The course:

The relationship between United States and Israel is often described as “special.” Yet the two countries are not bound by a formal alliance. Leaders of the two countries emphasize shared values and interests, yet the history of the relationship is punctuated by divergences. The relationship has many passionate supporters in both countries – and also passionate detractors. An army of journalists and scholars explores the complex dynamics of the US-Israeli relationship, as a prime case study in the interaction of foreign and domestic politics. Some believe that no relationship between any two states is more important in international relations today. In some respects, they may be right.

The objective of this course is to impart a deeper understanding of the history, inner workings, and context of the US-Israel relationship. While many people hold strong opinions about U.S.-Israel ties, there is a widespread ignorance of their precise history, the course of their development, and the way in which they have functioned in times of peace and war. We will work together in this course to acquire an insider’s knowledge of the relationship, through reading, discussion, and writing. And by the end of this course, you’ll be an expert.

By way of introduction, I am the Schusterman Visiting Professor at SAIS, as well as the Wexler-Fromer Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and the president-designate of Shalem College in Jerusalem. I am a native Washingtonian, and a resident of Israel for more than thirty years. I am a citizen of both countries. My own understanding of the relationship is informed by years of close observation in Washington and Jerusalem, and long-standing friendships with key players, both American and Israeli.

The structure of the course will be evident from the syllabus. An initial overview will be followed by a series of interesting case studies, focused on key episodes in the evolution of the relationship. Many of these studies center upon crisis situations, which tested the relationship and redefined it. Following this in-depth probing of case studies, we will proceed to discuss some of the more controversial contemporary aspects of the subject. This will include an examination of the “Israel lobby” question, as well as the debate over whether Israel is an American strategic asset – or not. We will conclude with a look to the future. And as this is a presidential election year, we will make time throughout the term to analyze the role the relationship is playing in the campaign.

It is important to emphasize what this course is not. It is not a course on the Arab-Israeli conflict or the peace process. Both of these subjects are covered in depth in a course offered by another SAIS faculty member, in the spring semester. Inevitably, we will touch upon aspects of war and peace. But we will not be detained by the cut and thrust of battles, or the intricate details of
negotiations to bring peace – a decades-long preoccupation of American diplomacy. In the foreground is the bilateral relationship between United States and Israel; the Arab states and the Palestinians, and their own complex relations with United States, are in the background. For this reason, too, our primary interest is in the perspectives of Americans and Israelis. Other perspectives on the relationship, especially European and Arab ones, are not irrelevant, but deserve their own study.

For our reading, we will range widely. There are a number of works which could serve as comprehensive textbooks for this course. But using them would limit the range of views and research methods to which you would be exposed. Instead, I have selected journal articles and book chapters, taken from a wide range of authors, so that by the end of this course, you will have read something by most of the recognized authorities in this field. If the reading appears a bit daunting, bear in mind that it includes many repetitions. There are also several documentary films and video clips of presentations by key figures.

I run this course as a seminar. While I will provide an overview in each session, I will assume that you have done the reading, and will expect active participation in discussions and debates. In anticipation of each class session, I will ask each of you, via Blackboard, to send a paragraph constituting a “reader’s response” to the readings, so that together we can identify problem areas that can be explored more fully in class.

From time to time, we will be visited by guests who have played roles as practitioners. They will not appear as lecturers, but as resources and informants, to whom you can pose informed questions that arise from your own study.

**Grading:**

- 15 percent of the grade is determined by class (and possibly on-line) participation. (I am new to Blackboard, but I have lots of experience in blogging and social media, so I will gives its features a try during the first weeks of class, to see whether it works for us.)

- 20 percent of the grade is determined by a short mid-term “state of the art” paper (maximum 1,200 words), surveying the secondary and primary sources for a subject in the early history of U.S.-Israeli relations, and assessing the reliability and limitations of the source materials. This is the sort of preliminary survey you would do before embarking on a major research project. This short paper will be due on Friday, October 19.

- 65 percent of the grade is determined by a final paper, the topic of which you will choose in consultation with me.
Calendar:

You will note that there are readings for 13 sessions, and that includes the first session. The first class session will be devoted to my overview. I recommend that you read the overview articles either before or after the first session, as a supplement to the overview I will provide in class. I have provided URLs for the articles, but you should be able to access these items via electronic reserves. The URL is for future reference, should you want to revisit the readings after the course.

I will hold an office hour immediately after class, or you may make an appointment if you have something else in that slot. Just message me through Blackboard.

Tuesday, September 18, is one of the two days of the Jewish New Year, and we will not have class on that day. The class will meet instead on the following day, Wednesday, September 19, from 12:15 to 2pm in N507.

Readings

1. Overview


2. Israel on America’s Mind


Jonathan D. Sarna, “A Projection of America as It Ought to Be: Zion in the Mind’s Eye of

3. Recognizing Israel


“All the Recognition of the State of Israel,” Truman Library (documents, photos, oral testimony), http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/israel/large/index.php


4. Clash and Reconciliation


5. Weapons and Nukes


6. Special Relationship at War


7. Breakthrough


8. AWACS, Green Lights, Spies


9. Restraining Israel


10. Unconditional Love?


**11. The Israel Lobby Debate**


### 12. Strategic Asset or Liability?


13. Obama, Bibi and Beyond


