

***The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy:***  
**Roundtable Review**



Reviewed Works:

**John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt.** *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, September 2007. Hardcover, \$25.00. ISBN: 978-0-374-17772-0.

Roundtable Editor: Christopher L. Ball

Reviewers: Andrew Preston, David Schoenbaum, Tony Smith

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## ROUNDTABLE *Review*

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### Contents

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Introduction by Christopher L. Ball, H-Diplo .....	2
Review by Andrew Preston, Cambridge University .....	8
Review by David Schoenbaum, The University of Iowa.....	15
Review by Tony Smith, Tufts University.....	23

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### Introduction by Christopher L. Ball, H-Diplo

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**T**he *Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* has generated intense coverage and debate, as David Schoenbaum delineates in his review, most of it unfavorable or critical. This is the first book-length analysis by prominent academics of pro-Israel lobbying, especially the ethno-religious dimension, as Tony Smith notes.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, as Andrew Preston and Schoenbaum discuss, much of what Mearsheimer and Walt argue is conventional wisdom among academics studying U.S. foreign policy— a loose-knit set of Jewish and Christian organizations and individuals powerfully advance vehemently pro-Israel policies in the United States; few U.S. politicians openly criticize Israel and most avow steadfast support; Israel has received the highest levels of U.S. aid and on more favorable terms; and the U.S. administrations infrequently challenge Israel policies with much force, even when criticism would benefit U.S. standing with Arab states.

Why then the controversy over the book? None of the reviewers here smears the authors with the canard that their criticism of Israel or its advocates amounts to anti-Semitism (indeed, the chapter on the Israel lobby's dominance of the public discourse about policy toward Israel is the one area that receives no dissent from the reviewers). Is it the violation of the quasi-taboos in U.S. elite — but not academic — discourse of trenchant criticism of the Israel lobby or casting doubt on Israel's value to U.S. interests? Books critical of the lobby have been published before, as Preston and Schoenbaum note. Is it that the book advances an one-sidedly anti-Israel version of contemporary Mid-East history or Arab-Israeli relations, as Preston and Schoenbaum argue? Or is it the charge that but-for the Israel lobby's urging, the United States would not have invaded Iraq in 2003? All the reviewers criticize this argument, and Smith argues that anti-Semites could misappropriate it readily.<sup>2</sup> Or is it that Mearsheimer and Walt are myopic in their focus on the Israel lobby's influence on U.S. foreign policy to the extent that other interests, ideas, and actors are cast aside analytically, as all reviewers agree?

It is ironic that authors from a social science specialty that is often criticized for its arcane, abstruse and a-historic attributes should find themselves under attack for, in effect, being insufficiently scientific. Mearsheimer and Walt are aiming for a wider audience than fellow academics and policy wonks — the book is published by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, not a

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<sup>1</sup> Janice J. Terry, *U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East: The Role of Lobbies and Special Interest Groups*. (London: Pluto Press, 2005) and Robert H. Trice, *Interest Groups and the Foreign Policy Process: U.S. Policy in the Middle East*. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976) examine more than pro-Israeli groups. See also the edited volume by Thomas Ambrosio, *Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy*. (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> A satiric illustration of this is Prof. Mearsheimer's [interview with Stephen Colbert](http://www.comedycentral.com/motherload/index.jhtml?ml_video=104544) ([http://www.comedycentral.com/motherload/index.jhtml?ml\\_video=104544](http://www.comedycentral.com/motherload/index.jhtml?ml_video=104544)) on Comedy Central's "The Colbert Report." After Mearsheimer explains his nuanced and qualified position, Colbert replies: "What I'm hearing is—and tell me if I'm wrong—'Jews control our foreign policy.'" (Mearsheimer tells him he is wrong.)

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

university or an academic-oriented commercial press.<sup>3</sup> But it is on methodological grounds that Mearsheimer and Walt stumble in three ways. First, although they proffer alternative explanations and find them lacking, they do not seriously examine these alternatives. They present a strong case that Israel's strategic value to the United States is exaggerated, but Schoenbaum suggests an alternative strategic rationale. They downplay the influence of lobbying by Persian-Gulf-located OPEC states or by U.S.-based transnational oil firms (142-146) compared to pro-Israel lobbying but they never compare the magnitude of lobbying by these factions. Of course, oil firms prefer peace to a war in the Gulf in order to safely and cheaply ship oil, but the U.S. invasion of Iraq was unlikely to unleash the counter-shipping campaigns that characterized the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>4</sup> Off-shore balancing by the United States, Mearsheimer and Walt's preferred U.S. strategy (338-341), is not likely to be favored by U.S. oil firms any more than by pro-Israeli groups; greater U.S. military presence in the region only makes it more likely that U.S. firms will receive more lucrative concessions by Arab states looking to curry favor.

Second, the evidence of lobbying success is more ambiguous than Mearsheimer and Walt allow. They treat non-binding Congressional resolutions as evidence of lobby influence on U.S. policy. While the ability to get Congress to pass such resolutions by large margins is a valid measure of lobbying effectiveness on Congressional resolutions, it is not a particularly useful measure of whether U.S. foreign policy substantively changes. Lobbyists' or Israeli statements in favor of one policy are attributed as causes of the adoption of that policy with little more than the utterance and its presumptive reception suggested as the casual mechanism. Scholars from the Realist school of international politics have never given much weight to discursive forms of power, but here Mearsheimer and Walt, both eminent Realists, appear to have undergone a major ontological shift: speech is power. The alternative is to take rhetoric as truth. As Preston notes, this is something Mearsheimer rejects in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (W.W. Norton, 2001). In *The Israel Lobby*, self-promoting statements of pro-Israel lobbyists are taken as evidence of influence. Self-excusing claims of politicians or campaign staff that lobby-promoted funding of their challengers caused their loss is accepted uncritically, as Schoenbaum notes in the case of Sen. Roger Jepsen's 1984 defeat.

Mearsheimer and Walt rely on counter-factual reasoning to bolster their evidentiary case but counter-factual thinking is notoriously difficult.<sup>5</sup> The authors fail to establish the null hypothesis clearly — if the lobby had 'normal' or limited influence, what would U.S. policy be? The question is not "Does the lobby have no effect?" because no sensible academic

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<sup>3</sup> While Farrar owns the Hill and Wang imprint, which publishes academic works, like Melvyn Leffler's *For the Soul of Mankind* (2007), but it is not an academically oriented commercial press like Routledge (Informa) or W.W. Norton.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that U.S. firms argued *for* the war; only that they had no need to argue *against* it.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, eds. *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives*. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996).

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

believes that the lobby's influence is nil just as no one thinks that the Cuban-American or Armenian-American lobbies have no effect on U.S. policy. But by what degree does the lobby influence policy? Mearsheimer and Walt say that the lobby does not "control" U.S. foreign policy (5), but is its influence like a butterfly's kiss or a freight train? Schoenbaum argues that there are many cases where Israel and its backers lose out in policy battles. For example, do cases like the U.S. insistence that Egypt's Third Army ensnared in the Sinai in 1973 be spared as a fighting force, the 1981 U.S. decision to sell AWAC aircraft to Saudi Arabia, or U.S. refusals to grant clemency to Jonathan Pollard show that the lobby loses only in rare circumstances or that the United States prevails when it wants to?

Third, Mearsheimer and Walt display little appreciation of multiple causation as it affects U.S. policy-making toward Israel. Schoenbaum outlines Arab policies that arguably pushed the United States closer to Israel. Mearsheimer and Walt imply that the Israel lobby's influence is an artifact of the lack of equivalent counter-lobbying by pro-Arab groups (141). There are fewer Arab-Americans and certainly Palestinian-Americans than Jewish-Americans and Christian Zionists. In other words, even if influence *were* proportional to ethnic constituencies, the electoral gains for backing pro-Israel policies would be better than pro-Arab policies. The lobby is amplifying and intensifying electoral factors rather than generating them. As Preston points out, they overlook the role that deep-seated, popular religious sentiment, rather than elite-level Jewish or Christian lobbying, plays in generating moral support for Israel in the United States.

In this evidentiary context, consider U.S. military and economic aid to Israel. Israel is the largest recipient of such U.S. aid for the period of fiscal years 1946–2006, second only to Vietnam, which accounted for 6% of total spending versus Israel's 9.3%.<sup>6</sup> Egypt is a close third to Vietnam, accounting for 5.7%. From FY1974 to FY2002, Israel was the largest recipient of U.S. aid every year. Since FY2003 Iraq has received the most each year, and in FY2006, the last year for which outlays are available, Afghanistan displaced Israel as the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest recipient.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> My calculations based on data from the U.S. Agency for International Development's on-line "greenbook" at <http://quesdb.usaid.gov/gbk/>. This measures the outlays, or actual expenditure, both in constant and current-year dollars, rather than authorizations, which set the ceiling on appropriations, and appropriations, which set the amount an administration may spend. My calculations include grants and concessional loans, but exclude non-concessional loans, like those provided by the Export-Import Bank. It does not include loan guarantees, which USAID accounts for separately. The U.S. liability, or subsidy cost, for outstanding Israeli loan guarantees was \$1.17 billion as of 30 Sep. 2006. See [http://www.usaid.gov/policy/par06/fs\\_0315\\_note06.html](http://www.usaid.gov/policy/par06/fs_0315_note06.html)

<sup>7</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt write that Israel remains the top recipient (26), missing the FY2003 change. This error may be due to the considerable lag in reporting aid *outlays* and the Bush administrations use of supplemental appropriations requests to fund Afghanistan and Iraq reconstruction and military aid rather than regular, annual requests.

