

# It's all about the money?

The influence of the Israel lobby on American foreign policy making.

# Abstract

In recent years the importance of lobby organizations in the American foreign policy making has increased. One organization that has gained significant influence is the Israel lobby. In this study I present the actors involved in the making of American foreign policy, the relationship America has with Israel and the strategies used by the Israel lobby to gain their influence. I use liberalism to demonstrate how the decisions made in the American Congress have consequences for the rest of the world and, in this discussion, primarily for Israel.

I find that the lobby has gained their influence through the funding of Congressional and Presidential election campaigns. Since the system of funding leaves loopholes the donations can reach large sums of money which makes it difficult for other candidates to win. I also find that if a candidate wishes to receive that funding they have to condemn critique aimed at Israel. If a candidate or legislator instead is one of the critics they risk being labelled an anti-Semite. This way the lobby keeps the critique to a minimum. However, I find that these strategies are not exclusive to the Israel lobby but are used by other interest groups as well.

*Key words:* Lobby organizations, foreign policy, America, Israel, Congress

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Object and question

Influence of lobby groups in America has increased over the last decade. One reason for this could be that the end of the Cold War opened up for new policy preferences, before then there had basically only been one; to prevent the spreading of communism and Soviet influence.

My object with this study is to conduct a discussion of the methods and tactics used by lobby organizations in their attempt to influence the American foreign policy. I will especially look at how the Israel lobby acts when they try to influence foreign policy makers. The reason I have chosen the Israel lobby is because the relationship between America and Israel has, since the founding of the latter, been very special. This is, to a large part, as a result of the different lobby organizations that have worked towards the aim to have America give unwavering support.

The question I will use to guide my study is: *What strategies do the Israel lobby use to gain influence on the American foreign policy making?* To help me find this out I also ask *What actors are involved in the foreign policy making?*

## 1.2 Theory

My study explores the relationship between interest groups and the government and, in the extension, America's behaviour in the world. To reach my conclusions I have to look at how the groups interact with congress, as well as how states interact with each other. To do this I will look at some more or less known theoretical discussions.

Most students of international relations have at some point come across the division of the world and states into different levels. The highest level would be the international system, which is characterized by anarchy, next the state level, which is characterized by institutions, and the lowest level the individual, characterized by psychology (Gourevitch, 2002, p. 309). I will concentrate on the system and state levels.

In the theorizing of the system level the domestic politics is kept constant and explores the variation in the international arena. In order to find out if the setting in which states function changes their behaviour the role of the domestic politics

is non-existent. This is the principal idea of realism (Gourevitch, 2002, p. 309). Realism also holds that states are the only actors in foreign policy. However, states could also be seen more like institutional structures than unitary actors (Carlsnaes, 2008, p. 89). As scholar John Frankel said “State decisions are not made by states but on their behalf, by individuals and by groups of individuals.” (Frankel, 1963, p. 2). This means that any type of action is always made by specific individuals (Carlsnaes, 2008, p. 89).

In the theorizing of the state level the international system is kept constant while looking at the aspects of the domestic politics. Instead of looking at how the system influences the states it is examining how features within the state influence its behaviour in the system. This is a classic liberal view (Gourevitch, 2002, p. 310).

Carlsnaes discusses civic actors’ advantage over political institutions in a “bottom-up” view. He mentions that social groups are regarded ahead of politics because their interests are defined independently of politics. It is not until they have defined their interests that they pursue them through collective action and political discussions (Carlsnaes, 2008, p. 95).

Interest groups, and voters, are a few of those who put pressure on politicians. Their preferences can often be economical but also ideological and then be based in a value system about justice and equality. Their preferred issues may also influence the foreign policy making. This “can be seen as preferences by members of society which influence the decision-making of their leaders.” (Gourevitch, 2002, p. 311). Lobby organizations are often active through campaign funding and participation in hearings which has a tendency to be targeted in the direction of sympathetic legislators. There are differences in what strategies the different lobby organizations use depending on what ideological preferences the committee members have (Kollman, 1997, p. 523).

Influence is defined by someone’s involvement in a decision-making process but without the power to make any actual decisions (Frankel, 1963, p. 5). It is only government officials who can be viewed as decision-makers. No matter how powerful any private citizen is, they can never be a political actor (Snyder, Bruck & Sapin, 1962, p. 99). They can only do their best to influence the ones who do hold federal offices.

According to Liberalism there is no government that is completely unbiased in its political representation. All governments are more active in their representation for some individuals or groups than they are for others (Moravscik, 1997, p. 518).

State behaviour is influenced by societal ideas, interests, and institutions that combined serves to shape the preferences of the individual state (Moravscik, 1997, p. 513). This means that the government policy is controlled by the identities, interests and power of different groups. These groups work both inside and outside the state system and are constantly pressuring the decision makers to tackle policies that are equal to the groups’ preferences (Moravscik, 1997, p. 518).

Liberal theory also explains that state institutions, as well as societal interests, are key determinants of how states act internationally (Moravscik, 1997, p. 518).

The expected behaviour of a state reflects not only its own preferences, but the combined preferences of all other states that are linked together through patterns

of policy interdependence. That means that national leaders always have to think about their position in the system that is composed of all the other states preferences (Moravscik, 1997, p. 523).

