

The Blind Man and the Elephant in the Room: Robert Lieberman and the Israel Lobby

John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt

Robert Lieberman's critique of our work on the Israel lobby is at odds with an abundance of evidence and prior scholarship describing the powerful influence that pro-Israel groups exert on U.S. Middle East policy. In addition to mischaracterizing our arguments, Lieberman claims that our methodology and research design are flawed and that our work contradicts the scholarly literature on American politics. Neither claim is true. Contrary to what he says, we did consider alternative hypotheses, and our analysis contains significant variation on both the independent and dependent variables. Given the methodological challenges involved in assessing the causal influence of any interest group, we also relied heavily on "process-tracing." Lieberman recognizes this is an appropriate method for assessing causal impact and he concedes that this evidence supports our central argument. Moreover, we went to some lengths to avoid selection bias. Similarly, our arguments are consistent with the existing literature on interest groups, and with much of the scholarly literature on congressional decision-making, campaign financing, electoral politics, and the role of think tanks and the media. Surprisingly, after leveling a variety of false charges, Lieberman offers an "alternative" explanation for the Israel lobby's influence that is virtually identical to our own.

It is hard to know what to make of Robert Lieberman's essay. Not only does it contain numerous unsupported charges and internal contradictions, it is at odds with a wealth of evidence and prior scholarship describing the powerful influence that various pro-Israel groups exert in Washington. If the Israel lobby is largely irrelevant, as he seems to think, why was the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) ranked the second most powerful lobby in Washington in a 2005 *National Journal* survey of Congress, and why did veteran Congressman Lee Hamilton say "There's no lobby group that matches it . . . They're in a class by themselves?"¹ If the lobby is so inconsequential, why is Israel still the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid (over \$3 billion each year, or more than \$500 per Israeli citizen) even though its per capita income is now 29th in the world?² Why do the highest-level policymakers and dozens of prominent politicians from both parties attend the AIPAC Policy Conference each year? Furthermore, why did Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Barack

Obama each feel compelled to make pandering pro-Israel speeches there in June 2008? In Lieberman's world, a politician's position on Israel has little effect on his or her electoral prospects, and U.S. presidents would not hesitate to make aid conditional on Israel ending its efforts to colonize the West Bank, a policy that every president since Lyndon Johnson has opposed.

Of course, this is not a world that experienced observers of the American political scene would recognize. Indeed, even our harshest critics acknowledge that the lobby is a remarkably powerful force. For example, Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz wrote in a memoir that "my generation of Jews . . . became part of what is perhaps the most effective lobbying and fund-raising effort in the history of democracy." Jeffrey Goldberg, another staunch defender of Israel, describes AIPAC as a "leviathan among lobbies," and AIPAC is only one of many pro-Israel organizations.³ One wonders how Lieberman could think that the lobby has so little impact on U.S. Middle East policy.

In fact, Lieberman's critique is more of a dust-kicking operation than a serious assessment of our work. His strategy is to raise countless objections, in the hope that the sheer volume of accusations will convince readers that our arguments should not be taken seriously.⁴ This approach leads him to misrepresent what we wrote, and to ignore or denigrate the extensive evidence we compiled about the lobby's influence. Accordingly, almost every page of his article contains some new condemnation: not only are we supposedly

John J. Mearsheimer is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science and the co-director of the Program on International Security Policy at the University of Chicago (j-mearsheimer@uchicago.edu). Stephen M. Walt is the Robert and Renée Belfer Professor of International Affairs at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (Stephen_Walt@harvard.edu).

guilty of “selection bias,” “lapses of logic,” “conceptual confusion,” “lack of variation,” and “impossibly vague” arguments, but our case studies are dismissed as only “slightly more extensive” than “anecdotes” and our causal claims are said to be “often illogical” and “almost never supported by dispositive evidence.”⁵ On top of that, we are said to lack “even a rudimentary understanding of how the American policymaking system works.”⁶ If we really committed all these scholarly sins, and others that we have not mentioned, we might be tempted to look for another line of work. Fortunately, his complaints are groundless.

Lieberman’s numerous accusations fall into two categories. First, he argues that our methodology and research design are flawed, and that these shortcomings invalidate the abundant evidence we presented about the lobby’s influence on U.S. Middle East policy. Second, he claims that our arguments are inconsistent with the scholarly literature on American politics, a body of work that allegedly proves that interest groups like the Israel lobby cannot wield influence in the manner we described. As we show below, both sets of charges are wrong.

It is worth noting that although Lieberman disputes our claim that the lobby has a profound influence on U.S. Middle East policy, he does not challenge our account of past or present Israeli policies or the history of America’s special relationship with Israel. Nor does he dispute our description of the lobby’s activities in the United States. In particular, he does not deny that a diverse array of pro-Israel organizations and individuals are active in Washington and in American political life more broadly. Indeed, after going to considerable effort to debunk our claims about the lobby’s influence, he offers his own “alternative” account of its power. But this move does not make sense: if the lobby exerts little influence on U.S. policy, why is it necessary to present alternative explanations for its power? Even more remarkably, his explanations turn out to be almost identical to our own.

We begin by summarizing our argument and explaining our research design. We then consider Lieberman’s main criticisms in detail.

Our Argument and Research Design

Our book addresses two main questions. First, what explains America’s “special relationship” with Israel, a relationship that the late Yitzhak Rabin once described as “beyond compare in modern history”?⁷ Second, is it good for the United States and Israel? Our aim was not to explain why the United States supports Israel’s existence—a policy that is not controversial and that we endorse—rather, we sought to explain why the United States gives Israel so much economic, military, and diplomatic support—for the most part unconditionally—and why key aspects of American foreign policy are conducted with the aim of making Israel more secure.⁸

We argued that this special relationship is due primarily to the political activities of a powerful interest group—which we termed the “Israel lobby”—whose members work assiduously to promote unconditional U.S. support and whose influence has grown significantly over time. We did not argue that the lobby “controlled” U.S. Middle East policy, and we emphasized that it did not win every policy dispute. Nonetheless, we showed that the individuals and organizations in this interest group have successfully employed a variety of strategies to advance the special relationship and to influence American foreign policy in ways intended to benefit Israel.

Although talking about the lobby and its influence has been something of a taboo subject in the United States—in part because some of its members are quick to smear anyone who questions the special relationship—we were not making a radical or counterintuitive argument. Other prominent interest groups—like the farm lobby, the National Rifle Association, the AARP, as well as some other ethnic lobbies—wield considerable influence over their respective policy domains, and they use similar strategies to achieve their goals. The key organizations that make up the Israel lobby possess the basic characteristics that make interest groups powerful in the United States, such as ample financial resources, a committed core of well-educated, politically active supporters, and lack of strong opposition.⁹ Thus, our account was consistent with the extensive literature on interest groups in American politics, as well as the literature on ethnic groups and foreign policy. It was also in line with a number of earlier studies of the lobby itself.¹⁰

Making our case required careful attention to research design, because determining the relative importance of the different factors that shape policy outcomes is a challenging task. This is especially true when dealing with interest groups, which sometimes conceal particular activities. Furthermore, policymakers rarely admit that their decisions were influenced by a lobbying group’s pressure, which can make it even more difficult to trace an interest group’s impact on policy.

Measuring influence requires an appreciation of political context as well. One cannot measure the influence of an interest group simply by looking at whether it “won” or “lost” a particular policy dispute. The real question is what the outcome would have been had interest group pressure been absent. After all, an interest group may lose a specific policy battle but still force policymakers to water down their goals or expend lots of political capital in order to overcome its opposition. In short, there is no simple linear relationship between “lobbying activities” and “policy outcomes” in the real world; thus gauging a lobby’s clout requires paying careful attention to the process by which decisions and outcomes were reached.

Mindful of these considerations, we thought carefully about the evidence needed to assess the lobby’s influence.