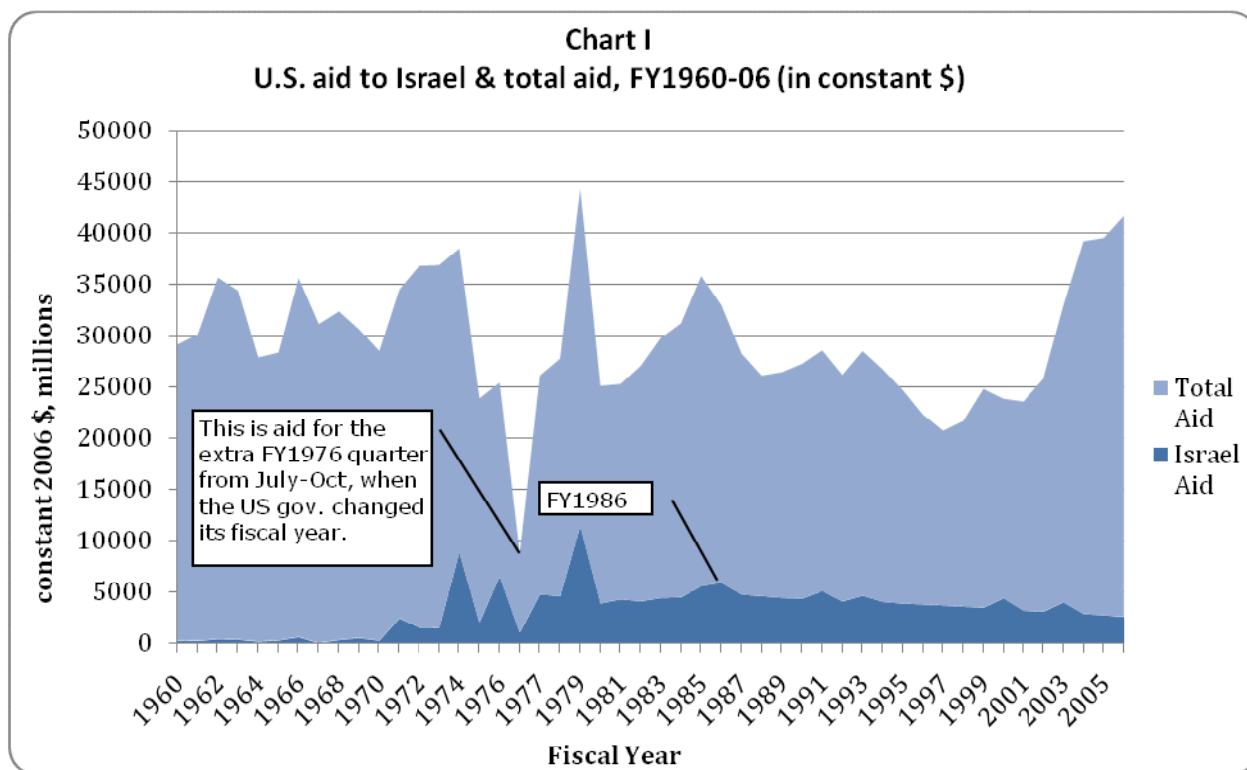
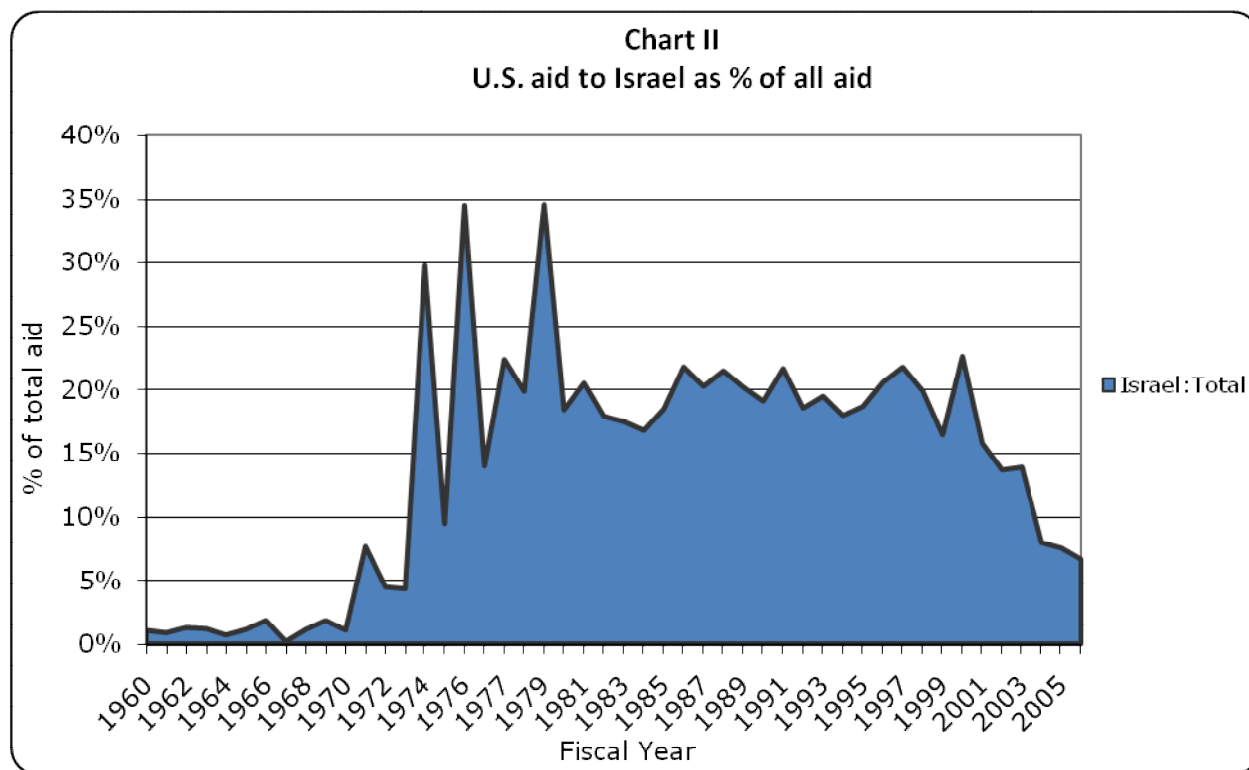


Chart I shows aid to Israel versus total U.S. aid in constant (inflation-adjusted) terms, and Chart II show this aid as percentage of total expenditure. Why does U.S. aid jump starting in FY1971 (July 1970-June 1971) in absolute and relative terms?<sup>8</sup> Should we attribute this to a sudden success of the Israel lobby, or to strategic decisions under the Nixon administration? Why does aid decline after FY2000 (ending 30 Sep. 2000) both in relative and absolute terms (except for a brief rise in FY2003)? Aid is at its lowest absolute level since FY1975 and lowest share since FY1974. Is the Israel lobby losing its sway or have U.S. priorities changed?

<sup>8</sup> The U.S. government changed its fiscal year system from a July 1 to June 30 schedule to an Oct. 1 to Sep. 30 schedule in 1976. This required that FY1976 have an extra quarter to cover the June-Oct. 1976 period, which is reported separately from the 12-month regular FY1976.

15 December 2007



None of these methodological issues are unique to *The Israel Lobby*; they plague many studies of interest-group lobbying. This is not just due to the idiographic approach of the studies; most quantitative work by political scientists on lobbying tends to focus on the behavior of lobbyists rather than their actual effectiveness because of these difficulties. But Mearsheimer and Walt evade the issue rather than confront it.

Their argument that the Israel lobby's influence was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the U.S. decision to invade Iraq in 2003 is the most prominent, causally tricky claim. Preston and Smith point out that many liberal internationalists also advocated or supported invading Iraq and that administration officials who were not pro-Israeli neo-conservatives (Bush, Rice, Rumsfeld) decided to invade. From their perches in the Pentagon, the neo-con hawks had insufficient authority to push the policy to fruition, even with lobby support. The lobby, as Smith suggests, followed rather than led the war policy on Iraq.

It is a further irony that Mearsheimer and Walt might have avoided many of the criticisms leveled against them had they focused on why Israel was more a strategic liability than an asset instead of trying to explain how the Israel lobby perpetuates this condition. As Preston explains, these Realist scholars were associated with the position that domestic factors are secondary in explaining foreign policy. Why are they so important here? Walt was "eclectic" in his *Taming American Power* (W.W. Norton, 2005) when he allowed that "social groups within states may exert independent influences on foreign policy" but he was explicitly not attempting a theoretical synthesis of this position with Realism (19).

Walt's discussion of the Israel lobby in *Taming* generated little of the controversy that this book does, even though it makes many of the same arguments (202-210). Mearsheimer used his offensive-Realist theory to explain foreign policy in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; he was not claiming that the study of foreign policy is different from explaining patterns in international politics.<sup>9</sup> Is United States policy toward Israel to be considered an anomalous case? Or, more consistent with Mearsheimer's *Tragedy*, is the United States safe to pursue imprudent policies so long as no single state is able to dominate the Middle East?

Mearsheimer and Walt deny that U.S. and long-term Israeli national interests are served well under current policies—a position with which I largely agree. Their conception of the countries' interests is shaped in part by their Realist assumptions, but Realism as a general approach to international relations has little to say about what the national interest is beyond what it is not. A state has an interest in enhancing its power, which it can achieve by allying with other, less-powerful states against more powerful ones, arming itself, and expanding its territory, wealth, or population. The national interest, however, is not a sub-national, other-national, or supra-national interest. It is not dictated by moral concerns either. Put differently, it is fortunate if Israel's interest or pro-Israeli American's moral commitments coincide with U.S. national interests, but a Realist would neither expect this nor equate them. This does not mean that most American realists are anti-Israeli, but that their support for Israel rests on a-Realist, moral grounds rather than strategic ones, as Mearsheimer and Walt note (58).

It may be that Mearsheimer and Walt's attack on the *moral* case to support Israel vehemently is what inspires much of the controversy. They undercut non-realist reasons for strong U.S. support for Israel, such as Liberal commitments to Jewish nationalism or democratic affinity. Israel is to be treated as a 'normal' state, but, as Preston discusses, what this means in Israel's strategic context is not entirely clear. Mearsheimer and Walt argue that the United States should aid Israel if its survival were threatened, but having weakened the moral and strategic reasons to do so, it is unclear on what basis such help would be justified, aside from a generic Liberal Internationalist argument against wars of territorial conquest. Indeed, they never use the word "defend" in this context, leaving some ambiguity over what U.S. policy *should* be. Israel's advocates may well fear the inferences others might draw from *The Israel Lobby* more than the implications Mearsheimer and Walt intended.

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<sup>9</sup> This argument was made by Kenneth Waltz in his *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 71-72.



Review by Andrew Preston, Cambridge University

When asked to join this H-Diplo roundtable review, I have to admit to having serious second-thoughts. Two reservations occurred immediately. First, what more is there possibly to say about *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*? The attention the book has received has been overwhelming, even at times obsessive. This glut of attention—or more precisely, the ferocious criticism that has dominated the glut of attention—led to my second, and admittedly stronger, reservation. Rarely has a major book, especially one written by esteemed scholars and published by a reputable press, been received so harshly by so many reviewers. Indeed, it is the very nature of the criticism that seems so intimidating. Mearsheimer and Walt have been accused of many things, from sloppy scholarship to analytical simple-mindedness. But more seriously, they have also been accused of anti-Semitism. While some reviewers have been sympathetic, on the whole their “Israel lobby” thesis has not just been criticized, but vilified on a deeply emotional level. Many reviews have been so extraordinarily passionate that future historians will undoubtedly study the book’s reception as much as they will the book itself.

