

A VALUABLE LOOK AT A CORNER OF THE PROBLEM

The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy

John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt

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Reviewed by Gilbert Porter Blythe

The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy is a dense, carefully documented, overwhelmingly convincing account of how American supporters of Israel have manipulated U.S. foreign policy in support of hard-line Israeli interests. It leaves no doubt that by diverting national prestige and billions of dollars to the benefit of a foreign country, a determined group of citizens has done incalculable harm to the United States. There has never been so complete an account of the Israel lobby's goals, strategies, and successes, and its appearance under the imprint of a major New York publisher means that this shattering of a long-standing taboo cannot be ignored. This is, in short, a vitally important book. Unfortunately, it will probably change nothing.

Authors Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer – both distinguished foreign policy experts at Harvard and the University of Chicago, respectively – have not made their case by uncovering new documents or eliciting admissions through interviews. They have worked exclusively from published sources, but have marshaled them so rigorously and exhaustively that the effect is staggering even for those who have long had their eye on the Israel lobby.

The book begins with a summary of the material benefits the United States has provided Israel. For decades, Israel has been the top beneficiary of American military and economic aid, with annual receipts of \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year – approximately \$500 per Israeli. Unlike other countries, Israel gets its money at the beginning of the fiscal year rather than in quarterly installments. Because our government borrows the money, it costs us an additional \$50 to \$60 million in interest payments every year just to make the money immediately available to Israel – for temporary investment before spending.

Walt and Mearsheimer note that Israel avoids taking military aid as grants, because grants require an American supervisory presence. Instead, assistance takes the form of loans, but the loans are always forgiven. Israel thus gets the money without the scrutiny. Israel is also the only country for whom military contracts of \$500,000 or less are awarded without prior U.S. review, and it is the only military aid recipient allowed to spend money on its own arms industry rather than spending it only in America. It is likewise the one recipient of economic aid not required to give an account of expenditures. Many private contributions to Israel are tax deductible—a benefit virtually no other country enjoys—and few Americans know that ever since 1975, we have guaranteed Israel's oil supplies should there ever be a crisis, and have set up a "supplementary strategic reserve" for this purpose at a cost of several hundred million dollars.

Beginning in 1989, we have "prepositioned" military equipment in Israel that is supposed to be for our use in a fight, but over which Israel has first priority and exercises control. Israel dipped freely into this stock of "American" equipment during the war with Lebanon in the summer of 2006.

The number two and three recipients of American aid are Egypt (\$2 billion a year) and Jordan (half a billion a year). This money is a long-term payoff for signing peace treaties with Israel. Israel was not willing to make reasonable concessions to its enemies, so the United States assumed the burden of making peace worthwhile for them.

The United States has consistently backed Israel diplomatically. From 1972 to 2006, it vetoed no fewer than 42 UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israel, a figure higher than the combined total of all other vetoes by the other permanent council members. In the General Assembly, votes critical of Israel have no legal force, but pass by huge majorities. Often, virtually the only countries that vote with Israel and the United States are our clients like the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau. Since 1976, six Israeli prime ministers have addressed joint sessions of Congress—more than from any other country—and about 10 percent of overseas trips by Senators and Congressmen are to Israel.

Walt and Mearsheimer point out that America did not initially have close relations with Israel, and that our intimacy grew only with the lobby's power. Woodrow Wilson endorsed the Balfour Declaration, but our only action at the time was by an American-led study group

to Palestine that found that the local people did not welcome Jews, and that opposed establishing a Jewish homeland. Both Truman and Eisenhower understood that supporting Israel would anger the Arabs, and they refused to sell arms to the Jewish state.

