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The Israel Lobby

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For the past several decades, and especially since the Six-Day War in 1967, the centrepiece of US Middle Eastern policy has been its relationship with Israel. The combination of unwavering support for Israel and the related effort to spread 'democracy' throughout the region has inflamed Arab and Islamic opinion and jeopardised not only US security but that of much of the rest of the world. This situation has no equal in American political history. Why has the US been willing to set aside its own security and that of many of its allies in order to advance the interests of another state? One might assume that the bond between the two countries was based on shared strategic interests or compelling moral imperatives, but neither explanation can account for the remarkable level of material and diplomatic support that the US provides.

Instead, the thrust of US policy in the region derives almost entirely from domestic politics, and especially the activities of the 'Israel Lobby'. Other special-interest groups have managed to skew foreign policy, but no lobby has managed to divert it as far from what the national interest would suggest, while simultaneously convincing Americans that US interests and those of the other country – in this case, Israel – are essentially identical.

Since the October War in 1973, Washington has provided Israel with a level of support dwarfing that given to any other state. It has been the largest annual recipient of direct economic and military assistance since 1976, and is the largest recipient in total since World War Two, to the tune of well over \$140 billion (in 2004 dollars). Israel receives about \$3 billion in direct assistance each year, roughly one-fifth of the foreign aid budget, and worth about \$500 a year for every Israeli. This largesse is especially striking since Israel is now a wealthy industrial state with a per capita income roughly equal to that of South Korea or Spain.

Other recipients get their money in quarterly installments, but Israel receives its entire appropriation at the beginning of each fiscal year and can thus earn interest on it. Most recipients of aid given for military purposes are required to spend all of it in the US, but Israel is allowed to use roughly 25 per cent of its allocation to subsidise its own defence industry. It is the only recipient that does not have to account for how the aid is spent, which makes it virtually impossible to prevent the money from being used for purposes the US opposes, such as building settlements on the West Bank. Moreover, the US has provided Israel with nearly \$3 billion to develop weapons systems, and given it access to such top-drawer weaponry as

Blackhawk helicopters and F-16 jets. Finally, the US gives Israel access to intelligence it denies to its Nato allies and has turned a blind eye to Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Washington also provides Israel with consistent diplomatic support. Since 1982, the US has vetoed 32 Security Council resolutions critical of Israel, more than the total number of vetoes cast by all the other Security Council members. It blocks the efforts of Arab states to put Israel's nuclear arsenal on the IAEA's agenda. The US comes to the rescue in wartime and takes Israel's side when negotiating peace. The Nixon administration protected it from the threat of Soviet intervention and resupplied it during the October War. Washington was deeply involved in the negotiations that ended that war, as well as in the lengthy 'step-by-step' process that followed, just as it played a key role in the negotiations that preceded and followed the 1993 Oslo Accords. In each case there was occasional friction between US and Israeli officials, but the US consistently supported the Israeli position. One American participant at Camp David in 2000 later said: 'Far too often, we functioned ... as Israel's lawyer.' Finally, the Bush administration's ambition to transform the Middle East is at least partly aimed at improving Israel's strategic situation.

This extraordinary generosity might be understandable if Israel were a vital strategic asset or if there were a compelling moral case for US backing. But neither explanation is convincing. One might argue that Israel was an asset during the Cold War. By serving as America's proxy after 1967, it helped contain Soviet expansion in the region and inflicted humiliating defeats on Soviet clients like Egypt and Syria. It occasionally helped protect other US allies (like King Hussein of Jordan) and its military prowess forced Moscow to spend more on backing its own client states. It also provided useful intelligence about Soviet capabilities.

Backing Israel was not cheap, however, and it complicated America's relations with the Arab world. For example, the decision to give \$2.2 billion in emergency military aid during the October War triggered an Opec oil embargo that inflicted considerable damage on Western economies. For all that, Israel's armed forces were not in a position to protect US interests in the region. The US could not, for example, rely on Israel when the Iranian Revolution in 1979 raised concerns about the security of oil supplies, and had to create its own Rapid Deployment Force instead.

The first Gulf War revealed the extent to which Israel was becoming a strategic burden. The US could not use Israeli bases without rupturing the anti-Iraq coalition, and had to divert resources (e.g. Patriot missile batteries) to prevent Tel Aviv doing anything that might harm the alliance against Saddam Hussein. History repeated itself in 2003: although Israel was eager for the US to attack Iraq, Bush could not ask it to help without triggering Arab opposition. So Israel stayed on the sidelines once again.

Beginning in the 1990s, and even more after 9/11, US support has been justified by the claim that both states are threatened by terrorist groups originating in the Arab and Muslim world, and by 'rogue states' that back these groups and seek weapons of mass destruction. This is taken to mean not only that Washington should give Israel a free hand in dealing with the

Palestinians and not press it to make concessions until all Palestinian terrorists are imprisoned or dead, but that the US should go after countries like Iran and Syria. Israel is thus seen as a crucial ally in the war on terror, because its enemies are America's enemies. In fact, Israel is a liability in the war on terror and the broader effort to deal with rogue states.

'Terrorism' is not a single adversary, but a tactic employed by a wide array of political groups. The terrorist organisations that threaten Israel do not threaten the United States, except when it intervenes against them (as in Lebanon in 1982). Moreover, Palestinian terrorism is not random violence directed against Israel or 'the West'; it is largely a response to Israel's prolonged campaign to colonise the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

More important, saying that Israel and the US are united by a shared terrorist threat has the causal relationship backwards: the US has a terrorism problem in good part because it is so closely allied with Israel, not the other way around. Support for Israel is not the only source of anti-American terrorism, but it is an important one, and it makes winning the war on terror more difficult. There is no question that many al-Qaida leaders, including Osama bin Laden, are motivated by Israel's presence in Jerusalem and the plight of the Palestinians. Unconditional support for Israel makes it easier for extremists to rally popular support and to attract recruits.

As for so-called rogue states in the Middle East, they are not a dire threat to vital US interests, except inasmuch as they are a threat to Israel. Even if these states acquire nuclear weapons – which is obviously undesirable – neither America nor Israel could be blackmailed, because the blackmailer could not carry out the threat without suffering overwhelming retaliation. The danger of a nuclear handover to terrorists is equally remote, because a rogue state could not be sure the transfer would go undetected or that it would not be blamed and punished afterwards. The relationship with Israel actually makes it harder for the US to deal with these states. Israel's nuclear arsenal is one reason some of its neighbours want nuclear weapons, and threatening them with regime change merely increases that desire.

A final reason to question Israel's strategic value is that it does not behave like a loyal ally. Israeli officials frequently ignore US requests and renege on promises (including pledges to stop building settlements and to refrain from 'targeted assassinations' of Palestinian leaders). Israel has provided sensitive military technology to potential rivals like China, in what the State Department inspector-general called 'a systematic and growing pattern of unauthorised transfers'. According to the General Accounting Office, Israel also 'conducts the most aggressive espionage operations against the US of any ally'. In addition to the case of Jonathan Pollard, who gave Israel large quantities of classified material in the early 1980s (which it reportedly passed on to the Soviet Union in return for more exit visas for Soviet Jews), a new controversy erupted in 2004 when it was revealed that a key Pentagon official called Larry Franklin had passed classified information to an Israeli diplomat. Israel is hardly the only country that spies on the US, but its willingness to spy on its principal patron casts further doubt on its strategic value.

Israel's strategic value isn't the only issue. Its backers also argue that it deserves unqualified

support because it is weak and surrounded by enemies; it is a democracy; the Jewish people have suffered from past crimes and therefore deserve special treatment; and Israel's conduct has been morally superior to that of its adversaries. On close inspection, none of these arguments is persuasive. There is a strong moral case for supporting Israel's existence, but that is not in jeopardy. Viewed objectively, its past and present conduct offers no moral basis for privileging it over the Palestinians.

Israel is often portrayed as David confronted by Goliath, but the converse is closer to the truth. Contrary to popular belief, the Zionists had larger, better equipped and better led forces during the 1947-49 War of Independence, and the Israel Defence Forces won quick and easy victories against Egypt in 1956 and against Egypt, Jordan and Syria in 1967 – all of this before large-scale US aid began flowing. Today, Israel is the strongest military power in the Middle East. Its conventional forces are far superior to those of its neighbours and it is the only state in the region with nuclear weapons. Egypt and Jordan have signed peace treaties with it, and Saudi Arabia has offered to do so. Syria has lost its Soviet patron, Iraq has been devastated by three disastrous wars and Iran is hundreds of miles away. The Palestinians barely have an effective police force, let alone an army that could pose a threat to Israel. According to a 2005 assessment by Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies, 'the strategic balance decidedly favours Israel, which has continued to widen the qualitative gap between its own military capability and deterrence powers and those of its neighbours.' If backing the underdog were a compelling motive, the United States would be supporting Israel's opponents.

That Israel is a fellow democracy surrounded by hostile dictatorships cannot account for the current level of aid: there are many democracies around the world, but none receives the same lavish support. The US has overthrown democratic governments in the past and supported dictators when this was thought to advance its interests – it has good relations with a number of dictatorships today.

Some aspects of Israeli democracy are at odds with core American values. Unlike the US, where people are supposed to enjoy equal rights irrespective of race, religion or ethnicity, Israel was explicitly founded as a Jewish state and citizenship is based on the principle of blood kinship. Given this, it is not surprising that its 1.3 million Arabs are treated as second-class citizens, or that a recent Israeli government commission found that Israel behaves in a 'neglectful and discriminatory' manner towards them. Its democratic status is also undermined by its refusal to grant the Palestinians a viable state of their own or full political rights.

A third justification is the history of Jewish suffering in the Christian West, especially during the Holocaust. Because Jews were persecuted for centuries and could feel safe only in a Jewish homeland, many people now believe that Israel deserves special treatment from the United States. The country's creation was undoubtedly an appropriate response to the long record of crimes against Jews, but it also brought about fresh crimes against a largely innocent third party: the Palestinians.

This was well understood by Israel's early leaders. David Ben-Gurion told Nahum Goldmann, the president of the World Jewish Congress:

If I were an Arab leader I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: we have taken their country ... We come from Israel, but two thousand years ago, and what is that to them? There has been anti-semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They only see one thing: we have come here and stolen their country. Why should they accept that?

Since then, Israeli leaders have repeatedly sought to deny the Palestinians' national ambitions. When she was prime minister, Golda Meir famously remarked that 'there is no such thing as a Palestinian.' Pressure from extremist violence and Palestinian population growth has forced subsequent Israeli leaders to disengage from the Gaza Strip and consider other territorial compromises, but not even Yitzhak Rabin was willing to offer the Palestinians a viable state. Ehud Barak's purportedly generous offer at Camp David would have given them only a disarmed set of Bantustans under de facto Israeli control. The tragic history of the Jewish people does not obligate the US to help Israel today no matter what it does.

Israel's backers also portray it as a country that has sought peace at every turn and shown great restraint even when provoked. The Arabs, by contrast, are said to have acted with great wickedness. Yet on the ground, Israel's record is not distinguishable from that of its opponents. Ben-Gurion acknowledged that the early Zionists were far from benevolent towards the Palestinian Arabs, who resisted their encroachments – which is hardly surprising, given that the Zionists were trying to create their own state on Arab land. In the same way, the creation of Israel in 1947-48 involved acts of ethnic cleansing, including executions, massacres and rapes by Jews, and Israel's subsequent conduct has often been brutal, belying any claim to moral superiority. Between 1949 and 1956, for example, Israeli security forces killed between 2700 and 5000 Arab infiltrators, the overwhelming majority of them unarmed. The IDF murdered hundreds of Egyptian prisoners of war in both the 1956 and 1967 wars, while in 1967, it expelled between 100,000 and 260,000 Palestinians from the newly conquered West Bank, and drove 80,000 Syrians from the Golan Heights.

During the first intifada, the IDF distributed truncheons to its troops and encouraged them to break the bones of Palestinian protesters. The Swedish branch of Save the Children estimated that '23,600 to 29,900 children required medical treatment for their beating injuries in the first two years of the intifada.' Nearly a third of them were aged ten or under. The response to the second intifada has been even more violent, leading *Ha'aretz* to declare that 'the IDF ... is turning into a killing machine whose efficiency is awe-inspiring, yet shocking.' The IDF fired one million bullets in the first days of the uprising. Since then, for every Israeli lost, Israel has killed 3.4 Palestinians, the majority of whom have been innocent bystanders; the ratio of Palestinian to Israeli children killed is even higher (5.7:1). It is also worth bearing in mind that the Zionists relied on terrorist bombs to drive the British from Palestine, and that

Yitzhak Shamir, once a terrorist and later prime minister, declared that ‘neither Jewish ethics nor Jewish tradition can disqualify terrorism as a means of combat.’

The Palestinian resort to terrorism is wrong but it isn’t surprising. The Palestinians believe they have no other way to force Israeli concessions. As Ehud Barak once admitted, had he been born a Palestinian, he ‘would have joined a terrorist organisation’.

So if neither strategic nor moral arguments can account for America’s support for Israel, how are we to explain it?

The explanation is the unmatched power of the Israel Lobby. We use ‘the Lobby’ as shorthand for the loose coalition of individuals and organisations who actively work to steer US foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. This is not meant to suggest that ‘the Lobby’ is a unified movement with a central leadership, or that individuals within it do not disagree on certain issues. Not all Jewish Americans are part of the Lobby, because Israel is not a salient issue for many of them. In a 2004 survey, for example, roughly 36 per cent of American Jews said they were either ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ emotionally attached to Israel.

Jewish Americans also differ on specific Israeli policies. Many of the key organisations in the Lobby, such as the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organisations, are run by hardliners who generally support the Likud Party’s expansionist policies, including its hostility to the Oslo peace process. The bulk of US Jewry, meanwhile, is more inclined to make concessions to the Palestinians, and a few groups – such as Jewish Voice for Peace – strongly advocate such steps. Despite these differences, moderates and hardliners both favour giving steadfast support to Israel.

Not surprisingly, American Jewish leaders often consult Israeli officials, to make sure that their actions advance Israeli goals. As one activist from a major Jewish organisation wrote, ‘it is routine for us to say: “This is our policy on a certain issue, but we must check what the Israelis think.” We as a community do it all the time.’ There is a strong prejudice against criticising Israeli policy, and putting pressure on Israel is considered out of order. Edgar Bronfman Sr, the president of the World Jewish Congress, was accused of ‘perfidy’ when he wrote a letter to President Bush in mid-2003 urging him to persuade Israel to curb construction of its controversial ‘security fence’. His critics said that ‘it would be obscene at any time for the president of the World Jewish Congress to lobby the president of the United States to resist policies being promoted by the government of Israel.’

