

**Talk before “Chicago Friends of Israel”  
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John Mearsheimer’s Comments**

**“The Israel Lobby and U.S. Support for Israel”**

**I would like to thank Nathalie Gorman for inviting me to speak to the Chicago Friends of Israel, and thank all of you for coming out to hear me speak on this cold winter night.**

**As you know, Steve Walt and I wrote a controversial article, followed by a controversial book, on the Israel lobby and US foreign policy. We make three core arguments: First, there is a powerful interest group in the United States, which we call the Israel lobby, and it helps shape our Middle East policy in profound ways. Second, most of the policies pushed by the lobby are not in the American national interest and not in Israel’s interest either. Third, the United States should end its special relationship with Israel and treat it the way it treats other democracies. In other words, the US should treat Israel as a normal country.**

**Given that I am talking to the Chicago Friends of Israel, I thought it would be appropriate to focus on our argument that the policies the lobby pushes the US to adopt are not in Israel’s interests. In particular, I would like to argue that the “special relationship” that exists between the US and Israel is not in Israel’s interest. In essence, my argument is that Israel’s strongest supporters are pushing policies that are not Israel-friendly.**

**Let me begin with a brief description of the relationship between Israel and the United States. To put it succinctly, the US has a “special relationship” with Israel that has no parallel in American history. Indeed, as the late Yitzhak Rabin once said, US support for Israel is “beyond compare in modern history.”**

**There are two dimensions to this special relationship.**

**First, Israel is the largest recipient of US economic and military aid—about \$500 per year per Israeli—even though its per capita income is 29<sup>th</sup> in the world. Since the end of World War II, the Jewish state has received more foreign aid than any other country.**

**Israel also gets consistent diplomatic backing from the US and we almost always take Israel's side in regional disputes. For example, since 1972, the US has vetoed 42 UN Security Council resolutions that were critical of Israel, which is greater than the combined total of all the vetoes cast by the other Security Council members for the same period. Furthermore, Israel is rarely, if ever, criticized by US officials, and certainly not by anyone who aspires to high office. Just look at the current Presidential campaign, where every major candidate is competing to show how devoted he or she is to Israel.**

**Second, and most importantly, that aid is given unconditionally. In other words, Israel gets this aid even when it does things that the United States opposes, like building settlements in the Occupied Territories.**

**This discussion raises the obvious question: what is the basis of the special relationship? Israel's supporters offer three main explanations to account for it.**

**Some maintain that Israel is a strategic asset for the United States. It may have been during the Cold War, but the Cold War is over. Today, giving Israel nearly unconditional support is one of the reasons we have a terrorism problem, and it makes it harder to address a range of other problems in the Middle East. Support for Israel is not the only source of anti-Americanism, of course, and our problems in the Middle East would not disappear if the US had a more normal relationship with Israel. Furthermore, the US does benefit from some forms of strategic cooperation with Israel – like intelligence sharing. But it is hard to argue that giving it nearly**

unconditional backing is making the US more popular around the world or making American citizens more secure. On balance, Israel is now a strategic liability.

There is also said to be a moral rationale for the special relationship. Israel is said to be a democracy that shares our values. Yes, Israel is a democracy, but so are many other states and none gets anywhere near as much support. Plus, Israel's treatment of its Arab citizens and Palestinian subjects is sharply at odds with US values. Nor is Israel's behavior significantly better than the Palestinians'. I will not go into details here, but any reasonably fair-minded look at the history of this region—including more recent histories written by Israeli historians—shows that both sides of this conflict have done many cruel things to each other, and neither side owns the moral high ground. Please note that I am not saying that Israel acts worse than other countries, just that it has not acted better, and so one cannot justify unconditional US support by saying Israel's behavior is exemplary.

I want to emphasize that there is a strong moral case for Israel's existence—based on the long history of anti-Semitism—and Steve Walt and I believe that the US should come to Israel's aid if its survival is in jeopardy. But its existence is fortunately not in jeopardy, and past crimes against the Jewish people do not justify giving Israel a blank check today.

Finally, there is the claim that the American people have such a favorable view of Israel that they demand that their politicians back the special relationship. In other words, the US supports Israel so generously and so unconditionally because there is broad public backing—politicians are just doing what the public wants. This argument, however, is not persuasive when you look at survey data on how Americans think about the Jewish state. There is no question that Americans have a generally favorable image of Israel—in part because media coverage tends to be favorable, but the support is not especially deep or wide. Just to give two examples, a survey conducted for the ADL in 2005 found that 78% of Americans think that the US should favor neither side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; another survey

conducted by the University of Maryland in 2003 found that over 70% of “politically active” Americans favored cutting aid to Israel if it refused to settle that conflict.

