Palestinian women and certain paragraphs within the UN Interim Force in Lebanon resolution. Finally,

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<sup>392</sup> Information obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Official Information Act 1982

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid. JUSCANZ is a sub-group within the Western European and Group that is comprised of Japan, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Iceland and San Marino.

<sup>396</sup> Winston Peters to Ambassador McCormick, in 'WikiLeaks Cable: NZ Remains Cool to Israeli JUSCANZ Participation', *New Zealand Herald*, 19 December 2010

<sup>397</sup> Information obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Official Information Act 1982

New Zealand withdrew from the Durban Review Conference on Racism, which left Israel “particularly pleased”.<sup>398</sup>

The recalibration also includes a subtle repositioning of General Assembly voting patterns. Resolutions in the UN on Israel or Palestine tend to fall into three categories: resolutions that favour the peace process; humanitarian resolutions; and process-related resolutions. The last category of resolutions authorises other committees within the UN to report and publicise aspects of the situation within the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It was felt by MFAT that since it was “questionable whether the work adds anything to international efforts underway to bring about peace, or provides tangible humanitarian assistance to those on the ground, there are good grounds for reconsidering New Zealand’s traditional stance.”<sup>399</sup> The only change to be made on the process-related resolutions between the 63<sup>rd</sup> and 64<sup>th</sup> Sessions of the Assembly was regarding the resolution entitled ‘Division for Palestinian Rights and the Secretariat’. New Zealand’s vote changed from an abstention to a negative vote on the grounds that it “was not a constructive use of resources” and “did little to contribute to the Middle East Peace Process.”<sup>400</sup>

It is important to emphasise that these recalibrations do not radically alter the application of even-handedness. Rather they signify a small realignment of foreign policy that inches towards increased compatibility with the pro-Israeli camp but remains firmly within the boundaries of the middle position within the UN. Tone and nuance are studied with such intense concentration in this conflict, both domestically and internationally, that any recalibration is noted immediately. After the 2008 Israeli incursion into Gaza, the American Embassy in Canberra noted the details of their conversation with Israeli Ambassador Yuval Rotem, who was also accredited New Zealand. Rotem explained that he was pleasantly surprised with the responses from both New Zealand and Australia to the war and noted that the new National government had been a

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

welcome change from the Clark government whose statements on Israel he claimed “could have been drafted in Damascus.”<sup>401</sup>

In recognition of this rigorous attention to tone MFAT warned McCully that “our withdrawal from Durban and the positions we have adopted recently on Middle East resolutions have raised Israel’s expectations as to the level of support it might receive from us”. It went on to remind the Minister that “[a]s you will recall, it was agreed that New Zealand should pursue a balanced, constructive, and even-handed approach to settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict” and noted that it needed to “position itself carefully if it is to avoid negatively impacting on its status as a genuinely balanced and even-handed country.”<sup>402</sup> Thus, it is cautiously predicted, based on the historical tradition, that MFAT will keep McCully from overstepping New Zealand’s customary position within this conflict and New Zealand will remain firmly within UN group devoted to dialogue and negotiation rather than slipping into outright support of one side over the other.

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<sup>401</sup> Dan Clune, ‘Gaza: Australian Response Makes Israeli Ambassador Happy’, January 9 2009, available from *The Australian*, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/australian-wikileaks-cables/story-fn59niix-1225971723172>, accessed January 3 2011

<sup>402</sup> Information obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Official Information Act 1982

## CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

The story of New Zealand's relationship with Israel over a period of sixty-five years is one of remarkable continuity interrupted periodically by the acts of individuals responding to either deep personal convictions or international trends. Beneath the veneer of an official policy committed to an even-handed stance on the Arab-Israeli dispute, lies a complex tale of shifting attitudes and changing language that has redefined the image of Israel in New Zealand political circles. The bilateral relationship is not an especially significant one to either country, but the high level of public and political interest in Israel has brought about a need for the relationship to be examined in depth and with dispassion.

