

# When Former CIA Chief David Petraeus Enraged the Israel Lobby

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*There has been fulsome praise for General David Petraeus since he resigned yesterday as head of the CIA after the FBI discovered he was having an extramarital affair.*

President Barack Obama lauded Petraeus's decades of "extraordinary service," which includes his time as general in charge of US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and as head of the CIA, where Petraeus would have been in charge of Obama's "secret" drone program which kills children and other civilians in several countries with no oversight or control from anyone.

Some have lamented, via social media, that wars, occupations, assassinations are not reasons to lose one's job in the United States government. Indeed, such service gets you praised and promoted, while an extramarital affair will kill your career.

But what also struck me was the total absence in the extensive media coverage of another way Petraeus made a little history: by publicly criticizing Israel and enraging the Israel lobby.

Israel, a liability to the US?

In March 2010, when Petraeus was still head of the US Central Command, he gave testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee which included this observation about one of the "challenges to security and stability" faced by the United States:

The enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the AOR [Area of Operations]. Israeli-Palestinian tensions often flare into violence and large-scale armed confrontations. The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support. The conflict also gives Iran influence in the Arab world through its clients, Lebanese Hizballah and Hamas.

Abe Foxman, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, one of the leading American Zionist lobby groups, was so alarmed he issued a statement condemning Petraeus' testimony, asserting in part of it:

Gen. Petraeus has simply erred in linking the challenges faced by the U.S. and coalition

forces in the region to a solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict, and blaming extremist activities on the absence of peace and the perceived U.S. favoritism for Israel. This linkage is dangerous and counterproductive.

What Foxman and other Israel lobbyists understood correctly was that Petraeus was articulating a view that is increasingly common within the US establishment, but is an absolute taboo when it comes to stating it publicly: that US “interests” and Israeli “interests” are not identical, and that Israel might be a strategic burden, rather than an asset to the United States.

But while Foxman fulminated, Petraeus’ view struck a chord with at least some in Israel. A few months after Petraeus spoke to the Senate, Israel’s Mossad chief Meir Dagan, told a Knesset committee that, “Israel is gradually turning from an asset to the United States to a burden.”

Of course Obama appointed Petraeus as CIA director after he made his Senate statement about Israel. And that too might have been a count against Obama in the false Republican and ultra-Zionist narrative that Obama threw Israel under the bus.

Petraeus was not speaking from any love of the Palestinians, nor any position of principle or concern for justice – no one should make that mistake. He was speaking from the same cold calculation of how to maintain and advance US imperial domination that allowed him to oversee – on behalf of the president – wars, occupations and murders of children and teenagers and other civilians all over the world using drones. That is precisely what scared the Israel lobby.

*Ali Abunimah, Co-founder of The Electronic Intifada, and author of One Country: A Bold-Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse.*

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