

## The Arab Lobby

# The American Component

by Mitchell Bard

“That is the best-organized lobby; you shouldn’t underestimate the grip it has on American politics—no matter whether it’s Republicans or Democrats.”<sup>1</sup> This recent comment by the European Union trade commissioner and former Belgian foreign minister, Karel de Gucht, epitomizes the pervasive belief that a Jewish-Zionist-Israel lobby has undue influence on U.S. Middle East policy.

This idea predates the establishment of the state of Israel. For the most part, the discussion was kept behind closed doors and limited primarily to State Department Arabists, but it gradually became popular among those who held a grudge (such as Congressman Paul Findley, who blamed his defeat in a reelection bid in 1982 on the lobby<sup>2</sup>) or who were open enemies of Israel (e.g., Pat Buchanan).<sup>3</sup> The recent publication of Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer’s *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*,<sup>4</sup> however, gave a patina of academic legitimacy to the long whispered complaints of the anti-Israel establishment.

Walt and Mearsheimer cavalierly dismissed the possibility that U.S. policy might be subject to countervailing influences by those who believe the national interest is best served by distancing the United States from Israel and cultivating ties with the Arab states. They are not alone. Many analysts have ignored or belittled the notion that an Arab lobby exists or has any influence.<sup>5</sup> Yet one need only look at the first year of the Obama administration to reject Walt and Mearsheimer’s case. How can Obama’s solicitous policy toward the Arabs and hostility toward Israel be understood if the Israel lobby is so omnipotent or if pro-Arab forces are nonexistent? While *The Israel*

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1 “Commission Distances Itself from Remarks about Jews,” *The Irish Times* (Dublin), Sept. 4, 2010.

2 Paul Findley, “The Open Secret about the Israel Lobby,” *Counterpunch*, Petrolia, Calif., Oct. 16, 2007.

3 “Pat Buchanan: In His Own Words: On American Jews and the Pro-Israel Lobby,” Anti-Defamation League, Sept. 1999.

4 New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008.

5 See, for example, Khalil M. Marrar, “Lobbying Public Opinion: The Pro-Arab Lobby and the Two-State Solution,” presented at the Annual National Conference of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, Mar. 26-29, 2008; *The Boston Globe*, Aug. 8, 1982; Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, pp. 140-6.

*Lobby* came out before Obama took office, one could as easily look to the hostility displayed toward Israel by the Eisenhower administration after the 1956 Suez War to see the fallacy of the hypothesis.

In reality, the Israel lobby has never had the lobbying playing field to itself. While detractors of Israel see a Zionist behind each

Middle East policy decision, they ignore all those who have been agitating behind the scenes for the adoption of policies favorable to the Arabs or hostile toward Israel. Thus, while Louis Brandeis may have

lobbied Woodrow Wilson for U.S. support for the Balfour declaration, the president's closest advisor, "Colonel" Edward House, vigorously opposed it.<sup>6</sup> Harry Truman's friend Eddie Jacobson asked for the president's support for Israel but his secretary of state, George Marshall, threatened to vote against Truman if he recognized the newly established state.<sup>7</sup> Similar examples can be found in the history of every U.S. administration.

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## WHAT IS THE ARAB LOBBY?

The term "Arab lobby" may be somewhat misleading because it suggests that the principal members are Arabs and that their focus is on the Arab world, but Arab Americans are only a small and mostly ineffective part of the overall lobby. Moreover, while one might think that the Arab lobby would reflect the interests of the various Arab states and the Palestinians, it has historically shown little sustained interest in other Arab countries or issues within those coun-

tries. The lobby does not campaign for human rights or better governance in any of these countries; does not defend women, Christians, or other minorities in Arab states; and does not even try to get aid for Arab governments. The only time any interest is shown in an Arab country is if Israel is involved as was the case in the recent Israel-Lebanon war when the lobby expressed great concern for the people of Lebanon. Prior to the event, the lobby never talked about issues such as the Syrian occupation, Hezbollah's takeover of the organs of government, the undermining of democracy, or the massacres perpetrated by Lebanese factions against each other.

Most lobbies focus predominantly on a single issue—for example, the National Organization of Women on abortion rights and choice, the National Rifle Association on second amendment rights and gun control—but the Arab lobby really has two issues, which occasionally overlap. One is based on oil, is pro-Saudi, and is represented primarily by representatives of that government and corporations with commercial interests in the kingdom, including weapons-related firms. Even before an Israel lobby was organized, an Arab lobby that included American missionaries, State Department Arabists, and small organizations of Arab and non-Arab Americans had evolved to build ties with the Arab world and, following the discovery of oil in the region, to secure access to that resource.