Liberals believes that transnational co-operation is required to be able to solve common problems in the international system. This means that co-operation between states in one area will lead to co-operation in other areas. They believe that changes in one part of the international system have ramifications for the other parts of the system (Dunne, 2005, p. 193).

### 1.3 Material and Method

This report constitutes a classical case study and will focus on the influence of U.S. lobby organizations on American foreign policy. In order to do so, I will evaluate the impact of the Israel lobby since this interest organization constitutes one of the most important and influential lobby groups<sup>1</sup> in the country. I will also use Liberal theory to analyse strategies used by the Israel lobby in their attempts to gain influence in the American foreign policy making.

In my research, secondary materials, such as books and articles by scholars active in the field of study, have been used primarily. However, internet sources have also been used in those cases where no other information was available. I have chosen to work closely with two main sources; Fraser Camden's book *US Foreign Policy After the Cold War: Global Hegemon or Reluctant Sheriff?* as well as John J. Mearsheimer's and Stephen M. Walt's controversial book *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. The books and articles I have used have all been published by renowned publishers and in academic journals. The internet sources I have chosen are from the official websites of respected newspapers and government institutions such as *Dagens Nyheter* and *The White House*. The information regarding the American Jewish community was collected from websites that were not familiar to me. I have based my findings on my understanding of which sites could be trusted as legitimate sources regarding their informational value.

I will start with a general presentation of the American foreign policy and the political system, to give a view of the arena the lobby groups work in. I will also give a general presentation of how lobby organizations work and then continue with a discussion about the American relationship with Israel. After that I will give a definition of the Israel lobby. Finally I will put the different parts together and conduct a discussion of how the Israel lobby work in gaining influence in the American foreign policy making.

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<sup>1</sup> I will use *lobby organizations* and *interest groups*, as well as combinations of them, synonymously as they are equally valid.

## 2 American foreign policy

I will start with some general knowledge about the American political system in order to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of its complexity.

The American forefathers thought that the most democratic system would be one that was divided into three branches; one legislative (the congress), one executive (the president) and one judicial (the Supreme Court) (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 117). So unlike the European states, America does not have a parliamentary system but a presidential one. This means that the congress and the presidential elections are not always carried out at the same time and, more importantly, that the president will not necessarily get the congress approval even if the majority are members of the same party as the president (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 124). These conditions also leads to tension building between the two, because even though the Supreme Court has some political influence, when people speak of the power struggle in Washington they usually mean the one between the president and Congress (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 122).

### 2.1 General information

America's first president George Washington said in his farewell address that "The great rule of conduct for us in regard of foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations but to have with them as little political connections as possible. It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world." (Cameron, 2002, p. 4) However, the world changed in the coming centuries and so did the American foreign policy. The involvement with other countries began already during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning this involvement was mostly in relation to the Latin American countries in connection to the expansion of the new state. However, after the war against Spain in 1898, and surely after the First World War, America has been part of the international arena (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 120). Since World War II, the U.S. has also been strongly linked to allies through, for instance, NATO.

During the Cold War America had close contact with countries, such as Pakistan, that could help keep an eye on the Soviet Union. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, being one of the victors of WWII, it have also held a special position in the world as a leader and since the end of the Cold War, having been declared the victor of that too, that position has only gotten stronger.

Even though the position of America in the world is strong, in the U.S. itself there seems to be little debate on the priorities of the foreign policy and what it should do with its power (Cameron, 2002, p. xv). This depends on the fact that the

foreign policy is created based on the goals of domestic constituency groups. This means that there might be as many views as there are groups on what the policy should be, which leads to a very scattered foreign policy (Cameron, 2002, p. 86). Since the number of actors who are involved in the policy making have increased during the past couple of decades, the executive branch of the government have lost some of the “freedom of action to decide and implement policy.” (Cameron, 2002, p. 99).

Some scholars are of the opinion that the U.S. lost a little of its direction when the Cold War ended. When America lost its enemy in the collapse of the Soviet Union, it also lost the policy principles that had been the base for the foreign policy for nearly forty years (Cameron, 2002, p. 174). There are also those scholars who would say that America in some ways needs its enemies. During much of the Cold War the Republican Party and its realistic world view held the Oval office. Realism has a very strong zero-sum view and that can easily be presented to the public since it paints the world in clear black and white colours. Everyone knew who America was fighting and why; the Soviet empire and the communist ideology (Cameron, 2002, p. 184).

However, when the risk of communist expansion ended the U.S. found itself slightly off course in the new world order. As the most powerful country in the world, the U.S. would rather see that the status quo remained than to see radical changes in international relations (Cameron, 2002, p. 185). When the Islamic fundamentalism emerged the U.S. got a new enemy to fight and the previous status quo could be restored. Before there was the Soviet Union, after the 11 September attacks there was the threat from Iran and Iraq and other “rouge states” (Cameron, 2002, p. 174, 196). The black and white world view returned as President Bush used a phrase in describing the war on terrorism that represent that view; either you are with the U.S. or you are against it (Cameron, 2002, p. 184).

This aggressive phrasing told the world that America was ready to act alone in foreign policy. Fraser Cameron wrote in 2002 that if this would be the case, “...Americans should be careful that the independence gained outweighs the cooperation lost.” (Cameron, 2002, p. 186). Since the American reputation in the world deteriorated after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Cameron’s statement seems quite prophetic (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 121).

