

The Influence of Israel and its American Lobby over US Middle East Policy Explained

By Jeffrey Blankfort

The apparent ability of Israel, one of the world's smallest countries, to shape the Middle East policies of the world's remaining superpower has been a source of puzzlement, conjecture, and constant frustration on the part of those fighting for justice for the Palestinians and for the peoples of the region, as a whole.

One of the roots of this unique historical phenomenon may be found in the interpretation of a 120-year-old US Supreme Court decision that afforded corporations the same rights as individual American citizens.

One of those rights is the freedom of speech that is guaranteed by the 1st amendment to the US Constitution.

Thanks to the extraordinary degree of corruption that was manifest in American society in the late 19th century, financial contributions to political candidates came to be seen by the court as expressions of political speech and thus under the court's protection.

This has resulted in the American political system becoming one of never-ending and ever more costly political campaigns, and, without question, the most corrupt among what are generally described as "advanced countries." The Supreme Court's decision, reaffirmed over the years, opened the door to well funded "special interests" and their lobbies and has allowed them, through what amounts to legal bribery, to shape the foreign and domestic policies of the United States.

By 1907, the American author, Mark Twain would write that there was only one "native criminal class in America—Congress" and a decade later, the humorist Will Rogers would joke, "America has the best Congress money can buy."

In the beginning it was the railroads and the steel companies who paid the going price and then came the lumber, oil and construction companies, the weapons and automobile manufacturers, the airplane and communications industries, and what are euphemistically known as the health providers--the doctors, the hospitals and the pharmaceutical manufacturers who have made sure that Americans would be the only citizens in a developed country that have no national health service.

In the arena of foreign policy, no lobby has proved more powerful than that of the organized American Jewish community in support of Israel; what is generally referred to as the Israel Lobby and in the halls of Congress, simply as "the Lobby." Its power is all the more impressive when one realizes the lobby represents no more than a third of America's six million Jews.

The dedication and single-mindedness of that one third, however, stands in stark contrast to the lack of involvement by the overwhelming majority of Americans in a system for which they long ago lost faith and respect. This has made the Lobby's task much simpler than it

might first appear. It is also why unconditional support for Israel will likely remain the only issue in which Democrats and Republicans submerge their hostilities and march in lock step together like trained circus animals. Not only do pro-Israel measures usually receive 400 votes of the 435 member House and up to 99 of a 100 in the Senate, but when it comes to foreign aid, Congress has frequently voted to grant Israel more money than a president has requested and to pass legislation favorable to the lobby over his opposition.

Since 1985 the amount of direct aid has fluctuated between \$3 and \$3.5 billion while unpublicized extras in the Pentagon budget have tended to raise that figure considerably higher.

The total today is estimated to be at least \$108 billion. This figure does not include the costs of \$19 billion in loan guarantees to Israel since 1991, the billions of taxpayers dollars invested in Israeli government bonds by union pension funds, individual states and county and city governments, nor the billions in tax-exempt donations by American Jews to quasi governmental Israeli agencies and charities since Israel became a State.

The state of the US economy has never been a consideration. When funds have been unavailable for essential domestic programs, such as in 1991, when six out of ten U.S. cities were unable to meet their budgets and several states their payrolls, Israel received, over the first president Bush's wishes, an additional \$650 million in cash as part of the Gulf War emergency spending bill. In September 1992, after stubbornly resisting for a year Israel's request for \$10 billion in loan guarantees, but with a difficult election against Bill Clinton just two months away, Bush went along with Congress's demand that Israel's request be approved. It was too late to help him at the polls.

This is not only a tribute to the millions of dollars contributed to national political candidates by wealthy American Jews but a testament to the fear that AIPAC, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, Israel's officially registered lobby, has instilled in members of Congress who have neither a personal interest in supporting Israel nor a sizeable Jewish constituency.

"If there was a secret ballot, aid to Israel would be cut severely," a Congressman described as pro-Israel told the New Republic's Morton Kondracke in 1989. "It's not out of affection any more that Israel gets \$3 billion a year. It's from fear you'll wake up one morning and find out than an opponent has \$500,000 to run against you."

