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Foreign Policy, Inc.

Privatizing America's  
National Interest

LAWRENCE DAVIDSON

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## Privatizing National Interest—the Israel Lobby

The ancestors of a majority of American Jews come from Europe. The European Jews are known as the Ashkenazim, and, of all the world's Jews, they were the ones who suffered the most consistent and harshest anti-Semitism and persecution. Their history has included a long period of persecution in czarist Russia, pogroms in much of Eastern Europe, and the Dreyfus Affair in France and culminated in the Nazi Holocaust. This history has largely conditioned the outlook of American Jews and instilled in them a collective feeling of vulnerability that is more or less conscious depending on the conditions of the time.

Small numbers of European Jews came to the British colonies of North America as early as the eighteenth century. And, like the other elements of the colonial population that had come looking for religious freedom, they brought their memories of persecution with them. However, unlike those of the Protestant colonists who went on to make up most of the nation's ruling elite, the memories of the Jewish colonists never completely faded, even in a political environment, described by George Washington in a 1790 letter to the local synagogue of Newport, Rhode Island, as one in which the government "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."<sup>1</sup>

Washington was speaking of the federal government of which he was the first president. Yet, until the mid-twentieth century, such power as would immediately affect the lives of citizens resided at the state and lo-

cal levels. And, as the history of slavery, Jim Crow laws, Red Scares, the women's suffrage movement, and the civil rights struggle of the 1960s tells us, there was plenty of active bigotry, paranoia, and persecution at these levels.<sup>2</sup> Just enough of this affected the Jews to maintain a low-level feeling of insecurity. In the fight against the discriminatory tendencies of the majority, the Jewish elites (which, in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, were of German origin)<sup>3</sup> would use the courts and occasionally ally with others (at first Catholics and later African Americans) to beat back debilitating laws and practices. These efforts naturally gave rise to "defensive" organizations.

One of the earliest of these organizations was the Board of Delegates of American Israelites (founded in 1859), which established the tactical pattern of government lobbying. The board was relatively successful. For instance, it was due to its lobbying effort that an 1860s proposal for a constitutional amendment declaring the United States "a Christian nation" failed to pass Congress. The activities of the board marked the emergence of a generation of American Jews who no longer saw themselves as newcomers on the American political scene, instead feeling established enough to operate as insiders.<sup>4</sup> Their lobbying and other political activities were aimed at making the United States as tolerant and open a society for all citizens as possible. They knew that it was in their community interest to make domestic tolerance a national interest.

In 1878, the Board of Delegates merged with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). This merger attests to the continuing dominance of Jews whose religious values and customs of worship were traditionally oriented. However, by the late nineteenth century, Reform Judaism, a less traditionalist and increasingly Americanized form of Judaism, emerged. For instance, the Reform Jews claimed to see the call for Jews to repossess Jerusalem as only a metaphor. They were Americans first and foremost. Deserted by the Reform Jews in 1883, the Board of Delegates/UAHC suffered yet another setback when the ultratraditionalists, the Orthodox Jews, left the organization later the same year.

Thus, by the 1880s, American Jewry was divided into three parts. Yet this schism reflected internal and somewhat esoteric disagreements and did not reflect any division about the vision for a tolerant and open American society. Thus, it did not prove a great challenge for Jewish Americans during this period. Nor, at this time, did any great challenge

come from anti-Semitic American gentiles promoting discriminatory behavior. The greatest challenge would come from the mass exodus of Jews fleeing Russian and Eastern European persecution and the fact that the vast majority of these refugees (some two million) were heading for American shores. There is something sadly ironic, though politically logical, about the fact that the descendants of Jews who championed tolerance and whose ancestors had found refuge in colonial America a hundred years before now looked with anxiety on the arrival of this next wave of Jewish refugees.

The fear among the established Jewish community was that the arrival of so many alien Jews would stir up latent American anti-Semitism and erode the insider status of the established Jews. This reaction also had a certain class aspect. The Russian and East European Jews were poor and distinctive in their dress, manners, and speech. Some of them were also politically suspect, harboring socialist and anarchist sympathies. A small number were Zionists.<sup>5</sup>

To minimize the impact on their own higher class status and also help assimilate the newcomers as quickly as possible, the now three distinct Jewish communities produced yet more organizations, committees, and activist groups. Premier among them was the American Jewish Committee, which, while financing efforts to educate and employ the new arrivals, successfully lobbied the U.S. government to abrogate its bilateral trade treaty with Russia because of that nation's official discrimination against Jews. What is significant here is the way in which the American Jewish Committee presented its case. As J. J. Goldberg tells us: "The fight against the Russian trade treaty was presented as an American domestic issue. Russia's anti-Semitic laws extended not only to Russian Jews, but to American Jewish visitors as well."<sup>6</sup> This approach, essentially making a domestic case out of a foreign policy issue, would be a tactic used again and again by the Jewish lobby groups.

Another Jewish group established at this time (1913) was the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith. As had been feared, the influx of Jewish immigrants had caused a rapid increase in the use of negative Jewish stereotypes in the newspapers of the day. B'nai B'rith set up the ADL to pressure the media not to use descriptions and images that denigrated Jews or identified them with disturbing developments (such as an increase in the crime rate). In the 1930s, the ADL transformed from a

defensive organization to one with an "offensive" posture by establishing an intelligence-gathering arm that targeted anti-Semitic groups.

In the 1920s and 1930s, anti-Semitism was, indeed, on the rise in the United States, largely following a similar trend throughout the Western world. How closely this phenomenon matched the racial theories springing up in Europe can be seen in an article written by President Calvin Coolidge for *Good Housekeeping* magazine in the early 1920s in which he asserted: "Biological laws show us that Nordics deteriorate when mixed with other races."<sup>7</sup> Working from this pseudoscientific assumption, Coolidge signed the Johnson-Reed Immigration Reform Act of 1924, shutting down the immigration of non-Aryan groups, including Jews. It is this restrictive stand on immigration—supported by over 80 percent of the American people well into the 1940s—that prevented the United States from rescuing many Jews, and others as well, from Nazi persecution.

All the major American Jewish organizations of the day had, at least officially, opposed the harshly restrictive immigration law. Indeed, in 1924, the head of the American Jewish Committee, Louis Marshall, sought an appointment with Coolidge to urge him to veto the Johnson-Reed bill. Coolidge refused to see him. After this, Jewish opposition was restrained out of fear of an anti-Semitic backlash. There was, however, a Jewish group that refused to take any sort of stand against immigration restrictions. This was the American Zionists.

At this time (from 1920 to the mid-1930s), Zionist Jews were but a minority of the overall American Jewish community. As a group, they tended to stand apart from the other Jewish groups. They were largely silent on the immigration issue because, ideologically, they were opposed to Jews coming to the United States. They insisted, instead, that they should go to Palestine. Thus, closing the door to Palestine's most attractive competitor as a refuge for Jews was in their interest. They held to this position even as an awareness of Nazi genocide grew.<sup>8</sup>

World War II and the Holocaust enhanced a deepening sense of vulnerability in all of surviving Jewry. The episodes of "respectable" and sometimes intense anti-Semitic discrimination that had appeared in the United States during the interwar and World War II period added to American Jewish insecurities. Thus, American Jews felt that they were once more outsiders—even when, with the end of World War II, Ameri-

can feeling toward Jews reversed itself. J. J. Goldberg suggests: "Jews may have benefitted from widespread postwar revulsion against the evils of prejudice . . . coupled with a general mood of good-natured optimism that emerged from the victory over fascism and the booming economy of the 1950s."<sup>9</sup> Whatever the reasons, American Jewish organizations reacted to the recent past, and the new situation of the present, by adopting an aggressive posture toward anything that smacked of discriminatory behavior against minorities.