Because we were writing for a broad audience, we did not employ the usual social science terminology about hypothesis testing to describe our research design. Nonetheless, in a section of our book that Lieberman does not mention, we explained how we make our case.¹¹ First, we tested our argument about the lobby's influence against the main alternative explanations. Second, we relied heavily on "process-tracing," a methodology well-suited for drawing causal inferences when complex questions of causation and political context are involved.¹² As discussed below, this method was especially valuable in this case, because the historical record was not especially conducive to analyzing covariation, which is at the heart of large-N research. Third, we examined U.S. relations with Israel since its founding in 1948, paying careful attention to broader patterns of variation over time. We also zeroed in on specific episodes where U.S. policy shifted, because these incidents provided opportunities to gauge the lobby's independent influence.

Lieberman's Methodological Critique

Lieberman's makes three main charges regarding our methodology and research design: 1) we failed to test alternative hypotheses, 2) our definition of the lobby and its activities is marred by "conceptual confusion," and 3) our evidence does not contain sufficient variation—both over time and across issues—to permit reliable inferences about the lobby's overall influence. In each case, Lieberman has either overlooked or misread key sections of our work, or failed to grasp the methodological issues involved.

Alternative Hypotheses

Lieberman is wrong to say that we failed to "systematically canvass alternative explanations that might help bolster . . . [our] case for the lobby's causal importance."¹³ In fact, two of the book's twelve chapters are devoted to evaluating alternative explanations for America's special relationship with Israel. Chapter 2 ("Israel: Strategic Asset or Liability?") assesses the claim that the special relationship exists because Israel is a unique strategic asset, while Chapter 3 ("A Dwindling Moral Case") evaluates whether it is due to "shared values" or other moral considerations. We reject both alternatives, and conclude that some other factor must be at work. Other sections of the book assess whether the oil lobby or public opinion are the real driving forces behind U.S. Middle East policy.¹⁴ Lieberman is free to disagree with our assessment of these rival explanations, although he does not do so in his critique, but his charge that we did not consider alternative explanations is false.

Conceptual Confusion (and Other Alleged Sins)

Lieberman repeatedly accuses us of "conceptual confusion," "lapses in logic," and assorted other analytic and

methodological errors. Given the frequency with which he hurls these various brickbats, it is sometimes hard to tell exactly what mistakes we supposedly committed. Nonetheless, Lieberman seems particularly bothered by our definition of the lobby. He says we "veer between two different portraits," one in which the lobby is "a non-governmental entity (or set of actors)" and another where it is a "ruling elite that includes both government officials and people outside of the government who are connected to one another by shared social background, economic status, or network ties."¹⁵ He also claims that the term "pro-Israel" is inherently ambiguous, and suggests that these difficulties confound our attempts to demonstrate the lobby's influence and render our argument unfalsifiable.¹⁶ He is mistaken.

First, Lieberman misrepresents our definition by saying that we think the lobby "encompasses Israeli government officials."¹⁷ We never made such a claim. On the contrary, we made it clear that the lobby is comprised of American citizens and American organizations, and that its behavior is as American as apple pie. Individuals in the lobby do meet with Israeli officials on occasion, but we neither said nor implied that the latter were part of the lobby. Furthermore, Lieberman does not identify a single example where we mistakenly placed an individual or group in the lobby or a single episode where we mistakenly described the lobby's actions.

Second, we do not "veer between two different portraits" of the lobby, and neither of his two alternatives accurately reflects our definition. Specifically, we made it clear that individuals in the lobby sometimes hold important positions in the government, so it cannot be said that we described the lobby simply as a "non-governmental . . . set of actors."¹⁸ Nor did we describe the lobby as a "ruling elite," which is an inappropriate term for describing most American interest groups, and especially one that includes people with such diverse backgrounds as Christian Zionists and secular Jews. Instead, we employed a straightforward, commonsensical definition that is consistent with the literature on interest groups. We defined the lobby as a "loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively work to shape U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction."¹⁹ We pointed out that the term "lobby" was somewhat misleading, insofar as some members do not engage in formal lobbying activities. But we employed it as a "shorthand term" because it was consistent with common parlance, as in farm lobby, gun lobby, or environmental lobby. We also noted that the boundaries of all interest groups are somewhat imprecise, although most have a core membership whose identity is not disputed.

Third, we recognized that the term "pro-Israel" is ambiguous; indeed, we made this very point in our book.²⁰ To clarify the issue, we emphasized that "the various groups that make up the lobby . . . share the desire to promote a

special relationship between the United States and Israel” and believe “the United States should give Israel substantial diplomatic, economic, and military support even when Israel takes actions the United States opposes.”²¹ Of course, one of our central conclusions was that the special relationship was in fact harmful to both countries.

Nor did we argue that policymakers who support a “pro-Israel” policy initiative are necessarily members of the lobby. On the contrary, we explicitly wrote that our definition does not “imply that every American official who supports Israel is part of the lobby.”²² We judged officeholders to be part of the lobby if their attachment to Israel preceded their entry into public service or if they devoted a substantial portion of their personal or professional lives both in and out of office to influencing U.S. Middle East policy in ways intended to benefit Israel. Thus, when Congressman Howard Berman (D-CA) declares that his concern for Israel is the reason he wanted to serve on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, it seems reasonable to count him as part of the broad “pro-Israel” interest group.²³ Similarly, when Martin Indyk—formerly deputy director of research at AIPAC and co-founder of the pro-Israel Washington Institute of Near East Policy—is appointed one of Bill Clinton’s key Middle East advisors, it strains credulity to exclude him from the “loose coalition” that “actively works” to promote the “special relationship.”²⁴

There is really no mystery or “conceptual confusion” here. Like other interest groups, organizations in the Israel lobby try to get individuals who are sympathetic to their views elected to office or appointed to key positions in the executive branch. They also try to convince presidents not to appoint individuals about whom they have doubts. As we documented in our book, these efforts sometimes succeed. When they do, these groups will be trying to influence officials who share their broad perspective—and may even have belonged to the same pro-Israel organization(s)—and they will not have to deal with officials who might have reservations or even be opposed to the special relationship. Does Lieberman deny that the lobby engages in these kinds of activities? And does he deny that they sometimes affect the policy process?

Process-Tracing versus Covariation

Lieberman recognizes that there are two distinct ways to assess the causal influence of the lobby on policy—covariation and process-tracing—and that we relied mainly on the latter.²⁵ Moreover, he acknowledges that process-tracing is potentially a powerful tool for showing cause and effect. In his words: “if . . . [Mearsheimer and Walt] can document recurrent sequences of cause and effect connecting pro-Israel political activity and pro-Israel policy outcomes, *they will be able to stake a strong claim to having established a more general causal relationship.*”²⁶ He then

concedes that our case studies—which fill five substantial chapters—“do, indeed, seem to show a consistent pro-Israel stance in American foreign and defense policy.”²⁷

Yet instead of simply admitting that we make a strong case for our argument, which would seem to follow from his comments on process-tracing and our case studies, Lieberman declares that “the success of the causal argument about the reasons for American Middle East policymaking and the power of the Israel lobby will depend primarily on the principle of variation.” He goes on to say that “the principle flaw in Mearsheimer and Walt’s empirical argument stems from the lack of variation.”²⁸ In other words, after stating that process-tracing is an acceptable way to demonstrate causal influence and that the process-tracing we performed supports our basic argument, he reverses field and insists that covariation is the only reliable way to analyze cause and effect and that there is hardly any variation in the evidence we presented. He is wrong on both counts.

