

The Place of the Pro-Israel Community in United States Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

The pro-Israel community has long been acknowledged as one of the most influential interest groups in United States politics. Results from a 2005 survey by the *National Journal* ranked the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, as the second most powerful lobbying organization in Washington. The debate over what some see as the community's disproportionate level of influence was reignited in 2006, when John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt published their essay "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy."

In assessing the extent of the community's influence on U.S. politics, this essay will focus on the community's role in activities that are most directly linked to the legislative process: congressional election campaigns and financing, and presidential and congressional legislation. The community's influence will first be examined in the general context of the afore-mentioned activities, and then more specifically in the context of its promotion of a confrontational position on Iran's nuclear programme.

1. INTRODUCTION

On March 23, 2006, the *London Review of Books* published an essay by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt titled “The Israel Lobby” in which the authors argued that the United States had become too reflexive in providing billions of dollars in economic and military aid to Israel and that this was due primarily to the activities of the pro-Israel community in the United States. The authors argued that this reflexivity was especially perplexing given the increasing incongruity between Israel’s interests and those of the United States. The publication of the article and subsequent book prompted a fierce debate. Initial criticisms ranged from charges of anti-Semitism and poor scholarship to the belief that Mearsheimer and Walt had publicized something that was already known.

Regardless of whether or not one agrees with the “Mearsheimer-Walt argument,” as it is called, it does raise an important question about the place of interest groups in United States politics. Many of the activities of the pro-Israel community – directing campaign contributions, organizing letter-writing campaigns, and meeting with policy-makers – fall within the parameters of political participation in a pluralist society. The foundation of the debate, however, is that a small segment of the population has reached what many see as a disproportionate level of influence. This influence has guided U.S. Middle East policy in a direction that, in the view of both moderate American Jews and academics, is seen as harmful to the interests of the United States. This essay will focus on the debate’s domestic policy component, and will pose two questions: (1) How much influence does the pro-Israel community wield in U.S. politics? (2) What is

the place of the pro-Israel community, and the place of interest groups in general, in the American policy-making process?

In considering the place of interest groups in politics, it is important to note that, by nature, public sector policy-making requires that decision-makers reconcile a number of sometimes competing interests. The case of the pro-Israel community is worth considering partly because of a lack of competition, which is the result of two factors: (1) Middle East foreign policy is not a priority issue for many Americans, allowing the pro-Israel community to dominate discussion of U.S. policy on Israel; and (2) Countervailing interest groups are not nearly as strong or well-organized as the pro-Israel community. While this comparative weakness is partly due to internal disputes and lack of unity in the pro-Arab community, the pro-Israel community also actively works to inflict damage on its opposition. As this paper will later show, the community is particularly energetic in its attacks on politicians that who adopt positions it views as anti-Israel, or even positions that are ambiguous towards Israel. Politicians do not always succumb to this pressure, but it does serve as a warning of the difficulties that awaits those who oppose the community.

Influential as the community may be, the complexity of American politics dictates that, especially with respect to election campaign financing, the work of the pro-Israel community is among a number of potentially deciding factors, a fact which is observed regardless of whether or not the margin of victory was close. There is a much stronger case for the pro-Israel community's Influence on legislation in Congress; AIPAC admits that this is the case, stating in a promo-

tional video on its website that: “The best way to guarantee that the United States continues to stand by Israel is through bi-partisan support in Congress.”¹ The community has been successful in supporting a number of Congressional initiatives that resulted in the reversal of a presidential or executive branch policy, illustrating an important tendency: that the community’s ability to influence decision-making at the executive level depends partly on whether or not such decisions require Congressional approval.

As is the general tendency with lobbying, the pro-Israel community is not successful in every case. The discussion of arms sales to Saudi Arabia in the late 1970s and early 1980s will show that, even in cases where the final outcome is not to its satisfaction, the community can still force decision-makers to temper what it considers to be the anti-Israel nature of their policies, and to expend tremendous amounts of effort in the process. These difficulties have potential implications for future decision-making, as politicians have shown little enthusiasm for repeated disputes with the pro-Israel community.

The community’s influence in Congress is also highlighted at AIPAC’s annual policy conferences. The conferences consistently attract a lengthy list of high-profile politicians and have for the last number of years focused on Iran’s nuclear programme. In addition to numerous speeches and discussions, the conferences have also included concerted lobbying efforts in which thousands of delegates disperse on Capitol Hill for meetings with Congress members. These meetings often focus on Iran. The effectiveness of these meetings, and of the pol-

¹ AIPAC, *About AIPAC*, online video, 1 min, 37 sec, accessed June 28, 2013, <http://www.aipac.org/about/how-we-work>.

icy conferences in general, has undoubtedly benefited from the timing of the conferences, which often coincide with the introduction of Congressional legislation that is relevant to Israel.

Much of this paper will refer to the “influence” of the pro-Israel community. “Influence” is the ability to convince an individual or organization to adopt one’s position through persuasive argumentation. This is different from “power,” which refers to the ability to control decision-making by threatening tangible consequences for opposing one’s position. One could also refer to the former as “soft power,” and the latter as “hard power” or “raw power.”²

The pro-Israel community holds both influence and power. In general, the community’s main activities – organizing campaign contributions, openly expressing positions, and meeting with legislators – can be categorized as influence because they do not show that the community controls the legislative agenda. The community can be said to wield a form of implicit power, however, because the vigour with which it pursues its opponents can sometimes lead politicians to censor themselves by pre-emptively adopting pro-Israel positions in order to avoid confronting the community.

This paper will focus on those activities that most directly affect the legislative process: campaign contributions and legislation. The discussion that follows is divided into three sections. The first section outlines and analyzes the pro-Israel community’s role in Congressional elections and legislation. The second section examines the community’s promotion of a harsh stance on Iran. Lastly,

² Jerome Slater, "The Two Books of Mearsheimer and Walt," *Security Studies* 18 (2009): 19.

the paper makes some concluding remarks about the place of the pro-Israel community in U.S. politics, and what the case illustrates about the place of interest groups in U.S. politics.

2. THE FOCAL POINTS OF PRO-ISRAEL ACTIVITY

It has long been acknowledged that the pro-Israel community is one of the most effective interest groups in U.S. politics. A 2005 survey in the *National Journal* ranked the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the leading organization in the pro-Israel community, as the second most powerful lobbying organization in Washington.³ Politicians and government officials can also attest to the influence of the community. For example, former Senator Barry Goldwater stated he was “never put under greater pressure than by the Israel lobby, nor has the Senate as a whole. It’s the most influential crowd in Congress and America by far.”⁴ Members of the pro-Israel community have boasted of being able to acquire, within twenty-four hours, the signatures of seventy Senators on a blank napkin, or of being able to “count on well over half the House – 250-300 members – to do reflexively whatever AIPAC wants.”⁵

³ Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, “Pro-Israel Lobbying Group Holds Meeting Amid Worries,” *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2005, accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/18/AR2005051802143.html>.

⁴ Barry Goldwater with Jack Casserly, *Goldwater* (Doubleday, 1988), 16-17.

⁵ Massing, “The Storm Over the Israel Lobby,” *The New York Review of Books* 53 (2006), accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2006/jun/08/the-storm-over-the-israel-lobby/?pagination=false>.

