



Middle
East
Forum



STEVE ROSEN:

An American Asset

BY DEXTER VAN ZILE AND ANNA STANLEY



Steven J. Rosen. (Steve Rosen archives)

Introduction: Steve Rosen - Architect of Modern U.S.-Israel Relations

BY GREGG ROMAN

As Executive Director of the Middle East Forum, I had the privilege of working alongside Steve during his tenure as our Washington Project Director. What struck me immediately about him was not merely his encyclopedic knowledge of Middle Eastern affairs, but his remarkable ability to operationalize that knowledge into actionable policy. Steve didn't just understand the intricate mechanics of Washington; he mastered the art of moving its levers to advance American interests through strengthened ties with Israel.

The monograph before you meticulously chronicles how Rosen fundamentally reoriented American policy discourse about Israel. When he arrived at AIPAC in 1982, the prevailing wisdom in foreign policy circles characterized Israel as a strategic burden—a liability that complicated America's relationships with Arab states and its access to oil. Through rigorous research and strategic advocacy, Rosen systematically dismantled this fallacy, demonstrating conclusively that Israel represented an invaluable strategic asset to American interests.

His 1982 paper "The Strategic Value of Israel" marked a watershed moment in policy discourse. No longer would Israel's advocates rely primarily

on moral arguments or Holocaust guilt to justify American support. Instead, Rosen articulated a compelling case based on hard strategic interests: Israel's technological prowess, military capabilities, intelligence cooperation, and geographic position made it an indispensable partner in advancing American security objectives. This paradigm shift in advocacy strategy remains the cornerstone of U.S.-Israel relations to this day.

Perhaps most consequentially, Rosen pioneered AIPAC's engagement with the Executive Branch. While the organization had built formidable influence in Congress, Rosen recognized that true policy impact required strategic access to the Pentagon, State Department, and National Security Council. His methodical approach to cultivating relationships with mid-level bureaucrats—the actual architects of policy initiatives—transformed how pro-Israel advocacy operated in Washington. The designation of Israel as America's first "major non-NATO ally" in 1988 stands as testament to the effectiveness of this approach.

What made Rosen particularly effective was his unparalleled talent for identifying emerging

threats and opportunities before they materialized in the policy arena. His research on Iran's malign activities informed the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996, demonstrating remarkable foresight about Tehran's destabilizing regional ambitions. Similarly, his early recognition of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement's potential impact on Israel's international standing led him to encourage the establishment of the European Leadership Network (ELNET) as a counterweight to anti-Israel sentiment across Europe.

Throughout his career, Rosen worked tirelessly to document and counter what he termed the "artificial constituency" seeking to undermine American support for Israel. His analysis of anti-Israel propaganda techniques provided a roadmap for pro-Israel advocates that remains relevant today, particularly as we witness the resurgence of these same tactics following Hamas's October 7th massacre.

The 2005 legal proceedings against Rosen represent one of the most troubling episodes of prosecutorial overreach in recent American history. That the Obama administration ultimately dismissed all charges in 2009 speaks volumes about the case's fundamental flaws. As one commentator astutely observed, the case effectively criminalized "routine practices in Washington" and represented an unprecedented assault on protected speech. Throughout this ordeal, Rosen maintained his dignity and ultimately prevailed, though not without personal cost.

What distinguishes Rosen from many policy professionals was his refusal to limit his vision to the confines of Washington. Recognizing Europe's strategic importance to Israel's security and economic well-being, he helped establish ELNET as "the European AIPAC." Today, as European capitals wrestle with complex questions about the Middle East, ELNET's influence continues to



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grow—a testament to Rosen's strategic foresight and organizational acumen.

During his tenure at the Middle East Forum, Rosen brought the same analytical rigor and strategic insight that had characterized his AIPAC career. His influential work on UNRWA's role in perpetuating the Palestinian refugee crisis anticipated by over a decade the issues now dominating international discourse. Similarly, his successful effort to block Charles Freeman's appointment to the National Intelligence Council in 2009 demonstrated that even outside formal institutional structures, Rosen remained a formidable force in Washington policy circles. As we confront an increasingly volatile Middle East—with Iran's nuclear ambitions, Hamas's terrorism, and Hezbollah's threats—Rosen's strategic framework provides an essential guide for navigating these challenges. His insistence that Israel be viewed through the lens of American strategic interests rather than charitable obligation revolutionized U.S.-Israel relations and established a durable foundation for this critical partnership.

This meticulously researched profile by Van Zile and Stanley offers readers unprecedented access to Rosen's strategic thinking and operational methods. For policymakers, advocates, and students of international relations, it provides a master class in effective policy influence. For those committed to strengthening the U.S.-Israel relationship, it offers a roadmap for advancing this vital alliance amid shifting geopolitical landscapes.

Steve Rosen's legacy is not merely historical; it is profoundly relevant to our present challenges. The frameworks he established, the institutions he built, and the strategic concepts he pioneered continue to shape how the United States and Israel collaborate to advance their mutual interests. At the Middle East Forum, we remain committed to building upon his extraordinary legacy as we confront the complex challenges of the contemporary Middle East.

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In an era of increasing geopolitical uncertainty, Rosen's life reminds us that individuals of vision, determination, and strategic acumen can indeed shape history. This comprehensive profile ensures that his contributions will continue to inform and inspire future generations of policy professionals dedicated to strengthening the U.S.-Israel relationship and promoting American interests in the Middle East.

STEVE ROSEN: AN AMERICAN ASSET

BY DEXTER VAN ZILE AND ANNA STANLEY

In late 2000, Rebecca Dinar, a self-described “matzoh-ball-eating [rather than religious] Jew,” was among thousands of political appointees preparing to transition out of government with no clear next step. Then, during Shabbat dinner with her future in-laws, a knock on the door changed everything.

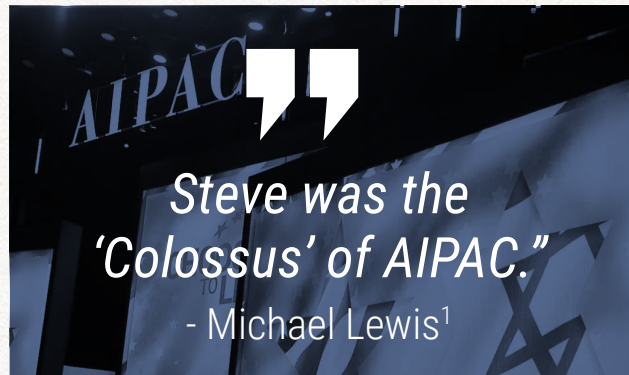
Steve Rosen, then a stranger, stood outside holding framed photographs of Polish-Jewish resistance fighters—one of whom was related to Dinar’s future father-in-law. Documentarians were making a film about the resistance and, as a result, descendants of the fighters—including Rosen—were reconnecting.

After dinner, Rosen joined the table. As conversation flowed, Dinar’s boyfriend and future husband asked if he knew of any job opportunities for his girlfriend.

“Maybe,” Rosen considered. “Ever heard of AIPAC?” he asked Dinar.

