

## Chapter 3: The Role of Pro-Israel Interest Groups in the US

### Foreign Policymaking: Domestic Level

During the interview with Journal of Palestine Studies on September 6, 1985, Paul Findley, a former twenty-two-year Republican Congressman from Illinois, revealed:

...not just a congressman from the Midwest running for election, but the whole of the Congress, the whole of the executive branch, the whole of academia, the whole of mainstream America and suburbia – it has been affected by Israel’s lobby (p. 107)

One of the most notable characteristics of Zionism in the US is its capability of forming well organized interest groups to influence US foreign policy. Despite neither that every American Jew is a Zionist nor that all Zionists are Jewish, the UN “Zionism is racism” resolution was intolerable for the Jewish American. The Israeli lobby had attempted to negate and revise the resolution. The structure of the Israeli lobby, according to Bard (1990), is complex but composed of “formal and informal actors that directly and indirectly influence American policy to support Israel” (p. 6).

#### 3.1 Formal Israeli Lobby

##### **Legislative Branch**

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is the core Israeli formal lobby in the United States, which attempts to directly influence the US Middle East policy. According to Fortune magazine, the AIPAC remarkably ranked second in the Washington’s most powerful lobbying groups (Birnbaum, 1997). Originally named

the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs (renamed in 1959), the AIPAC was founded in 1951 by Isaiah Kenen, who described the purpose of the organization as to “unite Americans in support of Israel” (as cited in Goldberg, 1990, p. 23). Although the AIPAC has kept a close relationship with the Israeli government, it maintains the status of a US domestic lobby, not only which is exempted from the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), but also act of which is considered as a part of US national interests, rather than foreign interests. The AIPAC (1987) had expressed its desire to repeal the “Zionism is racism” resolution.

One of most effective techniques of the AIPAC to influence US foreign policy is to directly deal with the legislative branches via delivering its money and votes in elections. The AIPAC’s annual budget in 1989 reached nearly \$11 million (Bard, 1990). Because the AIPAC is not the political action committee (PACs), it is not authorized to directly donate money for election campaigns. However, there is no regulation to prevent a lobby from creating as many PACs as possible.<sup>1</sup> The estimated numbers of pro-Israel PACs increased from thirty-three in 1982 to over seventy in 1988, contributing nearly \$5 million to the committee members who supported pro-Israel agenda, particularly related with foreign aid (Bard, 1990). In response to the AIPAC’s generous contribution, for example, since 1985 the US congress had approved nearly \$3 billion in annual grants to Israel, which makes Israel the largest recipient of US foreign assistance (Sharp, 2008).

The Congress supported the revocation of the “Zionism is racism” resolution as well. On October 2, 1991, with ninety six other cosponsors, US Senator Daniel Moynihan, who apparently received \$11,000 from pro-Israeli PACs in the 1981-82

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<sup>1</sup> According to Rubenberg (1986), for example, during the 1983-84 election season, Paul Simon (D., Illinois) received \$283,850 from sixty-two pro-Israeli PACs to defeat Charles Percy (R., Illinois), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Each PAC is limited to contribute at most \$5,000 per candidate.

congressional election season, introduced a bill to urge the US and the Soviet Union to lead an effort to repeal the resolution (Rubenberg, 1986). A bill was passed in Senate with Yea-Nay Vote of 97 to 0, with 3 abstentions (US Senate, 1991). Although it was barely a non-binding resolution, it showed the moral support of repealing the resolution in the Congress as well as the AIPAC's influence in the Congress.

### **Executive Branch**

Despite the AIPAC's a strong connection with the Congress, however, the Constitution of the US defines that the role of the Congress in the American foreign affair is not a decision maker, but restricted to approval of decisions made by the President. In fact, the AIPAC's influence on the executive branch is often constrained by sensitive issues of national security or authorities of the executive branch.

James Baker, the Secretary of State of the Bush administration, for example, challenged the audience of 1,200 American Jews at the annual conference of AIPAC in Washington on May 22, 1989. In order to show the leaders of Arab states that the Senior Bush administration was ready to act as an honest mediator for the Middle East peace process, Baker addressed that:

For Israel, now is time to lay aside once and for all the unrealistic vision of a Greater Israel. Israeli interests in the West Bank and Gaza, security and otherwise, can be accommodated in a settlement based on Resolution 242. Forswear annexation; stop settlement activity; allow schools to reopen; reach out to the Palestinians as neighbors who deserve political rights (IMFA, 1993a, p. 165).