2.1. The Executive Branch

A number of U.S. administrations have acknowledged the divergence of American and Israeli interests and as a result, have announced plans to curtail or withdraw U.S. aid to Israel. These plans have often precipitated significant backlash from the pro-Israel community, which has sometimes been so strong as to force the administration to retreat completely or revise its position. In such cases, however, the pro-Israel community tends to be less successful when Executive Branch decisions do not require approval from Congress.

2.1.1. The 1975 Ford-Kissinger Reassessment Plan

The eventual failure of the Ford-Kissinger reassessment plan of 1975 is of particular importance for three reasons. First, the White House had publicly announced its intention to revise the terms of the Israeli-American relationship. Second, the pro-Israel community was ultimately successful in opposing the plan, continuing the trend of strong U.S. support for Israel. Third, the success of the community was made possible by the fact that it was able to raise the profile of the issue by initiating a substantial discussion.

In the spring of 1975, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had been engaging in “shuttle diplomacy” in an attempt to bring a peaceful end to the conflict between Israel and Egypt. After talks proved unsuccessful, a frustrated Kissinger persuaded President Gerald Ford to conduct a “reassessment” of U.S. policy towards Israel. Among other things, the resulting policy would have significantly decreased U.S. aid payments to Israel. AIPAC was understandably opposed to the plan, and drafted a letter expressing its support for a \$2.59 billion U.S. aid

package that had been requested by Israel.⁶ ⁷ The letter was sent to Ford in May, but only after it had been signed by seventy-six U.S. Senators who, according to Republican Senator Charles Mathias, did so “promptly” and despite the lack of hearings, debate, or consultation with the Administration. Mathias alleges that one Senator “caved” to pressure from AIPAC while another believed it would be easier “to sign one letter than answer five thousand.”⁸ Despite a high level of tension that summer, the Sinai Interim Agreement (between Egypt and Israel) was signed in September. More importantly, for the purposes of this paper’s discussion, U.S. aid to Israel had resumed at pre-dispute levels.⁹

The community would have viewed the administration’s reversal on aid to Israel as a victory. This result was important, but equally as important was the fact that the community was able to shift the terms of the discussion and prompt a congressional questioning of the merits of the policy, even though the administration had already shown its commitment.

The fact that the community required the help of Congress points to the difficulty of influencing Executive Branch decisions. Even so, the details of decision-making in the administration are not normally made public, meaning that if

⁶ Charles C. Mathias, “Ethnic Groups and Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 05 (1981): 993.

⁷ George Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 150.

⁸ Mathias, “Ethnic Groups and Foreign Policy,” 993.

⁹ Gerald R Ford, *A time to heal: the autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 298.

the community has directly influenced such decision-making, evidence that confirms this influence would be difficult to come by.¹⁰

2.1.2. The U.S. Reaction to Operation Defensive Shield (2002)

The importance of working with Congress to overturn Executive Branch decisions is also illustrated in a more recent example: the fallout from Israel's launch of Operation Defensive Shield in 2002. The launch of the Operation was motivated by Israel's anger over the killing of thirty Israelis by a Hamas suicide bomber in March. As part of the Operation, Israel began to reassert its control over a number of areas in the West Bank. Seeing this, President George W. Bush and members of his administration began to exert pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to retreat. After harsh criticism from Congressional members and Christian evangelists, the administration changed course in April and began referring to Sharon as a "man of peace." It should be noted that while the Christian Zionists are neither Israeli nor Jewish, they are often included in definitions of the pro-Israel community because they actively work to push U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction, and employ many of the same strategies as organizations like AIPAC.¹¹

More substantial movement from Congress came after a mid-April rally organized by the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations and the United Jewish Communities. The rally featured appearances from a number of prominent U.S. politicians, as well as Benjamin Netanyahu. Then, on May 2,

¹⁰ Jerome Slater, "The Two Books of Mearsheimer and Walt," 27.

¹¹ "Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 209-210.

as a reminder of the historically strong support of Israel on Capitol Hill and, importantly, in opposition to the wishes of the administration, the Senate and House of Representatives passed separate resolutions expressing support for Israel. The resolutions passed by wide margins: 94-2 in the Senate, and 352-21 in the House. In addition, a House committee approved an extra \$200 million in aid to Israel on May 9, despite efforts to the contrary of Secretary of State Colin Powell.¹²

2.2. Election Campaigns

The pro-Israel community also uses its extensive network of supporters to direct campaign contributions for both House and Senate elections. In doing so, it is reasonably assured of substantial support in both houses when issues of importance to Israel are brought forward, sometimes at the behest of the community itself. Even so, the relationship between the community's activities and the results of elections is more difficult to observe than the community's relationship with Congress. As the following discussion demonstrates, even in cases where it is successful, the efforts of the community are among several potential factors; however, its successes are numerous enough to make politicians take note. As Mearsheimer and Walt describe the situation, in their response to Robert Lieberman's critique, the community "does not win every time. Rather, it wins often enough to make it clear to most politicians that they are putting their careers at

¹² Ibid, 210.

risk if they are perceived as anti-Israel.”¹³ In other words, even when AIPAC and its allies within the community are not successful, its efforts are so vigorous that they can lead politicians censor themselves in future debates in order to avoid repeated confrontations.

Supporters of the pro-Israel community, and specifically AIPAC, its largest and most influential member, are partly correct when they assert that its influence derives from outstanding organizational abilities.¹⁴ Its network, which reportedly includes over 100,000 members, is crucial to its ability to direct funds to the campaigns of congressional candidates that espouse pro-Israel policies. This organizational strength is illustrated by the case of a congressional candidate who contacted AIPAC in search of financial support. (The name of the candidate and the year of the election are not available.) AIPAC referred the candidate to one of its members, a New York City software developer, who subsequently hosted a fundraising event where the candidate collected roughly \$15,000 in donations. Because the candidate came from a mountain state with a small market for advertising, it was alleged that these donations were crucial in contributing to his narrow victory.¹⁵

In the 2002 campaigns of Representatives Cynthia McKinney and Earl Hilliard, the pro-Israel community was able to direct contributions to the candidates' opponents after both took what right-wing groups in the community deemed to be

¹³ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Blind Man and the Elephant in the Room: Robert Lieberman and the Israel Lobby,” *Perspectives on Politics* 7 (2009), 267.

¹⁴ Massing, “The Storm Over the Israel Lobby.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

anti-Israel positions. According to Massing, these contributions played a significant role in their defeats. While Massing is unable to provide explicit evidence for this conclusion, few commentators would disagree as to the importance of funding in U.S. elections; depending on one's perspective, few commentators would disagree with the idea that funding affects the outcomes of U.S. elections—which is arguably also true of the NYC case cited above. Yet even so, the outcome of any highly contested election could be affected by many of factors. Indeed, politics in general is often characterized by the reconciling of various considerations, and as Massing describes the cases above “a candidate's position on Israel is rarely enough by itself to cause defeat.”¹⁶

Pro-Israel campaign contributions can also be considered in the context of those from other interest groups. Such examinations must be conducted carefully, however, as contributions from individuals normally outnumber those from PACs, and the addition of these contributions might affect one's observations.¹⁷ It is also possible, though ultimately difficult to prove, that AIPAC-led contributions motivate ordinary Jewish citizens to make contributions of their own, resulting in a cascade effect that significantly enhances the value of whatever funds AIPAC itself contributes directly.