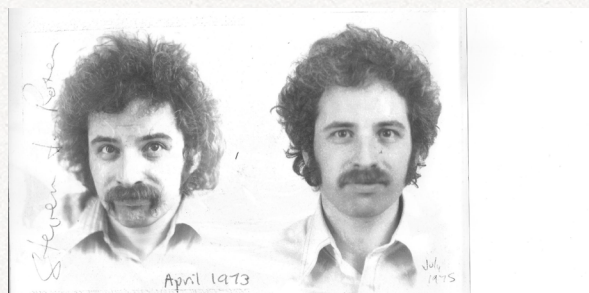
“No,” Dinar admitted.

A week later, she found herself at AIPAC’s Washington, D.C., office, meeting with the head of communications. She knew little about the organization or its work, but her background in politics—and the fact that she was about to marry an Israeli, they concluded—made her an ideal



fit. After a series of interviews, they hired her, promising to teach her about Israel, Zionism, and Jewish communal life. Over the next four years, she rose to become AIPAC’s deputy spokesperson, then chief spokesperson—roles that launched her career in advocacy and public policy.

Rosen, who was a mentor to Dinar as well as to many others, left her with a perspective that stuck: “There are two kinds of people in the world,” he told her. “Fox News people believe evil truly exists and must be fought with everything you’ve got. CNN people believe everyone is inherently good, and bad actors are just victims of circumstance. When you’re talking to someone, you have to figure out which kind of person they are—Fox or CNN—and shape your messages and actions accordingly.”² For Rosen, it was a deeply practical approach. For Dinar, it became a lifelong guiding principle.



Stephen Rosen’s idealism shines in these passport photos, taken in 1973 when he was 31. (Steve Rosen archives)

The Problem

Rosen brought his practical approach to AIPAC in 1982 after a four-year stint as a senior analyst and associate director of the Rand Corporation’s National Security Studies Program. After attending Hofstra University as an undergraduate, he earned an M.A. in international relations at

City College of New York and a Ph.D. in the same field from Syracuse University. He moved to Washington after concluding that if he really wanted to influence U.S. policy in the Middle East, he needed to live in the nation's capital.³

Rosen arrived at AIPAC the year after the organization had failed to stymie the Reagan administration's decision to allow the sale of \$8.5 billion worth of military equipment to Saudi Arabia, including the highly valued Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS)—even before this technology had been made available to U.S. allies Britain and France. The sale left Israel subject to increased surveillance by Saudi Arabia.⁴

The deal was not motivated by anti-Israel animus on President Ronald Reagan's part, but by a desire to direct revenue to American defense contractors and enlist the help of Saudi Arabia in the U.S. effort to counter Soviet influence in the Middle East. Maintaining good relations with Saudi Arabia was a crucial goal, even if it meant placing Israel at risk. To be sure, Reagan admired Israel and valued the Jewish state as an ally,⁵ but many officials in Washington, as an obstacle to good relations with other countries in the Middle East. Longtime Middle East Forum (MEF) president Daniel Pipes put it this way:

“When Israel was founded, it was a small, weak state that had very few commercial, military, intelligence, or other benefits that it could give its allies. And indeed, coming into existence in 1948, it came to existence at the very moment of the Cold War, becoming the dominant aspect of American foreign policy. In the context of the Cold War, Israel was seen as a liability. In particular, it was Soviet Russia that was the key benefactor. And subsequently, in the 1950s, it was Israel that impeded American efforts to create a NATO-like structure in the Middle East because the Arab states were enemies of Israel and Israel had strong support, especially among Democrats.”⁶

The notion that support for Israel was a threat to American interests in the Middle East flourished in the military and diplomatic establishment even before the state was founded. When President Harry S. Truman recognized the Jewish state in 1948, his secretary of state, George Marshall, almost resigned in protest, accusing Truman to his face of “pandering to the Jewish vote, and endangering national security as a result.”⁷ At issue was the U.S.'s ability to establish and maintain good relations with

Egypt—a powerhouse in the region—as British power and influence in the Middle East waned in the aftermath of World War II.

Such concerns were clearly foremost in the mind of Truman's successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, who wanted to play the role of honest broker as Britain's empire was dismantled in the years after World War II. In particular, he hoped to be a “mediator between Arab nationalism and Zionism.”

“In short, Eisenhower and his top advisors ... saw Israel as a liability. The strategic goal of American policy was to reclaim as much Arab goodwill as possible by demonstrating, in the terminology of the Eisenhower administration, “impartiality”—a word that implied tacking away from Israel.”⁸



Eisenhower later regretted his decision to side with Egypt during its conflict with the United Kingdom, France, and Israel during the Suez Crisis only to watch Gamal Abdel Nasser pursue a pro-Soviet and anti-American policy in the Middle East.⁹ But the notion that Israel was a burden to U.S. interests remained a persistent strain of thought among policymakers in

Washington.¹⁰ Israel's efforts to help King Hussein repel Syrian attacks during the Black September in 1970 reduced the influence of these ideas—but not completely—which helps explain why the AWACS sale went through in 1981. Saudi Arabia was simply too important an ally in the effort to keep the Soviet Union, which had invaded Afghanistan two years before, in check.



Due to its geostrategic location, vast size, and immense oil reserves accounting for a quarter of the world's known reserves, Saudi Arabia was best suited to replace Iran as Washington's military-strategic anchor in the Persian Gulf. Hence the striving of the Reagan administration from its first days in office (in January 1981) to incorporate the kingdom, and the Gulf states more generally, into its wider effort to ensure the uninterrupted flow of oil to Europe and Japan and to prevent potential Soviet expansion in the direction of the Gulf.¹¹

By the 1980s, there was a growing sense among policymakers in the D.C. area that sympathy for the Jews in shadow of the Holocaust could only go so far in determining U.S. policy toward Israel. Eventually, America's strategic interests in the region needed to be taken into account, even if it put Israel at risk. In his later career, Rosen voiced unhappiness over the amount of resources Jewish leaders invested into promoting the image of the beleaguered Jew worthy of pity and support, reports Larry Hochberg, who

worked with Rosen as he helped established the European Leadership Network (ELNET).

"He would go crazy with spending millions on Holocaust memorials, and millions on attempts to 'explain' the Jews and show how many Jews had gotten Nobel Prizes," Hochberg said. "He felt that was a misuse of our resources and that the key was 'Can we protect our homeland, or can't we?'"¹²

Rosen's Response

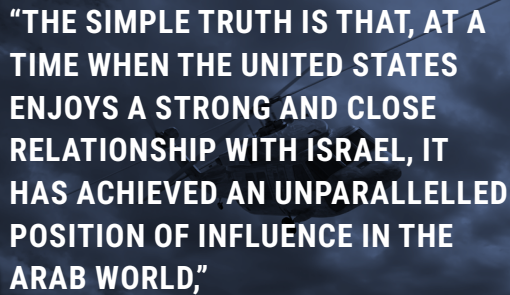
To this end, Rosen began the task of demonstrating that Israel served as a better ally and platform for American interests in the Middle East than its adversaries in the region. Beginning with the 1982 publication of *The Strategic Value of Israel*, Rosen argued that Israel was a hugely important asset—not a burden—to the United States, especially in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, which cost the U.S. an important ally in the region.¹³

Not only was Israel America's most politically stable and reliable ally in the region, Rosen argued. It was also a technologically advanced country located in a place that could serve as

staging grounds for conflicts in the Gulf of Arabia, the Mediterranean, NATO's borders with Russia, and in the Middle East. Simply put, U.S. military officials could get troops and equipment into combat areas more quickly and cheaply than from any bases located anywhere else in the world, including the Middle East and North Africa.