Thus it was with some trepidation that I agreed to review *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*—trepidation, but not really curiosity. I had probably read as many pages of reviews as there are in the book itself, and wondered whether there was any point in agreeing to read and review it. But read it I did; and as I read, I realized the extent to which some critics had wildly distorted the book, its authors, and especially its message. The book I read actually bore little resemblance to the one portrayed by its harshest critics. Using personal, mostly *ad hominem* attacks and scattershot but totally spurious charges of anti-Semitism, some of the most shrill, hysterical reviewers—Jeffrey Goldberg’s recent assessment in *The New Republic* is probably the best (or worst) example—have been guilty of nothing less than character assassination.<sup>1</sup>

So, putting aside all the sound and fury, what does the book actually say? Mearsheimer and Walt present one essential thesis with several component parts. Not all of the parts are completely convincing, and the overall thesis itself is at times stretched to its very limits, but every analytical aspect of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* is plausible and empirically testable. The first half of the book contends that there is a powerful interest group, comprised mainly of American Jews but also conservative Christians and mainstream gentile politicians, that exerts a profound influence on the shaping of U.S. policy towards the Middle East. The book’s first six chapters, which make up the first half, explore the Israel lobby’s membership (for lack of a better word, because as Mearsheimer and Walt rightly point out, the lobby is not a single, tightly controlled organization but a loose affiliation of like-minded individuals and groups) and how they operate. The second half of the book, consisting of five chapters that examine America’s relations with the

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Usual Suspect,” *The New Republic*, 8 October 2007, 40-50. For a similarly hyperbolic review of the Mearsheimer-Walt thesis—as expressed in the earlier *London Review of Books* article rather than the book—see Eliot A. Cohen, “Yes It’s Anti-Semitic,” *Washington Post*, 5 April 5 2006, A23.

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

Middle East, argues that the lobby's influence on U.S. foreign policy is actually detrimental to the American national interest. The lobby, in sum, is powerful, and it uses its power to distract and divert U.S. foreign policy from what it should actually pursue. Overall, Mearsheimer and Walt's thesis is broadly—yet not always completely—convincing.

Just as important, though, given the deeply irresponsible nature of much of the criticism, is what the book does *not* say. Mearsheimer and Walt do not argue that American Jews represent a uniformity of opinion or that they present a monolithic front. Quite the opposite: the Israel lobby, they write, “is not synonymous with American Jewry, and ‘Jewish lobby’ is not an appropriate term... For one thing, there is significant variation among American Jews in their depth of commitment to Israel” (115). Nor do they portray pro-Israel American Jews as operating conspiratorially and secretly manipulating gullible gentiles into pursuing a policy of Jewish dominance. “On the contrary,” they observe, “the organizations and individuals who make up the lobby operate out in the open and in the same way that other interest groups do” (112). Nor do they charge members of the Israel lobby with disloyalty to the United States. Throughout the book, Mearsheimer and Walt are true to their word on all these contentious matters. In short, there is nothing remotely anti-Semitic about the book or its authors.

They are, however, anti-Israel. Part of this approach is justifiable: if they aim to call into question the American-Israeli special relationship, and if that relationship is justified in large measure on moral grounds, Mearsheimer and Walt need to demolish such morality-based justifications. Fair enough. But the effect is also to present a strangely one-sided history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Mearsheimer and Walt rightly point out that the domestic U.S. view of the Middle East is overwhelmingly lop-sided in Israel's favor. But what is needed as a corrective is even-handedness, not a competing lop-sided version of the Arab case. Mearsheimer and Walt's arguments about the influence of the Israel lobby are mostly right, but they undermine them with a tone and analysis that is often overly strident.

What is remarkable about the book's thesis is just how, well, unremarkable it is. Mearsheimer and Walt argue that politically active pro-Israel Americans have dominated debate within the United States to such an extent that they have made it all but impossible for America to be even-handed in the Middle East. For anyone who has followed U.S. politics and foreign policy of the last forty years, even if only in passing, this is not exactly breaking news. The impact of the Israel lobby—and “lobby” is precisely the right word given its similar usage for other foreign policy interest groups, from the anti-Castro Cuba lobby to the infamous China lobby of the early Cold War—pops up in pretty much every book on post-1945 (and especially post-1967) U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East. Nor are Mearsheimer and Walt the first to focus exclusively on the Israel lobby itself.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The relevant literature is enormous, as Mearsheimer and Walt themselves acknowledge, but a good place to begin is Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). For a more comprehensive

But what *is* actually remarkable, even startling, about *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* is that it has been written by two preeminent realists of IR (international relations) theory. Realists, especially the more rigorous kind like Mearsheimer and Walt, look suspiciously upon domestic influences—when they bother to look at them at all. They believe in black boxes, billiard balls, and bandwagons, not in the messiness of domestic politics, religious and ethnic identity, and cultural discourse. Mearsheimer's theory of "offensive" realism is particularly emphatic on this point. American politicians and policymakers may occasionally need to bow before the false gods of domestic politics and a virtuous foreign policy. But "[b]ehind closed doors," Mearsheimer writes in his 2001 book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, "the elites who make national security policy speak mostly the language of power, not that of principle, and the United States acts in the international system according to the dictates of realist logic."<sup>3</sup> And although Walt has emphasized the crucial influence of internal politics on the external behavior of revolutionary states,<sup>4</sup> there is nothing currently revolutionary about the United States and its political system, leading adherents of Walt's thesis to assume that it should respond to the normal dictates of realist theory. States, then, maximize power and/or security because of an inherently anarchic international system; states also measure power and/or security in mostly objective terms. Ultimately, non-revolutionary states act in their own best interest and have little time or patience for influences that get in the way of this all-consuming goal.

Yet Mearsheimer and Walt have now produced a detailed exploration of the domestic influence on foreign policy, something more akin to political sociology or anthropology than parsimonious political science. True, recent work in "neoclassical" realist theory links domestic politics to international relations<sup>5</sup>—but this is not what Mearsheimer and Walt are doing here. In fact, according to them, policy on one of the most important regions for U.S. national security policy is being driven by a single domestic constituency. Contrary to most variants of realist theory, then, and certainly contrary to the impressive body of work already produced by both Mearsheimer and Walt, when it comes to the Middle East the biggest state in the international system is motivated not by threat or power or security, or even by ideology, but by short-term, partisan, domestic political calculations. According to Mearsheimer and Walt, domestic politics even prompts American leaders to pursue

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bibliographical list, see Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 359n17, 360n26, 393n2.

<sup>3</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics*, 51 (October 1998), 144-172; William C. Wohlforth, "Measuring Power—and the Power of Theories," in *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate*, ed. John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2002), 250-265; and Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

policies that run *contrary* to what is best for U.S. foreign policy. Support for Israel, they argue, is actually counter-productive to American national security. This is not to suggest that *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* is necessarily wrong—but it is certainly not an analytical world normally inhabited by hard-headed realists. With this in mind, one hopes that in future work Mearsheimer and Walt will use their vast array of evidence on the Israel lobby to link domestic politics more rigorously to IR theory.

If they do, they will probably need to revisit the issue of whether Americans' steadfast support for Israel is a top-down or bottom-up phenomenon. In other words, is it driven by elite preferences (as pursued by the lobby) or by a more widespread popular sentiment? Mearsheimer and Walt, of course, prioritize a top-down approach, but in doing so they pay insufficient attention to the deeper roots of American support for the idea of "Israel," be it before or after the founding of the official Jewish state in 1948. They note that the phenomenon of Christian Zionism—Christians who support a Jewish state in Israel largely because it purports to fulfill biblical prophecy—dates to the nineteenth century. But a more diffuse, popular identification with Judaism, with the Old Testament, and with "Israel," long predates the ideas of figures like William Blackstone, an evangelical who first led the Christian Zionist movement. The philo-Semitic, Old Testament-loving Puritans who migrated to New England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for example, had been persecuted in England not only as political and religious dissenters, but actually as Jews, under anti-Jewish laws, and they saw their mission—their errand into the wilderness—as establishing a New Jerusalem for God's chosen people. This cultural conceit, and others closely related to it, have been remarkably and consistently durable throughout American history. Of course, they do not in themselves automatically account for Americans' support for Israel today; but they do suggest that sympathy for Jews, and especially for an idea of "Israel" as a Jewish homeland and as Jews as a chosen people, rests deeper within the American psyche than Mearsheimer and Walt allow.

To put it differently, and more currently, the media have recently reported the growing influence of an "India lobby," reflecting increased Indian immigration to the United States and India's deepening ties to America due in no small part to its growing role in a globalized economy. According to the *Washington Post*, the fledgling India lobby finds the soaring Israel lobby "downright inspiring," and it is using the American Israel Public Affairs Committee—the notorious, and notoriously powerful, AIPAC—as its model for growth.<sup>6</sup> This has a certain *prima facie* plausibility: India would seem to be well-placed to take its place in American hearts alongside Israel because it shares some of the political attributes that Americans find so morally compelling in Israel, such as a democratic tradition and a constant threat from Islamic terrorism; and strategically, India will be an increasingly important player in world politics and economics. But still, despite these advantages, it is

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<sup>6</sup> Mira Kamdar, "Forget the Israel Lobby. The Hill's Next Big Player Is Made in India," *Washington Post*, 30 September 2007, B3. For a more optimistic view of the potential for an Indo-American alliance based in large part on cultural affinity, see R. Nicholas Burns, "America's Strategic Opportunity with India," *Foreign Affairs* 86 (November/December 2007), 145-146.

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

totally inconceivable—at least, to this reviewer—that Indians will attract among Americans the same levels of axiomatic sympathy and empathy that Israelis do. While India shares Israel's attractiveness in some ways, it cannot possibly compare at a deeper, historical, and more emotive level. Thus no matter how effective the India lobby will be at top-down political maneuverings—and there are already signs of its effectiveness—it will never be able to tap into the deep, wide, bottom-up reservoir of sympathy and empathy available to the Israel lobby.