The 2006 re-election campaigns of Senators Hillary Clinton and Joe Lieberman are instructive in this regard. In Senator Clinton's case, the \$328,000 in pro-Israel PAC contributions accounted for less than 1% of her total campaign contributions for that year. Other contributions included more than \$500,000

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Mearsheimer and Walt, “The Blind Man and the Elephant in the Room,” 266.

from the printing and publishing industry; \$800,000 from healthcare interests; \$1 million from women's rights groups; \$2 million from the real estate industry; and more than \$4 million from lawyers and law firms.¹⁸

In the case of Senator Joseph Lieberman, one of Israel's most ardent supporters in Congress, pro-Israel contributions totaled \$1.2 million, but represented only 6% of all contributions. While Lieberman's margin of victory was significant, his expenditures were also \$1.2 million less than his receipts. A wide margin would suggest, as does author Robert Lieberman, that the pro-Israel contributions to Senator Lieberman's campaign were "superfluous"¹⁹; however, one could also say that any other combination of contributions totaling \$1.2 million was superfluous. In any case, without knowing how these contributions were used, or how effective they were in mobilizing voters in comparison with other industries and interest groups, it would be difficult to determine which contributions were "superfluous." Such details reinforce the main lesson of the two previous examples, which is that even considering the afore-mentioned potential cascade effect from AIPAC-led contributions, pro-Israel campaign contributions cannot be said to have a decisive impact.

While pro-Israel contributions remain strong, their position in relation to those of other interest groups has declined over time. According to the Centre for Responsive Politics (CRP), contributions from pro-Israel political action commit-

¹⁸ Walter Russell Mead, "Jerusalem Syndrome: Decoding the Israel Lobby," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2007, accessed June 18, 2013. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63029/walter-russell-mead/jerusalem-syndrome>

¹⁹ Robert Lieberman, "The 'Israel lobby' and American politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 02 (2009): 244.

tees (PACs) totaled \$3 million for all races in the 2006 election cycle. Total pro-Israel contributions, including those from individuals and non-PAC organizations, totaled, on average, \$7.3 million for Congressional and Presidential elections for each election cycle between 1990 and 2006;²⁰ however, contributions from other interest groups have risen sharply over that same period, meaning that the relative share of overtly pro-Israel contributions has decreased. For example, in 1990, pro-Israel contributions ranked 12th out of those from industry or issue-oriented groups, but declined to 34th by 2006; this ranking had dropped as low as 52nd in 2004.²¹ Even so, one cannot be certain that the totality of pro-Israel contributions, which would include those from individuals as well as from organized interest groups, has decreased, as it is more difficult to determine which individual contributions are chiefly motivated by pro-Israel tendencies.

It should also be noted that elections are fought over a number of issues, of which foreign policy is only one, meaning that the pro-Israel community is unable to be a decisive factor on a consistent basis. While the pro-Israel community is indeed consistently ranked as one of the most powerful interest groups in Washington, attributing election results primarily to the activities of a single group dismisses the influence of other equally well-organized groups such as the National Rifle Association or the American Association of Retired Persons. One would also be hard-pressed to imagine that, in an election year such as 2008, when the U.S. was in the midst of a financial crisis, concerns over housing, em-

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

ployment, and income would be less important to voters than U.S. and Israeli policy in the Middle East.

2.3. Division in the Pro-Israel Community

The frustration over reflexive support of right-wing Israeli policies, and an overly restrictive view of what it means to be pro-Israel, is precisely what motivated Jeremy Ben Ami to create JStreet. Founded in 2008, J-Street describes itself as the “political home for pro-Israel, pro-Peace Americans.” As a moderate pro-Israel group, J-Street believes that a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is necessary to the peace and security of Israel, and that the conflict is not a zero-sum game;²² in other words, a gain for Palestine is not necessarily a loss for Israel. It should be noted that AIPAC officially supports a two-state solution, but has refused to condemn the construction of settlements; J Street, on the other hand, views Israeli settlements in the occupied territories as obstacles to peace, and only increase Palestinian hostility towards Israel.^{23 24}

It is evident that a number of American citizens share the same frustrations as Ben Ami and JStreet, and the group’s power has been steadily increasing. In 2009, JStreet doubled its operating budget from \$1.5 million to \$3 million. Attendance at its policy conferences has increased from 1,500 participants at the inaugural 2009 conference to more than 2,500 in 2012. JStreet has also doubled

²² “About JStreet,” accessed June 27, 2013, <http://jstreet.org/about>.

²³ “Settlements: J Street,” accessed July 11, 2013, http://jstreet.org/blog/post/settlements_1.

²⁴ “Our Mission,” accessed June 28, 2013, <http://www.aipac.org/about/our-mission>.

the amount of campaign contributions it distributes through JStreet PAC, raising roughly \$1.5 million in 2010.²⁵

It is also evident that JStreet shares many of the views of the Obama administration, and as a consequence is gradually gaining influence in the White House. In 2009, for instance, Ben Ami was invited to a meeting between the leaders of the pro-Israel community and President Obama in which the President refused to accept the wish of conservative pro-Israel leaders that the U.S. refrain from publicly airing its disagreements with Israel. JStreet and Obama also both believe in a less confrontational position on Iran.

The emergence of JStreet shows that the traditionally right-wing mainstream of the pro-Israel community is losing credibility. While this loss of credibility may result, in part, from feelings of exasperation with the long-standing and vigorous approaches of the established leadership, it also partly derives from the fact that its founders do not have the same values as many young Jewish Americans. Many of the community's right-leaning founders were raised in the years surrounding the Holocaust, and were thus motivated to prevent such a calamity from occurring in the future. Abraham Foxman, for example, founder the Anti-Defamation League, was born in Poland in 1940. Morton Klein, President of the Zionist Organization of America, was born in a refugee camp to two survivors of the Holocaust.²⁶ The Holocaust remains a motivating factor for AIPAC.²⁷

²⁵ "About JStreet."

²⁶ James Traub, "The New Israel Lobby," *The New York Times*, September 9, 2009, accessed May 11, 2013.
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/magazine/13JStreet-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

Support for the older generation is slowly disappearing. Ben Ami and JStreet, for instance, represent a much younger generation that does not face the same existential threat.²⁸ For this generation, the conception of Israel is not one of weakness and vulnerability, as is the case for founders of the mainstream, but one of strength. As a result of these factors, JStreet generally espouses policies that are less reflexive in supporting the Israel right wing, especially when it deems that Israel's position (and that of mainstream pro-Israel groups) is overly aggressive or confrontational. On Iran, for example, JStreet supports the imposition of harsh sanctions, but cites potential strengthening of the Iranian regime and the impermanence of the destruction of Iran's facilities as reasons why a military strike "would be ill-advised."²⁹

2.4. Influencing Congressional Legislation

Evidence of a link between pro-Israel lobbying efforts and pro-Israel foreign policy is strongest when the pro-Israel community works to shape Congressional legislation. While it appears that campaign contributions have a minimal impact on election results, a central premise of election campaigns is that they are meant to give voters a sense of the positions candidates intend to take once in office. If contributions from the pro-Israel community are significantly greater than those from countervailing interest groups, and if one believes that contributions are a suitable predictor of policy positions adopted by members of Con-

²⁷ "The Holocaust," accessed June 28, 2013, <http://www.aipac.org/why-israel-matters/the-holocaust>.