Lieberman’s claim that there is no variation in our empirical evidence takes three forms. First, he maintains that our case studies are drawn entirely from the Bush administration, and indeed, from the “last four years or so.”²⁹ But this is not true. For example, our case studies of U.S.–Syrian and U.S.–Iranian relations begin in the early 1990s and cover more than fifteen years. Moreover, we show that American policy toward both regimes—especially Syria—varied considerably over time, and we trace how these changes corresponded to shifts in Israeli policy and the lobby’s activities. Similarly, our chapter on the 2003 Iraq war traced the origins of that conflict back to the late 1990s, when the neoconservatives began putting pressure on the Clinton administration to use military force to topple Saddam Hussein. We also compared the role played by oil interests and the lobby in the period preceding the 1991 and 2003 wars against Iraq.³⁰

There is also a great deal of empirical evidence in our book that is not contained in the case studies, and this evidence exhibits considerable variation. In particular, we analyzed how America’s relationship with Israel has evolved since 1948 and drew special attention to how relations between the two countries had changed over that sixty-year period. Specifically, we emphasized that “the ‘special relationship’ that now exists did not emerge until several decades after Israel’s founding” and we documented the various disputes that characterized U.S.–Israeli relations during the 1950s and 1960s as well as U.S. efforts to keep its distance during Israel’s first fifteen years of existence.³¹ Although Israel certainly had strong American supporters from the beginning, we also showed that the lobby has grown more powerful and more active over time and that its leading organizations have become more hard-line in recent decades. Thus our book’s overarching narrative highlights variation over time in both the independent variable (the lobby’s clout and agenda) and the dependent variable (the extent of the U.S.–Israeli special relationship).

Lieberman's second argument regarding covariation is his claim that we focus almost exclusively on cases where high levels of lobby activity led to pro-Israel policy outcomes, and that we failed to consider three other kinds of cases: 1) high levels of lobby activity failed to stop anti-Israel policy outcomes; 2) low levels of lobby activity produced pro-Israel policy outcomes; and 3) low levels of lobby activity were associated with anti-Israel policy outcomes. According to Lieberman, this is another example of selection bias on our part.³² The implication, of course, is that if we had looked at all four kinds of cases—represented by the cells in his table 2—we might have found evidence that contradicts our argument.

This is yet another false charge. In fact, we discussed each of the cases contained in the various cells of his table 2: recognition of Israel in 1948, the Suez Crisis in 1956, and the AWACS sale in 1981. We also considered several episodes that he does not mention, such as the 1992 dispute over loan guarantees. Lieberman concedes that we discussed these cases in our book, but he complains that they received only "brief mention" and "they are not deployed as comparative cases that might provide a test of the book's overall hypothesis."³³ We dealt with these cases briefly because there was no need to discuss them at length. The story would have remained the same, because there is nothing about these incidents that undermines our basic account of the lobby's growing influence over time.

One might think there are cases in the various cells that we simply overlooked, because we focused most of our attention on those cases where high levels of lobby activity led to pro-Israel policy outcomes. But that would be wrong. We scrutinized the historical record with great care, looking for cases that might disconfirm our theory. And when we found them, we addressed them in the book. We also took advantage of the fact that critics of our original article pointed to cases that they thought undermined our claims about the lobby. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Lieberman does not identify a single important incident omitted from our analysis that might undermine our core claims.

Lieberman directs a third criticism at us regarding variation. "If American Middle East policy *were* constant," he writes, "it would be necessary to show that Mearsheimer and Walt's favored explanatory factor, the activities of the Israel lobby, was also constant, *while other possible explanatory factors varied.*"³⁴ Yet this is just what we showed. Foreign policy is never completely "constant," of course, but one of the principal aims of our book was to explain why the "special relationship" has remained intact in recent decades, even though other potential "explanatory factors" were varying in ways that should have led U.S. support for Israel to decline.

The special relationship developed during the Cold War, when one could plausibly argue that Israel was a useful asset for containing Soviet influence in the Middle East. But the

Cold War ended in 1989 and the strategic landscape changed drastically. As we document at length in our book, Israel has since become a strategic burden for the United States, which should have attenuated if not ended the special relationship, at least if strategic calculations were driving American policy. Similarly, although we believe there is still a strong moral case for Israel's existence, the moral case for giving Israel unconditional support has been weakened by its prolonged occupation of the West Bank and its brutal treatment of the Palestinians there and in Gaza. Thus, the evidence in our book fits the exact pattern that Lieberman claims is "necessary" to prove our case: 1) the activities of the lobby are constant or growing; 2) other "explanatory factors" are weaker or reversed; yet 3) the special relationship remains unchanged. *QED.*

The bottom line is that we are not guilty of selection bias or lack of variation. There is variation in our evidence and it supports our core argument.

What about Lieberman's claim that the only dependable way to analyze the lobby's influence is with covariation, not process-tracing? Both approaches obviously have strengths and weaknesses, and in an ideal world one would want to employ both methods more or less equally. The main reason we put greater weight on process-tracing is that there are certain limits to covariation in this case. As Lieberman acknowledges, if the lobby has significant influence on U.S. Middle East policy, as we claim it does, then the historical record will tend to show an association between lobbying activity and pro-Israel policy outcomes.³⁵ And if the lobby has become more powerful over time, as we claim it has, this association will be more pronounced now than it was in the past. As a result, most cases will fall in the cells where high levels of lobby activity lead to pro-Israel policy outcomes or low levels of activity are associated with less pro-Israel outcomes, but relatively few cases will appear in the "off-diagonal" cells. In other words, there will not be much variation in the historical record for scholars to observe and exploit. That certainly has proven to be the case in recent decades, and neither Lieberman nor any of our other critics has provided evidence to challenge that story. But in a situation like that, as Lieberman admits, "an explanatory strategy based on exploring the covariation of cause and effect would not work."³⁶ Instead, one would want to rely more heavily on process-tracing, which is what we did.³⁷

There is another dimension to this problem. When an interest group is especially powerful, policymakers may refrain from taking initiatives that might trigger its opposition. As a result, the interest group's influence leads to "non-events," potential disputes that do not occur and thus cannot be directly observed. As long-time U.S. Middle East negotiator Aaron David Miller has acknowledged, "those of us advising the secretary of state and the president were very sensitive to what the pro-Israel community was thinking, and *when it came to considering ideas*

Israel didn't like, we too often engaged in a kind of preemptive self-censorship."³⁸ Or as we noted in our book, "like other powerful interest groups . . . the Israel lobby achieves its aims [in part] by constraining the policies key officials are willing to consider."³⁹ Given this tendency for "preemptive self-censorship," the contrasting cases that Lieberman demands will be even less common and therefore it is not surprising that he cannot find any. Indeed, when self-censorship by key officials occurs, the historical record will actually understate the true extent of the lobby's power.

Given the problems with relying solely on covariation, Lieberman's insistence on privileging this research method is misplaced. That is why we relied primarily on process-tracing, while remaining alert for examples of covariation as well. But regardless of the relative merits of these two approaches for analyzing the lobby, the critical point is that each approach yielded similar results. To challenge our argument, Lieberman would have to show that an analysis based on covariation produced different results than one based on process-tracing, which he has not done.

The Lobby and American Politics

Lieberman's second line of attack alleges that we make "frequent misstatements about basic elements of American politics" and that many of our key claims about the lobby "frequently contradict well-established research findings in American politics."⁴⁰ He focuses his criticism on our discussion of 1) how the lobby influences Congress; 2) the effects of campaign spending by pro-Israel individuals and groups; 3) the importance of Jewish voters in presidential elections; and 4) the lobby's efforts to shape public discourse. He maintains that our discussion of these key causal paths of influence is not compelling, because it is at odds with "the state of knowledge about American politics."⁴¹

These criticisms are wrong. There are important disagreements among students of American politics—as there are in any field of study—so we do disagree with some findings but not with others. None of our claims, however, fall outside the boundaries of serious discussion among mainstream scholars in that subfield. More importantly, our discussion of how the Israel lobby operates is consistent with the extensive literature on interest groups. It is this literature that is most directly relevant for assessing Lieberman's charge that our findings contradict the conventional wisdom in the field of American politics, and he does not claim that our book is at odds with this extensive body of work. Indeed, he barely mentions it at all. There are also a number of earlier works on the Israel lobby itself—including discussions by well-known scholars of American politics—and this literature does not contradict our claims in any meaningful way.⁴²

Lieberman instead argues that the problem lies with our discussion of subjects like Congress and campaign

financing. We disagree, but even if our story were at odds with "well-established research findings" on those subjects, the Israel lobby might be an anomalous case and our core argument would still be correct. Lieberman actually concedes this point, saying "I am not suggesting that any finding that contradicts what other political scientists have said is necessarily invalid." Of course, he is suggesting just that; and he has little choice but to do so since he challenges hardly any of our facts. He goes on to say that if the lobby is a special case, we have "to show where current theory goes wrong" and why our "model of influence" is superior.⁴³ Fortunately, we did not have to perform that Herculean task, because the lobby's influence is easy to understand in light of the existing literature on American politics. It operates much as other powerful interest groups do, although it has several advantages that make it unusually effective.