Similarly, when the president of the Israel Policy Forum, Seymour Reich, advised Condoleezza Rice in November 2005 to ask Israel to reopen a critical border crossing in the Gaza Strip, his action was denounced as ‘irresponsible’: ‘There is,’ his critics said, ‘absolutely no room in the Jewish mainstream for actively canvassing against the security-related policies ... of Israel.’ Recoiling from these attacks, Reich announced that ‘the word “pressure” is not in my vocabulary when it comes to Israel.’

Jewish Americans have set up an impressive array of organisations to influence American

foreign policy, of which AIPAC is the most powerful and best known. In 1997, *Fortune* magazine asked members of Congress and their staffs to list the most powerful lobbies in Washington. AIPAC was ranked second behind the American Association of Retired People, but ahead of the AFL-CIO and the National Rifle Association. A *National Journal* study in March 2005 reached a similar conclusion, placing AIPAC in second place (tied with AARP) in the Washington 'muscle rankings'.

The Lobby also includes prominent Christian evangelicals like Gary Bauer, Jerry Falwell, Ralph Reed and Pat Robertson, as well as Dick Armey and Tom DeLay, former majority leaders in the House of Representatives, all of whom believe Israel's rebirth is the fulfilment of biblical prophecy and support its expansionist agenda; to do otherwise, they believe, would be contrary to God's will. Neo-conservative gentiles such as John Bolton; Robert Bartley, the former *Wall Street Journal* editor; William Bennett, the former secretary of education; Jeane Kirkpatrick, the former UN ambassador; and the influential columnist George Will are also steadfast supporters.

The US form of government offers activists many ways of influencing the policy process. Interest groups can lobby elected representatives and members of the executive branch, make campaign contributions, vote in elections, try to mould public opinion etc. They enjoy a disproportionate amount of influence when they are committed to an issue to which the bulk of the population is indifferent. Policymakers will tend to accommodate those who care about the issue, even if their numbers are small, confident that the rest of the population will not penalise them for doing so.

In its basic operations, the Israel Lobby is no different from the farm lobby, steel or textile workers' unions, or other ethnic lobbies. There is nothing improper about American Jews and their Christian allies attempting to sway US policy: the Lobby's activities are not a conspiracy of the sort depicted in tracts like the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. For the most part, the individuals and groups that comprise it are only doing what other special interest groups do, but doing it very much better. By contrast, pro-Arab interest groups, in so far as they exist at all, are weak, which makes the Israel Lobby's task even easier.

The Lobby pursues two broad strategies. First, it wields its significant influence in Washington, pressuring both Congress and the executive branch. Whatever an individual lawmaker or policymaker's own views may be, the Lobby tries to make supporting Israel the 'smart' choice. Second, it strives to ensure that public discourse portrays Israel in a positive light, by repeating myths about its founding and by promoting its point of view in policy debates. The goal is to prevent critical comments from getting a fair hearing in the political arena. Controlling the debate is essential to guaranteeing US support, because a candid discussion of US-Israeli relations might lead Americans to favour a different policy.

A key pillar of the Lobby's effectiveness is its influence in Congress, where Israel is virtually immune from criticism. This in itself is remarkable, because Congress rarely shies away from contentious issues. Where Israel is concerned, however, potential critics fall silent. One

reason is that some key members are Christian Zionists like Dick Armey, who said in September 2002: 'My No. 1 priority in foreign policy is to protect Israel.' One might think that the No. 1 priority for any congressman would be to protect America. There are also Jewish senators and congressmen who work to ensure that US foreign policy supports Israel's interests.

Another source of the Lobby's power is its use of pro-Israel congressional staffers. As Morris Amitay, a former head of AIPAC, once admitted, 'there are a lot of guys at the working level up here' – on Capitol Hill – 'who happen to be Jewish, who are willing ... to look at certain issues in terms of their Jewishness ... These are all guys who are in a position to make the decision in these areas for those senators ... You can get an awful lot done just at the staff level.'

AIPAC itself, however, forms the core of the Lobby's influence in Congress. Its success is due to its ability to reward legislators and congressional candidates who support its agenda, and to punish those who challenge it. Money is critical to US elections (as the scandal over the lobbyist Jack Abramoff's shady dealings reminds us), and AIPAC makes sure that its friends get strong financial support from the many pro-Israel political action committees. Anyone who is seen as hostile to Israel can be sure that AIPAC will direct campaign contributions to his or her political opponents. AIPAC also organises letter-writing campaigns and encourages newspaper editors to endorse pro-Israel candidates.

There is no doubt about the efficacy of these tactics. Here is one example: in the 1984 elections, AIPAC helped defeat Senator Charles Percy from Illinois, who, according to a prominent Lobby figure, had 'displayed insensitivity and even hostility to our concerns'. Thomas Dine, the head of AIPAC at the time, explained what happened: 'All the Jews in America, from coast to coast, gathered to oust Percy. And the American politicians – those who hold public positions now, and those who aspire – got the message.'

AIPAC's influence on Capitol Hill goes even further. According to Douglas Bloomfield, a former AIPAC staff member, 'it is common for members of Congress and their staffs to turn to AIPAC first when they need information, before calling the Library of Congress, the Congressional Research Service, committee staff or administration experts.' More important, he notes that AIPAC is 'often called on to draft speeches, work on legislation, advise on tactics, perform research, collect co-sponsors and marshal votes'.

The bottom line is that AIPAC, a de facto agent for a foreign government, has a stranglehold on Congress, with the result that US policy towards Israel is not debated there, even though that policy has important consequences for the entire world. In other words, one of the three main branches of the government is firmly committed to supporting Israel. As one former Democratic senator, Ernest Hollings, noted on leaving office, 'you can't have an Israeli policy other than what AIPAC gives you around here.' Or as Ariel Sharon once told an American audience, 'when people ask me how they can help Israel, I tell them: "Help AIPAC."'

Thanks in part to the influence Jewish voters have on presidential elections, the Lobby also

has significant leverage over the executive branch. Although they make up fewer than 3 per cent of the population, they make large campaign donations to candidates from both parties. The *Washington Post* once estimated that Democratic presidential candidates 'depend on Jewish supporters to supply as much as 60 per cent of the money'. And because Jewish voters have high turn-out rates and are concentrated in key states like California, Florida, Illinois, New York and Pennsylvania, presidential candidates go to great lengths not to antagonise them.

Key organisations in the Lobby make it their business to ensure that critics of Israel do not get important foreign policy jobs. Jimmy Carter wanted to make George Ball his first secretary of state, but knew that Ball was seen as critical of Israel and that the Lobby would oppose the appointment. In this way any aspiring policymaker is encouraged to become an overt supporter of Israel, which is why public critics of Israeli policy have become an endangered species in the foreign policy establishment.

When Howard Dean called for the United States to take a more 'even-handed role' in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Senator Joseph Lieberman accused him of selling Israel down the river and said his statement was 'irresponsible'. Virtually all the top Democrats in the House signed a letter criticising Dean's remarks, and the *Chicago Jewish Star* reported that 'anonymous attackers ... are clogging the email inboxes of Jewish leaders around the country, warning – without much evidence – that Dean would somehow be bad for Israel.'

This worry was absurd; Dean is in fact quite hawkish on Israel: his campaign co-chair was a former AIPAC president, and Dean said his own views on the Middle East more closely reflected those of AIPAC than those of the more moderate Americans for Peace Now. He had merely suggested that to 'bring the sides together', Washington should act as an honest broker. This is hardly a radical idea, but the Lobby doesn't tolerate even-handedness.

During the Clinton administration, Middle Eastern policy was largely shaped by officials with close ties to Israel or to prominent pro-Israel organisations; among them, Martin Indyk, the former deputy director of research at AIPAC and co-founder of the pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP); Dennis Ross, who joined WINEP after leaving government in 2001; and Aaron Miller, who has lived in Israel and often visits the country. These men were among Clinton's closest advisers at the Camp David summit in July 2000. Although all three supported the Oslo peace process and favoured the creation of a Palestinian state, they did so only within the limits of what would be acceptable to Israel. The American delegation took its cues from Ehud Barak, co-ordinated its negotiating positions with Israel in advance, and did not offer independent proposals. Not surprisingly, Palestinian negotiators complained that they were 'negotiating with two Israeli teams – one displaying an Israeli flag, and one an American flag'.

The situation is even more pronounced in the Bush administration, whose ranks have included such fervent advocates of the Israeli cause as Elliot Abrams, John Bolton, Douglas Feith, I. Lewis ('Scooter') Libby, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz and David Wurmser. As we

shall see, these officials have consistently pushed for policies favoured by Israel and backed by organisations in the Lobby.

The Lobby doesn't want an open debate, of course, because that might lead Americans to question the level of support they provide. Accordingly, pro-Israel organisations work hard to influence the institutions that do most to shape popular opinion.

The Lobby's perspective prevails in the mainstream media: the debate among Middle East pundits, the journalist Eric Alterman writes, is 'dominated by people who cannot imagine criticising Israel'. He lists 61 'columnists and commentators who can be counted on to support Israel reflexively and without qualification'. Conversely, he found just five pundits who consistently criticise Israeli actions or endorse Arab positions. Newspapers occasionally publish guest op-eds challenging Israeli policy, but the balance of opinion clearly favours the other side. It is hard to imagine any mainstream media outlet in the United States publishing a piece like this one.

'Shamir, Sharon, Bibi – whatever those guys want is pretty much fine by me,' Robert Bartley once remarked. Not surprisingly, his newspaper, the *Wall Street Journal*, along with other prominent papers like the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Washington Times*, regularly runs editorials that strongly support Israel. Magazines like *Commentary*, the *New Republic* and the *Weekly Standard* defend Israel at every turn.

Editorial bias is also found in papers like the *New York Times*, which occasionally criticises Israeli policies and sometimes concedes that the Palestinians have legitimate grievances, but is not even-handed. In his memoirs the paper's former executive editor Max Frankel acknowledges the impact his own attitude had on his editorial decisions: 'I was much more deeply devoted to Israel than I dared to assert ... Fortified by my knowledge of Israel and my friendships there, I myself wrote most of our Middle East commentaries. As more Arab than Jewish readers recognised, I wrote them from a pro-Israel perspective.'

News reports are more even-handed, in part because reporters strive to be objective, but also because it is difficult to cover events in the Occupied Territories without acknowledging Israel's actions on the ground. To discourage unfavourable reporting, the Lobby organises letter-writing campaigns, demonstrations and boycotts of news outlets whose content it considers anti-Israel. One CNN executive has said that he sometimes gets 6000 email messages in a single day complaining about a story. In May 2003, the pro-Israel Committee for Accurate Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) organised demonstrations outside National Public Radio stations in 33 cities; it also tried to persuade contributors to withhold support from NPR until its Middle East coverage becomes more sympathetic to Israel. Boston's NPR station, WBUR, reportedly lost more than \$1 million in contributions as a result of these efforts. Further pressure on NPR has come from Israel's friends in Congress, who have asked for an internal audit of its Middle East coverage as well as more oversight.

The Israeli side also dominates the think tanks which play an important role in shaping public debate as well as actual policy. The Lobby created its own think tank in 1985, when Martin

Indyk helped to found WINEP. Although WINEP plays down its links to Israel, claiming instead to provide a 'balanced and realistic' perspective on Middle East issues, it is funded and run by individuals deeply committed to advancing Israel's agenda.

The Lobby's influence extends well beyond WINEP, however. Over the past 25 years, pro-Israel forces have established a commanding presence at the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, the Center for Security Policy, the Foreign Policy Research Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Hudson Institute, the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA). These think tanks employ few, if any, critics of US support for Israel.

Take the Brookings Institution. For many years, its senior expert on the Middle East was William Quandt, a former NSC official with a well-deserved reputation for even-handedness. Today, Brookings's coverage is conducted through the Saban Center for Middle East Studies, which is financed by Haim Saban, an Israeli-American businessman and ardent Zionist. The centre's director is the ubiquitous Martin Indyk. What was once a non-partisan policy institute is now part of the pro-Israel chorus.

Where the Lobby has had the most difficulty is in stifling debate on university campuses. In the 1990s, when the Oslo peace process was underway, there was only mild criticism of Israel, but it grew stronger with Oslo's collapse and Sharon's access to power, becoming quite vociferous when the IDF reoccupied the West Bank in spring 2002 and employed massive force to subdue the second intifada.

The Lobby moved immediately to 'take back the campuses'. New groups sprang up, like the Caravan for Democracy, which brought Israeli speakers to US colleges. Established groups like the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and Hillel joined in, and a new group, the Israel on Campus Coalition, was formed to co-ordinate the many bodies that now sought to put Israel's case. Finally, AIPAC more than tripled its spending on programmes to monitor university activities and to train young advocates, in order to 'vastly expand the number of students involved on campus ... in the national pro-Israel effort'.

The Lobby also monitors what professors write and teach. In September 2002, Martin Kramer and Daniel Pipes, two passionately pro-Israel neo-conservatives, established a website (Campus Watch) that posted dossiers on suspect academics and encouraged students to report remarks or behaviour that might be considered hostile to Israel. This transparent attempt to blacklist and intimidate scholars provoked a harsh reaction and Pipes and Kramer later removed the dossiers, but the website still invites students to report 'anti-Israel' activity.

Groups within the Lobby put pressure on particular academics and universities. Columbia has been a frequent target, no doubt because of the presence of the late Edward Said on its faculty. 'One can be sure that any public statement in support of the Palestinian people by the pre-eminent literary critic Edward Said will elicit hundreds of emails, letters and journalistic accounts that call on us to denounce Said and to either sanction or fire him,' Jonathan Cole, its former provost, reported. When Columbia recruited the historian Rashid Khalidi from

Chicago, the same thing happened. It was a problem Princeton also faced a few years later when it considered wooing Khalidi away from Columbia.

A classic illustration of the effort to police academia occurred towards the end of 2004, when the David Project produced a film alleging that faculty members of Columbia's Middle East Studies programme were anti-semitic and were intimidating Jewish students who stood up for Israel. Columbia was hauled over the coals, but a faculty committee which was assigned to investigate the charges found no evidence of anti-semitism and the only incident possibly worth noting was that one professor had 'responded heatedly' to a student's question. The committee also discovered that the academics in question had themselves been the target of an overt campaign of intimidation.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of all this is the efforts Jewish groups have made to push Congress into establishing mechanisms to monitor what professors say. If they manage to get this passed, universities judged to have an anti-Israel bias would be denied federal funding. Their efforts have not yet succeeded, but they are an indication of the importance placed on controlling debate.