²⁸ James Traub, "The New Israel Lobby."

²⁹ "Iran," accessed June 28, 2013, http://jstreet.org/blog/post/iran_4.

gress, then one should expect a predominantly pro-Israel Congress. While Congress has been largely pro-Israel over the past few decades, and while the efforts of the pro-Israel community undoubtedly play a significant role, it is also possible that Congress is predisposed to support Israel for strategic reasons related to its desire for influence in the Middle East, or because the two countries are similar in their political ideologies.

While one may question how much control the community holds over Congressional legislation, the community works very hard to ensure that the outcome of any debate on legislation involving Israel is ultimately in its favour. This paper has already discussed one case – the “letter of seventy-six” sent to Gerald Ford in opposition to the proposed reassessment of U.S. Middle East policy in 1975 – in which the community successfully mobilized Congressional opinion. There are other instances, however, where AIPAC’s involvement was even more substantial.

One instance in particular concerns the sale of military equipment to Saudi Arabia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In February of 1978, U.S. President Jimmy Carter announced to Congress that he planned to sell 50 F-15 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia. This prompted a surge of activity in the pro-Israel community, which employed a number of tactics to oppose the sale. These tactics included the publication of op-ed pieces denouncing the sale and the organization of major demonstrations. The sale was eventually completed, but not before pressure

from the community forced the Carter administration to compensate Israel, by increasing military aid, for the risk posed to it by the sale.³⁰

For aerospace company Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI), however, the sale would have been beneficial, as it had been made contingent on the denial of external fuel tanks for the F-15s that would have allowed them to reach Israel. This requirement was silently removed in 1981; while security-minded Israelis would likely have been outraged by this development, IAI was undoubtedly pleased, as the fuel tanks were built in IAI's factory near Tel Aviv.³¹

Arms sales to Saudi Arabia continued to be an issue during the Reagan Administration. In 1980, Reagan proposed the sale of five airborne warning and control systems, or AWACS. The AWACS were part of a larger arms package requested by Saudi Arabia that included equipment for the F-15 jets, missiles, and refueling planes, among other items. After Reagan's election, AIPAC's then-Director Thomas Dine met with Attorney-General Edwin Meese and informed him that the pro-Israel community would be prepared to "fight all the way" on the AWACS sale. Dine also informed Meese that the "intense opposition" from pro-Israel Congress members "would not be in the best interests of anybody." AIPAC went further, and used its influence to organize discussions in the House and in the Senate.³²

³⁰ Andrew and Leslie Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison: The Inside Story of the U.S.-Israeli Covert Relationship*, (New York, HarperCollins Publishers: 1991), 194.

³¹ Ibid, 194-195.

³² Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 138-141.

Even though AIPAC was reasonably sure that a majority of Congress members would vote in favour of the sale, it ensured that the Jewish community at large was aware of the circumstances of the sale and of its significance for Israel. It began to exploit its organizational and information dissemination capabilities by contacting Jewish “community relations councils,” an act that resulted in a stream of phone calls, telegrams, and letters to Congress members informing them of the capacities of the F-15 planes, the dangers posed to Israel’s security by the AWACS, and of the contrast between the “unstable” Saudi administration and the democratic, stable Israeli administration.³³

Part of the reason the pro-Israel community was particularly effective in lobbying against the AWACS sale was the lack of an effective opposition. For example, Frederick Dutton, the chief advocate for Saudi Arabia, had not registered as a lobbyist on Capital Hill until part-way through the battle.³⁴ The U.S. pro-Arab community is also less unified than the pro-Israel community. This lack of unity partly derives from the fact that there are many Arab governments who hire lobbyists individually, meaning that, according to Dr. James Zogby, “Arab Americans are not an Arab Lobby.” Dr. Zogby also notes that this fractiousness contrasts with the pro-Israel community, which tends to converge around a single set of ideas and interests.³⁵ As Mitchell Bard notes, almost two fifths of Arab American are Lebanese Christians, the majority of whom oppose the policies of

³³ Tivnan, 142.

³⁴ Ibid, 153.

³⁵ Dr. James Zogby, “Arab Americans and the Middle East Policy in the 2008 U.S. Elections” (Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington, DC, December 29, 2007), accessed July 3, 2013, <http://2002-2009-fpc.state.gov/95931.htm>.

other Arab groups.³⁶ The Lebanese Christians are part of a larger group within the pro-Arab community that is older, and thus more Americanized than more recent immigrants of other Arab nationalities.³⁷ Partly as a result of these internal disputes, the pro-Arab community lacks the organizational capacity of AIPAC and the motivation to match its efforts. A contributing factor is the absence of a natural base of support in the U.S. – indeed, many Americans are pre-disposed to supporting Israel. One effect of this predisposition is that during the dispute over the AWACS sale, the pro-Saudi community refrained from traditional lobbying strategies for which the pro-Israel community has become known, such as personal discussions with legislators, providing electoral support, or letter-writing and informational campaigns.

The Reagan Administration formally announced the sale on October 1st of 1981. The efforts of the pro-Israel community, which had taken place over a period of months, appeared to have a considerable effect on the final vote: the House voted against the sale by a margin of 301 to 111, and the Senate foreign relations committee voted against the sale by a margin of 9 to 8. The Senate itself, however, voted for the sale by a margin of 52 to 48.³⁸ Although the sale eventually proceeded, the AWACS episode illustrates the difficulty of opposing the pro-Israel community. Even though AIPAC originally believed a majority of Congress would support the sale, the newly-elected Reagan was forced to be-

³⁶ Mitchell Bard, "The Israeli and Arab Lobbies," *Jewish Virtual Library*, updated July 2012, accessed July 3, 2013, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/lobby.html>.

³⁷ Nabeel A. Khoudry, "The Arab Lobby: Problems and Prospects," *Middle East Journal* 41 (1987): 379.

³⁸ Tivnan, 157, 160.

come personally involved and expended a tremendous amount of effort persuading Senators to approve it. The community had almost prevented what Edward Tivnan believes should have been an easy victory for the President, due to the relatively small size of the sale, and the U.S. interest in Saudi oil.³⁹

As we have already mentioned, any Congressional representative that shows signs of espousing anti-Israel or pro-Arab policies is likely to face significant pressure from the pro-Israel community. While resisting this pressure is often difficult for many representatives, the 2006 dispute between Representative Betty McCollum and AIPAC is a notable exception. The case is also instructive because it shows AIPAC's ability to move past opposition. McCollum, a Democrat from Minnesota with a history of supporting Israel, had voiced her opposition to the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act.⁴⁰ Drafted in the wake of the election of Hamas, this Act placed such extensive restrictions on U.S. aid to the Palestinian people that it failed to garner support from the State Department. McCollum was one of two House members to vote against the Act, which was passed in the House's International Relations Committee by a margin of 36-2.