The other issue of concern to the Arab lobby is the Palestinian question, which is the exception to the rule of lack of interest in Arab issues. The Palestinian question is the focus for Arab Americans who do not seem, however, to be working together actively and whose approach is primarily negative, aimed at criticizing Israel in an effort to drive a wedge between the United States and the Jewish state. These groups are backed by Christian anti-Zionists, such as Mennonites, Quakers, and a variety of mainline churches, and occasionally other elements of the lobby, such as State Department Arabists, who argue that the Palestinian issue must be resolved for the sake of U.S.-Arab relations.

One of the most important distinguishing

6 Richard Ned Lebow, "Woodrow Wilson and the Balfour Declaration," *The Journal of Modern History*, Dec., 1968, pp. 501-23.

7 Clark Clifford with Richard Holbrooke, "President Truman's Decision to Recognize Israel," *Jerusalem Viewpoints*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, May 1, 2008.

characteristics of the Arab lobby is that it has no grassroots support. While the Israel lobby has hundreds of thousands of active members, and U.S. public opinion polls consistently reveal a huge gap between support for Israel and the Arab nations or the Palestinians, the Arab lobby has almost no foot soldiers or public sympathy. On the other hand, while the Israel lobby is principally extra-governmental, a significant component of the Arab lobby may be part of the U.S. governing power structure. The Arabists, in particular, have been a force whose actions will remain unknown for decades until the State Department declassifies its correspondence and, even then, it is impossible to know how much of their activity will be kept secret for national security reasons, concealed to avoid embarrassment, destroyed purposely or inadvertently, or simply omitted because historians can only publish a tiny fraction of the correspondence produced each year.

## THE SAUDI FACTOR

The most powerful part of the Arab lobby is represented almost exclusively by Saudi Arabia and the corporate—especially oil companies—and diplomatic interests that view Saudi well-being as paramount to U.S. economic and security concerns. No other Arab state has any representatives with even marginal clout; in fact, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) often is the most effective lobbyist for Israel's diplomatic partners Jordan and Egypt, supporting both governments' requests for aid and at least tacitly



*President Harry Truman (left) meets with Israeli prime minister David Ben Gurion (right) and Abba Eban. Resisting the Arab lobby's pressure, Truman was the first world leader to recognize the newly-established state of Israel in May 1948. When Secretary of Defense James Forrestal reminded him of the importance of Arab oil for U.S. interests, Truman retorted that he would handle the situation in the light of justice, not oil.*

approving U.S. arms transfers.

The Saudis put their own interests first even if these interests are in direct conflict with America's national interests. Saudi Arabia's overriding concern has always been the survival of the House of Saud. Everything else—the weakening of Israel, the spread of radical Islam—is secondary. Since the 1930s, the Saudis have succeeded in convincing Washington that its access to oil would be endangered if the U.S. government did not keep the house of Saud happy. Over the years, the threats from Riyadh have changed. Prior to World War II, the Saudis played on U.S. fears that the British would poach their petroleum concessions; after the war, they used the Cold War to their advantage; today, it is the threat from Iran.

As owners of the largest oil reserves in the world and possessors of vast financial resources, it is easy to understand why the Saudis have had such political clout. The most remarkable aspect of the U.S.-Saudi relationship, however, is that policymakers in Washington

*Ignoring Saudi Arabia's rebuff of his request to support the 1978 Camp David accords—which helped sabotage the best hope for a comprehensive Middle East peace—President Jimmy Carter (second from left, with wife Rosalynn), shown here with King Khalid (center) in Riyadh, January 3, 1978, proceeded to sell the Saudis the most sophisticated fighter plane in the U.S. arsenal.*

have kowtowed to the Saudis from the time of the discovery of oil in the kingdom in 1938 and for roughly forty years afterward even though the United States did not then need their oil for its domestic needs. During this period, as today, it seems never to have occurred to anyone in the State Department to demand that the Saudis cooperate in supporting America's interests in democracy, human rights, or the establishment of a Jewish state in exchange for the U.S. security umbrella. As President Truman's political advisor, Clark Clifford, noted in frustration in 1948, the "Arab states must have oil royalties or go broke ... Their need of the United States is greater than our need of them."<sup>8</sup>

Had the principle been established at the outset when the Saudis were dependent on the United States, the history of the region could have been much different. Instead, Washington has consistently given in to what amounts to Saudi blackmail. Officials working out of the State Department have seemed unfazed by their supposed Saudi allies threatening to turn to America's enemies if they did not receive what they wanted. This was especially ironic during the Cold War when the Saudis portrayed themselves as staunch anti-communists; it was partly on this basis that Washington offered them arms and a security umbrella. At the same time, the Saudis would often threaten to go to the communists if an administration did not meet their demands. The threat became a reality in 1987 when the Saudis, frustrated by congressional scrutiny over arms sales, secretly purchased Chinese missiles.<sup>9</sup> The Reagan administration was infuriated but eventually responded by removing the U.S. ambassador who protested the sale and then offering new weapons to the kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

This illustrates another pattern in the relationship. When Washington does seek the Saudis' help, they refuse. Then, instead of punishing such recalcitrance, Washington rushes to make amends by supplying Riyadh with more weapons. This occurred after the Saudis imposed the October 1973 oil embargo. The Saudis repeatedly rebuffed Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's demand to end this economic warfare and only terminated the embargo in March 1974 after Egyptian president Anwar Sadat convinced King Faisal it had become a liability. The Nixon administration responded a month later with an arms sale.<sup>11</sup>

8 Peter Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), p. 270.

9 Robert Shuey and Shirley A. Kan, "Chinese Missile and Nuclear Proliferation: Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C., Nov. 16, 1995.