The Lobby, however, is more than AIPAC, which, alone, would be unable to exert such power. There are, in fact, more than 60 organizations, large and small, engaged single-mindedly, in promoting Israel's interests in the US while marginalizing, intimidating and silencing its critics. Its targets include Jews opposed either to Israel's existence as a Jewish state, such as myself and others who are simply outraged by Israel's continuing occupation and theft of Palestinian land, and the deadly means with which both are carried out, held in check only by the mild restraints of the international community.

Some 52 of these organizations belong to Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations, which is supposed to be the voice of American Jewry.

Along with AIPAC, the two largest and most influential of them are the Anti-Defamation League, or ADL, and the American Jewish Committee, or AJC. Representatives of the major organizations meet every month to plan strategy for that month. Nothing can be left to chance.

The ADL began in 1914 as an offshoot of the nation's oldest Zionist organization, B'nai B'rith. Its mission was to defend Jews from anti-Jewish acts and words. It still does that, but anti-Jewish racism ceased to be a serious problem in the US years ago and the ADL's chief task today is gathering information on critics of Israel, what it calls the "new anti-Semites" and smearing them in the public media.

Fourteen years ago, its information gathering went too far. A raid by the San Francisco police on ADL's San Francisco office revealed that the organization was conducting a major private spying operation across the United States. In the San Francisco area alone, its agent had illegally compiled files on more than 600 organizations and 12,000 individuals, myself among them. These were not just Arab-American, Palestinian and Muslim groups, but Black, Latino, Asian, Irish, and trade unions, as well.

There was a special category for the anti-apartheid movement, which given Israel's ties with apartheid South Africa, was not surprising, but the ADL spy was also passing that information on to a South African intelligence agent along with reports on black South African exiles living in the area.

Pressure from influential local Zionists convinced city officials not to bring the ADL to justice while the organization promised it would stop its spying activities. There is no reason to believe it has done so. Today, it works very closely with police departments across the country, educating them on so-called "hate crimes" and routinely sends groups of US police officials on free trips to Israel to learn how to respond to "terrorist attacks." This doesn't bode well for what is left of America's civil liberties.

The American Jewish Committee was founded by German Jews in 1906 and was firmly anti-Zionist until the events of the Second World War and the Jewish Holocaust led it to change its position. Today, it is the Lobby's unofficial foreign office, and until recently was largely content to work behind the scenes pressuring foreign governments on behalf of Israel. It began flexing its muscles more publicly two years ago when it opened an office in Brussels to lobby the European Union.

The AJC now has weekly meetings with a high official if not the chief of state of a EU member government and one can already see the effect. Over the past year the EU has moved away from relative support for the Palestinians to adopting one position after another reflecting Israeli demands.

A number of other important components of the Lobby will not be found in the President's conference, including 117 Jewish community relations councils, 155 Jewish federations, and several powerful "independent" Washington think-tanks such as the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a creation of AIPAC; the American Enterprise Institute, and the Foundation for the Defense of Democracy, founded after the attack on the World Trade Center..

When one adds to what I have mentioned so far, the Jewish religious bodies that also lobby for Israel, it should be obvious that there is no other ethnic or religious group that comes close to being so intensely organized, except, perhaps, the Christian Zionists, but the scope of their activities is relatively limited. This is but one of several things that distinguish the Israel Lobby from other powerful US special interest lobbies, apart from the fact that it represents the interests of a foreign country. All are important to understanding its success.

The first, of course, is its money. It is impossible to know exactly how much of it Jews contribute to American politicians, but it is far more than any other group.

The difficulty occurs because groups monitoring the data categorize contributions according to the financial sector of the donor, which, in the case of Israel, tends to disguise the goal of the contributor. For example, the Communications industry in the US is dominated by Jews, most of whom are known supporters of Israel. When they contribute to the Democrats or Republicans, however, that money is not attributed to the Israel Lobby, but to the Communications industry. This applies to the Banking and Wall Street Financial houses that are also largely Jewish, as well as to other sectors of the business world.