Kennedy was the first to sell weapons, but tried to be discreet; a sale of M48A battle tanks, for example, arrived as a transfer from Germany, and the German tanks were replaced from the United States. One reason Kennedy wanted to arm Israel was to keep it from going nuclear, and his government insisted on inspections. By that time, the strength of the Israel lobby was great enough so that America did not protest when Israel blatantly flimflammed the inspectors. When Johnson first learned that Israel had the bomb, he ordered his sources to keep quiet. As many have noted, the 1967 war was an important turning point in our relations with Israel, and after Johnson's all-out support against the Arabs—and cover-up of the Israeli attack on the USS *Liberty*—the lobby has gone from strength to strength.

Needless to say, the coalition of Jewish lobbyists, journalists, politicians, think-tank operatives, and fellow-traveling gentiles and Zionist Christians have only rarely said openly that they support Israel even if it damages American interests. Instead, they insist that Israel is a vital strategic asset, and that it is so morally superior to its enemies that simple justice dictates our support. Walt and Mearsheimer soundly refute these claims.

During the Cold War it was possible to make a case that Israel was useful. It was an Israeli spy who first got a copy of Khrushchev's 1956 de-Stalinization speech, and Israel handed over for inspection a MiG-21 that an Iraqi defector flew to Israel in 1966. The Israeli victories in 1967 and 1973 also suggested to Arabs that Soviet support was not nearly as valuable as American support. On the other hand, American support for Israel made it easier for the Soviets to woo Arab regimes in the first place, and it prompted the devastating oil embargo of October 1973.

Israel also gave the United States false intelligence in 1967—deliberately exaggerating the Arab threat—and did the same in 2003 with regard to Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, as Walt and Mearsheimer note, "the close relationship between Washington and Jerusalem has made it easier for Israel to steal American secrets, and it is has not hesitated to do just that" (p. 77). The Jonathan Pollard case is only the best known; Israel

steals our industrial secrets more aggressively than any other country. These are not the acts of a strategic partner.

Since the end of the Cold War, close relations with Israel have become an unqualified liability. All of Islam is furious over our support for Israel, and much of the rest of the world has lost patience with us as well. Whenever we have tried to accomplish anything in the Middle East—for example, to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait—Israeli assistance would have discredited us in the eyes of the entire Arab world. The most we could hope was that Israel do nothing.

Walt and Mearsheimer point out that, despite repeated claims by Israel-supporters that the September 11 attacks had nothing to do with the U.S.-Israel alliance, *The Economist's* Middle East correspondent has concluded: "Of all these themes [of resentment against America], the notion of payback for injustices suffered by the Palestinians is perhaps the most powerfully recurrent in bin Laden's speeches" (p. 67). As we will see below, the now-fashionable view that Israel and the United States are fighting the same war on "terror" is fantastically stupid and dangerous. No foreign policy commitment is nearly so damaging to our interests as our unswerving support for Israel.

As for the notion that Israeli virtue alone should command our loyalty, Walt and Mearsheimer write: "If the United States were to choose sides on the basis of moral considerations alone, it would back the Palestinians" (p. 80). The authors systematically puncture the myths Israel-boosters have fostered about the country's founding, pointing out that it was a shameless land-grab from the start. Jews chased out some 700,000 Palestinians in 1947 and '48, and removed 80,000 Syrians from the Golan Heights in 1967. Walt and Mearsheimer also refute the endlessly-repeated claim that Israel has been constantly battling for survival. In 1948 and 1973, Arab countries had specific territorial ambitions that fell far short of the destruction of Israel, and in 1967 they did not even expect to fight. As Menachem Begin explained: "We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him [Nasser]" (p. 85).

Walt and Mearsheimer explain that the image of the plucky Israeli underdog, outnumbered by Arabs armed to the teeth, is also a myth. Even in 1948, they were better trained and armed, and were always able to meet opposing forces with superior numbers. Now, Arabs routinely and correctly refer to Israel as the regional superpower, and no one doubts its ability to smash the armies of any plausible combination of attackers.