Despite criticisms from the AIPAC, Baker (1995) determined to contend with the domestic political pressures for developing the Middle East peace process which he truly desired.

Similarly, when the Israeli government requested \$10 billion loan guarantees from the US for the preparation of millions of Soviet Jewish settlements in the

Territories, on September 6, 1991, President Bush asked to postpone the congressional consideration until January 1992 because the approval of the loan guarantees would possibly jeopardize an on going peace process (Reich, 1995; Arens, 1995; Sharp, 2008). Besides numerous oppositions from both the Senate and the House, on September 12, the AIPAC organized more than a thousand people to contest Bush's request for 120 days delay of the loan guarantee on Capital Hill. Bush, however, appeared on TV and angrily told audiences that "we are up against some powerful political forces... very strong and effective groups that go up to the Hill... [but] I am going to fight for what I believe" (Arens, 1995, p. 247). The personal belief of President Bush was unwavering despite considerable domestic pressure.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it appeared that the decision making power of the executive branch undermines the lobby's influences.

### 3.2 Informal Israeli Lobby

Informal Israeli lobby was another instrument to influence the US foreign policy. The concept of informal lobby is very similar to soft power, which attracts others unconsciously to do what the lobby wants them to do (Nye, 2004). While its precise influence was difficult to estimate, the informal Israeli lobby utilized voting behavior, mass media, think tanks, and American public opinion to nullify the concept of Zionism as racism.

#### **Jewish Voting Behavior**

While money remains a key factor in election, the number of votes determines

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<sup>2</sup> While disagreeing with Israeli settlement in the Territories, Bush also supported the revocation of "Zionism is racism" resolution and signed S.J. Res. 246 (George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, 1990).

who to take office. Although the Jewish population (under six million) makes up merely three percent of the total US population, actual impacts of Jewish voting are significant in elections due to three characteristics of their voting behavior: their population distribution, high voter turnout rate, and non-Jewish factor.<sup>3</sup>

- 94 percent of the Jewish population lives in thirteen key Electoral College states. The total combined electoral votes for these thirteen states account for 278 whereas 270 electoral votes are enough to elect a president (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2008). For instance, wealthy retired Jews live in Miami, Florida where candidates pay the most attention due to the absence of a clear favorite, unlike California, New York, or Texas (Rudeneh, 1972).
- Understanding the consequences of politics as well as voting, more than 90 percent of the Jewish population indeed cast a ballot while nearly half of eligible American voters do not (Mansour, 1994).
- In addition, there are a large numbers of the non-Jews constantly favoring pro-Israel agendas as Jewish people (Bard, 1990).

The Israeli lobby recognizes the importance of non-Jewish American involvements because of their small Jewish population in the US. Thus, mass media and think tanks are the tools to produce favorable American public opinion towards Israel and Zionism.

## **Mass Media**

Bagdikian (2000) said, “Media power is political power” (p. vii). Not only would the mass media be capable of manipulating public opinion, but also decision makers

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<sup>3</sup> Depending on who is a Jew, the number of American Jewish population would vary. According to survey done by National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), Jewish population is 5.5 million in 1990 (United Jewish Communities, 2001).

rely on information and analyses from the media to shape the images of what is happening in the world (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1991). Davison (1976) also pointed out that “it is only a slight exaggeration to say that the mass media are the eyes and ears of diplomacy” (p. 317).

With their innovative talents and ambition to achieve the American Dream, the Jewish Americans have a long successful history to associate the mass media industry. Evolving from the America’s first radio chains, the three classical American TV networks, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), and the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) were all established by the Jewish Americans, David Sarnoff and William Paley. Furthermore, Rupert Murdoch’s (his mother is a Jew) the News Corporation formed another major network Fox Broadcasting Company (FOX) in 1985 (Johnson, 1987).

In addition to the TV networks, the founders of the major movie companies, such as Carl Laemmle’s Universal, Adolph Zukor’s Paramount, William Fox’s 20th-Century Fox, Louis Mayer’s Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Harry, Sam, Albert, and Jack Warner’s Warner Brothers, and Harry Cohn’s Columbia Pictures (Cohn-Brandt-Cohn Film Sales) were all Jewish Americans (Gabler, 1988). Even after the death of Walt Disney (non-Jew), Jewish Michael Eisner took over Walt Disney Company and turned it into one of the largest media conglomerates (Smoodin, 1994).