In general the Democratic Party has argued that the American values, the promotion of democracy for instance, are vital interests for the U.S. and that it should be accomplished through international co-operation. This is clear liberal ideas. The Republican Party, however, has been more sceptical to the thought of values as an approach to foreign policy and, as mentioned earlier, has had a more realistic view. This changed a great deal after the 11 September attacks (Cameron, 2002, p. 3).

The Republican President George W. Bush started using values as a way of keeping the country committed to the War on Terrorism. In his inaugural address in January 2005 he stated that “The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one.” (Transcript, NYTimes.com). These were quite liberal words however they were backed up by realistic actions for even though the forces that



had invaded Iraq in 2003 were formed by a “coalition of the willing”, this was strictly against the wishes of the United Nations and was therefore considered illegal (TheGuardian.co.uk).

Dunne stated earlier that this is not the liberal way since liberals would see that co-operation is needed to solve the problems in the world. In a sense this is what America did, however, as we learnt from Moravscik, leaders of the world always have to think about their position in regards to all other states preferences. Granted that the American position in the world is that of a leader but that also means, in a liberal sense, that as the leader they should tread carefully and humbly. In the realist sense however the actions of the leader should be limited but once involved they should be “muscular”. So the combination of liberal values and a realistic world view leads to the risk of becoming a bully and, as Cameron predicted, this is how many saw the U.S. during President Bush’s time in office.

However, in the 2008 presidential election the American people was ready for a change and chose not to renew the Republican Party’s mandate. Instead they put their trust in the Democratic Party represented by Barack Obama. Democrats usually have a softer world view and think that communication is the way to change. President Barak Obama also did show in his inaugural address that he would open up channels with countries that before had been locked out of the international community (Transcript, 2009(a), White House.gov).

## 2.2 The Actors

I will here give a presentation of the most important actors in the American foreign policy making. The purpose for this is to give the reader an overview of the American political arena.

### 2.2.1 Congress

The most important group of people that makes decisions on behalf of the state, as Frankel talked about, is the Congress. The congress is the legislative branch of the American government. It is divided into two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The members of the House are elected for a term of two years. This means that every two years the representatives have to run for re-election and hence are in constant search for campaign funds. Since elections have become more costly during the past ten years, interest groups that can raise campaign funds have acquired more and more influence over the representatives. The senators, however, are elected on terms of six years which make them less dependant on the help of interest groups (Cameron, 2002, p. 68).

The rules of how election campaigns are funded were sharpened in 1971 through the Federal Election Campaign Act. This was revised in 1974 as a result of the scandals concerning funding given to President Nixon’s re-election

campaign. According to this it is possible for presidential candidates to receive limited funding from federal means. This funding can be divided into two parts. The first part is the campaign leading up to the party conventions. During this part, if a candidate gains at least 5000 dollars per state in 20 states from private contributions they will get the same amount from the federal treasury. During the second part, the time leading up to the election, both party nominees will receive large sums from the treasury (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 137f).

For elections to congress the rules are basically the same but a bit more complicated with loopholes that make it possible to manipulate the system. The rules still makes it vital for candidates to raise funds from private contributors as well as from different organisations, however, the risk that these donations will border on corruption have been drastically reduced (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 138).

In the decades after the Second World War, the most important of the Standing Committees in congress was the Committee on Foreign Relations in the Senate. The chairman had a key-position in the foreign policy making, sometimes even playing a more important role than the Secretary of State. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives did not have quite the same influence (Frankel, 1963, p. 27). However, today the committees do not hold the same position.

The foreign policy committees are not the most popular committees for the congressmen and –women. This since it has been perceived as the voters are not that interested in the subject. Foreign policy has, during the past decade, been somewhat of a wasteland and has not constituted strong committees to fund raise from. That in turn have given the members little motivation to get actively involved in the policy making (Cameron, 2002, p. 69). It is therefore paradoxical that the Americans owe their reputation in the world to a group of people that do not pay much attention to it (Cameron, 2002, p. 67). For instance, several embassies in Washington spend a lot of time trying to meet members of Congress, inviting them to their countries. However, those invitations are rarely accepted (Cameron, 2002, p. 79). This lack of interest leads most foreign policy issues to be controlled by so called “issue-leaders” (Cameron, 2002, p. 78).

Even though there has been a lack of interest in foreign policy, the Congress's role in policy making have increased since the end of the Cold War (Cameron, 2002, p. 79). One of the most important powers of the Congress is the so called “power of the purse”. This means that the Congress must approve all funding of international action initiated by the administration (Cameron, 2002, p. 70).

As the domestic and foreign politics become more involved, the relations between the President and the Congress will probably become more strained. This, especially, if one Party holds the White House and the other holds Capitol Hill (Cameron, 2002, p. 79).

The main legislation making, which ends up as policy, is first handled by the Congressional committees. During the committees consideration of a piece of legislation it is customary with public hearings were experts and concerned parties get the chance to give statements as well as being questioned by the committee members (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 139). During this time the committee members

rely heavily on information given through different sources, for instance interest groups. This will be discussed in more detail further down.

## 2.2.2 The Administration

The other important actor that makes decisions on behalf of the state is the President.

