

Reply to Mearsheimer & Walt's "The Israel Lobby"

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by Francisco Gil-White

http://www.hirhome.com/israel/mearsheimer_walt.htm

Just a few days ago, *The Jerusalem Post* carried the headline: “Harvard study: AIPAC leads US to act against own interests.”^[1] This was followed by a headline that read “The Israel conspiracy” in *The Wall Street Journal*, and then “Who’s afraid of the ‘Israel Lobby’?” in *The Los Angeles Times*.^[2] You get the picture.

What is all this noise about?

John Mearsheimer, from the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt, from Harvard University, both political scientists, published a paper with the title, *The Israel Lobby*.^[3] In this paper they claim that “For the past several decades...the centerpiece of US Middle Eastern policy has been its relationship with Israel,” and they characterize the nature of this relationship as one of “unwavering [US] support for Israel.” According to them, “the thrust of US policy in the region derives almost entirely from [US] domestic politics, and especially the activities of the ‘Israel Lobby.’” This so-called ‘Israel Lobby’ has such tremendous power over the US government, say Mearsheimer and Walt, that US foreign policy becomes pro-Israel *to the point of hurting US interests*. They write:

“Other special-interest groups have managed to skew [US] foreign policy, but no lobby has managed to divert it as far from what the [US] national interest would suggest...”

The most important offender in this ‘Israel Lobby,’ the professors explain, is AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee).

But Mearsheimer and Walt are wrong.

I’ll give you one example. Mearsheimer and Walt complain about the US money that yearly goes to Israel, and represent this as evidence of an exaggeratedly and absurdly pro-Israeli US foreign policy.

“Washington has provided Israel with a level of support dwarfing that given to

any other state. It has been the largest annual recipient of direct economic and military assistance since 1976, and is the largest recipient in total since World War Two, to the tune of well over \$140 billion (in 2004 dollars). Israel receives about \$3 billion in direct assistance each year, roughly one-fifth of the foreign aid budget, and worth about \$500 a year for every Israeli. This largesse is especially striking since Israel is now a wealthy industrial state with a per capita income roughly equal to that of South Korea or Spain.”

The professors forget to mention, however, that this money comes at a very high price for the Israelis. Some years ago, the US threatened Israel repeatedly, for a period of 8 months, that it would lose *all* US economic assistance *unless Israel accepted the PLO inside the Jewish state*. The money was badly needed because at the time, Israel was trying to resettle hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the Soviet Union. But the PLO needed this US diplomacy more than Israel needed the money, because the PLO was then a thoroughly defeated organization, in exile, in Tunis, where it would have remained were it not for the singular interest the United States ruling elite takes in this antisemitic, terrorist organization. The crucial bit of US bullying happened in 1991, and you can read about this by clicking on the hyperlink for [1991](#) in the Table of Contents for the following piece:

“IS THE US AN ALLY OF ISRAEL?: A Chronological Look at the Evidence”;
Historical and Investigative Research; by Francisco Gil-White.
<http://www.hirhome.com/israel/ihrally.htm>

1991 is just one example. The piece above covers US foreign policy towards the Jewish people and state for the period beginning in the 1930s and ending with the year 2005. My claim is that perceiving a pattern of *net* US foreign policy favors to Israel is not difficult but impossible. Utterly.

The money that Israel gets from the United States is *precisely the opposite* of what professors Mearsheimer and Walt claim. It is not a symptom of a US government that hurts US interests in order to help Israel; it is, rather, the *payment* with which the US ruling elite has *purchased control* of Israeli foreign policy *in order to hurt Israeli interests*. Such control over Israeli foreign policy requires that Israeli citizens *deeply trust* the US government, and that kind of trust is expensive, so the US ruling elite buys it by sending an enormous amount of money to Israel (though it is really a small amount if you subtract from it the money that the US sends to Israel’s genocidal and antisemitic enemies). With the money to Israel, the US ruling elite

softens Israeli skepticism towards US-sponsored policies such as the Oslo 'Peace' Process, which involved forcing the Israelis, with threats of no more money, to accept as the government over the West Bank and Gaza Arabs an antisemitic and terrorist organization pledged to the destruction of the Jewish state, which organization at the time had already been defeated, and which languished in Tunisian exile, far away from its Israeli targets.

What is the logical consequence?

Well, if the net effect of US foreign policy is *not* pro-Israel, then the alleged 'fact' that professors Mearsheimer and Walt supposedly mean to 'explain' is (in fact) a *non*-fact. But they must know this, because Professor John Mearsheimer occupies an endowed chair at the University of Chicago (the most prestigious university in the world), and Professor Stephen Walt occupies an endowed chair at Harvard University (the second most prestigious university in the world), so they undoubtedly have the skills to document something that is trivial to document: that US foreign policy has been markedly anti-Israel.

But guess what *else* is trivial to document? This: that what professors Mearsheimer and Walt call the 'Israel lobby' (most people call it the 'Jewish lobby') does not even *try* to produce pro-Israeli US foreign policy. On the contrary, it tries hard, amazingly but obviously, to produce *pro-PLO* US foreign policy, and then it loudly applauds it. This would include Mearsheimer and Walt's special bogeyman: AIPAC.