10 Robert D. Kaplan, *The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite* (New York: Free Press, 1995), pp. 232-3.

During the Carter administration, the president put his faith in the Saudis to back the Camp David accords, and their failure to do so may have sabotaged the best hope for a comprehensive Middle East peace by ostracizing Egypt and discouraging other Arab states from following in Sadat's footsteps. Jimmy Carter's reaction? Sell the Saudis the most sophisticated fighter plane in the U.S. arsenal.<sup>12</sup> Barack Obama is continuing the pattern: After his personal request for King Abdullah's support for his Arab-Israeli agenda in spring 2009 was unceremoniously rebuffed, the administration announced plans for a new multibillion dollar arms sale in the summer of 2010.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, Washington's support for Israel has never been a central concern of the Saudis. In fact, the record shows that a typical meeting with the king would begin with a request that Washington stop supporting the Jewish state, and then the king would continue with "what we really are concerned about is ..."—referring to whomever the Saudis saw as the most immediate threat to their survival at the time.<sup>14</sup> In the 1940s and early 1950s, it was the Hashemites, whom Abdul Aziz ibn Saud had expelled from the Hijaz, and whose revanchist ambitions he constantly feared. From the mid-1950s to 1967, the Saudis' main concern was Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose quest for pan-Arab hegemony was viewed as destabilizing the conservative Arab regimes. This was followed by fear of the Soviets, and since 1979, by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

At the same time, there is a loud, though

ultimately feigned, interest in the Palestinian issue. The Saudis have been vocal opponents of Zionism but have always refrained from threatening Israel directly, sending only token forces to fight in Arab-Israeli wars. The Saudis have shown their supposed commitment to the Palestinian cause by financially backing other countries as well as terrorist groups such as Hamas in their periodic attempts to "liberate Palestine."<sup>15</sup> Riyadh's disposition toward Israel has less to do with sympathy for the Palestinians than antipathy for Jews and the firm belief that a Jewish state has no place in the midst of the Islamic world. The founder of the dynasty, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, for example, declared, "Our hatred for the Jews dates from God's condemnation of them for their persecution and rejection of Isa [Jesus] and their subsequent rejection of His chosen Prophet [Muhammad]," adding that "for a Muslim to kill a Jew, or for him to be killed by a Jew, ensures him an immediate entry into heaven and into the august presence of God Almighty."<sup>16</sup> Ibn Saud's son, King Faisal, repeated the blood libel of Jews using the blood of non-Jews to make Passover matzos and used to give copies of the anti-Semitic tract *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to his visitors.<sup>17</sup> In 2004, Crown Prince (now king) Abdullah blamed Zionists for an al-Qaeda attack on a Saudi oil facility<sup>18</sup> and, more recently, King Abdullah reportedly told French defense minister Hervé Morin, "There are two countries in the world that do not deserve to exist: Iran and Israel."<sup>19</sup>

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11 *Near East Report*, American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Washington, D.C., Sept. 18, 1974; David Long, *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), p. 55.

12 Steven Emerson, *The American House of Saud* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1985), pp. 174-5.

13 *The Washington Post*, Jan. 31, 2010.

14 See, for example, Parker T. Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 42; The Minister [Childs] in Saudi Arabia to the Secretary of State, Jan. 13, 1948, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (henceforth *FRUS*), vol. V, 1948, p. 209; Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs [Henderson] to the Secretary of State, Jan. 26, 1948, *FRUS*, vol. V, 1948, p. 218; The Minister [Childs] in Saudi Arabia to the Secretary of State, Apr. 24, 1948, *FRUS*, vol. V, 1948, pp. 235-7.

15 Dore Gold, "The Saudi State and Terrorism," Middle East Forum Briefing, Apr. 4, 2003; "Has the Saudi Kingdom Reformed?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2006, pp. 53-62.

16 British Foreign Office, no. 371/20822 E 7201/22/31 in Elie Kedourie, *Islam in the Modern World* (London: Mansell, 1980), pp. 69-72.

17 *Al-Musawwar* (Cairo), Aug. 4, 1972.

18 *MSNBC Nightly News*, July 26, 2004.

19 *Le Figaro* (Paris), June 30, 2010.