The President is the branch of government that holds the executive power which means that no legislation that is passed by the congress can become law unless the President signs it (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 123). When it comes to the foreign policy making the President is ultimately the determinant and whatever system of decision making and advice there is can only be with the approval of the President (Rockman, 1981, p. 924).

The President is also the Commander in Chief of the Army, Marine and the states National Guard. Hallenberg makes the interpretation that the forefathers probably thought that in a crisis or war situation decisions would be able to be made fast. However, this has in some situations been interpreted differently and the President has gained more power at the expense of the Congress. It is after all the authority of the Congresses that is mentioned first in the Constitution (Hallenberg, 2009, p. 123).

The fact that the President holds most of the foreign policy *decision*-making, the White House also becomes the target of foreign governments and interest groups that try to influence the American foreign policy (Cameron, 2002, p. 38).

The tension between the President and the Congress, mentioned above, often involves the State Department as well. There are few allies of State in the Congress because members of Congress believe that the State Department take too much consideration to the wishes of foreign governments and too little consideration is taken to the domestic interests (Cameron, 2002, p. 48).

Both Presidents Clinton and W. Bush were critical to international involvement. At the 1992 election Bill Clinton criticised President George H. W. Bush for paying too much attention to foreign policy. The same happened in the 2000 election when George W. Bush criticised President Clinton for the same thing (Cameron, 2002, p. 18f, 30f). However, both had to reconsider once they stepped into the Oval Office.

President Clinton had to handle the crises that came from the ending of the Cold War and his foreign policy agenda were in large parts developed by world events such as the wars in Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia etc. But he also got influenced by the domestic lobbies to start peace negotiations in the Middle East as well as in Ireland (Cameron, 2002, p. 27).

President W. Bush had to re-evaluate his foreign policy agenda as soon as the hijacked airplanes hit the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. However, unlike Clinton, who changed his initial policy in all areas and was involved in and supported many multilateral institutions and treaties, W. Bush was still critical towards the UN and other international co-operations and concentrated most of his efforts on the Middle East (Cameron, 2002, p. 31f).

### 2.2.3 Lobby organisations

The American political system makes it possible for lobby organizations to gain influence over the politicians. One of the most important, if not the most important, way is through campaign contributions. This system is, as stated above, constructed in a way that makes it very expensive to run for public office and makes the candidates very dependant on campaign funding. At the same time as there are rules, the contributions are still weakly regulated which makes it easier for interest groups to direct campaign funds to favour certain candidates (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 140).

There are probably thousands of groups and organizations that try to influence the different parts of the government. The influence that they have depends, among other things, on size, commitment and resources (Cameron, 2002, p. 92).

Lobby organizations have through the years mainly worked through Congressional channels (Frankel, 1963, p. 82) and have in recent years increased their access to Capitol Hill and encouraged the members of Congress to take more action in the foreign policy making (Cameron, 2002, p. 85). Since the election campaigns can, as said before, become very expensive costing several hundred million dollars, the candidates are reluctant to turn away funds from any source (Cameron, 2002, p. 92).

It is not only through campaign contributions that the organizations work, they also do ordinary lobbying, such as being a source of information.

All legislation made in congress starts in the congressional committees. Information to the committees comes from both internal and external sources (Merritt, 1975, p. 44f). Interest groups are very important to the committee decisions since they work closely with committee members and as external sources of information. Interest groups dedicate much attention to the congressional committees for the possibility of being part of the decision making (Kollman, 1997, p. 522). From a congressional point of view, the information acquired is sometimes used to legitimate decisions that have already been made (Merritt, 1975, p. 53). Usually, committee members rely on the committee staff or the administrative assistants to make contact with the different groups. Most staff members think that the interest groups fill a very important role in that they present ideas and arguments for why hearings are necessary (Merritt, 1975, p. 45).

Since the interest groups themselves are not allowed to formally participate in the drafting of legislation, they need to find legislators who can do that for them (Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, p. 778). Lobby organizations often target their allies when they lobby the Congressional committees, more than opponents or undecided, with the intention to mobilize the legislatures to push for the issues on their behalf (Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, p. 775). The reason to lobby undecided is because they can expect a high payoff since those members of Congress are the most susceptible to the organizations arguments (Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, p. 776). When lobby groups tries to influence their opponents or undecided, the groups usually have strong ties to those legislators' districts (Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, p. 775).

There are scholars who claim that the reason that interest groups lobby legislators who already are allies is for the purpose of counteracting lobbying efforts from opposing lobby groups (Austin-Smith & Wright, 1994, p. 26).

The lobby groups' work is not done when the drafting of the legislation is, instead that is the point when they have to start lobbying for the committee members votes. To do that they give information about the positives and negatives of the legislation and what the electoral consequences can be. They also distribute statistics and other facts and arguments to help their allies build coalitions on the groups' behalf (Hojnacki & Kimball, 1998, p. 778).

The ethnic lobbies are most often focused on the "home" region and get involved when there are many political exiles from their original country or if the homeland seems to be threatened by neighbouring countries. For instance, the Irish lobby followed the Irish peace process closely and the Israel lobby focuses on the events in the Middle East but also on the conditions for Jews in other parts of the world, for instance in Russia (Cameron, 2002, p. 86, 92). This is what Gourevitch means when he speaks of interest groups preferences being based in value systems and how those preferences influence the decisions of the leaders.