So while Americans have a generally favorable image of Israel and want it to exist and be secure, they are not insisting that we back it no matter what. But that is pretty much what our policy is, which raises the obvious question: what explains the special relationship if there is no strategic or moral imperative for it and if most Americans do not favor it. Our answer is that America’s unconditional support for Israel is due largely to the political influence of the various groups in the Israel lobby.

What exactly is the Israel lobby? It is a loose coalition of individuals and groups who work openly to influence US foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. It is not a centralized organization, and the groups that make up the lobby do not agree on every issue. It includes organizations like AIPAC, ADL, the Conference of Presidents, ZOA, and Christians United for Israel, just to name a few. It also includes think tanks like WINEP and AEI and publications like the *Weekly Standard* and the *New Republic*.

This is a broad definition, but most special interest groups have different components. The environmental movement, for example, is not just *Greenpeace* or the *Sierra Club*; it also includes research groups, sympathetic local organizations, academics and journalists, just like the pro-Israel movement does.

It certainly is not a cabal or conspiracy that “controls” US foreign policy. Rather, it is just a powerful interest group like the NRA, the farm lobby, the Cuban lobby, or the AARP, and it operates the same way that those other interest groups do. Its actions, in short, are “as American as apple pie.”

**Very importantly, the lobby is not synonymous with Jewish-Americans. Surveys suggest that about a third of American Jews do not care that much about Israel, others do not support the lobby's positions, and some groups that work on Israel's behalf, such as the so-called Christian Zionists, are not Jewish. In short, the lobby is defined by its political agenda, not by ethnicity or religion.**

**The lobby also does not include individuals who simply have a favorable attitude toward Israel; rather, one has to actively work to try to shape US policy in a pro-Israel direction. Obviously, some groups and individuals are more active and influential than others.**

**How does the lobby work? In the United States, small groups with a focused agenda often wield disproportionate influence, because they usually care much more about a single issue than does the population at large. Politicians will therefore be strongly inclined to support well-organized interest groups, because they care so much about the issue at hand, while not having to worry much about losing everyone else.**

**Like other interest groups, the Israel lobby works in two main ways. First, it exerts influence inside the Beltway by getting sympathetic persons elected to office or appointed to key positions, and by giving politicians and policy-makers clear incentives to embrace positions that the lobby favors. Organizations like AIPAC work 24/7 to convince politicians to support their positions.**

**AIPAC's annual budget is estimated to be about \$50 million, and it is very active on Capitol Hill, helping draft legislation, providing talking points, and writing letters for Congressmen to sign. It is a highly professional organization with an energetic grass roots base.**

**AIPAC is not a political action committee or PAC, which means that it doesn't give money directly to politicians. But it does help steer campaign contributions from individuals and pro-Israel political action committees. Over the past 30 years,**

**AIPAC and other pro-Israel groups have helped drive a number of prominent politicians from office, including Paul Findley, Pete McCloskey, Charles Percy, Cynthia McKinney, Roger Jepson, and Lincoln Chaffee. The lobby doesn't win every time, of course, but every congressman and presidential candidate knows that you are playing with fire if you question US support for Israel.**

**The second strategy that the lobby employs is to try to shape public discourse and perceptions so that Israel is viewed favorably by most Americans. Mainstream media tend to be pro-Israel, especially in their editorial commentary and with their op-ed columnists and pundits. Compared with Europe – and even Israel – there is a much narrower range of views. If you look at pundits in the US, for example, there is simply no equivalent of Robert Fisk or Patrick Seale in Britain, or Akiva Eldar, Bradley Burston, Gideon Levy, or Amira Hass, who write in Israel. My point is not that critics are always right and pro-Israel pundits are always wrong. The point is that voices like theirs are largely absent from the mainstream media in the United States.**

**Even so, watchdog groups in the lobby like the ADL and CAMERA monitor media coverage and organize boycotts and demonstrations against news agencies that publish anything critical of Israel. And groups like Campus Watch monitor activities on campuses and put pressure on universities. So when Jimmy Carter published his book *Palestine Peace not Apartheid*, the ADL and CAMERA took out ads in major newspapers that included the publisher's phone number, and invited readers to call in and protest. And the Jewish newspaper *Forward* reported late last year that CNN was coming under "unprecedented attack" for its three part series comparing Jewish, Muslim, and Christian fundamentalists, and that the Conference of Presidents was urging member organizations to take up the issue with companies that bought advertising slots for the program.**

