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### Is It Love or The Lobby? Explaining America's Special Relationship with Israel

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## **Is It Love or the Lobby? Explaining America's Special Relationship with Israel**

JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER AND STEPHEN M. WALT

*In The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy, we argued that the “special relationship” between the United States and Israel is due largely to the influence of a domestic interest group—comprised of Jews as well as non-Jews—and that this unusual situation is harmful to both the United States and Israel. Jerome Slater’s thoughtful review endorses many of our central arguments, but it also highlights several points of disagreement. He argues that we overlooked important alternative sources, defined the lobby too broadly, and exaggerated its influence on Congress and especially the Executive Branch. Although Slater is even more critical of U.S. Middle East policy than we are, he argues that the special relationship is due to strong cultural and religious affinities and broad public support in American society, and not to the influence of the lobby. In fact, the alternative sources cited by Slater do not undermine our basic claims; a broad conception of the lobby makes more sense than his narrower definition; and there is little disagreement between us about the lobby’s influence on Capitol Hill or in the White House. Most importantly, public opinion in the United States does not explain why the United States gives Israel such extensive and nearly unconditional backing. Although most Americans have a favorable image of Israel, surveys show that they also favor a more even-handed Middle East policy and a more normal relationship with Israel. Thus, the special relationship is due primarily to the lobby’s influence, and not to the American people’s enduring identification with the Jewish state.*

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We wrote about the Israel lobby to encourage a more open discussion of America's "special relationship" with Israel. The United States gives more foreign aid to Israel than to any other country, even though Israel is now a prosperous country with a per capita income that was twenty-ninth in the world in 2006. Israel gets consistent diplomatic backing from Washington, which almost always takes Israel's side in regional disputes. Most importantly, however, these various elements of support are given nearly unconditionally. In other words, Israel gets American backing even when it does things the United States opposes, such as building settlements in the Occupied Territories. Israel's actions are rarely criticized by American officials, and certainly not by anyone aspiring to high office. Finally, key aspects of U.S. foreign policy are conducted with the aim of making Israel more secure. Yet the causes of the special relationship have been a taboo subject within the mainstream foreign policy community, even after the September 11 attacks cast a bright light on America's troubled position in the Middle East.

Our research led us to conclude that the special relationship is now harmful to the United States and Israel alike, and that a more normal relationship would be better for both countries. We wrote our original article and subsequent book to focus attention on the lobby's activities and impact, because we believe it is the main element that sustains this counterproductive policy.

It was unfortunate—if predictable—that only a handful of responses to our work published in the United States actually engaged our arguments in a fair-minded fashion. Instead, we were routinely smeared as anti-Semites and accused—incorrectly—of making numerous scholarly errors.<sup>1</sup> Critics routinely misrepresented our arguments; indeed, they often accused us of saying the opposite of what we actually wrote.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed response to the critics of our original *London Review of Books* article, see John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "Setting the Record Straight: A Response to Critics of 'The Israel Lobby,'" available at <http://us.macmillan.com/theisraellobbyandusforeignpolicy>.

<sup>2</sup> To note a few examples: we wrote the Israel lobby "is engaged in good old-fashioned interest group politics, which is as American as apple pie," and we repeatedly stressed that "lobbying on Israel's behalf is wholly legitimate." Nonetheless, Jeffrey Goldberg's review in *The New Republic* called our book "the most sustained attack ... against the political enfranchisement of American Jews since the era of Father Coughlin." Compare John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 5, 13, 147, 185 with Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Usual Suspect," *New Republic*, 8 October 2007. We wrote that our definition of the lobby "does not mean that every American with favorable attitudes towards Israel is a member of the lobby ... one has to actively work to move American foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction," and we emphasized that to qualify as part of the lobby one had to support the special relationship. Yet Walter Russell Mead falsely charged in *Foreign Affairs* that "Mearsheimer and Walt have come up with a definition of the 'Israel lobby' that covers the waterfront, including everyone from Jimmy Carter and George Soros to Paul Wolfowitz and Tom Delay." Compare Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 5, 113–14 with Walter Russell Mead, "Jerusalem Syndrome: Decoding the Israel Lobby," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 6 (November/December 2007): 163. We wrote that "the Israel lobby is not a cabal or conspiracy or anything of the sort" (and repeated this assertion five other times), yet Ruth Wisse published an op-ed in the *Washington Post* saying that "Mearsheimer and Walt allege that a Jewish cabal dictates U.S. policy in the Middle East, helping Israeli interests and hurting U.S. ones." Compare Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 5, 13, 112, 114, 131, 150 with Ruth Wisse, "Are American Jews Too Powerful? Not Even Close," *Washington Post*, 4 November 2007. We explicitly said that "we are not challenging Israel's right to exist or questioning the legitimacy of the Jewish state," adding

In light of this experience, it was a pleasure to read Jerome Slater's review essay on *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Slater is deeply knowledgeable about these issues, and his own scholarship on Middle East issues is noteworthy for its insight and candor. He has been a courageous and trenchant critic of U.S. Middle East policy for many years, and we have learned a great deal from his writings. Not surprisingly, we appreciated his endorsement of many of our central arguments. Slater also has some fundamental disagreements with us, however, which he laid out clearly and forcefully. The key point is that he challenged us in a serious and sophisticated way, without misrepresenting our arguments or trying to smear our reputations. In sharp contrast to most of the mainstream reviews of our book in the United States, his critique concentrates on evidence and logic. This refreshing approach provides us with an opportunity to clarify our views in ways that may help readers reach a more complete understanding of the special relationship and the lobby's role in promoting it.

That said, we do not think Slater's critique undermines our main claims. As we show below, some of his complaints reflect a misunderstanding of what we wrote. On other issues, we believe the available evidence is at odds with his criticisms. Furthermore, his own position is somewhat contradictory: at times he seems to emphasize the lobby's power and at other times he tries to downplay it. Finally, although Slater's depiction of America's failed Middle East policy is compelling, his principal explanation for that failure—broad public support for the special relationship—is not convincing.

In our response, we will not dwell on the many points of agreement between Slater and ourselves, but will focus instead on the key disagreements. We begin by considering his comments about our treatment of some contending literature and then turn to his discussion of our definition of the lobby. We then discuss the lobby's influence on elections, Congress, and the Executive Branch. Finally, we examine the lobby's role in causing the special relationship, which is the central point of contention between us.