Aside from identifying who makes up the lobby and how they operate, the other chief argument in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* is that the lobby not only influences policy, but that it has a pernicious effect. Too often, Mearsheimer and Walt argue, the Israel lobby successfully pressures the White House and Congress to side with Israel when taking a more genuinely neutral, or even oppositional, stance would better suit American interests. This is perhaps even more controversial—and certainly more original—than their more straightforward observation that an Israel lobby exists and wields disproportionate power. They point to many examples, but in separate chapters they highlight the adverse influence the Israel lobby has had in recent years on U.S. policy towards Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and above all Iraq. Their argument has many merits, and some aspects of it—for example, that steadfast U.S. support for Israel increases Arab anger, and thus helps to foment Arab terrorism, against America—are just plain common sense.

But, as with their generally anti-Israeli stance, they occasionally overstate their argument. The case of Iraq—which they charge was the product of pro-Israel neoconservatives motivated primarily by a concern for Israel's security—is probably Mearsheimer and Walt's most important case, but it is also their most problematic. Their basic argument is that: the Iraq War was almost exclusively a neoconservative project; the neoconservatives are a powerful faction of the Israel lobby; therefore, the Iraq War was engineered by the Israel lobby. Leaving aside the fact that many others advocated war without sharing the neoconservatives' attachment to Israel, such as the liberal interventionists and the governments of Great Britain, Spain, and Australia, this line of reasoning prioritizes one aspect of neoconservative thought—identification with Israel—while completely ignoring others—such as a general belief in the power of military force to effect political change, or a belief that justice should be pursued over order—that are surely just as important. The neoconservatives, in other words, aimed to spread democracy even at the barrel of a gun because they believed it served American interests first and foremost. As a weak, rogue state that was run by a brutal dictator, had recklessly destabilized regional security twice in the space of a decade, and had more or less been at war with the United States since the autumn of 1990, Iraq was a perfectly natural target for this worldview. Whether it was wise to focus on Iraq—and here Mearsheimer and Walt are undoubtedly correct that it was not—is a rather different matter. Moreover, the key decision-makers—George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Condoleezza Rice—approached Iraq with their own priorities, many of which had little to do with Israel. Finally, as Mearsheimer and Walt acknowledge (pp. 233-234), Israeli officials themselves believed Iran posed a more immediate threat than Iraq, and threw their weight behind war with Iraq only after it was

15 December 2007

clear that the White House had decided upon it. Obviously, then, the White House had already decided upon war based on something other than Israeli security. The Israel lobby was certainly part of the story of the war's origins, but it is hardly the only, or even the definitive, part.

Mearsheimer and Walt are nonetheless onto something when they say that unlike its position during the Cold War, Israel is now more of a strategic liability to the United States than an asset. On many grounds, it seems to make little sense to support Israel unconditionally. "It is time," they propose, "for the United States to treat Israel not as a special case but as a normal state, and to deal with it much as it deals with any other country" (341). In many ways, this is sensible advice.

But is Israel in fact a "normal" state? For example, while Mearsheimer and Walt would like U.S. foreign policy to be more cautious and limited in its support for Israel, they also "explicitly endorse [America] coming to Israel's aid if its survival were ever in jeopardy" (18, *passim*). Quite right—but is this not an extraordinarily high bar to set? To get a sense of how unusual Israel's geopolitical position is, try and apply that statement to any other American ally. The simple fact is, the very "survival" of New Zealand or Britain or Egypt is not in any doubt. Perhaps only South Korea faces a similarly existential threat to its very existence, but in that situation it is America's adversary, North Korea, that is totally isolated. Kuwait once faced a similar threat from Iraq, but only to its sovereignty, not its very existence as a people. The absurdly unnecessary, superfluous nature of an explicit U.S. commitment to Canadian or Turkish or Japanese "survival" highlights just how precariously abnormal Israel's position is. Little wonder, then, that Israel overreacts to crises, such as its foolhardy 2006 war in Lebanon. In this geopolitical climate, the absolutely unshakable nature of the American security guarantee to Israel acts as a powerful deterrent to Israel's Arab and Iranian enemies—and being good realists, surely Mearsheimer and Walt realize that this deterrent is essential to peace.<sup>7</sup> Israel may for now be more powerful than its neighbors, but this balance of forces in the Middle East has not always been the case—as illustrated, contrary to the book's claims otherwise, by the 1973 Arab-Israeli war—and will certainly not hold forever. Finally, the peace that some Arab states, such as Egypt and Jordan, have made with Israel was (and continues to be) based mostly on the perception that as long as America strongly supports Israel, it would be futile to wage war.

Yet these points of difference should not detract from the importance of what is fundamentally an excellent, insightful book. Just as Mearsheimer and Walt call on Americans simply to treat Israel as a normal state, reviewers should simply treat *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* as a normal book. It is, as the best scholarship should be, controversial and provocative. But while it is contentious, it is not tendentious.

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<sup>7</sup> Especially when one considers that Walt built his formidable scholarly reputation by arguing that states respond to threat rather than simply to power. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

## ***Israel Lobby Roundtable***

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15 December 2007

Mearsheimer and Walt have corroborated all their arguments with a wealth of primary and secondary sources. If anything, at times their narrative plods along too deliberately because of their tendency to over-substantiate the analysis. One suspects Mearsheimer and Walt have done this deliberately in order to provide as strong a defensive shield as possible against an anticipated—rightly, as it turns out—partisan onslaught. Whatever the motive, the tactic succeeds: while their book is not always convincing, overall it is cogent and persuasive on many of its key points. *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* will not be the last word on the subject, but it will stand, for a very long time, as one of the most valuable.

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Review by David Schoenbaum, The University of Iowa

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For the visiting lecturer in search of an ice-breaker some 30 years ago, the thigh-slapper about Elizabeth Taylor's spouse-of-the-week was hard to beat. "I know what's expected of me," the man is heard to say. "The challenge is how to make it interesting." Twenty months after the clamorous debut of John Mearsheimer's and Stephen Walt's 13,000-word article in *The London Review of Books*, and three since its much-amplified publication as a book, the reviewer of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* is likely to feel the same way.

The authors' argument is familiar and simple. Organized supporters of Israel have helped Israel settle and colonize the Occupied Territories by persuading U.S. policymakers to look the other way, and keep the grants and arms deals coming. They've meanwhile encouraged them to pursue a variety of other counter-productive policies in the Middle East (e.g., the invasion of Iraq), that the policymakers might not otherwise have pursued. Their support for Israel has therefore been a net loss for the United States. Like a lot of simple arguments, it's comfortable and plausible in limits. It's also an impressive generator of heat. Think debating speech in connubial union with term paper. Think Michael Moore with footnotes.

Graduate students yet unborn may wonder about the fuss it inspired. But they're almost certain to find the publishing history, pre-history included, as interesting as the book. In fall 2002, *The Atlantic* approached the authors about a piece on U.S. foreign policy. No trace of the Israel Lobby appears in their shrewd critique of the Bush Administration's march to war with Iraq, published a few months later in *Foreign Policy*.<sup>1</sup> But its role and influence was evidently understood as part of their commission from *The Atlantic*. "We accepted... with reservations, because we knew this was a controversial subject, and that any article... was likely to provoke a harsh reaction," the authors report without further explanation in the book's preface (vii). The project wandered through various hands and revisions for the next two years. It was then killed unconditionally in early 2005.

Given the reaction that really did follow, and the book's claim to bust taboos on one of the most contentious special relationships in American and international experience, the grounds for rejection have been an understandable object of curiosity. According to the editor who wrote the letter, they were spelled out to the authors at length. But neither he nor they have made the letter public.

The actual publishing history began some ten months later, when a fortuitous connection to Mary-Kay Wilmers, the *London Review of Books's* editor and "mater familias of London's liberal intelligentsia," rescued the piece from oblivion. "Maybe it's because I am Jewish, but

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "An Unnecessary War," *Foreign Policy*, January 2003.



## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

I think I am alert to anti-Semitism," Wilmers told *The Observer*. "And I do not think criticizing American foreign policy or Israel's way of... influencing it, is anti-Semitic."<sup>2</sup>

From suspects usual and otherwise, including *Ha'aretz*, *The Independent* (of London), *The Financial Times*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, and David Duke, the onetime Louisiana legislator and Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, the echo was immediate and global.<sup>3</sup> For some it seemed as liberating as anything since the 21<sup>st</sup> amendment. For others it was as toxic as anything since "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." But for virtually everyone, it activated hot buttons and elicited passion like nothing since Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History" in 1989, Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations?" in 1993, or Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in 1996.

By July 2006, an 83-page PDF (Portable Document Format) version of the article on the Kennedy School website, preceded by cautionary label and a letter from the dean explaining the absence of a Kennedy School logo, had been downloaded 275,000 times.<sup>4</sup> The same month, *Foreign Policy* turned the piece into a symposium, and *The Washington Post* turned the authors into a cover story.

About a year later, it underwent another makeover. This time it reappeared as a trade book with 355 pages of text, comprising a preface, 331 pages of "Nous accusons," and 20 of basically sensible but hardly startling policy proposals; 106 pages of endnotes, and a reported \$750,000 advance.<sup>5</sup> Its publisher, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, was one of New York's most venerable, with a list including *The New York Times's* Thomas A. Friedman as well as 22 Nobel laureates in literature.

With their creeping barrages of hedges, qualifiers, anticipations, and preemptions, the authors made use of the extra space to distance themselves from the charges of anti-Semitism, Israel-bashing, and reductivism with extreme prejudice that had pursued them through the earlier versions. They were at particular pains to make clear that anti-Semitism is ancient, evil and still with us; that Israel too has legitimate security interests, and that the Israel Lobby, as they understand it, means neither more nor less than an organized group of Americans, some Jewish, many not, exercising their Constitutional rights of free speech and assembly to influence their elected representatives.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Beaumont, "Editor hits back over Israel row," *The Observer*, April 2, 2006. <http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/news/story/0,,1745030.00.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Viz. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Israel\\_Lobby\\_and\\_U.S.\\_Foreign\\_Policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Israel_Lobby_and_U.S._Foreign_Policy).

<sup>4</sup> Viz. <http://middleeastwonks.blogspot.com/2006/04/mearsheimer-and-walt-controversy.html> for the E-mail of explanation from Kennedy School Dean David Ellwood.

<sup>5</sup> Josef Joffe, "Das Komplott der Koscher Nostra," *Die Zeit*, September 6, 2007. <http://www.zeit.de/2007/37/Juedische-Lobby>.

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, and Paul Wolfowitz, all Jewish neo-conservatives and onetime senior Defense Department officials, nonetheless continue to appear in the index 16, 14 and 13 times respectively. Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, on the other hand, appears in the index only five times, although he is not Jewish, his conservatism is not neo, and he can be reasonably assumed to have been at least as responsible for the war in Iraq as any combination of the other three.