Haim Saban exemplifies this problem. An Egyptian-born Israeli-American billionaire and media owner, Saban, in 2002 gave the Democratic Party \$12.3 million, \$7.5 in one chunk. This was two million dollars more than the Exxon corporation gave the Republican Party over a 10-year period but rated no more than a few inches in the NY Times. Saban, a good friend of former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, has also made large contributions to AIPAC.

He also established the Saban Center on the Middle East at the Brookings Institute, turning that once independent think-tank into another component of the Lobby. Saban's \$12.3 million, however, was not considered to be Israel lobby funding.

What is considered as pro-Israel money is largely restricted to funds from some three dozen pro-Israel PACs or political action committees and their members. PACs are groups that are licensed to collect donations and pass them on to politicians supportive of the particular interests of the industry, trade union, or non-profit organization that formed the PAC. What distinguishes the pro-Israel PACs from the others is that they disguise their identity to avoid the prying eyes of the media and the public. They do this simply by not mentioning Israel in their name. Thus we have the Northern Californians for Good Government, St. Louisans for Good Government, the Desert Caucus, Hudson Valley PAC, and NATPAC, etc. This has led to them being referred to as "stealth PACs" by a former State Department official. Moreover, unlike other PACs, they only contribute to candidates in other states.

For example, the Desert Caucus will send money to congressional candidates or an incumbent Senate or House members in Illinois or New Jersey, based solely on their positions on Israel. This has led critics of the Lobby to portray them as 'Israel Firsters'. This is meant to indicate that they are more concerned with the welfare of Israel than their fellow Americans.

The way I measured pro-Israel political contributions was by visiting the Mother Jones magazine web-site, a pro-Israel liberal monthly. In 1996 and 2000, it compiled lists of the top 400 individual donors to both political parties. What I found was that in 2000, 7 of the top 10

donors, 12 of the top 20, and at least, 125 of the top 250 were Jewish, most of which went to the Democrats. In other words, at least 50% and even higher among the larger contributors. It is an extraordinary figure when you realize that Jews make up but 2.3 % of the American population.

The 50% overall figure corresponds to estimates from within the Democratic Party as well as Jewish organizations, although some speculate the figure is as high as 70%.

The extent of these contributions, coupled with those from trade unions that are strongly pro-Israel at the leadership level and which have invested at least \$5 billion in Israeli government bonds, have made the Democratic Party, into what American law professor Francis Boyle recently called, “a front for AIPAC.”

While maintaining a formidable presence in the nation’s capitol, so much so that it is referred to in Congress simply as “the Lobby,” AIPAC gathers its strength from its grass roots cadres and that of other Jewish organizations with which it networks in every state and major city in the United States. Its operations are carried out by a staff of 165, a healthy \$47 million annual budget, and offices across the country. What affords it a special advantage is that it is considered a domestic lobby and not required to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

This gives its lobbyists access such registration would prohibit, such as taking part in Congressional committee hearings, drafting or vetting legislation that concerns Israel or the Middle East, and placing its interns as volunteers in the offices of members of Congress where they serve as AIPAC’s eyes or, if you prefer, spies.

Few AIPAC staff members actually lobby. Most provide research materials, talking points, and speeches for members of Congress or help prepare AIPAC’s Near East Report, a four-page bi-weekly that is essential reading on Capitol Hill. At a local level, in addition to contributing money, AIPAC members voluntarily provide their expertise to competing candidates in congressional elections, so whoever wins, Israel is assured of a supporter.

AIPAC's annual conference in Washington each Spring is a major event of the political season. In 2005, 4,000 of its members attended along with 1000 student guests. The keynote address is usually given by the President, the Vice-President or the Secretary of State. This year it was Vice President Dick Cheney who was greeted with many rounds of applause and a standing ovation. As a tribute to the Lobby's power, approximately half the members of Congress attend, including the Democratic and Republican leaders in the Senate and the House. Predictably, their speeches reflect their personal loyalty and of America's unbreakable commitment to Israel. The names of the congress members who show up are publicized on AIPAC's web site, which enhances their status among major Jewish donors.

Just as important, but rarely publicized are regional lunches and dinners that AIPAC holds across the country, to which local political leaders-- mayors, supervisors, city council members, police chiefs, district attorneys, school superintendents, etc, are invited. The speakers at these events will usually be a US Senator or a governor from another state. What is interesting is that the media is never invited nor informed of their appearance, neither where the event takes place nor in the speaker's state.