McCollum's chief of staff received a phone call from one of AIPAC's representatives. The representative, who had frequently been in contact with McCollum's staff on previous matters, stated that "on behalf of herself, the Jewish community, AIPAC, and the voters of the Fourth District, Congresswoman McCollum's support for terrorists will not be tolerated." McCollum published a letter to AIPAC's executive director Howard Kohr in the *New York Review of*

³⁹ Ibid, 161.

⁴⁰ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 159.

Books on June 8, demanding an apology from AIPAC, and banning AIPAC representatives from her offices until the apology had been received.⁴¹ At the behest of Rep. Gary Ackerman, McCollum and Kohr did meet in a successful attempt to move past the issue, although it is unclear if McCollum received a formal apology.⁴²

This is instructive for two reasons. Firstly, the episode illustrates the heavy-handed and aggressive tactics with which the community is willing to operate to achieve its aims. Secondly, McCollum and Kohr were reportedly able to resolve their differences. In our analysis, however, we are not so much concerned with the resolution of a dispute between two parties as we are about the ability of the pro-Israel community to overcome opposition.

2.5 Summary

In sum, the pro-Israel community wields significant influence in Congress, and it has used this influence to weaken support for policies it opposes. Influencing decision-making is considerably more difficult at the Executive level; while the community has been successful on a number of occasions, in these cases the community has normally been required to seek help from Congress. The community's effect on elections is more obscure, and the preceding pages have shown that there is little observable connection between pro-Israel campaign

⁴¹ Betty McCollum, "A Letter to AIPAC," *The New York Review of Books*, June 8, 2006, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2006/jun/08/a-letter-to-aipac/>.

⁴² "Rep Set To Resolve Aipac Spat," *Forward*, June 02, 2006, accessed June 11, 2013, . <http://forward.com/articles/689/rep-set-to-resolve-aipac-spat/>.

contributions and election results. It is possible, however, though difficult to observe, that pro-Israel contributions serve as a reminder of the community's support once candidates take office.

3. CASE STUDY: IRAN

The reaction of the pro-Israel community to Iran's nuclear programme illustrates its influence in Congress especially vividly, and shows how it has been able to keep the issue at the forefront of U.S. political consciousness. In recent years, the United States has supported increasingly harsh sanctions against Iran, as punishment for what many suspect is a drive to develop nuclear weapons capability. Commentators will offer a number of explanations for U.S. opposition to the programme (strategic, ideological), but a major source of concern has been the potential threat to the security of Israel, for long the United States' most important ally in the Middle East. Specifically, these concerns relate to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's stated wish for Israel to "vanish from the page of time"; Iran's progression towards mastering the nuclear fuel cycle; its development of missiles capable of reaching Israel; its support of Hezbollah; and the possibility that Iran will be better able to resist U.S. and Israeli influence in the region if it were to acquire nuclear weapons.

AIPAC has been at the forefront of the campaign of the pro-Israel community to impose harsh sanctions, and has pressed both the Obama administration and Congress to emphasize the threat of a military strike if Iran crosses a certain threshold, or red line. While the community has been highly visible and influential in this regard, it is nonetheless difficult to determine how much responsibility is

borne by the community, and how much can be attributed to strategic or ideological concerns.

3.1. AIPAC'S Annual Policy Conferences

Many of AIPAC's recent policy conferences have focused on Iran, with the most warmly received guest speakers overwhelmingly supportive of a confrontational position on the issue. At the 2007 conference, John Hagee, head of Christians United for Israel, delivered an address in which he stated he "would hope the United States would join Israel in a military pre-emptive strike to take out the nuclear capability of Iran for the salvation of Western civilization." Hagee also compared Iran to Nazi Germany, and compared Ahmadinejad to Adolf Hitler. His remarks received numerous standing ovations, a reception which contrasted sharply with the much colder response to Senator Hillary Clinton, who spoke of the need for a general policy of re-engagement with Iran.⁴³

Barack Obama's remarks at the 2008 conference are also worth noting, not because of rapturous applause from the audience, but because they became the focus of Congressional action two years later. In his speech, Obama had assured delegates that he would do "everything" in his power to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. This statement does not necessarily mean that Obama's position had shifted - he had previously expressed his willingness to engage Iran and meet with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad - only that Obama had momentarily adjusted his rhetoric in what was likely meant to draw support from a largely conservative audience. Indeed, Obama's policy of considering all available op-

⁴³ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 301.

tions has remained consistent; negotiations and the threat of military action are not mutually exclusive.⁴⁴ AIPAC and Congress took these remarks to heart, however, and in April of 2010, Congressmen Jesse Jackson and Mike Pence drafted a letter asking Obama to fulfill his promise of doing “everything” to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The letter was endorsed by AIPAC, and signed by more than 300 members of Congress.⁴⁵

The success of the conferences has also been largely undiminished by news of AIPAC’s involvement in unscrupulous activities. The 2005 conference was promoted as AIPAC’s “largest ever” (as has been the case with many of its recent conferences) and featured an interactive video tour reportedly showcasing how Iran was planning to build nuclear weapons, and the steps that could be taken to prevent it from occurring. As usual, speeches came from a number of prominent politicians, including Ariel Sharon, Hillary Clinton, and Condoleezza Rice. The support shown by such prominent attendees was undiminished by the fact that two AIPAC officials, Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman, had been fired a month earlier for their involvement in a spying operation in which classified U.S. government documents were passed to the Israeli administration.⁴⁶

This was not the first case of Israeli espionage on the United States. In 1985, a Jewish American named Jonathan Pollard was sentenced to life in prison

⁴⁴ Ido Oren, "Why has the United States not bombed Iran? The domestic politics of America’s response to Iran’s nuclear programme," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 24 (2007): 666.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 667.

⁴⁶ Sasan Fayazmaneh, *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars, and Dual Containment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 166-167.

for espionage.⁴⁷ Pollard was a navy intelligence officer who had photocopied more than 800,000 pages of classified U.S. technical data on weapons systems.⁴⁸ The scope of the data provided by Pollard and the length of his sentence resulted in a sizeable campaign for his release that continues to draw support from a number of Israeli politicians. These include both Yithzak Rabin and Benjamin Netanyahu, the latter of whom, in 1998, informed Bill Clinton of his desire to make the signing of an agreement with Yasser Araft conditional on Pollard's release.^{49 50}

AIPAC's policy conferences are also used as a point of origin for major Congressional lobbying initiatives on Iran. In 2010, for example, more than 4,000 AIPAC delegates held roughly 500 separate meetings with members of Congress or their staff, in which harsh sanctions on Iran were one of three "asks" from AIPAC lobbyists. AIPAC member Steve Aserkoff was tasked with preparing a number of first-time lobbyists for their meetings on Capitol Hill, and believes discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were diverting attention from Iran's nuclear programme; Senator Evan Bayh made a similar statement in his address to the conference. Among the talking points that were distributed by Aserkoff was the following: "[T]he United States needs to lead the international community in

⁴⁷ Andrew Cockburn and Leslie Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison: The Inside Story of the U.D.-Israeli Covert Relationship* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 85.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 85, 206.

