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Stephen Walt's War with Israel

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Harvard Professor Stephen Walt and University of Chicago Professor John Mearsheimer have just published a lengthy diatribe against what they call the "Israel lobby." Their [article](#) appeared in the *London Review of Books*, and a longer version has been released as a Harvard Kennedy School working paper. The two professors are employed by prestigious universities. But their new paper, a collection of innuendo, half truths, and outright [misrepresentations](#), fails the test of academic integrity and honest research.

It is a work without a trace of balance, in essence no more than an angry polemic disguised as academic research. "The Israel Lobby" is a long, bitter, op-ed piece given a patina of respectability because of where the authors are employed. They may feel themselves protected from criticism by tenure and their titles. They live and work in the proverbial ivory towers of an academic environment that has become an Arab-subsidized lobby against Israel.

Walt and Mearsheimer have an axe to grind. They don't much care for Israel, and they resent the power of those whom they believe have influenced American policymakers to support Israel in its long conflict with some of the Arab states and the Palestinians. The authors do pay lip service to defending Israel's right to exist. But their attacks on Israel fail every basic test of fairness, and lead one to believe they would prefer a world without Israel.

One blatant example of this concerns Israel's role in the 1991 Gulf War. The authors condemn Israel, though it did exactly what the US asked, by electing not to enter the war despite absorbing Iraqi scud missile attacks that killed and wounded hundreds of Israelis.* Israel's crime, according to the authors, was the placement of Patriot batteries in the country to defend against the scuds. The Patriots, of course, were a failure, and given the American instructions for Israel to stay out of the war, were a minimum contribution by the US to Israel's self-defense.

But the real problem for Walt and Mearsheimer would seem to be Israel's existence at the time of the conflict. If it were not there, the US could have ignored it. And were Israel gone, the US could focus on what Walt and Mearsheimer have [elsewhere](#) argued should be the real strategic goal of our policy in the Middle East: securing a continuing source of cheap oil from the region.

This so-called "realist" school of foreign policy claptrap is comfortable with brutal Arab regimes, so long as the oil keeps coming. Saudi Arabia is an important ally for Walt and Mearsheimer because it supplies oil, regardless of whether its oil earnings fund the madrassas around the world that breed new generations of Muslim fanatics committed to destroying America; and regardless of the nature of its regime, and its treatment of minorities, women, gays, and Christians.

Syria and Iran

Israel is held to a standard of perfection (which of course it fails) in "Walt's World" while thuggish terror-supporting states such as Iran and Syria are presented as potential important allies of America, and are insulated from *any* criticism by the professors. Israel is demonized by the authors; the surrounding dictatorships, who have sent terrorists to our shores and who are killing our soldiers now, are sanctified.

The professors' attempt to promote the good deeds of Syria in the war on terror is particularly laughable. Syria has opened its border to virtually every jihadist willing to kill Americans in Iraq. It has attempted to undermine

every serious peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, or between Israel and its other neighbors since Israel's founding. Syria occupied Lebanon for over 15 years, has treated terrorist groups as proxies for Syria, has been implicated in the assassination of the leader of Lebanon, and has openly served as a conduit for over 10,000 missiles delivered to Hezbollah terrorists in Southern Lebanon – who seemingly run their own Islamic terror state within a state.

The professors also cavalierly argue that an Iranian nuclear capability is no threat to America. These “experts” seem to be unaware that Iran has consistently been ranked as the number one terror state in the world by our State Department (a charge they would probably discount since in their delusional world, the Jews control even the famously anti-Israel State Department). But Shiite Iran, with missiles purchased from North Korea, can reach many of the Sunni Arab states that the authors argue are America's real allies in the region, and also Europe.