As a follow-up, those favored public officials will soon find themselves invited on all-expense paid trips to Israel provided by local Jewish community relations councils, federations or other community organizations. There they meet the prime minister, defense minister and the IDF Chief of Staff, tour Israel and a West Bank settlement, and visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum. It is from such so-called "civil servants" that new members of Congress invariably emerge and so the personal relations established between them and influential Jewish community activists through these trips are mutually beneficial.

Politicians, from Congressional candidates to the president, frequently travel to Israel to gain the support of Jewish voters back home.

George W. Bush made his only trip to Israel before deciding to run for President in what was widely viewed as an effort to win pro-Israel voters' support. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a non-practicing Jew, did the same.

Once in Congress, members can be assured of more free trips to Israel arranged through the American Israel Education Fund, a foundation set up by AIPAC for that purpose. In 2005 alone, more than 100 members of Congress visited Israel, some several times.

It should be noted that few politicians think it necessary to make such a political trip to Mexico prior to or even after an election, despite the fact that Mexico is far more vital to the US economy and is the genuine homeland of many more millions of Americans. But then, there is no Mexican lobby with similar political or financial clout.

AIPAC does not contribute directly to congressional or presidential campaigns but it does advise its members and the pro-Israel community as to where their money can be the most effective, whether through individual contributions or through one of the PACs.

An important hallmark of AIPAC's power is its ability to get the signatures of at least 70 U.S. senators on any letter it wishes to send to a U.S. president when they believe he is not acting in Israel's best interests. One of the most notable was the letter addressed to President Gerald Ford on May 21, 1975 with 76 signatories, presented after Ford had suspended aid to Israel and was about to make a major speech re-assessing the US-Israel relationship and calling on Israel to return to the 1967 borders. The letter warned Ford against making any changes in the strong US-Israel relationship. Ford never gave the speech and no president has dared to make such a threat again.

Mitchell Bard, a former editor of AIPAC's Near East Report, explains that the source of the Lobby's power is that "Jews have devoted themselves to politics with almost religious fervor." Though the Jewish population in the United States is roughly six million, or a little over 2 % of the U.S. population, almost 90 percent live in twelve key electoral college states.

"These states alone," writes Bard, "are worth enough electoral votes to elect the president. If you add the non-Jews shown by opinion polls to be as pro-Israel as Jews, it is clear Israel has the support of one of the largest veto groups in the country."

Bard also points out what has been obvious to political observers for years. Jewish political activism obliges members of Congress to consider what a mixed voting record on Israel-related issues may mean to their political future. There are no benefits for those who openly criticize Israel and "considerable costs in both loss of money and votes from Jews and non-Jews alike." For a member of Congress, even to call for even-handedness towards both the Israelis and Palestinians is enough to be targeted for defeat.

Consequently, politicians at every level of government tend to be more responsive to the concerns of Jewish voters than to the larger segments of their constituencies who pay more attention to "reality" TV, soap operas, professional sports, and their mobile phones than they do to electoral politics.

While the fact "that the campaign contribution is a major key to Jewish power...[is] one of the worst-kept secrets in American Jewish politics," as JJ Goldberg, noted in his book, "Jewish Power", it was not considered enough by Israel's supporters in the years immediately following Israel's establishment. What was thought necessary was for Jewish groups to create a supra-organizational structure that would work to ensure that no sector of American life would be immune from its influence.

Although this structure has evolved over time and while the scope of its activities have expanded and become more sophisticated, its modus operandi has remained largely unchanged.

This was revealed in a Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing in 1963, a time when U.S. financial assistance and political support for Israel was minimal compared to what it would become, and it was still possible for at least one elected legislator to publicly criticize Israel on the floor of Congress. The retaliation would come later. Thus, in May 1963, Sen. J.W. Fulbright, an Arkansas Democrat, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations initiated a series of hearings concerning the

activities of foreign agents in the US to determine if more restrictive laws needed to be put in place.