In the 1950s and 1960s, American Jewish organizations realigned with each other under new umbrella organizations such as National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, which encouraged the establishment of Jewish community relations committees throughout the United States. Jewish organizations also established alliances that fought for civil rights reforms in the 1960s. The previous thirty years had taught them that they could not rely on sweet reason alone to change the potentially dangerous prejudices that lurked within society. Those prejudices had to be attacked as well as defended against. As Goldberg puts it: "Quiet diplomacy was out; legal action was in."<sup>10</sup> American Jews responded enthusiastically to these campaigns, pouring millions of dollars into the coffers of the various organizations, as well as lending their time and energy to political work. This was the period when the Jews made their reputation as activists within postwar American politics.

It is to be noted that the evolution of the American Jewish civil and political posture, driven as it was by a sense of vulnerability, had its core references in the American domestic scene. The reaction to events abroad—whether the massive immigration at the turn into the twentieth century or, later, the refugee problem created by Nazi persecution—was determined by the Jewish experience in America. This is one reason why American Jews' relief efforts in the early years of the century were in good part motivated by their fear of the impact on their own status of continued Jewish immigration. It is also why, later on in the century, the behavior of the American Jewish organizations was sometimes inconsistent. Some, like the American Jewish Committee, were more conservative in their approach to domestic anti-Semitism and discrimination (always fearing that an aggressive reaction would only make things worse), while others, such as the American Jewish Congress, were more assertive. As things got worse in the 1930s and 1940s, the conservative

posture prevailed, particularly on issues that referenced foreign situations. This is one reason why American Jews did not press harder for immigration reform even in the face of Nazi genocide. When the environment of American anti-Semitism abated, however, American Jewish organizations expressed a pent-up frustration with much more assertive action that, at least up until the year 1967, focused on domestic issues such as the fight for civil rights.

### The American Zionists Emerge

This new assertiveness applying itself to the elimination of any pronounced discriminatory behavior within America's legal and social domestic environment was a productive posture. It led to purposeful alliances with other American minorities and certainly served the self-interest of the American Jewish community. Once more, the community understood that its interest was in fighting to make the vision of a tolerant America a national interest.

The one exception that had always existed to this position was the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). It was, in essence, a one-issue organization. That issue was, not the interests of American Jewry, but promoting the Jewish colonization of Palestine and, after 1948, aiding Israel. Of course, all the major American Jewish organizations had supported Israel's creation and its continued existence. But, unlike the ZOA, they were not wholly fixated on what was, after all, a foreign policy issue. It was not until the 1960s that this began to change.

The Zionists had gained strength rapidly during World War II. For instance, ZOA membership in the year 1941 stood at about forty-six thousand, a figure that compared favorably with the other major Jewish organizations. This can be seen as a logical consequence of Jewish community frustration and fear. The frustration came from the inability, and often the unwillingness, of the mainstream Jewish groups to challenge the immigration laws that were stranding millions of Jews (often the relatives of American Jewish citizens) in an ever more hostile Europe. The fear came from the awareness that such restrictions reflected an ever more open American-style anti-Semitism. The logical conclusion to be drawn from all this appeared to be that the Zionists were right when they said that the Jews needed a state of their own. Thus, the war years brought

greater support for the ZOA and, slowly but surely, saw most other Jewish organizations falling in line with Zionist programs.<sup>11</sup>

The American Zionists—whose aims did not reference the needs of domestic Jews—used this support to lobby both the American government and the American people themselves to support the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish homeland. When it came to selling this goal, the Zionists were spending some \$70,000 a year in the 1940s to “crystallize the sympathy of Christian America” for the cause of a Jewish Palestine. They were also working hard to establish allied gentile organizations such as the American Palestine Committee, which, by 1941, boasted among its membership “68 senators, 200 congressmen and numerous academics, clergy and leaders in many walks of life.”<sup>12</sup> As these numbers imply, the Zionists were particularly successful in the case of the U.S. Congress. Indeed, Palestine as a refuge for the Jews was very popular with American politicians in the 1930s and 1940s because it was a way of helping Jewish refugees, and, thus, assuaging the guilt that came along with draconian immigration statutes, without having to alter those statutes. Yet, as we will see, Palestine for the Jews was problematic in terms of what should have been American national interests even before the state of Israel was created.

### The Problem of National Interests, Part I

An early example of the complications that could arise from American political susceptibility to Zionist lobbying can be found in the case of the congressional resolutions of 1944. On January 27, 1944, at the behest of American Zionists, Representatives James A. Wright of Pennsylvania and Ranulf Compton of Connecticut introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives that urged the U.S. government to take “appropriate measures” to induce the British government to allow unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine. According to Wright and Compton, this would result in the ultimate creation of “a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth.” A few days later, on February 1, an identical resolution was introduced into the Senate by Robert Wagner of New York and Robert Taft of Ohio. At the time, Wagner tied the resolution to what he saw as a history of congressional commitment to Zionism going back to Congress's 1922 joint resolution in support of the Balfour Declaration. Wagner went so far

as to assert: "Although [the Balfour Declaration] was issued in the name of the British Government it was as a matter of fact a joint policy of the Governments of Great Britain and the United States." As a matter of fact, Wagner was wrong. America's association with the document went no further than a personal, and very casual, nod of approval on the part of Woodrow Wilson.<sup>13</sup>

At the Senate hearings on the 1944 congressional resolutions, Wagner brought in most of the heads of major Jewish organizations, the American Jewish Committee, the American Council for Judaism, and Rabbi Abba Silver for the Zionists. Interestingly enough, at this time, one could actually bring opponents of the Zionist position before Congress, so we find the historian Philip Hitti from Princeton University telling the senators, on February 15, that Zionist aims at transforming Palestine into a "Jewish Commonwealth" violated "the third article of the Atlantic Charter[, which recognizes] the right of people to choose their own government."<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately for Hitti and the Palestinians, international law (then as now) carried little weight with Congress. The entire process of putting forth the resolutions and debating and passing them appeared pre-planned and attested to the power of the Zionist movement by this time. One reason that the Zionists' lobby power worked so well was (and is) because all politics are local. Thus, Jewish lobbyists rallying local voters both Jewish and gentile, and using their financial wherewithal in shrewd political ways, could get their way on issues that had little or very weak organized opposition. Another reason was attested to by a *New York Times* editorial in support of the resolutions published on February 12, 1944, that stated: "The increasingly desperate state of those of the Jewish faith in Europe has made it more than ever evident that the . . . doors of any place of refuge . . . should be open wider." The *Times* conveniently overlooked the draconian restrictions on American immigration law and proceeded to castigate Great Britain for its "arbitrary ban" on immigration to Palestine.<sup>15</sup>