Are the professors unaware of the thousand year rivalry between the Shiites and Sunnis in the Islamic world? Are Europe and the Arab states not areas of strategic interest for America? During his presidency, Jimmy Carter enunciated what later became known as the Carter Doctrine: an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf Region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

Jimmy Carter, and his National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski have always been considered two of the most anti-Israel national figures. The Carter Doctrine was not about protecting Israel. The Sunni nations around what they consider the “Arab Gulf” would feel threatened by Iranian hegemony in the region – as we all should be. An Iran in possession of nuclear arms would be in a position to greatly threaten the region and probably lead to a nuclear arms race in the most unstable region in the world. The current need to restrain Iran has nothing to do with Israel. It has everything to do with America and its role as the defender of the West. Are nuclear weapons in the hands of a fanatic Islamist state, committed to the destruction of America and the infidel states of Western Europe, something to be shrugged off?

The Role of AIPAC

Walt and Mearsheimer aim most of their fire at the supposed power of AIPAC, the America Israel Public Affairs Committee. The authors express powerful frustration in their inability to turn America against Israel. Their anger with Israel and the pro-Israel lobby lead them to indulge in some of the kinds of malicious attacks and charges that are routinely found on neo-Nazi websites where the “all-powerful Jews” are blamed for everything that is wrong with the world. They avoid telltale phrases, but the underlying arguments betray the same logic. For instance, the authors succumb to claiming that “AIPAC, a de facto agent for a foreign government, has a stranglehold on Congress.” The Congress, in other words, is Israeli-controlled territory. The neo-Nazis have coined a slogan for this charge: they call Congress part of the Zionist Occupation Government, or ZOG. Evidence of the authors' political [bedfellows](#) is the ringing endorsement of the Walt/Mearsheimer document by Ku Klux Klansman David Duke who called it “[vindication](#).” Harvard and University of Chicago professors are now swimming, or at least sticking their toes, in that fetid swamp.

The authors decry AIPAC's power but acknowledge that what AIPAC does, is perfectly legitimate.

“The US form of government offers activists many ways of influencing the policy process. Interest groups can lobby elected representatives and members of the executive branch, make campaign contributions, vote in elections, try to mould public opinion etc. They enjoy a disproportionate amount of influence when they are committed to an issue to which the bulk of the population is indifferent. Policymakers will tend to accommodate those who care about the issue, even if their numbers are small, confident that the rest of the population will not penalize them for doing so.

“In its basic operations, the Israel Lobby is no different from the farm lobby, steel or textile workers’

unions, or other ethnic lobbies. There is nothing improper about American Jews and their Christian allies attempting to sway US policy. The Lobby's activities are not a conspiracy of the sort depicted in tracts like the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. For the most part, the individuals and groups that comprise it are only doing what other special interest groups do, but doing it very much better. By contrast, pro-Arab interest groups, in so far as they exist at all, are weak, which makes the Israel Lobby's task even easier."

Of course, the authors denounce anti-Semitism, attempting to inoculate themselves from accusations that they harbor such views themselves by arguing that all critics of Israel have to face such charges. That argument is ludicrous. Israel's media is dominated by critics of Israeli policies in the territories, who have been political foes of every Likud-run government in the last quarter century. The authors themselves often rely on criticism coming from Israelis and within the Israeli government to disparage Israel. It is indeed odd that the authors don't at least acknowledge one of the many contradictions within their paper: Israel is demonized at every turn, yet it is the only nation in the entire region that allows such criticism to come from within the government and from its own citizens (including Israeli Arabs). No other government or nation that surrounds it would allow such freedom to criticize the regime.

One would think that that might be at least acknowledged by the authors as a mark in Israel's favor. But such fairness can not be found in a paper that is really just a hit job.

The authors argue that AIPAC has been little more than a Likud Party mouthpiece. This charge is also ridiculous, and if either of the authors had ever deigned to attend an AIPAC policy conference, they would be well aware of the vigorous policy debate that always goes on, and the range of views on Middle East policy that are represented within the organization, whether the topic be Iraq, Iran, the peace process or the territories.

American Support for Israel

The authors' frustration level must be greater today than when their article was first poison-penned. Recent surveys by the Gallup organization reveal that American support for Israel is at near record levels. Approximately four times as many Americans support Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians as support the Palestinian side. The victory by the terrorist group Hamas in the recent Palestinian elections, the refusal by Hamas to backtrack on any of the organization's guiding principles since that victory (including a commitment to the destruction of Israel), the wild statements by Iran's new president denying the holocaust while threatening a new one with Iran's soon-to-be-completed nuclear program, have all hardened the views of most Americans as to what is obvious about this region: who America's friends are, and who our enemies are.