#### DID WE IGNORE IMPORTANT SOURCES?

After defending us against the false charge of anti-Semitism and discussing some minor methodological issues, Slater suggests that we failed to take full account of some prominent alternative assessments of the lobby's influence.

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that we believed "the United States should stand willing to come to Israel's assistance if its survival were in jeopardy." Nonetheless, former Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich falsely claimed that our book "not only expressed criticism of Israel's policy but also questioned its legitimacy." Again, compare Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 11–12, 341–42 with Itamar Rabinovich, "What Will Happen After Bush?" *Ha'aretz*, 29 October 2007. Finally, Leslie Gelb's review of our book in *The New York Times* referred repeatedly to a "Jewish lobby," even though we never used that phrase and explicitly argued that it was an inappropriate and misleading term. Compare Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 115 with Leslie Gelb, "Dual Loyalties," *New York Times Book Review*, 23 September 2007. Given that these individuals are all sophisticated readers, one must assume that their mischaracterizations of our book were deliberate.

He writes: "Mearsheimer and Walt have not sufficiently addressed the findings and serious arguments of a number of important works that cast doubt on the view that the lobby nearly always gets its way."<sup>3</sup> Referring to earlier books by A. F. K. Organski, Steven Spiegel, and Robert Trice, he complains that "the three most skeptical and extensive works of scholarship get rather short shrift" and says that they should have been "directly addressed" ("Two Books," 15–16).<sup>4</sup>

We are of course familiar with these works and cited them in our book. Slater is correct that we did not offer detailed responses to the various arguments contained in these works, but the real question is whether they contain information that undermines our case in any significant way. Slater does not mention any compelling counterarguments or contrary evidence from these works. In fact, a careful reading of these works reveals that they are dated, focused to a considerable extent on other topics, or to a large extent consistent with our main claims.

To be more specific, each of these books was written during the Cold War, and Trice's work is now more than thirty years old. Organski's *The \$36 Billion Bargain* is mainly devoted to establishing that Israel was a strategic asset during those years, a point that we do not contest (although Slater does). Our point is that Israel has become a strategic liability since the Cold War ended, yet the special relationship persists in large part because of the lobby's efforts.

Steven Spiegel downplays the lobby's importance in *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, but his book nonetheless contains considerable evidence that it wields significant influence, especially on Capitol Hill. His central claim is that the lobby had less influence on the Executive Branch. We made the same point ourselves, writing that "American presidents are not as sensitive to pressure as Congress is, and most of them have taken positions that Israel or the lobby opposed at one time or another."<sup>5</sup> Spiegel does not claim that the lobby had no impact on the White House; indeed, he acknowledges that all U.S. presidents "treated the pro-Israeli lobby as a political force to be reckoned with."<sup>6</sup> In any case, Spiegel's book was published more than twenty years

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<sup>3</sup> Jerome Slater, "The Two Books of Mearsheimer and Walt," *Security Studies* 18, no. 1 (March 2009): 14, hereafter cited in text.

<sup>4</sup> The works in question are A. F. K. Organski, *The \$36 Billion Bargain: Strategy and Politics in U.S. Assistance to Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); and Robert H. Trice, "Interest Groups and the Foreign Policy Process: U.S. Policy in the Middle East," *Sage Professional Papers in International Studies*, ed. V. Davis and M. East (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 163.

<sup>6</sup> Spiegel, *Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 388. Even so, Spiegel understates the lobby's impact on the White House in part because he does not address "dogs that didn't bark," that is, situations where key officials decided not to undertake initiatives that might antagonize Israel's supporters. As long-time U.S. Middle East negotiator Aaron David Miller admitted recently: "those of us advising the secretary of state and the president were very sensitive to what the pro-Israel community was thinking, and when it came

ago, and one of the central themes of our book—and other works like J. J. Goldberg's *Jewish Power*—is the lobby's growing influence over time.<sup>7</sup>

Robert Trice's 1976 monograph *Interest Groups and the Foreign Policy Process* is even more dated, but it does not contradict our main findings. After examining the activities of the relevant interest groups between 1966 and 1974, Trice concludes that "pro-Israel groups are most likely to exert an impact on [Middle East] policy because ... they are the most numerous and the most active set of domestic groups on most issues ... [and] they have dominated the flow of policy demands from the domestic environment into the governmental policymaking arena." In particular, Trice shows that pro-Israel groups were far more influential than potential opponents like the "Arab lobby" or the "oil lobby." He also finds that the lobby has more impact on Congress than on the Executive Branch—just as we do.<sup>8</sup>

We did not "directly address" these works in our book, in short, because none of them cast doubt on our main thesis.

## DEFINING THE LOBBY

Slater argues that our definition of the lobby is too broad and that focusing solely on groups that "directly lobby" would be more appropriate. He points out that some of the individuals and organizations that we included in our definition of the lobby do not actually engage in formal lobbying activities (that is, they do not press their case directly with legislators or other policy makers). He also notes that there have been some clear disagreements among various pro-Israel groups. He argues further that "the u.s. government has often adopted policies opposed by these groups" ("Two Books," 18), implying that they are not that influential. Finally, he believes that government officials should not be considered part of the lobby, whatever their prior activities or affinities might be.

We are not persuaded by these criticisms. The boundaries of any interest group are somewhat imprecise, of course, and there is no one "right" way to define membership in a political or social movement that has a number of constituent parts. For example, the "pro-choice" movement in America is not confined simply to members of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), and the "environmental movement" is not limited just to

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to considering ideas Israel didn't like, we too often engaged in a kind of preemptive self-censorship." Aaron David Miller, *The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008), 123.

<sup>7</sup> J. J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (New York: Perseus Books, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> In assessing the influence of different interest groups, Trice focuses on the issues of u.s. aid to Israel and u.s. policy toward the Middle East peace process. He finds that pro-Israel groups had considerable impact on the former but less impact on the latter. See Trice, *Interest Groups and the Foreign Policy Process*, 25–26, 51, 56–58, 71–72.

Greenpeace or the Sierra Club. The key question when assessing a particular definition is whether it sheds useful light on the phenomena in question. We believe a broader definition makes sense in this case, given the diverse array of organizations and individuals that strive to shape U.S. policy toward Israel and the different strategies that they employ to strengthen the special relationship.