It makes it easier for issues to get on the agenda and into the debate if there are organizations that are lobbying for them. In contrast, there are issues that do not get much attention because there is little domestic constituent interest. An example of that is the crisis in Haiti that occurred in the 1990's. Other than the Black Caucus, African-American members of Congress, there was no significant American interest in Haiti. However, President Clinton chose to act anyway since he foresaw a large number of refugees seeking shelter in the U.S. (Cameron, 2002, p. 20).

There are analysts who mean that the ethnic lobby organizations are holding more power than is usually recognized. They believe that the negative results from having ethnic lobbies involved in foreign policy making might exceed the positives and that this influence asks questions about the legitimacy of democracy (Cameron, 2002, p. 86).

The U.S. has, almost since its founding, been divided by ethnicity, national background and religion. The problem for the government has been to define the national interest when these different vocal groups have been pushing for their own narrow agendas (Cameron, 2002, p. 87).

What is often seen by the rest of the world as the U.S.'s constant search for control of the international system is most often the result of domestic pressure from interest groups (Cameron, 2002, p. 78). This is something that Moravscik discusses above when he speaks of liberalism. According to his interpretation of the liberal theory, societal interests are vital determinants of state behaviour in the international arena.

## 2.3 Relationship with Israel

The relationship between the U.S. and Israel has been a very special one ever since the later declared its independence in 1948. Israel is the country in the world that receives financial assistance from the U.S even though it is perceived as industrialized. According to the CIA Factbook, Israel holds the position of 49<sup>th</sup> country/region in the world when considering GDP per capita. It also had the 24<sup>th</sup> best human development in the world in 2008 according to the Human Development Report presented by the United Nations Development Program (HDR.UNDP.org). Yet, Israel receives about 2.5 billion dollars annually in economic and military assistance from America (USAID.gov). Direct aid to the country has, since the states establishment, reached a significant amount (Cameron, 2002, p. 88).

As noted above, America does not only contribute with financial aid to Israel but the U.S. is also Israel's primary military and political supporter and has been so for several decades. Out of the 2.5 billion dollars given in financial assistance in 2007, about 2.3 billion dollars was given as military aid (USAID.gov). As for political support, few, if any, administrations have voted against Israel in the UN or tried to really pressure the country to change its policy on issues such as West Bank settlements. At the same time as the U.S. has been giving its almost unconditional support to Israel it has also been involved in the Middle East peace negotiations. This is something that some scholars have criticized arguing that it is impossible for the U.S. to be a mediator at the same time as its support of Israel is unwavering. Others claim that it is only the U.S. that can take on this role since it is the only country with enough power to make the parties stick to an agreement (Cameron, 2002, p. 166).

One thing that illustrates the special relationship is the fact that about 10% of all congressional trips over seas goes to Israel when it is but one of nearly 200 countries in the world (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 161).

Even though there are such strong support for Israel in the U.S. there are critics who feel that Israel no longer represent the very weak newcomer among the strong hostile Arab countries, the David surrounded by several Goliaths. They instead feel as though that role has been taken over by the Palestinians (Rosenson, Oldmixon & Wald, 2009, p. 74). One of these critics said that though the U.S. should not withdraw the support for Israel there was no justification "for Israel's indefinite suppression of the Palestinians" (Cameron, 2002, p. 137).

There is however some signs that tell that the U.S. is not doing everything that Israel ask for. For instance, Israel has, during many years, requested that the American Embassy should be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This is something that Washington has continuously refused. America has also continued to sell more advanced military arms to Arab states than Israel likes (Cameron, 2002, p. 87).

During President Bush's term in the White House there was a sense of tension in the world. Many Europeans felt that the world was a more hostile place to live in compared to the time with President Clinton. Last year the Presidential candidate Barack Obama called for a change, both for America as well as for the rest of the world. When he won most of the European countries saw it as a positive turn in the international politics. But what change has come? Is there now

a difference in the relations between Israel and the U.S and what is to be expected?

In the winter of 2008/9, when Obama was the President-elect and waiting to be inaugurated, the world learnt of new hostilities between Israel and the Gaza strip. The fighting began when a six month cease fire between the two parties came to an end on December 19. There had been bomb attacks on Israel from Gaza during the cease fire and after the cease fire agreement ended the attacks intensified which led Israel to attack, at first with airstrikes and later with ground troops. The war was heavily criticized by countries around the world except by the U.S. who supported the Israeli move (Snabbguide till Gaza, DN.se). During the 22 day war, more than 5.000 Palestinians were wounded, at least 1.300 were killed, of which almost 300 were children. The Israelis lost ten soldiers and three civilians (22 dagar av krig i Gaza, DN.se).

Throughout this war the President-elect Obama chose not to comment since there was only one president and that was still Bush, although this fact that did not silence him on other issues. He had however during his campaign said that if there were bombs falling over his family he would do anything to stop that from happening, this in reference to the Israeli families, not the Palestinians (Chomsky, 2009, Chomsky.info).

Earlier the U.S. has repeatedly demanded that the Palestinian authorities, Hamas, abide by the agreements drawn up between the two parties, recognize Israel and put an end to the violence. Yet, this has not been demanded from Israel in the past. However, in his speech in Cairo on June 4, 2009, President Obama did just that. He insisted that Israel should recognize Palestine's right to exist and he condemned further building of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories (Transcript, 2009(b), WhiteHouse.gov).