A lack of existing secondary resources necessitated an account drawing upon archival material and interviews. As a result, this research should very much be viewed as a 'first cut' account of the relationship with ample space and opportunity to expand on certain areas and delve further into various issues. Following a semi-chronological structure, this thesis has tracked the development of the relationship from the formation of Israel under the UN Partition Plan through until the presentation of credentials by the new Israeli Ambassador in May 2010. Although a discussion purely focussed on the official policy of even-handedness is almost banal, as despite slight recalibrations by various Ministers the policy has remained remarkably consistent over time, dynamic tonal undercurrents in the relationship expose a more complicated tale of shifting attitudes and realignments. This thesis consequently argues that the attitudes of political elites within New Zealand have undergone major shifts as they responded to international trends or as certain causes were pressed by key individuals within New Zealand. These international shifts generally meant that by the late 1970s Israel began to shift from a left-wing cause to a right-wing fascination.

The 'Golden Age' of the relationship came in the period around the Fraser and Nash years when Israel was seen as a shining example of idealism, socialism, new beginnings and pluckiness in the midst of a hostile region. During this time key individuals within the New Zealand Labour Party were enamoured with Israel and their enthusiasm was evident in speeches made in the UN. Peter Fraser made a

passionate speech in support of the formation of Israel in 1945, and his conservative diplomat Carl Berendsen fought for the adoption of the Partition Plan even in the face of British resistance. Moreover, although Sid Holland was not as enamoured with Israel, his representative in the UN, Sir Leslie Munro, espoused a more pro-Israeli position than perhaps the Government would have liked. The one-sided nature of the relationship in this period was clear. New Zealand had no diplomatic representatives in the Middle East and links between states were largely sustained through personal connections. The lack of diplomatic connections with Arab states in this time meant that sympathy lay firmly with the Israeli cause.

In the second period (1960 – 1975) ties remained cordial, although towards the end of the Rowling government, New Zealand was compelled to exercise a more balanced position in response to global economic incentives. Support for Israel initially came from conservative leader Keith Holyoake who was careful to ensure that New Zealand's sympathetic position was sufficiently well understood by the Israelis. The Six-Day War in Israel was perceived as a further ordeal for the small state, but its occupation of Palestinian territories after the war created a degree of animosity from within the Department of External Affairs, which prioritised the application of international law in international relations. However the extent to which the Department influenced the tone of the relationship after this event was negligible. Attitudes remained generally positive. Norman Kirk was a friend of Israel who strongly supported and idealised some of its social policies, including the Kibbutz movement. He was replaced by Rowling, another supporter of Israel, but New Zealand policy began to shift towards a more even-handed position after the advent of the first oil shock forced the Government to establish robust ties with the Arab states and Iran.

This manipulation of the relationship by external events continued into the third period of the relationship (1975 – 1999) and indeed became much more pronounced. The second oil shock encouraged the Muldoon Government to diversify its trading interests and establish robust relationships with the Arab states. This was eagerly embraced by Muldoon to the extent that he would confidently explain to journalists that New Zealand would be more likely to come down on the side of the Arabs over Israel. At the same time that these international material influences were influencing

the relationship, less tangible factors relating to social justice concerns were also casting doubt on the Israeli cause. Israel's invasion of Southern Lebanon in 1982 as well as its ongoing flouting of international law gradually began to change perceptions of the state within New Zealand. Thus, by the time of the Fourth Labour Government, Israel had ceased to become a cause that most Labourites could relate to, and attention instead turned to the plight of the Palestinians. The Bolger Government, which governed for the final decade of the twentieth century, returned the relationship to a degree of cordiality expressed primarily as a desire for open dialogue. This approach however was of a disinterested nature, especially once ties were restored and the Bolger government's attention turned to other global issues.

The final period explored the changing tone of the relationship under the Clark and Key Governments (1999-2010). The Clark Government included several key individuals, notably the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, who had closely followed the Palestinian cause and did not see Israel through the same romantic lens that earlier Labour Governments had. Their views were much more in line with the positions of other social democrat states. Irritants in the relationship such as the criticism of Israel's security wall in the West Bank and Goff's visit to Arafat did not help matters, however, relations were most severely hurt by the Passport Scandal which remains the lowest point of the relationship. Ties were frozen for a year when Israel failed to take responsibility for the actions of its agents and not reinstated until an acceptable apology was received. In 2008 a more conservative Government was elected under John Key. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Murray McCully, set about deliberately recalibrating the relationship to a position more favourable to Israel. This recalibration has not significantly altered the application of even-handedness despite a major shift in tone, and based on the historical record, the thesis concludes New Zealand is unlikely to move from its "middle" position in the UN to one that overtly favours Israel.