The desire to placate the Saudis has led U.S. presidents to overlook the fact that Saudi Arabia is one of the world's worst human rights abusers. Even Carter, who made human rights a centerpiece of his foreign policy, turned a blind eye to Saudi behavior and, after leaving office, became an apologist for the regime; not coincidentally, the Carter Center became a major beneficiary of Saudi donations.<sup>20</sup> The only U.S. president to stand up to the Saudis was John F. Kennedy who demanded that the kingdom put

an end to slavery, which was still being practiced in Arabia in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup> The Saudis complied, albeit temporarily and inconsistently, demonstrating that a determined U.S. president could force changes on the kingdom even if they challenged

**The establishment of Israel did little to dampen the hostility of the Arabists.**

the country's cultural norms. It is remarkable to speculate what the region might have become had U.S. administrations shown more determination in the past.

In the past, the Saudis did much of their lobbying on a personal level, leader to leader. As Saudi Arabia's longtime and highly influential ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar ibn Sultan, candidly explained, "If the reputation ... builds that the Saudis take care of friends when they leave office, you'd be surprised how much better friends you have who are just coming into office."<sup>22</sup>

Despite their efforts, the Saudis remain unloved by the American people. While they expected Israel to be blamed for the crippling effect of the 1973 embargo on the U.S. economy, the public viewed the Saudis as the culprits. Their public image only grew worse when it was discovered that fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 hijack-

ers proved to be Saudis. In a February 2002 Gallup poll, 64 percent of Americans held unfavorable views of the Saudis. Dislike of the kingdom peaked at 66 percent in 2004 and, in 2010, 58 percent still have mostly or very unfavorable opinions of Saudi Arabia.<sup>23</sup> Small wonder that after the 9/11 attacks, the Saudis embarked on a public relations campaign, spending roughly \$100 million to hire lobbyists and PR consultants<sup>24</sup> to convince Americans that they were allies in the war on terror rather than one of the principal sponsors of jihadists. Nor was this a new phenomenon: Saudi attempts to influence future decision makers by propagandizing the education system date back to the late 1960s when they began to invest in American universities, creating chairs, centers, and programs in Arab and Islamic studies to the tune of more than \$130 million (since 1986), including \$20 million contributions to both Harvard and Georgetown in 2005 by Prince Waleed ibn Talal, the king's nephew.<sup>25</sup>

## FOGGY BOTTOM'S MACHINATIONS

Arab states have benefited in the United States from the support of oil companies, defense contractors, and, perhaps most of all, from Arabists within the State Department. This can be seen most readily in the steady antipathy toward the Jewish state expressed by career diplomats at Foggy Bottom.

During the 1930s and 1940s as Washington was beseeched by a growing public outcry to support the aims of the Zionists in Palestine,

23 "Country Ratings," Gallup Poll, Feb. 1-3, 2010.

24 The U.S. Department of Justice Foreign Agents Registration Act lists the following registered on behalf of Saudi interests: Akin, Grump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld, LLP; Boland & Madigan, Inc.; Burson-Marsteller, Cassidy & Associates, Inc.; DNX Partners, LLC; Dutton & Dutton, PC; Fleishman-Hillard; Gallagher Group, LLC; Iler Interests, LP; Loeffler Group, LLP; Loeffler Tuggey Pauerstein Rosenthal, LLP; Loeffler, Jonas & Tuggey, LLP; MPD Consultants, LLP; Patton Boggs, LLP; Powell Tate, Inc.; Qorvis Communications, LLC; Sandler-Innocenzi, Inc.

25 "All Foreign Gifts Report," Department of Education, Washington, D.C., Feb. 13, 2008; *The Washington Post*, Dec. 13, 2005.

20 *NBC News*, July 26, 2004; "Health and Peace Program Donors," Carter Center, Atlanta, Ga., accessed Aug. 31, 2010.

21 Thomas Lippman, "Inside the Mirage: America's Fragile Partnership with Saudi Arabia," *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs*, New York, June 2, 2004.

22 *The Washington Post*, Feb. 11, 2002.

the Arabists at the State Department became vocal opponents. Many believed that America's national interests would be best served by distancing itself from the Jews of Palestine and working closely with the Arab states, disregarding the more objectionable aspects of their internal affairs.

The debate over partition and the recognition of Israel is a case in point. Though often presented as proof of the Jewish lobby's power, the Arabists' failure to prevent the creation of a Jewish state was not for a lack of trying. In a 1947 memo, William Eddy, U.S. representative in Saudi Arabia, warned Secretary of State George Marshall that partition would be an endorsement of a "theocratic sovereign state characteristic of the Dark Ages."<sup>26</sup> Once the majority of the U.N. Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP) proposed the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, Arabists within the administration lobbied to withhold support for the plan. When that failed, they tried to whittle away the borders of the Jewish state by advocating the inclusion of the Negev in the Arab state.<sup>27</sup>

