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Abstract

While the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is nominally pro-Israel, its advice undermines Israel's interests. It does not encourage Israel to make concessions, but rather recommends that Israel ignore the reformists within and outside of it. The folly of such counsel becomes apparent when one recognizes that Israel's current strategy cannot be sustained.

Keywords

Human rights, United States, Israel, Palestine, American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)

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AIPAC's Good Intentions Undermine Israel's Interests

by Ali Wyne

While the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is nominally pro-Israel, its advice undermines Israel's interests. It does not encourage Israel to make concessions, but rather recommends that Israel ignore the reformists within and outside of it. The folly of such counsel becomes apparent when one recognizes that Israel's current strategy cannot be sustained.

Indeed, common knowledge suggests that imposing hardship on Palestinians will never afford Israel the security that it seeks and deserves; [the burdens of instituting and maintaining occupation are tremendous](#). Were it not for massive infusions of American aid, one wonders how Israel would fare or how its leadership would proceed. As this hypothetical scenario reveals, Israel is in the odd position of having the world's lone superpower as its only reliable ally. It would likely have more partnerships if it embraced the international community's proposals for achieving a durable peace in the Middle East.

In AIPAC's rendering, unfortunately, proponents of this reasoning are either anti-Zionist or anti-Semitic (or perhaps both) and, at a minimum, guilty of extreme naïveté. The irony of this judgment is that many reasonable people consider themselves pro-Israel, without judging Israel's politics. The country's contributions to virtually every realm of human endeavor are invaluable. And when one considers that Israel was established by survivors of the world's most horrific genocide, its contributions seem all the more remarkable. It serves as a role-model for Arab and Muslim countries that endeavor to transcend their current plight.

Unfortunately, Israeli's myriad achievements—the ones that I and many others would prefer to discuss—rarely receive the attention that they merit because of a backdrop of conflict: conflict with Palestinians, conflict with Arab neighbors, and conflict among themselves. It is doubtful that this situation will change if the “Israel lobby”—in particular, AIPAC—maintains its current course (I place the term “Israel lobby” in quotes to emphasize how little a consensus exists on its meaning. While it lies well outside of the purview of this response to volunteer my own definition, suffice it to say that the definition offered by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer casts the net too widely).

AIPAC has every right to lobby on behalf of Israel, and it has done so with awing effectiveness for the past five decades. However, its efforts to stifle discourse—on the Arab-Israeli conflict and, increasingly, on the relationship between the United States and Israel—have aroused many individuals' ire. Interestingly, [most Israelis would disagree with its uncompromising posture](#), which (until now) has largely characterized mainstream discourse in the United States.

Indeed, one is hard-pressed to think of another instance in which one country defends the policies of another country more so than the embattled country itself. *Ha'aretz* routinely runs opinion pieces that criticize Israel's occupation. Many of them ([for example, Meron Benvenisti's articles](#)) quite openly invoke the language of apartheid to describe its policy towards settlements in the Occupied Territories. Regardless of these assessments' legitimacy, the fact that they are common staples of Israeli popular discourse but contentious rarities in American discussion is illuminating (AIPAC's own representatives boast of their enormous ability to shape mainstream

discourse and influence electoral outcomes. So, why is it, then, that these very observations are considered controversial (and conspiratorial) when their issuers happen to lie outside of the arena of pro-Israel advocacy?).

There is no question that Israel has real enemies. It is for this reason that the United States must always remain committed to its survival. Why, however, does AIPAC contrive enemies? In the universe that it has created, virtually every country outside of the United States either is or has the potential to become an adversary—is it surprising that Israel’s leadership is so often defensive (and, in many instances, paranoid)? As a nascent period of violence grips the Holy Land, those individuals who are Israel’s greatest defenders should be AIPAC’s sharpest critics.

Ali Wyne is a senior at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he is pursuing dual degrees in Management and Political Science, as well as a minor in Economics. He serves as Vice-President of the Undergraduate Association, and as Editor-in-Chief of the [MIT International Review](#), MIT’s first journal of international affairs. He will be contributing a chapter, “How World Opinion Challenges American Foreign Policy,” to a forthcoming volume, *The Public Diplomacy Handbook* (Routledge 2008). He maintains a blog on global problems and solutions, [“The Struggle of Memory Against Forgetting.”](#)