**Finally, efforts to stifle criticism often include smearing critics by accusing them of being anti-Semitic. Martin Peretz of the *New Republic* said that Carter "will go**

down in history as a Jew-hater,” and a critic in the *Washington Post* said Carter’s views were similar to David Duke’s. Needless to say, this is a common charge leveled at us, even though there is no evidence behind the charge. For instance, on more than one occasion critics have likened our book to the infamous fraud, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." However, if you read our book, you will find there’s nothing anti-Semitic about it, or anything remotely like the *Protocols*.

Smearing people serves three purposes. First, it distracts people from the real issue, which is US Middle East policy, and instead puts the focus on the critic. Second, it marginalizes critics in the public arena. After all, what politician would want to associate with someone who had been charged with being an anti-Semite? Third, it deters others from criticizing Israeli policy and the US-Israeli relationship, as they see what happens to those who do.

The bottom line is that few, if any politicians, will say anything remotely critical of Israel, and neither will anyone who wants to be a serious player in the making of US foreign policy. The result is that there is almost no serious debate about support for Israel in the US – especially in Congress – even when it is obvious to almost everyone that US Middle East policy has gone badly awry.

Let me now address the question of just how powerful is the lobby. Almost all of our critics acknowledge that there is a lobby, but many of them argue either that it is not very powerful or that we are saying it is “all-powerful” and that it “controls” US Middle East policy.

To be clear, we explicitly say that the lobby is not all-powerful and that it does not control US Middle East policy. Instead, we argue that the Israel lobby is very powerful and has a marked influence on American foreign policy. Indeed, when you look carefully at the evidence, there is little doubt that the Israel lobby is an especially powerful interest group – which again, is perfectly legitimate.

Consider AIPAC, which is just one of the many organizations in the lobby, although surely the most influential one. AIPAC was ranked #2 in a 2005 *National Journal* survey of the most powerful lobbies in Washington (tied with AARP), and ranked second in a 1997 survey by *Fortune* magazine.

Bill Clinton said that AIPAC was “better than anyone else lobbying in this town,” and Newt Gingrich, who rarely agrees with Clinton about anything, said it was “the most effective general interest group across the entire planet.” Former Congressman Lee Hamilton, who served in Congress for 34 years, said “there’s no group that matches it. They’re in a class by themselves.” Former Senator Fritz Hollings said as he left office that “you can’t have an Israel policy other than what AIPAC gives you.”

Steven Rosen, the AIPAC official who is now under indictment for passing classified information, once put a napkin in front of Jeffrey Goldberg, a journalist from the *New Yorker* and said: “in 24 hours, we could have the signatures of 70 senators on this napkin.” And Goldberg, who wrote one of the most vicious reviews of our book, calls AIPAC “a leviathan among lobbies.” Speaking of our critics, I might note that Alan Dershowitz said that, “My generation of Jews ... became part of what is the most effective lobbying and fund-raising effort in the history of democracy.” Thus, it is hardly surprising that Israeli PM Olmert said just last year: “Thank God we have AIPAC, the greatest supporter and friend we have in the whole world.”

And again, AIPAC is just one part of the Israeli lobby.

Now we come to the subject I want to focus the most attention on: our claim that the lobby’s influence is not good for Israel. To make that case I want to examine two cases: 1) US policy during the Lebanon war in the summer of 2006, and 2) US policy toward the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.



**On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah, the Shia organization that controls southern Lebanon, made a cross-border raid into northern Israel that killed and captured several Israeli soldiers. In response, the IDF launched a major air war against Lebanon. Israel's main goal was to deal a massive blow to Hezbollah's effectiveness as a fighting force. In particular, the Israelis were determined to eliminate the thousands of missiles and rockets that could strike northern Israel. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert drove this point home when he said, "The threat will not be what it was. Never will they be able to threaten this people they fired missiles at."**

**Israel had two different but complementary ways to try to neutralize Hezbollah's missiles and rockets. Israeli leaders were confident that they could use airpower to strike directly at those weapons and take almost all of them out. They also had a more indirect approach for dealing with the problem. Specifically, they planned a classic punishment campaign, whereby the IDF would inflict massive pain on Lebanon's civilian population by destroying residences and infrastructure, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes, and killing a significant number of civilians in the process. The aim of the punishment campaign was to send a message to Lebanon's leadership that it was ultimately responsible for Hezbollah's actions, and therefore, the country as a whole would pay a great price anytime Hezbollah attacked Israel. In essence, Israel was telling the Lebanese leadership that it must bring Hezbollah to heel.**