While the State Department complained about Zionist pressures, it rarely mentioned the lobbying by Arab delegations. When the staunchly anti-Jewish British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin complained about U.S. lobbying at the U.N., Marshall, himself hardly sympathetic to the idea of a Jewish state, noted that "the Arabs also had been bringing pressure to bear



*Abdul Aziz ibn Saud (center), founding monarch of Saudi Arabia who laid the foundations of the desert kingdom's influential position in Washington, here with U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt (right), was a religious zealot who believed that "for a Muslim to kill a Jew, or for him to be killed by a Jew, ensures him an immediate entry into heaven."*

everywhere."<sup>28</sup> Loy Henderson, director of the State Department's Office of Near Eastern Affairs, who was to play a prominent role in attempts to sabotage the U.N. partition plan, admitted that "complaints [were] reaching the White House that our delegates in New York were sitting on their hands while the Arabs and their friends were working."<sup>29</sup>

In an effort to weaken the Zionists, in 1947, Henderson proposed an arms embargo to the region that hardly affected the Arabs who were armed and trained by Britain. Once the embargo was written into the U.N. truce resolutions, President Truman could not shift policy without ap-

26 Michael Cohen, "William A. Eddy, the Oil Lobby, and the Palestine Problem," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Jan. 1994, pp. 166-80.

27 Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, Sept. 30, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, vol. V, p. 1167; Memorandum for the File by Mr. Robert M. McClintock, Nov. 19, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, vol. V, p. 1271-2; Frank J. Adler, "Review Essay," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, June 1973, p. 418; Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956), p. 156.

28 British Memorandum of Conversations, Dec. 17, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, vol. V, p. 1313.

29 Richard D. McKinzie "Loy W. Henderson Oral History Interview," Washington, D.C., Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, June 14, July 5, 1973.

pearing to undermine efforts to bring the fighting under control,<sup>30</sup> and thus a clearly pro-Arab policy was implemented. Contrary to those who maintain that an omnipotent Jewish lobby stifled

**Efforts to distance the United States from Israel did not result in any improvement in U.S.-Arab ties.**

any debate in the run-up to the partition resolution and in its wake, a vigorous war of persuasion was raging between the two sides, and the Arab lobby's view did at times prevail. For example, while Truman's advisor Clark Clifford prevented the Arabists from subverting parti-

tion, he failed to convince the president to adopt more proactive policies, such as arming the Jews, creating a volunteer international peacekeeping force, or having the U.N. brand the Arabs as aggressors.<sup>31</sup>

The establishment of Israel, its victory in the 1948 war, and U.S. recognition did little to dampen the hostility of the Arabists, who persistently tried to undo what they viewed as the mistakes of the Truman administration.<sup>32</sup> By way of doing so, they articulated over the years a number of common themes:

- Support for Israel weakens America's ties with the Arab world.
- Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and/or the Palestinian issue are the root of all problems in the Middle East.
- The United States should pursue an "evenhanded" policy, namely, to shift away from support for Israel and give greater support to the Palestinians and Arab states.
- U.S. pressure can change Israeli policy,

and such leverage should be used to force Israel to capitulate to Arab demands.

- The most important U.S. policy objective is to secure the supply of oil, and to do so, the Arabs must be placated.
- Support for Israel allowed the Soviet Union (and, later, Muslim extremists) to gain influence in the region to the detriment of U.S. interests.
- Support for Israel provokes anti-U.S. sentiment among the peoples of the Middle East and is a cause of terror directed at Americans.
- Israelis don't know what is best for them, and Washington needs to save them from themselves by imposing policies that are really aimed at satisfying U.S. interests in the Arab world.<sup>33</sup>

One remarkable aspect of Arabist thinking is its consistent advocacy of policies that have no obvious advantage to U.S. interests apart from placating Saudis or other Arabs. For example, in the wake of the Suez war in 1956, Israel insisted on freedom of navigation in the Red Sea since its blockade by Nasser had been a *casus belli* for the war. Washington supported this position. Saudi King Faisal declared, however, that the Gulf of Aqaba was "one of the sacred areas of Islam," stating he was prepared to defend the area against the Jews, who had allegedly threatened the "approaches to the Holy Places."<sup>34</sup>

The issue was a red herring since only a tiny fraction of Muslim pilgrims came to Saudi Arabia by sea, and Israel did not interfere with their journey. Saudi charges that Israel had been bombarding their territory were blatant fabrications. Still the State Department pressured Is-

30 Shlomo Slonim, "The 1948 American Embargo on Arms to Palestine," *Political Science Quarterly*, Fall 1979, pp. 497-8.

31 Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel [Clifford], Mar. 6, 1948, *FRUS*, vol. V, pp. 687-96.

32 Kaplan, *The Arabists*, p. 7.

33 See, for example, George Ball, "The Middle East: How to Save Israel in Spite of Herself," *Foreign Affairs*, Apr. 1977, pp. 453-63.