It was true that Great Britain had moved to restrict Jewish immigration into Palestine since just before the outbreak of World War II. This came in London's White Paper of 1939. The action was, indeed, a reversal from the position originally taken in the Balfour Declaration, one promising the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, but it was hardly "arbitrary" or a decision taken because of anti-Semitic prejudice. It was

an act of recognition that, with a world war looming, the British Empire had to compete with the fascists for the allegiance of the entire Arab and Muslim world. It could not do so while allowing unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine. As British military strategists had noted in January 1939: "We assume that . . . the necessary measures would be taken . . . in order to bring about a complete appeasement of Arab opinions in Palestine and in neighbouring countries. . . . If we fail to retain Arab goodwill at the outset of a war, no other measures which we can recommend will serve to influence the Arab States in favour of this country."<sup>16</sup>

The *Times* editors went on to assert: "The case for American intervention in this question is stronger than it was five years ago. The presence of our troops and supply depots in the Near East and our vital concern in peace and order in this strategic area give us a greater right to urge that the White Paper should now be abrogated."<sup>17</sup> It was a strange argument, for the presence of "our troops and supply depots" essentially put the United States in the same position as Great Britain relative to the need to maintain friendly wartime relations with Arabs and Muslims. This was obvious to the State Department's Division of Near Eastern Affairs and to the War Department, so they urged President Roosevelt and the executive branch of government not to interfere with British policy in Palestine.

In fact, noninterference was a matter of national interest as far as Secretary of War Henry Stimson was concerned. He had been informed by the State Department's Division of Near Eastern Affairs that passage of the resolutions was likely to "precipitate armed conflict in Palestine and other parts of the Arab world, endangering American troops," as well as "seriously prejudice, if not make impossible, important pending negotiations with Ibn Saud for the construction of a pipeline across Saudi Arabia, a development of utmost importance to the security of the United States." Thus, on February 7, 1944, Stimson wrote Tom Connolly, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "The subject of this resolution is a matter of deep military concern to the War Department. I feel that the passage of this resolution at the present time, or even any public hearings thereon, would be apt to provoke dangerous repercussions in areas where we have many vital military interests." Secretary of State Cordell Hull followed this up with a letter of his own to Connolly suggesting: "No further action on this resolution would be advisable at this time."<sup>18</sup>

This was no mere speculation on the part of Stimson and Hull. Arab



governments had made it quite clear to American authorities that they considered pro-Zionist congressional resolutions provocative. As to the pending 1944 resolutions, protests had been lodged with the U.S. legations in Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. The Iraqi government had communicated directly with Senators Taft, Wagner, and Connally to the effect that "immigration of Jews into Palestine with the idea of turning it into a Jewish state would lead to disturbances there and would aid the efforts of enemy propagandists." This was essentially what General George Marshall, the army chief of staff, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in executive session on March 4, 1944.<sup>19</sup>

While Marshall's intervention was sufficient to force a temporary withdrawal of the resolutions, the sponsors remained under continuing pressure from the American Zionists. It would seem that the Zionists were more concerned with their own organizational and ideological interests than any war-related national interest. The politicians, in turn, saw national interest in terms of their own local electoral interests. Thus, the resolutions' sponsors, and particularly Senator Taft, reacted churlishly to their forced withdrawal. Taft lashed out at the Iraqis for having the audacity to share their concerns with Congress. He told the *New York Times*: "The Congress of the United States, which for more than a century has been able to reach its own conclusions without advice from officials of foreign nations, is fully able to reach a wise conclusion in this matter." It being the case that Marshall had told the Congress about the same thing as the Iraqis had, Taft could not restrain himself from questioning his judgment as well. By the end of March, therefore, the *New York Times* noted, Taft had taken issue "with the military critics of the proposal [Congress's pro-Zionist resolutions] who suggested that the action might weaken the position of Allied troops in North Africa and the Middle East." After confessing that he was "no expert on military affairs" and that he "[did] not know enough about the military conditions in North Africa to affirm or deny the alleged [*sic*] position of the Secretary of War and General Marshall," Taft proceeded to do just that, telling the *Times*: "I strongly suspect that the real objection [to the resolutions] is political and not military."<sup>20</sup>

It is a testimony to the strength of American Zionist lobbying by this time that it could reach to the White House when needed. Thus, within a week of the withdrawal of the resolutions, President Roosevelt was mud-

dying the waters by authorizing the American Zionist leaders Stephen Wise and Abba Silver to release a statement in which he proclaimed: "The American government has never given its approval to the White Paper of 1939. . . . When future decisions are reached full justice will be done to those who seek a Jewish national home, for which our government and the American people have always had the deepest sympathy." This statement only renewed Arab concerns and sent the State Department scurrying for an explanation of the contradictory positions taken within the government. In the opinion of the head of the Division of Near East Affairs, Wallace Murray—as well as that of the Office of Strategic Services (the wartime predecessor of the CIA)—the behavior of the U.S. Congress when it came to pro-Zionist resolutions "led to a material weakening in the American psychological position in the Near East."<sup>21</sup> This was a judgment that seemed to reflect a real wartime national interest.

The American Zionists and the pro-Zionist congressional leaders either did not believe the judgment of the diplomatic and military experts or did not care. And this presents the possibility that they saw their own parochial interests as more important than the wartime national interest. The congressional leaders used Roosevelt's statement to resurrect the resolutions and, by the end of March, were arguing that the statement "overruled . . . the chief of Staff [General Marshall]." This position was reinforced when, in the summer of 1944, both the Republican and the Democratic party platform committees inserted planks favoring the "opening of Palestine to unrestricted immigration and colonization."<sup>22</sup> As a consequence, the pro-Zionist resolutions were back on the floor of Congress by November.

By that time, the Arab diplomatic protests over the issue had transformed themselves into charges of betrayal by the U.S. government. These charges referred specifically to Roosevelt's promise that no decision would be taken altering the status of Palestine without prior consultation with both Arabs and Jews.<sup>23</sup> Such reminders forced Roosevelt to once more intervene to have the resolutions temporarily shelved.

The saga of the 1944 resolutions points to the fact that, even in the midst of a global war, Congress lived in an altogether different world than either the State or the War departments. These organizations dealt with international realities and the contending forces of an ongoing conflict. They could see the potential damage the resolutions were likely to have on

the Allies' strategic military position, and, later, on the long-term overall interests of the United States, in the Middle East. On the other hand, it is hard to escape the conclusion that neither the American Zionists nor their supporters in Congress paid any attention to these issues unless absolutely forced to by General Marshall and, belatedly, President Roosevelt. And, even then, they did so begrudgingly and were constantly on the lookout for ways to get out from under limits imposed by strategic considerations.

Here, then, we have an example of the fact that the forces that shape behavior in the U.S. Congress are basically parochial in nature. The demands of the Zionist lobby may have presented a danger to U.S. national interests abroad, but they had become vital aspects of the interests of congressmen and senators at home. Therefore, they, and not U.S. national interests as defined by the foreign policy and military arms of the government, defined the behavior of most local politicians.<sup>24</sup> From this time on, this response pattern to Zionist lobbying would become fixed. For the Congress, and the political parties as well, Palestine/Israel would become an obsession.