## 3 The Lobby

### 3.1 Israel

A vast majority of the groups supporting Israel are found in the U.S. There are a significant number of interest groups lobbying for the sake of Israel. The fifty-one largest and most influential groups have joint together in the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations. This group is what is most commonly referred to when speaking of the Israel lobby in the U.S. The groups aim is to combine the powers and influences of the different groups into a unified force, representing Israel with the main goal to “strengthen and foster the special U.S.-Israel relationship.” (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 117).

The pro-Israel organization that is best-known, most important and that has most influence is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). I will mention the AIPAC the most since it is the most powerful of the organizations and most information refers to it.

The AIPAC’s agenda is reminiscent of the Conference’s and states for instance that they want to strengthen Israel’s security and change U.S. policy to recognize Jerusalem as the undivided capitol of Israel (Cameron, 2002, p. 87). In a survey of the most powerful lobby organizations in Washington, members of Congress put the AIPAC in second place right behind American Association of Retired Persons and ahead of the National Rifle Association and the largest labour organization AFL-CIO (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 117).

The AIPAC has had an enormous influence on nearly all of Congress’ action on Middle East policy for about 30 years. The Israel lobby organisations started to grow in the late 1960s after the Six-Day War. In the beginning the Conference was the strongest voice for Israel in Washington but in the late 1970s and early ‘80s AIPAC preceded it and has since then continued to grow (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 118f; Findley, 1985, p. 25).

Many of these groups would like to see American leaders treat Israel as the fifty-first state and they don’t like to hear people criticize Israel even if the criticism might be justified and even in Israel’s interest (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 6). For instance, if the U.S. had convinced Israel to stop building settlements in the Occupied Territories early on and helped create a Palestinian state things would probably be different today (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 9).

Even if the Israel lobby only represent less than three percent of the population it is the most effective of all the ethnic lobbies as well as one of the most influential among all the organizations in America (Cameron, 2002, p. 87).



## 3.2 Christian Zionist

An important part in the discussion of the Israel lobby is the Christian Zionists. They are made up mostly by protestant evangelists who believe that the Jews return to Palestine will lead to the Second Coming of Christ. This is based on a literal understanding of the bible which began in England in the nineteenth-century (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 132). More than half of all evangelists interpret the bible literally and this specific belief is called dispensationalism (Rosenson, Oldmixon & Wald, 2009, p. 76).

Even though they have been welcomed by Israel the Zionists are at their core anti-Semitic (Davidson & Harris, 2006, p. 60). The Christian Zionists see the recapture of Jerusalem's Old City at the founding of Israel, and other such events, as part of the "last day signs" which are "steps in God's unfolding plan" (Rosenson, Oldmixon & Wald, 2009, p. 77). However, The Book of Revelations, which speaks of the Apocalypse and the Second Coming, state that only 144, 000 Jews will be saved and converted. The rest will be destroyed as unbelievers (Davidson & Harris, 2006, p. 60). Because of their conviction that Christ will return when all Jews have returned to Palestine, the Zionists strongly oppose a two-state solution or other concessions given to the Palestinians (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 135). To make sure that no concessions are made they lobby the Israeli as well as the American governments to not give back any land whatsoever (Davidson & Harris, 2006, p. 63f).

The Christian Zionists does not only publicly oppose territorial concessions to the Palestinians they are also financially supporting the settler movement. This has reinforced hard-line attitudes in both Israel and America and it have made it more difficult for leaders in the U.S. to put pressure on Israel. Without the support of Christian Zionists, there would probably be fewer settlements in Israel (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 137-138).

For the moderate Israelis and Jewish Americans the Christian Zionists are worrying. They are concerned that the uncompromising views of the Zionists will make it harder to reach a lasting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 137).

Despite the influence of the Christian Zionists in the Republican Party, President Bush still declared support for a Palestinian state in 2001 showing that their power is not absolute (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 138).

## 4 How the lobby works

### 4.1 During elections

Moravscik says, as noted above, that according to Liberalism all governments work more actively for some groups than for others. This is very true in American politics.

The Israel lobby's influence is noticeable at the elections to Congress. As was mentioned above, it is very expensive for candidates to run campaigns and they are usually in desperate need of funding.

Despite what one might think, the AIPAC does not officially endorse any candidates or contribute with any money directly to campaigns. However, the members of AIPAC's board of directors have, during the period 1997-2001, contributed three million dollars to different campaigns. The AIPAC also arranges meetings between possible donors and candidates (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 154). If a candidate gets the approval from AIPAC as being pro-Israel, money will start to flow in to the campaign from all over the U.S. (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 156).

Some people even seem to change their opinion on Israel and Palestine when running for public office. For instance, as the First Lady, Hillary Clinton showed support for Palestinian statehood and was photographed when publicly embracing Yasser Arafat's wife leaving pro-Israel groups fuming. However, when she later was running for senator of New York she became a strong supporter of Israel which made her gain considerable amounts in campaign contributions from members of the lobby. Since then she has continued her support for Israel, even backing the war against Lebanon in the summer of 2006, in which she was joined by several American leaders, but which was criticized by many European countries (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 159).