We defined the lobby as a “loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively work to shape U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction.”<sup>9</sup> We emphasized that the term “lobby” was somewhat misleading, insofar as some members do not engage in formal lobbying activities. We explained that we were using the label as a “shorthand term,” because it was consistent with common parlance—as in “gun lobby,” “farm lobby,” or “Cuban lobby”—and had been widely used by other respected authorities. In any case, the precise label that one employs is not a critical issue; as we noted in our book, one could have called it the “pro-Israel community” or the “help Israel movement” without altering our conclusions at all.

More importantly, the activities of pro-Israel organizations are not confined solely to formal lobbying of government officials. As we discussed at some length in our book, they also use a number of other strategies to reinforce the special relationship. This is not surprising, of course, as the American system of government provides interested citizens with many avenues by which to influence government policy. AIPAC focuses most of its efforts on Capitol Hill, while some three dozen pro-Israel political action committees (PACs) are active in the electoral process. There are also influential individuals for whom Israel is a top priority, such as Israeli-American media mogul Haim Saban, the single largest donor to the Democratic Party in recent years, and gambling tycoon Sheldon Adelson, a Republican who has bankrolled several hard-line pro-Israel organizations.<sup>10</sup> Watchdog groups like the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA), Campus Watch, and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) seek to influence media coverage and to monitor activities on college campuses; while pro-Israel think tanks like the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) disseminate policy analysis intended to shape elite views about the Middle East. The narrower definition that Slater recommends would exclude most if not all of these organizations and activities, even though he is well aware that they play an important role

<sup>9</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 112–14.

<sup>10</sup> Saban has described himself as a “one-issue guy and my issue is Israel.” Not only has he given some \$13 million to candidates for office, PACs, or political parties (mostly Democratic) in recent years, but he also played a key role in persuading others to give as well. See Andrew Craig Sorkin, “Schlepping to Moguldom,” *New York Times*, 5 September 2004; and Amy Wallace, “Haim Saban: Power Ranger,” *Conde Nast Portfolio*, September 2008, accessed at <http://www.portfolio.com/executives/features/2008/08/13/Profile-of-Fundraiser-Haim-Saban>. On Adelson’s beliefs and activities, see Connie Bruck, “The Brass Ring: A Multimillionaire’s Relentless Quest for Global Influence,” *The New Yorker*, 30 June 2008; and June Kronholz and Tamara Audi, “Vegas Tycoon Bankrolls Republicans,” *Wall Street Journal*, 15 July 2008.

in cementing the special relationship and contribute to the distorted policy outcomes that he rightly deplors.

We also made it clear that the individuals and groups that make up the lobby do not agree on every issue. For instance, there are sharp disagreements among these groups regarding the merits of a two-state solution. Nonetheless, we emphasized that whatever their differences, individuals and organizations in the lobby “share the desire to promote a special relationship between the United States and Israel” and believe that “the United States should give Israel substantial diplomatic, economic, and military support even when Israel takes actions the United States opposes.” We therefore placed dovish groups like Americans for Peace Now within the lobby because they oppose any reduction in U.S. aid to Israel, but we excluded Jewish Voice for Peace because it supports making aid conditional on an end to Israel’s occupation of the West Bank.<sup>11</sup> Given that we sought to explain the persistence of the special relationship, it would have made little sense to exclude any group or individual who actively works to encourage it.

Slater’s claim that the U.S. government has “often adopted policies opposed by ... groups [in the lobby]” is too strong. Washington has occasionally pursued policies opposed by some pro-Israel groups, but not often, and certainly less frequently in recent years. Moreover, when key officials did pursue policies that groups like AIPAC opposed, the influence of these groups made it more difficult for these policy makers to achieve their aims. Accordingly, in the conclusion to our book we expressed the hope that moderate groups like the Israel Policy Forum would become more influential and that groups such as AIPAC, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and certain Christian evangelical groups would realize that the hard-line policies they have endorsed have been harmful to the United States and Israel alike. Slater does not dispute this point.

Finally, Slater believes pro-Israel officials in government should not be considered part of the lobby. We recognize that this is a tricky issue where careful judgment is needed, and we emphasized that our definition did not “imply that every American official who supports Israel is part of the lobby.”<sup>12</sup> Yet we also pointed out that organizations in the lobby do try to get individuals who are sympathetic to their views elected to office or appointed to key positions in the Executive Branch.<sup>13</sup> They will also seek to convince presidents not to appoint individuals about whom they have doubts. Such

<sup>11</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 5, 114, 120–21.

<sup>12</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 114.

<sup>13</sup> In a notorious incident in 1992, a New York businessman named Haim Katz posed as a potential AIPAC donor and secretly taped a phone call with AIPAC President David Steiner. Steiner told Katz that “we have a dozen people in [Clinton’s] campaign, in the headquarters . . . and they’re all going to get big jobs.” Steiner was forced to resign after Katz made the transcript public and he later said his statements were not true, but there is little reason to question the thrust of his remarks. See Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 165.



actions are commonplace in American politics, of course, and many other interest groups do exactly the same thing. When the lobby's efforts to shape the appointment process succeed, then they will be trying to influence officials who already share their broad perspective and may even have worked for these same organizations in the past. It also means these groups will not be trying to persuade officials who have strong reservations about the special relationship. Slater does not challenge this point either; indeed, he has been critical of U.S. officials that he deemed too sympathetic to Israel in the past.<sup>14</sup>

In writing our book, we judged officeholders to be part of the lobby if their attachment to Israel preceded their entry into public service or if they devoted a substantial portion of their personal or professional lives both in-and-out of office to advancing the special relationship. Thus, when Congressman Howard Berman (D-CA) declares that his concern for Israel is the reason he wanted to serve on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, it seems reasonable to count him as an active member of the broad pro-Israel interest group. Similarly, when Martin Indyk—formerly deputy director of research at AIPAC and one of the founders of WINEP—is appointed to a key position dealing with Middle East policy in the Clinton administration, it strains credulity not to see this as a case where a member of the Israel lobby is serving in government. One could say the same for Indyk's associate Dennis Ross (who joined WINEP after leaving government service), or neoconservative hard-liner Elliott Abrams, whose pro-Israel sympathies are well-established and who has handled Middle East policy on the National Security Council since 2002.