By late November 2007, the book version, in hard cover at \$26 retail, placed number 85 on Amazon's bestseller list, only a notch or two behind Ann Coulter on Democrats and Christopher Hitchens on God.<sup>6</sup> Lexis-Nexis listings of commentary, reviews, and reaction in major Anglophone media stood at 277, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Danish and Dutch media links at 97, broadcast and TV transcripts at 48.

Barely returned from an extensive tour of the United States, including such A-list addresses as the National Press Club and Council on Foreign Relations, the authors were now reported preparing for Europe. There was even a T-shirt - "Made in the USA," its designer added proudly - with the message "Walt and Mearsheimer Rock,"<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, translations into 16 languages were in the works,<sup>8</sup> or already in the bookstores, among them a German edition from Campus,<sup>9</sup> a spin-off of the Frankfurt School, not previously known for an interest in the Realist school of international relations.

Even fellow professionals might share a sense of shock and awe at the transformation of two respected senior colleagues into the academy's answer to Brangelina. Frustration with a despised Administration, a singularly unpopular war, a famously difficult client and its seemingly endless conflict with its neighbors, the elemental human need for someone, something, anything, to blame when things go multiply wrong — any or all of these might explain the book's success. But assessing it as a guide to the world as it is, let alone a MapQuest for readers who'd like to see something good happen in the Middle East, is not as easy.

Is the authors' comparative advantage, to paraphrase a classic of the Lobby-bashing canon,<sup>10</sup> that they dare to speak out? Maybe. But it's hardly as though they were the first to take on the subject.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/ref=pd\\_ts\\_pg\\_4?ie=UTF8&pg=4](http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/ref=pd_ts_pg_4?ie=UTF8&pg=4) (accessed November 23, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cafepress.com/israellobby>

<sup>8</sup> Rami G. Khouri, "The Israel Lobby Has Its Sights on Iran," *The Daily Star* (Beirut), October 31, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, Stephen M. Walt, *Die Israel Lobby* (Frankfurt, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Viz. Paul Findley, *They Dare to Speak Out* (Westport, CT, 1985).

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

In 1987, Edward Tivnan, a former reporter for *Time* and producer for ABC's news magazine "20/20," argued virtually the same case and advanced virtually the same prescriptions. His book, twice reviewed in *The New York Times*, was published by Simon & Schuster, a landmark of the book trade since 1924.<sup>11</sup>

In 1992, former Under Secretary of State George Ball, an enviable stylist and actual foreign policy pro, as well as a Democratic elder statesman, argued virtually the same case and advanced virtually the same prescriptions in a book under contract to W.W. Norton, a New York publisher at least as upscale as Farrar, Straus and Giroux.<sup>12</sup>

In 2002, the year before the Iraq war, Michael Lind, a media-savvy former editor of *The National Interest*, and a regular by-line in *The New Yorker*, *New Republic*, and *Harper's*, trampled out another vintage from the same grapes of wrath, this time in *Prospect*, a British monthly at least as upscale as *The London Review*.<sup>13</sup>

Yet Tivnan, Lind, even Ball scarcely made a ripple. So how account for Mearsheimer's and Walt's crashing waves? Is it their insight into a region whose people, to quote a character in a story by Saki, "unfortunately make more history than they can consume locally"?<sup>14</sup> Unlike Robert Fisk, *The Independent's* celebrated man in the Middle East, neither author has ever been known as an Israel-basher. But unlike Fisk, a resident of Beirut with decades of credible field experience, neither has made his career as an Old Middle East Hand either.

If they know the four Arab-authored, *UN Arab Human Development Reports*, it certainly doesn't show.<sup>15</sup> Published in 936 aggregate pages between 2002 and 2005, the reports spell out with masterly authority the world-class deficits, dysfunctions and discontents in literacy, political participation, economic development and gender equality that point, in effect, to a slow motion regional meltdown. A look at them while their own work was still in progress might have done wonders for Mearsheimer's and Walt's sense of cause, effect, perspective, proportion, and priority in what might reasonably be called the world's biggest little conflict. It might also have moved their book's center of gravity.

A couple of citations in a more familiar IR idiom make the same point in a couple of sentences.

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby* (New York 1987), cf. Walter Goodman, *New York Times*, April 30, 1987, Bernard Gwertzman, *New York Times*, May 17, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> George and Douglas Ball, *The Passionate Attachment* (New York, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> William Lind, "The Israel Lobby," *Prospect*, April 2002, "Israel Lobby, Part 3," *Prospect*, October 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Saki (H.H. Munro), "The Jesting of Arlington Stringham" in *The Short Stories of Saki* (New York, 1945), 150.

<sup>15</sup> *The Arab Human Development Report*, United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Arab States, New York, 2002-2005.

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

Islam, or rather a perversion of it, may exercise a vital influence on political decisions in the Near East if the area's basic intellectual and social crisis continues to deepen and no timely modern secular solution appears. Then emotional rejection of all the West stands for may become the negative content of Islam, and a totalitarian nihilism the Near East's primary defense mechanism.<sup>16</sup>

So wrote the U.S. State Department's INR in — read it and weep — 1952.

Contrary to the Israeli account, [Arafat's] behaviour since the start of the intifada has reflected not the existence of a prior strategy based on the use of force, but the absence of any strategy...

Whatever the material contribution of successive Israeli governments to the collapse of the Oslo framework or Israel's moral and legal responsibility for its own behaviour since autumn 2000, Arafat is guilty of strategic misjudgement, with consequences for the Palestinians of potentially historic proportions.<sup>17</sup>

So wrote Yezid Sayigh, author of the standard work on Palestinian nationalism in — read it and weep again — Fall 2001.<sup>18</sup>

Skewed by realities unmentioned or unanticipated by the authors, their sense of Realism is another soft spot. Colleagues who remember Mearsheimer's case for a German nuclear bomb no German even wanted in the early 1990s might wonder why he shows so little understanding for Israelis, who wanted — and with French, not U.S. aid — presumably got, a nuclear bomb in the late 1950s.

Colleagues with more experience in the area might hear other overtones the authors miss. In 1970, for a practical case, Israel, backed up by the U.S., proved to be Jordan's last best line of defense when Palestinians tried to hijack the kingdom. In 1981, when Israel bombed Osirak a.k.a. Tammuz 1, the French-built Iraqi reactor, little more was heard from Israel's neighbors than pro forma tut tuts. In 1982, the region was thunderously silent when the Palestine Liberation Organization shipped out of Lebanon for Tunis. Only recently, with Iranian centrifuges believed to be humming just over the horizon, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Bahrain, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen, Indonesia, even Syria, as well as Egypt and Jordan, joined Israelis and — some — Palestinians in Annapolis. Do they know something that Walt and Mearsheimer missed?

For readers familiar with the literature as well as the territory, the scholarship too is likely to come up short. A reference to Roger Jepsen (sic), a nominal victim of the Israel Lobby, is just the kind of error that suggests that there might be more, even many more, errors where this one comes from (157-158). A first-term Republican Senator from Iowa, a state with a Jewish population of possibly 5,000 in a total of a little under three million, Jepsen

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<sup>16</sup> "Problems and Attitudes in the Arab World: Their Implications for U.S. Psychological Strategy," Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State, May 19, 1952.

<sup>17</sup> Yezid Sayigh, "Arafat and the Anatomy of a Revolt," *Survival*, Autumn 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State* (Oxford, 1997).

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

had many problems when he decided to run for re-election in 1984. He claimed constitutional privilege when stopped for driving solo in the carpool lane from Virginia to Washington. He admitted membership in a private spa later shut down for prostitution. His rural constituents were suffering from a farm depression caused by huge federal deficits, and resulting high interest rates. It was true that Jepsen had voted to sell advanced surveillance aircraft to the Saudis. But it was at President Reagan's insistence. Reagan carried Iowa by 53 percent to 46. Jepsen lost his seat by 55 percent to 43.

"The essay itself, mostly a very average 'realist' and centrist critique of the influence of Israel, contains much that is true and a little that is original," Christopher Hitchens noted in Slate. "But what is original is not true and what is true is not original."<sup>19</sup>

Hitchens's point is hard to quarrel with. It may also be the book's central weakness, save for the still bigger question of whether it does anything to change minds that need changing, or only gets their owners' backs up, and brings them out swinging.

The authors acknowledge, correctly, that the supposed elephant in the parlor has trumpeted for all to hear since at least the 1940s. They acknowledge, again correctly, that its impact was minimal, at least at the White House level, for the first full generation of Israeli statehood.

Yet even a brief reference (52-53) to the once-famous Soviet-Egyptian arms deal of 1955 is enough to move a latter-day Ronald Reagan to a hearty "There you go again." If Egypt — and Syria too — approached the Russians, it was not, as the authors imply, because of America's support for Israel. It was because America, in cooperation with Britain and France, had imposed an arms embargo on the whole region, Israel included. Egypt, a loser in the 1948-49 war with Israel, addressed its arms problem by approaching the Soviet Union. Israel addressed its problem by signing on with Britain and France to invade Egypt. It incidentally put itself on a collision course with the United States. In 1990-91, in everybody's interest, American deployed troops in Israel for the only time ever to keep Israel out of the war with Iraq. Is it too much to imagine that a little more, not less, support for Israel in 1955 might have kept Israel out of the misbegotten Suez expedition a year later?

U.S. abstinence continued up to fateful 1967, when a critical mass of inter-Arab politics and Soviet grand strategy caused Israelis to dig mass graves in public parks in anticipation of the worst case.<sup>20</sup> With an assist from Arab League conferees in Khartoum, who unanimously said no to negotiations, recognition and peace, hesitation in Washington did

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher Hitchens, "Overstating Jewish Power," Slate, March 27, 2006, <http://www.slate.com/id/2138741/>.

<sup>20</sup> Viz. Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*, London and New York 1970, Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, *Foxbats Over Dimona*, New Haven 2007.

## *Israel Lobby Roundtable*

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15 December 2007

its part to let Israelis occupy and eventually settle the West Bank, previously annexed by Jordan, and Gaza, previously administered by Egypt. In 1973, American intervention stopped Israel from destroying another Egyptian army. Is it too much to imagine that a little more, not less, attention to Israel in 1967 might have shortened or minimized the occupation, and preempted the creeping colonization of the territories that has since been allowed to morph into an existential crisis for both Israelis and Palestinians?

As the authors again acknowledge, the U.S.-Israeli relationship underwent a sea change in the decade that followed. In 1970, President Nixon declared it in America's interest to make Israel a Cold War proxy, cost what it might. In 1979, President Carter declared it in America's interest that Israel and Egypt make peace, cost what it might. Largely unchallenged, the legacy of both decisions remains an article of faith, and a mortgage with no determinable date of retirement.