Among the groups under investigation were those of the young Israel lobby, including the supra-organizational structure or umbrella group, the American Zionist Council (AZC), and AIPAC that at the time was little more than a one man organization.

At the time, the AZC was comprised of eight other groups; only two are major players today, the extreme right-wing Zionist Organization of America, and the Women's Zionist Organization of America, better known as Hadassah. As the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs, AIPAC had been launched in 1951 as the lobbying arm of the American Zionist Council, but separated itself from the AZC in 1954 so as not to jeopardize the tax-exempt status of the other organizations by its lobbying efforts. It dropped "Zionist" from its name and became AIPAC in 1959. The separation was largely cosmetic. While AIPAC would focus its efforts on Congress, the other groups would take their lobbying for Israel along the length and breadth of American society.

This became clear from the program of a single committee of the AZC that was presented at the Senate hearing. It should be noted that at the time Israel was under no external danger and the Palestine Liberation Organization did not exist.

The American Zionist Council's Committee on Information and Public Relations would carry "on a major part of its work through highly specialized subcommittees composed of professionals in specific areas of activity who volunteer their services..." Its targets for the 1962/63 budgetary year were magazines, and their editors; TV, radio and films;

Christian religious groups; academia, at every level; the daily press; book publishing and promotion; expanding its already active speakers bureau; liaison with organizations, both on the national and local levels, especially those with an international relations programs with special attention to "the Negro community;" "issuance of special material and guidance on controversial issues such as Arab refugees, Syrian-Israeli situation, etc.," subsidizing trips to Israel for "individual public opinion molders to help provide them with an experience in Israel...and organizing tours "in which public opinion molders will participate [and] provide suitable arrangements in Israel for handling American visitors;... counteracting the opposition" (which was minimal at the time but they were taking no chances), "the monitoring and counteraction of all activities carried out here by the Arabs, American Friends of the Middle East and other hostile groups" and finally number twelve labeled "Miscellaneous," which included "Answering requests for information and providing suitable literature for the many thousands of requests annually received."

Those were their targets 44 years ago. Let's see how far they have come,

The first item was magazines and cultivating their editors. While a several of the most important magazines of that day are no longer published, those that exist today such as Newsweek, Time, US News & World Report, and the Weekly Standard are either Jewish owned or managed with Jews furnishing a substantial portion of their editorial staffs. While the fact that someone is Jewish does not necessarily mean he or she is an active Zionist, my observations, over the years, indicate that most are sympathetic to Israel and, at the very least, for their own self-interest, will know how to spin a story.

Television, Radio and Films were dominated by Jews then, but are more strongly in support of Israel now, from ownership, to management, to news direction. This is a prime source of pro-Israel propaganda and influence.

Christian religious groups have been a challenge for the lobby as various denominations have, over the years, sought to take a balanced position on the Israel-Palestine conflict. This, for Zionists, is an act of “anti-Semitism.” By and large, however, the Zionists have made sure their relations to the most of the Christian denominations is one in which Christian guilt for centuries of Jewish persecution is never far from the table. Their biggest success has been with the addition of the Christian evangelicals to the ranks of the Zionist movement, which provides massive voter support in rural America where few Jews live.

Among the more liberal denominations, the Zionists have had to work overtime recently to keep the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists, from approving or implementing plans that would have them divest from US companies profiting from the occupation.

Academia has long been a major battle ground between the Zionists and supporters of Palestine. In recent years, the battle over divestment and what can or cannot be taught about the Israel-Palestine conflict have been the main issues. The Zionists had already been extremely active before the present intifada but shortly after Israel was widely criticized for its attack on Jenin in April 2002, 26 of the campus groups led by Hillel and off-campus organizations, led by AIPAC, the ADL and the AJC formed the Israel Campus Coalition. They have so far been able to turn back all attempts at divestment on the university campuses as they have in the churches.

In the battle over teaching content, the ADL had a head start. In the early Eighties, it became the first organization to publish a list of pro-Arab professors and activists and distribute it to their members and to the media. The most recent group, Campus Watch, went so far as to put their addresses on its web site until obliged to remove them.