⁴⁹ "Rabin Appeals to Clinton for Clemency for Pollard," *JTA*, November 11, 1993, accessed June 27, 2013. <http://www.jta.org/1993/11/11/archive/rabin-appeals-to-clinton-for-clemency-for-pollard>

⁵⁰ Bill Clinton, *My Life*, (New York: Knopf, 2004), 468.

imposing crippling sanctions on Iran without delay.” These sanctions included the targeting of non-American companies conducting business in Iran.⁵¹

The push for Iran sanctions had also occurred the year before, when a similarly high number of delegates (6,500, to be precise) met with Congress members and their staff in 500 separate meetings. In this case, the lobbying push coincided with the introduction of a sanctions bill in the Senate by Evan Bayh and Jon Kyl.⁵² AIPAC’s lobbying efforts were undoubtedly strengthened by the fact that the bills had been introduced only a week before the conference, meaning there was ample time for AIPAC to persuade Congress members of its position before voting took place.⁵³

3.2. Influencing Legislation

3.2.1. Spending authorization legislation

Crucial to AIPAC’s success in advancing a confrontational stance on Iran has been its involvement in the preparation of Congressional legislation. In another case, that of a 2008 Senate amendment to a defense authorization bill, AIPAC was ultimately unsuccessful. The amendment called for Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to be designated a foreign terrorist organization. Approved by a margin of 76-22, the original version of the amendment was alleged-

⁵¹ Michael Scherer, “The Pro-Israel Lobby’s Plan to Storm Congress,” *Time*, March 22, 2010, accessed June 16, 2013, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1973983,00.html>.

⁵² Andrew Glass, “AIPAC launches push for Iran sanctions,” May 4, 2009, accessed June 16, 2013, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0509/22086.html>.

⁵³ Ron Kampeas, “AIPAC policy conference to push Iran bills,” *JTA*, April 27, 2009, accessed June 15, 2013, posted on <http://developing-your-web-presence.blogspot.ca/2009/04/aipac-policy-conference-to-push-iran.html>.

ly drafted by AIPAC. Some paragraphs of the bill were removed after it was argued that they moved the U.S. precipitously close to military action. For example, one section called for the U.S. to:

combat, contain and roll back the violent activities and destabilizing influence inside Iraq of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran...and its indigenous Iraqi proxies...and “the prudent and calibrated use of all instruments of United States national power in Iraq, including...military instruments, in support of (that) policy...”⁵⁴

In one sense, the removal of this and other sections constituted a loss for AIPAC because it failed to have the full text of its legislation adopted by Congress, and instead, was forced to play a part in the reconciliation of competing interests that lies at the foundation of politics. In another sense, however, the episode reinforced the close relationship between AIPAC and Congress, because AIPAC was able to participate in and influence the drafting of legislation. The fact that AIPAC and its supporters in Congress are not always victorious does not diminish the fact that they often work closely together.

3.2.2. House Resolution 568 and Senate Resolution 380

In May 2012, AIPAC strongly supported resolutions in both the House (H. Res. 568) and the Senate (S. Res. 380) that emphasized the necessity of preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.⁵⁵ The language of

⁵⁴ Jim Lobe, “Anti-Iran Hawks Win Partial Victory in Congress,” *Inter Press Service*, Sept. 27, 2007, accessed June 16, 2013, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2007/09/politics-us-anti-iran-hawks-win-partial-victory-in-congress>.

⁵⁵ AIPAC, “Bill Summary Iran Containment Resolutions,” last modified May 2012, accessed June 16, 2013, www.aipac.org/.../Bill Summaries/.../Bill Summary Iran.

these resolutions is telling because it clearly demonstrates a divergence between AIPAC's policies (and, most likely, a number of others in the pro-Israel community) and those of the Obama administration. While Obama and AIPAC share a desire to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability, AIPAC has gone further in seeking a fixed commitment from the President that he will, under certain circumstances, order an attack on Iran. Obama has refused, preferring instead to remain open to a broad range of options, of which military action is but one.

The distance between Obama's position and that of AIPAC is reinforced when one considers the difference between nuclear weapons capability and acquisition. "Capability" is an ambiguous term that can encompass any number of activities, from accelerated fuel enrichment (recall Iran's recent acquisition of 3,000 centrifuges), the production of heavy water (necessary for nuclear fuel production), or the acquisition of scientific and technical expertise. Nuclear weapons acquisition, however, is normally confirmed by the successful test of a device.

The lack of a standardized definition for capability leaves it open to interpretation. As Robert Wright describes the term, "capability" could be interpreted as having the capacity to construct a device in two months or two years. If legislators choose to employ the latter option, Iran is already believed to have crossed such a threshold, as many estimates see it as being able to produce a weapon in 12 to 18 months. Given these estimates legislation that requires that United

States to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability would effectively provide Obama with the authority to launch an attack.⁵⁶

Whether or not one determines that such an attack would be problematic depends on one's perception, which, in turn, affects whether or not one believes that Iran could be deterred. On one level, this difference in perception relates to the level of rationality of the Iranian administration. Although some members of the Iranian administration may not appear to be rational, there are doubts that Iran is a suicidal nation that intends to launch a nuclear attack on the United States. Both General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his Israeli equivalent have stated their beliefs that the Iranian regime is rational.⁵⁷ Benjamin Netanyahu, on the other hand, is much less convinced, noting that the nuclear age has not yet experienced a leader of a nuclear-capable country, such as Ahmadinejad, who prioritizes ideology over self-interest. Netanyahu is suspicious of the certainty with which a leader such as Ahmadinejad would behave rationally if Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapon.⁵⁸

Israel's view of deterrence differs from the more traditional view held by the United States. Traditional deterrence as employed during the Cold War was conceived as a relationship between two states in which each state would deter the other. In keeping with this theory, the Obama administration seems to be-

⁵⁶ Robert Wright, "AIPAC and the Push Toward War," *The Atlantic*, February 21, 2012, accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/02/aipac-and-the-push-toward-war/253358/>.

⁵⁷ Peter Jones, "Learning to Live With a Nuclear Iran," *The Nonproliferation Review* 19 (2012), 204-205.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

lieve that Iran can be successfully deterred from acquiring both a nuclear weapons capability and from building a weapon if the former did occur. Israel, on the other hand, sees nuclear weapons as providing it with the necessary protection from which it may pursue unilateral military actions in the region. Israel, thus, believes that it must be the only nuclear power in the region, and that any threats to that status, such as that from Iran, must be stopped.⁵⁹

Israel is effectively operating on different assumptions about the meaning of the term “nuclear weapons state.” Historically, nuclear weapons states have been defined as those that have successfully tested a nuclear device; this is the current position of the United States and was the position of both the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.⁶⁰ Critics of the test/no-metric believe that the fact that the absence of a successful test does not necessarily eliminate the possibility that a given country possesses nuclear weapons. Secret testing has been rendered almost impossible by advances in remote sensing technology, but there are some designs that do not require testing. (The Little Boy device dropped on Hiroshima is one historical example.) While Israel is one of the only countries believed to have inducted weapons into an arsenal without testing, one can hypothesize that this might inform its fears about the Iranian programme.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid, 207.