The point is not whether individuals like Berman, Indyk, Ross, and Abrams, or Christian Zionist politicians like James Inhofe (R-OK) and Tom DeLay (R-TX) were dedicated public servants acting in what they thought to be the best interests of the United States—they surely were. The issue is simply whether their strong prior sympathies for Israel shaped their approach to Middle East affairs, reinforced the special relationship, and made the United States less likely to use its leverage effectively. If so, then it is reasonable to count them as part of the “loose coalition” that sustains the present course of U.S. policy.

## CAMPAIGN SPENDING AND CONGRESSIONAL INFLUENCE

While Slater agrees with us that the lobby “has great power in Congress over matters concerning Israel,” he questions our claim that its power is due in good part to its ability to affect elections through campaign contributions (“Two Books,” 54). He points out that we only discuss nine cases over thirty

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<sup>14</sup> Jerome Slater, “The Missing Pieces in *The Missing Peace*,” *Tikkun*, May/June 2005, accessed at <http://www.tikkun.org/archive/backissues/xtik0505/israel/document.2005-04-22.7590826672>.

years “in which the lobby is said to have had a major impact in defeating incumbents” (“Two Books,” 23). He also notes that other factors besides Israel contributed to each of these defeats, and he points out that the lobby does not win every time.

These are not telling criticisms. We made exactly the same points ourselves, noting that other factors were involved in these cases and emphasizing the lobby does not win every election in which it is involved. Our point was that it has won often enough to make it clear to most politicians that they are putting their careers at risk if they are perceived as anti-Israel. As former U.S. government official Aaron David Miller recently observed, “Today you cannot be successful in American politics and not be good on Israel. And AIPAC plays a key role in making that happen.”<sup>15</sup>

Slater might doubt that the lobby can use campaign contributions to affect elections, but as Miller’s statement suggests, few politicians in Washington would agree with him. For example, after AIPAC successfully targeted Senator Roger Jepsen (R-IA) following his decision to support the sale of AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia in 1981, Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA) remarked that Jepsen’s defeat “has sort of struck terror into the hearts of senators about switching” on Middle East votes. It is for good reason that J. J. Goldberg, the editor of the Jewish weekly newspaper the *Forward*, said in 2002, “There is this image in Congress that you don’t cross these people or they take you down.”<sup>16</sup>

The lobby is able to use campaign contributions to great effect for several reasons. The main fear is that AIPAC and other like-minded groups will target politicians they consider insufficiently pro-Israel, thereby raising the odds that an incumbent will face a well-funded challenger. We discussed a number of these cases in our book, and the scholarly literature in American politics makes it clear that the ability to raise money is critical to successful congressional challenges. As Gary Jacobson notes, “Congressional challengers rarely win if they do not spend a substantial amount of money, and the more they spend, the more likely they are to win.”<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, incumbents strive to reassure AIPAC that they fully support the special relationship. They would prefer that pro-Israel PACs and individuals not give their challengers any money, and instead give it to them. An incumbent might well survive the challenge, but why take the chance? Furthermore, Israel is not a salient issue for most Americans, so most politicians will not incur significant political costs if they back Israel down the line. The Israel lobby has the additional advantage that there is no opposing lobby with deep pockets that politicians

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<sup>15</sup> Miller, *Much Too Promised Land*, 96.

<sup>16</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 158–59.

<sup>17</sup> Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 6th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 42.

can turn to for help.<sup>18</sup> Finally, a politician's voting behavior is shaped by the preferences of his or her party. If their party relies on contributions from individuals and groups who strongly support the special relationship—and both parties do, to varying degrees—then individual politicians will have even less incentive to question it.

Interestingly, Slater's concluding remarks about the political effects of campaign spending essentially reflect our analysis. He writes, for example, that "it is certainly plausible that because congressmen have nothing to gain and possibly much to lose by opposing Israel or the lobby, the perception that it is to be feared evidently gives it real power—as Senator Alan Cranston put it, the defeat of Senator Jepsen in 1984 'struck terror into the hearts of senators' on Middle East issues" ("Two Books," 25). Thus, we agree wholeheartedly with Slater's summary statement: "the presumed power of the Israel lobby to swing elections clearly gives it real power in Congress" ("Two Books," 25).

### THE LOBBY AND THE WHITE HOUSE

As noted, we agree with Slater (and others) that the lobby has less influence on the White House than in Congress. Less does not mean zero, however, and we believe the lobby's influence on the Executive Branch is greater than Slater thinks it is.

What are the main points of disagreement? First, Slater contests our point that "the lobby makes it impossible for American leaders to use the leverage at their disposal to pressure Israel into ending the occupation and creating a viable Palestinian state" ("Two Books," 26). He says that our analysis stands "in sharp contrast to the previous scholarly literature" and later suggests "there is not much evidence to support this argument" ("Two Books," 26, 43). To support this point, he challenges our account of the clash between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President George W. Bush in the spring of 2002, when the lobby helped Sharon humiliate Bush.

Here the evidence is in our favor. Ever since 1967, when Israel captured the West Bank and Gaza, it has been the official policy of every American president to oppose the building of settlements, which is tantamount to colonizing those territories and preventing the Palestinians from having their own state. Yet no president has been able to put pressure on Israel to halt the settlement enterprise, even though every president since Lyndon Johnson—including George W. Bush—has made it clear that he wants Israel to stop. The only partial exception was Bush's father, George H. W. Bush, whose administration held up an Israeli request for \$10 billion in loan guarantees in

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<sup>18</sup> As former AIPAC executive director Morris Amitay once noted, "we very rarely see ... [oil and corporate interests] lobbying on foreign policy issues ... In a sense, we have the field to ourselves," or as AIPAC's former legislative director, Douglas Bloomfield, remarked in 2003, "AIPAC has one enormous advantage. It really doesn't have any opposition." See Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 145–46.

1992. The regular U.S. aid package was not affected, however, and the loan guarantees were approved a few months later after Yitzhak Rabin became prime minister. Bush's action had no lasting impact and the number of Israeli settlers continued to increase, more than doubling in the eight years that followed the signing of the Oslo peace agreement in 1993. There is much evidence that the lobby is the root of the problem, as we discuss in the book. If it is not the lobby, what does account for the failure of the past eight presidents to put an end to settlement building, or even to make a serious effort in that direction? Slater does not answer that question.

