



## LOBBYISTS

### American Israel Public Affairs Committee

By Jimmy Biblarz

#### Introduction

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is one of the United States' most powerful foreign policy lobbying groups. Boasting a large, well-funded, membership, AIPAC also has religious advantages other lobbying groups do not, seeing as the organization's main thrust is to "protect the **Holy Land**." For this reason, American politicians, particularly members of the religious right, are heavily influenced by AIPAC lobbying efforts. Often accused of being blind to Israel's human rights abuses, AIPAC perennially lobbies the US Congress to support Israeli security, reject Palestinian statehood, and remain committed to Israel's dominance in any potential peace process. Some claim that AIPAC has limited the United States' ability to conduct successful Middle East policy, for the US is seen more as the pawn of Israel than as an independent world power. This claim is in large part the result of AIPAC's lobbying activities.

**Holy Land**—the term in Judaism which refers to the ancient Kingdom of Israel; according to Christians and Muslims, the whole area in between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea

#### History

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC, often misrepresented as the American Israel Political Action Committee), was founded in January 1963 by Isaiah L. Kenen. Kenen's political background was with the American Zionist Committee's public affairs lobbying department. It was not until the mid-1970s, however, that AIPAC acquired sufficient political power to be able to influence congressional and public opinion. Many link the rise of AIPAC's power with the presidency of Jimmy Carter as it is often thought of as a reactionary approach to his efforts to promote peace in the Middle East. This mid-1970s period also marked a shift in Israeli politics, beginning with the election of the conservative politician Menachem Begin to the position of prime minister in 1977. Since its inception, AIPAC has grown into a more than 100,000-member national grassroots organization that, although comprised mainly of American Jews, includes people of many faiths, including a surprisingly large number of evangelical and fundamentalist Christians.

#### Why Israel Matters

AIPAC gives a number of compelling reasons for why Israel is



an important concern not only for America, but also for the world. Some of these reasons include:

### *Biblical Heritage*

AIPAC emphasizes the critical role the land now known as Israel played during ancient times as well as the historical and religious significance that numerous sites throughout the country (Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Tel Aviv) hold to members of the world's three Abrahamic faiths (Jews, Christians, and Muslims). The historical significance of Israel to Muslims, however, is often overlooked.

### *The Holocaust*

The legacy of the Holocaust is still felt very strongly by AIPAC, and they argue that this historical travesty remains an important event to consider when determining US policy toward Israel. After the genocide of six million Jews by Hitler's Nazi regime, Israel was founded to give the Jewish people a homeland, something they had not enjoyed for thousands of years. The over-arching theme of Holocaust remembrance rings strong at AIPAC.

### *Quest for Statehood*

Channeling Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, particularly the **self-determination** clause, AIPAC notes that Israel's historic quest for statehood began in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century with small Zionist clubs throughout Europe, the Middle East, and the United States. AIPAC believes that the US, as the world's moral leader, should support international calls for democracy, self-determination, and national sovereignty, and that Israel embodies these progressive, American qualities.

**self-determination**—  
*the principle in international law that nations have the right to freely choose their sovereignty and international political status with no external compulsion or interference.*

### *Israel Today*

Casting aside socio-historic issues a bit, AIPAC feels it is important to note the vital role Israel plays in the world economy. Israel is one of the Middle East's most innovative nations, and has made major contributions to medical research, cell phone technology, computer science, and the social sciences and humanities. AIPAC regards Israel as one of the most culturally literate and intellectual nations in the Middle East, therefore making it an important player on the world stage. Additionally, AIPAC asserts that Israel is a world leader in human rights and takes the idea of protecting its citizens incredibly seriously, a national trait that is to be respected and admired.

### *Israel's Achievements*

AIPAC notes Israel's multitude of technological achievements, in fields as diverse as agriculture, pharmaceuticals, computers, the Internet, and cellular phones, and green technology.

### *Israel Around the World*

AIPAC emphasizes the amount of humanitarian work Israel engages in, particularly for such a small nation. Israel has sent experts to many resource-poor nations, teaching local officials how to set up medical administration infrastructure, government offices, and other national institutions. They also note that given Israel's history with World War II and the Holocaust, Israel has supported the victims of other genocides, particularly Rwanda and Sudan, and has accepted refugees from these nations. Israel has also contributed money and resources to nations suffering from natural disasters, including Thailand and Indonesia after the 2007 tsunami and the United States after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

## **Israel and the United States**

### *Shared Values*

AIPAC notes that the US and Israel have many of the same religious and political values, including an emphasis on the Judeo-Christian Biblical tradition and a desire to strive for democracy, liberty, freedom, and equality for all peoples. These common values, AIPAC feels, have made the US and Israel natural partners on the world stage. Freedom of expression (speech, press, assembly) and an emphasis on human rights are also upheld as shared values between the United States and Israel.

### *Strong Allies*

AIPAC focuses on the US's supportive role in the late 1940s when the creation of Israel was being debated at the United Nations (UN), and notes that since then, the two nations have been strong allies. The United States was the first country to recognize Israel (President Truman recognized the new nation only eleven minutes after its founding). Additionally, since the 1940s, Israel and the United States have engaged in a nearly unprecedented level of information sharing and international cooperation. All US presidents, across partisan lines, have strongly supported not only Israel's existence but also the unique relationship we have with the country. This has often got the US into hot water with many other Middle Eastern nations, who accuse the US of both directly and indirectly supporting Israel's human rights abuses of the Palestinian people.

