

IF AMERICANS KNEW

Iraq, Palestine, and the Israel Lobby

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Connecting the dots: IRAQ & PALESTINE

The Israeli lobby and the Iraq War

By Mazin Qumsiyeh

The tour around the country by Cindy Sheehan, a team of veterans, and family members of veterans is covering lots of ground in 21 days. On Sunday, they spoke in Boston, Providence, New Haven, and NYC. In New Haven, we had a crowd of over 1000 (largest ever for an anti-war rally here). Now hundreds of thousands will converge on Washington DC this weekend to expose government lies and demand money for jobs and education not for wars and occupations. Like local events, many speakers will draw the links between Iraq and Palestine (e.g. >\$250 billion to Israel. 200 billion to Iraq) and some side events will relate to Palestine*. Some will not like even these moderate connections. But some will especially react strongly if there is any mention of the organic links between the war on Iraq and the war on Palestine.

To me the most interesting misinformation disseminated both among some in the left and the right is that US foreign policy in Iraq and in supporting Israel's destruction of Palestine are merely related to US "strategic interests." They may differ in their formulation of the main US "interests", but you hear the same argument from leftists like Noam Chomsky and Stephen Zunes and rightists like Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle.

This mistaken notion in fact was pushed and articulated by the Israeli lobby and Israeli apologists in the media for decades well before neocons and some leftists adopted it. The Israeli lobby in Washington was never monolithic and knew that to be effective it had to get into both major parties in the US. The lobby knew that the best way to advance a closer working relationship with the right would be to insert the concept that Israel is a good and willing "tool" for advancing US interests. Such a formulation helps deflect criticism from patriotic Americans who worry about the growing

influence of this lobby. On the other side, left leaning Zionists wanted to work with a democratic left that occasionally complained about "US Imperialism" and corporate interests. In that case, it was easier to claim Israel helps US public interests or that Israel is a democratic ally. When push comes to shove, even Zionists on the left would deflect any critique of the Zionist lobby, claiming that criticism should be solely directed to the masters (corporate or other elites) who merely "use" Israel as a tool.

Senator Fullbright, Congressman Paul Findley, Jesse Jackson, Admiral Moorer, Jeff Blankfort, Alison Weir, and hundreds of others have articulated in books and articles why the Israeli lobby's formulation (whether cast in left or right angles) is at best misleading and at worst false and dangerous.

Clearly, those conscientious critics come at it from very different angles. Some argued that elites and those in power in the US can and have used Israel occasionally as a gopher, but that this was a net loss for US elite interests. Israel's role as intermediary in the Iran Contra scandal is now well known even though at the time the Congressional Record referred simply to a "third country." It is also well known that Congressional prohibition on assassination and other basic human rights violations by US forces are "bypassed" by the executive branch relying on Israel to do so. But could such tasks have been accomplished by other puppet countries even cheaper and without hurting US interests in the Arab and Islamic world?

Other critics argued that the US showed it was very adept at finding other puppets when they need them: after the fall of the Shah's regime in Iran, the US supported Baathist Iraq and Saddam Hussain – and this was especially profitable since most of the money for Saddam did not come directly from the US but from US other puppet regimes in the oil rich Arab Gulf States. But then Saddam wanted to support the Palestinians and wanted to build a strong country (the rest as you know is history). They argued that history shows that the return on investment simply would not bode well for the disingenuous argument of people like Noam Chomsky that Israel is simply a wholly owned subsidiary of US imperialism.

Yet other critics pointed out the alienation of 1.3 billion Muslims and hundreds of millions of Christians engendered by US support of Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Clearly this can't be in the interests of any segment in American society. Two thirds of the nine mil-

lion Palestinians are now refugees and displaced people. Defending this indefensible behavior is difficult. Supporting it with billions of taxpayer money and US diplomatic and military power is even more difficult. So a concerted media campaign and strategy was needed to create the illusion that Israel is a strategic asset to US "interests".

The elephant in the room that is being hidden by this fig leaf is the same pervasive Zionist lobby in the US that has pushed the argument for the fig leaf. According to *Ha'aretz*, Israel was really the only country to whole-heartedly push for the war in Iraq. Since the Israeli lobby is the most powerful foreign lobby in the US and is rated as among the top 5 most powerful lobbies in DC overall, it would be a legitimate question to ask what this lobby was doing in the months and years leading up to the Iraq war and what (if any) influence does it have. I think even a cursory review of the articles written in newspapers or "studies" done by think tanks would be sufficient to answer that question. Israeli apologists in these influential think tanks and in major editorial and columnist positions in mainstream media pushed for the war. **But there were a few Israeli apologists who either stayed silent on the war or even opposed it. This latter group became active in the anti-war movement but wanted to make sure that there is no linkage between Iraq and Palestine. They reacted vociferously and sometimes violently when writers brought up the role of the Israeli lobby and its extensions in pushing for the war on Iraq.**

There are attempts to hide the evolution and increasing strength of this lobby in the US (and before that in British imperial designs in the Middle East). So let us review a few examples of how this lobby operated over the years and even challenged imperial interests on some occasions.