**Both elements of this strategy were destined to fail from the start, as many American strategists understood at the time. Trying to disarm Hezbollah from the air was simply not feasible; even with an ample supply of smart bombs, there was no way the Israeli air force was going to eliminate Hezbollah's 10-16,000 rockets and missiles. Most of those weapons were widely dispersed and located in caves, homes, mosques, and other hiding places. Moreover, even if the IDF managed to destroy a large portion of Hezbollah's inventory, Iran and Syria would have sent in replacements. Not surprisingly, it quickly became apparent that airpower was not having the advertised effect, as missiles and rockets continued to reach northern**

Israel on a daily basis. In fact, Hezbollah launched more missiles at Israel on August 13—one day before the ceasefire took effect—than on any other day of the war.

The second element of Israel's strategy—its attempt to punish Lebanon for allowing Hezbollah to operate freely—was also certain to backfire. A wealth of historical evidence and scholarly literature makes clear that inflicting pain on an adversary's civilian population rarely causes a rival government to throw up its hands and surrender to the attacker's demands. On the contrary, the victims usually direct their anger at the attacker and, if anything, they become more supportive of their own government. Indeed, Israel had twice before launched large-scale bombing campaigns against Lebanon—Operation Accountability in 1993 and Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996—and both failed to damage Hezbollah in any meaningful way or undermine its popular support. The IDF got the same outcome in the summer of 2006.

Faced with a failing air war in late July, the Olmert government decided to rectify the problem by sending large numbers of ground troops into Lebanon, claiming that Israel would need a few more weeks to defeat Hezbollah once and for all. But this was another fools' errand. After all, the IDF had fought Hezbollah in Lebanon between 1982 and 2000, and Hezbollah had not only survived, it eventually forced Israel to withdraw in 2000. How was Israel now going to achieve in a few weeks what it could not accomplish in eighteen years? The ground offensive failed to produce decisive results and Israel had no choice but to accept a ceasefire on August 14. Israel, in fact, suffered its highest single day of casualties two days before the ceasefire went into effect.

Israel's actions were not only strategically foolish, but they also violated the laws of war. Amnesty International, for example, concluded in a report a few months after the war ended that: "Israeli forces committed serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including war crimes. In particular, Amnesty

**International has found that Israeli forces carried out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on a large scale.”**

**One might think that I am being unduly harsh on Israel for starting a war that it was doomed to lose, but the Olmert government set up an official commission to study the war – the Winograd Commission – and it reached essentially the same conclusions that I laid out above.**

**For example, it found that Israel’s response reflected “weakness in strategic thinking,” and that Israel’s leaders had “failed to adapt the military way of operations and its goals to the reality on the ground,” and pursued goals that were “not clear and could not be achieved.” Moreover, the Winograd Commission found that, “There were those in the IDF high command, joined by some in the political echelon, who entertained a baseless hope that the capabilities of the air force could prove decisive in the war.”**

**The Winograd Commission was reluctant to delve into charges that Israel violated international law because it saw these issues as “part of a political and propaganda war against the state” of Israel. Nevertheless, it did note that Israel’s extensive use of cluster bombs in southern Lebanon did not conform to international law.**

**This harsh indictment of Israeli policy during the Lebanon war raises the obvious question: what were leaders around the world, especially in the United States, saying about Israel’s policies during its 34-day war in Lebanon? Although hardly anyone challenged Israel’s right to respond to Hezbollah’s raid, or to defend itself, its excessive response was widely condemned around the globe. But, of course, that was not true in the United States.**

**The Bush administration provided Israel with extraordinary diplomatic protection, while Democrats and Republicans legislators competed to show that their party, not the rival one, was Israel’s best friend. One Jewish activist said that he thought that**

“it’s a good thing to have members of Congress outdo their colleagues by showing that their pro-Israeli credentials are stronger than the next guy’s.” The mainstream media also stood firmly behind Israel. The situation was nicely summed up in an article in the British newspaper *The Independent*: “There are two sides to every conflict – unless you rely on the US media for information about the battle in Lebanon. Viewers have been fed a diet of partisan coverage which treats Israel as the good guys and their Hezbollah enemy as the incarnation of evil . . . Not only is there next to no debate, but debate itself is considered unnecessary and suspect.”