"Forces prepositioned in Israel could be in Europe in half the time it would take those from continental United States to arrive, and Israel is closer than any of the other regional prepositioning sites except Turkey (which is, of course, a member of NATO)," he wrote.

Israel and Air Power



"THE SIMPLE TRUTH IS THAT, AT A TIME WHEN THE UNITED STATES ENJOYS A STRONG AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL, IT HAS ACHIEVED AN UNPARALLELLED POSITION OF INFLUENCE IN THE ARAB WORLD,"

Rosen advanced this line of argument by editing a subsequent policy paper published by AIPAC in 1983. The paper, written by Martin Indyk and Charles Kupchan and titled "Israel and the U.S. Air Force," detailed the tangible gains the U.S. could achieve in its efforts to counter Soviet aggression in the Middle East through closer ties with Israel: intelligence sharing, air defense support, and logistical advantages. While other countries in the region were reluctant to allow their territories to be used as a base of operations for the USAF because of a "taboo" against the presence of B-52s within their borders, Israel exhibited no such reluctance. "Enhanced strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel

could result in some very tangible gains for the United States Air Force, in such areas as intelligence sharing, bases, air defense for military airlifts, improved maintenance to raise operational readiness rates, and reliable fuel facilities for tactical fighter operations."¹⁴ Rosen argued that when it came to providing the USAF with close and defensible places to store its fuel supply—"the sine qua non of USAF operations"—Israel was without peer in the region. "Israel is the ideal location for such a strategic reserve because it offers the crucial combination of physical security, political reliability and cost-competitiveness."

Despite concerns that U.S.–Israel military cooperation might harm relations with Arab states, the report argued that deepening ties with Israel had not prevented the U.S. from simultaneously strengthening relationships with key Arab allies, particularly after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. "The simple truth is that, at a time when the United States enjoys a strong and close relationship with Israel, it has achieved an unparalleled position of influence in the Arab world," the report states. It continues:

“*In some critical cases, the close relationship with Israel has even been a direct asset in building closer U.S. ties with Arab states. The most recent example is Lebanon, where Israeli action severely reduced the influence of two Soviet allies (Syria and the PLO) and brought about the installation of a pro-American government there. Earlier examples include Jordan, where Israeli action in 1970 helped to save the government of King Hussein from a challenge by the PLO, and Egypt, whose new relationships with the United States was fostered by Israel's willingness to surrender the Sinai. In short, it is neither self-evident nor true that close cooperation between the United States and Israel hinders the improvement of relations with Arab countries.*

The document further underscored that U.S. military aid to Israel had not hampered Washington's growing relationships with Arab nations, concluding, "In this region for over thirty years, a deepening relationship with Israel has not hindered a steadily improving friendship with a widening circle of Arab countries. This has been particularly true since 1973, when the U.S. has given unprecedented levels of arms and aid to Israel while substantially improving relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the states of the Arabian Peninsula."¹⁵

Israel and the Mediterranean

Another AIPAC paper, written by W. Seth Carus and edited by Rosen, details how the U.S. Navy, which is responsible for protecting its interests throughout the world's oceans, can rely on Israel to deter Soviet aggression in the Mediterranean. Because there is no possibility that Israeli ships in the Mediterranean “will be redeployed to some other part of the world ... both the United States and the Soviet Union know that even in the absence of an American presence in the region, there will exist a potential anti-Soviet force of considerable strength.”



At a time when the U.S. Navy is stretched thinly across the globe, and may be unable to maintain a large fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean in times of crisis, the presence of the Israelis becomes a strategic asset for the United States, and thus for NATO, of no small importance.¹⁶

To capitalize on the benefits Israel's navy provided to American interests in the Mediterranean, the United States should supply equipment and training to Israel's maritime forces, Carus argued—a policy that has been followed many times in the years since.

Proof of Concept

Rosen and his colleagues at AIPAC won the argument over Israel's value to the United States, with the country becoming, in the words of its critics, “an aircraft carrier” for American interests in the Middle East.¹⁷ Rosen's influence was demonstrated when the U.S. and Israel signed an agreement acknowledging the Jewish state as a “major non-NATO ally” in 1988.¹⁸ The memorandum reaffirmed “the close relationship between Israel and the United States of America, based upon common goals, interests, and values; welcome the achievements made in strategic, economic, industrial and technological cooperation. ...”

The logic of Rosen's argument was affirmed again by R. Nicholas Burns, under secretary of state for political affairs, in 2007, when he announced that the U.S. would provide \$30 billion in military aid to Israel over the next ten years, even as it gave significant funds to Arab nations in the region—not to deter Russian aggression but to keep terror-supporting Iran at bay:



“THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, BASED UPON COMMON GOALS, INTERESTS, AND VALUES; WELCOME THE ACHIEVEMENTS MADE IN STRATEGIC, ECONOMIC, INDUSTRIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION. ...”



We look at this region and we understand that a secure and strong Israel is in the interests of the United States. We have also announced, in conjunction with this assistance to Israel, maintenance of our very high level of defense assistance to Egypt. We have said to the congressional leadership that we intend to seek their support for increased military assistance to our friends in the Gulf: To Saudi Arabia and to Kuwait and to Bahrain and to Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and to Oman. All of this together represents a signal from the United States that our country is strong in this region, that we intend to be a good friend to our allies and our partners in this region, and we intend to work with them for peace and stability and against those who attract this terrorism and violence in the region.¹⁹



Steve Rosen after a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in an undated photo. (Steve Rosen archives)

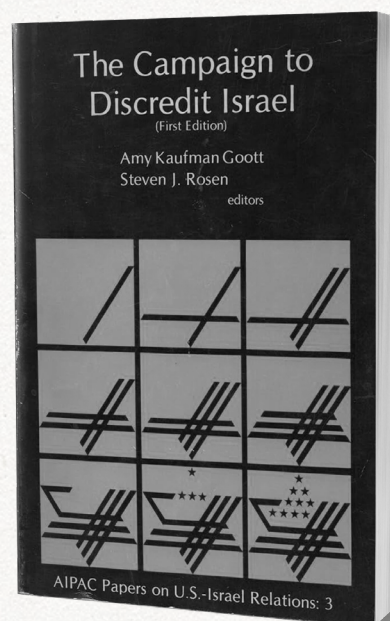
In the early 1980s, Rosen and his colleagues at AIPAC had argued that the United States could rely on Israel as an ally in the Middle East without harming its relationships with Arab countries in the region. A quarter century later, the U.S. State Department confirmed the truth of this argument.

Further evidence that Rosen and his colleagues won the argument—and decisively so—can be seen in American reliance on Israel forty years after they presented their arguments. The Soviet Union has collapsed, and yet the U.S. still relies on Israel as a forward base for its armaments—this time to deter Iran, a dread adversary to American interests and safety.

Rosen's Research-Based Advocacy

Rosen's influence on U.S.–Israel relations was not limited to demonstrating its value to American interests in the Middle East. Under his leadership, AIPAC's research department produced a number of papers documenting threats to Israel's reputation in American society.