Two broad themes have been identified in this study as explanatory factors behind changing attitudes. The first was the extent to which individuals acting as a result of instinct, passion, or prejudice have redirected the rhetoric and tone of the relationship. Certain people stand out quite clearly in this regard: Peter Fraser, Carl Berendsen, Keith Holyoake, Norman Kirk, Robert Muldoon, Russell Marshall, Don



Carson, Helen Clark, Phil Goff and Murray McCully. When a strongly motivated individual took an interest they were able to substantially alter the tonal direction of the relationship. Muldoon, for example, was responsible for a major shift away from Israel and towards the Arab states and Iran during his period as leader as he was strongly motivated by pursuing an economic interest in the Middle East.

The second theme discussed is the importance of factors outside New Zealand in altering the direction of the course of the relationship. This under-examined phenomenon dictated how groups in New Zealand, reacting to external events or trends, would respond to Israel. This thesis argues that, as is certainly the case with 'nationalist' accounts of New Zealand foreign policy, there has been too much emphasis on internal, domestic factors at the expense of broader influences. In the case of Israel, material pressures after the 1970s oil shocks combined with the growing influence of international social justice concerns worked to influence and redirect political attitudes in New Zealand.

### **Where to go from here**

One goal of this thesis was to set down a substantive foundational basis for a history on the New Zealand-Israel relationship to date. Unfortunately, space constraints and the dearth of secondary material meant that aspects of the relationship were not able to be analysed here. Some of these deserve a much greater level of academic attention than could have been accommodated in this thesis. The final paragraphs of this thesis will consequently identify six areas where further research is needed.

First, the role and influence of people-to-people links between New Zealanders and Israelis deserves close scrutiny. The importance of these links has been identified by both Israel and Palestine as a major priority in their public diplomacy campaigns. In the case of Israel, significant resources are spent encouraging well-placed individuals to make a trip to Israel to give them a more rounded impression of the country, beyond the news headlines. Several of the interviewees for this research had been on such trips including MPs, business people, journalists and academics. This aspect of the relationship was further enhanced by Foreign Minister McCully's visit to Israel this year, which saw the creation of a Working Holiday Scheme after some ten years

of discussion. This provides a greater incentive for New Zealanders and Israelis to work, holiday and study in each others countries. Personal links between individuals within Arab states and New Zealanders before the oil shocks also need scrutiny, in order to allow us to understand how these links may have influenced governmental responses towards economic and security issues in the Middle East.

As well as people-to-people links, there is also great scope to better understand the role of other non-governmental actors in the direction of foreign policy. Business and trade links between Israel and New Zealand are increasingly being promoted by both states. There are opportunities for business partnerships, especially in the fields of science and technology – particularly agricultural and geothermal technology. Trade with Israel is minimal at present. Exports from New Zealand totalled only \$52 million and imports from Israel totalled \$120 million for the year ended December 2008.<sup>403</sup> There are serious barriers - religious, economic and political - to overcome if this is to be improved. For example New Zealand has recently passed legislation which rules that animals are to be stunned before killing, something which problematises the practice of kosher kill. On the economic side, Israel has high tariff and non-tariff barriers which have de-prioritised trade to Israel. Finally, on the political front there are significant issues arising from the trading of dual-use technologies. This has been a domestic issue in New Zealand in the past in light of protest activities organised against an Auckland company, Rakon, which was accused of manufacturing crystal oscillators used in the guidance systems of smart bombs that were sold to the Israel Defence Force.<sup>404</sup>

There is also a fascinating project to be pursued which would assess the role of religious connections or church activism. There is a tumultuous history of religious support for criticism of Israel and Jewish people more generally. Father Burns, a Catholic priest in Wellington was one of the most vocal critics of Israel's incursion into Gaza in 2008-2009. In an act which received substantial publicity, Burns poured red paint over a memorial to Yitzhak Rabin as well as a few drops of his own blood. On the other hand, the Christian Friends of Israel make up a substantial component of support for Israel within New Zealand and have been active in lobbying

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<sup>403</sup> Information obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Official Information Act 1982

<sup>404</sup> Phil Taylor, "The Rakon Files: NZ Company's Weapons Role", *Weekend Herald*, 27 May 2006

campaigns. There is also great potential for a research project that would track the increasing activism from NGOs like Amnesty International or Crisis Watch as well as the remarkable internationalisation of the Israel-Palestine dispute. Especially in the context of the 2010 Aid Flotilla tragedy, it would be of value to explore the politicisation of aid in this conflict and examine the motivations of New Zealand aid workers like Nicola Enchmarch to fight for the cause of a people far removed from New Zealand.