A number of Jewish philanthropists have recently established Israel Studies programmes (in addition to the roughly 130 Jewish Studies programmes already in existence) so as to increase the number of Israel-friendly scholars on campus. In May 2003, NYU announced the establishment of the Taub Center for Israel Studies; similar programmes have been set up at Berkeley, Brandeis and Emory. Academic administrators emphasise their pedagogical value, but the truth is that they are intended in large part to promote Israel's image. Fred Laffer, the head of the Taub Foundation, makes it clear that his foundation funded the NYU centre to help counter the 'Arabic [*sic*] point of view' that he thinks is prevalent in NYU's Middle East programmes.

No discussion of the Lobby would be complete without an examination of one of its most powerful weapons: the charge of anti-semitism. Anyone who criticises Israel's actions or argues that pro-Israel groups have significant influence over US Middle Eastern policy – an influence AIPAC celebrates – stands a good chance of being labelled an anti-semite. Indeed, anyone who merely claims that there is an Israel Lobby runs the risk of being charged with anti-semitism, even though the Israeli media refer to America's 'Jewish Lobby'. In other words, the Lobby first boasts of its influence and then attacks anyone who calls attention to it. It's a very effective tactic: anti-semitism is something no one wants to be accused of.

Europeans have been more willing than Americans to criticise Israeli policy, which some people attribute to a resurgence of anti-semitism in Europe. We are 'getting to a point', the US ambassador to the EU said in early 2004, 'where it is as bad as it was in the 1930s'. Measuring anti-semitism is a complicated matter, but the weight of evidence points in the opposite direction. In the spring of 2004, when accusations of European anti-semitism filled the air in America, separate surveys of European public opinion conducted by the US-based Anti-Defamation League and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found

that it was in fact declining. In the 1930s, by contrast, anti-semitism was not only widespread among Europeans of all classes but considered quite acceptable.

The Lobby and its friends often portray France as the most anti-semitic country in Europe. But in 2003, the head of the French Jewish community said that 'France is not more anti-semitic than America.' According to a recent article in *Ha'aretz*, the French police have reported that anti-semitic incidents declined by almost 50 per cent in 2005; and this even though France has the largest Muslim population of any European country. Finally, when a French Jew was murdered in Paris last month by a Muslim gang, tens of thousands of demonstrators poured into the streets to condemn anti-semitism. Jacques Chirac and Dominique de Villepin both attended the victim's memorial service to show their solidarity.

No one would deny that there is anti-semitism among European Muslims, some of it provoked by Israel's conduct towards the Palestinians and some of it straightforwardly racist. But this is a separate matter with little bearing on whether or not Europe today is like Europe in the 1930s. Nor would anyone deny that there are still some virulent autochthonous anti-semites in Europe (as there are in the United States) but their numbers are small and their views are rejected by the vast majority of Europeans.

Israel's advocates, when pressed to go beyond mere assertion, claim that there is a 'new anti-semitism', which they equate with criticism of Israel. In other words, criticise Israeli policy and you are by definition an anti-semite. When the synod of the Church of England recently voted to divest from Caterpillar Inc on the grounds that it manufactures the bulldozers used by the Israelis to demolish Palestinian homes, the Chief Rabbi complained that this would 'have the most adverse repercussions on ... Jewish-Christian relations in Britain', while Rabbi Tony Bayfield, the head of the Reform movement, said: 'There is a clear problem of anti-Zionist – verging on anti-semitic – attitudes emerging in the grass-roots, and even in the middle ranks of the Church.' But the Church was guilty merely of protesting against Israeli government policy.

Critics are also accused of holding Israel to an unfair standard or questioning its right to exist. But these are bogus charges too. Western critics of Israel hardly ever question its right to exist: they question its behaviour towards the Palestinians, as do Israelis themselves. Nor is Israel being judged unfairly. Israeli treatment of the Palestinians elicits criticism because it is contrary to widely accepted notions of human rights, to international law and to the principle of national self-determination. And it is hardly the only state that has faced sharp criticism on these grounds.

In the autumn of 2001, and especially in the spring of 2002, the Bush administration tried to reduce anti-American sentiment in the Arab world and undermine support for terrorist groups like al-Qaida by halting Israel's expansionist policies in the Occupied Territories and advocating the creation of a Palestinian state. Bush had very significant means of persuasion at his disposal. He could have threatened to reduce economic and diplomatic support for Israel, and the American people would almost certainly have supported him. A May 2003 poll

reported that more than 60 per cent of Americans were willing to withhold aid if Israel resisted US pressure to settle the conflict, and that number rose to 70 per cent among the 'politically active'. Indeed, 73 per cent said that the United States should not favour either side.

Yet the administration failed to change Israeli policy, and Washington ended up backing it. Over time, the administration also adopted Israel's own justifications of its position, so that US rhetoric began to mimic Israeli rhetoric. By February 2003, a *Washington Post* headline summarised the situation: 'Bush and Sharon Nearly Identical on Mideast Policy.' The main reason for this switch was the Lobby.

The story begins in late September 2001, when Bush began urging Sharon to show restraint in the Occupied Territories. He also pressed him to allow Israel's foreign minister, Shimon Peres, to meet with Yasser Arafat, even though he (Bush) was highly critical of Arafat's leadership. Bush even said publicly that he supported the creation of a Palestinian state. Alarmed, Sharon accused him of trying 'to appease the Arabs at our expense', warning that Israel 'will not be Czechoslovakia'.

Bush was reportedly furious at being compared to Chamberlain, and the White House press secretary called Sharon's remarks 'unacceptable'. Sharon offered a pro forma apology, but quickly joined forces with the Lobby to persuade the administration and the American people that the United States and Israel faced a common threat from terrorism. Israeli officials and Lobby representatives insisted that there was no real difference between Arafat and Osama bin Laden: the United States and Israel, they said, should isolate the Palestinians' elected leader and have nothing to do with him.

The Lobby also went to work in Congress. On 16 November, 89 senators sent Bush a letter praising him for refusing to meet with Arafat, but also demanding that the US not restrain Israel from retaliating against the Palestinians; the administration, they wrote, must state publicly that it stood behind Israel. According to the *New York Times*, the letter 'stemmed' from a meeting two weeks before between 'leaders of the American Jewish community and key senators', adding that AIPAC was 'particularly active in providing advice on the letter'.

By late November, relations between Tel Aviv and Washington had improved considerably. This was thanks in part to the Lobby's efforts, but also to America's initial victory in Afghanistan, which reduced the perceived need for Arab support in dealing with al-Qaida. Sharon visited the White House in early December and had a friendly meeting with Bush.

In April 2002 trouble erupted again, after the IDF launched Operation Defensive Shield and resumed control of virtually all the major Palestinian areas on the West Bank. Bush knew that Israel's actions would damage America's image in the Islamic world and undermine the war on terrorism, so he demanded that Sharon 'halt the incursions and begin withdrawal'. He underscored this message two days later, saying he wanted Israel to 'withdraw without delay'. On 7 April, Condoleezza Rice, then Bush's national security adviser, told reporters: "'Without delay" means without delay. It means now.' That same day Colin Powell set out for the Middle

East to persuade all sides to stop fighting and start negotiating.

Israel and the Lobby swung into action. Pro-Israel officials in the vice-president's office and the Pentagon, as well as neo-conservative pundits like Robert Kagan and William Kristol, put the heat on Powell. They even accused him of having 'virtually obliterated the distinction between terrorists and those fighting terrorists'. Bush himself was being pressed by Jewish leaders and Christian evangelicals. Tom DeLay and Dick Armey were especially outspoken about the need to support Israel, and DeLay and the Senate minority leader, Trent Lott, visited the White House and warned Bush to back off.

The first sign that Bush was caving in came on 11 April – a week after he told Sharon to withdraw his forces – when the White House press secretary said that the president believed Sharon was 'a man of peace'. Bush repeated this statement publicly on Powell's return from his abortive mission, and told reporters that Sharon had responded satisfactorily to his call for a full and immediate withdrawal. Sharon had done no such thing, but Bush was no longer willing to make an issue of it.

Meanwhile, Congress was also moving to back Sharon. On 2 May, it overrode the administration's objections and passed two resolutions reaffirming support for Israel. (The Senate vote was 94 to 2; the House of Representatives version passed 352 to 21.) Both resolutions held that the United States 'stands in solidarity with Israel' and that the two countries were, to quote the House resolution, 'now engaged in a common struggle against terrorism'. The House version also condemned 'the ongoing support and co-ordination of terror by Yasser Arafat', who was portrayed as a central part of the terrorism problem. Both resolutions were drawn up with the help of the Lobby. A few days later, a bipartisan congressional delegation on a fact-finding mission to Israel stated that Sharon should resist US pressure to negotiate with Arafat. On 9 May, a House appropriations subcommittee met to consider giving Israel an extra \$200 million to fight terrorism. Powell opposed the package, but the Lobby backed it and Powell lost.

In short, Sharon and the Lobby took on the president of the United States and triumphed. Hemi Shalev, a journalist on the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv*, reported that Sharon's aides 'could not hide their satisfaction in view of Powell's failure. Sharon saw the whites of President Bush's eyes, they bragged, and the president blinked first.' But it was Israel's champions in the United States, not Sharon or Israel, that played the key role in defeating Bush.

The situation has changed little since then. The Bush administration refused ever again to have dealings with Arafat. After his death, it embraced the new Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, but has done little to help him. Sharon continued to develop his plan to impose a unilateral settlement on the Palestinians, based on 'disengagement' from Gaza coupled with continued expansion on the West Bank. By refusing to negotiate with Abbas and making it impossible for him to deliver tangible benefits to the Palestinian people, Sharon's strategy contributed directly to Hamas's electoral victory. With Hamas in power, however, Israel has

another excuse not to negotiate. The US administration has supported Sharon's actions (and those of his successor, Ehud Olmert). Bush has even endorsed unilateral Israeli annexations in the Occupied Territories, reversing the stated policy of every president since Lyndon Johnson.

US officials have offered mild criticisms of a few Israeli actions, but have done little to help create a viable Palestinian state. Sharon has Bush 'wrapped around his little finger', the former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft said in October 2004. If Bush tries to distance the US from Israel, or even criticises Israeli actions in the Occupied Territories, he is certain to face the wrath of the Lobby and its supporters in Congress. Democratic presidential candidates understand that these are facts of life, which is the reason John Kerry went to great lengths to display unalloyed support for Israel in 2004, and why Hillary Clinton is doing the same thing today.

Maintaining US support for Israel's policies against the Palestinians is essential as far as the Lobby is concerned, but its ambitions do not stop there. It also wants America to help Israel remain the dominant regional power. The Israeli government and pro-Israel groups in the United States have worked together to shape the administration's policy towards Iraq, Syria and Iran, as well as its grand scheme for reordering the Middle East.

Pressure from Israel and the Lobby was not the only factor behind the decision to attack Iraq in March 2003, but it was critical. Some Americans believe that this was a war for oil, but there is hardly any direct evidence to support this claim. Instead, the war was motivated in good part by a desire to make Israel more secure. According to Philip Zelikow, a former member of the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, the executive director of the 9/11 Commission, and now a counsellor to Condoleezza Rice, the 'real threat' from Iraq was not a threat to the United States. The 'unstated threat' was the 'threat against Israel', Zelikow told an audience at the University of Virginia in September 2002. 'The American government,' he added, 'doesn't want to lean too hard on it rhetorically, because it is not a popular sell.'

On 16 August 2002, 11 days before Dick Cheney kicked off the campaign for war with a hardline speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the *Washington Post* reported that 'Israel is urging US officials not to delay a military strike against Iraq's Saddam Hussein.' By this point, according to Sharon, strategic co-ordination between Israel and the US had reached 'unprecedented dimensions', and Israeli intelligence officials had given Washington a variety of alarming reports about Iraq's WMD programmes. As one retired Israeli general later put it, 'Israeli intelligence was a full partner to the picture presented by American and British intelligence regarding Iraq's non-conventional capabilities.'

Israeli leaders were deeply distressed when Bush decided to seek Security Council authorisation for war, and even more worried when Saddam agreed to let UN inspectors back in. 'The campaign against Saddam Hussein is a must,' Shimon Peres told reporters in September 2002. 'Inspections and inspectors are good for decent people, but dishonest

people can overcome easily inspections and inspectors.’

At the same time, Ehud Barak wrote a *New York Times* op-ed warning that ‘the greatest risk now lies in inaction.’ His predecessor as prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, published a similar piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, entitled: ‘The Case for Toppling Saddam’. ‘Today nothing less than dismantling his regime will do,’ he declared. ‘I believe I speak for the overwhelming majority of Israelis in supporting a pre-emptive strike against Saddam’s regime.’ Or as *Ha’aretz* reported in February 2003, ‘the military and political leadership yearns for war in Iraq.’

As Netanyahu suggested, however, the desire for war was not confined to Israel’s leaders. Apart from Kuwait, which Saddam invaded in 1990, Israel was the only country in the world where both politicians and public favoured war. As the journalist Gideon Levy observed at the time, ‘Israel is the only country in the West whose leaders support the war unreservedly and where no alternative opinion is voiced.’ In fact, Israelis were so gung-ho that their allies in America told them to damp down their rhetoric, or it would look as if the war would be fought on Israel’s behalf.

Within the US, the main driving force behind the war was a small band of neo-conservatives, many with ties to Likud. But leaders of the Lobby’s major organisations lent their voices to the campaign. ‘As President Bush attempted to sell the ... war in Iraq,’ the *Forward* reported, ‘America’s most important Jewish organisations rallied as one to his defence. In statement after statement community leaders stressed the need to rid the world of Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction.’ The editorial goes on to say that ‘concern for Israel’s safety rightfully factored into the deliberations of the main Jewish groups.’

Although neo-conservatives and other Lobby leaders were eager to invade Iraq, the broader American Jewish community was not. Just after the war started, Samuel Freedman reported that ‘a compilation of nationwide opinion polls by the Pew Research Center shows that Jews are less supportive of the Iraq war than the population at large, 52 per cent to 62 per cent.’ Clearly, it would be wrong to blame the war in Iraq on ‘Jewish influence’. Rather, it was due in large part to the Lobby’s influence, especially that of the neo-conservatives within it.