The 1983 paper, *The Campaign to Discredit Israel*, which Rosen produced with the help of Amy Kaufman Goott, provided a crucial understanding of the “artificial constituency” that sought to undermine American support for Israel.²⁰ This constituency, the authors report, comprised Americans of Arab descent, foreign agents working on behalf of Arab nations in the Middle East, corporations intent on selling arms to countries from which the U.S. imported oil, radicals who, in previous decades, protested against the Vietnam War, and right-wing antisemites.



The corporations pursued their interests through political donations, lobbying in Congress, and by providing financial support to organizations such as American Near East Refugee Aid and Americans for Middle East Understanding. Some of the more radical organizations, such as the Palestine Human Rights Campaign, the authors reported, were suspected of receiving funds from countries such as Libya and Cuba. But overall, the threat of this constituency was that it provided “a means to nurture and sustain anti-Israel propaganda activity in the United States on a large scale without the overt involvement of the Arab League.”

Rosen and Gooft observed that this “artificial constituency” was made up of “two incompatible groups between whom an enduring alliance is unlikely—the corporations and the radicals,” who are “embarrassed by associating with the other.” Nevertheless, this coalition was strengthened by corporations willing to fund “the less extreme anti-Israel groups.” This innovation, the authors warned, “puts extensive resources at the disposal

of small ideologically committed groups, opening the possibility of influence out of proportion to the limited constituencies they represent.”

Rosen and Gooft documented four themes used to undermine American support for Israel that replaced previous propaganda put forth by fringe groups of Marxists and radicals which offered open—and ineffective—calls for Israel’s destruction. These “polished and more effectively targeted themes” were “Israel is not David, but Goliath,” “Israel is not an admirable country but an oppressive one,” “Israel is neither an ally nor an asset to the United States, but a problem and a burden,” and “Support for Israel is not ‘normal’ but alien.” The overall purpose of this messaging, Rosen and Gooft reported, was “to change the image of Israel from a ‘good’ country and a faithful ally to a ‘bad’ country in which the United States invests unwisely because of the machinations of an un-American pressure group.” Rosen and Gooft brilliantly document the psychological impact of these themes on their audiences:

” *Many supporters of Israel find a peculiar moral comfort in the idea that the Jewish state is weak while their oppressors have been strong. To some, the very possession of power has come to be identified with an image of monstrous evil. Others see Israel’s defense preparations not as a realistic response to a massive threat, but as a form of psychopathology deriving from ‘Jewish paranoia’ or as a ‘Masada complex.’ As a result, the campaign to depict Israel as Goliath is one of the more psychologically effective themes of the new propaganda.*

This messaging had a real impact during the summer of 1982 as a result of images that came out of the war in Lebanon, giving the artificial constituency an opportunity to promote an “illusion of mass support.” “Israel’s military operation in Lebanon provided the anti-Israel groups with an emotional issue unlike any other,” allowing them to compare Israel to the Nazis during the Holocaust and accuse Israel of “genocide.”

Yet the effectiveness and reach of this campaign were undermined by the disclosure of foreign sources of funding and “the exposure of anti-American sentiments of many of the activists” who called “Israeli aggression” in Lebanon the “spearhead of American imperialism.” The mobilization around the Lebanon war was a “dismal failure” because it “brought to the surface the very radicalization and anti-American extremism that has limited the movement’s

influence from the beginning,” Rosen and Goott wrote.

Rosen and Goott were wise enough not to declare complete victory, however, warning there was a good chance that the “anti-Israelis will continue to improve their methods” and enjoy increased financial support from corporations and the Arab League and consequently exhibit an “increase in sophistication” and “political savvy.”

Five years later, Rosen enlisted the help of researchers Jonathan Kessler and Jeff Schwaber to produce *The AIPAC College Guide: Exposing the Anti-Israel Campaign on Campus*.²¹ This document reported that students on American college campuses were targeted with anti-Israel propaganda that “most other Americans are not,” and that the campaign to vilify Israel in higher education was “led primarily by visiting foreign students.” This campaign successfully deflected attention away from ongoing attacks against the Jewish state by its Arab neighbors in the Middle East by focusing attention on “anything negative” that takes place in Israel.

To counter this campaign, it was necessary to highlight the weak intellectual foundations of the campaign against Israel, as documented in another AIPAC paper, *A Human Rights Comparison: Israel Versus the United States*,²² by Sara M. Averick. This text subjected the calumnies directed at Israel by its Arab enemies to withering scrutiny, declaring that “the question of human rights in the Middle East often signifies a codeword for criticizing Israel, the region’s only democracy.”

Documenting the wholesale executions, torture, and even the practice of slavery by Israel’s adversaries in the Middle East, Averick gave lie to the notion that Israel was the human rights problem in the region. Averick also documented how Israel protected the rights of women while other area countries did not. “In the Arab world, ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ regimes alike abuse human rights. These same human rights abusers

have vilified the one democracy in their very nasty neighborhood. They have built a coalition with such states as the Soviet Union and Iran to condemn Israel in the United Nations, where they are too often joined by western democracies in their anti-Israel efforts,” the paper reports.

Reading these papers more than forty years after their publication is akin to looking at a blueprint of the controversy surrounding American support for Israel today. The false accusations of “genocide” against Israel and portrayals of the Jewish state as an extension of American imperialism deployed during the summer of 1982 were used with even greater ferocity on college campuses and in city centers in the months after the October 7 massacre. Now, they are given greater energy and power by the presence of Islamist organizations on the American scene. Through his writing and editing, Rosen gave a generation of scholars and analysts the tools to respond to the ongoing war against Israel’s legitimacy on the American scene.



“IN THE ARAB WORLD, ‘RADICAL’ AND ‘MODERATE’ REGIMES ALIKE ABUSE HUMAN RIGHTS. THESE SAME HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS HAVE VILIFIED THE ONE DEMOCRACY IN THEIR VERY NASTY NEIGHBORHOOD. THEY HAVE BUILT A COALITION WITH SUCH STATES AS THE SOVIET UNION AND IRAN TO CONDEMN ISRAEL IN THE UNITED NATIONS, WHERE THEY ARE TOO OFTEN JOINED BY WESTERN DEMOCRACIES IN THEIR ANTI-ISRAEL EFFORTS.”

‘How Americans Feel About Israel’

Even as Rosen and his team of researchers helped document the calumnies directed at Israel by its adversaries inside and outside the United States, he did not feed into the panicked notion that all was lost. In 1983, Rosen coauthored another important paper with Yosef Abramowitz—“How Americans Feel About Israel.”²³ Here, the authors document ongoing support for Israel on the part of the general public in the U.S., public opposition to the sale of weapons to Arab countries in the Middle East, and extensive support for “military, economic, diplomatic, and moral aid to Israel.”

One survey cited indicates that a majority of Americans agreed that the United States should withdraw from the United Nations and cease all payments to the organization if Israel were “thrown out of any UN organization.” Remorse

over the Holocaust was only one of several factors contributing to public support for Israel. In particular, Americans believed that Israel was more committed to the pursuit of peace than its Arab adversaries, whom they did not regard as “contributors to peace,” with the authors adding that the “polls show clearly that the more educated citizens become, the more supportive of Israel they are.”

