

AIPAC, the Religious Right and American Foreign Policy

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"Most citizens are unaware of the startling fact that for years our U.S. Middle East policy has not been crafted by seasoned experts who are committed to America's basic national interests." —Paul Findley, U.S. Republican Congressman, (1961-83)

"Thank God we have AIPAC, the greatest supporter and friend we have in the whole world,"
-Ehud Olmert, Israel's Prime Minister

"Either I make policy on the Middle East or AIPAC makes policy on the Middle East."
-Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter administration National Security Advisor

Nobody can understand what's going on politically in the United States without being aware that a political coalition of major pro-Likud groups, pro-Israel neoconservative intellectuals and Christian Zionists is exerting a tremendously powerful influence on the American government and its policies.

Over time, this large pro-Israel Lobby, spearheaded by the [American Israel Public Affairs Committee \(AIPAC\)](#), has extended its comprehensive grasp over large segments of the U.S. government, including the vice president's office, the Pentagon and the State Department, besides controlling the legislative apparatus of Congress. It is being assisted in this task by powerful allies in the two main political parties, in major corporate media and by some richly financed so-called "think-tanks," such as the [American Enterprise Institute](#), the [Heritage Foundation](#), or the [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#).

AIPAC is the centerpiece of this coordinated system. For example, it keeps voting statistics on each congressional representative and senator, which are then transmitted to political donors to act accordingly. AIPAC also organizes regular all-expense-paid trips to Israel and meetings with Israeli ministers and personalities for congressmen and their staffs, and for other state and local American politicians. Not receiving this imprimatur is a major handicap for any ambitious American politician, even if he can rely on a personal fortune.

In Washington, in order to have a better access to decision makers, 'The Lobby' even has developed the habit of recruiting personnel for senators and House members' offices. And, when elections come, 'The Lobby' makes sure that lukewarm, independent-minded or dissenting politicians are punished and defeated. It is a source of such political power, campaign financing and media propaganda that no U.S. politician can dare ignore its demands without fear of being destroyed. As veteran columnist [Robert Novak](#) recently pointed out, thanks to the influence of AIPAC and 'The Lobby,' "Washington remains largely a bipartisan, criticism-free zone for Israel."

This is understandable. [AIPAC's techniques](#) are so efficient that one can easily have the impression that it is a 'parallel government' in Washington, D.C. In the words of its president, Howard Friedman, consigned in a hubristic bulletin to supporters, it relies on two techniques in particular:

1. "AIPAC meets with every candidate running for Congress. These candidates receive in-depth briefings to help them completely understand the complexities of Israel's predicament and that of the Middle East as a whole. We even ask each candidate to author a 'position paper' on their views of the U.S.-Israel relationship, so it's clear where they stand on the subject."

2. "Members of Congress, staffers and administration officials have come to rely on AIPAC's memos. They are very busy people and they know that they can count on AIPAC for clear-eyed analysis. We present this information in concise form to elected officials. The information and analyses are impeccable, -after all our reputation is at stake. This results in policy and legislation that make up Israel's lifeline."

I doubt that there is any democratic country in the entire world where candidates have to pass an ideological litmus test, if they want to have a chance of being chosen candidates and being elected. Thus, who could blame AIPAC from being convinced that it has the U.S. Congress on a very short leash? If AIPAC were a company, it could be subject to a Federal Trade Commission (FTC) antitrust and anti-cartel investigation for cornering the market.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that, on Capitol Hill, 'The Lobby' seems to be in charge, so much so that its near complete control of U.S. foreign policy and other policies, such as defense, has become the equivalent of a joke. We are not witnessing consensus here, but rather a situation tantamount to unanimity in the desire to align American policies to Israeli policies, each time Israel's interests in the Middle East are on the line. A totalitarian country would not function differently.

AIPAC has such a grip on Washington that sometimes one can be forgiven for confusing Tel Aviv and Washington, D.C. A recent example: AIPAC penned a resolution of support for Israel in its savage and illegal bombings of Lebanon. On July 20, 2006, the resolution was voted unanimously by the 100-member Senate and the vote in the House was 410 to 8. Case closed.

For many years, the influence of 'The Lobby' remained under the radar, being ignored or concealed by the media it controlled and by most commentators. On March 10, 2006, however, two respected American scholars, professors Stephen Walt from Harvard University and John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago published a study in *The London Review of Books*, entitled [The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy](#), about the disproportionate influence that this special interest Lobby has on American foreign policy. It said that AIPAC was "*the most powerful and best known*" organization in a pro-Israel lobby that systematically distorts American foreign policy. The study concluded that Israel played a major role in pushing the Bush administration toward a war with Iraq, and it argued that the pro-Israel lobby's influence on U.S. foreign policy was bad both for Israel and for the U.S. Thereafter, nobody could feign ignoring the corrosive influence of this powerful lobby on U.S. foreign policy.

Another example of the type of power 'The Lobby' carries these days in Washington, D.C., is

its success in establishing within the State Department, with taxpayers' money, a special interest agency, called the '[Office of Global Anti-Semitism](#)'. In a move reminiscent of what happened during past centuries under totalitarian regimes, this new 'agency' is totally devoted to monitoring around the world instances, among other things, of criticism of Israel or of American pro-Israel policies. The creation of this new department of [Inquisition](#) was mandated by a law, [H.R. 4230], that President George W. Bush signed on October 16, 2004. Who says that reality is not stranger than fiction!

So-called [Christian Zionists](#) also have a significant influence on American foreign policy, especially as it relates to the Middle East. Their propaganda has been so successful that today, 40 percent of Americans believe that Israel was directly given to the Jewish people by 'God'. One-third of Americans even believe that the creation of the state of Israel, in 1948, after a terrorist campaign against Great Britain, was a step towards the 'Second Coming of Jesus Christ' and the 'End of the world'. For the most fanatical ones among them, the 'war on terrorism,' whatever it means, is a [war of religion](#) between Christianity and Islam. With such thinking, the world is thrown back four centuries, since the last war of religion was the 1618-1648 [Thirty Years' War](#) between European Protestants and Catholics.

These days, the American religious Right has its own special interest office within the State Department. It is called the '[Office of International Religious Freedom](#),' whose principal mission is to meddle in the domestic affairs of other countries. Such a state agency would seem to run contrary to the "[wall of separation](#)" between church and state that President [Thomas Jefferson](#) thought he had erected with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Such governmental forays in religious matters are in addition to the state-financed '[Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives](#)' that the Bush administration created soon after it took office.

Since the current occupant of the White House is a [born-again Christian](#) who harbors ideas which are close to those advanced by the American [Christian Right](#) it should not be too surprising if the Bush administration's policy in the Middle East has very strong religious overtones.

In any government, one has to look behind the curtains to see who is really pulling the strings and who is steering the policies. In the case of the [Bush-Cheney administration](#), one has to know about 'The Lobby' and the 'religious Right'. Without that knowledge, one is in the dark when it comes to understanding the direction taken by certain policies.

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