### The Postwar Situation

As we have seen, after the war, the Jewish organizations took a very aggressive position when it came to discriminatory domestic laws. They made alliances and helped promote civil rights for all citizens. However, as could be anticipated from the now permanent position of strength that the Zionist element occupied within the Jewish community, the maintenance of an uncritical, supportive attitude on the part of both the American people and the U.S. government toward the state of Israel was at least as important. This dual position can be seen as a two-pronged expression of continuing feelings of vulnerability. One had to fight for one's position in America as well as for the strong Israeli state, which could serve as a refuge if the future turned bad in America, as it once had in Germany. This was the psychological situation as the year 1967 approached. The events of that year would create a contradiction between these dual ends of the Jewish organizations. In that year, they would have to choose between continuing to work toward a liberal and tolerant America and uncritical support for Israel.

By the beginning of June 1967, Egypt and Israel were on the brink of war. Egyptian President Nasser's precipitous action in dismissing the UN peacekeeping forces in the Sinai Desert and closing the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping had contributed to this situation, as had Israel's hostile behavior toward Egypt's ally Syria. Under these circumstances, the Israelis initiated war with a predawn attack on Egypt in early June. Within six days, they had defeated the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and occupied the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights.

This victory was a surprise to everyone except the military and political experts who paid attention to the realities of the Middle East. The worldwide Jewish consensus flowed not from present reality (which the experts knew was characterized by Israeli strength and Arab weakness) but from historically conditioned feelings of vulnerability that encompassed not only the Israeli public but the diaspora too. As far as world Jewry was concerned, Israel was perpetually on the brink of annihilation—an assumption often encouraged by the American media. In the three weeks of crisis preceding the war, this fear of the imminent destruction of Israel reached fever pitch. However, instead of experiencing another Holocaust, what the Jews got was the rapid and complete victory of the Zionist state. This outcome produced both disorientation and delirious joy. And, in its mythic power, it confirmed and deepened the bond between almost all diaspora Jews and the Jewish state. A suggestion of this could be seen in the outpouring of American Jewish wealth that went to the United Jewish Appeal to help defray Israeli war expenses—\$307 million in the six months following the war.<sup>25</sup>

As J. J. Goldberg points out, the rapid, if unexpected, victory of Israel did not leave American Jews with a greater sense of security. Rather: "The events of May and June 1967 shattered the nerves of the American Jewish community." Goldberg quotes the Jewish leader Milton Himmelfarb writing in *Commentary* in October 1967 to the effect that Jews had a "sudden realization that genocide, antisemitism, a desire to murder Jews—all those things were not merely what one had been taught about the bad, stupid past. . . . Those things were real and present." Jews had, Himmelfarb concluded, "relearned the old truth that you can depend only on yourself."<sup>26</sup>

It was this emotionally driven worldview (the Jews' ethnocentric thought collective) that dictated the response of American Jewish lead-

ers to what happened next. The Israeli victory was not all positive. It gave Israel control of conquered territory that it almost immediately started to colonize, in violation of international law. More than a million non-Jews, that is, native Palestinians, found themselves under an increasingly oppressive regime of occupation. Israel was taken to task on human rights issues by the United Nations, and many Third World nations started to criticize Israeli policies in the newly occupied territories as resembling the behavior of apartheid South Africa.

Some of this criticism came from civil rights and antiwar groups in the United States with whom the American Jewish organizations had long-standing alliances. This proved to be the pivotal moment. Would the American Jewish leaders and activists stay true to their liberal principles of tolerance and equality for all, including the Palestinians under Israeli occupation, or would they retreat into a fortress mentality that interpreted all criticism of Israel as anti-Semitism and proof that the Jews could depend only on themselves? The answer turned out to be the latter. With little debate or hesitation, the establishment leadership of American Jewry traded its traditional alliances with the progressive forces of the nation for new alliances with right-wing conservative forces that uncritically backed Israel.

This was, perhaps, not an unexpected choice. If American Jewish leaders assumed that a strong Israel was forever on the brink of destruction, if they did not have the collective ego strength to accept others' criticism of postwar Israeli policies, and if they had no faith in the historically demonstrated ability of liberal policies to guarantee their own domestic rights, then a fortress mentality was the only thing they could retreat to. And so they did. Jewish leaders resigned from the liberal organizations that raised even the mildest criticism of Israel. And those few American Jews who kept to their liberal principles were accused of being traitors to their people.

Simultaneously, a new "holocaust awareness" sprung up among American Jews fueled by Israel's alleged recent "near death experience."<sup>27</sup> Jewish leaders started demanding that Holocaust studies become part of secondary and college curricula. Synagogues and Hebrew schools gave the topic a much greater place in their teachings and sermons. The Holocaust, which had been a symbol of a past overcome by a better present, was now put forth as a symbol of present and future danger. The Arabs were transformed into latter-day Nazis.

It is unclear what percentage of the general American Jewish population immediately went along with this rapidly developing dogma. However, there is little doubt that the vast majority of American Jews at least passively acquiesced in the policy shift. The shift was based on simple subtraction. Where before the 1967 war there were two pillars of American Jewish policy—Israel and the fight for a liberal and tolerant America—now there was only one. And that was Israel.

### Zionism Triumphant

From this time on, the major goal of American Jewish organizations and lobbies was to serve the interests of Israel. All lobbies were now essentially Zionist. As far as Israeli leaders were concerned, this was only as it should be. From their point of view, the gentile world was inherently, if sometimes latently, hostile, and, therefore, Jewish organizations in the diaspora had no other purpose but to support the state of Israel. That is, all Jewish organizations in the diaspora should function in their home countries as agents of a foreign power. In the United States, the organization that now came to the fore in this role was the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). As a testimony to this claim, the AIPAC Web site quotes the *New York Times* describing it as "the most important organization affecting America's relationship with Israel."<sup>28</sup>

AIPAC was originally founded as the Washington-based office of the ZOA. At that time, the DC office was called the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs. Its name was changed to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in 1959. The initial head of the American Zionist Committee/AIPAC was Isaiah Kenen, an American journalist. Kenen had several times previously registered with the U.S. Justice Department as an agent of the American section of the Jewish Agency, a quasi-government organization based in Israel.<sup>29</sup> He had also worked as the press secretary and public relations person for the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations. This was the famed Abba Eban. It was Eban who first approached Kenen about setting up a lobbying effort to influence the U.S. government in Israel's favor. Together with Louis Lipsky, the leader of the American Zionist Council, the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs was established with Kenen at its head. According to Lipsky, Kenen was to be an "American lobbyist for an American organization"

and, thus, avoid the "impropriety of an agent of a foreign power lobbying Congress." However, according to revelations made during William Fulbright's Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings in 1963, the Jewish Agency provided the start-up money and continued to subsidize the American Zionist Committee/AIPAC indirectly through third-party organizations.<sup>30</sup> Because he had the audacity to reveal this, Senator Fulbright was politically targeted by the American Zionists, who helped the Arkansas governor, Dale Bumpers, defeat Fulbright in 1974.