Rosen was a brilliant writer and editor who knew how to get the message across to readers, reports Kessler, a researcher and longtime colleague.

“He always said, ‘Get the executive summary right,’” Kessler said. “His reasoning was that for every person who reads the full text of a report, you’ve got twenty who only read the summary of the article.”

Rosen’s Executive Branch Activism

In addition to producing policy papers that helped AIPAC members influence Congress, Rosen played a key role in shifting the organization’s focus toward the executive branch. His creative approach to shaping policy was evident in an episode Dinar witnessed early in her time at AIPAC.

In 2002, AIPAC’s senior team gathered in the organization’s Washington office conference room to watch President George W. Bush’s State of the Union address. In the speech, Bush introduced the now-famous phrase “Axis of Evil,” listing Iran, Iraq, and North Korea.

The moment it ended, Rosen rhetorically asked, “Why didn’t they mention Syria? There must be a reason.”



Because of Rosen’s efforts, the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee played a substantial role in shaping White House policy regarding Israel. Rosen, bottom left, sits across the table from U.S. Vice President Al Gore in an undated photo. (Steve Rosen archives)

He contacted a reporter at the *Washington Post* and posed the same question. A few days later, the answer appeared in print: “The Bush administration, seeking to nurture a growing

intelligence relationship with Syria in the war on terrorism has refrained from confronting Damascus. ...”²⁴ The article revealed that while the Bush administration recognized Syria as a bad actor, it was deliberately giving the Assad regime a pass due to geopolitical concerns. Mission accomplished.

In his effort to lobby the White House and strengthen America’s relationship with the Jewish State, Rosen used an endless number of tools and levers, including finding innovative ways to shape public discourse at the highest levels.

AIPAC had already established its ground game in forming relationships with future and current lawmakers in Congress and educating them about the threats Israel faced—and countered—in the Middle East, but Rosen expanded the organization’s influence in the U.S. Department of Defense and the National Security Agency.

“It was Steve who convinced AIPAC to bring the executive branch of the U.S. government into the realm of discussion,” reports Larry Hochberg. “That effort cemented the Israel–U.S. relationship. It wouldn’t have happened the same way if you just were dealing with the legislature.” Ron Kampeas, the longtime editor of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, reports that Rosen, “who would become AIPAC’s foreign policy chief, led a small cadre of staffers who sought meetings with not just the top executive branch officials but with the anonymous mid-level staffers with whom initiatives often originated.” This allowed the lobby to “score impressive victories by seeding ideas among these bureaucrats, among others, including making Israel the first nation to have ‘non-NATO ally’ status.”²⁵

Rosen outlined his strategy in a report to the Strategic Planning Committee of AIPAC’s board of directors in early September 1985. The report, titled “A Perspective on Lobbying the Executive Branch,” states that while AIPAC’s “very claim to fame” is its role in influencing Congress, “most foreign policy is determined primarily



by the agencies of the executive branch, with little or no congressional involvement.” Rosen then recounted that the Reagan Peace Plan (a failed attempt to achieve a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians) “was invented by, negotiated within, and implemented by the Administration. No Congressional hearings were held, no legislation was required, and no major acts of Congressional approval were sought.” Similarly, the Carter administration set forth a number of policies, which were later reversed by the Reagan administration, “with little to no Congressional involvement.”

Even when Congress does act, Rosen argued—as it did by substantially increasing aid, trade, and arms sales to Israel during Reagan’s first term—these increases would have been “unobtainable without Administration support,” Rosen wrote before listing numerous officials within the Reagan administration with whom AIPAC had no connections. “If these people were the heads of Congressional committees, this situation would not be tolerated for a day,” he wrote.

Things were no better for AIPAC when dealing with career bureaucrats. “We have almost no contact with the vast majority of the Office of the Secretary of Defense,” he wrote. “It is as if they were a foreign government,” he added, stating that AIPAC had the same problem with “the Central Intelligence Agency, and other key bodies.”

To fix this problem, Rosen called on AIPAC to establish a wing of four or five AIPAC staffers led by an “Admin specialist” capable of dealing with the political players within the Reagan administration. The new lead staffer did not need to be a “house conservative,” Rosen wrote, but someone who can circulate effectively within the “community of discourse” of the officials AIPAC sought to influence. These AIPAC staffers would be able to influence administration officials by virtue of their professional background and expertise. “For example, if we intended to deal seriously with the Pentagon,” Rosen wrote, “we need a contact person at mid-career, from a defense community background.”

In a chart comparing the different environments of Congress and the executive branch, Rosen warned that AIPAC staffers would be working

in a completely different environment than they were used to. While lawmakers deal “selectively with particular issues,” staffers in the executive branch deal “comprehensively with all issues” and are “often guided by [a] strategy or game plan.” Congress exhibited little organized opposition to Israel, but the executive branch, Rosen warned, “contains strong, permanent opposition: the Arabists.” And while lawmakers can enunciate their own views and change their positions, bureaucrats must voice one policy and are not able to change their stance on issues.

Rosen also warned that while Congress is an “open” environment, the executive branch is “secretive, veiled in security.”²⁶ In the final paragraphs of the main text to AIPAC’s board, Rosen warned that there were risks involved in establishing a wing of executive branch lobbyists.

“Because a serious program to transform our relations with the Executive branch would be an enormous undertaking, requiring a tremendous investment of resources, time, and attention. It might also require changes in some of the principles of policy that have guided us until now. At the other end of the scale, we may decide that the costs and risks exceed the benefits, or that we simply do not have the resources. If this is the case, we should at least make a set of conscious choices with some discussion of the implications.”²⁷

“BEFORE ROSEN AIPAC HAD BELIEVED THAT THE WAY TO ALTER AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY WAS TO GET SENATORS TO SIGN A LETTER. HIS INSIGHT WAS THAT HE COULD ALSO AFFECT THE PROCESS BY DEALING WITH THE STAFF-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH WHO ORIGINATED THE POLICIES.”

AIPAC went ahead with Rosen’s proposal to lobby officials in the executive branch, with Rosen himself developing “close ties with officials in policy positions at the State Department, the National Security Council and the Pentagon.”²⁸ Judging from numerous reports about Rosen, the man himself was at the center of AIPAC’s efforts to lobby the executive branch, with Jeffrey H. Birnbaum reporting in the *Washington Post* in 2006 that “Rosen helped pioneer executive-branch lobbying.” “Before Rosen,” he continued, “AIPAC had believed that the way to alter American foreign policy was to get senators to sign a letter. His insight was that he could also affect the process by dealing with the staff-level bureaucrats in the executive branch who originated the policies.”²⁹

Extensive List of Contacts

While Rosen was well known for his irascibility and as someone who did not suffer fools—gladly or otherwise—he was also a legendary networker with a huge list of contacts. Copies of his personal papers obtained by MEF include an 870-page list of all the people he interacted with over the course of his career. Rosen paid obsessive attention to detail as he maintained this gargantuan catalog of contacts, recounting details of their personal lives, whom people were related to, and their approach to issues that are relevant to Rosen's work. The entry about a high-ranking, prominent official in Washington's intelligence community, for example, provides information about Rosen's personal connection to the person's doctor and other mutual contacts Rosen shared with the official. In some entries, it appears Rosen

copied and pasted the biographies of people posted on the internet so that he could use the information to guide him in future introductions or conversations with the people in question.