⁶⁰ Jacques E.C. Hymans, “When Does a State become a Nuclear Weapons State?” in *Forecasting Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st Century: The Role of Theory. Vol. 1* ed. William C. Potter and Gaukhar Mukhatzanova (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 106.

⁶¹ Hymans, “When Does a State Become a Nuclear Weapons State?,” 109.

Because Israel's red line lies at capability, it requires much more from Iran than does the U.S. to meet its demands. These demands include an end to Iran's enrichment program, the removal of all enriched uranium from Iran, and the permanent closure of its facilities. Obtaining such concessions from Iran is highly unlikely, given that it has already made significant political and financial investments in its programme. Forcing these concessions through a military attack is likely to be a temporary measure, as Iran is certain to rebuild its facilities and take stronger steps to secure them. Thus, ensuring Iran's compliance long into the future would require not a single attack, but a continuing series of attacks. Further complicating the matter is the fact that it is the United States, and not Israel, that is equipped to sustain such military efforts over the long term. Given the complications of the recent incursions into Iraq and Afghanistan, however, the Obama administration is likely not receptive to the prospect of another long-term military commitment in the Middle East.⁶²

Israel also likely fears that Iran could quickly assemble a weapon once the latter has acquired a significant quantity, or SQ, of fissile material. As Jacques Hymans notes, however, converting from an SQ to a weapon is an extremely difficult task. Thus, while Iran is in the process of acquiring an SQ, - recall the recent installation of 3,000 centrifuges at Natanz - it remains to be seen whether or not it will be able to convert it to a weapon.⁶³

⁶² Peter Jones, "Enrichment of Weapons: Where is the Red Line on Iran?," *CIPS BLOG*, March 5, 2012, accessed June 25, 2013, <http://cips.uottawa.ca/enrichment-or-weapons-where-is-the-red-line-on-iran/>.

⁶³ Hymans, "When Does a State Become a Nuclear Weapons State?," 114.

The larger lesson, for the purposes of this essay, is that the American pro-Israel community is attempting to push the United States closer to accepting Israel's position as described in the preceding paragraphs. This is a position that, because of its non-traditional definitions of nuclear weapons states and deterrence, would bring the United States much closer to a military attack. The Obama administration, however, has been unwilling to accept it.

3.3. The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act

One of the most frequently cited influences on U.S. policy in the Middle East, and one which often surfaces in discussions of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, is the protection of American access to oil. In the case of the abandonment of the Conoco oil agreement in 1995, however, it appears that concerns over oil gave precedence to preserving the relationship with Israel.

Iran had selected Conoco, an American company, as the developer for its Sirri oil fields, in what Mearsheimer and Walt believe was a deliberate attempt to foster a more positive relationship between the two countries.⁶⁴ While the authors fail to support this statement with evidence, one could easily imagine that the agreement would have eased Iranian-American tensions. Nonetheless, President Clinton took a number of steps to end cooperation with Iran that went beyond the Conoco agreement. First, he cancelled the Conoco agreement on March 14; second, he issued an executive order the next day preventing American companies from entering into any such agreements in the future; third, he

⁶⁴ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 288.

issued a second executive order on May 6, prohibiting trade and financial investments with Iran.⁶⁵

Senator Alfonso D'Amato had introduced a bill in the Senate in September of 1995 that sought to eliminate all trade with Iran and cease purchases of Iranian oil by U.S. companies.⁶⁶ After Clinton's Executive Orders, D'Amato re-introduced the bill. While AIPAC had been pressuring Congress for sanctions on Iran for some time, the fact that D'Amato was historically confrontational on Iran makes it unclear whether or not pressure from AIPAC was a contributing factor in his re-introduction of the bill. Regardless, an AIPAC official alleges that the organization worked closely with Congress in drafting the legislation, stating that "These guys (Congress) wrote their thing (ILSA) with us sentence by sentence."⁶⁷ This claim may very well be true, but lobbyists have been known to make such boasts in order to give the impression that their employers are particularly influential, and one could recall boasts of being able to acquire the signatures of seventy Senators on a blank napkin as another example. It is difficult, however, to know the extent of AIPAC's involvement without evidence that explicitly confirms it.⁶⁸

Among the changes to what became the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) proposed by AIPAC was the inclusion of non-American companies in the scope

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Sasan Fayazmaneh, "The Politics of the U.S. Economic Sanctions Against Iran," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 35 (2003): 230.

⁶⁷ Herman Franssen, and Elaine Morton, "A Review of US Unilateral Sanctions Against Iran," *Middle East Economic Survey*, 45, no. 34 (2002), <http://www.mafhoum.com/press3/108E16.htm> (accessed June 17, 2013).

⁶⁸ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 10.

of the sanctions. Specifically included were provisions that prevented U.S. companies from conducting business with foreign companies trading with Iran and prevented the government from selling export licenses to firms whose affiliates operated in Iran. The Clinton administration had originally objected to some provisions of the Iran sanctions bill but was fortunate to have its objections heeded. These modifications, in which AIPAC was allegedly involved, virtually ensured Clinton's signature.⁶⁹

Sanctions against Libya were added at the last minute. Noting that Clinton's signature on the Iran sanctions was all but assured, AIPAC pushed for the Libya amendment to be passed as separate legislation, as this would have made it more difficult for President Clinton to veto the sanctions on Iran.⁷⁰ Despite the reservations of some members of the American business community, as well as the Assistant Secretary of State, the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act received unanimous approval in both the Senate and the House.⁷¹

AIPAC and those close to it had sensationalized the security threat from Iran in order to build the case for harsher sanctions and military action. In his testimony to the Congressional hearing on March 23, 1995, for instance, D'Amato stated that "Iran has placed chemical weapons on disputed islands in the Strait of Hormuz,"⁷² when no such thing had occurred. D'Amato also called

⁶⁹ Franssen and Mortan "A Review of US Unilateral Sanctions."

⁷⁰ George Moffett, "Push to widen Libya sanctions riles US allies," *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 24, 1996, accessed June 17, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/1996/0124/24011.html/%28page%29/3>.

⁷¹ Trita Parsi, "Israeli-Iranian relations 1970--2001: Ideological calculus or strategic rivalry?," (PhD diss. Johns Hopkins University, 2006), 312-314.

⁷² Fayazmaneh, *The United States and Iran*, 74.

on the testimony of Patrick Clawson, director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP). WINEP had been founded in 1985 by Martin Indyk who, at in his previous post, was Research Director for AIPAC.

MJ Rosenberg, a former employee of AIPAC, describes the vision for WINEP as “an AIPAC controlled think tank that would disseminate the AIPAC line but in a way that would disguise its connections.”⁷³ Indyk describes it differently, stating that his goal was to perform balanced, scholarly, pro-Israel research, but that his credibility suffered when he worked for AIPAC precisely because of his affiliation with the organization.⁷⁴ Regardless of Indyk’s motivation, it is difficult to ignore the connection between AIPAC and WINEP.

