

fighting words**Overstating Jewish Power**

Mearsheimer and Walt give too much credit to the Israeli lobby.

By Christopher Hitchens

Posted Monday, March 27, 2006, at 1:47 PM ET

It's slightly hard to understand the fuss generated by the [article on the Israeli lobby](#) produced by the joint labors of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt that was published in the *London Review of Books*. My guess is that the Harvard logo has something to do with it, but then I don't understand why the doings of that campus get so much media attention, either.

The essay itself, mostly a very average "realist" and centrist critique of the influence of Israel, contains much that is true and a little that is original. But what is original is not true and what is true is not original.

Everybody knows that the [American Israel Public Affairs Committee](#) and other Jewish organizations exert a vast influence over Middle East policy, especially on Capitol Hill. The influence is not as total, perhaps, as that exerted by Cuban exiles over Cuba policy, but it is an impressive demonstration of strength by an ethnic minority. Almost everybody also concedes that the Israeli occupation has been a moral and political catastrophe and has implicated the United States in a sordid and costly morass. I would have gone further than Mearsheimer and Walt and pointed up the role of Israel in supporting apartheid in South Africa, in providing arms and training for dictators in Congo and Guatemala, and helping reactionary circles in America do their dirty work—most notably during the Iran-Contra assault on the Constitution and in the emergence of the alliance between Likud and the Christian right. Counterarguments concerning Israel's help in the Cold War and in the region do not really outweigh these points.

However, Mearsheimer and Walt present the situation as one where the Jewish tail wags the American dog, and where the United States has gone to war in Iraq to gratify Ariel Sharon, and where the alliance between the two countries has brought down on us the wrath of Osama Bin Laden. This is partly misleading and partly creepy. If the Jewish stranglehold on policy has been so absolute since the days of Harry Truman, then what was Gen. Eisenhower thinking when, on the eve of an election 50 years ago, he peremptorily ordered Ben Gurion out of Sinai and Gaza on pain of canceling the sale of Israeli bonds? On the next occasion when Israel went to war with its neighbors, 11 years later, President Lyndon Johnson was much more lenient, but a strong motive of his policy (undetermined by Israel) was to win Jewish support for the war the "realists" were then waging in Vietnam. (He didn't get the support, except from Rabbi Meir Kahane.)

If it is Israel that decides on the deployment of American force, it seems odd that the first President Bush had to order them to stay out of the coalition to free Kuwait, and it is even more odd that the first order of neocon business has not been an attack on Iran, as Israeli hawks have been urging. Mearsheimer and Walt are especially weak on this point: They speak darkly about neocon and Israeli maneuvers in respect to Tehran today, but they entirely fail to explain why the main initiative against the mullahs has come from the European Union and the International Atomic Energy Authority, two organizations where the voice of the Jewish lobby is, to say the least, distinctly muted. Their theory does nothing to explain why it was French President Jacques Chirac who took the lead in isolating the death-squad regime of Assad's Syria (a government that Mearsheimer and Walt regard, for reasons of

their own, as a force for stability).

As for the idea that Israel is the root cause of the emergence of al-Qaida: Where have these two gentlemen been? Bin Laden's gang emerged from a whole series of tough and reactionary battles in Central and Eastern Asia, from the war for a separate Muslim state in the Philippines to the fighting in Kashmir, the Uighur territories in China, and of course Afghanistan. There are hardly any Palestinians in its ranks, and its communiqués have been notable for how little they say about the Palestinian struggle. Bin Laden does not favor a Palestinian state; he simply regards the whole area of the former British Mandate as a part of the future caliphate. The right of the Palestinians to a state is a just demand *in its own right*, but anyone who imagines that its emergence would appease—or would have appeased—the forces of jihad is quite simply a fool. Is al-Qaida fomenting civil war in Nigeria or demanding the return of East Timor to Indonesia because its heart bleeds for the West Bank?

For purposes of contrast, let us look at two other regional allies of the United States. Both Turkey and Pakistan have been joined to the Pentagon hip since approximately the time of the emergence of the state of Israel, which coincided with the [Truman Doctrine](#). Pakistan was, like Israel, cleaved from a former British territory. Since that time, both states have carried out appalling internal repression and even more appalling external aggression. Pakistan attempted a genocide in Bangladesh, with the support of Nixon and Kissinger, in 1971. It imposed the Taliban as its client in a quasi-occupation of Afghanistan. It continues to arm and train Bin Ladenists to infiltrate Indian-held Kashmir, and its promiscuity with nuclear materials exceeds anything Israel has tried with its stockpile at Dimona. Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974 and continues in illegal occupation of the northern third of the island, which has been forcibly cleansed of its Greek inhabitants. It continues to lie about its massacre of the Armenians. U.N. resolutions have had no impact on these instances of state terror and illegality in which the United States is also partially implicated.

But here's the thing: There is no Turkish or Pakistani ethnic "lobby" in America. And here's the other thing: There is no call for "disinvestment" in Turkey or Pakistan. We are not incessantly told that with these two friends we are partners in crime. Perhaps the Greek Cypriots and Indians are in error in refusing to fly civilian aircraft into skyscrapers. *That* might get the attention of the "realists." Or perhaps the affairs of two states, one secular Muslim and one created specifically in the name of Islam, do not possess the eternal fascination that attaches to the Jewish question.

There has been some disquiet expressed about Mearsheimer and Walt's over-fondness for Jewish name-dropping: their reiteration of the names Wolfowitz, Perle, Feith, etc., as the neocon inner circle. Well, it would be stupid not to notice that a group of high-energy Jews has been playing a role in our foreign-policy debate for some time. The first occasion on which it had any significant influence (because, despite its tentacular influence, it lost the argument over removing Saddam Hussein in 1991) was in pressing the Clinton administration to intervene in Bosnia and Kosovo. These are the territories of Europe's oldest and largest Muslim minorities; they are oil-free and they do not in the least involve the state interest of Israel. Indeed, Sharon publicly opposed the intervention. One could not explain any of this from Mearsheimer and Walt's rhetoric about "the lobby."

Mearsheimer and Walt belong to that vapid school that essentially wishes that the war with jihadism had never started. Their wish is father to the thought that there must be some way, short of a fight, to get around this confrontation. Wishfulness has led them to seriously mischaracterize the origins of the problem and to produce an article that is redeemed from complete dullness and mediocrity only by being slightly but unmistakably smelly.

Christopher Hitchens is a columnist for Vanity Fair. His most recent book is [Thomas Jefferson: Author of America](#). His most recent collection of essays is titled [Love, Poverty, and War](#).

Article URL: <http://www.slate.com/id/2138741/>

Copyright 2006 Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive Co. LLC