The document is a gold mine of useful information that a Washington insider would need to survive—and thrive—inside the Beltway. Another entry about a prominent news broadcaster provides the contact information for the journalist's booker: "If you are running late or you have a question prior to the show tonight, your contact is ____." The document even includes a reference to a *maitre d'* who apparently helped him get good tables at an unnamed restaurant.

The 'Colossus' of AIPAC



Rosen, right, stands proudly alongside his longtime companion, Barbara Schubert, center, and U.S. Senator John McCain, an ardent supporter of Israel, in this undated photo. (Steve Rosen archives)

Rosen was clearly a central and indispensable player in the passage of the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996,³⁰ which imposed sanctions on the Iranian oil industry in an attempt to hinder the country's support for terrorism and to pursue a nuclear weapons program. In particular, AIPAC research educated policymakers about the need for sanctions against Iran. In early March 1996, *The Forward* reported that AIPAC research informed policymakers that, "Even as Iran funds Hamas bombing attacks against civilians and trains Hamas terrorists, Germany is subsidizing Iran with \$3 billion in below-market-rate loans." That was not all.



The report shows that Western countries, led by Germany, Japan and Italy, have been financing Iran's campaign of terror and its attempt to develop nuclear weapons. Germany loans the money to Iran at between 5% to 7% interest rates, when the market rate would be about 20%, the report says.

Well known analyst Kenneth Timmerman told *The Forward* the AIPAC report was “a very well-documented piece of research.”³¹ It had a real impact. By the end of March, diplomats from Ireland, Italy, and Spain traveled to Tehran in an effort to convince the regime to disavow terrorism, with the *Dallas Morning News* reporting that German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel declared, “Iran must distance itself clearly from Hamas terrorism and from the terrible attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.”³² Writing in *The New Yorker* in 2005, Jeffrey Goldberg reported that “Rosen’s main role at AIPAC, he once told me, was to collect evidence of ‘Iranian perfidy’ and share it with the United States.”³³ Rosen was not exaggerating. Given Rosen’s efforts, it is no surprise that Howard Kohr, AIPAC’s CEO from 1996 to 2024, declared that Rosen “consistently and demonstrably exceeds” job requirements in annual performance reviews



“ONE OF THE BEST STRATEGIC THINKERS IN THE COUNTRY [WHO] HAS MADE SURE AIPAC STAYS FOCUSED ON THE ISSUES CONFRONTING U.S.–ISRAEL RELATIONS.”

for the years 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2004, the year before Rosen’s departure from the organization. In 1999, Kohr declared Rosen was “one of the best strategic thinkers in the country [who] has made sure AIPAC stays focused on the issues confronting U.S.–Israel relations.” In 2000, Kohr wrote of Rosen:

“One of the best in the world. A privilege to work with at AIPAC. Provides real leadership here on policy matters. An example for others. His department is an example of dedicated team workers. Working relations excellent with lay leaders. Still needs to exhibit some patience with co-workers.

In 2001, Kohr wrote:

“Totally committed to our cause and the organization. International caliber. A recognized leader in his field. Always gets the most of his personnel. Working relations getting better. Lay leaders have very high regard for him. Colleagues respect him. An important member of the senior team of AIPAC. An important advisor to me. Strengths: analytic skills, knowledge of U.S.-Israel relations, public speaking skills. Weaknesses: patience.

In 2002, Kohr declared that Rosen “remained a national asset for our work, a privilege to work with.” In 2004, the second-to-last year Rosen worked at AIPAC, Kohr described him as:

“A critical member of the senior team. Quality of work superb. A national figure in our field. Planning: One of the best. Dedication: A model for everyone. A model manager. Respected by lay leaders and colleagues. Areas requiring improvement: Continued patience with colleagues.”³⁴

All of this lends credence to AIPAC staffer Michael Lewis’s assessment of Rosen as “the ‘Colossus’ of AIPAC.”³⁵

Departure from AIPAC



Despite his stellar work at AIPAC, his time at the organization came to an end after he was charged in August 2005 with sharing information with fellow AIPAC employees and a journalist at *The Washington Post* about threats to U.S. and Israeli citizens in Iraq in hopes of preventing their deaths. According to a lawsuit Rosen subsequently filed against AIPAC, he was placed on administrative leave by AIPAC two weeks after he had been awarded a bonus of \$7,000 from the organization. According to Rosen's complaint against AIPAC, his ultimate discharge was a response to threats from the Department of Justice.³⁶

The charges were dropped by the Obama administration on May 1, 2009, after Rosen's lawyer threatened to put numerous government officials on the witness stand such as former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, former national security adviser Stephen Hadley, former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, forcing them to admit that they had "disclosed almost exactly the same type of information that led to the prosecution of Rosen [and another defendant]."³⁷ The charges against Rosen, which one former CIA officer suggested was a case of entrapment by law enforcement officials,³⁸ highlighted the secretive nature of the executive branch that he had discussed in the memo he had sent to AIPAC leaders twenty years previously. In response to the

dismissal of the charges against Rosen, one commentator declared, "The case amounted to the criminalization of extremely routine practices in Washington: acquiring and distributing information that's overclassified."³⁹

At the time of Rosen's dismissal, AIPAC said it had nothing to do with the allegations against him and that he was fired because he "did not comport with the standards that AIPAC respects and requires of its employees." The explanation did not carry much weight for insiders, with Martin Indyk, a former colleague of Rosen's at AIPAC, declaring, "It appears they've abandoned their own on the battlefield."⁴⁰ At the time of his death in 2024, it was generally accepted that the case against Rosen was a political hit job, with *The New York Times* reporting that the "highly unusual prosecution [against Rosen] raised alarms about whether the government was moving to turn the trading of inside information, practiced daily among Washington power players and journalists, into a criminal activity."⁴¹

"The case fell apart," said Rosen's longtime partner, Barbara Schubert. "The judge said, 'There's no case here.'" But as weak as the case against Rosen was, the investigation did its damage. Schubert reported that, in addition to putting listening devices in his home and car, federal investigators followed Rosen and Schubert around in unmarked cars as they went about their daily errands during the investigation. "The neighbors were laughing because we all knew who they were," Schubert said. "When we went for a hike, they followed us."

The investigation, prosecution, and forced departure from AIPAC—which came just as Rosen's daughter started attending college—demonstrated the government's ability to inflict emotional and financial suffering even on people innocent of the charges against them, Schubert reports.⁴²

"HE LIKED PEOPLE—ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE WITH ALL KINDS OF OPINIONS. HE SAID, 'IF YOU WANT PERFECT FRIENDS, YOU'LL BE VERY LONELY,'"

"They can make you hurt," she said. Fortunately, Rosen had defenders and supporters who helped him make the transition from American-based advocacy to promoting European-Israel relations, which had been a priority of his for a long time, Schubert said.

Through it all, Rosen worked to maintain his network of friends and supporters, despite the controversy. "He liked people—all kinds of people with all kinds of opinions. He said, 'If you want perfect friends, you'll be very lonely,'" Schubert said.