Before examining what Lieberman has to say about each causal path, it is important to note that he misrepresents what we said about the relationship between the various causal paths we describe. In particular, he maintains that "it is not clear how these different mechanisms interact with each other in Mearsheimer and Walt's causal scheme. Are they complementary? Do they compete with one another?"⁴⁴ This charge is false, however, as we explicitly stated that "the various strategies that groups in the lobby employ . . . are mutually reinforcing."⁴⁵ We also provided several examples to support that point, which is again consistent with the literature on interest group politics.

Having misrepresented our views on how the different causal paths interact, Lieberman then implies that we believe that each causal mechanism should independently be able to explain the special relationship. For example, when discussing our point that support for Israel in Congress is due in part to the fact that some legislators are strongly pro-Israel, he writes that "the proposition that a small band of ideologically pro-Israel members of Congress has hijacked American foreign policy seems dubious."⁴⁶ We agree, which is why we never advanced that proposition. Furthermore, he claims that we believe "it is disproportionate representation on the relevant committees that constitutes the critical ingredient of the 'lobby's' influence."⁴⁷ But we did not say it was "the critical ingredient"; we merely noted that well-placed supporters on key committees are one reason for the lobby's success in Congress, a proposition consistent with the existing literature on Congressional behavior.⁴⁸ In short, our argument is that the lobby seeks to influence the policy process in several complementary ways, no one of which alone accounts for the special relationship.

Congress and the Lobby

Lieberman does not dispute our claim that "Israel is virtually immune from criticism" in Congress, but he suggests

that there is a simple explanation: legislators reflect the public's preferences. "Long-term trends in American public opinion," he writes, "show that Americans have long consistently expressed substantial support for Israel."⁴⁹ Thus, "the burden is on Mearsheimer and Walt to show that congressional action on the Middle East is out of synch with the central tendency of national opinion." Lieberman fails to mention that this is precisely what we showed. As detailed in our book, the behavior of Congress is not in synch with public opinion. The American people are generally sympathetic to Israel, but they are much more critical of Israeli policy than their representatives are and they are far more willing to support a hard-nosed approach to dealing with Israel. Indeed, a 2005 survey by the Anti-Defamation League found that 78 percent of Americans believe that Washington should favor neither Israel nor the Palestinians, which effectively means that they do not support the special relationship.⁵⁰ The Lebanon war in 2006 revealed a similar gap between public opinion and Congressional behavior.⁵¹ If Congress reflected the views of the American people, criticism of Israeli policy would be commonplace on Capitol Hill and U.S. policy itself might be substantially different.

Lieberman next takes us to task for not explaining how Israel's staunch supporters exercise power in Congress, especially given their "relatively small numbers."⁵² He lays out three possible theories from the American politics literature, and notes that the third model of congressional policymaking, which emphasizes the role of committees, "is actually potentially consistent with Mearsheimer and Walt's account of the lobby's influence." So, on this important issue, it turns out we are not at odds with the American politics literature after all! Nonetheless, Lieberman criticizes us for not providing enough evidence to show that there is "disproportionate representation on the relevant committees." Furthermore, he says that we "misrepresent the process by which committee and subcommittee chairs are selected, implying that there was some kind of Israel litmus test."⁵³

We did limit ourselves to talking about the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, mainly because of space constraints, but we easily could have shown that the other relevant committees in Congress are stocked with pro-Israel members, and that hardly anyone on those committees is likely to say things or push policies that would anger AIPAC or other groups in the lobby.⁵⁴ On the matter of a litmus test, Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA), a veteran Congressman who is also a devoted supporter of Israel, said in the wake of the 2006 election, "There will be some Democratic chairmen who may not share all my views . . . on Israel [but] . . . they will not be chairing committees dealing with Israel and the Middle East."⁵⁵ He was telling it like it is.

Finally, Lieberman is guilty of his own form of selection bias: while claiming to offer a careful scholarly assessment, he fails to mention when our arguments drew

explicitly on the American politics literature. For example, we pointed out that AIPAC is often directly involved in drafting legislation intended to benefit Israel, thereby providing the sort of "legislative subsidy" that scholars have identified as a key source of lobby influence.⁵⁶ Similarly, he says hardly anything about the many cases we described where individuals or groups in the lobby intervened on Capitol Hill to shape policy outcomes. To note one example, consider the recollections of former Secretary of State George Shultz:

In early December [1982] . . . I got word that a supplement was moving through the lame-duck session of Congress to provide a \$250 million increase in . . . U.S. military assistance granted to Israel: this in the face of Israel's invasion of Lebanon, its use of cluster bombs, and its complicity in the Sabra and Shatila massacres! We fought the supplement and fought it hard. President Reagan and I weighed in personally, making numerous calls to Senators and congressmen . . . *The supplement sailed right by us and was approved by Congress as though President Reagan and I had not even been there.* . . . This brought home to me vividly Israel's leverage in our Congress. I saw that I must work carefully with the Israelis . . . if I was to maintain congressional support for my efforts to make progress in the Middle East.⁵⁷

Lieberman's omission of this body of evidence is important, because AIPAC, by virtually all accounts, plays a critically important role in pushing Congress to support the special relationship. Nor does he mention the abundant evidence and direct testimony we provided about the lobby's influence—such as the 2005 *National Journal* survey that ranked AIPAC as the second most powerful lobby on Capitol Hill—or the testimony of experienced political figures such as former Congressman Lee Hamilton or former Senators John Culver, Fritz Hollings, and Barry Goldwater.⁵⁸

Campaign Contributions and the Special Relationship

Lieberman makes three arguments about why campaign contributions from pro-Israel sources have hardly any effect on either Congress or the president. First, he says that we "substantiate" our claim that Israel's supporters "donate a lot of money to candidates for federal office."⁵⁹ But then he reverses course, arguing that these contributions are too small a percentage of total contributions to have much impact on politicians' behavior. He writes, for example, that "Bill Clinton received only \$7,000 from pro-Israel sources in his 1996 reelection campaign."⁶⁰ Second, he maintains that we mistakenly believe that "campaign contributions effectively 'buy' influence."⁶¹ He counters by invoking scholarly studies arguing that legislators' votes are driven in large part by the preferences of their constituents and their party, because these factors are critical to getting elected or re-elected. In this story, money from interest groups generally has little influence on how politicians vote. Third, he notes that candidates backed by the

lobby do not always win, and candidates the lobby opposes do not necessarily lose. Taken as a whole, Lieberman's critique suggests that a candidate's position on Israel will have little effect on his or her chances of winning.

Lieberman's arguments on this point are at best misleading and at worst simply wrong. To begin with, he greatly understates the role that pro-Israel fundraising plays in American politics, which includes campaign contributions, financial support for party organizations, and various forms of "soft money." To be sure, there is no comprehensive and wholly reliable source on the precise amount of money that Jewish-Americans, Christian Zionists or other pro-Israel individuals give to political campaigns. The main reason is that individuals are not required to report their ethnicity or religious beliefs when they contribute to a campaign or party, and therefore organizations that monitor campaign financing—like the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP)—have no good way of assessing the total amount of money that different ethnic or religious groups give to politicians.