In the 1950s, in order to shore up the claim that the American Zionist Committee was a lobby (rather than an agent of Israel), Kenen and his organization were taken off the Jewish Agency payroll, domestic fundraising having reached the point of self-support. Also, a formal connection was made between the committee and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (Presidents' Conference for short). The problem was that the Presidents' Conference also took its foreign policy direction from Israel. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that both organizations maintained a significant connection with the Israeli ambassador.<sup>31</sup>

So close was the connection between the American Jewish/Zionist organizations and the Israeli government that, according to Edward Tivnan, "Jewish leaders rarely met with Administration officials without first being briefed by the [Israeli] embassy." William Waxler, who for two years served as the head of the Presidents' Conference, confessed to meeting with the Israeli ambassador almost weekly during his time in office. He also traveled to Israel "six to nine times a year" in order to "discuss tactics for Jewish support in the U.S." with Israeli government officials. As far as Waxler was concerned: "The American Jewish community has been used and should be used [by the Israeli government]. . . . Nobody is going off on their own and doing things without proper instructions. The only place where those instructions could really originate was in Israel." Under these circumstances, Israel's ambassador, Abba Eban, functioned as "the real head of the American Jewish community." And that community had become, in the words of an Israeli diplomat, "a spigot" that Israel could "turn on whenever it want[ed]."<sup>32</sup>

In the 1950s, the American Zionist Committee/AIPAC consolidated its influence over Congress. How this happened will be explained shortly, but even someone as independent minded as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles "openly asserted the difficulty of making foreign-policy deci-

sions that displeased the organized Jewish community."<sup>33</sup> It was through Congress that pleasure or displeasure was most often registered. Influence with the executive branch of government in the post-World War II era first waxed, and then waned, and then waxed again. Zionist influence with Harry Truman was very strong, as his behavior in the lead-up to Israeli independence shows.<sup>34</sup> That influence waned when President Eisenhower (who, significantly, was not a professional politician) forced the Israelis to withdraw from Egypt's Sinai region following the 1956 British-French-Israeli invasion. Beginning with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, Zionist influence waxed again and has remained substantial in the White House ever since.

There were many reasons for the post-Eisenhower growth in Zionist influence. After Eisenhower left office, the United States had a run of presidents who, for religious or cultural reasons, were fascinated with the Jews. Lyndon Baines Johnson is a good example. Claiming "my Christian faith sprang from yours," he would explain to American Jewish audiences "the similarities between the Jewish pioneers building a home in the desert [this is how he envisioned Palestine] and his own family's hardscrabble life farming . . . in the Hill Country of Texas." As it turned out, almost all the information Johnson ever got on the Middle East came not from his own country's State Department or intelligence services but from Israeli and American Zionist sources.<sup>35</sup>

However, probably more important in the long run for the growth in influence of the Zionist lobby was the fact that Jewish Americans became important donors to the political parties, particularly the Democrats. This gave their lobbying arms the necessary leverage to eventually convince the U.S. government to become Israel's principle financial and military supporter. The desire to compete for Jewish money brought the Republicans into range for the Zionists as well. And, after 1967 and the turning away from a liberal agenda by the American Jewish organizations, the Republican Party began to get Jewish financial backing. It was Richard Nixon, with his doctrine of reliance on allies to project American power around the world, who proclaimed that Israel was a "strategic asset."<sup>36</sup> The importance of money to the Israel lobby's effectiveness has been described by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt in their *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. As Mearsheimer and Walt tell us: "AIPAC's success is due to its ability to reward legislators and congressional can-

didates who support its agenda, and to punish those who challenge it. . . . AIPAC makes sure its friends get strong financial support from the myriad pro-Israel PACs. Those seen as hostile to Israel, on the other hand, can be sure that AIPAC will direct campaign contributions to their political opponents.<sup>37</sup> To this may be added the fact that AIPAC often had dynamic leadership, as in the case of Thomas Dine, who led the organization from 1980 to 1992. Under his guidance, a grassroots membership of some fifty-five thousand was created, a staff of 150 hired, and an annual budget of some \$15 million established. The organization also managed to become the chief source of information on Israel and related subjects for most of the members of Congress. Thus, most of the talking points, synopses, and research papers that inform ordinary congressmen and senators about the sometimes esoteric issues, such as water rights, settlements, and borders, that concern the Israeli-Palestinian dispute as well as the condition of Jews around the world come from AIPAC. In this way, it has monopolized and continues to monopolize the information flow in Israel's favor. To this end, AIPAC put together a small army of researchers and writers to augment its team of lobbyists.<sup>38</sup>

### The Problem of National Interests, Part 2

The 1970s showed the strength of the Israel lobby again and again. A spectacular example of AIPAC's influence can be seen in the shaping of U.S. foreign policy as regards the Soviet Union. The motivation, in terms of the Jewish lobby, was Soviet Jewry, which appeared to be seeking to emigrate in large numbers. Such an exodus would be a great demographic boon to Israel, which has always feared the high birth rate of the Palestinians it sought to displace. Thus, the freedom of Jews to emigrate from Russia became a high-priority issue for America's now very Zionist Jewish organizations. As was the case back in the late nineteenth century, the pressure point used by the lobby was trade. In 1972, working with the Washington State Democratic senator Henry Jackson (whose aide at the time was the neoconservative Richard Perle), Zionist lobbyists such as AIPAC's Isaiah Kenen helped prepare legislation that would deny the Soviet Union most-favored-nation status (which the Nixon administration saw as an important step in its policy of detente) unless complete freedom of emigration was allowed.<sup>39</sup>

It is to be noted that, at this time, the Soviet Union was not denying the Jews the right to emigrate. It was, however, using a quota system and levying a hefty exit tax (sometimes referred to as a *diploma tax*) on those who were highly educated. These policies are what had angered the Jewish American leadership. As in the case of the 1944 congressional resolutions, the political desire to comply with Zionist lobbying seemed to take precedence over what objective observers might have judged to be a number of national interests—detente with the Soviet Union, that nation's assistance in ending the Vietnam War, and the more peaceful world such steps potentially provided. The apparent sacrifice of national interests did not bother Richard Perle and other neoconservatives. Their ideology considered detente as but a dangerous illusion. Perle, on Jackson's behalf, worked to line up Democratic backing for the bill to deny trade status to the Soviets. Soon, he had seventy-two cosponsors in the Senate. So effective was this strategy that it moved the Soviets to drop the exit tax and promise to issue sixty thousand visas a year to Soviet Jews wanting to leave. In the end, the deal fell apart owing to extraneous events that neither the Nixon administration (then in the midst of the Watergate scandal) or the Jewish lobby organizations had anticipated.<sup>40</sup>

Nonetheless, the Jackson amendment (as the effort to deny the Soviet Union favored trade status became known) was seen as a great precedent by Zionist lobbyists. They felt that it had demonstrated the power of their lobby to force Congress, the executive branch, and even foreign governments to pay attention to their demands. This assumption was tested in the mid-1970s when Jewish organizations pushed for legislation that would outlaw compliance by U.S. businesses with the Arab embargo of Israel.

There were many factors that were involved in this demand. For instance, American companies did a lot of business with the Arab world, to say nothing of the fact that Middle East oil helped fuel much of the Western economy. Then there was the additional fact that the United States maintained its own embargoes against countries such as Cuba and Vietnam. As we saw in chapter 4, Congress would not hesitate to try to punish American and foreign firms for violations of these embargoes, just as the Arabs sought to blacklist American companies doing business with Israel. Nonetheless, when it came to the Arab embargo of Israel, Congress suddenly discovered a grave moral wrong.