What Mearsheimer and Walt consistently neglect to mention is that there might be more to the story. From Eisenhower to Clinton, U.S. presidents have gone toe-to-toe with the Lobby and won. Anwar el-Sadat, an Egyptian president who visited Israel, addressed the Knesset, and smoked his pipe at Barbara Walters and Walter Cronkite, won too. Arrayed in a three-piece suit instead of a uniform, he rolled up both Israeli occupiers and the Israel Lobby where all possible combinations of Soviet arms and Arab armies had failed, regained all territory lost in 1967, and laid claim to an annual American aid package that, like Israel's, continues to this day.

No one can say for certain whether the same would have worked for Yasir Arafat, or that what worked for Gandhi in India, Martin Luther King in Dixie, Mandela in South Africa, or Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel in Iron Curtain Europe, would also have worked in Palestine. But this is only in part because it's hard to prove a negative. The crucial part (see Yezid Sayigh) is that Palestinians never seriously tried it. Instead, from the 1930s on, they opted for leaders who lined up successively with Hitler, the Soviet Union, and Saddam Hussein. By 1982 it had got them to Tunis, by 2006 to the threshold of civil war.

It's true that Israeli settlers were allowed to colonize Palestinian land after 1967. They were even encouraged after the election of Menahem Begin a decade later. But it's at least as true that Israeli voters elected three negotiation-minded prime ministers, two by landslide majorities, between 1984 and 1999.

If none returned for a second term, the fault was not entirely theirs. In 2000, the post-Camp David intifada effectively elected Ariel Sharon, the candidate Palestinians most loved to hate. Over the next four years, Palestinian suicide bombers targeted seders, pizzerias, discos, beachfront restaurants, and university cafeterias. To most people's surprise, the violence turned even Sharon into a born-again pragmatist. Persuaded for the first time since 1967 that settlement might make them less safe, Israelis agreed in 2005 to withdraw from Gaza. A half year later they reelected Sharon.

## *Israel Lobby Roundtable*

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15 December 2007

Soon afterward, Israeli soldiers were killed and kidnapped on land Israel had voluntarily withdrawn from. Since then, Israeli civilians across the border from Gaza have been under regular bombardment. The experience has not made easier to sell more withdrawals. Freely elected to govern Gaza in 2006, Hamas is now a contender for control of the West Bank too.

For those who haven't got the message, Article 22 of its charter still stands. It explains how "the enemies" with their "control of the world media, news agencies, the press, publishing houses, broadcasting stations and others" were behind "the French Revolution, the Communist Revolution," and World War I, "sabotaging societies and achieving Zionist interests" through secret societies they formed, "such as Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, the Lions and others."<sup>21</sup>

"Alas," the late and venerated Edward Said sighed not long before his death, "one can already see in Palestine's potential statehood the lineaments of a marriage between the chaos of Lebanon and the tyranny of Iraq."<sup>22</sup> Neither the suicide bombers, Hamas, the world view behind Article 22, nor Said's deepening pessimism are conspicuous in the authors' argument either. But with adversaries and obstacles like these, does a book on the Lobby suffice — is a Lobby even needed — to explain why majorities of Americans over decades have inclined to keep their distance, curse both houses, continue to support Israel or at least give it the benefit of their doubt?

So back to the questions that really matter. Have the authors done all they can to nudge and guide Americans, including the Lobby and its constituents, from the dismal Here to a happier There? Or have they only rediscovered the wheel, and told us again what's been public knowledge for years about one of the many obstacles along the route? Is their version of tough love likely to make Israelis play better with other children? Or is it only likely to make them hang on all the harder to the status quo?

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<sup>21</sup> The complete text can be found at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/hamas.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by Lisa Anderson, presidential address, Middle East Studies Association, November 7, 2003.

**T**he *Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer is an important publication for two reasons: first, for what it says about the structure and purpose of an important actor in the making of American Middle East policy, and second, for the understandable—if to my mind exaggerated—concerns it arouses that Israel, indeed Jews everywhere, could be blamed for the calamity surrounding the American debacle in Iraq in a way reminiscent of anti-Semitism in the West from time immemorial. I therefore propose first to review the book itself, then to turn to the controversy surrounding the volume, a subject that deserves consideration in its own right.

### I. The Book Itself

The book is important for what it says because so little has been written about the Israel Lobby, or indeed any ethnic lobby at all in the United States, that a book of this level of sophistication can make a field of study for a generation to come. Ten years ago, when I was researching *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Harvard University Press, 2000), I was surprised at how little attention the subject of ethnic group influence on U.S. foreign policy had received. A fundamental reason, I think, was that during the Cold War most ethnic groups quite successfully merged their concerns for their ancestral homelands with the greater national struggle against international communism. Whether their political identities were not only American but also Cuban or Polish, Czech, or Lithuanian, whether Jewish, Greek, or Armenian, national and foreign loyalties nicely coincided. (The sole important exception was African Americans, for most of whom the struggle for majority rule in Africa and in opposition to the war in Southeast Asia took precedence over containing, and ultimately bringing down, the Soviet Union.) Moreover, realism, the guiding framework for understanding world affairs during the Cold War, tended to ignore domestic sources of foreign policy in favor of examining the international environment. As a result, earlier periods were long forgotten, such as the run-up to World War I, or the aftermath in the struggle over whether this country would join the League of Nations, when many German and Irish Americans supported neutrality for the sake of their kinfolk abroad. Hence, before the early 1990s, the study of ethnic politics with respect to foreign policy appeared to be relatively unimportant. I recall the surprise of some colleagues that I should address such a seemingly trivial issue when I began work on it in the mid-1990s.

But as I felt at the time, with the end of the Cold War, ethnic concerns could not blend in quite so easily with the national interest as before. More, given America's lone superpower status, ethnic groups could hope that Washington would increase its support for their causes. Armenian Americans, for example, were able to get substantial subsidies for their newly independent homeland from the Congress and to involve themselves in American relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan in ways that they reckoned could help Armenia. In his electioneering, Bill Clinton sensed the possibilities, addressing Irish Americans with respect to the festering problems of Northern Ireland, and East European Americans



## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

anxious to see that their kinfolk abroad be brought under NATO's protection. My guess is that the best single explanation of the return of white Catholic voters to the Democratic Party in 1992 and 1996 after having voted more for the Republicans since 1980 had to do with the appeal of Clinton's foreign policy platform to American Catholics of Irish, Czech, and Polish descent (among others). Clinton also gave in to African American demand that he restore Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power in Haiti, and he enthusiastically endorsed the Oslo Peace Process begun under his predecessor George H.W. Bush with the support of many American Jews. During the 1992 election cycle, Asian Americans (Chinese and Taiwanese especially) became involved for the first time in debating foreign policy in ethnic terms, although with the financial scandals that broke out with respect to their contacts with the Democratic Party, they were soon to retreat from the scene. By contrast, South Asian Americans (those of Pakistani descent opposed to those of Indian, to be sure) became more active than ever both at the state and the national level.

However, it was not only America's triumph over the Soviet Union that meant that ethnic groups were emboldened to act on behalf of their ancestral kinfolks with a directness unprecedented in the annals of U.S. foreign policy. The rise of multiculturalism since the 1960s, a domestic development dependent far more on the Civil Rights Movement than on world affairs, was basic to the self-confidence of many ethnic activists that they could represent their foreign attachments without being overly concerned with how they might affect American national interests. Consider, for example, multiculturalist arguments such as those made by Michael Walzer writing in 1992 that, "in the case of hyphenated Americans, it doesn't matter whether the first or the second name is dominant...an ethnic American is someone who in principle, lives his spiritual life as he chooses, *on either side of the hyphen*."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, many ethnics began to speak frankly of the United States as their "host country," whereas the "homeland," or for some their "diaspora," was acknowledged as where their primary political loyalties lay.

Confirmed by both international and domestic trends, the 1990s was, in short, the ethnic group moment. Nevertheless, not much was made of this in academic circles so far as the nation's foreign policy was involved. Part of the reason lay in the reluctance of any special interest group, ethnic or otherwise, to make its business public knowledge. Part of it was due to the difficulty inherent in getting a handle on so many diverse movements. And part of the problem reflected the fragmentation of the study of domestic American politics so that a holistic view of interest groups, parties, Congress and the presidency was becoming increasingly difficult to write. To be sure, the Israel Lobby (or "lobbies" if one prefers) was generally agreed not only to be the strongest of the ethnic lobbies but one of the strongest lobbies at work in Washington of any kind at all. Still, there were difficulties plaguing scholarship on the matter that were general to the field, not simply those specific to the study of AIPAC, the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, and their companions including Christian Zionists that can be grouped together as the Israel Lobby. And so it was with the Cuban, Armenian, Greek, African, Irish, Polish, Czech, Baltic, Indian,

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<sup>1</sup> *What It Means To Be An American*. (New York: Marsilio, 1992), 45 (emphasis in original).

Pakistani, and Taiwanese Americans focused on world affairs as well. They seemed to be little fish with lots of bones, so better work on other matters. Except, to repeat, for the Israel Lobby. Many knowledgeable observers in the late 1990s told me that this was the thousand pound gorilla in the room and even saluted my “courage” in trying to lay out the character of ethnic politicking with all the emotion this could arouse.

Here then is an important reason to salute the publication of the Walt and Mearsheimer volume. Not only is it by far the best study of the Israel Lobby published to date, it is in fact the best study of any ethnic lobby yet to appear. We might hope that it will serve as a model to stimulate students and scholars to analyze the myriad other ethnic or ethno-religious groups now active in domestic politics even if there will remain general agreement that none of these other groups comes close to matching the power of the Israel Lobby. It may sensitize us as well to the range of groups usually referred to as “the domestic sources of U.S. foreign policy,” revitalizing holistic studies relating civic actors to political parties and these in turn to the leading institutions of national government. In a period when the study of American politics so often hinges on methodological sophistication best practiced on narrow issues, we may here welcome the example of a major domestic force in American politics analyzed in a broad framework.

