

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



<sup>a</sup> Professor Emeritus Department of Sociology, Binghamton University, New York, USA

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## COMMENTARY

# Why Condemning Israel and the Zionist Lobby is so Important

JAMES PETRAS

*Professor Emeritus Department of Sociology, Binghamton University, New York, USA*

It's no great secret why the Jewish agencies continue to trumpet support for the discredited policies of this failed administration. They see defense of Israel as their number-one goal, trumping all other items on the agenda. That single-mindedness binds them ever closer to a White House that has made combating Islamic terrorism its signature campaign. The campaign's effects on the world have been catastrophic. But that is no concern of the Jewish agencies (8 December 2006, statement by J.J. Goldberg, editor of *Forward*, the leading Jewish weekly in the USA).

Many Jewish writers, including those who are somewhat critical of Israel, have raised pointed questions about our critique of the Zionist power configuration (ZPC) in the USA and what they wrongly claim are our singular harsh critique of the state of Israel. Some of these accusers claim to see signs of "latent anti-Semitism," others, of a more "leftist" coloration, deny the influential role of the ZPC, arguing that US foreign policy is a product of "geo-politics" or the interests of big oil firms. With the recent publication of several widely circulated texts, highly critical of the power of the Zionist "lobby," several liberal pro-Israel publicists generously conceded that it is a topic that should be debated (and not automatically stigmatized and dismissed) and perhaps be "taken into account."

### ZPC Deniers: Phony Arguments for Fake Claims

The main claims of ZPC deniers take several tacks. Some claim that the ZPC is just "another lobby" like the Chamber of Commerce, the Sierra Club or the Society for the Protection of Goldfish. Others claim that by focusing mainly on Israel and by inference the "Lobby," the critics of Zionism ignore the equally violent abuses of

---

*Correspondence Address:* James Petras, Professor Emeritus Department of Sociology, Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY. Email: [jpetras@binghamton.edu](mailto:jpetras@binghamton.edu)

rulers, regimes and states elsewhere. This “exclusive focus” on Israel, the deniers of ZPC argue, reveals a latent or overt anti-Semitism. They propose that human rights advocates condemn all human rights abusers everywhere (at the same time and with the same emphasis?). Others still argue that Israel is a democracy – at least outside of the Occupied Territories (OT) – and therefore is not as condemnable as other human rights violators and should be “credited” for its civic virtues along with its human rights failings. Finally, others still claim that because of the Holocaust and “History-of-Two-Thousand-Years-of-Persecution,” criticism of Jewish-funded and led pro-Israel lobbies should be handled with great prudence, making it clear that one criticizes only specific abuses, investigates all charges – especially those from Arab/Palestinian/United Nations/European/Human Rights sources – and recognizes that Israeli public opinion, the press and even the Courts or sectors of them may also be critical of regime policies.

These objections to treating the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict and the activities of Zionist Lobbies as *central to peace and war* serve to dilute, dissipate and deflate criticism and organized political activity directed at the ZPC and its directors in Israel.

The response of the critics of Israel and the ZPC to these attacks has been weak at best and cowardly at worst. Some critics have responded that their criticism is directed only toward a specific policy or leader, or to Israeli policies in the OT and that they recognize Israel is a democracy, that it requires secure borders, and that it is in the interests of the Israeli “people” to lower their security barriers. Others argue that their criticism is directed at securing Israeli interests, influencing the Zionist Lobby or to opening a debate. They claim that the views of “most” Jews’ in the USA are not represented by the 52 organizations that make up the Presidents of the Major Jewish Organizations of America, or the thousands of PACs, local federations, professional associations and weekly publications which *speak with one voice as unconditional supporters* of every twist and turn in the policy of the Zionist State.

There are numerous similar lines of criticism, which basically avoid the fundamental issues raised by the Israeli state and the ZPC, and which we are obliged to address. The reason that criticism and action directed against Israel and the ZPC is of central importance today in any discussion of US foreign policy, especially (but not exclusively) of Middle East policy and US domestic policy making is that *they play a decisive role and have a world-historic impact on the present and future of world peace and social justice*. We turn now to examine the “big questions” facing Americans as a result of the power of Israel in the USA.

## **The Big Questions Raised by the ZPC and Israeli Power in the USA**

### *War or Peace?*

Critical study of the lead up to the US invasion of Iraq, US involvement in providing arms to Israel (cluster bombs, two-ton bunker buster bombs and satellite surveillance intelligence) prior to, during and after Israel’s abortive invasion of Lebanon, Washington’s backing of the starvation blockade of the Palestinian people and the White House and Congress’ demands for sanctions and war against Iran are

linked directly to Israeli state policy and its Zionist policy makers in the Executive branch and US Congress. One needs to look no further than the documents, testimony and reports of AIPAC and the Presidents of the Major American Jewish Organizations to observe their claims of success in authoring legislation, providing (falsified) intelligence, engaging in espionage (AIPAC) and turning documents over to Israeli intelligence (now dubbed “free speech” by liberal Zionists).