1) In 1930 after career British diplomats issued a governmental backed white paper suggesting tying Jewish immigration to Palestine to Palestinian economic interests not just the Yishuv capacity, all hell broke loose. Weissman and other British Zionists mobilized their forces en masse and the effort succeeded in reversing this policy quickly (well discussed in Tom Segev's excellent book on this period).

2) When there was strong sentiment in the US to help European Jews fleeing Nazi Germany, the Zionist lobby both in Britain and the US lobbied to limit Jewish immigration to the west and keep the door open only for one

destination: Palestine (see Naeim Giladi's book "Ben Gurion Scandals" and Lenni Brenner's "51 Documents: History of the Nazi-Zionist collaboration).

3) When the State Department, the Pentagon, and all major career diplomats in the US stood against support for establishment of Israel, President Truman explained his decision to his cabinet (privately) very clearly as relating to the lobby and voting adding that "I have no Arab constituency" (Truman papers and many history books). The US went on to twist the arms of other countries to support partition and imposing of a Jewish state on Palestine.

4) When Israeli forces attacked the USS Liberty in International waters in 1967, the White House, aided by Congress, pushed the Navy to hide the facts. Senior Navy officers (and all survivors of the attack) were angry but could do nothing in the face of a concerted media silencing campaign. Even in 2003 when new evidence emerged little is reported on it (see <http://www.usliberty.org/>)

5) When George Bush received a barrage of media questions in a press conference in 1991 (after Baker earned the ire of the lobby by suggesting linking expending in growing settlements with foreign aid), **Bush uttered his famous line: "I am only this little guy in the white house there are these thousands on Capital Hill..."** So much for the grand leader of the Military/Industrial complex. Bush and Baker backed down and building went on to increase the number of colonists/settlers on occupied Palestinian areas from <200,000 in 1991 to over 450,000 in 2000. This was the main reason for the collapse of the peace process and increased resentment and anger in the world.

6) President Clinton brought to high office people who were previously employed by the various Israeli lobby groups. Dennis Ross who worked for WIMEP then appointed as US Envoy to the Middle East and then returned to work for WINEP (see <http://www.activistsreader.com/articles%20folder/thinktankwatch-winep2.html>). Martin Indyk worked for AIPAC and to my knowledge is the only lobbyist for a foreign country ever appointed ambassador to that same foreign country. These folks and many others made clear their interest in merging US policy and Israeli policy. Thus it was not surprising that Clinton issued assurances saying that if the Camp David meetings fail, no one will be faulted. But even as negotiations continued in

Taba, Ross, Clinton, and Indyk blamed Arafat. The Clinton administration under influence of these lobbyists continued to support aggressive policy in Iraq and tried valiantly to thwart the International community (and US businesses) who pushed for letting go of the sanctions that were killing 6000 children every month.

7) **When GWB appointed people like Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, Douglas Feith, and Richard Perle to high offices, there was no questioning the affiliation of those folks to the Zionist lobby.** Cheney was for example on the board of the so called "Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs" (JINSA). Perle and Wolfowitz were active in Zionist think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute. Those are the folks who pushed for war on Iraq and their paper records show their rationing includes supporting Israel (<http://weekly.ahram.org/2004/706/op60.htm>).

There is a myth that weapons and oil industries support Israel. The fact is that most of the time Israeli/Zionist interests and those interests of weapons/oil companies are completely divergent. See http://www.ifamericansknew.org/us_ints/

In fact many argue that without the lobby, there would not be support for Israeli colonization nor for an illegal and illegitimate war on Iraq and certainly not from companies that are suffering because of this close relationship. Israel, in fact, is now directly competing with US weapons manufacturers in exporting high tech weapons (most of it made possible by US transfer of military technology and money to Israel). Congress and the White House frequently have had to interfere to protect Israel from any repercussions by its violations of US and international laws regarding proliferation, arms export, use of arms against civilians etc.

There were rare times when the lobby was not as powerful in pushing the myth of equivalency of US and Israeli interests. In 1956 President Eisenhower listened to career diplomats and US elites, and pressed for Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza and Sinai despite rumblings from Congress (itself influenced by the lobby). But any such minor resistance vanished after 1967 when the lobby pushed the idea that US weapons in Israeli hands are keeping the Soviets/Communism out of the Middle East (a lie because communism could never get a hold in Arab society).