With respect to Bush and Sharon, Slater maintains that Bush had decided to side with Sharon against Arafat in early 2002 and thus Bush "did not need to be pressured, let alone 'humiliated,' 'triumphed over,' and the like" in the spring of that year ("Two Books," 43). There is no question that Bush agreed with Sharon about Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat during this period, as we made clear in the book. But this does not mean that Bush and Sharon did not have a genuine and significant disagreement about Israel's actions in the Occupied Territories, a dispute that ended when Bush backed down.

To be specific: in the spring of 2002, Israel launched Operation Defensive Shield, in which the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) resumed control of virtually all of the major Palestinian areas on the West Bank.<sup>19</sup> Although Bush sympathized with Israel's position, he understood that its action would damage America's image in the Arab and Islamic world and undermine the war on terrorism, which was now his top priority. Accordingly, he demanded on 4 April that Sharon "halt the incursions and begin withdrawal." He underscored this message two days later, saying this meant "withdrawal without delay." On 7 April, Bush's national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, told reporters "'without delay' means without delay. It means now." That same day Secretary of State Powell set out for the Middle East to pressure all sides to stop fighting and start negotiating. The question is simple: which side got its way, and which side blinked?

As described in detail in our book, the administration almost immediately came under fire from groups and individuals in the lobby. Pro-Israel neoconservatives in the media attacked Powell's mediation effort and key congressional leaders like Tom DeLay (D-TX), Richard Armey (R-TX), and Trent Lott (R-GA) visited Bush and warned him to back off. The congressional switchboard was flooded with calls from pro-Israel Christian evangelicals and major Jewish organizations organized a well-publicized rally in Washington protesting Bush's attempt to pressure Israel. Ignoring the administration's objections, Congress proceeded to pass two strongly-worded resolutions expressing unyielding support for Israel at the beginning of May. Bush was already backtracking by this time: he told reporters at the White House on

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<sup>19</sup> For a fuller account of this episode, see Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 208–11.

18 April that Sharon was “a man of peace” and said that Sharon had responded satisfactorily to his call for a full and immediate withdrawal, when Sharon had in fact done no such thing. Commentators at the time recognized that Sharon had humiliated Bush, although it was ultimately the lobby, not the Israeli prime minister, that had forced the president to retreat. It is perhaps worth noting that little has changed since then, even after the November 2007 summit in Annapolis that was supposed to restart the peace process. The settler population continues to grow, yet top U.S. officials merely term this policy “unhelpful.”

Second, Slater maintains that “the Jewish vote is much less important in presidential than in congressional elections, for most presidential elections are not decided by small minorities in a handful of key states (the 2000 election being one of the few exceptions).” Furthermore, he argues that “Jewish money and votes can hardly explain the pro-Israel policies of Republican presidents, who get far less of both than do the Democratic presidents” (“Two Books,” 26).

Slater is correct that most presidential elections are not decided by narrow margins, but this point is largely irrelevant. Candidates for the White House cannot know in advance whether the general election will be a landslide (as in 1984) or a nail-biter (as in 2000), and they must therefore act as if every vote might count. Given that American Jews have high turnout rates and are concentrated in important swing states, and given that Israel is an important issue for many (though by no means all) of them, it makes sense for any serious candidate to endorse the special relationship unequivocally.

Slater is also correct that far more Jewish money and votes have gone to Democrats than Republicans, but this point hardly means that candidates from both parties do not have an incentive to pander to potential voters and contributors anyway. After all, Republicans have an obvious interest in minimizing the amount of money and the number of votes that Democrats get from the American Jewish community, simply because what happens on the margins could matter greatly in a close election. The 2008 Presidential campaign confirmed this in spades, with all of the major candidates going to sometimes embarrassing lengths to portray themselves as unquestioning supporters of the special relationship. Indeed, the pandering was so extreme that both American and Israeli commentators began to complain about it.<sup>20</sup>

Third, Slater argues “that when the president opposes the lobby, the lobby loses most of the time, especially when the issue involves national security” (“Two Books,” 26). He defends this claim by citing a number of cases

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<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, “Enough About Israel, Already,” *The Atlantic*, 12 October 2008, accessed at [http://jeffreycgoldberg.theatlantic.com/archives/2008/10/enough\\_with\\_all\\_the\\_israel\\_tal.php](http://jeffreycgoldberg.theatlantic.com/archives/2008/10/enough_with_all_the_israel_tal.php); M. J. Rosenberg, “Fodder for Comedy: Pandering to Jewish Voters,” *Weekly Opinion Column*, Issue # 385, Israel Policy Forum, Washington, DC, 10 October 2008; and Shmuel Rosner, “Enough About Israel, Already,” *Slate*, 8 October 2008, accessed at <http://www.slate.com/id/2201849/>.

from the years between 1973 and 1991, and by pointing out that no president has been willing to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, despite AIPAC's public support for this initiative ("Two Books," 27).

Slater is factually correct, but this line of argument leaves our main claims unscathed. We never said the lobby wins all the time; on the contrary, we wrote that "we do not believe the lobby is all-powerful," and we discussed a number of prominent cases where "the lobby did not get its way." Our argument, which Slater acknowledges, is that cases where the lobby loses "are becoming increasingly rare" ("Two Books," 26). Thus it is not surprising that almost all of his examples date from before 1992. Nor does the refusal to move the U.S. embassy count heavily against our claims, as it is not a salient concern for Israel or the main organizations in the lobby, and they have not pushed hard to relocate it.

### HOW POWERFUL IS THE LOBBY?

As Slater notes, "the heart of the controversy" about our book is over "how much power the lobby really exercises" ("Two Books," 18). Here he offers two distinct lines of criticism. First, he argues that our "characterization of the power of the Israel lobby is not always internally consistent," arguing that we sometimes refer to "near-control" but at other times qualify our claims. Nonetheless, he concludes that we are effectively saying it is all-powerful. In his words: "the overall weight of their language and central arguments, particularly in the sections in which they sum up their case, strongly suggests that they are essentially claiming that it is the existence of an unconstrained lobby—mostly even if not exclusively Jewish—that largely explains contemporary U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East" ("Two Books," 18, also 14, 43).

