



Mehmet Talaykurt

Position of the Israel Lobby in the United States' Political System

Influences of the Israel Lobby on the U.S. Foreign and
Domestic Policy



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	1
Acknowledgments.....	2
CHAPTERS	
1.INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. SYSTEM OF THE ISRAEL LOBBY IN THE UNITED STATES.....	14
2.1 General Aspects of Lobbies as Political Actors.....	14
2.2 Organizational Structure and Power Reserves of the Israel Lobby.....	18
3. SUCESESSES AND FAILURES OF THE ISRAEL LOBBY IN AMERICAN ELECTIONS	32
3.1 Effects of the Israel Lobby on the United States' Political System	32
3.2 Successes and Failures of the Lobby Regarding Elected Branches.....	39
4. ISRAEL LOBBY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES' FOREIGN POLICY.....	50
4.1 Israel Lobby, Key U.S. Administrations, and the Main Policy Spheres...	51
4.2 Clinton Administration's Correspondence With the Israel Lobby.....	72
5. THE ISRAEL LOBBY AND THE UNITED STATES POLITICAL POSTURE DURING BUSH ADMINISTRATION.....	76
6. CONCLUSION.....	88
REFERENCES.....	94

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America and her political system have always symbolized a huge platform where the ethnic Diasporas and lobbies are freely acting in order to have an effect on the political attitude of the world's chief political actor. The Jewish Diaspora and its lobbying activities within the United States can be considered as one of the most important and effective examples or models of lobbying activities around the world together with the Israel lobby's implications on the United States' policies concerning the Middle East.

Settling on a topic in order to write a book is not an easy decision, because the creation of such an effort is a process that requires a huge amount of time and motivation. So, it is very important to choose a topic that inspires the writer. In other words, the Israel lobby's position in the United States and its effects on the United States' foreign policy regarding the Middle East can be considered as an area of study that is highly inspirational and motivating. This topic locates the book in a significant status among the literature dealing with such a contemporary and significant topic related with the vanishing line between the domestic political structures of countries and their foreign policies. Also, the validity of the topic of this study and its academic value for the field of international relations cannot be questioned since several mighty nongovernmental organizations, interest groups and their lobbying activities or interest politics are gaining more power and importance day by day in international political atmosphere.

In order to continue to analyze what reasons were behind the selection of this topic, the level of secrecy within the operation of the Israel lobby within the United States' political system should also be mentioned. For instance, a debate on the partially covert nature of the Israel lobby erupted in 2004 when it became known that Larry Franklin, a key Pentagon official, had provided confidential information to an Israeli diplomat who aided by two American-Israel Public Affairs Committee

(AIPAC) officials.¹ The example above is only a small indication regarding the level of contribution and pressure that the Israel lobby instigates within the United States' political system in order to promote the interests of Israel and make sure that the state of Israel has attained a significant or decisive value in the various calculations of the institutions responsible for the construction of the United States' foreign policy.

Israel lobby's effects on the United States' foreign policy regarding the Middle East cannot be explained in a simple way, because the discussion of this matter has very limited black and white parts, which are obvious. Instead, the majority of the discussion is related with the gray area where the power of the lobby and its influence on many foreign policy decisions are widely known but an exact proof or evidence is generally missing. This is the nature of the given topic, and writing on such topics is always interesting and investigative. In addition, evaluation, discussion, and analysis of such topics automatically provide the author a point of view that locates the author in one of the available sections within the literature on the same topic. For instance, some international relations scholars, such as Yossi Shain, interpreted the Israel lobby and its activities as a result of the supremacy of the liberal democratic principles within the United States, while some other scholars, such as Robert Friedman, suggested that the lobby complicated the United States' foreign policy regarding the Middle East. However, this study has not aligned itself with any factions within the literature on the Israel lobby in the United States of America. Instead, the book underlines the need of a balance within the United States' political system between the interests of the United States and the interests of the Israel lobby in order to achieve an objective American foreign policy regarding the Middle East.