In the academic arena, the AJC and Campus Watch have been pushing Congress to pass legislation that would require monitoring of Middle East studies in the universities to make sure that professors are not indoctrinating their students with anti-Israel or anti-US “propaganda.” Since this would clearly violate the 1st amendment and curtail the free speech of professors in the classroom, the legislation is stalled in the Senate.

Most recently, the lobby scored an important victory when it was able to prevent Yale university, the nation’s oldest, from hiring University of Michigan professor and Middle East expert, Juan Cole, even though Cole had been recommended by the university’s hiring committees. His crime? He is critical of Israel and of the lobby and a supporter of the Palestinians.

Conquering the daily press has been at times a contest, but the lobby has emerged a clear winner. With ownership of the two most influential papers in the country, the New York Times and the Washington Post historically in Jewish hands, with pro-Israel columnists for both of those papers syndicated in hundreds of other papers

across the country, the pro-Israel position is the only one that America reads on both its editorial and op-ed pages.

The news, as well, is given a pro-Israel slant but this is not enough for the Zionist media monitoring groups, CAMERA and Honest Reporting. They accuse both papers of having an anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian bias. This, of course, is nonsense, but it serves to keep them in line.

Any survey of book titles will reveal yet another success of the lobby. While there have been a plethora of books about Israel and Jewish culture, nothing has been more successful than promoting books about the Jewish holocaust and the output appears to be never-ending. Moreover, it is the rare American child that can go through public school without an intense study of the holocaust through the diary of Ann Frank. For them, that is the story of the Second World War. More time, in fact, is spent by American school children studying the holocaust than the genocide of the Native Americans and the three and a half centuries of slavery and the decades of racism that followed. Before they get out of college students will also have read and experienced the maudlin recriminations of Eli Wiesel against the non-Jewish world for not coming to the aid of the Jews. Wiesel is now a permanent fixture on the American cultural scene.

I'll not go through all the rest of AZC's program except to point out that its liaisons with the African-American community, and more recently with the emerging Latin-American population, have been of major importance to the lobby's leadership. While left-wing Jews played important roles in America's civil rights struggles, controlling the black political agenda and determining its leadership have long been major goals of the lobby. It has succeeded in achieving both. Contributions from wealthy pro-Israel Jewish businessmen provide key financial support for black churches and keeps their pastors quiet, while providing campaign funding and key data bases for aspiring black politicians insures their loyalty to their donors, if not to Israel. Those who refuse to genuflect to the Lobby, which required their withholding of criticism when Israel was providing arms to apartheid South Africa, find themselves accused of "anti-Semitism" and targeted for political extinction.

What remains today is what I have called "the invisible plantation." The only member of Congress not on that plantation at the moment is Cynthia McKinney from Atlanta, Georgia. They defeated her in 2002 for criticizing Israel and the war on Iraq but she battled back to regain her seat in 2004, much to the unhappiness of not only the Lobby but also the Democratic Party.

They are gunning for her again in Georgia's July 18 primary.

Finally, and what is most disturbing, and what distinguishes the Israel Lobby from all the others is that it has no significant opposition.

In fact, it was only this spring, with the publication of a paper entitled The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy in the London Review of Books by Professors John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Steven Walt, of Harvard, that the subject of the Lobby's power and influence over US Middle East policy became an acceptable subject for public debate.

In their paper, the professors asserted, with considerable evidence, that US support for Israel over the years has not been in America's national interest and the present war in Iraq was essentially initiated in Israel's behalf and argued, effectively, against the notion of Israel serving as "strategic asset" of the US at the present time.

That the article had to come to light in London, after being rejected by the Atlantic magazine in the US, is a telling commentary on the degree to which discussion of the lobby has been a taboo subject in American political circles.

Those circles include not just the supporters of Israel and the politicians and the media over which they maintain their influence, but the American left and its leading icon, Prof. Noam Chomsky. While praising the two professors for having raised the issue, he proceeded to casually dismiss their thesis without addressing its key points.

This was no surprise. For more than 30 years, in countless books, speeches, and interviews, Professor Chomsky has maintained that Israel is a "strategic asset" of the US, that it serves as Washington's "cop on the beat" in the Middle East, and that the Lobby is not really a factor in Washington's foreign policy deliberations. It only seems so, he insists, because its positions tend to agree with those of America's ruling elites. It is also important to note that he strongly opposes any form of economic pressure being brought against Israel, be it, boycott, divestment, or South African type sanctions.