Nevertheless, almost everyone agrees that the amount that American Jews provide is substantial and that candidates who are seen as insufficiently supportive (let alone critical) of Israel will have great difficulty raising money from these sources. The *Washington Post* once estimated that Democratic presidential candidates "depend on Jewish supporters to supply as much as 60 percent of the money raised from private sources." This figure may be too high, but we noted that other estimates range between 20 and 50 percent.⁶² We emphasized that "Israel is not the only issue that inspires these contributions. . . but candidates who are perceived as hostile (or even indifferent) to Israel run the risk of seeing some of these funds go to their opponents."⁶³ Thus, it is hardly surprising that Benjamin Ginsberg, a prominent American politics scholar, remarked in July 2008 that "the Obama campaign has pretty much tapped out individual contributors and the number of people giving small amounts online is diminishing. So it's back to the Democratic Party's traditional finance sources, which for the most part means big Jewish donors."⁶⁴ Needless to say, Obama's behavior throughout the campaign was entirely consistent with Ginsberg's remark.

The claim that the 1996 Clinton campaign received only \$7,000 from "pro-Israel sources" is absurd, and it is frankly surprising that a specialist in American politics would make it. The \$7,000 figure, like all of Lieberman's campaign finance data, comes from the CRP database, which reports PAC money given to political campaigns but not individual contributions.⁶⁵ This data understates actual contributions by a wide margin, because individuals give far more money to candidates than PACs do. As one of Lieberman's key sources notes, "In congressional elections, where PACs are most active, candidates raised over 3 times more from individuals directly than they did from PACs."⁶⁶ Lieberman acknowledges that individual

contributions are more important than PAC contributions, but he says nothing about the fact that individual contributions can be affected by a donor's commitment to Israel, thus ignoring this critically important source of pro-Israel money.⁶⁷ Israel's supporters can also influence elections by giving so-called "soft money" to the party of their choice, and they can establish purportedly "independent" political organizations like "Freedom's Watch," a hardline pro-Israel organization bankrolled by hawkish pro-Israel billionaire Sheldon Adelson.⁶⁸ In short, simply relying on CRP data, as Lieberman does, greatly understates the amount of money that politicians have received from pro-Israel sources, including President Clinton in 1996.

The claim that campaign contributions are largely useless for influencing politicians fails the common sense test. Why would the Israel lobby—and other interest groups—contribute to campaigns if they were effectively throwing money away? Why would incumbents and challengers alike fear AIPAC so much if they did not think it could affect their electoral prospects?

Contrary to what Lieberman writes, we do not believe that all campaign contributions automatically translate into political influence, and we never said so. We recognize that there will be cases where this does not happen, for several obvious reasons. For example, interest groups often give substantial amounts of money to politicians who already share their views. These contributions are not "buying influence" directly, though they can help these politicians remain in office. Also, politicians sometimes receive money from rival lobbies, which means that the contributions effectively cancel each other out. And if the issue at stake is highly salient for a politician's constituents, he or she will almost certainly do what the voters want and ignore an interest group pushing in the other direction. Finally, incumbents usually enjoy a significant electoral advantage and usually have less difficulty raising campaign money, and thus they are likely to be harder for interest groups to influence than challengers.

Yet scholars in American politics also recognize that there will be some cases where campaign contributions do translate into political influence, and the Israel lobby is probably one of them.⁶⁹ Israel is not a salient issue for most Americans, so most politicians will not incur significant political costs if they back Israel down the line.⁷⁰ But there are real costs to questioning the special relationship, as virtually every politician in Washington knows. The main fear is that AIPAC and other like-minded groups will target politicians they consider insufficiently pro-Israel, thereby raising the odds that an incumbent will face a well-funded challenger. We discussed a number of these cases in our book, and the scholarly literature makes clear that the ability to raise money is critical to successful Congressional challenges. As Gary Jacobson notes, "Congressional challengers rarely win if they do not spend a substantial amount of money, and the more they spend,

the more likely they are to win.”⁷¹ Not surprisingly, incumbents strive to reassure AIPAC that they fully support the special relationship. They would prefer that pro-Israel PACs and individuals not give their challengers any money, and instead give it to them. An incumbent might well survive the challenge, but why take the chance? The Israel lobby also has the great advantage that there is no opposing lobby with deep pockets that politicians can turn to for help. Moreover, as Lieberman notes, voting behavior is also shaped by the preferences of a legislator’s party, and if the party itself relies heavily on contributions from individuals and groups who strongly support the special relationship, then individual politicians will have even less incentive to question it.⁷²

Finally, we made it clear that the lobby does not win every time. Rather, it wins often enough to make it clear to most politicians that they are putting their careers at risk if they are perceived as anti-Israel. Or as Aaron David Miller recently observed, “Today you cannot be successful in American politics and not be good on Israel. And AIPAC plays a key role in making that happen.”⁷³ We discussed a handful of cases where pro-Israel forces targeted candidates successfully and showed that other politicians noticed. For example, after AIPAC successfully targeted Senator Roger Jepsen (R-IA) following his decision to support the sale of AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia in 1981, Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA) remarked that Jepsen’s defeat “has sort of struck terror into the hearts of senators about switching” on Middle East votes. It is for good reason that J.J. Goldberg, the editor of the Jewish weekly newspaper the *Forward*, said in 2002, “There is this image in Congress that you don’t cross these people or they take you down.” All of these considerations explain why former Senator Ernest Hollings said upon his retirement in 2004, “You can’t have an Israeli policy other than what AIPAC gives you around here.”⁷⁴

Jews as Pivotal Voters

Lieberman attempts to challenge our argument that Jews can be pivotal voters in presidential elections—a situation that encourages candidates for the White House to enthusiastically endorse the special relationship—but he ends up agreeing with us. He performs a mathematical simulation to assess our claims, and concludes that the “results do seem to confirm, arithmetically at least, Mearsheimer and Walt’s supposition that Jewish voters might, under the right circumstances, be decisive in presidential elections, and that this pivotal position might have policy consequences.” He then observes “in fact, we have lately experienced just such an election . . . Florida in 2000.”⁷⁵ He points out that the Jewish vote was not decisive in 2004, which is true, but the key point is that the presidential candidates rarely know *ex ante* whether the vote will be close (as it was in 2000) and they must therefore act from the start as if it might be. Even if most Jewish Americans favor the Democratic side, the

actual percentage voting for the Democratic candidate has varied significantly in the past and could determine the outcome of a close contest. For this reason, both Obama and McCain went to great lengths to court the Jewish vote in Florida and other possible swing states in 2008, mostly by repeatedly affirming their strong support for the special relationship.

In addition, Lieberman ignores the importance of courting Israel’s supporters during presidential primaries. He points out that states like California or New York have substantial Jewish populations but have not been competitive in recent presidential elections, thereby suggesting that candidates need not court the Jewish vote in order to carry those states. This may be true for the general election but not the primaries, which is yet another reason why any serious candidate will work hard to convey his or her support for the special relationship.

Shaping Public Discourse

Lieberman also takes aim at our discussion of the many newspapers and magazines that “display a pro-Israel editorial bias,” and the think tanks that adopt the same perspective.⁷⁶ Significantly, he does not challenge our description of the position those publications and think tanks take on Israel. Instead, he accuses us once more of “selection bias,” arguing that it is not clear whether our examples “are somehow representative of a larger phenomenon that cuts across the entire population of media outlets, think tanks, or other relevant venues.”⁷⁷ The implication is that we overlooked important mainstream media publications and think tanks that are critical of Israel and the special relationship.

Lieberman offers no evidence to support this line of argument. The discussion in our book did focus on the country’s major newspapers, mainly because they exert greater influence on public attitudes, but also because of space limitations. In doing the research for the book, however, we surveyed numerous newspapers across the country and found no evidence that publications in smaller markets were systematically less pro-Israel than their bigger and more well-known cousins. And nobody we know of suggests that is the case.