If, as the overwhelming evidence indicates, the ZPC played a major role in the major wars of our time, wars capable of igniting new armed conflicts, then it ill behooves us to dilute the role of the Zionist/Jewish Lobby in promoting future US wars. Given Israel’s militarist-theocratic approach to territorial aggrandizement and its announced plans for future wars with Iran and Syria, and given the fact that the ZPC acts as an unquestioning and highly disciplined transmission belt for the Israeli state, then US citizens opposed to present and future US engagement in Middle East wars must confront the ZPC and its Israeli mentors. Moreover, given the extended links among the Islamic nations, the Israel/ZPC proposed “new wars” with Iran will result in *Global wars*. Hence what is at stake in confronting the ZPC are questions which go beyond the Israeli-Palestine peace process, or even regional Middle East conflicts: it involves the big question of world peace or war.

### *Democracy or Authoritarianism?*

Without the bluster and public hearings of former Senator Joseph McCarthy, the Jewish Lobby has systematically undermined the principal pillars of our fragile democracy. While the US Congress, media, academics, retired military and public figures are free to criticize the President, any criticism of Israel, much less the Jewish Lobby, is met with vicious attacks in all the op-ed pages of major newspapers by an army of pro-Israeli “expert” propagandists, demands for firings, purges and expulsions of the critics from their positions or denial of promotions or new appointments. In the face of any prominent critic calling into question the Lobby’s role in shaping US policy to suit Israel’s interests, the entire apparatus (from local Jewish federations, AIPAC, the Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations etc.) go into action – smearing, insulting and stigmatizing the critics as “anti-Semites.” By denying free speech and public debate through campaigns of calumny and real and threatened repercussions, the Jewish Lobby has denied Americans one of their more basic freedoms and constitutional rights.

The massive, sustained and well-financed hate campaigns directed at any congressional candidate critical of Israel effectively eliminates free speech among the political elite. The overwhelming influence of wealthy Jewish contributors to both parties – but especially the Democrats – results in the effective screening out of any candidate who might question any part of the Lobby’s Israel agenda. The takeover of Democratic campaign finance by two ultra-Zionist zealots, Senator Charles Schumer and Israeli-American Congressman Rahm Emanuel ensured that every candidate was totally subordinated to the Lobby’s unconditional support of Israel. The result is that there is no Congressional debate, let alone investigation, over the key role of prominent Zionists in the Pentagon involved in fabricating reports on Iraq’s “weapons of mass destruction,” and in designing and executing the

war and the disastrous occupation policy. The Lobby's ideologues posing as Middle East "experts" dominate the op-ed and editorial pages of all the major newspapers (*Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*). In their pose as Middle East experts, they propagandize the Israeli line on the major television networks (CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox and CNN) and their radio affiliates. The Lobby has played a prominent role in supporting and implementing highly repressive legislation, such as the Patriot Act and the Military Commission Act, as well as modifying anti-corruption legislation to allow the Lobby to finance congressional "educational" junkets to Israel. The head of Homeland Security with its over 150,000 functionaries and multi-billion dollar budget is none other than Zionist fanatic Michael Chertoff, head persecutor of Islamic charity organizations, Palestinian relief organizations and other ethnic Middle Eastern or Moslem constituencies in the USA, which potentially might challenge the Lobby's pro-Israel agenda.

The biggest threat to democracy in its fullest sense of the word – the right to debate, to elect, to legislate free of coercion – is found in the organized efforts of the Zionist lobby, to repress public debate, control candidate selection and campaigning, direct repressive legislation and security agencies against electoral constituencies opposing the Lobby's agenda for Israel. No other lobby or political action group has as much sustained and direct influence over the political process – including the media, congressional debate and voting, candidate selection and financing of congressional allocation of foreign aid and Middle East agendas as the organized Zionist power configuration and its indirect spokespeople heading key Congressional positions. A first step toward reversing the erosion of our democratic freedoms is recognizing and publicly exposing the ZPC's nefarious organizational and financial activities and moving forward toward neutralizing their efforts.