America’s overwhelming support for Israel – which was so out of step with the rest of the world – is largely explained by the lobby, which worked overtime from the start to the finish of the war to make sure that America fully backed Israel. Four days after the war began, Nathan Guttman reported in the *Jerusalem Post* that “the American Jewish community has been demonstrating wall-to-wall support for Israel as it fights on two fronts.” The lobby raised money for the Jewish state, took out advertisements in newspapers, closely monitored the media, and sent its representatives to meet with legislators and staff in Congress, policymakers in the Bush administration, and influential media figures.

Key organizations in the lobby have been quite open and candid in discussing their influence on U.S. policy in Lebanon. For example, AIPAC’s president, Howard Friedman, wrote a letter to friends and supporters of his organization on July 30, which he began by saying, “Look what you’ve done!” He then wrote, “only ONE nation in the world came out and flatly declared: Let Israel finish the job. That nation is the United States of America – and the reason it had such a clear, unambiguous view of the situation is YOU and the rest of American Jewry.” It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said during the war: “Thank God we have AIPAC, the greatest supporter and friend we have in the whole world.”

**One might argue that the lobby was not the principal driving force behind US policy, but instead it reflected the views of the American public. This line of argument is not convincing, as numerous polls taken at the time make clear. For example, on the question of who is to blame for starting the conflict, an ABC News-*Washington Post* poll conducted on August 3-6, 2006, found that 46 percent of the respondents said that Israel and Hezbollah were equally to blame. Another 7 percent blamed Israel alone. On whether the United States should support Israel or remain neutral in the conflict, a *USA Today*-Gallup poll conducted on July 21-23, 2006, found that 65 percent of the respondents said that the United States should take “neither side” in the conflict. In short, there was a sizeable gap between how Americans thought about Israel and the second Lebanon war and how their leaders in Washington talked and behaved during that conflict.**

**The lobby surely thought that it was acting in Israel’s best interests during the Lebanon war as it worked to get the United States to back Israel unconditionally. But is that true? Did it make good sense from Israel’s perspective to have the United States act as a cheerleader while it pursued a bankrupt policy in Lebanon? Would it not have been better for Israel if there had been an open discourse here in the US about its conduct of the Lebanon war, where critics were free to make their case? Would it not have been better for Israel if the Bush administration had been better able to exercise independent judgment and put pressure on Israel during the war? I think that the answers to these questions are obvious.**

**Let me now turn to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. It has been the official policy of every US president since 1967 to oppose the building of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. And that includes President George W. Bush, who has made repeated requests to the Israelis to halt settlement building. Yet no president has been able to put meaningful pressure on Israel to stop building settlements, and, in effect, colonizing those territories.**

**Just to show you how serious this problem is, consider what the Israelis did in the Occupied Territories between the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993 and the outbreak of the Second Intifada in September 2000. During that seven-year period, when the Clinton administration was committed to creating a Palestinian state and finally settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israelis confiscated 40,000 acres of Palestinian land, built 250 miles of connector and by-pass roads, doubled the number of settlers, and built 30 new settlements.**

**President Clinton, like his predecessors and his successor, could not use America's considerable leverage to halt this building spree. In fact, the Clinton administration effectively supported Israel's actions in the Occupied Territories by protecting the Jewish state from criticism at the UN, giving Israel more foreign aid than any other country, and giving it unconditionally. Of course, the reason that Clinton and other presidents have been unable to put meaningful pressure on Israel to stop building settlements is the lobby.**

**Nevertheless, Israel's policies in the Occupied Territories are not in America's national interest, which is why every president since Lyndon Johnson has opposed the settlements. Moreover, those policies are not in Israel's interest either. It would have been better for Israel if the United States had long ago pressured Israel to stop building settlements and allow for the creation of a viable Palestinian state. Let me explain.**

**As things now stand, it is hard to see how there can be a meaningful two-state solution. The root of the problem is that Israel controls large portions of the West Bank, and it shows little interest in giving that land to the Palestinians. To be more specific, there is little public support, not to mention elite support in Israel, for the famous "Clinton parameters" of December 2000, which are the only realistic basis for creating a viable Palestinian state. And there is little reason to think that this situation is going to change anytime soon. The United States is certainly not going to put pressure on Israel to leave the West Bank and allow for the creation of a**

**viable Palestinian state. And Israel is likely to continue building roads and settlements on the West Bank, while the US continues to support Israel unconditionally.**