The neo-conservatives had been determined to topple Saddam even before Bush became president. They caused a stir early in 1998 by publishing two open letters to Clinton, calling for Saddam’s removal from power. The signatories, many of whom had close ties to pro-Israel groups like JINSA or WINEP, and who included Elliot Abrams, John Bolton, Douglas Feith, William Kristol, Bernard Lewis, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz, had little trouble persuading the Clinton administration to adopt the general goal of ousting Saddam. But they were unable to sell a war to achieve that objective. They were no more able to generate enthusiasm for invading Iraq in the early months of the Bush administration. They needed help to achieve their aim. That help arrived with 9/11. Specifically, the events of that day led Bush and Cheney to reverse course and become strong proponents of a preventive war.

At a key meeting with Bush at Camp David on 15 September, Wolfowitz advocated attacking Iraq before Afghanistan, even though there was no evidence that Saddam was involved in the attacks on the US and bin Laden was known to be in Afghanistan. Bush rejected his advice and chose to go after Afghanistan instead, but war with Iraq was now regarded as a serious possibility and on 21 November the president charged military planners with developing concrete plans for an invasion.

Other neo-conservatives were meanwhile at work in the corridors of power. We don't have the full story yet, but scholars like Bernard Lewis of Princeton and Fouad Ajami of Johns Hopkins reportedly played important roles in persuading Cheney that war was the best option, though neo-conservatives on his staff – Eric Edelman, John Hannah and Scooter Libby, Cheney's chief of staff and one of the most powerful individuals in the administration – also played their part. By early 2002 Cheney had persuaded Bush; and with Bush and Cheney on board, war was inevitable.

Outside the administration, neo-conservative pundits lost no time in making the case that invading Iraq was essential to winning the war on terrorism. Their efforts were designed partly to keep up the pressure on Bush, and partly to overcome opposition to the war inside and outside the government. On 20 September, a group of prominent neo-conservatives and their allies published another open letter: 'Even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack,' it read, 'any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq.' The letter also reminded Bush that 'Israel has been and remains America's staunchest ally against international terrorism.' In the 1 October issue of the *Weekly Standard*, Robert Kagan and William Kristol called for regime change in Iraq as soon as the Taliban was defeated. That same day, Charles Krauthammer argued in the *Washington Post* that after the US was done with Afghanistan, Syria should be next, followed by Iran and Iraq: 'The war on terrorism will conclude in Baghdad,' when we finish off 'the most dangerous terrorist regime in the world'.

This was the beginning of an unrelenting public relations campaign to win support for an invasion of Iraq, a crucial part of which was the manipulation of intelligence in such a way as to make it seem as if Saddam posed an imminent threat. For example, Libby pressured CIA analysts to find evidence supporting the case for war and helped prepare Colin Powell's now discredited briefing to the UN Security Council. Within the Pentagon, the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group was charged with finding links between al-Qaida and Iraq that the intelligence community had supposedly missed. Its two key members were David Wurmser, a hard-core neo-conservative, and Michael Maloof, a Lebanese-American with close ties to Perle. Another Pentagon group, the so-called Office of Special Plans, was given the task of uncovering evidence that could be used to sell the war. It was headed by Abram Shulsky, a neo-conservative with long-standing ties to Wolfowitz, and its ranks included recruits from pro-Israel think tanks. Both these organisations were created after 9/11 and reported directly to Douglas Feith.

Like virtually all the neo-conservatives, Feith is deeply committed to Israel; he also has

long-term ties to Likud. He wrote articles in the 1990s supporting the settlements and arguing that Israel should retain the Occupied Territories. More important, along with Perle and Wurmser, he wrote the famous 'Clean Break' report in June 1996 for Netanyahu, who had just become prime minister. Among other things, it recommended that Netanyahu 'focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq – an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right'. It also called for Israel to take steps to reorder the entire Middle East. Netanyahu did not follow their advice, but Feith, Perle and Wurmser were soon urging the Bush administration to pursue those same goals. The *Ha'aretz* columnist Akiva Eldar warned that Feith and Perle 'are walking a fine line between their loyalty to American governments ... and Israeli interests'.

Wolfowitz is equally committed to Israel. The *Forward* once described him as 'the most hawkishly pro-Israel voice in the administration', and selected him in 2002 as first among 50 notables who 'have consciously pursued Jewish activism'. At about the same time, JINSA gave Wolfowitz its Henry M. Jackson Distinguished Service Award for promoting a strong partnership between Israel and the United States; and the *Jerusalem Post*, describing him as 'devoutly pro-Israel', named him 'Man of the Year' in 2003.

Finally, a brief word is in order about the neo-conservatives' prewar support of Ahmed Chalabi, the unscrupulous Iraqi exile who headed the Iraqi National Congress. They backed Chalabi because he had established close ties with Jewish-American groups and had pledged to foster good relations with Israel once he gained power. This was precisely what pro-Israel proponents of regime change wanted to hear. Matthew Berger laid out the essence of the bargain in the *Jewish Journal*: 'The INC saw improved relations as a way to tap Jewish influence in Washington and Jerusalem and to drum up increased support for its cause. For their part, the Jewish groups saw an opportunity to pave the way for better relations between Israel and Iraq, if and when the INC is involved in replacing Saddam Hussein's regime.'

Given the neo-conservatives' devotion to Israel, their obsession with Iraq, and their influence in the Bush administration, it isn't surprising that many Americans suspected that the war was designed to further Israeli interests. Last March, Barry Jacobs of the American Jewish Committee acknowledged that the belief that Israel and the neo-conservatives had conspired to get the US into a war in Iraq was 'pervasive' in the intelligence community. Yet few people would say so publicly, and most of those who did – including Senator Ernest Hollings and Representative James Moran – were condemned for raising the issue. Michael Kinsley wrote in late 2002 that 'the lack of public discussion about the role of Israel ... is the proverbial elephant in the room.' The reason for the reluctance to talk about it, he observed, was fear of being labelled an anti-semitite. There is little doubt that Israel and the Lobby were key factors in the decision to go to war. It's a decision the US would have been far less likely to take without their efforts. And the war itself was intended to be only the first step. A front-page headline in the *Wall Street Journal* shortly after the war began says it all: 'President's Dream: Changing Not Just Regime but a Region: A Pro-US, Democratic Area Is a Goal that Has Israeli and Neo-Conservative Roots.'

Pro-Israel forces have long been interested in getting the US military more directly involved in the Middle East. But they had limited success during the Cold War, because America acted as an 'off-shore balancer' in the region. Most forces designated for the Middle East, like the Rapid Deployment Force, were kept 'over the horizon' and out of harm's way. The idea was to play local powers off against each other – which is why the Reagan administration supported Saddam against revolutionary Iran during the Iran-Iraq War – in order to maintain a balance favourable to the US.

This policy changed after the first Gulf War, when the Clinton administration adopted a strategy of 'dual containment'. Substantial US forces would be stationed in the region in order to contain both Iran and Iraq, instead of one being used to check the other. The father of dual containment was none other than Martin Indyk, who first outlined the strategy in May 1993 at WINEP and then implemented it as director for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council.

By the mid-1990s there was considerable dissatisfaction with dual containment, because it made the United States the mortal enemy of two countries that hated each other, and forced Washington to bear the burden of containing both. But it was a strategy the Lobby favoured and worked actively in Congress to preserve. Pressed by AIPAC and other pro-Israel forces, Clinton toughened up the policy in the spring of 1995 by imposing an economic embargo on Iran. But AIPAC and the others wanted more. The result was the 1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act, which imposed sanctions on any foreign companies investing more than \$40 million to develop petroleum resources in Iran or Libya. As Ze'ev Schiff, the military correspondent of *Ha'aretz*, noted at the time, 'Israel is but a tiny element in the big scheme, but one should not conclude that it cannot influence those within the Beltway.'

By the late 1990s, however, the neo-conservatives were arguing that dual containment was not enough and that regime change in Iraq was essential. By toppling Saddam and turning Iraq into a vibrant democracy, they argued, the US would trigger a far-reaching process of change throughout the Middle East. The same line of thinking was evident in the 'Clean Break' study the neo-conservatives wrote for Netanyahu. By 2002, when an invasion of Iraq was on the front-burner, regional transformation was an article of faith in neo-conservative circles.

Charles Krauthammer describes this grand scheme as the brainchild of Natan Sharansky, but Israelis across the political spectrum believed that toppling Saddam would alter the Middle East to Israel's advantage. Aluf Benn reported in *Ha'aretz* (17 February 2003):

Senior IDF officers and those close to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, such as National Security Adviser Ephraim Halevy, paint a rosy picture of the wonderful future Israel can expect after the war. They envision a domino effect, with the fall of Saddam Hussein followed by that of Israel's other enemies ... Along with these leaders will disappear terror and weapons of mass destruction.

Once Baghdad fell in mid-April 2003, Sharon and his lieutenants began urging Washington

to target Damascus. On 16 April, Sharon, interviewed in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, called for the United States to put 'very heavy' pressure on Syria, while Shaul Mofaz, his defence minister, interviewed in *Ma'ariv*, said: 'We have a long list of issues that we are thinking of demanding of the Syrians and it is appropriate that it should be done through the Americans.' Ephraim Halevy told a WINEP audience that it was now important for the US to get rough with Syria, and the *Washington Post* reported that Israel was 'fuelling the campaign' against Syria by feeding the US intelligence reports about the actions of Bashar Assad, the Syrian president.

Prominent members of the Lobby made the same arguments. Wolfowitz declared that 'there has got to be regime change in Syria,' and Richard Perle told a journalist that 'a short message, a two-worded message' could be delivered to other hostile regimes in the Middle East: 'You're next.' In early April, WINEP released a bipartisan report stating that Syria 'should not miss the message that countries that pursue Saddam's reckless, irresponsible and defiant behaviour could end up sharing his fate'. On 15 April, Yossi Klein Halevi wrote a piece in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled 'Next, Turn the Screws on Syria', while the following day Zev Chafets wrote an article for the *New York Daily News* entitled 'Terror-Friendly Syria Needs a Change, Too'. Not to be outdone, Lawrence Kaplan wrote in the *New Republic* on 21 April that Assad was a serious threat to America.

Back on Capitol Hill, Congressman Eliot Engel had reintroduced the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act. It threatened sanctions against Syria if it did not withdraw from Lebanon, give up its WMD and stop supporting terrorism, and it also called for Syria and Lebanon to take concrete steps to make peace with Israel. This legislation was strongly endorsed by the Lobby – by AIPAC especially – and 'framed', according to the *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 'by some of Israel's best friends in Congress'. The Bush administration had little enthusiasm for it, but the anti-Syrian act passed overwhelmingly (398 to 4 in the House; 89 to 4 in the Senate), and Bush signed it into law on 12 December 2003.

The administration itself was still divided about the wisdom of targeting Syria. Although the neo-conservatives were eager to pick a fight with Damascus, the CIA and the State Department were opposed to the idea. And even after Bush signed the new law, he emphasised that he would go slowly in implementing it. His ambivalence is understandable. First, the Syrian government had not only been providing important intelligence about al-Qaida since 9/11: it had also warned Washington about a planned terrorist attack in the Gulf and given CIA interrogators access to Mohammed Zammar, the alleged recruiter of some of the 9/11 hijackers. Targeting the Assad regime would jeopardise these valuable connections, and thereby undermine the larger war on terrorism.

Second, Syria had not been on bad terms with Washington before the Iraq war (it had even voted for UN Resolution 1441), and was itself no threat to the United States. Playing hardball with it would make the US look like a bully with an insatiable appetite for beating up Arab states. Third, putting Syria on the hit list would give Damascus a powerful incentive to cause trouble in Iraq. Even if one wanted to bring pressure to bear, it made good sense to finish the

job in Iraq first. Yet Congress insisted on putting the screws on Damascus, largely in response to pressure from Israeli officials and groups like AIPAC. If there were no Lobby, there would have been no Syria Accountability Act, and US policy towards Damascus would have been more in line with the national interest.

Israelis tend to describe every threat in the starkest terms, but Iran is widely seen as their most dangerous enemy because it is the most likely to acquire nuclear weapons. Virtually all Israelis regard an Islamic country in the Middle East with nuclear weapons as a threat to their existence. 'Iraq is a problem ... But you should understand, if you ask me, today Iran is more dangerous than Iraq,' the defence minister, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, remarked a month before the Iraq war.

Sharon began pushing the US to confront Iran in November 2002, in an interview in the *Times*. Describing Iran as the 'centre of world terror', and bent on acquiring nuclear weapons, he declared that the Bush administration should put the strong arm on Iran 'the day after' it conquered Iraq. In late April 2003, *Ha'aretz* reported that the Israeli ambassador in Washington was calling for regime change in Iran. The overthrow of Saddam, he noted, was 'not enough'. In his words, America 'has to follow through. We still have great threats of that magnitude coming from Syria, coming from Iran.'

The neo-conservatives, too, lost no time in making the case for regime change in Tehran. On 6 May, the AEI co-sponsored an all-day conference on Iran with the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and the Hudson Institute, both champions of Israel. The speakers were all strongly pro-Israel, and many called for the US to replace the Iranian regime with a democracy. As usual, a bevy of articles by prominent neo-conservatives made the case for going after Iran. 'The liberation of Iraq was the first great battle for the future of the Middle East ... But the next great battle – not, we hope, a military battle – will be for Iran,' William Kristol wrote in the *Weekly Standard* on 12 May.

The administration has responded to the Lobby's pressure by working overtime to shut down Iran's nuclear programme. But Washington has had little success, and Iran seems determined to create a nuclear arsenal. As a result, the Lobby has intensified its pressure. Op-eds and other articles now warn of imminent dangers from a nuclear Iran, caution against any appeasement of a 'terrorist' regime, and hint darkly of preventive action should diplomacy fail. The Lobby is pushing Congress to approve the Iran Freedom Support Act, which would expand existing sanctions. Israeli officials also warn they may take pre-emptive action should Iran continue down the nuclear road, threats partly intended to keep Washington's attention on the issue.

One might argue that Israel and the Lobby have not had much influence on policy towards Iran, because the US has its own reasons for keeping Iran from going nuclear. There is some truth in this, but Iran's nuclear ambitions do not pose a direct threat to the US. If Washington could live with a nuclear Soviet Union, a nuclear China or even a nuclear North Korea, it can live with a nuclear Iran. And that is why the Lobby must keep up constant pressure on

politicians to confront Tehran. Iran and the US would hardly be allies if the Lobby did not exist, but US policy would be more temperate and preventive war would not be a serious option.