European Leadership Network

With his departure from AIPAC, Rosen's sphere of influence shifted to Europe with his involvement in the founding of the European Leadership Network (ELNET), a group charged with promoting positive European-Israel relations.

The organization was founded in 2007 with the support of American donors who disagreed with the prevailing notion that promoting positive European-Israel relations was a waste of time. Rosen scolded those who would abandon Europe to Israel's enemies in a video promoting ELNET's work, describing the new organization as a "European AIPAC."

"A lot of AIPAC people don't actually believe that Europe can be saved," Rosen said in a video on the "JewTube" YouTube channel in 2019. "They believe that Europe is lost. They believe it's too late. They also believe it doesn't matter, that as long as we have America we don't need Europe all."⁴³

"All of that is wrong," Rosen declared bluntly. "Twice as much of Israel's trade passes through Europe as the United States. Europe is the main target of the BDS [Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions] movement, not the United States. Thanks to AIPAC, which is really good at what it does, the BDS movement doesn't have much chance in the United States, but it does have

a chance in Europe. And Europe is Israel's principal trading partner, and yet it's also the place where public opinion is less friendly and political parties are less friendly. So, actually, Europe is vital to Israel."

In correspondence to ELNET donors obtained by MEF, Rosen declared that, given that many of the European-based activists, directors and employees in ELNET had no prior experience in pro-Israel advocacy and had no role models to follow, it was up to ELNET's American



"A LOT OF AIPAC PEOPLE DON'T ACTUALLY BELIEVE THAT EUROPE CAN BE SAVED. THEY BELIEVE THAT EUROPE IS LOST. THEY BELIEVE IT'S TOO LATE."

supporters to mentor them. He also declared that, while American control over ELNET was inappropriate, American advice was vital to its success. The goal, as Rosen saw it, was for ELNET to develop a European donor base and establish a key contact system of volunteers and lay leaders who would then establish contact with elected and appointed officials. His primary goal was to encourage pro-Israel citizens—Jews and non-Jews—to participate in the democratic process.

Once ELNET established its base of support, the organization would fulfill the same mission that AIPAC did in the United States. Among other things, this included countering Iranian aggression, putting and keeping Hamas and Hezbollah on European terror lists, and defeating efforts to isolate Israel with boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaigns.

ELNET's Influence

Rosen and ELNET's work apparently paid off, with the European Union imposing a number of sanctions on Iran. In April 2007, the EU passed a set of sanctions prohibiting the sale of goods and technology that Iran could use to advance its nuclear weapons program. The bank accounts of companies that violated these prohibitions would be subject to freezing.⁴⁷ While these sanctions were passed the same year as ELNET's funding and were in the works before the organization was established, the EU passed another, much more robust set of sanctions in 2010.⁴⁸

In December 2018, ELNET played a pivotal role in organizing the first-ever Trilateral U.S.-Europe-Israel Strategic Dialogue in partnership with the Hudson Institute.⁴⁹ The dialogue included high-level discussions on key security issues—notably Iran—and addressed the consequences of the U.S. departure from the JCPOA (Iran nuclear deal)

Playing a role in Europe similar to the one he played in the United States, Rosen became a crucial source of information for European leaders struggling to deal with issues related to the Middle East and hostility toward Israel. He provided briefings to politicians throughout the continent, with his work attracting the attention of anti-Zionists at Electronic Intifada, who complained that Rosen “helped the Israel lobby to expand beyond the U.S.”⁴⁴ This was no exaggeration. ELNET documentation indicates that between 2009 and 2015, Rosen made a total of fifty visits to Europe, with most of these trips to France (twenty), Germany (twelve), and Spain (nine).⁴⁵ With these visits, Rosen helped pave the way for ELNET's ground game in Europe, which currently includes strategic dialogue forums that allow Israeli and European leaders to address shared national security and foreign policy concerns and establish long-lasting personal and professional ties.⁴⁶

April 2007

The EU passed a set of sanctions prohibiting the sale of goods and technology that Iran could use to advance its nuclear weapons program.

December 2018

ELNET organized the first-ever Trilateral U.S.-Europe-Israel Strategic Dialogue in partnership with the Hudson Institute.

2020

ELNET responded to the decision to trigger the Dispute Resolution Mechanism in the Iran nuclear deal.

2021

ELNET published a policy brief titled “Back to Iran Nuclear Talks: Perspectives, Scenarios and Recommendations”.

and the differing views between the U.S., Europe, and Israel on how to confront Iran. Participants noted the growing gap between U.S. and European policies on Iran.

In 2020, ELNET responded⁵⁰ to the decision by the governments of the U.K., France, and Germany to trigger the Dispute Resolution Mechanism in the Iran nuclear deal. ELNET also called⁵¹ on EU High Representative Josep Borrell to adopt the E3 position and urged the EU to apply sanctions on Iran should it not cooperate with the Dispute Resolution Mechanism and continue to violate the agreement.

In 2021, ELNET published a policy brief titled⁵² “Back to Iran Nuclear Talks: Perspectives, Scenarios and Recommendations,” authored by Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin, former head

of Israeli defense intelligence. The paper emphasized the necessity of coordination between Europe, the United States, and regional partners directly threatened by Iran—including Israel—to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.



Fighting Anti-Israel Boycotts

Rosen’s research skills featured prominently in countering the threat of anti-Israel boycotts in Europe. In 2015, he authored a memo titled “The BDS Movement’s Main Target is Europe,” which could have served as the script for the YouTube video summarized above.

“*The BDS movement has chosen Europe as its main target because Europe is the soft underbelly of Israel. European trade with Israel is double the level of the U.S., and European public opinion and parliaments are far less favorable to the Jewish state. The boycott campaign knows that decisions in the European Parliament and the E.U. Council can have a far greater impact on Israel than anything the student council at Berkeley or a Presbyterian church in Idaho can do.*”⁵³

In a 2016 memo⁵⁴ he wrote for Friends of Israel in response to the United Nations Human Rights Council’s decision to establish a blacklist targeting companies that operating in Judea and Samaria and even the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem,⁵⁵ Rosen warned that there was growing pressure on the European union “to establish a blacklist labeling Israeli companies that have any, even secondary, involvement in the disputed areas.” Israeli financial institutions that, for example,

have issued mortgages to Jewish homeowners in East Jerusalem could find themselves on the EU’s blacklist, resulting in “economic warfare against Israel on an unprecedented scale” by expanding the anti-settlement campaign into “a boycott of all Israel.” Such a campaign would prompt European companies to “steer clear of Israeli partners altogether to avoid any possible taint” of doing business with the Jewish state. To buttress his warning, Rosen cited a report from the European

Council on Foreign Relations suggesting that Israeli banks should not be granted licenses to operate at all in the EU.

