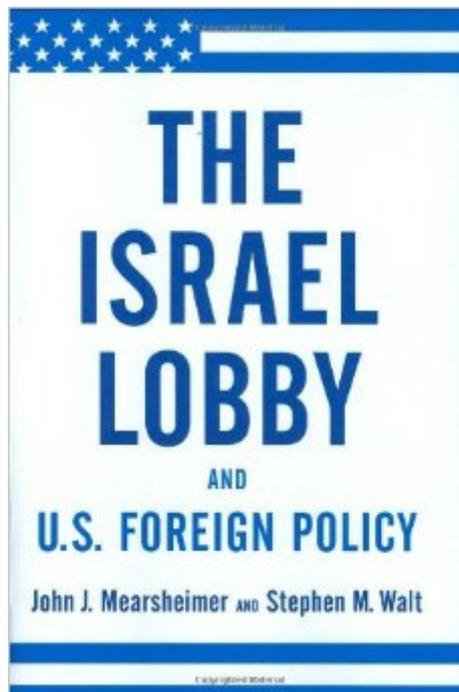


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The Israel Lobby And U.S. Foreign Policy



Synopsis

"The Israel Lobby," by John J. Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen M. Walt of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, was one of the most controversial articles in recent memory. Originally published in the London Review of Books in March 2006, it provoked both howls of outrage and cheers of gratitude for challenging what had been a taboo issue in America: the impact of the Israel lobby on U.S. foreign policy. Now in a work of major importance, Mearsheimer and Walt deepen and expand their argument and confront recent developments in Lebanon and Iran. They describe the remarkable level of material and diplomatic support that the United States provides to Israel and argues that this support cannot be fully explained on either strategic or moral grounds. This exceptional relationship is due largely to the political influence of a loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively work to shape U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. Mearsheimer and Walt provocatively contend that the lobby has a far-reaching impact on America's posture throughout the Middle East--in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict--and the policies it has encouraged are in neither America's national interest nor Israel's long-term interest. The lobby's influence also affects America's relationship with important allies and increases dangers that all states face from global jihadist terror. Writing in The New York Review of Books, Michael Massing declared, "Not since Foreign Affairs magazine published Samuel Huntington's 'The Clash of Civilizations?' in 1993 has an academic essay detonated with such force." The publication of The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy is certain to widen the debate and to be one of the most talked-about books of the year.

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Customer Reviews

This book is stunning. The two authors are prominent political scientists with impeccable credentials, hailing from Harvard and the University of Chicago. They have boldly gone where many of their academic colleagues would fear to tread. Although their conclusions about Israel and its negative influence on American foreign policy will awaken much anxiety, resentment and fury in certain quarters, Walt and Mearsheimer don't seem to care. Why not? They are scientists. They appeal to logic, facts and common sense; and let the conclusions fall where they may. The writing is calm, dispassionate, thorough. The basic argument is that the extraordinarily high degree of economic, military and diplomatic support given to Israel by the United States cannot be explained or justified by the notion that Israel functions as a strategic asset to the U.S., or that Israel as the "only democracy" amidst a sea of authoritarian neighbors is deserving of special favor for its "shared interests and values". In fact, the authors claim, Israel is more a liability than an asset. During the Cold War, the strategic-value argument had perhaps some plausibility -- but no longer. What has replaced the Soviet menace, as the enemy which the U.S. supposedly needs Israel's help to combat, is Islamic terrorism. But the U.S. favor shown to Israel at the expense of the Palestinians only makes us more not less vulnerable to terrorism. Furthermore Israel's cruelty towards the Palestinians and its essential nature as a Jewish but not a truly democratic state in which all citizens of whatever ethnicity or religion would be given equal rights and respect, belie the "shared values" argument. So if neither "shared values" nor "strategic asset" can explain the overwhelming U.S. support of Israel, what else is there? The power of the Israel lobby, which has brought about a situation in which it is impossible for elected officials to question support for Israel, much less redirect foreign policy in any way contrary to the perceived self-interest of Israel. This has led the U.S. to make critical mistakes, such as invading and occupying Iraq. The war on Iraq has proven disastrous; the authors argue that the U.S. would not have attacked Iraq, were it not for the influence of the Israel lobby. In the end, perhaps what is most significant and remarkable about this book is that it has seen the light of day. It got published. Could it be that there is still hope for reasonable, open debate about the right courses of action in the Middle East? The authors have been and will continue to be vilified as anti-Semitic or worse. They are owed a debt of gratitude for having the courage to stand up and to refuse to be silenced.