Iran has spoken publicly of destroying America, not just Israel. That was bin Laden's message well before 9/11, and his public statements about Israel are a late addition to his anti-Western vitriol. It is not AIPAC, nor the pro-Israel lobby that has made most Americans wary of Islamic radicalism, and terror supporting states. It was not an Israeli student who attempted to mass murder students at the University of North Carolina by running them over.

The Palestinians have now graduated from merely harboring terrorists on the loose, and with a wink and a nod sanctioning their heinous suicide attacks, to giving the reins of power to these same murderers. Americans saw the Palestinians partying in Ramallah celebrating the attacks on 9/11, and the same death cult worship of martyrdom with every successful terror attack against Israel. If the Congress is pro-Israel, it is because Americans are pro-Israel. If Americans are unsympathetic to the Palestinian cause, it is because they regard it as self-destructive for always choosing the path of violence over constructive negotiations, and are uncomfortable with its celebration of anti-Americanism.

Perhaps the American public is more aware of the facts than these two experts.

Fact: Muslims are committing terror in the Sudan, in India, In England, in Nigeria, in Somalia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, France, Algeria, Morocco, Russia...need we continue? These countries

will never be mistaken for supporters of Israel.

Fact: America has supported Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo and protected them from genocide, has liberated millions of Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq, has provided vast material support to Muslims suffering from natural disasters (the tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake), and has worked to support the founding of a Palestinian state.

The crux of the problem is not American support for Israel. The crux of the problem is that the Muslim world is beset by a variety of divisions and conflicts that have nothing to do with the Palestinians. The Arab world is deeply dysfunctional and a clash of civilizations does seem to be occurring.

Another item Walt and Mearsheimer pass over: the ideological symbol for the extremists in the Arab World is [Sayyid Qutb](#). He was an Egyptian writer who attended a small college in Colorado in the 1950s. He came back from his American sojourn with a vile hatred of the West and America in particular. Gender equality (relative to the Arab world), capitalism, free speech, consumerism, American culture – all were facets of America he hated. His view was that America must be destroyed for what it was, not for what it did. America was not a strong supporter of Israel during the 1950s: the Israeli Air Force flew French fighters because America would not supply it. He was executed for treason by the Egyptian dictator Nasser in 1966, but his views have lived on with even greater power. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian doctor jailed for his role in the murder of Sadat, is an ideological heir of Qutb, as is his partner-in-terror Osama Bin Laden.

If the Arab world cared so much for the plight of the Palestinians, why have they all (except for Jordan) denied them rights to citizenship? Or the right to own property? Why did Kuwait force 300,000 Palestinians out of their nation after Saddam's army was forced out of their nation in the first Gulf War in 1991? Why are Filipinos and Indians given hundreds of thousands of jobs in the Gulf nations while Palestinians languish in camps? Indeed, why do Arab nations continue to keep them penned up in refugee camps instead of resettling them (as Israel re-settled the 600,000 Jews forced out of Arab lands after the founding of Israel in 1948)?

Why do Arab nations routinely fail to deliver on their pledges of aid to the Palestinians – except for money meant to support the killing of Israelis? That last point gives a clue: the Arab nations prefer to keep Palestinians impoverished and radicalized – all the better to destroy Israel. To not even mention any of these facts, is to reveal that the authors have violated the principles of academic scholarship, which demand that facts be portrayed in an objective, non-biased manner. This paper is a hatchet job, with the hatchet falling on Israel and American Jews.

Israeli Peace Efforts

The authors repeat the lie that Ehud Barak offered nothing but South African-style bantustans to the Palestinians at Camp David. In a separate [statement](#) Walt and Mearsheimer have called for a return to the Taba approach (the January 2001 discussions between Barak, Arafat and former President Clinton). But the Taba approach differed very little from what was discussed at Camp David. Certainly the Palestinians did not need to create an intifada, and the suffering it has caused on both sides, to move the negotiating process forward.