It is not surprising that Israel and its American supporters want the US to deal with any and all threats to Israel's security. If their efforts to shape US policy succeed, Israel's enemies will be weakened or overthrown, Israel will get a free hand with the Palestinians, and the US will do most of the fighting, dying, rebuilding and paying. But even if the US fails to transform the Middle East and finds itself in conflict with an increasingly radicalised Arab and Islamic world, Israel will end up protected by the world's only superpower. This is not a perfect outcome from the Lobby's point of view, but it is obviously preferable to Washington distancing itself, or using its leverage to force Israel to make peace with the Palestinians.

Can the Lobby's power be curtailed? One would like to think so, given the Iraq debacle, the obvious need to rebuild America's image in the Arab and Islamic world, and the recent revelations about AIPAC officials passing US government secrets to Israel. One might also think that Arafat's death and the election of the more moderate Mahmoud Abbas would cause Washington to press vigorously and even-handedly for a peace agreement. In short, there are ample grounds for leaders to distance themselves from the Lobby and adopt a Middle East policy more consistent with broader US interests. In particular, using American power to achieve a just peace between Israel and the Palestinians would help advance the cause of democracy in the region.

But that is not going to happen – not soon anyway. AIPAC and its allies (including Christian Zionists) have no serious opponents in the lobbying world. They know it has become more difficult to make Israel's case today, and they are responding by taking on staff and expanding their activities. Besides, American politicians remain acutely sensitive to campaign contributions and other forms of political pressure, and major media outlets are likely to remain sympathetic to Israel no matter what it does.

The Lobby's influence causes trouble on several fronts. It increases the terrorist danger that all states face – including America's European allies. It has made it impossible to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a situation that gives extremists a powerful recruiting tool, increases the pool of potential terrorists and sympathisers, and contributes to Islamic radicalism in Europe and Asia.

Equally worrying, the Lobby's campaign for regime change in Iran and Syria could lead the US to attack those countries, with potentially disastrous effects. We don't need another Iraq. At a minimum, the Lobby's hostility towards Syria and Iran makes it almost impossible for Washington to enlist them in the struggle against al-Qaida and the Iraqi insurgency, where their help is badly needed.

There is a moral dimension here as well. Thanks to the Lobby, the United States has become the de facto enabler of Israeli expansion in the Occupied Territories, making it complicit in the crimes perpetrated against the Palestinians. This situation undercuts Washington's efforts

to promote democracy abroad and makes it look hypocritical when it presses other states to respect human rights. US efforts to limit nuclear proliferation appear equally hypocritical given its willingness to accept Israel's nuclear arsenal, which only encourages Iran and others to seek a similar capability.

Besides, the Lobby's campaign to quash debate about Israel is unhealthy for democracy. Silencing sceptics by organising blacklists and boycotts – or by suggesting that critics are anti-semites – violates the principle of open debate on which democracy depends. The inability of Congress to conduct a genuine debate on these important issues paralyses the entire process of democratic deliberation. Israel's backers should be free to make their case and to challenge those who disagree with them, but efforts to stifle debate by intimidation must be roundly condemned.

Finally, the Lobby's influence has been bad for Israel. Its ability to persuade Washington to support an expansionist agenda has discouraged Israel from seizing opportunities – including a peace treaty with Syria and a prompt and full implementation of the Oslo Accords – that would have saved Israeli lives and shrunk the ranks of Palestinian extremists. Denying the Palestinians their legitimate political rights certainly has not made Israel more secure, and the long campaign to kill or marginalise a generation of Palestinian leaders has empowered extremist groups like Hamas, and reduced the number of Palestinian leaders who would be willing to accept a fair settlement and able to make it work. Israel itself would probably be better off if the Lobby were less powerful and US policy more even-handed.

There is a ray of hope, however. Although the Lobby remains a powerful force, the adverse effects of its influence are increasingly difficult to hide. Powerful states can maintain flawed policies for quite some time, but reality cannot be ignored for ever. What is needed is a candid discussion of the Lobby's influence and a more open debate about US interests in this vital region. Israel's well-being is one of those interests, but its continued occupation of the West Bank and its broader regional agenda are not. Open debate will expose the limits of the strategic and moral case for one-sided US support and could move the US to a position more consistent with its own national interest, with the interests of the other states in the region, and with Israel's long-term interests as well.

10 March

An unedited version of this article is available at <http://ksgnotes1.harvard.edu/Research/wpaper.nsf/rwp/RWP06-011>, or at <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=891198>.

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Letters

[Vol. 28 No. 7 · 6 April 2006](#)

From Adam Glantz

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's piece (*LRB*, 23 March) boils down to a simple argument, despite copious circumstantial detail and politically correct evasiveness. The 'Israel Lobby', spearheaded by AIPAC, is a coterie of Jews, neo-conservatives and Christian Zionists that dominates US foreign policy. It achieves this through the strategic activity of its leaders and its ability to deflect criticism with accusations of anti-semitism.

This argument rests on the belief that a small clique can achieve hegemony over an entity as complex as the US government. AIPAC commands great resources, but its reputation for untrammelled dominance is grossly overstated. There are plenty of countervailing centres of power, such as paleoconservatives, Arab and Islamic advocacy groups (e.g. CAIR) and the diplomatic establishment. A more powerful explanation for the influence of the 'Lobby' is that its values command genuine support among the American public. According to a February 2006 Gallup poll, 59 per cent of Americans express strong support for Israel. This figure includes 77 per cent of Republicans, but also half of all Democrats. Far from being the result of unschooled myths and stereotypes, support for Israel is higher among people who follow international events than among those who don't (i.e. 66 per cent v. 59 per cent).

In addition, reducing American (and Western) conflict with Islam to the issue of Israel obscures more than it reveals. It fails to explain anti-Western Islamicist movements in places as far from Israel as Algeria and the Philippines. It refuses to examine instances when the US, on its own merits, trampled on Muslim self-esteem (in Iran from 1953 to 1979, in Lebanon in 1958), and when non-'Lobby' Americans may have had personal axes to grind in the Middle East (e.g. the Bush family in Iraq). Mearsheimer and Walt don't consider the way that Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf sheikhdoms justify their own autocratic privileges by bankrolling extremism against Israel, or the reasons young European Muslims respond to discrimination in their host societies with anger not at white Europeans, but at a country thousands of miles away. Could it be that vote-seeking European leftists and Saudi-funded Islamic clerics are amplifying the conflict in the Middle East into a transnational obsession? The violence following the publication of Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in late 2005 may be instructive in this regard: though touching a real nerve, it was widely recognised that particular groups and countries were prolonging the outrage for their own benefit. Josef Joffe argued in *Foreign Policy* last year that 'far from creating tensions, Israel actually contains more antagonisms than it causes.' The USA may very well be purchasing world stability at a bargain through its alliance with Israel.

Perhaps hardest to swallow is Mearsheimer and Walt's moralising tone. They present themselves as hard-headed realists dispassionately guarding America's national interest, which is surprisingly not compromised by nuclear weapons in North Korean or Iranian hands. They then catalogue Israel's moral flaws, refusing to give equal time to Palestinian extremism, maximalism and truculence. We are left with the impression that Israel's founding and post-1967 expansion were gratuitous sins, while the refusal of the Palestinians to compromise in the 1930s or their current cult of violence are

(presumably) natural responses, fixed and unalterable. Having made this point, the authors presume to suggest that a more restrained US policy will be good for Israel. This is probably a display of monumental presumptuousness, but I'll give the authors more credit than they give Israel and chalk it up to sheer myopia.

Adam Glantz

Herndon, Virginia

From Michael Szanto

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt give a strikingly inaccurate account of Middle Eastern history. Arab resentment of America originates from a long pattern of British and French imperialism in the region. This resentment evolved into a more generalised anti-Westernism perpetuated and exploited by the USSR and Soviet allies like Nasser. The distrust of the West including America was further exacerbated by a feeling in the region that the United States often favoured pro-American dictators over more democratic leaders. Over the past two decades, anti-Western militancy in the Middle East has evolved from a Marxist movement into one built on a twisted religious extremism. At the same time, the Arab world has been afflicted with extreme anti-semitism reminiscent of Nazism. A lost war by Israel or a significant poison gas attack on Tel Aviv could easily translate into another holocaust. Finally, support for Israel does not seem quite so extensive when one considers the massive level of manpower America has deployed over the past six decades to defend Western Europe, South Korea and Japan.

Michael Szanto

Chicago

From Daniel Pipes

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt write: 'The Lobby also monitors what professors write and teach. In September 2002, Martin Kramer and Daniel Pipes, two passionately pro-Israel neo-conservatives, established a website (Campus Watch) that posted dossiers on suspect academics and encouraged students to report remarks or behaviour that might be considered hostile to Israel.' This account is inaccurate in several ways (e.g. Martin Kramer had no role in founding Campus Watch), but I write specifically to state that no 'Lobby' told me to start Campus Watch. Neither the Middle East Forum nor myself has ever taken orders from some mythical 'Lobby', and specifically I decided to establish Campus Watch on my own, without direction from any outside source. I challenge Mearsheimer and Walt to provide their information that connects this 'Lobby' to my decision to establish Campus Watch.

Daniel Pipes

Philadelphia

From Jeffrey Herf & Andrei Markovits

Accusations of powerful Jews behind the scenes are part of the most dangerous

traditions of modern anti-semitism. So it is with dismay that we read John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's 'The Israel Lobby'. We have known and respected John Mearsheimer for over twenty years, which makes the essay all the more unsettling.

First, it is not true that the American relationship with Israel has been 'the centrepiece of US Middle Eastern policy'. That centrepiece has been and remains access to oil for the United States and for the global economy. As it became apparent during the 1960s that Israel was not merely the only democracy in the region but also a supporter of the West in the Cold War, the American relationship intensified. At that point, support for Israel, which had been strongest among liberals who supported a Jewish state in the wake of the Holocaust, expanded to include the previously less than enthusiastic military and diplomatic foreign policy establishment, some of which was deeply hostile to Israel and suspicious of Jews, to put it mildly. This was not due to the efforts of the Jewish Lobby or the power of the five million Jews (in a country of almost 300 million). It was due to an assessment of American national interest made by an overwhelmingly non-Jewish political and military establishment long before Christian fundamentalism became a factor in the Republican Party. It coincided with increasingly close ties with the Saudi regime.

Second, it is not true that the United States went to war in Iraq because of the pressure of a Jewish Lobby. Even if the key decision makers were Jews, this would not prove the point about the Jewish Lobby. As it happens, the primary advisers and war planners for Bush were Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell and Rice and the entirely non-Jewish military leadership, not the usual suspects now trotted out by those peddling stories about Jewish power behind the scenes. Whatever Israel or its supporters in the US may or may not have wanted, American and British leaders decided to go to war for reasons grounded in their own interpretation of their respective national interests. Saddam Hussein stunned and surprised his own military leaders three months before the US and Britain invaded by revealing to them that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction. There were many officials in London and Washington – or Berlin and Paris, for that matter – who would have been just as surprised.

One need not think the decision to go to war was the correct one to remember that it was not motivated by concerns about Israel's national security. One need not agree that oil below the ground and dictatorship above it posed an immediate threat to recall that British and American (as well as other Western) leaders believed that Saddam with weapons of mass destruction in years to come would have posed a threat to the other Arab oil-producing states as much as to Israel. Mearsheimer and Walt's realism ignores this conventional threat in the minds of American and British policymakers.

Third, while much opinion in the Arab and Islamic world has rejected the presence of a Jewish state in its midst, anti-Americanism, hatred of Europe (including Britain) and of liberal modernity in general would exist if Israel was not there. Mearsheimer and Walt stand in a long tradition of 'realist' political scientists known for naivety regarding the power and import of ideological fanaticism in international affairs. This naivety is the reason that radical Islam and the enduring crises of modernisation in the region that

produced it receive hardly a word in their long attack.

Fourth, American Jewish citizens have a right to express their views without being charged with placing the interests of Israel ahead of those of the US. Mearsheimer and Walt's attack appears eight years after the terrorist war against the West declared by Osama Bin Laden; six years after Ehud Barak offered a compromise plan to end the conflict and occupation of the West Bank, and Yassir Arafat responded with a terrorist campaign of his own; after countless terrorist attacks all over the world by al-Qaida and its sympathisers, including the London Underground bombings; after repeated acts of terrorist barbarism in Iraq by radical Islamists; after the declaration by the Iranian president that Israel should be wiped out and that the Holocaust was a myth; and, most recently, after the world's first electoral victory with a solid majority won by an openly anti-semitic terrorist organisation, Hamas. Mearsheimer and Walt further ignore that all of this happened also after Israel withdrew from Lebanon, offered the Barak plan, retaliated to the terrorist campaign as any state – including Britain or the United States – would, accepted the principle of a Palestinian state and thus agreed to withdraw from over 90 per cent of the West Bank, and then withdrew completely from Gaza. If the Palestinians had responded to these offers of a compromise peace, they would perhaps have had a functioning state before radical Islam came to dominate their politics. It was radical Islamist and secular Palestinian militants, not the Jewish Lobby, that destroyed prospects for a compromise settlement.

If the US concluded that it no longer had a vital interest in the continued survival of the only democracy in the Middle East, those now attacking Western modernity might conclude that the Americans could be convinced that the defence of Europe – and Britain – was also not in the American interest.

Jeffrey Herf & Andrei Markovits

University of Maryland & University of Michigan

From Michael Taylor

Perhaps you know, perhaps you don't, that the longer, unedited version of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's essay posted on Harvard and Chicago University websites is being distributed by the PLO in Washington, and is being hailed by AbdulMoneim Abul-Fotouh, a senior member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and by David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan leader. He had this to say about it: 'I have read about the report and read one summary already, and I am surprised how excellent it is. It is quite satisfying to see a body in the premier American University essentially come out and validate every major point I have been making since before the war even started.' He added that 'the task before us is to wrest control of America's foreign policy and critical junctures of media from the Jewish extremist neo-cons that seek to lead us into what they expectantly call World War Four.' I don't want to be in such company, and neither should you. Please cancel my subscription.

Michael Taylor

Old Malton, North Yorkshire

Vol. 28 No. 8 · 20 April 2006

From Alan Dershowitz

As an advocate of free speech and an opponent of censorship based on political correctness, I welcome a serious, balanced, objective study of the influences of lobbies – including Israeli lobbies – on American foreign policy. I also welcome reasoned, contextual and comparative criticism of Israeli policies and actions. But in light of the many errors in John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's article, and their admission that 'none of the evidence' they give 'represents original documentation or is derived from independent interviews', it is fair to ask why these distinguished academics chose to publish a paper that does not meet their usual scholarly standards, especially given the obvious risk that it would be featured, as it has been, on neo-Nazi and extremist websites, and even those of terrorist organisations, and that it would be used by overt anti-semites to 'validate' their claims of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy (*LRB*, 23 March).