This year has witnessed an amazing phenomenon. More accomplished Americans are willing to

question United States blind support for the State of Israel. Recently we have seen books out by President Jimmy Carter, Grant Smith, Professor Petras and full-page placements in newspapers questioning the American Israel Political Actions Committee placed by the Council for the National Interest Foundation. I suspect the major reason behind this is the Iraq War. As one digs deeper in why this war occurred and who were the major advocates a deeply troubling theme emerges. The chief architects and advocates of this war were also what Pat Buchanan terms "Israel Firsters." These are Americans who have conflated American interests with those of Israel's. I urge all readers to do a search on Scooter Libby, Paul Wolfowitz, Elliot Abrams, Bill Kristol, Doug Feith, Richard Perle, etc. and investigate their financial and political ties to Israel. I think the reader will be astonished. I suspect that Professors Mearsheimer and Walt did just as I did and were both outraged and troubled by what they discovered. Moreover, the recent efforts by the same cabal that manipulated a rather dull President into invading Iraq are up to their same tricks again by lobbying for war against Iran and Syria. Hence the book; "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy." This study is both timely and critical. The authors published a brief last year that examined the Israel lobby and its impact on U.S. Middle East policy. When the Atlantic Monthly cowardly reneged on their promise to publish the paper, they found refuge with the London Review of Books. Thank to the internet, the Lobby was not able to squelch their research. This paper has now circulated among millions of Americans. For this rather minor effort in questioning US-Israeli policy, they were subjected to slander, humiliation and threats. Faster than you could say AIPAC, the usual pro-Israel flacks, Dershowitz and Foxman, rolled out their worn out charge of anti-Semitism. I suspect if a dog's bark was construed as critical of Israel, Dershowitz and Foxman would be on the first morning talk show claiming the dog was an "anti-Semite!" I wish these two clowns would buy a thesaurus and find other words of insult. However, to their credit, Mearsheimer and Walt upped the ante and decided to publish a more detailed and documented book on the Israel Lobby. The book examines in detail the power that the Israel Lobby now has over U.S. Middle East policy- manifested in the extreme by the invasion of Iraq. The book is well documented with over 100 pages of notes and citations. It first examines the true financial costs of the American-Israel relationship- it should surprise no one that this is one way relationship- the U.S. taxpayers shovel out billions of dollars every year (now exceeding \$4 billion) getting little if anything in return. The authors then ask the critical question- is Israel a strategic asset or liability to the United States? Correctly they conclude that it has evolved into a major liability. The United States pays a high price for its blind support of Israeli policies. For example, take case of Lebanon. Though more than 25,000 American citizens were put in harms way by Israel's reckless brutal attack on Lebanon last year, I could count on one

hand any members of Congress that raised objections. In fact, our politicians behaved more like a herd of swine running to the microphones to be the first to praise Israel for its willful slaughter of more than 1,000 Lebanese civilians. It was surreal and it was disgusting. Later the authors document the contest between the Lobby and the Palestinian people. See President Carter's book for further discussion on the brutalization of the Palestinian people by Israel. They also describe how Israel routinely undermines American presidents- publicly humiliating them through their virtual control of Congress. They tell the story of how an AIPAC member bragged that within an hour he could have over 70 Senators sign whatever resolution he wrote on a napkin! They then warn us how the Lobby is attempting to again manipulate Washington into another senseless war- this time against Iran and Syria. Finally, they ask, "What is to be done?" They are skeptical whether a "counter lobby" would be effective. They instead put their trust in open debate and open discourse. This reflects their intrinsic belief that "the truth will set you free." However, I am not sure about this. It may be that with the arrival of the internet the distribution of information can no longer be controlled by the Lobby and its fellow travelers. However, the recent disgraceful case of Professor Finkelstein denial of tenure by De Paul University gives me pause. Thus, I am now of another school. Polite scholarly ways will not work against organizations such as AIPAC. I believe that the Israel Lobby now represents an existential threat to the security of the United States. The Lobby's objectives are to engage the United States in perpetual confrontation and war in the Middle East solely to advance the interests of a foreign power- Israel. This requires an offensive response as aggressive as that of the Israel Lobby in its efforts to silence scholars such as Mearsheimer and Walt. Who, if nothing else, deserve the admiration of all patriotic Americans. Additionally, readers are referred to "Foreign Agents- The American Israel Public Affairs Committee from the 1963 Fulbright Hearings to the 2005 Espionage Scandal" by Grant Smith; "The Power of Israel in the United States" by James Petras; "They Dare to Speak Out" by Paul Findley.

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