The authors condemn former Prime Minister Sharon's re-occupation of some West Bank cities in 2002, though they say nothing about the suicide attack murders of 130 Israelis in the month preceding Sharon's move. On an American scale, given Israel's small population, 130 deaths is the equivalent of more than two World Trade Center attacks. Israel did not start the intifada, but tried to end it. The building of a separation barrier designed to keep suicide killers out, the disengagement from Gaza and a few West Bank settlements and the promise of further pullbacks, are all part of a plan designed to separate the warring parties, and insure Israel's security. Americans would demand no less of our government if we were subject to dozens of daily terror threats and attacks.

The authors also claim that Palestinian terror attacks are caused by the Israeli occupation. Are the authors unaware of the terror attack against Israel or Jewish settlers in the 50 years before the 1967 war? The PLO was

founded in 1964. Fatah attacks occurred with regularity from 1948 on.

Walt and Mearscheimer claim that Israel has rejected overtures to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This is either a deliberate fabrication or academic failure of the highest and ugliest order.

The authors deliberately choose to send down the “memory hole” the Israeli offers of peace after the 1967 war. These offers were roundly and proudly rejected by the Arab world in the infamous “3 Nos” of the [Khartoum Resolution](#): No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, No negotiations with Israel. The fact that the authors fail to mention this stance (and the past 30 year history of Muslim rejection of Israel’s right to Israel exist, let alone gloating over the upcoming genocide of the Jews of Israel) is an indication that they have suspended the prime principle of academic scholarship: an honest and comprehensive view of all the facts, including those that weaken one’s own argument. The authors seem to set aside these age-old scholarly principles to indulge in the writing of a screed that is best described as agitprop.

Certainly individual Israeli policies can be legitimately criticized by Americans, whether journalists, government officials, or academics. As mentioned already, Israeli policies are routinely savaged in the Israeli media. No less a foe of Israel than Ali Abunimah, the creator of the electronic intifada website, has stated that the Israeli press is far more willing to publish his denunciations of Israel than the Arab press. But to believe Walt and Mearsheimer, the Arab and Palestinian side of the debate gets no hearing in this country. The authors point to the fact that Israeli studies chairs are popping up on some campuses, and that some well known columnists routinely support Israel. The authors attempt to de-legitimize this support for Israel in this country by making a dual allegiance charge, much as they attempt to de-legitimize Israel throughout their article.

Arab Lobbying Efforts in America

The authors pretend there is no effective counterweight on the Palestinian or Arab side to this pro-Israel juggernaut. They ignore the proliferation of stridently anti-Israel Middle East studies centers on campuses across the country, which receive funding from the Gulf states and wealthy Arab donors. Professor Walt’s own university recently received a \$20 million gift from a Saudi prince for a new Islamic studies program. Georgetown University received a similar gift from the same donor. Perhaps to show its appreciation, Georgetown decided not to allow an anti-terrorism conference to take place at a hotel on its campus, but helped sponsor and promote a Palestinian solidarity conference, replete with calls for Israel’s destruction by various speakers. The Saudis have spoken openly of how they can influence officials of the State Department and the intelligence community while they are employed by the American government, with the knowledge that when their government careers are over, they can be set up with far more lucrative arrangements at Middle East studies centers, or lobbying groups or public relations firms that promote the Saudi line.

The former Saudi Ambassador, Prince Bander bin Sultan, openly [boasted](#) of his [success](#) in [cultivating](#) powerful Americans.

“If the reputation then builds that the Saudis take care of friends when they leave office, you would be surprised how much better friends you have who are just coming into office.”

The list of ex-office holders who propagate pro-Saudi spin is a long and disgraceful one. Hume Horan is an ex-Ambassador to Saudi Arabia who is a noble exception to the rule. He says this of his former colleagues who are now on the Saudi dole:

“There have been some people who really do go on the Saudi payroll and work as advisors and consultants. Prince Bandar is very good about massaging and promoting relationships like that.”