Aided by representatives from AIPAC, legislation making cooperation with the Arab boycott a violation of U.S. law was introduced by Representative Jonathan Bingham of New York in early 1975. The debate that followed pitted the Jewish lobby against the Ford administration and representatives of big business. It turned out that the latter had some \$4.5 billion at stake in Middle East business and was, thus, compelled to cooperate with the Arab boycott.<sup>41</sup> This level of investment demanded that some attempt at compromise be made, so, in the first half of 1976, a series of discussions were held between representatives of the major American Jewish organizations and the Business Roundtable (a lobby group that represented most of the country's big corporations). These were facilitated by the Carter White House. By May, legislation had been passed that reflected a compromise, some exceptions having been allowed in the antiboycott law, such as for the oil companies.

Once more, the Jewish lobby felt empowered. It had rewritten foreign policy. That the rescripting involved not a little hypocrisy and threatened a good amount of American foreign investment was never publicly noted. An objective observer might have pointed out that American government did to others what it was trying to punish the Arabs for doing. That observer might also have pointed out that a commonsense approach to national interest suggested that the nation protect its investments in the Arab world and maintain the goodwill of those who possessed the resources so necessary to the successful running of the economies of much of the West. But that is not how American politics worked. It was, once more, the parochial interests of those lobbies effective enough to influence the legislative process that stood in for national interests.

Even in those cases where the Jewish lobby had to accept compromise, or even when, owing to extraneous circumstances, it did not achieve its ends, it still ended up with an enhanced reputation for influence and power. A good example of such a case was the battle over the sale of airborne warning and command systems (AWACS) to Saudi Arabia in 1981.

The Saudis wished to buy five such spy planes from the United States largely as an early warning system guarding against attack from Iraq or Iran. However, the Israelis opposed the sale because, as they pointed out, the Saudis were technically still at war with Israel and might use the planes to warn against an Israeli attack. From a military standpoint, the Israelis had absolutely nothing to fear from the Saudi army or air force. However,

the Saudis might have much more to fear from the Israelis. Saudi Arabia was among the most important suppliers of oil to the industrial world, so Washington had, arguably, a national interest in the defense of that nation from attack from any quarter. Nonetheless, Israel's position on the sale of AWACS demanded that the Jewish lobby fight wholeheartedly against it.

The sale was first backed by the Carter administration and then by Ronald Reagan (though Reagan had opposed it as long as he was campaigning for office against Carter). Once more, despite the reasonable national security arguments that could be made for the sale, the Congress was readily persuaded to stand against it by the effective lobbying of AIPAC and other Jewish groups. The House of Representatives voted on October 1, 1981, to reject the sale by a margin of 3–1.<sup>42</sup> The Senate was also set to turn the sale down. Under normal circumstances, Zionist parochial interests would have trumped national interest, dooming the sale. Then, on October 6, 1981, the president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, was assassinated. All of a sudden, circumstances were no longer normal, and this one event proved enough to reverse congressional opinion. It now seemed that American allies in the Middle East were vulnerable to anti-American and anti-Israeli forces both external and internal. It was this fear that allowed the sale to go through.

### The Suppression of Free Speech for American Jewry

Despite losing this specific battle because of the unexpected assassination of an American ally, the increasingly right-wing Jewish organizational leadership became ever more effective in influencing U.S. foreign policy. The Zionist lobby continued to work closely with the administration of Ronald Reagan. Reagan's admiration for Israel and its role in the region flowed primarily from his Christian fundamentalist outlook. Also, ideologically, the Jewish neoconservatives fit in well with Reagan's hard-line approach to the cold war world. It was this president who swapped detente for stigmatizing the Soviet Union as the "evil empire." In Israel, a corresponding ideological turn to the right had occurred when, in 1977, Israeli voters brought to power Menachem Begin and his Likud Party.<sup>43</sup> The Jewish American neoconservatives quickly became close advisers to the Likud government in Jerusalem.

It was also around this time that AIPAC came to the fore as the en-

forcement arm of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. As mentioned above, AIPAC had developed a symbiotic relationship with the Presidents' Conference. The two organizations had interlocking directorates. The chair of the Presidents' Conference was always a member of the inner ruling body (sometimes known as the *officers' group*) of AIPAC. As J. J. Goldberg tells it: "The job of the Presidents' Conference was to forge a consensus on Israel from among the diverse views of organized American Jews. Translating those views into political clout was the job of AIPAC."<sup>44</sup> This relationship becomes suspect, however, when it is realized that the foreign policy positions taken by the Presidents' Conference were often dictated by the Israeli government.<sup>45</sup> When it came to influencing American Middle East policy, that made the Presidents' Conference, and AIPAC, *de facto* agents of a foreign power. In the case of AIPAC, this has even involved charges of espionage on Israel's behalf.<sup>46</sup>

It is a curious aspect of the story of the transformation of these powerful American Jewish organizations into arms of the Israeli government that the main argument in this process was the sanctity of Israeli democracy. Those who argued against the right of American Jews to be publicly critical of Israel insisted that, as Goldberg put it, "Israelis were the only ones entitled to decide Israeli policy, since they alone bore the risks." The job of American Jews was to "stand publically united with Israel." And, since, for instance, it was the Israeli decision not to negotiate with the Palestinians because, allegedly, they were all terrorists, American Jews were forbidden to urge otherwise. This was the official position of the Presidents' Conference and AIPAC.<sup>47</sup> In other words, American Jews were told that, in order to respect Israeli democracy, they must forgo their right to free speech on the subject of Israel. Throwing a bone to the disappointed, the increasingly undemocratic American Jewish leadership said that it was all right for Jews to air their differences in private. However, public disagreement with the official line meant effective ostracization from the Jewish community.

A case in point is the short history of the small progressive American Jewish organization known as Breira (the word *breira* means "alternative" in Hebrew). Breira was founded in 1973, and its membership never numbered more than fifteen hundred nationwide. Most of its members were intellectuals and young liberal rabbis. What they sought to do was

promote a discussion on the topic of what was the proper relationship between diaspora Jews and Israel. After the Yom Kippur War, the organization took a public position urging mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinians. Although the members of Breira were too few in number to mount a serious challenge to the likes of the Presidents' Conference and AIPAC, these and other major Jewish organizations went after them as if they were traitors. They were condemned by all the leaders of organized Jewry from Reform through Orthodox Judaism. Establishment leaders would not appear at events if a Breira member was also on the agenda. Breira members were also castigated by Israeli diplomats in the United States and, ultimately, accused of "giving aid and comfort . . . to those who would cut aid to Israel and leave it defenseless before murderers and terrorists."<sup>48</sup> These tactics, which the American Jewish writer Irving Howe called "heimishe [homebred] witch hunting,"<sup>49</sup> were similar to those used by the Soviet Comintern to maintain discipline among "diaspora" Communists in the 1920s and 1930s. And, as with dissenting Communists, the tactics worked when it came to the Jews of America. Breira was defunct by 1977.