Furthermore, the Israeli lobby's undertakings in the United States' political system and its effects on the United States' foreign policy are not always parallel with the interests of the United States of

¹ Jeffrey Goldberg, "Real Insiders: A Pro-Israel Lobby and an F.B.I Sting", *New Yorker*, Vol. 18, Issue. 19 (July 4, 2005), pp. 34-40. AIPAC is mentioned in this citation because it is the most powerful and successful political action committee within the structure of the Israel lobby, which has discussed in detail in the next chapter.

America. However, the lobby remarkably achieves to get what it wanted even if the United States' interests are at stake. One of the biggest reasons behind this situation is the lobby's outstanding achievement in influencing the Congress, which is one of the main discussion points in the next chapters. As former Senator Ernest Hollings noted; "you can't have an Israeli policy other than what AIPAC gives you around here."² It is fascinating to study such a topic that very few Americans are aware of its implications on the political system and foreign policy decisions of their country. Actually, this characteristic of the topic of this study is extremely appealing. Also, the United States' public does not easily hold open discussions and criticisms concerning the Israel lobby and its influence on the decision-making process because of the lobby's decisive power in the various grounds within the United States including the media, press, academia, and almost all political platforms, which are mainly discussed in the second chapter.

Lots of ordinary people and a number of researchers or specialists have various interpretations regarding the outcomes of Jewish lobbying activities, which are anti-Semitism accusations, campaign contributions to pro-Israel candidates, manipulation of high level appointments, retrieving considerable benefits from its long-lasting ties to important executive staff, and the effective use of its supporters both in the House and the Senate in order to eliminate any open debate on the might of the lobby and the probability United States' more evenhanded policy preferences. However, the availability of different views on the Israel lobby in the United States and its operation has not changed the fact that the Israel lobby in the United States and the state of Israel are arriving at their intentions in general, which can be listed as the silencing criticisms toward Israel, overrating the special relationship between the United States and Israel, retrieving decisive aid packages for the state of Israel by the use of several pretexts, and backing the "Israel first" foreign policy attitude rather than the evenhandedness in the United States' policies regarding the Middle East. For instance, the lobby has an enduring rate of success in promoting and advancing the special

² John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, "The Israel Lobby", *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (March, 2006), p. 8.

relationship between the United States and Israel. Also, the lobby worked hard and mostly achieved to prevent or at least to accuse any open and fair debate on the Middle East policies of the United States and any cost-benefit analysis regarding the state of Israel's special position in the United States' policies. This means that the Israel lobby is one of the crucial power circles within the machinery of United States' foreign policy regarding the Middle East.

Therefore, the second chapter of the book includes an analysis or examination of the power reserves or centers of the lobby within the political system of the United States. One of the main power reserves of the lobby, which are analyzed in the next chapter, is the financial role that the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and other important pro-Israel institutions play in the United States' elections. In order to provide a substantiated analysis on this matter, the case of Senator Charles Percy from Illinois, who was defeated in 1984 elections mainly by the undertakings of the AIPAC, have explained within the following chapter. Also, it is underlined in the second chapter that the Israel lobby channels funds and financial contributions to both Republican and Democratic Parties. The analysis of the Senator Percy's case with the AIPAC also illustrates the Israel lobby's capacity to affect the performances of its possible challengers in Senate and House elections. In the case of Senator Percy, Illinois contains a large Jewish population, and the lobby is very effective in affecting the Congressional elections in such electoral districts. However, the amount of the Jewish votes is less important than their distribution to the key states in the Presidential elections, which discussed below.

Furthermore, the second chapter of this book has discussed how the lobby has effectively takes the advantage of the distribution of Jewish votes in the United States to the most important states in the Electoral College system, such as New York, California, Ohio and New Jersey.³ As many international relations and political science researchers would argue, the Presidential elections and their system are a little complicated in the United States in which a candidate may not win the

³ Odeh Abu Rudeneh, "The Jewish Factor in US Politics", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1972), p. 95.

election even if he or she gets more popular votes than the other candidate. There are some key states as mentioned above, and candidates should get enough support from them in order to be elected. As a result of this situation, the Jewish votes in these states became extremely important in the election of the Electoral College, while the amount of their votes does not make a big portion of the total votes cast. This situation created a politically natural power reserve for the Israel lobby to achieve its intentions mentioned above.