To see that this is true, it will suffice to examine the documentation in just two HIR pieces:

1) This piece documents AIPAC's pro-PLO stance:

<http://www.hirhome.com/israel/aipac.htm>

2) This other piece documents the anti-Israel activities of a broad spectrum of the so-called 'Jewish lobby':

<http://www.hirhome.com/israel/leaders2.htm>

What is the logical consequence?

Well, that the thing which professors Mearsheimer and Walt invoke in order to 'explain' their non-fact -- an 'Israel lobby' pushing for pro-Israeli US foreign policy -- does not exist.

I think losing *either* the thing one was going to explain, *or* the proposed cause, ought to be considered fatal for any theory. Mearsheimer and Walt are missing both. So unless somebody can find problems with the documentation or the logic in the above pieces (and professors Mearsheimer and Walt are invited to try), then professors Mearsheimer and Walt stand refuted.

But I would like to add something.

If Mearsheimer and Walt's 'Israel lobby' controlling the US government to hurt US interests *reminds* you of how the Nazis accused 'the Jews' of controlling in secret the US government (and other Western governments) to hurt non-Jews, there is a good reason for this: Mearsheimer & Walt's accusation *should* remind you.

It was a slander then, and it is a slander now. It was dangerous then, and it is dangerous now. If you would like to understand the forces behind such accusations better, the following HIR piece provides the broad historical context, documenting also the manner in which these sorts of accusations are mobilized these days.

“THE MODERN ‘PROTOCOLS OF ZION’: How the mass media now promotes the same lies that caused the death of more than 5 million Jews in WWII”; Historical and Investigative Research; 25 August 2005; by Francisco Gil-White

<http://www.hirhome.com/israel/mprot1.htm>

Full disclosure

Before I went to UCLA to obtain my Ph.D. in biological and cultural anthropology (which I earned in January 2002), I got a master's degree in the social (and biological) sciences from the University of Chicago. While there I took a course with professor Stephen Walt, who was then a full decade younger, and teaching at the most prestigious university in the world, not the second most prestigious. He was an engaging lecturer and I very much enjoyed his class. I did not, however, enjoy getting *an F* on my do-at-home-essay midterm exam. But I fully deserved my F, I hate to admit. Without any regard for the content of the course, I had gone off on a tangent of mine and I had theorized liberally and extravagantly with zero documented facts. Professor Walt extended a special invitation for me to meet with

him in his office so that he could give me a thorough scolding, and everything he said about my paper was true: it was trash. I did not turn confrontational, but conceded my error, pleaded for leniency, and promised to conduct myself like a good student and scholar in the final exam. Professor Walt seemed impressed by my act of contrition and promised that I could still get a good grade for the course if I did very well on the final. I got an A- on the final and landed a B for my course grade, after which I made a special trip to Professor Walt's office to thank him for giving me an opportunity to recoup my grade. "Congratulations on recouping!" was his gracious and friendly reply.

I think Professor Stephen Walt was fair to me, and I learned an important lesson that *stuck*. I never approached another assignment with less than complete seriousness and scholarship, and my University of Chicago master's thesis, I am proud to say, went on to win a prize.[4] Since I am indebted to Professor Walt, I would now like to extend the same courtesy to him. If Professor Walt, after finally doing some actual social science, publicly retracts himself in a manner and venue comparable to the manner and venue in which he made his absurd claims about the so-called 'Israel lobby,' moreover providing the public with a full explanation of how he came to make such absurd claims, I will publish a special recognition that he has done so. This is Professor Stephen Walt's chance to recoup the F which his paper with Professor John Mearsheimer richly deserves, a grade that I would give Stephen Walt if he were a student of mine at the University of Pennsylvania, and that he would give himself if he were still upholding the standards of scholarship that he rightly applied to me.

Footnotes and Further Reading

[1] Harvard study: AIPAC leads US to act against own interests, The Jerusalem Post, March 19, 2006, Sunday, NEWS; Pg. 2, 574 words, Nathan Guttman Jerusalem Post Correspondent

[2] THE ISRAEL CONSPIRACY, Information Bank Abstracts, WALL STREET JOURNAL ABSTRACTS, March 25, 2006, Saturday, Section A; Page 8, Column 1, 81 words, BY BRET STEPHENS

Who's afraid of the 'Israel Lobby'?, Los Angeles Times, March 26, 2006 Sunday, Home Edition, CURRENT; Editorial Pages Desk; Part M; Pg. 3, 1169 words, Nicholas Goldberg, NICHOLAS GOLDBERG is editor of the Op-Ed page and the

Current section.

[3] London Review of Books | Vol. 28 No. 6 dated 23 March 2006 | John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt | The Israel Lobby

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/mear01.html>

[4] 1996 EARL S. & ESTHER JOHNSON PRIZE. University of Chicago (\$1000), for my MA Thesis: The use of biology: A general defense of the evolutionary approach to human behavior. It is “awarded annually to that student in the Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences whose paper best combines high scholarly achievement with concern for humanistic aspirations and the practical applications of the Social Sciences.”

http://mapss.uchicago.edu/about_mapss/johnson_prize.shtml

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<http://www.hirhome.com/academic.htm>

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"In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act." -- George Orwell

"Life is either a daring adventure, or it is nothing." -- Helen Keller

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