If liberals were consistent they would decry Israel as a “racist” state rather than evoke our “shared values.” Walt and Mearsheimer note that Israel discriminates heavily against Arabs and other non-Jews, and treats Palestinians much the way South Africans treated blacks. The majority of Israelis think Arabs should be encouraged to emigrate, and are not fooled by the “diversity” Americans are supposed to worship.

The lobby never tires of telling us Israel showed extraordinary virtue and generosity by offering Yasser Arafat nearly everything he wanted during the Camp David talks in 2000, and they hold up Arafat’s refusal as proof that Palestinians do not want peace. Walt and Mearsheimer point out that Israel’s best offer would have left the Palestinians with an unworkable pseudo-state, and quotes Israel’s foreign minister at the time, Shlomo Ben-Ami: “If I were a Palestinian I would have rejected Camp David as well” (p. 105).

If Israel is neither a strategic asset nor a beacon of virtue, why do we support it? Walt and Mearsheimer leave no doubt that the Israel lobby is so powerful that it can bend our power and prestige to suit Israel. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is the most visible and prominent part of that lobby, but it has a host of allies: the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, the Anti-Defamation League, dozens of PACs that fund pro-Israel candidates, openly pro-Israel think tanks like the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), and thousands of ardent Zionists at all levels of American government, journalism, entertainment, and intellectual life.

AIPAC, whose primary role is to keep Congress firmly in Israel’s corner, has an annual budget of \$40 million to \$60 million and brags openly of its power. It meets with every candidate for Congress and explains what positions are acceptable. If it likes a candidate, it tells the PACs to swell his campaign chest. If it dislikes him, it tells them to back his opponent. Every member of the House and Senate quickly learns that to keep his seat he must please the lobby. When Senator Ernest Hollings left the Senate in 2004, he explained that “you can’t have an Israeli policy other than what AIPAC gives you around here” (p. 162).

Walt and Mearsheimer cite example after example of legislators who tried to put America’s interests before those of Israel only to become former legislators. Paul Findley (R-Illinois) even wrote a book in 1985 about how Jewish interests snuffed out his congressional career,

but it backfired: Congressmen who read it told him they were now convinced independence really was impossible and were determined to truckle to the lobby more than ever.¹

It is the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organization's main job to keep pressure on the White House, but AIPAC uses its muscle in Congress for the same purpose. If the president gets frisky, AIPAC drafts an admonition and gets hundreds of Senators and Congressmen to sign it. An AIPAC official once put a paper napkin on the table and boasted that in 24 hours he could get the signatures of 70 Senators on it. AIPAC unleashes the wrath of its supporters on anyone who will not sign. As Sen. Daniel Inouye once explained, "It's easier to sign one letter than answer 5,000" (p. 162).

It is power of this kind that made former House Speaker Richard Arney say, "My number one priority in foreign policy is to protect Israel," (p. 152) when one would think his priority would be protecting the United States. Likewise, former President Bill Clinton, who carefully avoided fighting in Vietnam, once told a Jewish audience that if Israel were threatened he would "grab a rifle and get in the trench and fight and die."² Walt and Mearsheimer point out that American politicians disagree on a great deal, but they always claim to agree on one thing: that they think night and day about the security and happiness of Israel.

Almost the entire intellectual apparatus of the United States is geared to one-sidedly favorable treatment of Israel. WINEP and JINSA are openly partisan; and as Walt and Mearsheimer explain, Zionists have progressively maneuvered into the pro-Israel camp such think tanks as the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, the Hudson Institute, the Middle East Forum, the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and the Center for Security Policy. The Brookings Institution used to write even-handed papers on the Middle East, but now funnels all such work through the Saban Center for Middle East Policy. The center was funded by the Egyptian Jew Haim Saban, who says, "I'm a one-issue guy, and my issue is Israel" (p. 176).

Well-placed Jews in the press also influence public discussion, and

¹ Paul Findley, *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1985).