34 Memorandum of a Conversation, Feb. 7, 1957, pp. 101-2, editorial note, Arab-Israeli Dispute 1957, *FRUS*, vol. XVII, p. 498.



rael to tie up its warships in Eilat, and Near Eastern Affairs chief William Rountree wanted them removed from the Red Sea altogether. When the Israelis asked if complying with the U.S. request would influence Faisal's attitude toward the Jewish state, Rountree answered that he did not believe it would alter the Saudi position at all but insisted, nonetheless, that Israel's compliance would somehow contribute to regional stability.<sup>35</sup>

During his first year in office President Obama pressured Israel to impose a settlement freeze with the idea that this would lead the Saudis and others to make positive peace gestures and bring the Palestinians to the negotiating table. While officials may have earnestly believed this would work when they first devised the idea, it became quickly obvious the Israeli action would not bring about the expected result. Still, the administration continued to insist that settlements were an obstacle to progress toward peace.

## NOT A ZERO-SUM GAME

Essentially, Arabists in Washington have viewed U.S. Middle East policy as a zero-sum game in which relations between Washington and Jerusalem and with the Arab states are inversely related. The historical record, however, shows just the opposite. Efforts to distance the United States from Israel did not result in any improvement in U.S.-Arab ties whereas the evolution of a de facto U.S.-Israel alliance coincided with the development of better relations with most Arab states.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the best illustration of this can be seen in actions taken by the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration.

Despite President Eisenhower's initial pur-



*Loy Henderson (right), director of the State Department's Office of Near Eastern Affairs and the quintessential "Arabist," pictured here with Jordan's King Hussein (left), March 1959, played a prominent role in the attempt to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state.*

suit of policies toward Israel that were unhelpful at best, such as keeping the Jewish state out of military alliances and opposing arms and aid requests and, later, during the Suez crisis, threatening to take a variety of punitive actions if Israel did not withdraw from the Sinai,<sup>37</sup> relations with much of the Arab world worsened. The Soviets gained a foothold in the region using Egypt as a proxy to weaken U.S. allies in the late 1950s. The Saudis failed to emerge as a reliable counterweight to promote U.S. interests; U.S. (and British) troops were forced to intervene to

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, Apr. 4, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-60, vol. XIII, p. 36-8.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, David Pollock, "Actions, Not Just Attitudes: A New Paradigm for U.S.-Arab Relations," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., June 2010.

<sup>37</sup> President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, Nov. 7, 1956, "Eisenhower Tells Israel to Withdraw from Sinai and Ben-Gurion Responds," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed Sept. 1, 2010.

save pro-Western regimes in Lebanon and Jordan while the pro-Western Iraqi monarchy was overthrown.

By the end of his term, Eisenhower had become disenchanted with the Saudis and concerned with the nationalist and pan-Arabist forces unleashed and stoked by Nasser.<sup>38</sup> Oil companies worried that the Nasserites would push for nationalization of their interests and supported the administration's greater emphasis on propping up anti-communist regimes and leaders. Those within the Arab lobby who advised seeking friends among the revolutionary regimes lost influence.

Israel benefited from this perceptual change since it was no longer seen as an obstacle to U.S. policy. In fact, Israel came to be viewed for the first time as a potential asset after the July 1958 coup that ended Iraq's Hashemite dynasty and the growing threat to the Lebanese and Jordanian regimes by the pan-Arabist forces spear-

headed by Nasser. When Jordan's King Hussein felt threatened by his neighbors, Eisenhower agreed to ship vital strategic materials to the kingdom, including petroleum, as part of a joint Anglo-U.S. airlift. Saudi Arabia refused to allow either country to use its air space and even denied access to the U.S.

airfield in Dhahran; instead, the supplies were flown through Israel, which was happy to cooperate.<sup>39</sup>

This demonstration of Israel's value helped bring about a nearly 180-degree shift in the administration's attitude. This was reflected in a

memorandum submitted on August 19, 1958, to the National Security Council by its planning board:

It is doubtful whether any likely U.S. pressure on Israel would cause Israel to make concessions which would do much to satisfy Arab demands which—in the final analysis—may not be satisfied by anything short of the destruction of Israel. Moreover, if we choose to combat radical Arab nationalism and to hold Persian Gulf oil by force if necessary, then a logical corollary would be to support Israel as the only pro-West power left in the Near East.<sup>40</sup>

Arabist influence continued to diminish with the crisis leading up to the Six-Day War. In June 1967, the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and its Arabist experts were bypassed in favor of the Bureau of International Affairs, run by Joseph Sisco, which took charge of managing the crisis. Ambassador Alfred Atherton recalled,

The impression people had was that this was building up to a life and death struggle for Israel. ... And therefore it was, I guess, viewed as perhaps not politic to have the bureau of the Department which was perceived to be more on the Arab than the Israeli side, running the crisis.<sup>41</sup>

According to Samuel Lewis, a former ambassador to Israel, from the Eisenhower administration through the Johnson years, the dominant view was that Washington's overriding interests were in the Arab world and that Israel was a nuisance. But beginning with Kennedy, presidents became more directly involved in Middle Eastern issues moving into areas that the State Department had hitherto handled. There were now a diversity of voices within the administration, including advocates for Israel. Lewis commented,

**After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the balance of lobbying power began to shift with the gulf Arabs' oil weapon.**

38 Lt. Col. Stephen D. Brown, "The Eisenhower Model of Shared War Powers," National War College, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C., 1993, p. 7.