### 4.2 On Capitol Hill

It is not only during elections that the lobby is active in trying to gain influence. Or more accurately, during the elections they gain the influence, later they use that influence to push for legislations that are beneficial to them.

The AIPAC is not only lobbying, it is also a source of information for members of the Congress. It is often approached to help perform research, work

on, collect co-sponsors for and collect votes in favour of legislation. In this way the AIPAC puts itself directly inside the policy-making and legislative process (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 161). Here one could question the statements made above by Frankel and Snyder, Bruck and Sapin that influence only can get you so far, that no decision can be made if you are not a government official. It is of course true that the decision itself only can be made by the Congressmen and – women, however, in this case the line between providing information and saying what the decision should be is very fine indeed. How much influence is too much influence?

By sponsoring certain legislation the members of Congress demonstrate to interest groups, which have the power to affect their re-election, that they are receptive to the interest of key constituencies (Rosenson, Oldmixon & Wald, 2009, p. 85). There are few cases where Congress' votes do not endorse the lobby's position and there are few members of Congress that goes against its wishes, instead the pro-votes are usually overwhelming (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 11). For instance, in the summer of 2001 the AIPAC, and other organizations in the lobby, was pushing for an extension of the Iran – Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which was to expire. In a very short time, only a few days, they had secured over seventy senators and 200 representatives signatures in support of the extension (Cameron, 2002, p. 88).

The Israeli lobby has a firm hold on the American Congress. One of the U.S. government's three branches is very much committed to the support of Israel and there is no open debate on the American policy towards Israel taking place (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 162). Senator Adlai Stevenson tried to pass an amendment to a bill, in the 1980s, calling for reduced foreign aid to Israel if the country did not stop the building of settlements. The amendment only gained seven votes, most probably because many were afraid of losing campaign funding. The support for Israel is so strong in Congress that members will act in a way that is opposite the U.S. official policy. Senator Stevenson even got abused in the press as anti-Semitic when he later ran for governor, an election he lost (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 158).

The lobby's network is substantial and makes it possible to send their message out fast through mailing lists and phone calls. Paul Findley describes an incident that happened when he served in the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee in the 1970's. "I whispered to a colleague ... I might offer an amendment to a pending bill cutting aid to Israel. Within 30 minutes two other Congressmen came to me with worried looks, reporting they had just had calls from citizens in their home districts who were concerned about my amendment." (Findley, 1985, p. 35f). This clearly shows that networks are important and effective and it has probably not changed much during the years since this occasion. It is also a testimony to the fact that the preferences of the people become the preferences of the leaders. However, should the preferences of the constituency in one congressional district become the preferences of the Representative of another? If Paul Findley felt that he represented his constituency with this possible amendment then he should be able to put it forward. If other Representatives did not think that they would represent the

people of their districts by supporting the amendment then they could just vote against it. So the question is; do the members of the Congress work for their constituencies or for the lobby?

The lobby also has access to Congressmen like no other lobby organization. One AIPAC member was even surprised himself when he had no problem getting meetings with five House Representatives in one day. While they have this access to the members of Congress, most other organizations find two meetings in one day a success (Findley, 1985, p. 37).

### 4.3 Concerning the Jewish community

It is important to note that not all of the Jews in America stands behind the lobby organizations views or ways of gaining influence. There are no exact numbers of how many Jews there are in America, according to one survey conducted in 2000-01 the Jewish community includes 5.2 million Jews (About.com) while another, from 2007, say 6.5 million (The American Jewish Yearbook, Jewishdatabank.org). Out of these, approximately 6 million people, about 38% are members of a Jewish organization.

Since the information only state “Jewish organizations”, quite unspecified, it is not clear if that means political lobby organizations or both political and non political. However, if it includes both, which is the impression it conveys, there are even fewer people who are members of the Israeli lobby groups. Also, not all of the members are actively involved in the organizations, but only contribute with donations (Jewish Demography and Our Relationship with Israel, Jewishdatabank.org). This means that there is a clear minority of the Jewish community that is involved in the American foreign policy making. Even so, that minority has a very real influence on what the American policy towards Israel should be and in the extension on how Israel acts in the conflict with the Palestinian people. As Dunne said, what happens in one part of the world has consequences in another part.

#### 4.3.1 Criticism from within

There has been public criticism made by Jewish groups against Israel. One notable incident happened 1973 when the organization Breira, formed by progressive American Jews, publicly called for a more open discussion about Israel and also tried to mobilize support for withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. The response from most other Jewish and pro-Israeli organizations was not positive to say the least. Breira was for instance accused of undermining support for Israel and they were called “Jews of Fatah”, which meant that they were seen as supporters of the Palestinian political Party Fatah. The result was that they dissolved after only five years since few wanted to either support or join them (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 122f).

After this it was decided that criticism was to be kept inside the community and for the most part people comply with it (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 123).

Another incident that occurred in 2006 was when the Union of Progressive Zionists (UPZ) invited the organization Breaking the Silence to appear on different campuses around the U.S. This group was formed by former Israeli soldiers who are critical about the Israel Defence Forces operations in the Occupied Territories. The result from this was that other pro-Israel groups demanded that UPZ were to be expelled from the network of pro-Israel groups, Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC), which contains of several large organizations such as the AIPAC. The reasons were that it was not the ICC's mission to sponsor groups that were critical to Israel. For the UPZ things worked out better than for Breira. Other groups supported them and the ICC steering committee rejected the demand for UPZ exclusion (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 125).