The distribution of the Jewish electorate to the key states can be called as the natural power reserve of the lobby because the other power reserves mentioned in the second chapter are mainly constructed by the lobby, such as the lobby's undertakings to limit the evenhanded media coverage and reports regarding the Middle East, and its structural components and tactics to influence the media. For instance, Pro-Israel Committee for Accurate Middle East Reporting in America is another matter of discussion in the second chapter, which assists the Israel lobby in the prevention of evenhanded Middle East coverage and reports of the media.

Moreover, the political employment of the anti-Semitism accusations by the Israel lobby and its powerful allies, such as Norman Podhoretz in the U.S. press, in almost all spheres of public affairs is also explained in the following chapter together with the lobby's ability to influence the high level appointments in a way that the sympathy toward Israel and the lobby should be a characteristic of the appointed individual. The example used in the following chapter is Clinton's appointment of Martin Indyk, a veteran of a pro-Israel think-tank associated with AIPAC, as ambassador to Israel only a few days after this Australian citizen received his United States citizenship papers.⁴

The second section of the book also includes a discussion on the relationship between the Israel lobby and the Middle Eastern studies in the United States. The lobby's undertakings in the educational ground can be explained in a scale moving from the individual level to the institutional

⁴ Michael Lind, "Distorting U.S. Foreign Policy: The Israel Lobby and American Power", *Third World Traveler* (Washington Report – On Middle East Affairs), May 2002, p. 3.

and even system level. Pressures on specific academics considered as the starting point of the Israel lobby's attempts to overwhelm different and critical political opinions and attitudes. Rashid Khalidi and Edward Said can be considered as the main examples of academics pressured by the lobby. With the discussion of the Israel lobby's different power reserves and areas of competency within the United States, the following chapter draws a clear picture regarding the operation and the capacity of the Israel lobby in the United States of America. Also, the second chapter analyzes the relationship between the power reserves of the Israel lobby in the United States and the difficulties experienced by the United States in balancing the interests of the Israel lobby and the interests of her own, especially regarding her foreign policy concerning the Middle East.

Within the formation of the third chapter, the lobby's analysis organized on the basis of its implications on the United States' political system. Also, the lobby's record of successes and failures regarding its influence on the elected offices, mainly the Presidency and the Congress, can be considered as another point of analysis in the third chapter. In the given section, "Israel first" and evenhandedness approaches on the United States' foreign policy have been analyzed and compared by the use of applicable examples. The most important question that the third chapter dealt with can be specified as; "What is debatable is whether the pro-Israel lobby, through this massive organized structure, has allowed or continues to allow the issues to be clearly and objectively dealt with by both policy-makers and the public in the United States?"⁵ The answer to this question is provided in the third chapter by an analysis of the lobby's relationship with the elected branches. For instance, the role of the Israel lobby in the formulation of the one-sided approach in the Congress in relation to Israel and the Middle East policies of the United States is substantiated by the third chapter with an evaluation of the defeat of the Nick Rahall's, a member of the Congress in 1984, suggestion for

⁵ Nancy Jo Nelson, "The Zionist Organizational Structure", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 10, No.1 (Autumn, 1980), p. 93.

an amendment to cut \$250 million from the sum that allocated to be spent in Israel for the establishment of the Lavi fighter plane industry there.⁶

Another point of research in the third chapter, which discussed in detail, was the lobby's attempts to influence the Congress of the United States for the passage of the Anti-Persecution Bill that would establish a permanent office in the State Department to evaluate the United States' foreign aid to nations on the basis of their respect to the religious freedom.⁷ Actually, the main aim here was to create a perfectly useful institution for the lobby to intervene or to influence the United States' foreign aid or grants for the countries, which do not appear to have foreign policy attitudes parallel to the lobby's perceptions, expectations and interests.