Second, Slater claims "there is a problem or inconsistency in how Mearsheimer and Walt define power," and he suggests that we fail to consistently observe the distinction between the lobby's "raw power"—which derives from "the ability to reward and punish" policy makers—and its "influence"—which stems from the ability to convince policy makers that its recommendations are objectively correct ("Two Books," 19).

With respect to the first charge, our language is not inconsistent. Our characterizations of the lobby's power do vary somewhat throughout the book, but that is largely because the lobby's power varies over time, across institutions, and across issues. This phenomenon is reflected in Slater's own language. For example, he says that the "lobby has great power" when he is focusing on Congress ("Two Books," 22), but says it "sometimes has important influence" when talking about the presidency ("Two Books," 28). As discussed above, we went to some lengths to show that the lobby was not all-powerful and that it does not always get its way, even on Capitol Hill.

Our claim is that the lobby is one of the most powerful interest groups in Washington and that it has a profound effect on U.S. policy in the Middle East. But we neither said nor implied that it has near-control over every aspect of that policy.

Regarding the second charge, we emphasized that the Israel lobby, like other prominent interest groups, has several sources of power and uses several different strategies to achieve its policy objectives. Although we did not use the terms “power” and “influence” in the manner that Slater does, we understood the basic distinction, and it is reflected throughout our analysis. Accordingly, one entire chapter (“Guiding the Policy Process”) focuses primarily on the lobby’s capacity to reward or punish politicians, while a second chapter (“Dominating Public Discourse”) examines the efforts of pro-Israel organizations to persuade Americans that their recommendations are correct. Moreover, having raised this issue, Slater writes “it is not necessarily wrong to define the term ‘power’ to include both the capacity to prevail over opposition and the capacity to persuade” (“Two Books,” 19). He is in effect acknowledging that this is a semantic quibble that does not undermine our basic argument.

## IRAQ AND IRAN

The issue of the lobby’s power is front and center in Slater’s discussion of the Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003 and in the lobby’s subsequent efforts to get the United States to deal with Iran’s nuclear enrichment program. In addition to challenging our interpretation of the Iraq case, Slater uses the Iran debate to show that the lobby is not all-powerful.

Our argument on Iraq is straightforward.<sup>21</sup> The idea of using military force to topple Saddam Hussein was the brainchild of a group of prominent neoconservatives—an important subset of the lobby—who began pushing the Clinton administration in that direction in 1998. Yet they could not convince Clinton to adopt this policy, and they likewise failed to convince President Bush to go after Saddam during Bush’s first eight months in office. This course of events shows clearly that the lobby does not always get its way. After September 11, however, the neoconservatives were able to help convince Bush and Dick Cheney that it made sense to oust Saddam, and once the president and vice president were on board, the path to war was clear. Thus, we concluded that the neoconservatives’ efforts were necessary to make the war happen—they dreamed up the idea and were the only important forces promoting it until September 11—but they could not cause a war by themselves. They needed Bush and Cheney’s backing to make it happen. We also

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<sup>21</sup> For a fuller account of the decision to invade Iraq in March 2003, see Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 229–62.

emphasized that neither the major organizations in the lobby nor Israel initiated the idea of attacking Iraq, although we did show that senior Israeli leaders and key individuals and groups in the lobby helped sell the war to Congress and the American people.

Slater gets much of our argument about Iraq correct, but not all of it. First, he writes that “whatever the arguments and agenda of the neocons, it does not follow that the top officials of the government—Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, and Powell, none of them neocons (or Jewish)—decided in favor of the war primarily in order to protect Israel.” But we never argued that their “principal motivation had been merely to preempt a possible future threat to Israel” or that they went to war “primarily in order to protect Israel” (“Two Books,” 47, 49). On the contrary, these key decision makers chose war because they thought it would be in the American national interest, although most of them surely thought it would be good for Israel as well. To repeat, Bush and Cheney opted for war because the neoconservatives helped convince them it was a good idea. Indeed, we emphasized in our book that even the neoconservative architects of the war did not advocate it solely to benefit Israel. Rather, they believed that removing Saddam from power would be good for both countries. For them, what is good for Israel is good for the United States and vice-versa. But whatever motivations drove each policy maker’s ultimate decision, our core claim was about causation: the war, we wrote, “would almost certainly not have occurred” had the neoconservatives in the lobby not been pushing for it, and it would have been less likely if organizations like AIPAC had not leapt on the bandwagon later on.<sup>22</sup>

Turning to Iran, we showed that the lobby and Israel have worked hard and successfully since the early 1990s to convince the U.S. government to pursue a confrontational policy toward Iran. In recent years, Israel and the most important groups in the lobby have been the main advocates of using military force to halt Iran’s nuclear enrichment program. Although the United States would be concerned about Iran’s nuclear ambitions even if Israel did not exist and there was no Israel lobby, there would be little talk about the military option were Israel and the lobby not pushing this course of action. It is surely not the approach preferred by the State Department, the uniformed military, or the intelligence services. This is also an issue where the pro-Israel community is divided, with some of the smaller and more moderate groups in the lobby expressing open skepticism about the military option.<sup>23</sup>

Slater offers no evidence to challenge our account of the lobby’s role in preventing engagement and promoting military confrontation with Iran.

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<sup>22</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 230.

<sup>23</sup> In December 2007, for example, Americans for Peace Now issued an open letter to President Bush calling for serious negotiations with Iran, emphasizing that “the goal of U.S. engagement and diplomacy should not be to make a show of exhausting all non-military options in order to build a case for war; rather, the goal must be to capitalize on non-military options in order to resolve the differences and avoid war.” Accessed at [www.peacenow.org/updates.asp?rid=0&cid=4348](http://www.peacenow.org/updates.asp?rid=0&cid=4348).



Instead, he writes that “the Mearsheimer and Walt argument that a war against Iran would not be in the U.S. interest appears to lead them to the conclusion that such a war therefore could only be explained by Israeli lobby pressures” (“Two Books,” 50). This assertion is wrong: what led us to conclude that the lobby and Israel are leading the charge to strike Iran was overwhelming evidence of their respective activities in this regard—which we presented in our book—not our belief that it would not be in the U.S. interest. This is why we wrote—as Slater notes (“Two Books,” 50)—that if a war does occur, it would be “in part on Israel’s behalf, and the lobby would bear significant responsibility.”