Breira met its fate while Israel was governed by the Labor Party. In 1977, things would get much worse for independent-minded American Jews. In that year, Menachem Begin took the reigns of power in Israel. When Begin was elected prime minister of Israel, the chair of the Presidents' Conference in the United States was Alexander Schindler, the leader of Reform Jewry in America. Schindler was a liberal in all things but Israel. After going to Israel to meet Begin personally, he became convinced that American Jewry must accept and follow the prime minister because he was democratically elected and because he appeared to "really care" about American Jews. Thus, Schindler manipulated and prodded most of American Jewry into defending policies of imperialist expansion instituted by the Likud government.<sup>50</sup> A year later, with American Jewish discomfort with Israeli settlement policies growing at the community level, the Israelis brought eight leaders of major American organizations to Israel. For three days, they had long meetings with Begin, Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, and Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan. They were given helicopter tours of the West Bank and generally lectured on why the Israeli government could not possibly trade land for peace. They went home staunch supporters of Menachem Begin.

Simultaneously, the Israeli government started to concentrate its influence on the Presidents' Conference and AIPAC. Other Jewish organizations, such as the long-established National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, were increasingly ignored by the Israelis. It was assumed that the Presidents' Conference and AIPAC would discipline such organizations, forcing them to toe the Israeli propaganda line. The Israelis had made this strategic decision because AIPAC had proved itself increasingly able to penetrate the policy-formulating ranks of the American government. For example, following the AWACS vote in 1981, a vote that the Zionist lobbyists had actually lost, the Reagan administration had made a decision to enlist AIPAC as an ally rather than an opponent. To this end, administration officials approached AIPAC to participate in the government's Middle East policy-formulation process.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, anyone within the foreign policy bureaucracy who was critical of the evolving U.S. alliance with Israel was pushed out of the policymaking process. Congress saw no problem in this arrangement, for its members had long ago come to regularly consult the Israeli lobby on pending relevant legislation. In 1983, the Reagan administration solicited a "formal strategic alliance" with Israel, the overture resulting in the signing of a "memorandum of understanding on strategic cooperation." By 1987, Israel was designated a "major non-Nato ally," a status that gave it access to most U.S. military technology.<sup>52</sup>

It was AIPAC's reputation for influence in Congress that convinced the Reagan officials that these were smart moves. The Reagan people should have known of AIPAC's connection to the Israeli government—certainly, the American intelligence agencies did. It apparently made no difference, particularly to a president who had a biblically inspired admiration for the Israelis. In any case, by 1983, Israel was a formal military partner of the United States. The two governments would now mutually engage in such adventures as "aiding the Nicaraguan contras, training security forces in Zaire, sending arms secretly to Iran," and more. The "sharing of technology and information and intelligence reached unprecedented proportions."<sup>53</sup> When Begin sent the Israeli army into Lebanon in June 1982 and ended up shelling Beirut and allowing massacres of Palestinians at the Shabra and Shatilla camps, the operations were conducted, in part, with American weapons. Reagan, who feebly protested this usage to Begin (it is against U.S. law for foreign nations to use American military aid

for offensive purposes), was momentarily regarded by the prime minister as a hostile gentile.

As has been noted, many American Jews found the behavior of Israel in the occupied territories and in Lebanon very unsettling. Polls taken at the time show that nearly two-thirds of American Jews were "troubled" by Israeli policies. Yet, in practice, individual American Jews looked the other way and literally took refuge in their localism. Not willing to turn opinion into organized action, this majority abdicated to the minority of American Jews who were willing and able to act in an organized and national way. Polls also show that 70 percent of Jewish leaders at the community level were also "troubled" but went along with the national dictates so as to maintain their positions of local leadership.<sup>54</sup> For his part, Menachim Begin proved not as concerned about the feelings of American Jews as Schindler and others had believed. He simply ignored them. His Likud Party successor, the old terrorist Yitzhak Shamir, was interested in American Jews only to the extent that he could turn them into, as Goldberg puts it, "an organ of Likud policy." To this end, the Presidents' Conference and AIPAC were brought into the inner circles of Likud politics. So compromised were the leadership positions of these American organizations that the Israeli government considered them as equivalent to "any top ambassadorial or civil service job."<sup>55</sup> Given that the Israeli government was now very right-wing, it should come as no surprise that it saw to it that neoconservative American Jewish leaders such as Morris B. Abram (who headed what passed for a civil rights commission in the Reagan administration) became the chair of the Presidents' Conference and a mouthpiece for Likud views.

Those who were seen as critical in any way whatsoever, even though they had otherwise proved themselves loyal to the Israeli cause, were castigated as traitors and intimidated into silence. Take the case of Senator Frank Lautenberg, the Jewish senator from New Jersey who had both served as the chairman of the United Jewish Appeal and helped smooth the way for Russian Jewish emigration. However, in 1987, he made the mistake of initiating a letter commending Secretary of State George Shultz for his efforts at seeking a compromise settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Prime Minister Shamir took exception to this gesture, and almost immediately Zionist Americans from across Lautenberg's state started to attack him and work against his reelection. "What I saw was almost a



venomous response," the senator said. "Suddenly I was painted a pariah." Lautenberg, who remarked that he had commended Shultz because he thought a compromise peace was in the best interest of the United States (as well as Israel), observed: "I was shocked by the response from some segments of the Jewish community. I was practically accused of being a traitor to the cause."<sup>56</sup>

American Jewish intellectuals supportive of the Labor Party element in Israeli politics could find a home at the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy (WINEP). WINEP was established in 1984 by Larry Weinberg, a past president of AIPAC, and its first director was Martin Indyk, who had once been the research director at AIPAC. The institute saw its goal as "moving beltway [Washington, DC] thinking toward Israel" and, thereby, making it possible for the U.S. government to "resist the pressures for a procedural breakthrough [on Palestinian-Israeli peace issues] until conditions have ripened."<sup>57</sup> In other words, WINEP sought to make it possible for the U.S. government to resist peace while Israel continued to expand its illegal colonies, thus creating facts on the ground that would, in the long run, preclude the possibility of an independent Palestinian state. With this as a goal, it made little difference that the institute was controlled by people more aligned with Israel's Labor Party than with Likud. When it came to expansion and the occupation of Palestinian land, the difference between the two Israeli parties, though sometimes bitterly expressed, was, ultimately, tactical. And, in any case, no matter which party was in power, all important positions taken by the Presidents' Conference and AIPAC referencing the Middle East were carefully aligned with those taken by the reigning Israeli government.<sup>58</sup>

As suggested above, the ordinary individuals who made up the American Jewish community, once so noted for its progressive and liberal attitudes, simply acquiesced in this situation. In part, this was due to ignorance. As one observer put it, many Jews "don't have a strong sense of just how precisely their community is being defined daily by their capital lobbyists."<sup>59</sup> Another part of the explanation is the historically conditioned acceptance of the argument that all Jews must maintain a united front when it comes to Israel. Both these reactions fit well with the notion that American Jews generally live according to the theory of localism put forth in the first chapter of this book. Of course, a good number of them are influenced by issues of ethnic identity. For the more atten-

tive, this makes Israel a virtual component of their local environment. Yet it must be borne in mind that the news about Israel and the Middle East is brought to them through a largely self-censoring media, as well as through the pulpits of their rabbis and the offices of their organizational leaders. Most of these sources are less than objective and do not encourage individual analysis and debate. Thus, American Jews (like most of the rest of the people in the United States and beyond) live in an information environment that shapes and skews their perceptions and reactions.