The accomplishment is noteworthy. Walt and Mearsheimer describe in better detail the structure of the Israel Lobby than any of their predecessors (chapter 4), analyze holistically the lobby’s relationship to the public discourse, political parties, Congress, and the Presidency (chapters 5 and 6), point to the Lobby’s influence on five current major Middle East problems (the Palestinians, the invasion of Iraq, U.S. relations with Syria and Iran, and the U.S. reaction to the Israeli attack on Lebanon in the summer of 2006 (chapters 7-11), and present their case for feeling that the Lobby has been a starkly negative influence on the American national interest since the end of the Cold War if not earlier (chapters 1-3 and the Conclusion). In a word, the book is a *tour de force*, bearing witness to the vigor of the American political science community at a moment when the nation is in crisis wondering how our foreign policy came to such a parlous state and what might be done about it.

## II. The Book’s Reception

So why the well-nigh universal dismissal of this book by the American foreign policy cognescenti? Why has a controversy grown up around its publication that is almost as interesting as the book itself? Here is my second theme: the inherently dangerous tinderbox of anti-Semitism that could be lit if the disastrous invasion of Iraq, and the collateral failures of American policy throughout the Middle East, could, to put it baldly, “be pinned on the Jews.” This concern, I believe, is a main reason the book’s reception has been so negative.

The concern is legitimate. We must consider the historical moment at which this book appears. There is wide agreement that the decision to invade Iraq in March 2003 will likely appear in historical retrospect as the greatest mistake in the history of our country’s

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

foreign policy to date, with more unsettling repercussions the globe around—and not just from the Middle East—probable as time goes by. Both Russia and China are stirring in response to American reversals. Hostility to the United States grows apace throughout the Muslim world with the possibility of regimes once friendly to Washington either collapsing or changing direction. At home the menace of an “imperial presidency” compounded by manifold economic difficulties can be tied directly to this calamitous policy. Who, then, is to blame?

Not surprisingly, recriminations are coming from every side. The former head of the Central Intelligence Agency blames the vice president, who returns the charge. The press is in turmoil at how badly many of our leading reporters and their editors handled the information they provided the public, especially on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), during the run-up to the invasion. The left sees the hand of corporate interests. The military (and just about everyone else) is pointing the finger at Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld for Pentagon manipulation of intelligence and the mistakes in the occupation of Baghdad; torture outrages continue to surface; and the possibility of an increasingly powerful executive multiply, whoever is in office. Were all this not quite enough, the fears grow that worse may still be to come, with another, more deadly terrorist attack, an American or Israeli strike against Iran, a blow-up in Pakistan, or the regionalization of the Iraqi civil war as Turkey, for example, becomes involved.

Who, then, are the guilty parties that got us in to this nightmare? My own contribution to the debate has been to be something of a whistleblower with respect to academic discourse. In *A Pact with the Devil: Washington's Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of the American Promise* (Routledge, 2007), I look at the intellectual origins of the Bush Doctrine.<sup>2</sup> What I find was that the framework for national policy announced in 2002 had been mightily contributed to by a group of left-center academics mainly at Princeton, Harvard, Stanford, and Yale whom I call the “neoliberals.” Not that I leave the neoconservatives off the hook, to be sure, but I conclude that essential elements of the Bush Doctrine depended for their emotional resonance on intellectual substance provided by a group quite distinct from the neocons in the Republican Party.

The point of bringing this up is to report as no surprise that many of the neoliberals criticized in my book are quite irate that anyone should suggest they have any responsibility whatsoever for the terms of the Bush Doctrine and hence for the widespread support in intellectual circles in 2002 for the invasion of Iraq. So too, and with much more understandable anger and far more clout than my bevy of Ivy League professors and a few collaborating journalist like Thomas Friedman, those in the Israel Lobby criticized by Walt and Mearsheimer are appalled that they are said to have some accounting to do for their political activism in the decision to go to war. Others outside the Lobby are in agreement. Hence the heavy volleys of criticism the book has received.

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<sup>2</sup> See the H-Diplo Roundtable Review at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/#8.14>.

## *Israel Lobby Roundtable*

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15 December 2007

The controversy over the book has become as interesting as the book itself. One possibility, of course, is that the Israel Lobby is so powerful that it has generated a hostile reaction to Walt and Mearsheimer's book, a knee jerk response to an attack on a sacred cow, the inevitable result when a taboo is broken. In a word, the negative critiques of the book (to date, I have not seen a single one in the United States in a prominent publication that could be called positive) illustrate just the charge that the book makes in chapter 6 on the way public discourse has been possessed by a form of thinking that gives a blank American check to whatever it is Israel decides to do. I believe this is in fact part of what has occurred: the Lobby has called in its chips. It has done so before (most recently with respect to Jimmy Carter) and now again. You either attack the book and are in its good graces, or you do not and the heavens may fall. Still, I believe that the reasons for what on balance has most certainly been a bad press for the book are more complicated.

What grounds does the book give to alarm many that it may contribute to anti-Semitism? So many reviews have appeared at this point, with such a wide range of arguments mooted, that I will make no effort to cover them. Instead, I would like to suggest five "tests," or questions, that might be applied to the volume to see on what grounds such a criticism might be made to stick.

First, do Walt and Mearsheimer use their evidence to de-legitimize the Israeli state? That is, do they accuse it of such manifold wrongdoings that we are to understand that it should be ranked a pariah state, a rogue country that we should boycott, disinvest from, and in general denounce as apartheid South Africa was once attacked or as Myanmar/Burma is treated today? Sometimes this charge is put as the "double standard" criterion: is Israel being held up to a higher code of conduct than other countries, found wanting, and implicitly if not explicitly de-legitimized as a sovereign state while other countries, with equal or far worse records, are accorded international recognition?

Here Walt and Mearsheimer are clear. Although they criticize at length the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians, both in terms of their account of Zionist hopes in the 1930s to achieve what today would be called "ethnic cleansing" and with respect to the current treatment of the subject Arab population, they do not use their evidence to suggest that as a result Israel represents some kind of especially objectionable form of government. They salute Israel's many accomplishments and they assert more than once that should the survival of the Jewish state genuinely be at risk, then the United States should come to its defense. As for the ugly truths, well, what country does not have them?

Their position is not likely to satisfy everyone. Not only is their account of Zionist history unsettling in light of today's thinking with the emphasis they place on Zionist plans to expel Arabs from most of the Palestinian mandate not only historically but still in the hearts of many today, but Walt and Mearsheimer point out in their conclusion that the cost of supporting a Jewish state that engages in the kind of policies it does in the Occupied Territories and toward its neighbors is a high one for the United States to pay. Our basic national interests in the region, they assert, are to stop terrorism, to impede the spread of

## *Israel Lobby Roundtable*

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15 December 2007

WMD, and to secure a stable flow of petroleum at affordable prices. All these concerns are complicated by working with Israel as it is now. They do not buy the argument that some kind of special relationship should exist that privileges Israel over other nations with whom we look to cooperate. They nonetheless raise none of the flags one might expect with respect to the legitimacy of Israel's existence.

What emerges from this review is something of a contradictory position: Walt and Mearsheimer assert in one breath not only that Israel is a legitimate state but also that we should underwrite its survival. Yet with the next breath they lambaste Israel for its treatment of the Palestinians while they stress the manifold costs to the United States of giving a blank check to an Israel bent on intimidating its neighbors. Those who laud the book's argument will refer to the first breath, while those concerned by its perspective are sure to stress the second. I do not see how on this score the book could be considered anti-Semitic, but I can appreciate the nervousness some may feel before the strength of their charge.

A second test is whether Walt and Mearsheimer treat the Israel Lobby, and more especially its Jewish leadership—particularly the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, AIPAC—In a way that makes it appear conspiratorial, out of the mainstream, or illegitimate as an actor on the American political stage. They do not. To be sure, they feel that the national interests of the United States are being ill-served by the policies the Israel Lobby advances. Still, they repeatedly point out that a good deal of American politics is interest group based.

Had they wanted to, Walt and Mearsheimer might have argued, as at times Robert Dahl has, that one of the greatest flaws in the American democratic system is the degree of power special interests possess. Agribusiness or pharmaceuticals, energy corporations or banks, the National Rifle Association or the American Association of Retired Persons—all of these self-concerned groups and many, many more, find their needs met by special interest lobbying that can be argued to sacrifice the common good to the desires of narrow interests. But the authors do not indict even to the smallest extent the way American democracy works in terms of special interest lobbying. At one point, they do write that campaign finance reform that resulted in public financing of elections would be enormously detrimental to the Israel Lobby's influence and presumably to most other special interest lobbies as well. But the authors are at pains to assert that given the way American politics works, the Israel Lobby is a perfectly legitimate undertaking. This is no more a "conspiracy" against the common good than any of a host of other special interests long active in American public life.

Still, whatever their apparent acknowledgment of the right of special interests to act as they will, the books suggests that the Lobby has a degree of power without parallel in American foreign policy. The failure of any of the major candidates for the 2008 presidential contest to take any other than a supplicant role toward AIPAC is one piece of evidence. The long history of the Lobby's ability to bring even the White House to reverse course is another. The book cites Jewish activists and many political leaders—Bill Clinton,

## *Israel Lobby Roundtable*

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15 December 2007

Newt Gingrich, Richard Armev, and Lee Hamilton among others—who assert that the Lobby is without equal in making policy in Washington in foreign affairs (152ff).

Once again, we have the first breath/second breath phenomenon. Walt and Mearsheimer are careful to say that special interest lobbying is as American as apple pie only to pile on so much evidence of special interest success in the case of the Israel Lobby that the reader may feel the American democracy is a terribly flawed affair and that there is no better illustration of its shortcomings than the exercise of Jewish power. Still, by this second measure, their attitude toward AIPAC and the lobby in general, however hostile it may be, cannot be termed anti-Semitic as I understand the term.

The third test is the question of “dual loyalties.” The Israel Lobby may fit in well enough to the American style of politics, but do its proponents themselves act in ways that suggest that although they are American nationals, the security of Israel is what most concerns them such that they use their rights as citizens to pursue the foreign policy objectives of a foreign state? In a word, are they disloyal to the United States?

On this question, Walt and Mearsheimer appear to be categorical: “Any notion that Jewish Americans are disloyal citizens is wrong...those who lobby on Israel’s behalf are acting in ways that are consistent with long-standing political traditions. Indeed, political life in the United States has long proceeded from the assumption that all individuals have a variety of attachments and loyalties...” (147) That said, we once again find evidence that to some extent belies this assertion. Thus, their book cites Malcolm Hoenlein, director of the Conference of Presidents and often mentioned for the influence he wields in Washington, as saying that should Israel have opposed (as it did) President Bush’s 2003 “road map,” “we will not hesitate to make our voice heard,” for “I devote myself to the security of the Jewish state” (122, 150). The authors agree with George Packer that for neoconservatives like Douglas Feith and David Wurmser “the security of Israel was probably the prime mover’ behind their support for the [Iraq] war” (240). And they cite Elliott Abrams, head of the Middle East section of the National Security Council, and more recently counselor to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, as declaring, “There can be no doubt but that Jews, faithful to the covenant between God and Abraham, are to stand apart from the nation in which they live. It is in the very nature of being Jewish to be apart—except in Israel—from the rest of the population” (167).