Now do not misunderstand anything I said. It is misleading to say that

Israel rules US foreign policy. But it would be even more misleading to ignore the central role of this lobby in shaping US foreign policy in the Middle East and in building support by various means. Nor would it be fair to ignore the PR aimed at exaggerating the “strategic use” argument to outright misinformation about threats and responses to promoting a particular and false view of Christianity (“Christian Zionism”). For those of us interested in freedom and equality (i.e. human rights), it is simply not correct to try to ignore history and facts and accept the language of our oppressor. **It is playing into both Zionist and Imperial hands by accepting their claim that the reason for support of Israel (and for the war on Iraq) is a “strategic relationship” directed to serving only US elite interests (oil, military, and other corporate interests).**

Some Democrats believe the attack on Iraq was for corporate profits. Some Republicans believe it was WMD, defeating terrorism, and most lately bringing “democracy” and freedom. Many US TV and newspapers consider a discussion outside this permissible duality as taboo. But people are getting facts about the Israeli lobby from international media, books, and most importantly the Internet. This explains why an increasing number of Democrats, Republicans, Greens, and independents in the US asking some serious questions that go beyond this duality that misses so much. More people are realizing that without explaining the role of the Israeli lobby in pushing for this war, the story would be very incomplete at best, and misleading at worst.

Many within the lobby are also finally seeing the light and leaving that destructive work. Thousands of Jews are now openly speaking about the destructive power of the lobby. The ground is shifting as Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others who believe in human rights and do not support Zionism join hands not only to point out the elephant in the room but also to take the old elephant out of the room and to an overdue retirement.

The Debate that never happened: Blankfort vs. Plitnick on the Israel Lobby

Earlier this year, after publication of my critical article on Noam Chomsky in Left Curve,¹ I was asked by Khalil Bendib, a co-host of Voices of the Middle East and North Africa on Berkeley's KPFA radio station, if I would be interested in debating Mitchell Plitnick of the Berkeley-based Jewish Voice for Peace on the issue of the Israel Lobby. I said that I would be glad to but assured him that Plitnick would never agree to it. Even when he apparently had agreed to do so in his initial response, I was still convinced, and told Khalil, that he wouldn't do it, and I was proved correct. Khalil was then able to get Stephen Zunes to agree to come on the air with me and the debate was recorded on May 25 and broadcast on KPFA in two segments on the following two Wednesday nights².

Was it a coincidence that the night before the taping, Plitnick gave a talk on the subject in Berkeley? And was it another coincidence that this article appeared and was circulated on the internet very shortly afterward? I will leave the answer to that to the reader.

I have below, reprinted Plitnick's commentary, followed by my comments in bold face, section by section. I am sure you will understand, as you read along, why he was not anxious to debate and was determined to control what was said and printed.

- Jeffrey Blankfort

Commentary:

Myth and Reality: Jewish Influence on US Middle East Policy

By Mitchell Plitnick, Director of Policy and Education, Jewish Voice for Peace (annotated by Jeff Blankfort without permission of the author):

Plitnick: In working for a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict, we constantly bump into the fact that the powerful party is the state of one of history's most oppressed groups. Some get frustrated by always having to address anti-Semitism while working toward a just resolution to the plight of the Palestinians. But we're kidding ourselves if we believe for a moment that anti-Semitism is not an integral part of the problem.

Blankfort: That seems to be the role that Jewish Voice for Peace has assigned for itself, to make sure that the issue of anti-Semitism is never far from the minds of those engaged in fighting for justice for the Palestinians and where it can inhibit activists from targeting Jewish organizations and institutions that support Israeli policies, such as AIPAC, the ADL, the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish National Fund, and the Jewish Community Relations Councils, locally.

It is significant that the only publication issued by JVP to date was entitled, "Reframing Anti-Semitism," which sets the parameters it deems acceptable for criticizing Israel, e.g., only specific policies may be opposed and not Israel's existence as a Jewish state, and no link can be made connecting actions of the Israel lobby or the interests of Israel to the current war in Iraq. Regarding the former, what JVP is implying is that "anti-Zionism" equals "anti-Semitism," which is identical to the position of the Anti-Defamation League and the organized Jewish establishment.

It is that history which creates the fear and anger that drive many Israeli policies. And if we fail to recognize the legitimate fear that his-

tory has instilled in the Jewish people, we fail before we start.

Apparently, we must forget the issue of settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians Arabs that predated the Holocaust, forget the issue of house demolitions, torture of prisoners, administrative detentions and collective punishment. It has all been done out of fear and so, it seems, we must make allowances for Israel's crimes. For those who have not directly experienced oppression, the Zionist propaganda machine is around to make sure every Jew sees her or himself as a "victim," enabling them to eat their cake and have it, too.

When dealing with the question of US support for Israel's occupation, this awareness is especially critical. One of the classic anti-Semitic myths is that of Jews manipulating governments and other seats of power behind the scenes. That pretty closely describes the work of a lobby, and there is a powerful one, with a Jewish face, working to push particular policies regarding Israel. We need to understand that lobby, what its effect is, and what its nature is. That means asking, directly and fairly, is this a "Jewish lobby", and does this lobby truly have the power to be a tail wagging the dog of American Middle East policy?