This shows that there are critical voices in the community but since most abide by the policy of keeping it within the group it gives the appearance that the entire community agrees even though this is obviously not the case.

#### 4.4 How other lobbies work

It is important to remember that the Israeli lobby is not the only ethnic interest group that has the power to influence American foreign policy. Another ethnic lobby that is important in the discussion on interest groups is the Cuban American lobby. There are both similarities and differences between the two groups. The clearest difference is that the Israeli lobby work to gain support for the Israeli government while the Cuban Americans work to gain opposition for the Cuban government in the form of a continued embargo. It was not until the 1980's that the Cuban Americans got organized in a lobby group, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). By then the Israel lobby had been active for about two decades. Through the years the Cuban Americans, unlike the Israeli lobby, have been more linked to the Republican Party than to the Democratic Party since the Republicans have shared the Cuban lobby's policy towards Cuba (Vanderbush, 2009, p. 289, 292).

Similarly to the pro-Israeli community the Cuban exiles form a small group. However, while the Israeli lobby is made up by plenty of different groups the Cuban Americans have relied on a small number of strong individuals such as Jorge Mas Canosa, former president of CANF, and a few Cuban American members of Congress (Vanderbush, 2009, p. 289).

Even though it is a relatively small organization it has a significant influence. While the pro-Israel community is spread out over America, with a larger concentration in the big city areas, most of the Cuban Americans live in Florida. Thanks to the concentration of the community it has given them an electoral influence that is not proportional to their numbers. Since Florida is a key state in elections the Cuban Americans have gained the ability to determine which candidate wins the Florida votes (Vaderbush, 2009, p. 301). This is, however,

similar to the pro-Israeli community since the big city areas, Los Angeles and New York, are also located in important states in the battle for electoral votes and therefore also have the capacity to influence the elections (Cameron, 2002, p. 88).

So it is a small exile community that has managed to influence American policy to continue imposing an embargo on Cuba, even though there have been a large number of politicians that would rather have seen a different relationship with the small island state (Vanderbush, 2009, p. 303).

A final similarity between the two groups is the way they both meet their critics. The Israel lobby often responds by calling people who criticise the Israel government, or them selves, anti-Semite. The Cuban Americans respond to their critics by saying that if you are not supporting the embargo you are supporting Fidel Castro (Vanderbush, 2009, p. 302). This is another thing that is pointing to the American political arenas tendency to see things in black and white. There never seems to be a grey middle ground.

## 5 Conclusion

In this study I have tried to present and discuss the complex situation of lobby groups in the U.S. and how they influence the American foreign policy.

I started with a discussion of how the American foreign policy has developed through the years, especially after the end of the Cold War. What I found was that the direction of the policy became disoriented and scattered after the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union which made America lose the enemy with which they had fought for forty years. This is quite understandable considering the amount of crises that erupted in many different parts of the world in the 1990's due to the ending of the Cold War. It might have been difficult for legislators that were used to the Cold War policy view of a bilateral system to take the new crises and countries into consideration. Many legislators probably still have not gotten used to the multilateral world we now live in.

Foremost I have looked into what strategies the Israel lobby uses when influencing the policy makers in the American Congress. What I have found is that the lobby, to a large extent, use money and the threat of labelling opponents as anti-Semite to gain influence. Money in that they support the election campaigns of pro-Israel candidates with such funding that it makes it very difficult for other candidates to win. Because of their historic heritage, the Israel lobbies possess one powerful tool to gain support for their agenda. Opponents and critics are reluctant to voice their opinions in public since this can result in being labelled as an anti-Semite: a label that is difficult to get rid of or defend oneself against.

However, this is not a strategy that is exclusive to the Israel lobby but something that other interest groups also uses, as in the Cuban case where the label instead is pro-Castro. An extraordinary thing in both cases is that the lobby organizations represent such a small amount of people and yet has such a considerable influence.

What are the consequences that come out of the Israel lobby's considerable influence? I believe that it is limiting to the democratic discussion since there is no one willing to initiate a debate about the actions of Israel, the justification of the amount of economic assistance given to the country by the U.S. and also the influence of the lobby organizations themselves. The tendency of actors in American politics to view the world in black and white has direct consequences on the events in the rest of the world. When the American politicians are so dependent on the support of the Israel lobby, and the lobby itself is so uncompromising, there can be nothing but unwavering support for the Israel government. However, the consequence of this is that a possible peace between Israel and the Palestinian people becomes more unlikely since the American

policy towards Israel is not based on what is best for Israel or even the U.S. but what is best for the American legislators own political careers.

It is however not surprising that the American politicians are unwilling to criticise Israel, or Israel lobby organizations, since even the people within the Jewish community finds it difficult criticising the situation.

The lack of internal self-criticism constitutes a problem, as one cannot expect a change to take place as long as it is considered a taboo to criticise Israel even in the community itself. Unless more people become willing to criticise the lobby, and engage in an open discussion regarding both America and Israel as states, little change can be expected to the Middle East problematic. It might just be temporary, but recently more critical voices has been raised against the Israel lobby and the strategies they use; perhaps this constitutes the beginning of a more diverse political discussion in the U.S.



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