### *Their Foreign Policy or Ours?*

Intimately and directly related to the loss of democratic freedoms and a direct consequence of the Jewish lobby's influence over the political process is the making of US Middle East policy and who benefits from it. The entire political effort of the Lobby (its spending, ethnic baiting, censorship and travel junkets) is directed towards controlling US foreign policy and, through US power, to influence the policy of US allies, clients and adversaries in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. The Lobby's systematic curtailment of our democratic freedoms is related intimately to our own inability to influence our nation's foreign policy. Our majoritarian position against the Iraq war, the repudiation of the main executioner of the war (the White House) and our horror in the face of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and destruction of Gaza are totally neutralized by Zionist influence over Congressional and White House policy makers. The recently victorious Congressional Democrats repudiate their electorate and follow the advice and dictates of the pro-Zionist leadership (Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid, Rahm Emmanuel, Stephan Israel and others) by backing an escalation of troops and an increase in military spending for the war in Iraq. Bush follows the war policy against Iran proposed by the zealous Zionist fanatics in the American Enterprise Institute, repudiating the diplomatic proposals of the bi-partisan Baker Commission. Congress quadruples US arms stored in Israel

(supposedly for dual use) in the aftermath of Israel's bombing of Southern Lebanon with one million anti-personnel bomblets from cluster bombs in direct defiance of US electoral opinion. While hundreds of millions of undernourished women and children suffer and die in Africa, Latin America and Asia, the Lobby ensures that over half of US foreign aid goes to Israeli Jews with per capita incomes of over \$US22,000.

No other organized political action group or public relations firm acting on behalf of the Cuban and Venezuelan exiles or Arab, African, Chinese or European Union states comes remotely near the influence of the Zionist Lobby in shaping US policy to serve the interest of Israel.

While the Lobby speaks for less than 2% of the US electorate, its influence on foreign policy far exceeds the great majority who have neither comparable organizational nor financial muscle to impose their views.

Never in the history of the US republic or empire has a powerful but tiny minority been able to wield so much influence in using our nation's military and economic power and diplomatic arm-twisting in the service of a foreign government. Neither the Francophiles during the American Revolution, the Anglophiles in the Civil War and the German Bund in the run-up to World War II, nor the (anti-China) Nationalist Taiwan Lobby possessed the organizational power and sustained political influence that the ZPC has on US foreign and domestic policy at the service of the State of Israel.

### **Confronting the Lobby Matters**

The question of the power of the Lobby over US policies of war or peace, authoritarianism or democracy and over who defines the interests served by US foreign policy obviously go far beyond the politics of the Middle East, the Israeli-colonial land grabs in Palestine and even the savage occupation of Iraq. The playing out of Zionist influence over the greatest military power in the world, with the most far-reaching set of client states, military bases, deadly weapons and decisive voice in international bodies (IMF/World Bank/United Nations Security Council) means that the Lobby has a means to leverage its reach in most regions of the world. This leverage power extends over a range of issues, from defending the fortunes of murderous Russian-Jewish gangster oligarchs, to bludgeoning European allies of the US to complicity with Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

The ZPC represents a basic threat to our existence as a sovereign state and our ability to influence whom we elect and what agendas and interests our representatives will pursue. Even worse, by serving Israeli interests, we are becoming complicit with a State whose Supreme Court legalizes political assassinations across national boundaries, torture, systematic violations of international law and a regime which repudiates United Nations resolutions and unilaterally invades and bombs its neighbours and practises military colonist expansionism. In a word, Israel resonates and feeds into the most retrograde tendencies and brutal practices of contemporary American politics. In this sense the Lobby, through its media, Congressional influence and think tanks is creating an Israeli look-alike. Like Israel, the US has established its own Pentagon assassination teams; like Israel, it invades and colonizes

Iraq; like Israel, it violates and rejects any constitutional or international legal restraints and systematically tortures accused but untried prisoners.

Because of these fundamental considerations, we cannot oblige our Jewish “progressive” colleagues and compatriots and refrain from confronting the Zionist Lobby with force and urgency. Too many of our freedoms are at stake; too little time is left before they succeed in securing a greater military escalation; too little of our sovereignty remains in the face of the concerted effort by the Lobby and its Middle Eastern “expert-ideologues” to push and shove us into a new and more devastating war with Iran at the behest of Israel’s pursuit of Middle East dominance.

No other country, abuser or not, of human rights, with or without electoral systems, has the influence over our domestic and foreign policy as does the state of Israel. No other Lobby has the kind of financial power and organizational reach as the Jewish Lobby in eroding our domestic political freedoms or our war-making powers. For those reasons alone, it stands to reason, that we Americans have a necessity to put our fight against Israel and its Lobby at the very top of our political agenda. It is not because Israel has the worst human rights agenda in the world – other states have even worst democratic credentials – but because of its role in promoting its US supporters to degrade our democratic principles, robbing us of our freedom to debate and our sovereignty to decide our own interests. The Lobby puts the military and budgetary resources of the Empire at the service of Greater Israel – and that results in the worst human rights in the world.

Democratic, just and peaceful responses to the Big Questions that face Americans, Europeans, Muslims, Jews and other peoples of the world pass through the defeat and dismantlement of the Israeli-directed Zionist power configuration in America. Nothing less will allow us to engage in an open debate on the alternatives to repression at home and imperialism abroad.