### *Pursuing Peace*

AIPAC believe that Israel and the US are both committed to pursuing peace in the Middle East, and that this is not the case with other Middle Eastern countries. AIPAC cites the multiple peace treaties Israel has signed, **disarmament** campaigns they have engaged in, and other strategies Israel has utilized in the hopes of gaining a lasting Middle East peace.

**disarmament**—*the reduction or withdrawal of military forces and weapons.*

### *Fighting Terrorism*

AIPAC comments heavily on the US and Israel's dual commitment to ending fundamentalist Islamic terrorism, both in the Middle East and throughout the world. The four main areas of cooperation between the two countries, regarding fighting both domestic and international terrorism, are: aviation security (the US and Israel have worked to standardize and improve their airport screening procedures), police cooperation (American intelligence and police agencies often work closely with Israel agencies, exchanging ideas and best practices), bioterrorism (mutual cooperation to minimize the potential threat of bioweapons), and emergency management (this includes natural disasters, and, as is often the case in Israel, unexpected bouts of civil violence).

### *Military Partnership*

AIPAC notes that the US and Israeli have both a diplomatic/strategic partnership and a military partnership that has made both countries safer. They cite joint military exercises in which soldiers from both countries have engaged in military drills in order to learn from each other, efforts to protect American troops (both countries place a considerable emphasis on military technology and strategies that will reduce casualties from both countries), missile defense (a long-term security program developed by President Ronald Reagan), and strategic planning in which US and Israeli military leaders discuss long-term plans for Israeli security and peace in the Middle East.

### *Technology and Innovation*

AIPAC believes that Israel and the US are not only connected on a political, military, and historical level, but also technologically. AIPAC believes that the US and Israel are both technologically savvy, innovative countries (as opposed to many less developed Middle Eastern nations) and a mutual, constant push toward new technology further unites the two nations.

### *Energy and Environment*

Lastly, AIPAC feels that the US and Israel are connected by a mutual respect of the environment. AIPAC argues that the US and Israel are two of the world's leaders in green technology and reducing worldwide carbon emissions, further binding the two nations in terms of protecting the Earth's future.

## **Issues**

### *Palestinian UN Statehood Bid*

In September 2011, a UN proposal to recognize a Palestinian state was presented to the **Security Council**. Israel expects the US to veto

**Security Council**—one of the principal organs of the United Nations charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.

this proposal; however, President Obama at first did not declare which way the US will go, one of the few times a US president has shown what could be perceived as wavering support for Israel. Nevertheless, the Obama administration did eventually announce its continued support for Israel, and it is extremely likely that the US will veto the bid for Palestinian statehood as expected.

### *Iran*

AIPAC and Israel see Iran as a major national security threat, especially since Iran's president has declared he does not believe Israel should exist. Israel fears a nuclearized Iran and has looked to the US for support in containing Iranian nuclear expansion and regional influence.

### *Hamas*

Israel has labeled Hamas, the organization governing the **Gaza Strip**, as a terrorist organization set on taking over the main portion of Israel and creating a larger, cohesive, Palestinian state. Again, Israel has looked to the US for support concerning this issue.

**Gaza Strip**—a semi-autonomous territory along the Mediterranean coast that was occupied by Israel during the Six-Day War in 1967.

### *Defense and Homeland Security*

AIPAC places significant emphasis on Israel's defense procedures for when it is attacked in addition to homeland security measures designed both for retaliatory action and pre-emptive strikes. AIPAC lobbies the US government to support Israel financially and resource-wise in this regard.

### *Hezbollah*

Israel has also labeled Hezbollah, an organization controlling many parts of southern Lebanon, a terrorist group set on destroying Israel. AIPAC has lobbied for the US to support Israel in defending itself against possible Hezbollah attacks as happened during the 2009 Israel-Lebanon War.

### *Israel's Right to Self-Defense*

AIPAC not only conducts policy lobbying, but also seeks to shift public opinion in a more pro-Israel direction. In this sense, AIPAC tries to lobby American citizens and politicians to believe that Israel has the moral advantage in Middle East politics, and that their actions are solely self-defensive.

### *Jerusalem*

In any peace discussion, Jerusalem is of special importance to Israel and, by extension, AIPAC. Jerusalem is considered the holiest city to the Jewish people, and it is therefore something worth drawing a line in the sand over during peace negotiations. Israel and AIPAC reject any

calls to make Jerusalem a sort of international province, and maintain that any multi-state solution must keep all of Jerusalem firmly in Israeli territory.

### *The Peace Process*

Israel believes it, along with the US, must be at the helm of any Middle East peace process. Israel sees itself as both the only democracy and the only moral leader in the region, and therefore it should lead any negotiations.

## **Conclusion**

Israel is and will continue to be one of the United States' closest allies. This is largely due to the actions of AIPAC in the last forty years. Whether this is in the best interests of the United States, the international community, or the Middle East peace process are separate issues that require serious examination and debate. For now, AIPAC remains a powerful lobbying force on behalf of one of the few true democracies in the Middle East and demands the attention of the American people and political leaders.

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