Another remarkable component of the relationship is the nature of attitudes from Māori towards Israel. To some extent there has been a significant amount of fascination about Israel from Māori with some iwi groups even claiming to be one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. On the other hand, there have been attempts by some Māori to link Māori and Palestinian issues together in a sort of indigenous solidarity claim. One Māori activist to do this is Te Kupu who travelled to the Occupied Palestinian Territories to write and record a section for a ‘rapumentary’ about such oppressed peoples’ connections.<sup>405</sup> This rapumentary is entitled ‘Ngatahi – Know the Links’ and the Palestinian section includes politically charged songs including ‘West Bank Cage’, ‘The Apartheid Wall’ and ‘The Reign of the Thief’. Other aspects of Māori connection to Israel involve studies that have been done by Israeli scholars who have analysed the Treaty of Waitangi in an attempt to better understand the extent to which this treaty could serve as a useful tool for understanding the potential future legalistic dimensions of the Israel/Palestine dispute.

Rather than pursue a trilateral history of the ties between New Zealand and Palestine alongside the relationship with Israel, I chose to narrow the scope down to only examining the bilateral ties between Israel and New Zealand. There were several reasons for this. First, the thesis already covers an enormous period of history in this thesis and could only do justice to one facet of the relationship. Second, there has never been a Palestinian Embassy or Information Office in New Zealand so the opportunity to explore archival material was more limited. Third, other academics like Ron Macintyre and Nigel Parsons have been fastidiously documenting the New

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<sup>405</sup> A rapumentary is described by Te Kupu as a “hiphop infused music-documentary without narration, featuring spoken word performance and conscious discourse interwoven with music.” A clip of his Palestinian section can be viewed on his website: <http://tekupu.com/>, last accessed 14 July 2010

Zealand-Palestine relationship, particularly from the mid-1980s until now. Finally, because New Zealand does not officially recognise Palestine, I believed it may have been more difficult to get forthright comments on the relationship and consequently thought it necessary to establish a solid understanding of the New Zealand-Israel relationship initially so this could be used as a springboard to examine the relationship with Palestine later. Thus, the New Zealand-Palestine relationship is one that deserves a much greater exploration than has currently been completed.

A final major component in this area that should be pursued is the examination of the convergences and (significant) divergences between New Zealand and Australian attitudes and policies towards Israel. These differences were alluded to by several of the interviewees including both the Israeli and Palestinian Ambassadors. Australia has tended to be more overtly supportive of Israel right from the beginning of Israel's formation and can often be included in the 'pro-Israel' voting camp in the UN. Australia has also had leaders like Bob Hawke who was so passionate about the Israeli cause that he was sometimes reduced to tears on national television. This level of perceived personal interest in Israel or Palestine has not been replicated in New Zealand. The differences between the Jewish communities of the two states are substantial and could be a possible explanatory factor behind the divergences. The Australian Jewish community is much bigger and more effective at lobbying than its New Zealand counterpart. Finally, Australia's identity as a rising middle power is another possible factor behind the neighbourly differences. Australia's more robust relationship with the United States and its desires to become a serious international player may have led it to take a less impartial stance towards the conflict than New Zealand would be comfortable with.

Thus, in conclusion there is considerable scope for further research in various components of this relationship beyond that of the diplomatic and historical nature of this thesis. It is hoped that the research undertaken for this thesis will provide future researchers with a firm foundation upon which to conduct further investigations into the relationship as well as to explore the comparative nature of relations with Israel within the Asia-Pacific region. One aim of this thesis was to provide a context through which to explain the progression of a dynamic and shifting relationship without overstating its importance to New Zealand. The final aim was to provide an

analysis of two broader themes within New Zealand's foreign affairs and to explain how interaction between the outside world and key individuals inside New Zealand has impacted on this relationship. In doing so, it is hoped that there will be a better understanding of an evolving dynamic between two small but very disparate states.

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