² Andy Geller and Richard Johnson, "Bubba: I'd Fight and Die for Israel," *New York Post*, August 2, 2002.

newspapers that deviate from orthodoxy face reader and advertiser boycotts. The result is an intellectual climate that is far more monolithically hard-line and anti-Arab than even in Israel, where there is lively debate about policy.

Although there are some American Jews who disapprove of Israel's uncompromising positions, Walt and Mearsheimer quote one Jewish observer who notes that "for millions of American Jews, criticism of Israel was a worse sin than marrying outside the faith." Dissenters—Jew and gentile alike—can be quickly and ruthlessly marginalized. Again quoting a Jewish source, Walt and Mearsheimer note that as a result, "there has been no other country whose citizens have been as committed to the success of another country as American Jews have been to Israel" (p. 115).

Walt and Mearsheimer note correctly that not all Israel-boosters are Jews, but that the influence of Jews is decisive. They describe the rise of neoconservatism and note its essentially Jewish character. They also correctly assess the impact of Christian Zionists, who serve as gentile cover for Jews, but who are a minor force. Jewish groups downplay their own power by claiming that Evangelical Christians are a major factor in America's pro-Israel policies, but this is disingenuous. Christians have failed almost completely in politics, whether the issue is prayer in school, abortion, or acceptance of homosexuals. They have "succeeded" on Israel policy only because Jews have suffered them to be useful idiots.

There are many smart people in government who work for the interests of the United States and realize that backing Israel damages those interests. They also know that Israel is hard-nosed about its own interests and ignores ours because it knows the lobby will protect it from pressure. As Walt and Mearsheimer point out, "When dealing with Israel, in fact, U.S. leaders can usually elicit cooperation only by offering additional carrots (increased assistance) rather than employing sticks (threats to withhold aid)" (p. 37). Even American Jews have been frustrated by Israel's defiance, which comes from knowing it has a stranglehold on American decision-making. Henry Kissinger, who wrote that he tried to keep his Jewish loyalties in check and work for American interests as Secretary of State, complained: "I ask [Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak] Rabin to make concessions, and he says he can't because Israel is weak. So I give him more arms, and then he says he doesn't need to make concessions because Israel is strong" (p. 47).

Foreigners have noticed our biases. At the Camp David talks in 2000 between Israel and the Palestinians, the U.S. claimed to be an honest broker but instead acted like Israel's lawyer. The Palestinians rightly complained that they were "negotiating with two Israeli teams—one displaying an Israeli flag, and one an American flag" (p. 166).

Walt and Mearsheimer offer several convincing case studies of how the lobby forced American policy into pro-Israeli directions that have been disastrous for America. The most obvious has been the war in Iraq, which the authors explain would not have happened had neo-conservatives not believed Israel's security required it. Now that the war has failed, Jewish groups are pretending they never lobbied for it. Walt and Mearsheimer also dissect the history of American relations with Syria, Iran, and the Palestinians, explaining how our policies veer from warmth to hostility in accordance with Israel's interests rather than ours. These sections are remarkably illuminating and up to date.

All of this folly is now part of the most dismaying illusion of all: that Israel and the United States are shoulder to shoulder in a common "war on terror," a view that Israelis and American Jews have promoted with great energy. During a visit to the United States shortly after the attacks of September 11, Ariel Sharon exclaimed: "You in America are in a war against terror. We in Israel are in a war against terror. It's the same war" (p. 61). Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the Senate in 2002: "If we do not immediately shut down the terror factories where Arafat is producing human bombs, it is only a matter of time before suicide bombers will terrorize your cities" (p. 61). In April and May, 2002, an obedient Congress overwhelmingly passed resolutions asserting that "the United States and Israel are now engaged in a common struggle against terrorism" (p. 62).

As Walt and Mearsheimer explain, this is dangerous nonsense. Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and Hezbollah have specific grievances against Israel, but they do not threaten the United States. If they want to hurt us it is only because we back their enemy, Israel. Al Qaeda, as well, attacked us mainly because we arm and bankroll Israel. Israel and its American friends promote the fantasy that "terrorists" hate our two countries not because of what we do but because of who we are. Opposition to Israel is anti-Semitism, and opposition to the United States is hatred of freedom.