Who is 'The Lobby'?

There is a real need to be clear about who "the Lobby" is. It is sometimes called "The Jewish lobby", which is inaccurate and misleading, and foments just the sort of conspiracy theorizing we must avoid. It implies that a population of 5.2 million Americans dictates a very crucial area of foreign policy to a nation of over 296 million.

The term, "The Jewish lobby" is how it is referred to, and not too favorably, in Israel's Hebrew Press, so perhaps, Plitnick should address that issue there. Here, it is generally referred to as the Israel Lobby or the pro-Israel Lobby, so Plitnick is creating a straw man. It is, however, fear of being labeled as an "anti-Semite" that people in the US do not emulate those in Israel. While a large pro-Israel constituency has grown in among certain evangelical Christians, it does not lobby politicians in

Washington as does AIPAC and other national Jewish organizations.

As for the lobby's ability to influence policy, in a speech given on the same subject on May 24th, Plitnick answered that question:

"The lobby doesn't have the power to make policy, but it has the power to block any change in policy"

If that doesn't sound like it has the ability to shape policy, exactly what does Plitnick mean?

Former State Department staffer, Stephen Green, described the situation accurately in his classic *Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations with Militant Israel*, when he wrote, "Israel, and friends of Israel in America, have determined the broad outlines of US policy in the region. It has been left to American presidents to implement that policy, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and to deal with the tactical issues."

In fact, it is only a segment of that 5.2 million US Jews that are involved—a third, at best—but it is highly organized. Politicians of both political parties who have been its victims, as well as historians who studied the subject, attest to the control that the lobby exerts over both Houses of Congress and there is ample factual evidence to back them up.

The face and voice of the lobby is Jewish, because Jews are the most sympathetic and most passionate about this cause. But the votes that the lobby can deliver are not Jewish votes. Christian Zionist groups, numbering some 20 million strong, having their biggest strengths in areas where there are few or no Jews, and also voting at high rates, give the lobby its voting power. This is why many of the most radical bills in Congress are brought by members from Bible Belt states with virtually no Jews in them.

Long before the Christian Zionists emerged as a political force, the lobby, directed by AIPAC, was already dictating policy to Congress and staffers from the AIPAC office were writing the critical legislation that would set US Middle East policy. The Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration and Syrian Accountability Act was one of its more recent

accomplishments. While the Christian Zionists supply votes in states where there is a small Jewish population, the Senators and House members from those states are high on the list of recipients of funding from pro-Israel Jewish donors and PACs.

In the 2004 spending cycle alone, representing states without large Jewish populations, the following senators were 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th, respectively on the list of pro-Israel PAC contributions: Harry Reid, (D-NV) 66,499; Samuel Brownback, (R-KS) 61,350; Evan Bayh, (D-IN) 59,000; Brad Carson, (D-OK) 58,600, and Robert Bennett, (R-UT) 57,250.

As for Jewish votes not being important, tell that to the shades of Harry Truman and LBJ among others. While the Jewish population is relatively tiny, the percentage of Jews who vote is not, and they tend to live in key states where their votes can determine the outcome of an election, such as New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and California.

These two groups can mobilize votes and sympathy. They can mobilize some significant money as well, but nothing like what major corporations can raise. Corporations, which have enormous lobbying networks and many ways of funneling perfectly legal contributions to favored candidates, and who are involved in the sale of military and hi-tech equipment, derive huge benefits from the ongoing state of hostility in the region.

The reason that the pro-Israel lobby has to give so much more money to the politicians than the other lobbies such as arms manufacturers, oil, etc., is that supporting Israel is arguably not in the US interest from any perspective and the contributions are necessary to buy the politicians' cooperation. If Plitnick and JVP were to be believed, one would conclude that all the Black members of Congress who refused to support Israel for its arms sales to South Africa secretly supported apartheid, and that those members of Congress who opposed US policies in Central America but kept silent about Israel's role in arming some of the most murderous regimes on the planet, were, in fact, secretly supporting them.

One must also ask why is it always possible to criticize a US pres-

ident on the floor of Congress but never an Israeli prime minister?

Massive tax dollars flow to American corporations from aid to many countries in the Middle East, of which the annual aid to Israel is only one part. Israel receives by far the most aid, and 75% of all the aid must be spent with American corporations. Many Middle Eastern countries spend considerable money over and above the subsidies they receive from the US on American weapons and military technology.

The major arms purchaser in the Middle East does not get subsidies from the US; its purchases help keep the arms industry alive. As far as the arms sales to other Middle East countries go, does anyone seriously think those sales would not be taking place if Israel did not exist?

Jews in the Forefront.