Yet the United States thus far has not attacked Iran and appears unlikely to do so any time soon. Slater concludes that if there is no U.S. attack, the Iranian case would demonstrate “the failure rather than the power of the lobby” (“Two Books,” 51). He is correct, but that is not evidence against our argument. We emphasized ourselves that the lobby does not always get its way, just as we stressed that the lobby alone could not make the Iraq war happen. To repeat: the lobby’s influence on U.S. policy toward Iran can be seen in the fact that military force is being seriously considered, but its influence may not be great enough in this case to produce a U.S. attack. Given the debacle that has befallen the United States in Iraq, as well as the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, it is not surprising that the lobby’s advocacy of a military response to Iran has thus far failed to garner broad support.

### EXPLAINING THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

We turn now to the core issue: why does the United States provide Israel with so much economic, military, and diplomatic support, and so unconditionally? Why do U.S. politicians offer only the mildest criticisms of Israel actions, even when some of its policies, such as the widespread use of cluster bombs in the 2006 Lebanon war or the continued expansion of settlements, are both counterproductive and contrary to U.S. interests? What accounts for a level of support that the late Yitzhak Rabin judged to be “beyond compare in modern history?”<sup>24</sup>

There are four possible explanations for this extraordinary relationship: 1) Israel is a vital strategic asset for the United States, and so supporting it makes Americans safer here at home; 2) there are compelling moral reasons; 3) the American people, to include their leaders, strongly identify with Israel; and 4) the influence of the Israel lobby. In our book, we argued at length that the first three explanations cannot account for American policy toward

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<sup>24</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby*, 23.

Israel. The special relationship, we argued, was mainly due to the political clout of the lobby.

Slater disagrees with us on this important issue. He recognizes that there is a special relationship, and he agrees that it is bad for both Israel and the United States, but he questions our claim that the lobby is primarily responsible for it and believes that we exaggerate its power to shape American Middle East policy.

What is Slater's explanation? He says at the beginning of his review that "how to account for the level and consistency of U.S. support for Israel . . . is something of a mystery" ("Two Books," 5). Yet he does have an answer to the question. He certainly does not believe that there is either a strategic or moral rationale for the special relationship. Indeed, he maintains that our case against those two explanations is "if anything, understated" ("Two Books," 31). For example, we said that a plausible case could be made that Israel was a strategic asset for the United States during the Cold War. Slater maintains, however, that "there is a strong case that Israel was a net strategic liability to the United States even during the Cold War" ("Two Books," 33). Regarding the moral rationale, he is even more critical of Israeli democracy than we are and says we "understate the extent of Israeli violence against the Palestinians, much of which has approached the level of outright terrorism" ("Two Books," 39). These differences notwithstanding, the three of us agree that American policy toward Israel is not based on strategic or moral calculations.

Slater's answer is simple: he believes Israel gets special treatment from the United States because the American people and their leaders strongly identify with Israel. He argues, for example, that there are "cultural and religious affinities" between the two countries, and Israel has "captured the imagination and sympathy of the American public." Moreover, most Americans feel "a moral obligation to help Israel defend itself," and they see Israel as "anticommunist, pro-American, and . . . as an indispensable ally in the struggle against Islamic radicalism and terrorism" ("Two Books," 56). In short, we argue that the special relationship is due primarily to the lobby's influence, but Slater believes that it reflects the desires of the American people.

Before explaining why we believe Slater is wrong, let us look more closely at his description of the lobby's political influence. As we have already seen, Slater repeatedly suggests that we overstate the lobby's power, but when one reads his article in toto there does not seem to be much difference between us on this issue. Consider some of Slater's observations about Congress, the executive branch, and the media. Despite the criticisms noted above, Slater acknowledges that "there are many examples of impressive lobby successes in Congress," adding that "the evidence amassed by Mearsheimer and Walt and others leaves no reasonable doubt [that] the power of the Israel lobby has played a major role in congressional insistence that the U.S. continue its unconditional support of Israel" ("Two Books," 20,

22). So there is little daylight between us regarding the lobby's influence on Capitol Hill.

As previously discussed, Slater's main disagreement with us concerns the Executive Branch, but even on this issue he concedes that the lobby wields significant influence. "It seems evident," he writes, that "domestic politics and the power of the Israel lobby have been strong, independent variables in explaining U.S. policy." Slater elaborates on this point in his discussion of some of our critics. For example, he challenges Jeffrey Goldberg's views, writing that Goldberg "thinks that Israel should 'slowly wean itself from American aid, *but AIPAC first has to agree with this*' without noticing that if so, it provides powerful support for the Mearsheimer and Walt argument." Slater goes on, noting that "In a somewhat different context, Goldberg later repeated this odd, logical error in a *New York Times* op-ed article; after again criticizing the *Israel Lobby* in passing, he concludes that the U.S. government will not be able to 'talk, in blunt terms, about the full range of dangers faced by Israel, including the danger that Israel has brought on itself . . . until AIPAC and the leadership of the American Jewish community allow it to happen.'"<sup>25</sup> Slater concludes his discussion of the lobby's influence on U.S. foreign policy by pointing out that "Similarly, Leslie Gelb, another major critic of Mearsheimer and Walt, admits that 'it's true . . . that the lobby has made America's long-standing \$3 billion annual aid program to Israel untouchable and indiscussible' [sic]" ("Two Books," 20, note 40). By challenging Goldberg and Gelb in this fashion, Slater leaves little doubt that he recognizes the lobby is a potent political force.

Finally there is no meaningful disagreement between Slater and us regarding the lobby's influence with the media. "Mearsheimer and Walt's argument," he writes, "is a moderate one, and they are quick to emphasize that they are referring to the lobby's influence, rather than its 'control.' As such, the argument is certainly defensible, and it is supported by a number of examples they cite as well as by the experience of many others who have sought to publish newspaper or magazine articles that were strongly critical of Israel" ("Two Books," 29).