Not surprisingly, Lieberman offers no examples of newspapers or mainstream commentators that contradict our basic point. His failure to do so is itself revealing: if there were lots of media outlets and pundits who were consistently critical of Israel, one would think that some of them would be well-known and he would have no trouble identifying them. But as we noted in our book, there are at best a handful of mainstream media figures or outlets that offer more than the mildest criticism of Israel’s behavior or take a skeptical view of the special relationship, and a multitude of prominent voices on the other side. This situation, we also noted, is substantially different from the discourse in many other democracies, including Israel itself.

We also surveyed all of the relevant think tanks inside the Beltway—which is where most of the foreign policy think tanks are located—and we noted that “there are a few smaller think tanks that are not reflexively pro-Israel.” Our point was that “the largest and most visible” ones “usually take Israel’s side,” and thus “the balance of power . . . strongly favors Israel.” We also discussed the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations, which is located in New York City and which has become increasingly supportive of the special relationship over time.⁷⁸ Once again, Lieberman provides no evidence that contradicts our description of the think-tank world.

Lieberman also suggests that pro-Israel research organizations are not likely to have much impact on policymaking because “recent research . . . has found that think tanks with clearly ideological or one-sided missions tend to have a smaller impact precisely because the policy research they produce comes with a known ideological predisposition.”⁷⁹ The lobby, of course, is well-aware of this problem, and thus pro-Israel think tanks do not openly advertise their pro-Israel orientation. As we noted in our book, this is why the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, which was founded in 1985 by individuals closely identified with AIPAC, “plays down its links to Israel and claims that it provides a ‘balanced and realistic’ perspective on Middle East issues,” which is not the case.⁸⁰

Lieberman’s “Alternative” Explanations

Lieberman concludes his critique by offering several “alternative explanations” that might account for the lobby’s influence. As we noted earlier, this step makes no sense, as the main purpose of his essay is to argue that the lobby “is not the prime mover in shaping American foreign policy toward the Middle East.”⁸¹ His aim should therefore be to identify the real driving forces behind the special relationship, and U.S. Middle East policy more generally, instead of trying to explain why the lobby wields so much influence, a claim he challenges throughout his article. Yet here he focuses on the lobby and claims to offer a more sophisticated analysis than our supposedly “blunt interest-group approach.” However, his alternative explanations are in fact our own.

First, he suggests that the lobby might be influential because of the way that the costs and benefits of the special relationship are distributed. He acknowledges that we made this point and quotes our statement that “in a democracy, even relatively small groups can exercise considerable influence if they are strongly committed to a particular issue and the rest of the population is largely indifferent.” Lieberman goes on to say “Mearsheimer and Walt are undoubtedly right that the benefits of pro-Israel policy are particularly concentrated among those American voters whose intense policy preferences . . . are thereby satisfied,

while the costs of that policy are widely dispersed across the population, most of whom are consequently indifferent to policy outcomes.”⁸² Under such circumstances, he notes, one would expect little debate about the special relationship, which was of course another one of our key points. Thus, Lieberman’s first “alternative” merely restates our basic account.

Second, he suggests that “a second alternative might focus more comprehensively than Mearsheimer and Walt do on the institutional structure of the American political system and the particular discipline that this structure imposes on policymaking.”⁸³ Lieberman’s language indicates that he is simply calling for doing further research on matters that are at the core of our book. We would welcome additional research along these lines, but there is no reason to think that it would undermine our analysis of the ways that groups in the lobby work on the different branches of government or our historical account of how they have sought to institutionalize the special relationship. Lieberman adds that “assessing this approach would require a careful examination of policy over time,” which is exactly what we sought to provide within the space at our disposal.⁸⁴

Third, Lieberman suggests that another “alternative approach to conceptualizing the ‘lobby’s’ influence” might be to focus on how it shapes policy debates about Israel and the Middle East.⁸⁵ This argument is yet another central part of our own explanation; in fact, we devoted an entire chapter to explaining how this process works. Lieberman says it is “plausible to observe that American Middle East policy is made in a context that discourages robust debate about the costs and benefits of support for Israel,” admitting further that it is “reasonable to hypothesize that pro-Israel actors, both inside and outside of government, make it very hard—or at least very costly—for public officials to be openly critical of Israel.”⁸⁶ This supposed “alternative” is our argument, of course, as even a cursory reading of Chapter 6 (“Dominating Public Discourse”) makes manifestly clear. In our words, “key elements in the lobby strive to influence discourse about Israel. . . They promote efforts to portray Israel in a positive light and they go to considerable lengths to marginalize anyone who questions Israel’s past or present conduct or seeks to cast doubt on the merits of unconditional U.S. backing.”⁸⁷

In short, after directing a lot of ill-aimed firepower at us, Lieberman concludes his essay by recapitulating some of our main arguments and offering no new ones. We are gratified by his turn-around, but left wondering why he was so exercised by our book in the first place.

Conclusion

We do not regard our book as the last word on the Israel lobby or America’s special relationship with Israel. Indeed, we wrote it to encourage a more open discussion of these

important but frequently taboo subjects. We did so because we believe the United States will not be able to address the various challenges it faces in the Middle East if Americans cannot have a candid and wide-ranging discussion of the different forces that shape U.S. foreign policy in this vital region, and whether the resulting policy makes good strategic sense. A careful and fair-minded critique of our work would have advanced our understanding of these weighty issues and been a welcome addition; unfortunately, Lieberman's effort falls well short of that standard.

Notes

- 1 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 117.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 26, 30.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 14, 153–54.
- 4 Space does not permit us to deal with every one of Lieberman's accusations, so we focus on his most important charges.
- 5 Lieberman 2009, 235, 240, 241, 244, 247, 250.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 250.
- 7 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 23.
- 8 Lieberman claims that we believe "the moral case for supporting Israel is weak at best" Lieberman 2009, ms. pg.1. This is wrong. In fact, we repeatedly endorse Israel's right to exist and state explicitly that the United States should come to its aid if its survival were in jeopardy. Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 5, 12, 15, 18, 79, 114, 338, 341. What we question is the special relationship, which we argue is harmful to both countries.
- 9 A recent comparison of ethnic interest groups identified six characteristics that determine a group's political influence; the Israel lobby is the only group possessing all of them. See Rubenzer 2008, table 3.
- 10 On interest groups in general, see Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Hall and Wayman 1990; Hall and Dear-dorff 2006; Hansen 1991, Cigler and Loomis 2006; and Kollman 1998. On ethnic groups and foreign policy, see King and Pomper 2004; Smith 2000; Ahr-ari 1987; Said, 1981; Haney and Vanderbush 1999; Trice 1976; Shain 1994–95; Mathias, 1981; Watanabe 1984; Sheffer 2003, Dekmejian and Themelis 1997. On the Israel lobby itself, see Tivnan 1987, Ball and Ball, 1992; Bard 1991; Findley 1985; Goldberg 1996; Lind 2002; and Massing, 2002a, 2002b.
- 11 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 14–18.
- 12 Van Evera 1997; George and Bennett 2005.
- 13 Lieberman 2009, 240.
- 14 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 108–110, 142–46, 226–27, 330–32.
- 15 Lieberman 2009, 241.
- 16 *Ibid.*, n. 4.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 165–67.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 5, 112.
- 20 In our words, "This definition does not mean that every American with favorable attitudes toward Israel is a member of the lobby. . . .the authors of this book are 'pro-Israel,' in the sense that we support its right to exist, admire its many achievements, want its citizens to enjoy secure and prosperous lives, and believe that the United States should come to Israel's aid if its survival is in danger. But we are obviously not part of the Israel lobby." Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 113–14.
- 21 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 5, 114. Thus, we placed dovish groups like Americans for Peace Now within the lobby because they oppose any reduction in U.S. aid to Israel, but we excluded Jewish Voice for Peace because it supports making U.S. aid conditional on an end to Israel's occupation of the West Bank. See Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 120–21.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 23 On Berman's views, see Guttman 2008.
- 24 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 114, 152, 165–66, 175–77, 249, 258, 284, 286, 290.
- 25 Lieberman 2009, 239–240.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 241, emphasis added.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 249.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 253–55.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 32 Lieberman 2009, 250.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 240.
- 34 *Ibid.*, emphasis original.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 There are two other reasons why process-tracing is well-suited for analyzing the lobby. First, carefully examining particular events allows a scholar to look for direct evidence of the links between causes and effects. In practice this means that one can show how groups or individuals in the lobby weighed in on a particular issue to influence the outcome. Second, process-tracing allows us to examine the broader context in which particular decisions are made, which is important because there is not always a simple linear relationship between "pro-Israel lobbying activity" and "American policy," as Lieberman (14) seems to think. As noted, whether an interest group wins or loses a particular policy dispute may not tell us much about its overall influence. For example, the lobby "lost" the 1981 AWACS fight in the narrow sense that the Senate approved the sale—after a protracted struggle—by a vote of 52–48. But this case does not prove the lobby was weak, because the Reagan administration had to pull out all the stops to overcome its opposition. Moreover, the AWACS battle may have been