Just as we must not lose sight of the fact that Jewish "shadow control" is an old canard of anti-Semitism, we must also recognize that asking why American policy takes the form it does is a legitimate question. The fact that AIPAC, the ADL, B'nai Brith, the Conference of Presidents and other Jewish organizations work hard to convey to politicians and others that Jews have a large amount of power cannot be ignored. Jews' actual political power, while considerable relative to our numbers, is easily dwarfed by more powerful sectors of American society, such as Christian groups and large corporations.

This is one of Big Lies that groups like JVP and those who would have us believe the lobby is little more than a cheering section continue to circulate. They would like us to believe that it really a perception of power, rather than real political power that gives the lobby its strength. Those who work and live in Washington know better. There it is so intimidating that it is simply known as "the lobby." There is a good reason why half of the members of Congress and the leaders of both parties in the Senate and the House show up for its annual conferences.

Jews contribute a great deal of money to campaigns, but it is overwhelmingly given to Democrats and a great portion of it comes from wealthy Jews who historically have shown little attachment to Israel, but great attachment to the liberal-leaning ideals of the Democrats. Jewish contributions have never been based solely on Israel, and are less so now than they have been in the past.

Plitnick, of course, offers no evidence for this last statement. Jewish donors not only dominate the lists of major donors to both parties, the sums they give are equal or almost equal to those donated by non-Jews.

In 2002, an Israeli-American, Haim Saban, donated \$12.3 million to the Democratic Party. All of the arms industry PACs together gave \$14 million to both political parties the same year. It was headlines when Enron was reported to have given the Republican Party \$6 million over 10 years, but the item on Saban's donation—twice as much in only one year—rated only a few paragraphs in the NY Times. Moreover, Mother Jones 400 list of the leading individual donors for the 2000 election showed that 8 of the top 10 were Jews, and 13 of the top 20, and at least 125 of the top 250 were Jewish. At that point I stopped counting. While these donors obviously had other interests besides Israel, "There's only one thing members [of Congress] think is important to American Jews—Israel," Sen. Bernard Metzenbaum, told the 500 delegates to the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council in 1991 (Forward, 2/22/91).

AIPAC clearly played a pivotal role in its early days in the defeat of Illinois Representative Paul Findley and Senator Chuck Percy. However, claims of their influence on subsequent defeats of other members of Congress such as Pete McCloskey, Earl Hilliard and Cynthia McKinney, as well as other public officials such as Adlai Stevenson and George Ball are much more dubious. It is the reputation that matters politically, and AIPAC certainly has that. But their actual ability to determine the fate of particular candidates has been

greatly exaggerated, not least by AIPAC's supporters and activists.

Here, Plitnick is clearly doing "damage control" for the lobby. Again, AIPAC's reputation is based on its ability to do what it sets out to do. As one unnamed Congressman told Morton Kondracke in 1989, "it's not out of any affection for Israel that there is no debate on aid. If there was a secret ballot, aid to Israel would be cut severely. But no one wants to wake up the next morning and have an opponent who has received a \$500,000 war chest to run against you."

Jews play a major role in American politics. Jews vote, give to campaigns and, as a group, are as active as anyone in the American political scene. But it is a huge mistake, and rooted in anti-Semitic mythology, to believe that Israel is more of a focus than many domestic issues for someone simply because they are Jewish. Nor is it true that all major Jewish contributors hold the same line on Israel, or even make Israel a priority. But the leading lobbyists for Israel are Jewish, a relatively small number of Jews activate much of the grass roots, and Jews are the ones who deal first and foremost with the media, with politicians and with public appearances. This allows supporters of Israel's policies to blur the line between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism.

While American Jews as individuals have other issues that they support, the organized Jewish establishment has only one issue and that is Israel. They may differ over various Israeli policies but they are united in their desire to maintain strong US financial and military support for Israel.

Further, when it comes to Congress, the biggest reason AIPAC is so successful is that there is no serious opposition. Elected officials see no political capital to be gained by voting against the wishes of the many constituents they hear from favoring unconditional support of Israeli policies and who enclose checks along with their comments. It's not that they don't believe that other voters would agree with them if they voted against the wishes of the pro-occupation lobby; it's that they

see no evidence that they would gain votes and support, while they are getting a message that voting against AIPAC's wishes will cost votes and support.

There is opposition, such as the Council for the National Interest, made up of former victims of the lobby such as ex- Congressmen Findley and McCloskey, and former State Dept. diplomats but since JVP's view, promulgated most notably by Professors Noam Chomsky and Stephen Zunes dominates "the left," it gets no support from the progressive movement and, predictably, is frequently, and unfairly accused of being "anti-Semitic."