The authors pre-emptively accuse the Lobby of indiscriminately crying anti-semitism: 'Anyone who criticises Israeli actions or argues that pro-Israel groups have significant influence over US Middle East policy ... stands a good chance of being labelled an anti-semite'; 'In other words, criticise Israeli policy and you are by definition an anti-semite.' This is demonstrably false, though it is a charge made frequently in the hate literature. Several years ago, I challenged those who made similar accusations to identify a single Jewish leader who equated mere criticism of Israeli policy with anti-semitism. No one accepted my challenge, because no Jewish leader has made such a claim. Among the harshest critics of Israeli policy are Jews and Israelis: just read the mainstream Israeli and Jewish-American press.

Mearsheimer and Walt rely on discredited allegations and partial quotation. They twice quote David Ben-Gurion out of context so that he appears to be saying the exact opposite of what he actually did say. First, the authors have Ben-Gurion stating: 'After the formation of a large army in the wake of the establishment of the state, we shall abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine.' The clear implication is that this would be done by force. Yet, in a follow-up question, Ben-Gurion was asked whether he meant to achieve this 'by force as well?' He responded in the negative: 'Through mutual understanding and Jewish-Arab agreement.' Mearsheimer and Walt omit this important qualification. Ben-Gurion is then quoted as saying that 'it is impossible to imagine general evacuation' of the Arab population 'without compulsion, and brutal compulsion', which makes it seem as if Ben-Gurion was advocating 'brutal compulsion'. They omit what he said next: 'But we should in no way make it part of our programme.' Either they were unaware of the context of the quotes because they read only misleading excerpts ripped out of context; or they decided to misuse the quotes so as to mislead the reader.

There are many other factual errors, but I will draw attention to just a few. 'Israel,' they state, 'was explicitly founded as a Jewish state and citizenship is based on the principle of blood kinship.' This mendacious emphasis on Jewish 'blood' is a favourite of

neo-Nazi propaganda. It is totally false. A person of any ethnicity or religion can become an Israeli citizen. In fact, approximately a quarter of Israel's citizens are not Jewish, a higher percentage of minority citizenry than nearly any other country. Indeed, Mearsheimer and Walt admit that Israel has 1.3 million Arab citizens – about 20 per cent of its population. The paper's authors confuse Israel's law of return – which was designed to grant asylum to victims of anti-semitism, including non-Jewish relatives of Jews – with its law of citizenship.

If Mearsheimer and Walt were truly concerned about racist citizenship statutes, they could have looked right next door to Jordan, which openly and explicitly refuses to grant citizenship to Jews. When asked by the *New York Sun* about Arab citizenship laws, Walt responded: 'We were not writing on Saudi Arabia and Jordan.' Mearsheimer and Walt in fact compare Israel to its Arab neighbours on several occasions, finding – incredibly – that 'in terms of actual behaviour, Israel's conduct is not morally distinguishable from the actions of its opponents.' Walt's evasive answer reminds me of a remark attributed to another Harvard administrator, A. Lawrence Lowell, who fought fiercely to keep Jews out of Harvard. His reasoning was that 'Jews cheat.' When it was pointed out to him that some non-Jews cheat, Lowell allegedly responded: 'You're changing the subject. I'm talking about Jews.'

Mearsheimer and Walt contend that the 'United States has a terrorism problem in good part because it is so closely allied with Israel, not the other way around ... There is no question, for example, that many al-Qaida leaders, including bin Laden, are motivated by Israel's presence in Jerusalem and the plight of the Palestinians.' In fact, bin Laden was primarily motivated by the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, recall, had asked the United States to defend the Arabian Peninsula against Iraqi aggression prior to the first Gulf War. So it was America's ties to and defence of an Arab state – from which 15 of the 19 9/11 hijackers originated – and not the Jewish state, that most clearly precipitated the events of 11 September 2001. Nor does Israel's supposed domination of American public life explain the terrorist massacres in Bali, Madrid, London and elsewhere. Europe, after all, is praised for being less susceptible to the Lobby's manipulation.

Mearsheimer and Walt's boldest mis-statement concerns the negotiations at Camp David in July 2000. 'Prime Minister Ehud Barak's purportedly generous offer,' they write, 'would have given the Palestinians only a disarmed and dismembered set of Bantustans under de facto Israeli control.' Barak has said that the Bantustan accusation was 'one of the most embarrassing lies' Arafat told about Camp David. Mearsheimer and Walt do not cite the map Dennis Ross published in his book *The Missing Peace*, which contrasts the Palestinian characterisation of the final proposal at Camp David with the actual proposal. The second map – the real map offered to the Palestinians at Camp David – shows a contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank. Prince Bandar, a member of the Saudi royal family, was so astounded by the generosity of Israel's offer that he told Arafat: 'If we lose this opportunity, it is not going to be a tragedy. This is going to be a crime.'

Even if the scholarship were sound and the facts accurate, the paper's thesis would

remain unsound. Their first argument is that the very existence of an Israeli lobby proves that support for Israel is essentially un-American. 'The mere existence of the Lobby,' they write, 'suggests that unconditional support for Israel is not in the American national interest. If it was, one would not need an organised special interest group to bring it about.' In other words, any group that needs a lobby must be working against the 'American national interest'. The most powerful lobby in the US is, in fact, the American Association of Retired Persons. According to Mearsheimer and Walt's logic, that would mean that the rights of retired people are inconsistent with American national interests, as is equality for African Americans (NAACP) and choice for women. The reality, of course, is that virtually all interest groups and many foreign countries undertake lobbying, but only the 'Israel Lobby' is accused of being contrary to American national interest.

Mearsheimer and Walt attribute anything that Israel and America do or aspire to achieve in common to Israeli manipulation. They confuse correlation with causation. The upshot of their argument concerning the invasion of Iraq is that Ariel Sharon duped President Bush into overthrowing Saddam Hussein. They do not consider the more likely explanation: that Bush and Sharon shared the same worldview and vision for the Middle East.

Walt's Harvard colleague David Gergen – who has a great deal of experience of the decision-making process in the White House – finds the paper's thesis 'wildly at variance' with what he witnessed. Had Mearsheimer and Walt interviewed Gergen they would have learned the following:

Over the course of four tours in the White House, I never once saw a decision in the Oval Office to tilt US foreign policy in favour of Israel at the expense of America's interest. Other than Richard Nixon – who occasionally said terrible things about Jews, despite the number on his team – I can't remember any president even talking about an Israeli lobby. Perhaps I have forgotten, but I can remember plenty of conversations about the power of the American gun lobby, environmentalists, evangelicals, small-business owners and teachers unions.

It is not only Mearsheimer and Walt's words that invoke stereotypes and canards. It is the 'music' as well – the tone, pitch and feel of the article – that has caused such outrage. Imagine if two academics compiled an equivalent number of negative statements, based on shoddy research and questionable sources, to the effect that African Americans cause all the problems in America, and presented that compilation as evidence that African Americans behave in a manner contrary to the best interest of the United States. Who would fail to recognise such a project as destructive?

Walt and Mearsheimer repeatedly claim that they wrote their article, at least in part, in order to stimulate a discussion about the influence of the Lobby. They claim that it is the pro-Israel side that seeks to suppress this 'because an open debate might lead Americans to question the level of support they provide'. My invitation to debate remains open. I challenge Mearsheimer and Walt to look me in the eye and tell me that because I am a proud Jew and a critical supporter of Israel, I am disloyal to my country.

Alan Dershowitz

Harvard University

From Frank Solomon

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt write that ‘not all Jewish Americans are part of the Lobby, because Israel is not a salient issue for many of them.’ They thus ignore those American Jews for whom Israel is important but who do not agree with the aims of the Lobby, or do not think that it acts to the benefit of Israel, America or anyone else in the Middle East.

Frank Solomon

MIT

From Caroline and Nathan Finkelstein

If the inhumane behaviour of the Israeli government is allowed to continue, anti-semitism will certainly increase and unfortunately it will be real, and no longer merely Israeli apologists crying wolf.

Caroline and Nathan Finkelstein

Tannay, Switzerland

From Yair Evron

The current situation in the Middle East is very different from the one depicted by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. Egypt and Jordan have peace treaties with Israel, and they, the Gulf States and some North African countries share a vital interest in repelling militant Islam and, in the case of the Gulf States, ensuring their security against Iran. The United States and Israel share this interest.

Yair Evron

Jerusalem

From Robert Pfaltzgraff

Having read John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt’s extensive writings in international relations theory, I assumed that, as realists or neo-realists, they attached primacy to the international setting in shaping foreign policy choices. According to such theory, states act in accordance with national interests which are shaped by the outside world and in response to threats within an anarchical international system and society. If this is the case, their thesis about the alleged influence of the Israeli Lobby on US foreign policy contradicts the essential tenet of the theory on which they have in large part constructed their academic reputations.

However, I have a more immediate concern. The authors allege that ‘over the past 25 years, pro-Israel forces have established a commanding presence’ at US think-tanks, and give a list that includes the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis. The basis on which the authors make this assertion escapes me. We have undertaken studies of US policy towards the Gulf States as well as Israel and other countries in and around the Middle

East. To the extent that such studies support Israel or any other states in the region, this is the result of an independent analysis of US needs and interests. If Mearsheimer and Walt had taken the time to interview me or any of my colleagues, they could easily have discovered this.

Robert Pfaltzgraff

Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, Cambridge, Massachusetts

From Marion Woolfson

More than thirty years ago, I was one of the first British Jewish writers to write about the harsh behaviour of the Israeli authorities towards the Palestinians living under a cruel and illegal occupation. Although I did not write about anything which I had not witnessed, I was accused of lying, of being 'paid by the Arabs' and even of 'having sex intercourse with the Arab gangsters'. I was inundated with letters containing hysterical abuse and anonymous death threats, and attacked verbally and physically. One man wrote to say he considered it his duty 'to prevent a Jewess from damaging the cause of Israel'. Publications for which I had worked were told that I was 'a member of a terrorist gang'.

It is a pity that supporters of Israel still reach for the same obfuscations, denigrations and outright distortions of fact. As far back as 1980, the May/June issue of *Yiton* 77 (a Hebrew literary monthly) published an article by the Israeli writer Boaz Evron on the use of accusations of anti-semitism and reminders of the Holocaust to silence critics. There have been many similar articles in the Israeli media over the years.

Marion Woolfson

Edinburgh

From Renee Slater

Why do Jeffrey Herf and Andrei Markovits employ the Lobby's rhetorical tactic of conflating Israel with Jews ([Letters, 6 April](#))? John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt are careful to distinguish the Israel Lobby from American Jewish citizens, and never refer to a 'Jewish' Lobby. And why do they accuse Mearsheimer and Walt of 'naivety regarding the power and import of ideological fanaticism in international affairs'? Their article was precisely about the impact of ideological fanaticism not only on international affairs but on American democracy. Finally, does the fact that Likud came third in the recent Israeli elections mean that the majority of Israelis are not in sympathy with all of the policies promoted in their name by the Lobby?

Renee Slater

Bristol

From Jeremy Schreiber

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt claim that Golda Meir said that 'there is no such thing as a Palestinian.' This reference to Meir is obligatory in anti-Israel polemics. In fact, Meir said something quite different in the interview from which the professors'

quotation supposedly originates. In this interview, with the *Sunday Times* in 1969, when asked if she considered ‘the emergence of the Palestinian fighting forces, the Fedayeen, an important new factor in the Middle East’, Meir replied:

Important, no. A new factor, yes. There was no such thing as Palestinians. When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state? It was either southern Syria before the First World War, and then it was a Palestine including Jordan. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.

A few years later, in the *New York Times* of 14 January 1976, Meir stated:

To be misquoted is an occupational hazard of political leadership; for this reason I should like to clarify my position in regard to the Palestinian issue. I have been charged with being rigidly insensitive to the question of the Palestinian Arabs. In evidence of this I am supposed to have said, ‘There are no Palestinians.’ My actual words were: ‘There is no Palestine people. There are Palestinian refugees.’ The distinction is not semantic. My statement was based on a lifetime of debates with Arab nationalists who vehemently excluded a separatist Palestinian Arab nationalism from their formulations.

It is clear that even in the original interview Meir was referring to Palestinian nationhood and not Palestinians in general, whose existence she clearly acknowledged both in that comment and in everything else she ever said about them.

Mearsheimer and Walt also write that ‘in 2003, the head of the French Jewish community said that “France is not more anti-semitic than America.”’ The quotation is from an interview with Roger Cukierman in the magazine *Forward*, in which Cukierman differentiated between French anti-semitism of the traditional French/European variety, and ‘new’ manifestations of anti-Jewish violence in France. As the *Forward* article explains, in Cukierman’s estimation the latter manifestations ‘were responsible for 95 per cent to 98 per cent of anti-semitic incidents’ in France: ‘This is why “France is not more anti-semitic than America,” he explained, despite the fact that most Muslims in France are French citizens.’ Mearsheimer and Walt distort Cukierman’s assessment by portraying his comments as if he had been referring to all French anti-semitism.

Jeremy Schreiber

Columbus, Ohio

From John Gretton

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt do not address the fundamental issue: Israel’s relationship to America is that of a client state. Difficulties arise because Israel, unlike many client states in the past, has a very strong agenda of its own: it wants to exist, preferably at peace with its neighbours, but within boundaries and with a population of its own choosing.

Israel's way of achieving these goals and dealing with regional opposition to them is, in many people's eyes – possibly including those of many Jewish Americans – morally repugnant. That America has tended to look the other way is hardly surprising: reining Israel in would be difficult and even more costly than accepting the status quo. These costs can be counted not just in dollars, which the Israeli government is adept at extorting in ever greater quantities, but in terms of Israel's willingness to act as the agent of pax Americana in a region that is strategically important but potentially very hostile to the United States.

In other words, an Israel Lobby, whatever degree of influence one attributes to it, isn't really vital to the client-state relationship. Still, it would be surprising if both partners, and Israel in particular, were not having doubts about the viability of the relationship in the longer term. On the one hand, along with anti-Americanism, anti-semitism is creeping back into Europe via the immigrant underclasses. And, on the other, Iraq has shown the world that America is not good at creating and nurturing client states. Would it be any better, if push came to shove, at protecting an already existing one? Should word get around that America will not or cannot defend its Middle Eastern client state, no amount of lobbying in Washington will protect Israel.