Nor are these four politically prominent American Jews the only ones Walt and Mearsheimer cite who appear to have as their foremost consideration not American, but Israeli, security interests when they argue the orientation of U.S. foreign policy. Thus, there is a section entitled “Think Tanks That Think One Way” (175ff) that includes Martin Indyk’s Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, and a host of other policy centers where to be “pro-Israel” means that Washington should underwrite without objection for its own foreign policy whatever it is that Jerusalem decides is in Israel’s interest. The section “Unity in Diversity and the Norm against Dissent” (120ff) lays out in still more detail the ways many American Jews

15 December 2007

have come to defer to Jerusalem's bidding in determining where they should stand with respect to American foreign policy.

In short, once again, Walt and Mearsheimer make a declaration that appears to exonerate Jewish Americans from a slate of charges that might indict them for the mess that is American policy in the Middle East only to provide evidence that such accusations might have more than a hint of truth to them. Had Walt and Mearsheimer wanted to do so, they might have found multiple references from other ethnic groups—Irish, Cuban, Armenian among others—with the same sentiment expressed: valued as one's American citizenship is, its utility in good part is to use one's power as a citizen to serve the interests of one's kinfolk abroad. In *Foreign Attachments* I gave many examples of this kind of thinking, as if it were naturally assumed that what is good for the United States is to serve the foreign policy priorities of one's ancestral homeland. The same might be said as well of corporate interests whose primary concern is the bottom line, even if this means exporting American jobs and technology abroad, or of religious communities who feel that their understanding of their moral obligations should take precedence over whatever policy the United States government has decided is appropriate.

Whether Walt and Mearsheimer are giving aid and comfort to anti-Semitism by their findings on this score is thus in the eye of the beholder. That there are American Jews who use their power as citizens to advance Israel's interests as decided by Jerusalem seems evident. That this differs in any marked way from the behavior of many other ethnic, religious, or corporate communities who also pursue their narrow interests without regard for what is good for America (whatever their protestations of patriotism to the contrary) is equally evident.

The fourth test is whether Walt and Mearsheimer in fact exaggerate the power of the Israel Lobby in the making of American Middle East policy. If they make the United States political system a pawn of this special interest denying the government an autonomy that it actually has might not this be properly construed as anti-Semitism?

Here is what I find to be the most debatable part of the book, the one of most concern to those who fear its findings could be used by anti-Semites. I do not doubt but that Israel itself and the Israel Lobby pushed hard for the American invasion of Iraq and would welcome a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities if all else fails to derail Tehran's program to develop WMD. Yet, does the book adequately survey the range of other actors and motives at work in American foreign policy so that the power of the Lobby is set within a larger context that gives us a measure of its relative power? I fear they do not.

Suppose, for example, that Walt and Mearsheimer had been leftists concerned to show that the invasion of Iraq reflected corporate American interests to control the international supply of gas and oil. They might have assembled citations from many actors, pointed to the past business roles of both the president and the vice president and to the ultimate policy decision made in Washington, and thereupon concluded that energy considerations

## Israel Lobby Roundtable

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15 December 2007

(not restricted to corporate interests but as part of great power positioning) were the most important motive force underlying the war that began in March 2003.<sup>3</sup> Would we unquestionably have accepted such an argument? I doubt it.

The question is the extent not to which the Lobby's job was simply facilitated by the fact that the president, vice president, and the defense secretary were looking for "a splendid little war," *but that the Lobby may itself actually have been used by the administration rather the other way around*. Indeed, Bush's own religious fervor (as well as his relationship with his father and with the Texas culture in which he is steeped) could provide us with major insights as to the origins of the Iraq War and the current threats against Iran. Yet instead of indicating the independent wishes of these powerful actors for a war such as with Saddam, Walt and Mearsheimer rather let them off the hook. Their book suggests the power of the Lobby by indicating points at which the president was critical of Israel, or wavered on policy that Israel might prefer toward the Palestinians, Syria or Iran, only to be brought in to line by the Lobby. Bush and Cheney emerge as stick figures, easily manipulated, to a degree that surely needs far more defense than is given.

These are critical matters. Are we to believe that it was the Lobby, virtually alone, that achieved the various results we witness? A phrase such as that the Lobby was "necessary but not sufficient" for the invasion of Iraq raises the question of what were the motive forces that made for a "sufficient" determination. There is no answer. Was it simply 9/11? If, as the authors acknowledge, it is unlikely that had Albert Gore been president he would have invaded Iraq, what then of the character of President Bush? In the same paragraph as the "necessary but not sufficient" citation we find them writing "absent the lobby's influence, there almost certainly would not have been a war" (17). But they would seem to agree that absent Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld we might not have had the invasion either. What, then, was the role of the Bush administration—policy-makers composed entirely of gentiles, it should be remembered—autonomous and independent of the Israel Lobby? That the convictions of the administration and the Lobby converged can be little in doubt. But that the gentiles in charge of policy were marionettes with the strings pulled by the Jews and their allies...here I can not follow.

My concern, then, is that Walt and Mearsheimer exaggerate the Lobby's power. While I certainly believe that their book renders a service in altering us to the modus operandi of a group with enormous influence in Washington, one that is systematically overlooked by students of American foreign policy, I also believe that their failure to weigh this power against other forces that converged in the decision to go to war opens the door to their argument being misappropriated in a way that could be frankly anti-Semitic. Or take the current possibility of an attack on Iran to end its program of nuclear development. The Lobby and Israel most certainly favor such a strike should diplomatic negotiations fail, as today appears likely. But surely the president and his immediate advisors (along with many others) favor strong action of some kind for reasons that dovetail with that of the

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., Jim Holt, "It's the Oil," *London Review of Books*, 18 October 2007 (Vol. 20, No.19).



## *Israel Lobby Roundtable*

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15 December 2007

Lobby but nonetheless reasons that rest on their own bottoms, that they would hold to even if Israel did not exist.

Something of the same might be said about the way in which the book simplifies the character of the neoconservatives. The evidence is clear that they wanted to attack Iraq, in part for the sake of increasing Israel's security in the Middle East. But it would be simplifying the character of the neoconservatives considerably to reduce them to being no more than agents of Israel's security concerns.

As I have indicated at length in *A Pact with the Devil*, the neoconservatives (both of the current generation and their predecessors going back to the late 1930s) were committed opponents of totalitarian systems in all their guises, be they fascist or communist or of the sort seen more recently with Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, or Saddam Hussein in Iraq. They correspondingly championed American military primacy not just for the sake of Israel but also for the well-being of liberal democracies everywhere, be they in Western Europe or East Asia, or in parts of the planet where forces struggling for democratic governments have yet to be successful.

But the treatment of the neoconservatives in Walt and Mearsheimer's volume is almost as thin as that of the Bush administration. That is, they emerge as if to some extent parachuted on to the American scene thinking of Israel first, last, and always. I repeat: that they were right-wing Zionists linked to the Likud party in Israel is undeniable, just as their concern for Israel's security was an important aspect of their concerns. But their agenda was far more nationalist and cosmopolitan, domestically as well as internationally, than their character is as it emerges in *The Israel Lobby*. The reduction of neocon concerns to all Israel all the time is simply not fair.

To conclude. *The Israel Lobby* is not an anti-Semitic book. Rather, it should be seen primarily as a welcome approach to the study of ethnic group politics in the United States, a chance to see the real strength of right-wing Jewish power in this country so far as foreign affairs are concerned and to debate its meaning. We should learn from it how to debate ethnic preferences in world affairs as we do those of corporate or financial interests (not at all well to be sure, but at least without the high emotion that characterizes ethnic group clashes). Both authors are structural realists in international relations terms, and they have succeeded in raising again the fundamental insight of this school of thought, that in the anarchy of world affairs a self-protective concern for national interests should be the first concern of American foreign policy. The blank check Washington has long given to Israel has been done real damage to the national interest. As such, the book is a significant publication well worthy of a careful reading.

Yet at the same time, history reminds us that there has been a temptation as old as Christian history to "pin it on the Jews." Whatever the intention of the authors, this book's failure to weigh the contribution of elements other than the Israel Lobby to a range of

Middle East decisions, is not simply to fault the book's message but to be concerned that it could be misappropriated by sinister forces wishing ill to Israel and the Jewish diaspora.

Let me conclude by returning to the historical moment in which the book appears. Published say a decade ago, the volume would presumably not have caused anything like the controversy it has today. The American invasion of Iraq entails a serious reversal for American power by any historical standard. Just who was responsible for this disastrous decision is sure to be asked everywhere. But just as it would be an error to argue that the Israel Lobby was not at all involved in the making of this calamity, just as surely it is an error to exaggerate the role of the Lobby. The reason is perfectly evident: Jews have too often had bad developments unfairly, indeed murderously, laid at their doorstep. In talking about the Jewish role in politics one therefore has a special obligation to weigh their influence judiciously. In my opinion, this book fails to exercise such a discriminatory sense, leaving the reader with a sense of a degree of right-wing Jewish culpability in this disastrous undertaking that I believe to be exaggerated. The result may be to fan genuinely anti-Semitic feelings at home and abroad whatever the intentions of Walt and Mearsheimer.

A fifth and final test is whether the authors understand that anti-Semitism is indeed a powerful historical current capable of surfacing even in environments where its presence might seem unlikely. Do they understand that their criticism of Jewish power might be taken up by others and used in ways that are unquestionably anti-Semitic? Do they rebuke beforehand such appropriation of their material?

The answer is positive. Walt and Mearsheimer acknowledge the serious problem of anti-Semitism in today's world as historically, and they deplore use of their arguments in ways that could reignite the kind of genocidal hatred all too familiar in Western history. They point out that the Jewish American community votes by a large majority for the Democratic, not the Republican Party, and that opinion polls of Jewish Americans have indicated more reserve about the Iraq War than expressed by the general population as well as strong support for the creation of a Palestinian state. One should not confuse the American Jewish community with its political leadership on world affairs. That said, it is nonetheless regrettable that by diminishing the role of actors other than the Lobby in making America's Middle East policy, the volume might provide aid and comfort to anti-Semitism in a way that these two distinguished political scientists would well deplore.

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