But while Congress controls the purse strings, actual policy is not formed in Congress. Foreign policy is generally the purview of the Executive branch. Israel has cemented a "special relationship" with the US that has meant enormous foreign aid, unprecedented diplomatic protection and an American blind eye to many Israeli actions. This is rooted in policy formation, not in Congress.

It is a matter of record that every bill deals with US Middle East policy originates in Congress and it is no secret that any piece of legislation that will affect Israel is either written by an AIPAC staffer or vetted by one before it even "goes to committee" at which an AIPAC representative will invariably be present.

Why then does Israel seem to get so much of what it wants from the US?

Polls consistently indicate that Americans support Israel, but do not agree with many Israeli actions and do not believe the US should be as biased toward Israel as it is.

When George Bush the First called a press conference and told the American people that he was trying to stop Israel from getting \$10 billion in loan guarantees in 1991 and informed the public how much each Israeli was getting from the American taxpayers, the polls showed that 85% of the public agreed with him and several weeks later, by a 46 to

44 % margin, they were for halting all aid to Israel. Whenever the American public is told the truth about Israel, it's so-called popularity among Americans has gone down. Even now, a number of PR firms are busily at work, trying to prop up Israel's declining image.

The clearly dictatorial styles of governments in Egypt, Syria, Iraq under Saddam and Saudi Arabia, to name a few, contrast for Americans with Israel's more developed democratic institutions. Israel in many ways looks like a European country. And for most Americans, the idea of a Jewish Israel is a familiar and comfortable one. In the post-Holocaust world, Israel has had decades of sympathy.

This was true but the gloss has worn off and more Americans are beginning to see Israel for what it is, a nation that believes it is above international law and can do what it wishes when it wishes where it wishes.

Arab-Americans were, until recently, a small and largely invisible community. All this creates an atmosphere where many Americans, including decision-makers, have long been disposed toward Israel.

They are disposed towards Israel because "decision-makers" gravitate to where the power lies, and in virtually every aspect of American culture and politics, it lies very heavily with Jews.

But decision makers work within the framework of what they perceive as the "national interest." US geo-strategic interest in a strong Israel has been considerable for a long time. The idea that after WWII the US or any other major power would allow independent Arab governments to emerge and control their own oil resources is simply not credible.

What role has Israel played in this? Whenever there was a crisis, we have seen US troops, not Israelis.

Throughout the years of the Cold War, Israel was an indispensable ally for the US. It served, after 1967, as what former Secretary of State and NATO forces commander Alexander Haig called "the largest American aircraft carrier in the world." It stood with the US in supporting Apartheid South Africa; was the ally the US turned to when it needed help facilitating the Iran-Contra deal; provided enormous support to US intelligence in covert operations, particularly in Central America; and continued to stand fast as a fundamental defense against Arab nationalism, protecting friendly regimes as it did in Jordan in 1970.

Haig was a megalomaniac. His statement is meaningless without substance. Israel supported South Africa because it saw its mirror image in the apartheid state, "a European population trying to stave off the mobs of indigenous natives." Every arms deal it made in Central America and elsewhere it did in its own interest. Again, does Plitnick really believe those congress members who opposed the US intervention in Central America and apartheid in South Africa but who remained silent when Israel was involved in both areas, were only kidding us? That Ron Dellums, who dropped a measure from the anti-apartheid legislation that would have cost Israel \$800 million for its arms sales to South Africa, was a secret supporter of the apartheid regime? That, in essence, is what he is implying. Warning Syria against siding with the Palestinians who were being massacred by King Hussein in 1970 was done in its interest and required no action on Israel's part..

Like many of the decisions of the superpowers in those years, whether or not this was the right course for US interests is debatable.

Does he mean that there were arguments supporting apartheid, Iran-Contra, etc?

There were many misadventures during the Cold War, and often these were not just tactical errors, but the natural result of ill-con-

ceived policies and political theories (dominoes, anyone?) Still, a wide spectrum of opinion in the Cold War years saw Israel as a key, if not THE key US asset. This did not stop all internal (rarely public) debate over how to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict. But the starting point was always that Israel was a key ally and asset.

It behooves Plitnick to back up such a statement with evidence, but like the rest of this article it is opinion without fact. If there was an asset in the region it was Turkey, home to US air bases targeting the USSR, and until the revolution, many thought Iran. In Asia, the Philippines was more valuable as a base for actions in Vietnam

The end of the Cold War coincided, in essence, with the beginning of the Oslo Process. In this new era, the national interest argument is much less clear. Overt Israeli action on behalf of US interests is less viable. Still, much that made many American planners fawn over Israel during the Cold War remains true. Israel provides unqualified support for the occupation of Iraq. It saves American corporations billions every year in research and development by acting as a testing ground for American weapons and other technology, as well as by facilitating sales of American-made weapons all around the world.