The authors try to minimize the pro-Arab lobbying effort in America, and create the Goliath of Israel in its path. But Saudi money, which is much more substantial than that of the pro-Israel lobby, is very much at work, very often against American interests, in a variety of ways: radicalizing prison clerics, and mosque imams, setting up

Wahhabist schools, lobbying Congress against energy independence, and supporting academic chairs and policy centers that hire professors who routinely bash American policies and America itself.

The authors roundly condemn any and all efforts by supporters of Israel in America to make their voices heard. Christian support for Israel is criticized, despite the fact that Israel is the only country in the region that has allowed Christians complete freedom to practice their religion and has protected all Christian religious sites. It seems to have escaped the authors' notice that there has been a mass exodus of Christians from throughout the region (particularly in Palestinian-controlled areas), that any religion other than Wahhabbi Islam is banned or severely restricted in Saudi Arabia, that Christian Copts are persecuted in Egypt. It is no surprise that Christians in America see Judeo-Christian civilization under threat and would support a lone outpost of such civilization in the place where Judeo-Christian civilization was born.

Jewish American support for Israel is likewise castigated. The authors resent Jewish citizens who contribute to universities, Jewish critics of the media, Jewish supporters of think tanks, and, finally it seems, Jewish people in government. However, they seem to have no concern for or even acknowledge the magnitude of FOREIGN (Arab) donations, given by dictators who steal their own people's wealth to support hate and terror around the world, raining money down on think tanks, colleges, and media outlets in America.

On the latter issue, the same Saudi Prince who gave \$20 million to Harvard [bragged](#) of his recent 5% purchase of News Corporation stock giving him the power to influence news reporting. This is a worrisome development, for he also owned a 30% stake in an Arab TV network, ART TV, that spews forth anti-Semitism and [anti-Western agitprop](#). Foreign money, as long as it is anti-Israel, is worth its weight in gold (or oil). Jewish Americans who support universities are somehow tainted in their worldview. Do these authors seem to support an America that would strip Jews of their right to support charities, voice their opinions, or work in government or other influential positions? Have these scholars ever heard of Nazi Germany?

The authors also contend that there is a "dwindling moral case" for Israel. To prove this point, they pull statements out of context to discredit Israel. Indeed, one of the most distressing instances of their lack of objectivity and proof of their bias is the devotion they show in scraping together every bit of innuendo, biased research, quotes out of context, and use of suspect sources, while completely ignoring even the most basic facts of the conflict, available to anyone with more than a passing interest in the topic, let alone professors who hold themselves out as "experts." They fail, for instance, to address some simple facts: Israeli Arabs enjoy not just the right to vote, but the highest standard of living in the region of any Muslim individuals (except for the unusual cases of tiny Gulf states), and until the outbreak of terrorism, the West Bank residents had benefited from a very strong and healthy symbiotic economic relationship with the Israelis. Their own economy boomed along with Israel's, and indices of educational and health benefits had soared from pre-1967 levels.

The Iraq War Slur

The Iraq war is a source of much of the Israel-loathing which is just beneath the surface in the Walt/Mearsheimer article. The authors promote the theory that America went to war with Iraq in 2003 because of Israel, and in particular, at the direction of Israel's Likud Party and Ariel Sharon and their flacks in the American neoconservative movement. There were certainly Jews who supported the war with Iraq, though as even the authors admit, Jewish Americans disproportionately opposed the war, with a far higher percentage opposed to the war than among the general population. So much, one would think, for the proposition that the Jews drove America to war. But the professors want us to ignore the general disapproval of the war by American Jews, for what is important are the powerful neoconservative voices, who pushed Bush and Cheney to war. To believe this theory, Bush and Cheney and Rumsfeld, and Condi Rice and Colin Powell were mere pushovers and puppets for the likes of Douglas Feith and Paul Wolfowitz and Lewis Libby.