Rosen reported that top elected leaders in the U.K., France, Germany, and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini “have all expressed strong opposition to any boycott of Israel” and called for expanding Israel’s economic relations with Europe. Still, the

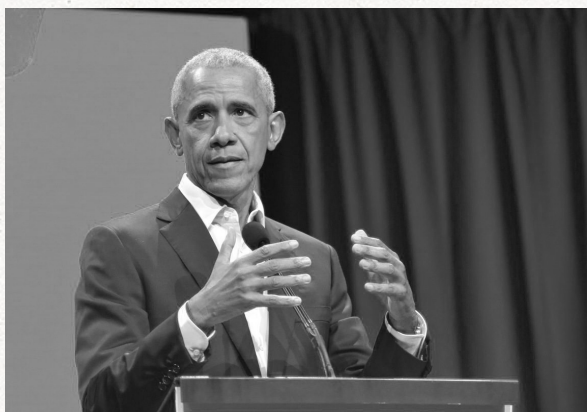
threat of a boycott was real, Rosen warned. “Not a single European government has declared its opposition to a blacklist,” he wrote. Nevertheless, he advised that “more resources need to be devoted to fighting the blacklist campaign.”

Predictably, ELNET has generated paranoid criticism from the far left, with Open Democracy complaining of its ability to gain access to politicians in the U.K., reporting that

“*ELNET has managed to secure access to the highest levels of British politics. Rishi Sunak and David Cameron have both attended its events; Sunak went to the group’s reception to mark the anniversary of the Abraham Accords less than two weeks after he became prime minister in 2022, while Cameron was interviewed as part of its online discussion about Islamist radicalisation. Labour grandee Peter Mandelson and the government’s adviser on political violence and disruption, John Woodcock, have each also joined at least one of ELNET’s online briefings about the ongoing atrocities in Gaza. The organisation also takes delegations of MPs, peers and parliamentary staff on trips to Israel, some of which were registered with the UK’s Electoral Commission in accordance with the rules. It has boasted in meetings that these trips are so influential that they have “literally turned [politicians] around as pro-Israeli”. The group also promises to “fight” the “damaging statements by Western leaders” who criticise the IDF.*⁵⁶

Following Rosen’s strategy, ELNET generated the same paranoid response from its critics that AIPAC did during his time at that institution, ultimately demonstrating the organization’s effectiveness.

Rosen’s Time at the Middle East Forum



In 2009, Rosen joined MEF as a visiting fellow. At the time of his hire, Daniel Pipes, then the Forum’s director, said, “Steve Rosen brings new strengths to our work, particularly in the Washington policy environment that he knows so well.” Rosen launched two influential projects: the *Obama Mideast Monitor* weblog and the *Policy Forum* publication series, both of which provided in-depth analysis of the administration’s policies on Iran, the Palestinian territories, and broader regional affairs.

Authoring almost 300 articles during his tenure, Rosen covered a wide range of critical topics. The *Obama Mideast Monitor* was a blog that provided analysis and commentary on the Obama administration's Middle East policies. It focused on key regional issues such as U.S. relations with Islamist movements, Iran's nuclear ambitions, counterterrorism strategies, and the administration's engagement with regimes in the region.

The blog was part of a broader effort by MEF to scrutinize U.S. foreign policy and highlight concerns over what it viewed as the administration's overly accommodating stance toward groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as its handling of conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Iraq. Contributors often critiqued policies they believed weakened U.S. influence or emboldened Islamist actors.

At the blog, Rosen was careful not to ignore positive actions by political actors others would dismiss as damaging to the U.S.-Israel relationship. For example, in late December 2008, Rosen highlighted statements offered by David Axelrod, a senior adviser to President-elect Barack Obama, in response to a round of fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Axelrod had previously appeared on the CBS News show *Face the Nation* to declare that "the President-elect recognizes the special relationship between the United States and Israel" and that Obama was going to honor it. "Obviously, this situation has become even more complicated in the last couple of days and weeks as Hamas began its shelling and Israel responded." With this simple blog entry, Rosen highlighted an acknowledgment from the incoming administration that Hamas was ultimately responsible for the ongoing conflict.⁵⁸

The *Policy Forum* series, ahead of its time, published papers by Rosen and other contributors that explored pressing issues of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Many of the topics it covered—such as the role of the United Nations

THE POLICY FORUM SERIES, AHEAD OF ITS TIME, PUBLISHED PAPERS BY ROSEN AND OTHER CONTRIBUTORS THAT EXPLORED PRESSING ISSUES OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in enabling terrorism—are only now gaining mainstream attention.⁵⁹

The 2009 article, "UNRWA at 60: Are There Better Alternatives?" exposed how UNRWA facilities, including schools, health clinics, and even hospitals, were being used as training grounds and safe havens for guerrilla armies and terrorists. It highlighted how UNRWA's autonomous status allowed it to ignore international conventions with impunity—a reality that has only recently started to receive widespread scrutiny.⁵⁹

Later serving as director of the Washington Project at MEF, Rosen further influenced debate on critical issues, authoring incisive analyses on UNRWA and U.S. congressional actions concerning the agency. His research on U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation offered key insights into the shifting dynamics of Middle Eastern geopolitics.



Charles Freeman



Rosen clearly retained his ability to influence events in Washington, D.C., during his time at ELNET and MEF. In 2009, he played a central role in derailing the Obama administration's appointment of Charles (Chas) Freeman as chairman of the National Intelligence Council, an ersatz think tank that provides high-level analysis to officials in the intelligence community. Citing a brief report on *Foreign Policy's* website announcing Freeman's appointment,⁶⁰ Rosen wrote a brief—and incisive—post for MEF's *Middle East Monitor*, arguing that Freeman was



*a strident critic of Israel, and a textbook case of the old-line Arabism that afflicted American diplomacy at the time the state of Israel was born. His views of the region are what you would expect in the Saudi foreign ministry, with which he maintains an extremely close relationship, not the top CIA position for analytic products going to the President of the United States.*⁶¹

Rosen then went on to recount some of Freeman's more unhinged statements demonstrating his unfitness for the job. Freeman was eventually forced to withdraw his name from consideration. Upon his departure, Freeman complained bitterly about the influence of the Israel lobby in Washington,⁶² but Freeman's real problem was that he was on the losing end of an argument that Rosen had been winning since the 1980s—that Israel was America's most reliable and valuable ally in the Middle East.

Defeated Arabists

Under Rosen's leadership, Rosen's researchers effectively countered the Arabists whose thinking influenced decision-makers in Washington, D.C. Arabism enjoyed a resurgence with the publication of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) but failed to make a significant dent in American support for Israel. The defeat of the Arabists, however, does not mean we can close the book on Rosen's intellectual contributions. The same arguments used to counter Arabist animosity toward Israel in previous decades are relevant in the face of growing popularity of isolationist thought on the part of "America Firsters," who have become more visible in the current decade. The arguments Rosen helped formulate in the 1980s remain relevant nearly fifty years later.



Conclusion

Steve Rosen's decades-long career in U.S.-Israel relations—spanning think tanks, AIPAC, and the founding of ELNET—left a legacy unmatched in its strategic clarity and operational influence. With meticulous research, behind-the-scenes diplomacy, and an unrelenting drive to counter Israel's detractors, Rosen redefined what effective advocacy looked like. He played a central role in recalibrating how Washington and, eventually, European capitals understood Israel's value. Even after his unfair prosecution and departure from AIPAC, Rosen never stopped working. Through MEF and ELNET, he remained a resolute defender of the Jewish state and a strategic visionary who understood that logic, not sentiment, must drive policy.



Barbara Schubert, Rosen's longtime companion, marveled at how he stayed connected with friends even in the face of harassment by federal investigators and prosecutors. (Steve Rosen archives)

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