The US’s three most prestigious newspapers: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, all have a Jewish link as well. After Jewish Adolph Ochs bought the *New York Times* in 1896, a member of his family has controlled the *Times*.<sup>4</sup> Since Eugene Meyer, a son of wealthy French-Jewish, purchased the *Washington Post* in 1933, Meyer-Graham families have owned the *Post*

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<sup>4</sup> For example, his grandson, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger was the publisher and chairman of the New York Times Company from 1962 until his son, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Jr. succeeded him in 1992. (Diamond, 1995)

(Graham, 1998). The *Wall Street Journal* is published by Dow Jones & Company, president of which in 1989 was Peter Kann, a Jewish American, who later became the CEO in 1991 (Dow Jones & Company, 2008). In addition, some powerful Jewish American, such as Gerald Levin, Katherine Meyer Graham, Mortimer Zuckerman have maintained strong tie with publishing *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US news & world report*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*.

These Jewish Americans were not all ardent Zionists, rather American citizens (even some of them were anti-Zionists), but Robert Blumofe, a film executive, said about an establishment of Jewish homeland in Israel:

Most of us... had a feeling that we were homeless, waiflike people who got pushed around, not really accepted... and suddenly Israel, even to the least Jewish of us, represented status of some sort. It meant that we did have a homeland. It meant that we did have an identity. It meant that we were no longer the stereotype of the Jew: the moneylender, the Jew businessman. These were fighters and they were farmer and they revived the land there... All of this was terribly, terribly uplifting (as cited in Gabler, 1988, p. 350).<sup>5</sup>

As the Jewish American's massive ownership of the mass media industry, informal Israeli lobby constantly attempted to create particular images of Zionism, Palestinians, and Israeli national interest. The mass media, while repeatedly uses anti-Semitism and Holocaust related materials to produce media products, deliberately blended the original meaning of Zionism with anti-Semitism which is prejudice, hostility, or discrimination against the Jewish people (Rubenberg, 1985; Findley, 1985).<sup>6</sup> Although some Americans, including a Jewish Americans, expressed the idea of establishing a Jewish homeland in somewhere else than Israel, their ideas were often regarded as anti-Semitism. It also created the stereotypes of Palestinians, Arabs and the PLO as terrorists, anti-Western, corruption, Communist or simply an evil

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<sup>5</sup> Graham (1998) described in her book that "I saw a sign in front of an apartment house that read 'No dogs or Jews allowed' and was deeply shaken" (p. 123).

<sup>6</sup> *Gentleman's Agreement* or *Schindler's List*: winners of the Academy Award for Best Motion Picture are good examples.

(Said, 1995; Peretz, 1990). Especially during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the images of Arabs were “overwhelmingly racist,” emphasizing them burning US flags or shouting anti-US slogans (Raboy and Dagenais, 1992, p. 168). The third image that the mass media attempts to create was that Israeli and American national interests were essentially identical.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast with the frequent appearance of particular images, some information does not appear in mainstream television or newspapers. For example, Democrat House Representative George Crockett, a consistent critic of the apartheid regime in South Africa, expressed after visiting the West Bank in September, 1985 that nobody in the US was talking about the fact that Israel established a sort of apartheid in the West Bank (Hunter, 1985). Moreover, in addition to Israel’s annual \$3 billion in official US foreign aid, there was more than \$1 billion private tax-exempt donation from the US to Israel, which was also not publicized (Rubenberg, 1986; Curtiss, 1997). Indeed, the mass media, carefully choosing what to tell or what not to tell to the audiences, produced the sympathetic images of Israel.