39 "Factors Affecting U.S. Policy toward the Near East," in Abraham Ben-Zvi, *The Origins of the American-Israeli Alliance: The Jordanian Factor* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 31-53.

40 Ibid.

41 Alfred Leroy Atherton, Jr., Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Summer 1990.

Starting with Lyndon Johnson, every president saw Israel as a military ally—an idea reinforced by the Six-Day War. From 1967 on, an unwritten alliance became more of a reality despite Arabist concerns.<sup>42</sup>

## OILING THE ARAB CAUSE

From President Truman through the end of Nixon's first term, the Arab lobby's influence was exerted almost exclusively through the Arabists, Arab embassies, and the oil companies. Meanwhile the Israel lobby, AIPAC, was at the time basically a one-man show run by Isaiah Kenen, which focused all its attention on Congress in order to counter the State Department's Arabists and to try to secure economic and military assistance for Israel. Following the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, those aid figures began to increase dramatically,<sup>43</sup> but the balance of lobbying power also began to shift with the introduction of the gulf Arabs' oil weapon.

Contrary to the claims of Walt and Mearsheimer,<sup>44</sup> the oil industry has always actively participated in the Arab lobby. James Terry Duce, then vice-president of Aramco operations, for example, met with State Department officials on November 4, 1946, to complain about Truman's support for a Jewish state; he issued dire warnings about the fate of American oil concessions, going so far as to suggest that Aramco might have to "convert itself into a British corporation to save its investment."<sup>45</sup> While the oil companies did express pro-Arab views, they were mostly neutral on Zionism, admitting that King Ibn Saud was more dependent on the United States than the other way around.<sup>46</sup>

Abe Fortas, undersecretary of the interior, told one of the pro-Zionist lobbyists "even the oil companies hardly believe that strong American backing of Zionism would result in a permanent endangering of American interests."<sup>47</sup> Typically, the oil companies lobbied quietly behind the scenes, careful not to leave a paper trail, but they became more visibly active in the Arab lobby in the 1970s and early 1980s under pressure from the Saudis.

Most dramatically, in May 1973, oil executives from Aramco, Standard Oil of California, Texaco, Exxon, and Mobil met in Geneva with King Faisal who warned them that if they did not take measures to inform the public and government officials about America's "true interests" in the Middle East, they would "lose everything."<sup>48</sup> A week later, oil company executives flew to Washington to lobby officials in the White House, State Department, and Pentagon. Their message was simple and unequivocal: If U.S. policy toward Israel did not change, "all American interests in the Arab world will suffer."<sup>49</sup>

When the Arab embargo was subsequently imposed, the oil companies collaborated against their own government by complying with the embargo and cutting even more than the 10 percent the Arabs demanded. They were also encouraged to lobby the U.S. government to support the Arab position by the U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia James Akins. Not surprisingly, Akins was fired by Secretary of State Kissinger<sup>50</sup>

**American public sympathy is overwhelmingly on the side of Israel.**

42 Author's interview with Samuel Lewis, May 22, 2009, Chevy Chase, Md.

43 Jeremy M. Sharp, "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel," Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C., Dec. 4, 2009, p. 19.

44 Walt and Mearsheimer, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 142-6.

45 Cohen, "William A. Eddy, the Oil Lobby, and the Palestine Problem," pp. 166-80.

46 Mitchell G. Bard, *The Water's Edge and Beyond: Defining the Limits to Domestic Influence on United States Middle East Policy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991), pp. 131-2.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

48 Emerson, *The American House of Saud*, pp. 23, 28; Kenneth C. Crowe, *America for Sale* (New York: Anchor Books, 1980), pp. 150-1; Daniel Yergin, *The Prize* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 595-6.

49 Emerson, *The American House of Saud*, p. 30.

50 *The New York Times*, July 24, 2010.

for representing the Saudi kingdom more than the United States government.

## DIVIDED WE STAND

One element within the Arab lobby that can make some claim to advancing U.S. national interests is the defense industry. For roughly half a century, the United States has sold the Saudis weapons that, for the most part, they could not use and did not need. As Ambassador Hume Horan noted, the Saudis believe in a simple relationship:

We get the arms; you get the oil. Your weapons shops keep producing, and at lower unit costs. From time to time we'll denounce *al-Kiyaan al-Sahyouni*, the Zionist entity, but everyone knows we are not a factor in the Arab-Israeli conflict. You ought to leave well enough alone.<sup>51</sup>

The Saudis pay lip service to the Palestinian cause, having provided funding for cam-

**Over the last two decades, American Muslims have had no discernible impact on policy.**

paigns on the Palestinians' behalf within the United States, and have supported some organizations, such as Americans Near East Refugee Aid and the Council on American-Islamic Relations. This domestic Arab lobby, consisting mainly of Arab Ameri-

cans and Muslims, is also comprised of a small number of former government officials, retired Arabists, and anti-Zionist Christians.