John Gretton

Birmingham

From Tom Wengraf

It's interesting that Daniel Pipes does not think his 'decision to establish Campus Watch' – a nasty anti-dissent echo of McCarthyism – might be the action of a member of the Israel Lobby because no 'outside source' told him to set it up ([Letters, 6 April](#)). He doesn't deny Mearsheimer and Walt's description of what Campus Watch is trying to get people to do.

You could get the impression, reading Adam Glantz's letter in the same issue, that Israel and Palestine are two evenly matched warring states. Given the failure of the US media to inform Americans of alternative viewpoints it is hardly surprising that those in the US who 'follow international events' give even more 'support to Israel' than those who don't. Glantz is right that world hostility to American fundamentalism and domination can't be reduced to the issue of Israel, but suggests that through its alliance with an armed and expansionist Israel the US 'may be purchasing world stability at a bargain price'. As many empires have found, extremist satellite regimes are not always the best bargain in the long term.

Tom Wengraf

London N10

From Joseph Palley

Harry Truman recognised the state of Israel fifteen minutes after it declared itself a nation. 'In all of my political experience,' he said, 'I don't ever recall the Arab vote swinging a close election.' But it's wrong to blame uncritical US support for Israel on

the Lobby. British Jews are as well organised, well funded, almost as numerous relative to population and, understandably, just as pro-Israel as American Jews. Yet European and US public – and therefore government – attitudes to Israel are very different.

Until 1967, Israel was admired equally on both sides of the Atlantic. Its subsequent colonisation of East Jerusalem and chunks of the West Bank – on top of the 78 per cent of Palestine it already had – gradually alienated most Europeans, whose overstretched governments had just given up their colonies. In a 2003 European Commission poll in 15 EU countries, 59 per cent of those who responded named Israel as a threat to world peace; significantly fewer named Iran, Iraq, North Korea or Afghanistan.

Americans, however, kept the faith. In the 1980s, Republican support for Israel hardened as a result of the growing Christian fundamentalist movement, which believes Jerusalem's holy sites belong in Western hands. Then there's the analogy between the Zionist 'recovery' of Palestine and the early North American settlers' flight from religious persecution in Europe. Could America's support of Israel be driven in part by identification with its own history?

Joseph Palley

Richmond, Surrey

From Michael Grenfell

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt claim that Israel has become a 'strategic burden' to the US and give as an example the use of Patriot missile batteries in the 1991 Gulf War 'to prevent Tel Aviv doing anything that might harm the alliance against Saddam'. This is bizarre: the reason the US had to supply Patriots to Israel was to defend it against attacks by Saddam, who attacked Israel as a response to the US/ coalition action against Iraq, which was itself a defence of Kuwaiti independence and wider US strategic interests in the region. If this instance shows anything, it is that Israel's security was jeopardised as a result of US action in support of US and Kuwaiti strategic interests that had nothing to do with Israel – virtually the opposite of the case the authors are trying to make.

Michael Grenfell

Edgware, Middlesex

From Yitzhak Laor

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt almost acquit the American war machine of what is happening here. 'The bottom line,' they write, 'is that AIPAC, a de facto agent for a foreign government, has a stranglehold on Congress, with the result that US policy towards Israel is not debated there.' Suppose AIPAC weren't there: would American policy in the Middle East be different? I doubt it.

Yitzhak Laor

Tel Aviv

From Kenneth Cuno

The development of Jewish Studies and Israel Studies programmes in US universities is motivated in large part by a desire to promote Jewish identity (often utilising Israel as an anchor for that identity), but within America, as an antidote to assimilation. In some respects this is a very un-Zionist agenda, as it aims to create a space in which one can be Jewish and American at the same time. While I agree with Mearsheimer and Walt that often it is difficult to discuss Israel or the Israel Lobby without having one's motives impugned, this situation tends to push commentary to the extremes, and their article is an unfortunate example of that.

Kenneth Cuno

University of Illinois, Champaign

From Editors, 'London Review'

Besides those published here and in the last issue, we have received a great many letters in response to John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's piece – not all of them edifying, though we haven't received any death threats, as one correspondent from New Jersey feared we would. There have been a number of accusations of anti-semitism, as Mearsheimer and Walt predicted, and some very unpleasant remarks about Arabs, but also dozens of messages praising the article. Most readers understood that Mearsheimer and Walt were writing about US foreign policy and its effects on the Middle East, though there have also been a few congratulatory messages of an anti-semitic nature. The letters accusing Mearsheimer and Walt of having written an 'anti-semitic rant' and those congratulating them for having exposed a 'secret Jewish' – or, as one individual felt the need to spell it, 'J E W I S H' – 'conspiracy' have something in common: they come from people who appear not to have read the piece, and who seem incapable of distinguishing between criticism of Israeli or US government policy and anti-semitism.

We don't usually publish letters of simple praise, which meant that only letters putting the case against Mearsheimer and Walt appeared in the last number of the *LRB*. This led one correspondent to write: 'Your obvious slant in the letters you have chosen to publish regarding the Israel Lobby establishes, once again, that Israeli apologists are alive and well and living at the *London Review of Books*.' It may be impossible to write or publish anything relating to Israel without provoking accusations of bias.

Mearsheimer and Walt will reply to the correspondence we've published and discuss the wider response to their article in the next issue.

Editors, 'London Review'

Vol. 28 No. 9 · 11 May 2006

From John Mearsheimer & Stephen Walt

We wrote 'The Israel Lobby' in order to begin a discussion of a subject that had become difficult to address openly in the United States (*LRB*, 23 March). We knew it was likely

to generate a strong reaction, and we are not surprised that some of our critics have chosen to attack our characters or misrepresent our arguments. We have also been gratified by the many positive responses we have received, and by the thoughtful commentary that has begun to emerge in the media and the blogosphere. It is clear that many people – including Jews and Israelis – believe that it is time to have a candid discussion of the US relationship with Israel. It is in that spirit that we engage with the letters responding to our article. We confine ourselves here to the most salient points of dispute.

One of the most prominent charges against us is that we see the lobby as a well-organised Jewish conspiracy. Jeffrey Herf and Andrei Markovits, for example, begin by noting that ‘accusations of powerful Jews behind the scenes are part of the most dangerous traditions of modern anti-semitism’ ([Letters, 6 April](#)). It is a tradition we deplore and that we explicitly rejected in our article. Instead, we described the lobby as a loose coalition of individuals and organisations without a central headquarters. It includes gentiles as well as Jews, and many Jewish-Americans do not endorse its positions on some or all issues. Most important, the Israel lobby is not a secret, clandestine cabal; on the contrary, it is openly engaged in interest-group politics and there is nothing conspiratorial or illicit about its behaviour. Thus, we can easily believe that Daniel Pipes has never ‘taken orders’ from the lobby, because the Leninist caricature of the lobby depicted in his letter is one that we clearly dismissed. Readers will also note that Pipes does not deny that his organisation, Campus Watch, was created in order to monitor what academics say, write and teach, so as to discourage them from engaging in open discourse about the Middle East.

Several writers chide us for making mono-causal arguments, accusing us of saying that Israel alone is responsible for anti-Americanism in the Arab and Islamic world (as one letter puts it, anti-Americanism ‘would exist if Israel was not there’) or suggesting that the lobby bears sole responsibility for the Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq. But that is not what we said. We emphasised that US support for Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories is a powerful source of anti-Americanism, the conclusion reached in several scholarly studies and US government commissions (including the 9/11 Commission). But we also pointed out that support for Israel is hardly the only reason America’s standing in the Middle East is so low. Similarly, we clearly stated that Osama bin Laden had other grievances against the United States besides the Palestinian issue, but as the 9/11 Commission documents, this matter was a major concern for him. We also explicitly stated that the lobby, by itself, could not convince either the Clinton or the Bush administration to invade Iraq. Nevertheless, there is abundant evidence that the neo-conservatives and other groups within the lobby played a central role in making the case for war.

At least two of the letters complain that we ‘catalogue Israel’s moral flaws’, while paying little attention to the shortcomings of other states. We focused on Israeli behaviour, not because we have any animus towards Israel, but because the United States gives it such high levels of material and diplomatic support. Our aim was to determine whether Israel merits this special treatment either because it is a unique strategic asset or

because it behaves better than other countries do. We argued that neither argument is convincing: Israel's strategic value has declined since the end of the Cold War and Israel does not behave significantly better than most other states.

Herf and Markovits interpret us to be saying that Israel's 'continued survival' should be of little concern to the United States. We made no such argument. In fact, we emphasised that there is a powerful moral case for Israel's existence, and we firmly believe that the United States should take action to ensure its survival if it were in danger. Our criticism was directed at Israeli policy and America's special relationship with Israel, not Israel's existence.

Another recurring theme in the letters is that the lobby ultimately matters little because Israel's 'values command genuine support among the American public'. Thus, Herf and Markovits maintain that there is substantial support for Israel in military and diplomatic circles within the United States. We agree that there is strong public support for Israel in America, in part because it is seen as compatible with America's Judaeo-Christian culture. But we believe this popularity is substantially due to the lobby's success at portraying Israel in a favourable light and effectively limiting public awareness and discussion of Israel's less savoury actions. Diplomats and military officers are also affected by this distorted public discourse, but many of them can see through the rhetoric. They keep silent, however, because they fear that groups like AIPAC will damage their careers if they speak out. The fact is that if there were no AIPAC, Americans would have a more critical view of Israel and US policy in the Middle East would look different.

On a related point, Michael Szanto contrasts the US-Israeli relationship with the American military commitments to Western Europe, Japan and South Korea, to show that the United States has given substantial support to other states besides Israel (6 April). He does not mention, however, that these other relationships did not depend on strong domestic lobbies. The reason is simple: these countries did not need a lobby because close ties with each of them were in America's strategic interest. By contrast, as Israel has become a strategic burden for the US, its American backers have had to work even harder to preserve the 'special relationship'.

Other critics contend that we overstate the lobby's power because we overlook countervailing forces, such as 'paleo-conservatives, Arab and Islamic advocacy groups ... and the diplomatic establishment'. Such countervailing forces do exist, but they are no match – either alone or in combination – for the lobby. There are Arab-American political groups, for example, but they are weak, divided, and wield far less influence than AIPAC and other organisations that present a strong, consistent message from the lobby.

Probably the most popular argument made about a countervailing force is Herf and Markovits's claim that the centrepiece of US Middle East policy is oil, not Israel. There is no question that access to that region's oil is a vital US strategic interest. Washington is also deeply committed to supporting Israel. Thus, the relevant question is, how does each of those interests affect US policy? We maintain that US policy in the Middle East

is driven primarily by the commitment to Israel, not oil interests. If the oil companies or the oil-producing countries were driving policy, Washington would be tempted to favour the Palestinians instead of Israel. Moreover, the United States would almost certainly not have gone to war against Iraq in March 2003, and the Bush administration would not be threatening to use military force against Iran. Although many claim that the Iraq war was all about oil, there is hardly any evidence to support that supposition, and much evidence of the lobby's influence. Oil is clearly an important concern for US policymakers, but with the exception of episodes like the 1973 Opec oil embargo, the US commitment to Israel has yet to threaten access to oil. It does, however, contribute to America's terrorism problem, complicates its efforts to halt nuclear proliferation, and helped get the United States involved in wars like Iraq.

Regrettably, some of our critics have tried to smear us by linking us with overt racists, thereby suggesting that we are racists or anti-semites ourselves. Michael Taylor, for example, notes that our article has been 'hailed' by Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke ([Letters, 6 April](#)). Alan Dershowitz implies that some of our material was taken from neo-Nazi websites and other hate literature ([Letters, 20 April](#)). We have no control over who likes or dislikes our article, but we regret that Duke used it to promote his racist agenda, which we utterly reject. Furthermore, nothing in our piece is drawn from racist sources of any kind, and Dershowitz offers no evidence to support this false claim. We provided a fully documented version of the paper so that readers could see for themselves that we used reputable sources.

Finally, a few critics claim that some of our facts, references or quotations are mistaken. For example, Dershowitz challenges our claim that Israel was 'explicitly founded as a Jewish state and citizenship is based on the principle of blood kinship'. Israel was founded as a Jewish state (a fact Dershowitz does not challenge), and our reference to citizenship was obviously to Israel's Jewish citizens, whose identity is ordinarily based on ancestry. We stated that Israel has a sizeable number of non-Jewish citizens (primarily Arabs), and our main point was that many of them are relegated to a second-class status in a predominantly Jewish society.

We also referred to Golda Meir's famous statement that 'there is no such thing as a Palestinian,' and Jeremy Schreiber reads us as saying that Meir was denying the existence of those people rather than simply denying Palestinian nationhood ([20 April](#)). There is no disagreement here; we agree with Schreiber's interpretation and we quoted Meir in a discussion of Israel's prolonged effort 'to deny the Palestinians' national ambitions'.

Dershowitz challenges our claim that the Israelis did not offer the Palestinians a contiguous state at Camp David in July 2000. As support, he cites a statement by former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak and the memoirs of former US negotiator Dennis Ross. There are a number of competing accounts of what happened at Camp David, however, and many of them agree with our claim. Moreover, Barak himself acknowledges that 'the Palestinians were promised a continuous piece of sovereign territory except for a razor-thin Israeli wedge running from Jerusalem ... to the Jordan River.' This wedge, which would bisect the West Bank, was essential to Israel's plan to

retain control of the Jordan River Valley for another six to twenty years. Finally, and contrary to Dershowitz's claim, there was no 'second map' or map of a 'final proposal at Camp David'. Indeed, it is explicitly stated in a note beside the map published in Ross's memoirs that 'no map was presented during the final rounds at Camp David.' Given all this, it is not surprising that Barak's foreign minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, who was a key participant at Camp David, later admitted: 'If I were a Palestinian I would have rejected Camp David as well.'

Dershowitz also claims that we quote David Ben-Gurion 'out of context' and thus misrepresented his views on the need to use force to build a Jewish state in all of Palestine. Dershowitz is wrong. As a number of Israeli historians have shown, Ben-Gurion made numerous statements about the need to use force (or the threat of overwhelming force) to create a Jewish state in all of Palestine. In October 1937, for example, he wrote to his son Amos that the future Jewish state would have an 'outstanding army ... so I am certain that we won't be constrained from settling in the rest of the country, either by mutual agreement and understanding with our Arab neighbours, *or by some other way*' (emphasis added). Furthermore, common sense says that there was no other way to achieve that goal, because the Palestinians were hardly likely to give up their homeland voluntarily. Ben-Gurion was a consummate strategist and he understood that it would be unwise for the Zionists to talk openly about the need for 'brutal compulsion'. We quote a memorandum Ben-Gurion wrote prior to the Extraordinary Zionist Conference at the Biltmore Hotel in New York in May 1942. He wrote that 'it is impossible to imagine general evacuation' of the Arab population of Palestine 'without compulsion, and brutal compulsion'. Dershowitz claims that Ben-Gurion's subsequent statement – 'we should in no way make it part of our programme' – shows that he opposed the transfer of the Arab population and the 'brutal compulsion' it would entail. But Ben-Gurion was not rejecting this policy: he was simply noting that the Zionists should not openly proclaim it. Indeed, he said that they should not 'discourage other people, British or American, who favour transfer from advocating this course, but we should in no way make it part of our programme'.