- a strategic victory for AIPAC, because it discouraged the Reagan administration from picking another major fight with the lobby again.
- 38 Miller 2008, 123, emphasis added.
- 39 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 151.
- 40 Lieberman 2009, 235.
- 41 Ibid., abstract.
- 42 Lieberman may not be aware that respected scholars in American politics have used the Israel lobby as a textbook case of the power that small interest groups can exert, and their portrayal of its influence is for the most part consistent with ours. According to one well-known scholar, “only one other ethnic group, Cuban-Americans, has achieved anything near the prowess of the pro-Israel lobby,” which he describes as the “best organized, best-funded, and most successful of the ethnic lobbies.” See Uslaner 2006, 303–304. Another widely-used American politics textbook contains a special section on “The U.S. Politics of the Arab-Israeli Conflict” and notes that “whatever the merits of the issue, it can be perilous for U.S. elected officials to appear to be anti-Israel. Although Jewish Americans make up only 2 percent of the population, several key interest groups are extremely well-organized advocates for Israel.” See Fiorina et al. 2006, 602–605.
- 43 Lieberman 2009, 241.
- 44 Ibid., 240.
- 45 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 196, emphasis added.
- 46 Lieberman 2009, 244.
- 47 Ibid., 241.
- 48 On the importance that interest groups place on influencing committee leaders, and especially how they will use their time, see Hall and Wayman 1990.
- 49 Lieberman 2009, 242.
- 50 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 109–110.
- 51 U.S. opinion was sharply divided about Israel’s actions during that war: two separate polls found that 46 percent of Americans held Hezbollah and Israel equally responsible for starting the conflict and a *USA Today*/Gallup poll found that 65 percent thought the United States should take neither side in the conflict. Yet the House passed a resolution of support for Israel by a vote of 410–8. The House also dropped a clause in the draft resolution calling for both sides “to protect civilian life and infrastructure” after AIPAC objected. See Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 326, 330–31.
- 52 Lieberman 2009, 242.
- 53 Ibid., 243. The claim that we did not provide sufficient or “systematic” evidence recurs throughout Lieberman’s essay. See 239, 240, 241, 244, 246, 247, 248. As noted, he also says that our case studies are only “slightly more extensive” than anecdotes, adding that they are “hardly very detailed” (250). Given that the five case study chapters contains on average over one hundred and twenty footnotes and several hundred separate sources, one wonders what he considers a “detailed” study to be.
- 54 Prior to his election as Vice President, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was chaired by Joseph Biden (D-DE), whom the *New Republic*’s Martin Peretz recently described as “more than just a ‘friend of Israel’” (Peretz 2008). His successor as chairman, John Kerry (D-MA), has been a strong supporter of the special relationship as well, and the committee’s ranks presently include other reliable defenders of Israel such as Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Benjamin Cardin (D-MD), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), and Christopher Dodd (D-CT). Only former member Chuck Hagel (R-NE), who retired in 2008, might have been regarded as somewhat critical of the special relationship.
- 55 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 153.
- 56 Ibid., 161; Hall and Deardorff 2006.
- 57 Ibid., 46, emphasis added.
- 58 Ibid., 162. As Barry Goldwater recalled after nearly three decades in the Senate, “I was never put under greater pressure than by the Israeli lobby, nor has the Senate as a whole. It’s the most influential crowd in Congress and America by far.” Goldwater and Casserly 1988, 16–17. For similar statements by prominent political figures such as Bill Clinton, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, former Congressman Mervyn Dymally and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, see Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 117, 153–54.
- 59 Lieberman 2009, 244.
- 60 Ibid., 245.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 163. One scholarly study of campaign financing estimates that 33 percent of the contributors to Michael Dukakis’ 1988 presidential campaign were Jewish. See Brown, Powell and Wilcox 1995, 45, 77.
- 63 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 163.
- 64 Besser 2008.
- 65 Lieberman 2009, n. 31. It is revealing that the CRP database includes a separate heading for the more than two dozen “pro-Israel PACs” currently active in American politics, under the broader category of “Ideological/Single-Issue PACs.” No other ethnic lobby has its own heading. Similarly, the 2006–2007 edition of the *Almanac of Federal PACs* lists twenty-four “pro-Israel” PACs (by far the largest number in the entire “foreign policy” category) and identifies only one opposing organization (the Arab-American Leadership Council PAC). See *Almanac of Federal PACs 2006*.
- 66 Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003, 109.
- 67 Lieberman 2009, 245.
- 68 On Adelson and “Freedom’s Watch,” see Bruck 2008, Kronholz and Audi 2008, and Van Natta 2007.

Similarly, the largest single donor to the Democratic Party in recent years is Haim Saban, an Israeli-American media mogul who describes himself as a “one-issue guy, and my issue is Israel.” Not only did Saban give some \$13 million himself to the Democratic Party, he also played a key role in persuading others to give as well. Sorkin 2004, Ben David 2008, Wallace 2008. These additional ways of using money to affect elections are also discussed by Ansolabehere, Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003.

- 69 Scholars in American politics have reached a variety of conclusions about the impact of campaign contributions on legislative behavior, which is not surprising given the considerable methodological difficulties involved in this issue. One recent survey performs a meta-analysis of prior studies and concludes that “the hypothesis that campaign contributions have no effect on voting behavior is rejected at the 1% level,” although the author cautions against overstating this result. See Stratmann 2005, 146; also Stratmann 2002, 1992. For arguments that the impact of campaign contributions on elections may be understated and that they constitute a “long-term investment” in sympathetic politicians, see Levitt 1998 and Snyder 1992. A recent formal analysis determines that interest group giving can bias incumbent behavior when “there is some asymmetry in the resources of the interest groups representing opposing sides of a given issue,” in part because lawmakers must “consider the effect of their policy choices on the incentives interest groups have to bankroll an opponent to run against them.” The author notes that there are “several policy areas where only one side is effectively represented financially,” one of these areas being “U.S. foreign policy towards Israel, where money for the pro-Israeli side swamps the pro-Palestinian side.” See Fox 2006, 2–3 and especially note 4.
- 70 One U.S. senator explained why he and his colleagues signed a piece of controversial legislation pushed by the lobby by saying: “There is no political advantage in not signing. If you do sign you don’t offend anyone. If you don’t you might offend some Jews in your state.” Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 140.
- 71 Jacobson 2004, 42. Another survey of the subject concludes that “early money from PACs does help candidates raise additional monies both from other committees and from individuals. Although there may be some dispute about the marginal impact of campaign spending by incumbents, all researchers agree that non-incumbents benefit more from additional money than incumbents.” Herrnson and Wilcox 1994.
- 72 This is especially true of the Democratic Party, which decided not to give former President Jimmy Carter a speaking role at the 2008 presidential convention

because of his views on Middle East politics. As Ira Forman, head of the National Jewish Democratic Council, explained: “The party is very sensitive to the American Jewish community, and it’s very sensitive to ever conveying that this is anything but a pro-Israel party.” Quoted in Lieberman and Guttman 2008. For a discussion of how campaign contributions influence political parties, see Currinder 2009.