Moreover, the third chapter discusses the differences between the lobby's attitudes regarding the Congress and the Presidency. While the lobby had a significant level of success in relation to its influence on the congress in different time periods, the case of the presidency was different as the lobby faced with different political figures and lost its influence on this office from time to time. In order to explain this suggestion, the given section provides different presidents' various approaches toward the Israel lobby and the state of Israel. Also, evenhandedness and "Israel first" approaches on the United States' Middle East policies have associated with different presidents by the third chapter. For example, Eisenhower's perception of Israel was different from that of Harry Truman. Eisenhower was more evenhanded and he gave less chances of success to the lobbying activities because he was faced with the Suez crisis in which Israel's foreign policy and her role in the crisis were completely out of the United States' political expectations and approach about the Middle East in the Cold War era.

The third chapter of this study can be understood as a shift from the discussion of the Israel lobby in United States' domestic politics to the analysis of the lobby in terms of its position and effects on

⁶ Paul Findley interview by Journal of Palestine Studies, "Paul Findley: Congress and the Pro-Israel Lobby", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Autumn, 1985), p. 109.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

the United States' foreign policy decisions. The given shift in the third chapter realized by the evaluation of different United States administrations' foreign policy attitudes in the foreign affairs that the lobby is also related, such as Saudi Arabia's acquisition of AWACs from the United States during Reagan administration and the lobby's tactics to prevent the given deal⁸ in order to retrieve more benefits from the United States for the state of Israel as a precondition of its compliance. Also, the given chapter suggests that the United States' foreign policy formulation process receives feedbacks from different power circles. The Israel lobby and its allies within the Congress and the Presidency are consisting an extremely crucial power circle contributing and influencing to the formation of the United States' foreign policy, but it should not be neglected that the lobby is not the sole power circle influencing the United States' foreign policy.

Certainly, it is quite important to provide a proof or evidence that the lobby has shaped any particular decision of the United States. However, this book is not considering the lobby as the sole actor that provides inputs and pressures to the United States' foreign policy. Instead, it suggests that the lobby is one of those who are influencing the policies and tactics of the United States mainly in the Middle East. However, the suggestion that the lobby is one of the important actors in the United States foreign policy formulation must be substantiated by relevant links between the lobby and the actors within the foreign policy machinery. This is the main task of the fourth chapter of the book, which explains how the Israel lobby's relationship with the Congress and the Presidency of the United States in different periods are related to the different foreign policy inclinations of the United States in the Middle East.

Shortly, the fourth section of this study consists of the analysis of key decisions taken by different administrations with different levels of intimacy with the Israel lobby. For instance two different examples discussed in detail in the fourth chapter can be descriptive regarding what has been discussed in the given chapter. It can be noted that the Eisenhower administration took the risk of a

⁸ Avi Shlaim, "The Impact of U.S. Policy in the Middle East", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter, 1988), p. 26.

clash with the Israeli lobby as an exchange for United States' interest in the Suez. In 1956, the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) lobbyists criticized Eisenhower's policy in the Suez crisis, but his secretary of state, Dulles, immediately threatened to have the UJA's tax exemptions lifted.⁹ On the other hand, after the United States' vote in the United Nations Security Council to adopt Resolution 465, which condemned Israel's settlements policy and called for the dismantling of existing settlements, including those in Jerusalem,¹⁰ the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's attitude toward the Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, which discussed in the fourth chapter in detail, was quite explanatory in order to make an analysis of the lobby's firm opposition and undertakings concerning the acceptance of such a resolution by the Carter administration. In this example, the lobby's situation is just the opposite of the lobby's situation in the previous example or case. Questioning of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the explanation of the process of approval of the given resolution is quite helpful to understand how the Israel lobby uses its relative power coming from Senators, who compete with each other to be the most pro-Israeli, in the Senate and various Senate Committees to create a level of pressure on the executive branch originating from the Capitol Hill.¹¹ These two different examples of the lobby's position within the United States foreign policy formulation process explains the fourth chapter's suggestion that the lobby had different levels of power and influence in different time periods concerning different foreign policy decisions of different US administrations.