According to Sasan Fayazmaneh, Clawson’s testimony was highly exaggerated and bellicose in nature. While Fayazmaneh does not support this statement with evidence, Clawson has elsewhere advocated for a harsh position on Iran, and, in fact, has suggested that Israel create a “false flag” to provide the justification for attacking Iran. Speaking at a WINEP policy forum luncheon in September 2012, Clawson stated that “if, in fact, the Iranians aren’t going to compromise, it would be best if someone else started the war.”⁷⁵ Clawson went on to suggest that the sinking of an Iranian submarine could be used as such a provocation.

⁷³ Geoffrey Ingersoll and Michael Kelly, “Lobbyist Says Israel Should Create A ‘False Flag’ To Start A War With Iran,” *Business Insider*, Septemebr 26, 2012, accessed June 18, 2013. <http://www.businessinsider.com/top-researcher-suggests-israel-get-nastier-with-iran-sink-sub-illicit-false-flag-2012-9>.

⁷⁴ Fayazmaneh, *The United States and Iran*, 63.

⁷⁵ Ingersoll and Kelly, “Lobbyist Says Israel Should Create A ‘False Flag,’”

The Act was due to expire on August 5, 2001, and AIPAC faced significant opposition from the business community in the debate over its renewal. AIPAC director Howard Kohr, for instance, remarked that the business community had “mobilized on the issue in a way they didn’t five years ago...A number of major American corporations are organizing their own coalition with a lot of resources and mounting a very significant campaign.” In addition, the administration preferred a one- or two-year extension of the Act, as opposed to the five-year extension favoured by the House and Senate, and most likely AIPAC, too.⁷⁶ AIPAC’s efforts contributed to a successful outcome (from its point of view) as the Senate and House versions both passed, with 218 and 72 co-sponsors, respectively.⁷⁷

Even considering the strength of AIPAC’s efforts as mentioned above, it is difficult to determine if the Clinton administration authorized these sanctions because of AIPAC, or because of an overarching policy of gradually increasing sanctions. Indeed, Obama has employed a similar tactic, and it is possible that Clinton was employing the same strategy. For Clinton, gradually increasing sanctions would have provided a way of appearing responsive to the demands of the pro-Israel community.

3.4. Summary

To summarize, the debate over U.S. policy on Iran’s nuclear programme suggests that there is a strong relationship between Congress and the pro-Israel community. It is difficult, however, to measure precisely the extent of this influ-

⁷⁶ Fayazmaneh, *The United States and Iran*, 103.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 104.

ence and whether or not it is more responsible for the overall U.S. position than strategic or ideological concerns. The community, and AIPAC in particular, has been instrumental in advocating for harsh sanctions against Iran and has drafted or co-sponsored a number of resolutions asking the President to emphasize further the threat of a military strike. While one could point to the fact that such a strike has not yet occurred as evidence of the community's lack of influence, the community has been heavily involved in imposing sanctions that go far beyond those of any other nation. The dispute over Iran also provides a number of successes for the pro-Israel community and confirms the close relationship between the community and Congress.

4. CONCLUSION

The Mearsheimer-Walt thesis has been as controversial as it has been useful. While many commentators are at odds with the manner in which the authors chose to argue their point, the core of their argument – that the pro-Israel community sometimes has an extremely close relationship with decision-makers on U.S. foreign policy - is essentially correct.

Most of AIPAC's observable influence rests with Congress. Firstly, AIPAC's annual policy conferences routinely draw more than half of Congress. This fact alone does not prove that AIPAC controls the legislative agenda, but it does serve as an important proxy measure of the importance that many U.S. politicians place on maintaining a close relationship with Israel. AIPAC's policy conferences are also important because they tend to coincide with Congressional debates on legislation involving Israel. It is possible that, in order to benefit from

the community's abilities, Congress has deliberately timed legislation to coincide with AIPAC's conferences. While this is difficult to prove, it is also difficult to ignore the advantageous position in which AIPAC is placed when this timing allows it to send thousands of conference delegates to hundreds of meetings with Congress members and their staff.

Secondly, AIPAC has sought a firm commitment to military action from a number of U.S. administrations and has been an important contributor to legislation in this regard. These pieces of legislation include the following: a resolution asking the Obama administration to commit to leave the military option on the table, which, it might be added, Obama always has done; amendments to spending bills that effectively commit the U.S. to a military attack; and Senate and House resolutions that move the threshold for military action from nuclear weapons acquisition to nuclear capability. This last item is especially important because, depending on one's definition of capability, it moves the threshold past a point that many believe Iran has already crossed. While the community has been successful in influencing Congress, the Obama Administration has refused to yield to the community and has remained committed to considering a number of options, which include military action, but also sanctions and negotiation.

The influence of the pro-Israel community is least observable in election campaigns, but this does not indicate that it plays no role. The pro-Israel community is able to mobilize considerable, if not decisive, numbers of funds and voters, and in some cases, such as the 1984 defeat of Senator Charles Percy, one can observe a clear connection between the activities of the community and

the outcome of the election. Having said this, election campaigns are decided on a number of factors, the least of which is foreign policy. This would have been true especially in an election year such as 2008, when many American voters would likely have been more concerned with their financial prospects than with U.S. policy in the Middle East. In addition, in cases where the margin of victory was particularly narrow and it was shown that pro-Israel votes provided the necessary “bump” in support, any group of voters could be said to have the same effect. In such cases, one’s perception is key to one’s conclusions. The same holds true for arguments about election spending, as was shown in the cases of Joseph Lieberman and Hillary Clinton, two ardent supporters of Israel.

While it is difficult to deny the degree to which, on some matters, AIPAC and the pro-Israel community is able to influence U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, one can question whether or not this should be the case, and whether or not interest groups should be allowed to achieve this degree of influence. Part of the difficulty with this question lies with the fact that the activities of the pro-Israel community are legal and viewed as essential elements of political participation in a pluralist democracy. There is no issue from this perspective. The concern, rather, is that an interest group that does not represent the majority of American voters can have a disproportionate effect on U.S. foreign policy. While a significant portion of this influence can be attributed to the community’s resolve and to its organizational abilities, its influence can also be explained by the lack of an effective opposition and by the natural and historical American sympathy towards Israel.

If one wished to curb the influence of the pro-Israel community, one could amend legislation to limit the influence of interest groups. It would be impossible, however, to limit the influence of the pro-Israel community without doing so for all interest groups. It is also difficult to imagine that powerful interest groups would take kindly to such legislation, and it is likely that legislators would face extraordinary pressure from a number of sources. A simpler strategy would be to change the narrative on the issue. The fact that moderate pro-Israel groups such as JStreet are becoming more powerful, and the fact that that President Obama has not yielded to the community's position on Iran's nuclear programme, show that the ability to resist AIPAC and other right-wing pro-Israel groups is increasing.

In returning to the two questions posed at the outset of this paper, one can make two final observations: (1) The pro-Israel community wields a significant amount of influence on U.S. policy. Most of this influence lies with Congress and in executive-level decisions that require its approval; (2) The community, and interest groups in general, will remain an integral part of U.S. politics as long as American society remains pluralist and democratic, and as long as decision-makers are unwilling to alter this fact. Ultimately, the less fortunate aspects of this approach must be tolerated along with those that are more constructive.

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