Despite the successful media manipulation, the *Intifada*, the eruption of the Palestinian uprising from December 1987 in Gaza and the West Bank, began to raise the US domestic consciousness about what was really happening in the Middle East. At the first phrase of the event, the *Intifada* was reported as a part of Palestinian terrorist activities against the government of Israel. As media coverage increased, however, some of the American media became critical of Israel’s policy to use of forces against Palestinians (Gilboa, 1993). For instance, in spite of a loyal supporter of Israel, Woody Allen, a film director, criticized the Israeli policy toward the *Intifada*,

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<sup>7</sup> The founder of AIPAC Isaiah Kenen (1971) said, “Israel’s survival is consistent with America’s interest – economics, strategic, and moral” (p. 16). However, Mearcheimer and Walt (2006) argued because of the US’s close alliance with Israel and Israel’s nuclear arsenal, the US became a target for terrorist groups or oil embargo, and Arab states desire to develop nuclear weapons, not other way around.

calling “wrongheaded approach” (Peretz, 1990, p. 175). However, while the *Intifada* helped to produce supportive media coverage, these reports did not cover the in-depth analyses of the complex roots of the Palestinian issue (Gilboa, 1993). In fact, the *intifada* had achieved limited success to gain a general American sympathy.<sup>8</sup>

### **Think Tanks**

American think tanks, considered as academic study groups of intellectual or the professional elites, exercise the power to influence decision-making process and public opinion, particularly in a complex foreign affair where many American citizens are remained uninterested or uninformed.

The origin of Israeli lobby’s a robust relationship with American think tanks was since 1985 when Martin Indyk, a former research director at AIPAC, became a founding executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP). According to Mearsheimer and Walt (2006), the Israeli lobby has “established a commanding presence” at number of think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the Brookings Institution, the Center for Security Policy (CSP), the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), the Heritage Foundation, the Hudson Institute, and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) (p. 22). The Brookings Institution, one of Washington’s oldest think tanks, for example, launched the Saban Center for Middle East Policy founded with \$13 million by a Zionist billionaire Haim Saban.<sup>9</sup>

As a matter of fact, these think tanks advocated the revocation. Christopher Gacek of the Heritage Foundation, for instance, wrote an article titled “Removing the Stain of the United Nations’ ‘Zionism is Racism’ Resolution.” In the article, Gacek

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<sup>8</sup> Public sympathy is described in a later section

<sup>9</sup> Saban told New York Times that “I’m a one-issue guy and my issue is Israel... It is the right thing for us to do to be supportive of Israel” (Sorkin, 2004, para 5, 39).

(1991) claimed the revocation of the resolution was in US interest and urged that Thomas Pickering, the US Ambassador to the UN, to veto any potential candidacy for Secretary General of the UN unless the candidate agreed to support the revocation of the resolution.

## **Public Opinion**

Public opinion supposedly plays a fundamental role in a policy establishment in the democratic society; on the other hand, Kegley and Wittkopf (1991) said, “The media *are* public opinion” because the public opinion is often described as uninformed, uninterested, or easily manipulated (p. 309). As described in previous sections, the mass media and think tanks became the lobbying instrument for Israeli interest groups. Although the consequences of mass media and think tanks are not measurable, the opinion polls have consistently showed more sympathy toward Israel and Zionism.