- 73 Miller 2008, 96.
 74 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 158, 159, 162.
 75 Lieberman 2009, 247.
 76 Ibid.
 77 Ibid., 248
 78 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 177–78.
 79 Lieberman 2009, 248.
 80 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 175.
 81 Lieberman 2009, 250.
 82 Ibid., 251.
 83 Ibid.
 84 Ibid., 252.
 85 Ibid.
 86 Ibid.
 87 Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 160.

References

- Ahrari, M.E., ed. 1987. *Ethnic Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Westport: Greenwood.
- Almanac of Federal PACs*. 2006. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, John M. de Figueiredo, and James M. Snyder Jr. 2003. Why is there so little money in U.S. politics? *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17 (1): 105–30.
- Ball, George W., and Douglas L. Ball. 1992. *The Passionate Attachment: America’s Involvement with Israel from 1947 to the Present*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Bard, Mitchell. 1991. *The Water’s Edge and Beyond: Defining the Limits to Domestic Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy*. New York: Transaction Books.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., and Beth L. Leech. 1998. *Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ben David, Calev. 2008. “Analyze This: Ninja Turtle Mogul Saban Rallies around Obama.” *Jerusalem Post* (online). August 31.
- Berger, Matthew E. 2006. “U.S. Vote May Alter Stance on Middle East.” *Jerusalem Post* (online), November 7.
- Besser, James. D. 2008. “Obama ‘Baffled’ by Jews’ Resistance.” *Jewish Week*. July 23.
- Biersack, Robert, Paul S. Herrnson and Clyde Wilcox, eds. 1994. *Risky Business: PAC Decisionmaking in Congressional Elections*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- Brown, Clifford W., Lynda W. Powell, and Clyde Wilcox, eds. 1995. *Serious Money: Fundraising and Contributing*

- in Presidential Campaigns*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bruck, Connie. 2008. "The Brass Ring: A Multimillionaire's Relentless Quest for Global Influence." *New Yorker*, June 30.
- Cigler, Allan J., and Burdett A. Loomis, eds. 2006. *Interest Group Politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Currinder, Marian. 2009. *Money in the House: Campaign Funds and Congressional Party Politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Dekmejian, R. Hrair, and Angelos Themelis. 1997. "Ethnic Lobbies in U.S. Foreign Policy: A Comparative Analysis of the Jewish, Greek Armenian and Turkish Lobbies." Occasional Research Paper 13. Institute of International Relations, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences. Athens.
- Findley, Paul M. 1985. *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby*. Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill.
- Fiorina, Morris, Paul Peterson, Bertram Johnson, and William G. Mayer. 2006. *The New American Democracy*. 5th ed. New York: Longman.
- Fox, Justin. 2006. "Electoral Donations and Interest Group Influence." Unpublished paper available at <http://pantheon.yale.edu/%7Ej398/electoral.pdf>
- George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Goldberg, J. J. 1996. *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment*. New York: Perseus Books.
- Goldwater, Barry M., with Jack Casserly. 1988. *Goldwater*. New York: Doubleday.
- Guttman, Nathan. 2008. "New Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Draws Praise From All Sides." *Forward* (online). April 24.
- Hall, Richard, and Alan V. Deardorff. 2006. Lobbying as legislative subsidy. *American Political Science Review* 100 (1): 69–84.
- Hall, Richard, and Frank W. Wayman. 1990. Buying time: Moneyed interest and the mobilization of bias in Congressional committees. *American Political Science Review* 84 (2): 797–820.
- Haney, Patrick, and Walt Vanderbush. 1999. The role of ethnic interest groups in U.S. foreign policy: The case of the Cuban-American National Foundation. *International Studies Quarterly* 43 (1): 341–61.
- Hansen, John Mark. 1991. *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919–1981*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Herrnson, Paul S., and Clyde Wilcox. 1994. Not so Risky Business: PAC Activity in 1992. In *Risky Business: PAC Decisionmaking in Congressional Elections*, ed. Robert Biersack, Paul S. Herrnson, and Clyde Wilcox. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- Jacobson, Gary. 2004. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- King, David, and Miles Pomper. 2004. The U.S. Congress and the contingent influence of diaspora lobbies: Lessons from U.S. foreign policy toward Azerbaijan and Armenia. *Journal of Armenian Studies* 8 (1): 72–98.
- Kollman, Ken. 1998. *Outside Strategies: Public Opinion and Interest Groups*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kronholz, June, and Tamara Audi. 2008. "Vegas Tycoon Bankrolls Republicans." *Wall Street Journal*, July 15.
- Levitt, Steven D. 1998. Are PACs trying to influence politicians or voters? *Economics and Politics* 10 (1): 19–35.
- Lieberman, Brett, and Nathan Guttman. 2008. "Jimmy Carter Conspicuously Absent from Podium." *Forward* (online). August 28.
- Lieberman, Robert. 2009. The "Israel lobby" and American politics. *Perspectives on Politics* 7 (2): 235–57.
- Lind, Michael. 2002. "The Israel Lobby." *Prospect*, April 1.
- Massing, Michael. 2002a. "The Israel Lobby." *Nation*, June 10.
- . 2002b. "Deal Breakers." *American Prospect*, March 11.
- Mathias, Charles McC. 1981. Ethnic groups and foreign policy. *Foreign Affairs* 59 (5): 975–98.
- Mearsheimer, John J., and Stephen M. Walt. 2007. *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Miller, Aaron David. 2008. *The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace*. New York: Bantam.
- Peretz, Martin. 2008. "Biden Is More than Just a 'Friend of Israel.'" *Jerusalem Post*, September 4.
- Rubenzon, Trevor. 2008. Ethnic minority interest group attributes and U.S. foreign policy influence: A qualitative comparative analysis. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4 (2): 169–85.
- Said, A.A. 1981. *Ethnicity and U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Praeger.
- Shain, Yossi. 1994–95. Ethnic diasporas and U.S. foreign policy. *Political Science Quarterly* 109 (4): 811–42.
- Sheffer, Gabriel. 2003. *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*. New York: Cambridge.
- Smith, Tony. 2000. *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Snyder, James M., Jr. 1992. Long-term investing in politicians; or, Give early, give often. *Journal of Law & Economics* 35 (1): 15–43.
- Sorkin, Andrew Craig. 2004. "Schlepping toward Moguldom." *New York Times Magazine*, September 5.

-
- Stratmann, Thomas. 1992. Are contributors rational? Untangling strategies of political action committees. *Journal of Political Economy* 100 (3): 647–64.
- . 2002. Can special interests buy Congressional votes?: Evidence from financial services legislation. *Journal of Law & Economics* 45 (2): 345–74.
- . 2005. Some talk: Money in politics—A (partial) review of the literature. *Public Choice* 124 (1–2): 135–56.
- Tivnan, Edward. 1987. *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Trice, Robert H. 1976. Interest groups and the foreign policy process: U.S. policy in the Middle East. *Sage Professional Papers in International Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Uslaner, Eric M. 2006. American interests in the balance? Do ethnic groups dominate foreign policy making? In *Interest Group Politics*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Van Natta, Don. 2007. “Big Coffers and a Rising Voice Lift a New Conservative Group.” *New York Times*, September 30.
- Wallace, Amy. 2008. “Haim Saban: Power Ranger.” *Condé Nast Portfolio* (online). September.
- Watanabe, Paul. 1984. *Ethnic Groups, Congress, and American Foreign Policy: The Politics of the Turkish Arms Embargo*. Westport: Greenwood.