**This discussion raises the obvious question: what does Israel's future look like in the absence of separate Jewish and Palestinian states living side-by-side? Given present circumstances, there are three possible alternatives, all of which involve creating a "greater Israel," which means an Israel that effectively controls both the West Bank and Gaza.**

**In the first scenario, "greater Israel" could become a democratic bi-national state in which both Palestinians and Israeli Jews enjoyed equal political rights. This solution has been suggested by a handful of Jews and a growing number of Palestinians. The practical obstacles to this option are daunting, however, and bi-national states do not have an encouraging track record. Moreover, this option means abandoning the original Zionist vision of a Jewish state, since the Palestinians would eventually outnumber the Jews in greater Israel. There is little reason to think that Israel's Jewish citizens would voluntarily accept this solution, and one can also safely assume that individuals and groups in the lobby would have virtually no interest in this outcome. I might add that Steve Walt and I do not believe it is a feasible or appropriate solution.**

**Second, Israel could expel most of the Palestinians from "greater Israel," thereby preserving its Jewish character through an overt act of ethnic cleansing. Although a few Israeli hardliners have advocated variants on this approach, to do so would be a crime against humanity and no genuine friend of Israel could support such a heinous course of action. It is worth noting that there are almost 5.2 million Palestinians in the lands that would comprise "greater Israel," and they would surely put up fierce resistance if Israel tried to expel them from their homes. If this is what opponents of a two-state solution are advocating, they should say so explicitly. This form of ethnic cleansing would not end the conflict, however; it**

would merely reinforce the Palestinians' desire for vengeance and strengthen those extremists who still reject Israel's right to exist.

The final alternative, which is the most likely, is some form of apartheid, whereby Israel continues to increase its control over the Occupied Territories, but allows the Palestinians to exercise limited autonomy in a set of disconnected and economically crippled statelets. Israelis – and their American supporters – invariably bristle at the comparison to white rule in South Africa, but that is the future they face if they try to incorporate the Occupied Territories into Israel while denying full political rights to an Arab population that will soon outnumber the Jewish population in the entirety of the land. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said as much when he recently proclaimed that if “the two-state solution collapses,” Israel will “face a South-African-style struggle.” He went so far as to argue that, “as soon as that happens, the state of Israel is finished.” Similarly, Israel's vice prime minister said last month that, “the occupation is a threat to the existence of Israel.” Other Israelis, as well as Jimmy Carter and Bishop Desmond Tutu, have warned that continuing the occupation will turn Israel into an apartheid state.

Of course, the apartheid option is not a viable long-term solution either, because it is morally repugnant and because the Palestinians will continue to resist until they get a state of their own. This situation will force Israel to escalate the repressive policies that have already cost it significant blood and treasure, encouraged political corruption, and badly tarnished its global image.

These three possibilities are the only alternatives to a two-state solution, and no one who wishes Israel well should be enthusiastic about any of them. Thus, I ask: would it not have been better for Israel if the United States had long ago pressured Israel to stop building settlements and allow for the creation of a viable Palestinian state? But this did not happen – and it will not happen – because the lobby makes it impossible for American leaders to use the leverage at their disposal to pressure



**Israel. In short, the lobby has pushed policies regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that are in neither America's national interest, nor Israel's.**

**Let me conclude with a brief word about what we think the US-Israel relationship should look like.**

**To start, the US should end its "special relationship" with Israel and treat it as a normal country. The US should treat Israel the same way that it treats other democracies like Britain, France, Germany, and India.**

**In practice, this means that when Israel is acting in ways that are consistent with American interests, Washington should back the Jewish state. But when Israel is acting in ways that harm US interests, Washington should distance itself from Israel and use its considerable leverage to get Israel to change its behavior, just as would do with any other country that was acting in ways that might hurt the United States.**

**Regarding Israel's conflict with the Palestinians, the United States should act as an honest broker. In other words, Washington should pursue an even-handed policy toward the two sides. In particular, the United States should make it clear to Israel that it must abandon the Occupied Territories and allow for the creation of a viable Palestinian state on those lands. Jerusalem should be told that the United States will oppose, not tolerate Israel's colonial expansion in the West Bank.**

**None of this is to say that the US should abandon Israel. On the contrary, the US should defend Israel's right to exist within its pre-1967 borders with some minor modifications. And most importantly, if Israel's survival is threatened, the United States should come to its aid. Thank you and I look forward to your comments and questions.**