The objective of promoting this view is two-fold. By ignoring Israeli oppression and violence, the lobby portrays legitimate Arab resistance as pure evil that can be stopped only by extermination. By describing the September 11 attacks as part of the same skein of berserker evil, the lobby hopes to mobilize American might to fight Israel's enemies everywhere and always. As Walt and Mearsheimer point out, the lobby has nearly succeeded in making this the orthodox position.

Though Walt and Mearsheimer do not put it this way, the lobby wants Americans to think like Jews. Jews have convinced themselves that all criticism is groundless and irrational, and stems only from a vicious disorder known as anti-Semitism. People cannot dislike Jews for what they do—because what they do is always good—but only because of who they are. If Americans can learn to think the same way, they will understand that Muslims hate them, not for their subservience to Israel, but for their freedom and goodness. Once Americans grasp this, they need never examine their own actions. They will understand that there can be no negotiation, no compromise—only war to the knife. This is what Norman Podhoretz and William Kristol and Martin Peretz are calling for when they tell us to bomb Iran, invade Syria, overthrow moderate Arab regimes, and wipe out Hamas and Hezbollah.

Walt and Mearsheimer are clear about where America's interests lie: "Israel's security is ultimately not of critical strategic importance to the United States" (p. 338). If Israel were conquered, "neither America's territorial integrity, its military power, its economic prosperity, nor its core political values would be jeopardized. By contrast, if oil exports from the Persian Gulf were significantly reduced, the effects on America's well-being would be profound" (p. 338).

They also explain that the only way to solve the Palestinian problem, which has poisoned the entire region for a half century, is to force Israel to accept a viable, sovereign Palestinian state:

The United States has enormous potential leverage It could threaten to cut off all economic and diplomatic support for Israel. If that were not enough, it would have little difficulty lining up international support to isolate Israel, much the way South Africa was singled out and shunned at the end of the last century. Regarding the Palestinians, the United States could hold out the promise of fulfilling their dream of a viable state in the

Occupied Territories coupled with massive long-term economic aid. (p. 226)

Walt and Mearsheimer quote opinion polls that show Americans would be willing to exert this kind of pressure to secure peace. Our elites refuse to act because they fear the lobby.

A book by respectable scholars that calls attention to the terrible distortions of our foreign policy has long been overdue. *The Israeli Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* represents such a great service to our country that one is reluctant to criticize it, but it strikes a number of false notes.

For example, Walt and Mearsheimer repeatedly assert that conciliatory Israeli behavior that would be in our interests would also be in Israel's interests. They say that if Israel made real concessions to a Palestinian state, the resulting peace would ensure Israel's safety. There is considerable arrogance in assuming that two Americans know better than the Israelis themselves what is in Israel's interests, but Walt and Mearsheimer seem to be trying to play the same game as the lobby by suggesting that Israel and the United States really do have congruent interests. Perhaps they decided that a constant refrain of concern for Israel was a calculated necessity, but they would sound less disingenuous if they promoted what is good for America even if it might sometimes hurt Israel.

Likewise, Walt and Mearsheimer assure us that not even the most ardent supporters of Israel have "dual loyalties," and that "any notion that Jewish Americans are disloyal citizens is wrong." It is not clear how they could know this, but much of the evidence they present suggests otherwise. They note, for example, that Lenny Ben-David, who was once director of information and research at AIPAC, went on to be deputy chief of mission at Israel's embassy in Washington from 1997 to 2000. How can such a man possibly be loyal to the United States? Malcolm Hoenlein, head of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations once described his job this way: "I devote myself to the security of the Jewish state" (p. 150). Elliot Abrams, who worked on Middle East affairs for George W. Bush's National Security Council and constantly undermined efforts to create a Palestinian state, has written that Jews "stand apart from the nation in which they live," and that "it is the very nature of being Jewish to be apart—except in Israel—from the rest of the population" (p. 167). Martin

Peretz, editor of *New Republic*, constantly demands that the United States fight Israel's enemies. "I am in love with the state of Israel" (p. 172), he explains, and predicts that Jimmy Carter "will go down in history as a Jew-hater" because of his criticism of Israel (p. 193).