It saves US corporations billions? Please Plitnick, show us the evidence. As to "facilitating sales of American-made weapons," this is nonsense, but a lie that one frequently hears from Zionists engaged in doing "damage control" for Israel. Israel is *competing* with US for weapons sales around the world and are now upset that Israel has been selling weapons to China, incorporating US technology, which has caused a rift with elements in the Bush Administration.

But above all, Israel remains a Western outpost in the Middle East, one run by people of European descent who are not Muslim. There is just no danger that Israel will ever go the way of that once "loyal" country, Iran, as Turkey, for example, someday could.

There is a danger that it will use its nuclear weapons, however, and just what does "a Western outpost" really mean? Just another cliché in an article replete with clichés.

The Palestinians continue to offer little to US geo-political interests. There is no way of knowing what a future that includes Palestinian self-determination would hold. The idea that popular hostility toward the US would virtually disappear in such a future is dubious; without Palestine, many other issues, including US support for some of the worst dictatorships in the region for decades, would still be there. The main concern remains: ensuring that Arab resources are primarily used to benefit Western powers, not the Arab people.

The Neocons

This era has also seen the rise of the neoconservatives and their institutions. While Jews are certainly prominent among the neocons, the perception that neocon and Jew are synonymous is an extreme exaggeration.

The neo-con movement has been a Jewish movement from the beginning, which started with Carl Gershman at the National Endowment for Democracy, and Tom Kahn, with the AFL-CIO's Department of International Affairs, with Richard Perle working for Henry Jackson, with Norman Podhoretz, Michael Ledeen Irving Kristol, Douglas Feith, and on and on. One can count the number of non-Jewish neo-cons virtually on both hands.

Again, when it comes to Israel and the Middle East more generally, Jews are the face, in order to capitalize on people's sympathy for a history of anti-Semitism. But prominent neocons (if we define neocon by their views and policies rather than whether or not they are Jewish or whether or not they were once leftists) include Richard Armitage, Bill Bennett, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, James Woolsey, Robert Bork, Lewis Libby, Lynne Cheney, Newt Gingrich and Ed Meese.

Whatever the politics of Bork and Meese, they are not active around foreign policy, nor is Bill Bennett and Fitzpatrick has had her day. Check out the PNAC list.

When it comes to Mideast policy, neocons have gotten a strong foothold at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, though they do not dominate it. But on this issue, WINEP does work with neocon institutions as well as more mainstream ones. WINEP has great influence on policy formation and maintains the intellectual foundation of a policy that is based on Israel being the key to US influence in the region.

Why doesn't Plitnick tell us that WINEP is a creature of AIPAC, established as its think tank arm which provides it with direct access to the US media. That the neocons do not control it is irrelevant. It is 100% pro-Israel.

Current support for Israeli policies is the result of an entrenched foreign policy, and an aversion to taking a risk on a new one. This combines with the comfort level of decision-makers with fellow Caucasians, keeping a sort of "white male network" in place.

I am not sure that Israelis are viewed as fellow Caucasians, but Plitnick is apparently desperate for justifications for US support for Israel.

But the basic themes remain the same: the goal is Western control of Arab oil. Israel is a unique ally in that it stands by the US no matter what, and faces little domestic opposition when it does so, unlike England for example.

What does Israel have to do with Western control of Arab oil other than it wants some of it and that, at least partly, what the US invasion of Iraq, was all about. No Israeli soldier has ever lifted a finger in behalf of US interests. There are quite a few Brits who have been stupid

enough to have done so.

It provides deterrence; it provides testing for new American technology and facilitates weapons and hi-tech sales all over the world; and it is neither an unstable dictatorship like Saudi Arabia, nor could it ever have a government that would turn against its benefactor.

Again, it does not sell US weapons around the world. Not a Big Lie but an important one that folks like Plitnick, like Stephen Zunes, keep repeating.

American policy depends on the popularity of Israel in the US. The "almighty lobby" still needs to devote huge resources to PR to maintain that. Its power, as formidable as it is, is largely based in public perception of its strength and the absence of serious opposition. Its effects are mostly felt in the stifling of debate on the question of Israel, among the intellectual elites, in Congress and in the mainstream media.

If the lobby is able to do that, as Plitnick concedes here, we're not talking about perceptions of strength but the real thing. Control Congress and the media and the policy will follow.

Policy continues to be decided by a perception of US interests, and the mainstream of that perception continues to see Israel as the key to US influence in the Middle East. Jews can be found on both sides of that debate.

Anyone reading this essay should wonder what side Plitnick is on.

The myth of the powerful lobby intimidates and disempowers many people. But the idea that policy is decided in halls of inscrutable power is equally disempowering. The fact is there is a way for us to change American policy. We, as supporters of a just peace have largely abdicated this ground, and we need to reclaim it.

The first thing that was abdicated was recognizing the truth and in this "essay," Plitnick continues to suggest the movement maintain the same "head in sand" policy that has led us to this point.