Characterizing this as suggesting the cart is pulling the horse is [too kind](#) to the authors' theory. In fact, people such as Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle have always been consistent in their views opposing tyranny. They

worked to bring down Communism, acted to save Bosnian Muslims and Iraqi Shiites from genocide, tried to stabilize Somalia and protect its citizens from the depredations of warlords, and have acted to stop the genocide in the Sudan. These actions are not particularly pro-Israel, as much as they are anti-dictatorship and pro-human rights.

The nations that directly benefited from the downfall of Saddam were Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq itself, since all these nations and peoples suffered from the sadism of Saddam. If Israel also benefited (a big "if"), it certainly was not a prime beneficiary. Perhaps, these experts should be more aware of a basic statistical principle: correlation does not prove causation. Israel may have been aided by Iraq's liberation, but it does not prove – except in the delusional world of the authors – that tiny Israel (or a tiny minority of American Jews) caused the war to happen.

The realist school in foreign policy, and its old standbys, Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski among them, have been bitter critics of the Iraq war. These former government officials were always fond of, and comfortable with, Arab leaders, regardless of how loathsome their regimes were. For this realist school, containing Saddam was better than removing Saddam and thereby risking upsetting the status quo order.

These same individuals have always had little good to say about Israel. That Walt and Mearsheimer are comfortable with this realist group is no great surprise. When your highest strategic concern is maintaining the flow of oil, it is pretty logical that your friends are where the oil is, and you can look away from all the hideous behavior associated with the regimes in question, and just accept that it goes with the territory.

One needn't have to defend the Iraq war to challenge the thesis that Israel made us do it. President Bush came to office as a proponent of sorts of the realist school. He argued in the 2000 campaign against America attempting to undertake nation building. His worldview, as the authors are forced to admit, changed after 9/11. It changed because the President decided that the "let sleeping dogs lie" approach to the Arab world was not working, that these brutal, intolerant regimes were breeding fanatics who wanted to kill Americans. Bush decided that the region needed a dose of openness, and freedom and democracy, much as occurred in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet empire.

It is too early to judge the wisdom of the Bush Doctrine. Clearly, everything has not gone smoothly, and the forces of resistance to change in the Arab and Islamic world are quite strong. But the Walt accusation is phony and wrong. Israel, at best, would have been a minor beneficiary of removing Saddam. But it did not initiate, nor cause the shift in policy in the Bush administration to actively seek Saddam's removal. The same small band of neoconservatives Walt paints as the architects and orchestrators of our Iraq war policy were singularly ineffective in getting any American President to move on Iraq until 9/11. It would be a lot more accurate to say bin Laden made Bush do it, not Israel.

But Iraq is important to the Walt/Mearsheimer argument for one reason: it is a twofer. If you blame an unpopular war on a foreign country and on Americans working at the behest of this country rather than their own, you can translate some of the discontent with the war onto the authors' real bogeyman, Israel. If Israel is blamed for the Iraq war, then maybe some of that strong support for Israel among Americans will wear thin. And that is the apparent goal of the professors. They want to destroy the pro-Israel Lobby, because it is effective. To that end, almost any reckless charge will do. An example is their attempt to link the Pollard spying case to the current affair with Larry Franklin, a non-Jewish Defense Department official, who, on his own volition, passed information to an Israeli, and to two AIPAC employees. No one has accused Israel of running any agents or officials or spying on America in this matter.

But guilt by association is part and parcel of the Walt approach. For this noxious paper is designed above all to taint the efforts by any Americans to support a strong US-Israel relationship, a bipartisan effort that has won overwhelming American support for many decades. Much as they try, this article will be unpersuasive in convincing Americans that our real national interest lies with cozying up with Saudi Arabia, and abandoning

Israel. And much as they claim their approach is motivated only by the national interest, something uglier is at work here. When something walks like a duck, talks like a duck, and looks like a duck, usually it is a duck. Walt and Mearsheimer have decided to navigate the waters of the Israel-hating, Jew-hating conspiracy theorists. There is a good reason for this. They seem comfortable in these waters.

*To clarify: a few hundred were treated for wounds, but only two actual fatalities were recorded. Property damage ran to tens of millions of dollars.

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