This component of the lobby is limited by a number of factors. One is the relative unpopularity of the Palestinian cause. While today most Americans, like most Israelis, support the creation of a Palestinian state, public sympathy is overwhelmingly on the side of Israel (63 percent

in a February 2010 Gallup poll, compared to 15 percent for the Palestinians).<sup>52</sup> A second limiting factor in their influence are the divisions among Arabs and Muslims, which carry over to their expatriates and their descendants in the United States. According to the 2000 U.S. census, 1.2 million Americans were of Arab descent. Unlike the Israel lobby, which can stand up for the strengthening of America's relationship with a single nation, it is difficult, if not impossible for Arab Americans to represent all Arabs because Americans of Arab descent come from no fewer than twenty-one countries with conflicting interests and which are often feuding among themselves. As Jawad George, the executive secretary of the Palestine Congress of North America said, "The same things that divide the Arab world divide the Arab-American world."<sup>53</sup>

For example, there are Arab Americans with a nationalist view who are critical of U.S. policy and supportive of the Palestinian cause as well as those who have a regional or religious orientation making them apathetic or even hostile toward the Arab lobby. Lebanese comprise more than one-third of all Arab Americans,<sup>54</sup> and Christians from Lebanon, in particular, have very different attitudes about Middle East issues than many other Arabs because of their bitter experience with Muslim and Palestinian organizations in Lebanon. Many Maronites, for example, supported the American Lebanese League (ALL), an anti-Palestinian group that believed U.S. policy should take a tougher stand against the Palestine Liberation Organization and Syria.<sup>55</sup>

Since it is so difficult for these domestic groups to agree on what they support, they focus most of their energy on what they are against.

51 Interview with Hume Horan, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Nov. 3, 2000.

52 Lydia Saad, "Support for Israel in U.S. at 63%, Near Record High," Gallup, Princeton, N.J., Feb. 24, 2010.

53 Amy Kaufman Goot and Steven J. Rosen, eds., *The Campaign to Discredit Israel* (Washington, D.C.: AIPAC, 1983), p. 6.

54 2000 U.S. Census, U.S. Census Bureau, Suitland, Md., Apr. 1, 2000.

55 Ernest Nasseph McCarus, *The Development of Arab-American Identity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 81.

Rather than support legislation to help Palestinians or improve the lives of Arabs in the Middle East, their agenda focuses on weakening the U.S.-Israel alliance by reducing aid to Israel or forcing Israel to capitulate to Palestinian demands. American Muslims have become more politically active and used the counterterrorism measures taken after 9/11 as a rallying point for asserting their rights, fighting perceived discrimination, and gaining access to the educational system with the aim of influencing what students are taught about the Middle East and Islam.

Over the last two decades, these domestic groups have had greater success in gaining access to decision makers and the media but have had no discernible impact on policy. Their legislative initiatives are routinely rejected, and even one of their leading spokesmen, Hussein Ibish, admitted that numerous Arab-Muslim organizations have been created, but “none of these organizations are particularly strong or effective representatives of the Arab-American community.”<sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The charge of dual loyalty, a throwback to the longstanding anti-Semitic caricature of Jews as lacking true patriotism, is one that Israel’s enemies have never tired of making against the “Is-



*In May 1973, Saudi King Faisal (left, here with President Nixon and his wife Pat) told the heads of the main U.S. oil companies that unless they informed their public and government about America’s “true interests” in the Middle East, they would “lose everything.” A week later, these executives warned officials in the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon that if U.S. policy toward Israel did not change, “all American interests in the Arab world will suffer.”*

rael lobby” and Jewish Americans more generally.<sup>57</sup> Arab lobbyists have been no exception to this rule. It is far easier, after all, to blame a mythological Jewish cabal for their repeated failure to advance an anti-Israel agenda than to concede that one’s arguments are unpersuasive and have, therefore, been rejected by the majority of Americans. In the final tally, it would seem that most Americans would rather support their longest and most loyal Middle Eastern ally—and the only country in the region that shares their democratic ethos and ideals—than heed organizations that have consistently opposed American values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights or which are linked to nations that have, or are seen to have, undermined U.S. security interests.



<sup>56</sup> Hussein Ibish, lecture, Bahrain Center for Studies and Research, Manama, Oct. 27, 2008.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Stephen M. Walt, “On Dual Loyalty,” *Foreign Policy*, Apr. 2, 2010.