In sum, despite his criticisms of certain components of our argument, Slater's overall assessment of the lobby's influence does not square with his claim that it has "considerably less power than that attributed to it by the *Israel Lobby*" ("Two Books," 56). There is simply not that much difference between us. Rather, the main disagreement arises over Slater's claim that the lobby's power is due to "the underlying values, ideologies, and perceptions about Israel shared by the public and officials alike" ("Two Books," 56). In other words, he believes that it is the American people's enduring identification with the Jewish state that underpins the lobby's influence.

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<sup>25</sup> Note that in this context "U.S. government" means the Executive Branch, not Congress.

We think Slater's explanation is wrong for three reasons. First, it fails the common sense test. If the American public were steadfastly supportive of the special relationship, there would be no reason for AIPAC, the Conference of Presidents, Christians United for Israel, the ADL, and the other components of the lobby to work 24/7 to preserve and deepen it. Remember, Slater acknowledges that the lobby is a major presence on Capitol Hill, and that it "has played a major role in congressional insistence that the United States continue its unconditional support of Israel" ("Two Books," 22). He also recognizes that potential opponents like the Arab lobby and the oil lobby are too weak to pose a significant counterweight. So if the American people and their leaders were genuinely committed to the special relationship, there would be little need for a powerful lobby, since politicians and policy makers would need no convincing to provide Israel with such extraordinary support.

Second, to the extent that the American people have a favorable image of Israel, this is to some degree due to the lobby's efforts to shape public discourse. As Slater's own research has shown, media coverage in the United States is far more sympathetic to Israel than media coverage in most other democracies, including Israel itself.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the key element of Slater's account—"the imagination and sympathy of the American public"—is itself partly attributable to the lobby's efforts and not a genuine alternative explanation.

Third, as detailed in our book, the American people are not strongly in favor of the special relationship (that is, the policy of generous and unconditional support). There is no question that most Americans are generally sympathetic to Israel, but they are much more critical of Israeli policy than their elected representatives are and they are far more willing to support a hard-nosed approach to dealing with the Jewish state than most policy makers would be. For example, a 2003 survey conducted by the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes found that 60 percent of Americans were willing to withhold aid to Israel if it resisted U.S. pressure to settle its conflict with the Palestinians. In fact, 73 percent of those surveyed said the United States should not favor either side in the conflict. Two years later, a survey commissioned by the ADL found that 78 percent of Americans believed that Washington should favor neither Israel nor the Palestinians. This data effectively means that three out of every four Americans do not support the special relationship, even if they have a generally favorable view of Israel itself. Keeping the special relationship intact depends on the presence of a powerful pro-Israel lobbying movement, which uses a variety of

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<sup>26</sup> Jerome Slater, "Muting the Alarm Over the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: *The New York Times* versus *Haaretz*, 2000–06," *International Security* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 84–120. Also see Richard Falk and Howard Friel, *Israel-Palestine on Record: How the New York Times Misreports Conflict in the Middle East* (London: Verso, 2007); and Marda Dunsy, *Pens and Swords: How the American Mainstream Media Report the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

strategies to ensure that u.s. policy does not reflect the actual preferences of the American people.

The Lebanon war in 2006 provides further evidence that the American public does not favor supporting Israel unconditionally. Polls at the time showed that u.s. opinion was sharply divided about Israel's actions during that war. Two separate polls found that 46 percent of Americans held Hezbollah and Israel equally responsible for starting the conflict and a *USA Today*/Gallup poll found that 65 percent thought the United States should take neither side in the conflict—which again is contrary to the idea of a special relationship. Nevertheless, the u.s. government emphatically took Israel's side during the Lebanon war, as it has in every recent conflict involving Israel. Far from favoring “neither side,” Washington resupplied Israel with smart bombs and successfully delayed a United Nations ceasefire resolution so that the IDF could have more time to try to defeat Hezbollah. Not to be outdone, Congress passed a resolution of support for Israel by a vote of 410–8, but only after deleting a clause in the initial draft (to which AIPAC had objected) that called for both sides to “protect civilian life and infrastructure.”

This enthusiastic and unconditional support cannot be explained by the favorable opinion of Israel held by most Americans. But it can be explained by the lobby's influence, as we detailed in chapter 11 (“The Lobby and the Second Lebanon War”) of our book. The resulting policy was not in America or Israel's interest, as Israel's strategy in the war was doomed to fail, and prolonging the conflict cost additional Israeli lives and left Hezbollah in a stronger position within Lebanon. In this case, as in others, the lobby's influence was unintentionally harmful to the Jewish state.

In sum, the available evidence does not support Slater's claim that the American people feel a powerful attachment to Israel and are therefore willing to support it generously and with few conditions. It is noteworthy that he does not provide empirical support for his side of the argument. Furthermore, his recognition that there is a lobby that wields considerable power—“excessive power” he says at one point—casts further doubt on his claim that Americans are strongly inclined to back Israel no matter what (“Two Books,” 56). In fact, the lobby is the driving force behind the special relationship, as we show in great detail in our book, and as Slater also shows in his review. *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, he writes, “clearly establishes that the lobby has considerable influence and sometimes outright power over the formulation of u.s. policies toward Israel, though considerably more so in Congress than in the executive branch” (“Two Books,” 55). We agree.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite our various disagreements, we are grateful to Slater for his respectful yet tough-minded assessment of our work. This exchange is the sort of

discussion we sought to elicit when we began work on the project, and we hope that other scholars will follow Slater's lead.

Further work on this topic is needed for several reasons. First, the United States is bound to remain deeply engaged in the Middle East for some time to come, and it will be unable to devise intelligent policies to address the many challenges in this region if Americans of all stripes cannot have a systematic and dispassionate discussion of the various factors that shape U.S. policy. Second, current trends are not encouraging, particularly with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has recently warned, if Israel does not reach a two-state solution with the Palestinians, it will eventually face what he called a "South Africa-style struggle." If that happens, he added, "the state of Israel is finished." Unfortunately, both Israelis and Palestinians are too divided internally to move rapidly to a final status agreement, and the lobby's continued influence will make it more difficult for the Barack Obama administration to exert the necessary leverage on both sides. Third, increasing numbers of Israel's supporters in the United States are becoming aware of these realities, which means the lobby itself may evolve in a more positive direction. It therefore remains an important topic of study, and we hope that subsequent work on this issue will be as thoughtful and constructive as Slater's essay.