With so much invested in his position Professor Chomsky is not about to change his mind at this point. Nor, apparently, will other professors such as Stephen Zunes who have rigidly adopted his viewpoint.

But what is more important and unfortunate, that this has also been the position taken by the anti-war and Palestine solidarity movements. Rather than welcoming the opportunity to criticize or even discuss the Lobby's role that has been afforded by the Mearsheimer-Walt paper, they have either ignored it or, like Chomsky and Zunes, insisted that the problem is not the Lobby, but US imperialism (as if the two were mutually exclusive) which is an easy target but provides little foundation for concrete political action. The fact that the Palestine support movement in the United States has been an utter failure to this point in time, I believe, can be traced, in a large part, to its refusal to acknowledge the power of the Israel lobby and to challenge that power either locally and nationally.

It is interesting to note that in 1971, three years before Chomsky published his first book on the subject, Roger Hilsman, who had been a State Department official in charge of intelligence under the Kennedy administration wrote :

"It is obvious to even the most casual observer, for example, that United States foreign policy in the Middle East, where oil reigns supreme, has been more responsive to the pressures of the American Jewish community and their natural desire to support Israel than it has to American oil interests."

Stephen Green, whose ground-breaking research into State Department documents, was incorporated in his superb book, "Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations with Militant Israel," put it in a more nuanced way:

"Since 1953," he wrote, "Israel, and friends of Israel in America, have determined the broad outlines of US policy in the region. It has been left to American Presidents to implement that policy, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and to deal with tactical issues."

The late Professor Edward Said did not mince words on the issue. In 2001, in his contribution to *The New Intifada*, entitled, appropriately, "America's Last Taboo," he rhetorically asked: "What explains this [present] state of affairs? The answer lies in the power of Zionist organizations in American politics, whose role throughout the "peace process" has never been sufficiently addressed—a neglect that is absolutely astonishing, given the policy of the PLO has been in essence to throw our fate as a people into the lap of the United States, without any strategic awareness of how American policy is dominated by a small minority whose views about the Middle East are in some ways more extreme than those of Likud itself.

And on the subject of AIPAC, Said wrote:

"[T]he American Israel Public Affairs Committee—AIPAC—has for years been the most powerful single lobby in Washington. Drawing on a well-organized, well-connected, highly visible and wealthy Jewish population, AIPAC inspires an awed fear and respect across the political spectrum. Who is going to stand up to this Moloch in behalf of the Palestinians, when they can offer nothing, and AIPAC can destroy a professional career at the drop of a checkbook? In the past, one or two members of Congress did resist AIPAC openly, but the many political action committees controlled by AIPAC made sure they were never re-elected... If such is the material of the legislature, what can be expected of the executive?"

Professor Said's opinion, like the others, fell on largely deaf ears.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that in the absence of any organized public opposition and the abject default to it by those purporting to support the Palestinian cause, the Israel Lobby has had no trouble maintaining its control over the US Congress, and essentially US Middle East policy while making the political costs of any President that opposed it, a predictable defeat at the polls on election day.

Every president beginning with Richard Nixon has made at least a half-hearted effort to get Israel to leave the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights, not for the benefit of the Palestinians, but to improve America's regional interests and each has been thwarted by the Lobby.

The exception was Jimmy Carter, a political outsider, who forced Menachem Begin to evacuate the Sinai in exchange for the Camp David peace treaty with Egypt and in 1978, to rub it in, ordered him to withdraw his troops from Lebanon after Israel's first invasion of its northern neighbor.

The lobby was not pleased with Camp David and with Carter's other efforts to pressure Israel and he paid for it at the polls in 1980 when he received only 48% of the Jewish vote, the lowest for any Democrat since they started keeping count.

Given the situation, I have described, the outlook for changing American policy in terms of providing even a modicum of justice to the Palestinians is not bright.

What is left for us to do is explain why and to challenge those on our side who stubbornly control the message to face the truth or get out of the way.

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