We close with a final comment about the controversy surrounding our article. Although we are not surprised by the hostility directed at us, we are still disappointed that more attention has not been paid to the substance of the piece. The fact remains that the United States is in deep trouble in the Middle East, and it will not be able to develop effective policies if it is impossible to have a civilised discussion about the role of Israel in American foreign policy.

John Mearsheimer & Stephen Walt
University of Chicago & Harvard University

Vol. 28 No. 10 · 25 May 2006

From Philip Zelikow

In their essay 'The Israel Lobby', John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt invoke

comments made by me as evidence for a controversial assertion of their own concerning the motives for the US invasion of Iraq (*LRB*, 23 March):

Pressure from Israel and the Lobby was not the only factor behind the decision to attack Iraq in March 2003, but it was critical ... The war was motivated in good part by a desire to make Israel more secure. According to Philip Zelikow, a former member of the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, the executive director of the 9/11 Commission, and now a counsellor to Condoleezza Rice, the 'real threat' from Iraq was not a threat to the United States. The 'unstated threat' was the 'threat against Israel', Zelikow told an audience at the University of Virginia in September 2002. 'The American government,' he added, 'doesn't want to lean too hard on it rhetorically, because it is not a popular sell.'

Readers may find it interesting to know what I actually said and how Mearsheimer and Walt appear to have misused my comments.

My talk was on 10 September 2002 at a 9/11 anniversary symposium. I argued that possession of nuclear (or biological) weapons by Saddam Hussein would be very dangerous. Reflecting on my White House work during the Gulf War in 1990-91, I did point out that I believed then, and later, that the most likely *direct* target of an Iraqi WMD attack would be Israel, but that policymakers had no wish to emphasise this. That said, any US or European government, in 1991 or later, would rightly have regarded an Iraqi nuclear attack on Israel – or on any other country – as a horrific prospect they would do much to prevent.

Neither of these conclusions – that Saddam's possession of nuclear weapons would be dangerous, or that Israel might be most directly threatened by such weapons – was especially remarkable. These things were understood in 1991. Iraq tried very hard to pull Israel into that war and its politics, ultimately even bombarding Israel with ballistic missiles. The coalition laboured successfully to thwart Saddam and keep Israel out of that war.

None of this, though, bore on the question of what to do about a possible Iraqi WMD programme in 2002. On that issue – whether or when the US ought to go to war with Iraq – I expressed no view in my September 2002 talk, or on any other public occasion during those years.

Nor did I try to explain why the Bush administration went to war, either in 2002 or after the invasion in 2003 or 2004. And in those years I had little special knowledge of those motives. My work on the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (from which I resigned in February 2003) had not involved Iraq.

So how did my views wind up in Mearsheimer and Walt's essay as evidence that Bush went to war in part for Israel? In 2004, local reports of my September 2002 comments were discovered by the Inter Press Service. To put it mildly, that body has a strong political point of view. It circulated on the web an article headlined 'War Launched to Protect Israel – Bush Adviser'. Without any evidence other than the old September 2002 quotes, the article's lead was: 'Iraq under Saddam Hussein did not pose a threat

to the United States but it did to Israel, which is one reason why Washington invaded the Arab country, according to a speech made by a member of a top-level White House intelligence group.’ The claim has bounced around the internet ever since. Mearsheimer and Walt cite this article, which they found in *Asia Times Online*, as their source for my comments.

The original slur did not deserve a response, but the situation is different when it is repeated by two accredited scholars, and endorsed by publication in the *LRB*. The claim still has three holes. First, like most of the world, I did think that, if Saddam Hussein possessed nuclear weapons, this would endanger the interests of America and the world in several ways, including the direct threat of a possible strike on Israel. Second, I did not state an opinion about whether this should be a cause for war in 2002-03. Third, I did not state an opinion – or even have any special knowledge – about the motives of the Bush administration in going to war in 2003.

I hope that readers will contrast these points with what Mearsheimer and Walt wrote in the passage quoted above. Readers will also notice that the passage leads with a reference to the ‘Lobby’, of which I am clearly presumed to be a part. There is no evidence for that either.

Philip Zelikow

Washington DC

John Mearsheimer & Stephen Walt write: Philip Zelikow claims he did not say in September 2002 that the present war in Iraq was motivated in good part by concerns about Israel’s security. He suggests that our reference to his remarks came from an unreliable source and says we ‘misused’ his comments. He implies that he was talking mainly about the 1990-91 Gulf War, not the US decision to invade Iraq in March 2003. Furthermore, he maintains that he ‘expressed no view’ on ‘whether or when the US ought to go to war with Iraq’. None of these assertions is correct.

Emad Mekay, who wrote the *Asia Times Online* article we referenced, is a well-regarded journalist who worked for Reuters and the *New York Times* before moving to Inter Press Service, a legitimate news agency. He did not rely on ‘local reports’ in writing his story, but had access to a complete and unimpeachable record of Zelikow’s talk. He repeatedly tried to contact Zelikow while writing his story, but his inquiries were not returned.

Below are excerpts from Zelikow’s remarks about Iraq on 10 September 2002 (we have the full text). It shows that 1. he was focusing on the possibility of war with Iraq in 2002-03, not the 1990-91 Gulf War; 2. he supported a new war with Iraq; and 3. he believed Iraq was an imminent threat to Israel, but not to the United States.

Finally... I wanted to offer some comments on Iraq... I beg your patience, but I think there are some points that are worth making that aren’t being made by either side in the current debate.

The Iraq situation this administration inherited is and has been unsustainable. Ever

since 1996 the Iraqi situation has basically unravelled... . So then the real question is, OK, what are you going to do about it? How are you going to end up fixing it? And if you don't like the administration's approach, what's the recommended alternative?

Another thing Americans absorb, and this administration especially, is the lesson of Afghanistan. Because remember we knew that international terrorist groups were plotting to kill Americans in a sanctuary called Afghanistan... [I]n retrospect, it is perfectly clear that only ... an [American] invasion could reliably have pre-empted the 9/11 attacks, which relied on people who were being trained in that sanctuary ... So what lesson does one take from that with respect to Iraq? Well you can see the lesson this administration has taken from that example. And so contemplate what lesson you take.

Third. The unstated threat. And here I criticise the [Bush] administration a little, because the argument that they make over and over again is that this is about a threat to the United States. And then everybody says: 'Show me an imminent threat from Iraq to America. Show me, why would Iraq attack America or use nuclear weapons against us?' So I'll tell you what I think the real threat is, and actually has been since 1990. It's the threat against Israel. And this is the threat that dare not speak its name, because the Europeans don't care deeply about that threat, I will tell you frankly. And the American government doesn't want to lean too hard on it rhetorically, because it's not a popular sell.

Now ... if the danger is a biological weapon handed to Hamas, then what's the American alternative then? Especially if those weapons have developed to the point where they now can deter us from attacking them, because they really can retaliate against us, by then. Play out those scenarios ... Don't look at the ties between Iraq and al-Qaida, but then ask yourself the question: 'Gee, is Iraq tied to Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the people who are carrying out suicide bombings in Israel?' Easy question to answer, and the evidence is abundant.

Yes, there are a lot of other problems in the world ... My view, by the way, is the more you examine these other problems and try to put together a comprehensive strategy for America and the Middle East, the more I'm driven to the conclusion that it's better for us to deal with Iraq sooner rather than later. Because those other problems don't get easier ... And the Iraq problem is a peculiar combination at the moment, of being exceptionally dangerous at a time when Iraq is exceptionally weak militarily. Now that's an appealing combination for immediate action ... But ... if we wait two years, and then there's another major terrorist attack against the United States, does it then become easier to act against Iraq, even though the terrorist attack didn't come from Iraq? No... . [A]t this moment, because of the time we bought in the war against terror, it actually makes it easier to go about Iraq now, than waiting a year or two until the war against terror gets harder again.

In sum, it is Zelikow, not us, who is attempting to rewrite history. He was admirably candid in 2002, but not in 2006.

Vol. 28 No. 11 · 8 June 2006

From Jerome Slater

Alan Dershowitz accuses John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt of ‘quoting David Ben-Gurion out of context so that he appears to be saying the exact opposite of what he actually did say’ ([Letters, 20 April](#)). Mearsheimer and Walt accurately quote Ben-Gurion as saying that after Israel became powerful, it would expand to encompass all of Palestine. Dershowitz supplies an ensuing phrase, implying that Ben-Gurion meant only expansion by ‘mutual understanding and Jewish-Arab agreement’. However, a fuller statement, in Michael Bar-Zohar’s biography of Ben-Gurion, *Facing a Cruel Mirror*, runs:

We shall organise a modern defence force ... and then I am certain that we will not be prevented from settling in other parts of the country, either by mutual agreement with our Arab neighbours or by some other means ... we will expel the Arabs and take their places ... with the force at our disposal.

Perhaps after independence Ben-Gurion changed his mind? Apparently not. Tom Segev, in *The First Israelis*, quotes him as follows:

Before the founding of the state, on the eve of its creation, our main interest was self-defence ... But now the issue at hand is conquest, not self-defence. As for setting the borders – it’s an open-ended matter. In the Bible as well as in history there are all kinds of definitions of the country’s borders, so there’s no real limit.

Jerome Slater

Williamsville, New York

From Daniel Pipes

‘We can easily believe,’ John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt write, ‘that Daniel Pipes has never “taken orders” from the lobby, because the Leninist caricature of the lobby depicted in his letter is one that we clearly dismissed. Readers will also note that Pipes does not deny that his organisation, Campus Watch, was created in order to monitor what academics say, write and teach, so as to discourage them from engaging in open discourse about the Middle East’ ([Letters, 11 May](#)).

First, Mearsheimer and Walt unconditionally concede they have no information that the alleged ‘lobby’ gives me orders concerning Campus Watch, thus confirming the falsehood of their initial claim. Second, what they dismiss as a ‘Leninist caricature’ of a lobby – one that strategises and gives orders – is the only type of lobby that exists. If no one instructed me to begin Campus Watch, how could Campus Watch’s coming into existence be part of an organised campaign? Third, I deny their point that Campus Watch intends to discourage academics ‘from engaging in open discourse about the Middle East’. As our mission statement explains, the project ‘reviews and critiques Middle East studies in North America with an aim to improving them’.

Campus Watch is to Middle East studies as political analysis to politics, film criticism to

movies, and consumer reports to manufacturing: we provide assessments for the public. Unlike politicians, actors and business executives, who accept criticism with good grace, academics howl with umbrage at being judged.

Daniel Pipes

Philadelphia

From Salah el Serafy

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt are making a mistake when they say, in their rebuttal of their critics ([Letters, 11 May](#)), that the oil embargo of 1973-74, which caused panic among gasoline consumers in the US, was instituted by Opec: it was instituted by a group of Arab countries, led by Saudi Arabia, and prompted by support of Israel on the part of the US and the Netherlands during the war with Egypt and Syria. While the embargo lasted, other members of Opec, including some of the Arab exporters, even expanded their exports, so that total Opec exports actually rose during that period, and neither the US nor the Netherlands was specifically targeted.

Salah el Serafy

Arlington, Virginia

[Vol. 28 No. 12 · 22 June 2006](#)

From Curtis Brown

Daniel Pipes denies that Campus Watch was established to discourage academics ‘from engaging in open discourse about the Middle East’, and points *LRB* readers to its mission statement, according to which the project merely ‘reviews and critiques Middle East studies in North America, with an aim to improving them’ ([Letters, 8 June](#)). This ‘mission statement’ does not date back to the project’s inception.

When Campus Watch was launched, a year after the 11 September attacks, its website described its founders as a group of ‘highly qualified American academics that have banded together in defence of US interests on campus, which includes continued support for Israel’. It spoke of ‘profound mistakes of interpretation’ in Middle East Studies, as well as elements in academia who ‘reject the enduring policies of the US government’. It asked students to supply information about professors who were ‘hostile’ to America or Israel, listed such professors on its website and included ‘dossiers’ of information about them.

After Campus Watch in its original incarnation met with widespread disgust, Pipes made cosmetic changes. The dossiers were dropped in favour of a ‘Survey of Institutions’ (‘For me, “dossier” was just a Frenchword for “file”,’ Pipes explained), and the new mission statement no longer spoke of ‘band[ing] together in defence of US interests on campus’, or of listing those who ‘actively dissociate themselves from the United States’, but rather began with the words Pipes repeats in his letter: ‘Campus Watch, a project of the Middle East Forum, reviews and critiques Middle East studies in

North America, with an aim to improving them.’ The defence of Israeli policies and ideological support for the ‘enduring policies of the US government’ were quietly subsumed into what now purported to be a critique of methodological and pedagogical standards.

Campus Watch continues to indulge in McCarthyite swagger and innuendo; when called on it, however, Pipes and his colleagues take refuge in the anodyne language of the ‘mission statement’. The fact is, Campus Watch’s *raison d’être* has nothing whatever to do with academic standards. I challenge Pipes to name one instance in which Campus Watch has ever praised, defended or even grudgingly acknowledged the academic integrity of anyone who disagrees with him about US policy towards Israel, or an occasion on which he has found fault with the methodology or pedagogy of any scholar who shares his ideological views on this or related matters.

Curtis Brown

Cambridge, Massachusetts

From John Beattie

Quite a few of the attacks on John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, Daniel Pipes’s among them, refuse to accept the possibility that a lobby might lack central organisation yet nonetheless produce apparently co-ordinated action. The Free and Open-Source Software (FOSS) movement has exactly these characteristics. It is made up of individuals, groups and organisations that all subscribe to more or less the same principle: in this case, open-source software or freely available content generally. There is no central co-ordinating body or hierarchy of committees, but an attack on any one organisation or individual within FOSS may get a response from many different groups. In spring 2004, Ken Brown of the Alexis de Tocqueville think-tank published a report in which he claimed to make a *prima facie* case that the Linux operating system is based on plagiarism. Brown’s case was very rapidly exposed as a sham by the FOSS community. And it may well have appeared to him, and to others, that that response was co-ordinated.

John Beattie

Glasgow