### Conclusion

AIPAC supporters will often say that what they are doing is practicing the right of all American citizens to petition their government and hold their representatives accountable for their actions. And, not only do they do this effectively and efficiently in Washington, DC, but they also have "members active in the camp of nearly every candidate for every seat in Congress."<sup>60</sup> There is, on the face of it, nothing illegal about any of this. This is, one might say, the way the system works. However, when an organization of such influence most often takes its cue from a foreign state rather than from the democratically debated and decided desires of a community of American citizens it claims to represent, then the right-to-petition argument becomes highly questionable. Yet the same influence over policy that makes AIPAC and its allied American Jewish lobbies so powerful has saved it from being labeled an operative of a foreign government and made to register as such.<sup>61</sup>

A good example of the consequences of this arrangement was the role played by the Israel lobby in promoting the Second Iraq War. In *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Mearsheimer and Walt dedicated thirty-three pages and 175 footnotes to documenting the link between the Zionist lobby and the invasion of Iraq. The lobby's prowar position was taken because, by late 2002, the Israeli government had decided to back war with Iraq.<sup>62</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt conclude that both Israel and its lobby "played crucial roles in making [the invasion of Iraq] happen" and that, without their pressure, the invasion would "almost certainly not have occurred."<sup>63</sup>

There are knowledgeable observers who say that Mearsheimer and Walt give too much credit to the Israel lobby when it comes to shaping

policy. Such critics would most likely also take issue with the whole notion of privatizing foreign policy. In particular, Noam Chomsky, the notable critic of American foreign policy from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Joseph Massad, from Columbia University, have both asserted that the Mearsheimer and Walt thesis denies structural interests that shape American policy worldwide and not just in the Middle East. Chomsky describes these structural interests as “strategic-economic interests of concentrations of domestic power in the tight state-corporate linkage.”<sup>64</sup> The Chomsky-Massad position is that these interests stand prior to any special interests, which, in terms of foreign policy, gain influence only to the extent that their parochial interests serve to further the structural national interests of the state. Thus, the lobby power and the privatization positions are seen as reductionist. In Massad’s words, they “exonerate the United States government from all responsibility and guilt that it deserves.”<sup>65</sup> While experts can differ as to just what the distribution of influence is among “concentrations of domestic power” at any one time or relative to any particular foreign policy, the fact remains that such concentrations of power are, at bottom, special interests. Chomsky lists some of them—“oil companies, arms industries and other special interests . . .”—in the very piece in which he takes issue with Walt and Mearsheimer. It would seem that, structurally conceived or not, there is no foreign policy formulation for the Middle East apart from special interests. One cannot make a sharp distinction between the “responsibility and guilt” of the U.S. government and of the special interests that effectively influence the behavior of that government.

To the extent that the Israel lobby did influence the decision to invade Iraq, it did so without any prior extended debate or popular feedback from the American Jewish community it claims to represent. Did any of the lobby’s myriad volunteers note this lack of democratic procedure? Or, like good soldiers, do they find it quite normal that AIPAC decisions are made behind closed doors by a relatively small officers’ group that just happens to have periodic meetings with Israeli diplomats and officials? The troops of the Israel lobby (as of 2006, AIPAC claimed to have 100,000 members) are simply given their marching orders, and, glorying in being associated with such a powerful and influential organization, off they go. Yet what are the consequences of this situation for the defining of U.S. national interests in the Middle East? Our unnaturally close relationship

with Israel has, at the very least, helped bring the reputation of the United States to a very low state and, simultaneously, abetted the growth of anti-American movements in the region.

A rational outside observer, standing above the influence of special interests, however configured, would not have too much difficulty figuring out what American national interests are in the Middle East. First and foremost, American interest lies in the maintenance of a peaceful, stable, and pro-American regional environment that assures uninterrupted access to necessary resources such as oil at reasonable, fair market rates as well as in the carrying on of other commercial and cultural activities of mutual benefit. Overt or covert policies that erode pro-American feelings by identifying the United States with dictatorial regimes or apartheid-style behavior can and do lead to hostile actions, such as attacks on American tourists, businesses, embassies, and consulates and also such attacks as occurred on September 11, 2001. Such policies are obviously counterproductive. It is in the national interest that they be avoided and that a policy of noncooperation be adopted toward countries whose governments pursue policies that complicate or make difficult the maintenance of such a regionally stable and friendly environment.

No country in the Middle East, be it Iran, Syria, Libya, or Iraq, has made the region more dangerous and difficult for American interests than Israel. Here is why. First, the immense influence and obstructionist tactics of organizations and lobbyists whose first loyalty is to Israel have made it nearly impossible for the United States to respond to Israeli behavior that undermines a stable and pro-American environment in that region. Second, almost every peace initiative offered by U.S. administrations over the past forty years has been actively or passively rejected by Israel. Yet the Congress and the executive branch have repeatedly been unable to adequately respond and discipline Israel because of the power of the Israel lobby. Third, the lobby also sees to it that Israel drains resources from the U.S. Treasury to fund activities that are not only against U.S. interest (because they stir up hatred against America) but in violation of international law (e.g., settlement activities and the building of the misnamed security wall). Fourth, the United States has repeatedly been induced by lobby power to diplomatically protect Israel from UN condemnation through the use of its Security Council veto. In doing so, it once more publicly ties itself to Israeli policies and, thereby, declares its complicity in

that country's often illegal and violent behavior. Fifth, as a consequence, access to the Middle East for U.S. businesses, tourism, cultural endeavors, and the like has been increasingly difficult and dangerous. One historian of the issue has estimated that, as a consequence, "American companies and the United States economy suffer an estimated \$1 billion loss per year."<sup>66</sup> Sixth, Islamic fundamentalists, of both the violent and the non-violent variety, have had a field day quite accurately associating our support of Israel with the suffering of the Palestinians. Seventh, Israel has repeatedly ignored the limitations placed by law on the use of the military equipment given to it by the United States. It has, at one time or another, used such equipment repeatedly in an illegal offensive manner against all its neighbors. Thus, Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, and Egyptian civilians have, because of Israeli actions, been killed or maimed by ordinance "made in the USA." Because of the power of the Israeli lobby, Israel suffers no consequences for such violations, but American interests are harmed irreparably. Arguably, the attack of September 11, 2001, is, to date, the most profound proof that support of Israel has brought nothing but disaster for U.S. interests. Yet, owing to the inordinate power of this particular special interest faction, policies in direct contravention of American national interests in the Middle East continue to be pursued.

## Is There a National Interest?

The evidence and examples given so far suggest that the notion of a national interest is at best problematic. Certainly, well-organized interest groups with strong feelings about how American foreign policy should operate in a particular part of the world can and often do shape government actions. In this way, they effectively privatize foreign policy relative to their areas of interest. Their parochial interest becomes the so-called national interest.

Nonetheless, there is truly a vast American literature dealing with the topic of how Americans should conceive of and pursue their national interest. Authors ranging from Alexis de Tocqueville to Samuel Huntington have written on the subject, and there is still an ongoing debate as to how the subject should be understood. Much of the literature, though not all, organizes itself around a number of schools of thought. These constitute theoretical approaches to the subject of national interest and work on the assumption that it is a real phenomenon, shaping the international relations not only of the United States but of all states. Thus, before we can draw any definitive conclusions about national interest, we must consider these arguments.

### The School of the Realists

Realists of various shades want a foreign policy that accords with the facts of human nature as it has supposedly manifested itself through the ages. According to the realists, it is a basic fact of human nature that, over