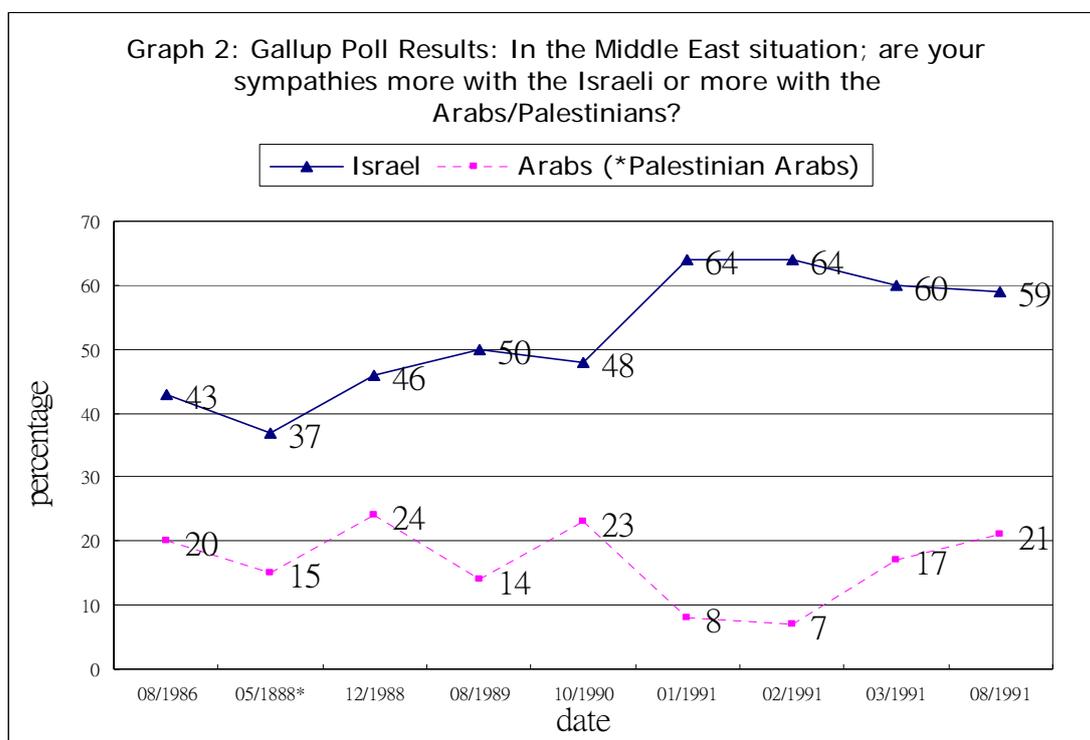
The Gallup organization conducted that American public opinion toward Israel and Arabs.<sup>10</sup> After the occurrence of the *intifada* on December 1987, the American public sympathy slight declined five percent from August 1986 to April 1988. More importantly, both Israel and Arabs suffered loss of public support due to inaccurate reports from the media toward the *Intifada*. While most Americans (79% in January 1988 and 88% in April 1988) became more aware of the Palestinian uprising due to a large scale of general coverage by the mass media and a presence of public criticism from the Jewish Americans, less than 30% paid close attention to the event (Gilboa, 1993). Indeed, American public opinion shifted relatively little.

In contrast, when the PLO’s endorsement of Saddam Hussein was repeatedly reported, the American sympathy toward the Arabs sharply dropped from 23% to 8%,

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<sup>10</sup> See Graph 2

while their sympathy toward Israel increased significantly from 48% to 64% (Benvenisti, 1995). Thus, the mass media had efficaciously implanted the accumulated stereotypes of Israel and Arabs in the audiences' minds. Americans did not consider the *intifada* was the most important international issue of the time (Benvenisti, 1995). Rather, they believed what they wanted to believe or what they had taught for a long time.



Source: Drawn by the author based on Gallup (2008) and partially cited in Bard (2008)

### Limitation of Informal Lobby

In the era of information revolution, the media no longer possess the power as Cohen described in 1963: “the mass media may not be successful in telling people what to think, but the media are stunningly successful in telling their audience what to think about” (p. 13). With the development of internet, the credibility and the quality of media coverage became more important. The informal Israeli lobby was effectively

influencing the mass media for the purpose of creating American sympathy toward Zionism, but what was really happening in the world was not as easily manageable as the mass media (Chomsky, 1989).

Unlike the ideology of democracy, the public opinion does not apparently determine the US foreign policy (Spanier and Uslaner, 1989; Nelson, 2004).<sup>11</sup> In fact, when more than a thousand people protested the President Bush's announcement of delay of the consideration of Israeli housing loan, the President Bush proclaimed that "I don't care if I only got one vote [in 1992 presidential election]" (as cited in Arens, 1995, p. 247). Therefore, at the event that the lobby's interest is confronted with national interest or executive's personal interest, the power of lobby diminishes significantly.

### 3.3 Summary

The formal and informal Israeli lobbies attempt to control Washington's Middle East policy through their connection with legislative and executive branches, voting behavior, mass media, think tanks, and American public opinion. After the detailed analysis of the Jewish interest groups, the myth of their ultimate power to control the American foreign policy was illustrated, especially in the case when the leaders were willing to confront the lobby, media, or public opinion with the national interest they defined. Thus, despite their contribution to gain public sympathy toward Zionism, the role of the Israeli lobby in the US policymaking is not controlling but influencing.

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<sup>11</sup> Spanier and Uslaner (1989) pointed out that "Presidents are likely to look on public opinion with disdain or to ignore it completely when confronted with an international crisis" (p. 214). Nelson (2004) noted that "the presidency and the presidents who occupy the office are never more important than in the making of foreign policy. This is especially true of issues and challenges that concern the national security" (p. 146).