Why not admit the obvious? These men, and many like them, do not have dual loyalties. They have a single loyalty, and it is to Israel. Men like Paul Wolfowitz, David Wurmser, and Douglas Feith went from formulating Israeli foreign policy to formulating American foreign policy without the slightest change in content or objectives.

Walt and Mearsheimer do not seem to realize that America has a *Jewish* lobby, of which the Israel lobby is only the most prominent wing. Jews have worked tirelessly to fight "discrimination," promote "diversity," weaken national cohesion, open our borders, and subvert Christianity, all in the service of specifically Jewish interests. In the 1990s, Jews enlisted the support of state and federal government to put pressure on Swiss banks to turn over alleged unclaimed assets of Holocaust victims, in a show of force that seriously damaged Swiss-American relations.

Jews have accumulated enough power to outlaw anything that could be conceivably described as "anti-Semitism," and to make exco-riation of Nazism almost a national religion. Entirely typical was a recent flap over four L-shaped buildings built in the 1960s at a U.S. Navy base in Coronado. From the air—but only from the air—they appear to form a swastika, and Jews were furious when this curious arrangement became apparent on Google Maps. In September 2007, the Navy duly agreed to spend \$600,000 to camouflage how the buildings look from the air.

Hollywood and the press continue to report on and dramatize the Holocaust as if it were breaking news, and Jewish interests have added "Holocaust Studies" to the school curricula of many states. This ensures to Jews their continuing status as history's special victims who will always deserve deference and compensation.

Walt and Mearsheimer make it clear that Jews demand full participation in the most intimate and significant affairs of the countries in which they live—and Walt and Mearsheimer would certainly put no restrictions on this—yet many Jews maintain a separate identity that makes full participation suspect. This is, indeed, the heart of the Jewish question that has vexed societies both Eastern and Western for more than 1,000 years. This book is a valuable but very partial exami-

nation of that question.

Because they do not grapple with the larger issue of Jewish identity and power, Walt and Mearsheimer descend into incoherence on the important subject of anti-Semitism. "True anti-Semitism," they write "conceives of Jews as being different from other people in various invidious ways, which gives those others license to single them out and persecute them in large and small ways" (p. 195). This, needless to say, they harshly condemn. However, what is the gentile reader to conclude from this book except that Jews are different from other people (Jews say so themselves), and that their motives deserve constant scrutiny?

There was a time when the president never appointed a Jew as ambassador to Israel. Was this sensible policy, or was it "anti-Semitism?" Must gentiles always ignore the aggregate effect of Jews on their societies, or does there come a time when that effect should be countered deliberately? It is clear how Walt and Mearsheimer would answer these questions, but their book suggests the issue is not clear-cut.

What, finally, will be the impact of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*? Most likely, it will change nothing in the United States. The people who could make a difference—mainly politicians but also some intellectuals—already know the lobby is powerful and ruthless. Virtually without exception, politicians put political survival before principle, so this book will teach them the Paul Findley lesson: that it is folly to fight the juggernaut. Americans who were not aware of the breadth and depth of Jewish power will have their eyes opened, but most will draw the same lessons as the politicians.

This book will have its greatest impact overseas. Most Europeans do not understand our Middle East policies, so what until now was incomprehensible will suddenly make sense. Arabs already suspect the power of the Israel lobby, and this book will confirm those suspicions. It is likely to be studied in countless foreign universities and chancelleries, and perhaps even in remote caves in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the United States, it will only add to the growing cynicism of countless Americans who already know their rulers are hopelessly corrupt.

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