We need to mobilize ourselves and our neighbors. Speak to Congresspeople, even the ones who seem overtly hostile to us. Write to newspapers, meet with their editors. We need to let representatives know we will vote for them only if they approach the Middle East fairly. We need to rally our neighbors and put our money where our ideals are. We need to articulate a reasoned, balanced and coherent alternative to current policy. We need to prove that we are as motivated for justice and peace as our adversaries are for what they believe in. If we can't do that, we don't deserve to win. Similarly, if we can't plead our case as one that is in favor of the rights of all the people of the region, as one that acknowledges and honors the history of anti-Semitism that has brought about the support for the deplorable occupation and dehumanization of the Palestinians, then we also don't deserve to win.

I am not sure who Plitnick means by "we," but it is the Palestinians who have had their land stolen from them, not the Israelis and not American Jews. But there we have it, back to the beginning, lest we forget, honoring, no less, "the history of anti-Semitism."

I have seen much of this movement over the years. It is clear to me that we can mount the case we need to mount, one where Israelis and Palestinians are treated as equals, as people with much tragedy in their historical consciousness. But we haven't done it yet. Now is the time to start.

What Jews have in their consciousness is one thing and subject to debate. What the Palestinians have as their reality is quite another. With friends like Plitnick that reality does not promise to get any better.

And I fully understand why he was not willing to debate me, as I predicted beforehand.

Booklets available from If Americans Knew

The Origin of the Palestine-Israel Conflict	Do Palestinians Teach Their Children to Hate?
Rachel's Letters	The Information Blockade: The Prism Between Middle Eastern Reality and Americans
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American Media Miss the Boat	Israeli Attacks on the US Navy and Marines
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Serving Two Flags: Neo-Cons, Israel and the Bush Administration	Being a Target: Reports from Gaza & 'Close your organization or die...'
Reflecting on our Relationship with Israel	A Rose by Another Name: The Bush Administration's Dual Loyalties
Living With the Holocaust: A Child of Holocaust Survivors Visits Palestine	The People Who Pushed for War
Censored: Israel and Palestine	Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel
Christians in the Holy Land	Christians Discriminated Against by Israel
Let Us Rethink Our 'Special Relationship' With Israel	Einstein's Letter to the New York Times
Special Report: Israel's Treatment of Americans	Jewish Defense League Unleashes Campaign of Violence in America
The Cost of Israel to U.S. Taxpayers	Life in a Palestinian Refugee Camp
The Israel Lobby and the Left: Uneasy Questions	Biased Thinktanks Dictate US Foreign Policy
Pressure on Campus: Interest groups successfully stifling academic discourse	Stealing Success Tel Aviv Style
	A War for Israel

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In a democracy, the ultimate responsibility for a nation's actions rests with its citizens. The top rung of government - the entity with the ultimate power of governance - is the asserted will of the people. Therefore, in any democracy, it is essential that its citizens be fully and accurately informed.

In the United States, currently the most powerful nation on earth, it is even more essential that its citizens receive complete and undistorted information on topics of importance, so that they may wield their extraordinary power with wisdom and intelligence.

Unfortunately, such information is not always forthcoming.

The mission of If Americans Knew is to inform and educate the American public on issues of major significance that are unreported, underreported, or misrepresented in the American media.

It is our belief that when Americans know the facts on a subject, they will, in the final analysis, act in accordance with morality, justice, and the best interests of their nation, and of the world. With insufficient information, or distorted information, they may do the precise opposite.

It is the mission of If Americans Knew to ensure that this does not happen - that the information on which Americans base their actions is complete, accurate, and undistorted by conscious or unconscious bias, by lies of either commission or omission, or by pressures exerted by powerful special interest groups. It is our goal to supply the information essential to those responsible for the actions of the strongest nation on earth - the American people.

Iraq, Palestine, and the Israel Lobby

"The most interesting misinformation is that US foreign policy in Iraq and in supporting Israel's destruction of Palestine is in the US 'strategic interest.'"

- Mazin Qumsiyeh

"The reason that the pro-Israel lobby has to give so much more money to the politicians than the other lobbies, is that supporting Israel is not in the US interest, and the contributions are necessary to buy the politicians' cooperation."

- Jeffrey Blankfort

Mazin Qumsiyeh, a former professor at Yale University School of Medicine, is widely acknowledged as an expert on Palestinian refugee rights. He is author of *Sharing the Land of Canaan: a vision based on human rights for Israelis and Palestinians*, which explores the history and current efforts towards creating a pluralistic democracy in Israel/Palestine.

Jeffrey Blankfort was raised in a Jewish non-Zionist family. He produces radio programs on three stations and has written extensively on the Middle East. In February 2002, he won a lawsuit against the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which was found to have had a vast spying operation directed against American citizens opposed to Israel's policies in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza and to South African apartheid.