Of course, an objection to the second example above may precisely arise on the basis that the Senate and their Senate Committees checks the Executive branch for the fulfillment of their functions in the system, and the lobby's effects on this process are lesser than the fourth chapter's prospects. However, the response of this study to such objections is grounded on the Senators' profiles concerning their relationship with the Israel lobby, and some key characteristics of

⁹ Nancy Jo Nelson, "The Zionist Organizational Structure", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 10, No.1 (Autumn, 1980), p. 90.

¹⁰ Ghassan, Bishara, "Israel's Power in the US Senate", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Autumn, 1980), p. 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

important figures within the Senate Foreign Relation Committee during the questioning of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. For instance, the link between Jacob Javits, who was the most pro-Israeli Senator during the questioning of Cyrus Vance, and the Israel lobby can be better understood by looking at the Israeli embassy's attitude to check with Javits before making a political move and the given Senator's heavy schedule of long appointments with Rabin and high administrative officials at times of crisis in the Middle East.¹²

The fourth chapter also discussed the evenhanded political figures and developments in the Congress, and the challenges they faced in the Congress after the lobby or its supporters had noticed the specified evenhandedness. For instance, the Stevenson amendment and its defeat explain the lobby's ability to challenge any evenhanded development in the Congress even if the given evenhandedness would provide more interests to the United States. The specified amendment was asking the withdrawal of Israel's \$150,000,000 share from the security and development assistance bill for fiscal year 1981 until Jimmy Carter found out that Israel has ceased the development of her settlements in the occupied territories.¹³ Also, another point of analysis of the fourth section is the Israel lobby's set of efficient pressures on the media in order to shape the public opinion in a way that it acquires benefits. For a relevant analysis of this conclusion, an evaluation has been introduced in the fourth chapter regarding the lobby's restrictive attempts regarding the media and the press during the war in Lebanon in 1982. Moreover, the relationship between the arms sales and the Israel lobby can be listed as another subject within the specified chapter. It is analyzed that the lobby has a restrictive influence on the United States' arms sales to the Middle Eastern countries other than Israel. It is quite explanatory to look at the discussion in the fourth chapter regarding Frank Carlucci's, one of the former Secretaries of Defense, warnings to display greater realism on Washington's defense relationships with moderate Arab states in order to keep tens of billions of dollars worth of jobs in the United States.

¹² *National Journal*, January 8, 1972, p. 64.

¹³ Ghassan Bishara, "Israel's Power in the US Senate", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Autumn, 1980), p. 74.

Recent developments in the United States foreign relations, which are related with the Israel lobby's competency areas, and the lobby's undertakings to affect the developments in its area of competence can be considered as the topic of the last chapter of the book before the conclusion section. Mainly, the aggressive policies of the Bush administration after September 11 in the context of war on terrorism, and the lobby's approval and support concerning the policy preferences of neoconservative groups in the Bush administration can be accepted as the point of analysis in the last chapter of the book before the conclusion section. Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, Paul Wolfowitz, William Kristol and other main figures within the neoconservative movement maintained their close relationships with the Israel lobby. Consequently, the lobby became an indirect actor in many foreign policy decisions of the Bush administration, and the common characteristic of those decisions was the benefits available for the state of Israel. This explains that the overlapping principles and objectives within the neo-conservative's and Israel lobby's agendas have perfectly exploited by the Israel lobby in the United States in order to locate the United States' relationship with Israel in the middle of the neo-conservatives' political and strategic calculations regarding the war on terrorism in which Israel seen as an ally in the war on terror. On the other hand, Iran, Iraq and Syria are classified as rogue states and the given reasoning spread to the public opinion by the contributions of the Israel lobby. Furthermore, the use of the terrorist attacks as a pretext for retrieving more support from the United States to the state of Israel by the Israeli lobby can be considered as a continuation of the traditional 'interest creation' tactic of the lobby. An earlier important example of the 'interest creation' tactic was the lobby's set of efficient undertakings to retrieve military aid for Israel when it had to tolerate the United States' profitable arms sales policies concerning the Saudi Arabia and some other moderate Arab allies of the United States.

Furthermore, the last chapter analyzes the tension occurred between the Secretary of State Colin Powell and the neoconservative faction of the Bush administration, which related to the lobby's and the neoconservatives' successful influence on the Congress because the House Appropriations