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### **There is no Israel 'Lobby'**

BY DAVID GERGEN

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It brings no joy to issue a public rebuttal against a valued colleague, but there are moments that demand no less. The occasion is the publication of an essay titled "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," written by two professors, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt, the academic dean and my colleague at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

In essence, their 82-page piece argues that U.S. policy in the Middle East has been hijacked by a pro-Israel "Lobby." "The core of the Lobby," they say, "is comprised of American Jews who make a significant effort in their daily lives to bend U.S. foreign policy so that it advances Israel's interests."

As a result, "the United States has a terrorism problem in good part because it is so closely allied with Israel."

Mearsheimer and Walt assert that for decades, and especially since the Six-Day War in 1967, the lobby has manipulated our political system to give short shrift to Palestinians, was a "critical element" in the decision to invade Iraq and is now skewing our policy on Iran (the United States, they say, "can live with a nuclear Iran").

Not only are these charges wildly at variance with what I have personally witnessed in the Oval Office, but they also impugn the unstinting service to America's national security by public figures like Dennis Ross, Martin Indyk and many others.

As a Christian, let me add that it is also wrong and unfair to call into question the loyalty of millions of American Jews who have faithfully supported Israel while also working tirelessly and generously to advance America's cause, both at home and abroad. They should be praised, not pilloried.

To be sure, pro-Israeli groups in this country, led by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, push hard to gain the support of U.S. political leaders. AIPAC is officially registered as a lobbying group, but that does not mean that its members are engaging in something sinister.

It is just not true that the Israel "Lobby" has captured U.S. policy toward the Middle East. As David McCullough writes, Harry Truman recognized Israel in 1948 out of humanitarian concerns and in spite of pressure from Jewish groups, not because of it. Since then, 10 straight American Presidents have befriended Israel - not because they were under pressure but because they believed America had made a commitment to Israel's survival, just as we have to other threatened outposts of freedom like Berlin, South Korea and Taiwan.

Over the course of four tours in the White House, I never once saw a decision in the Oval Office to tilt U.S. foreign policy in favor of Israel at the expense of America's interest.

Moreover, history shows many instances when our Presidents have sharply opposed the Israeli government. I was there when Ronald Reagan, a great friend of Israel, was so repelled by pictures of victims in Lebanon that he insisted the Israelis call off their assault on Beirut (they did).

Has Washington sometimes tilted too much toward Israel? Of course, just as we have toward other friends overseas. Is our policy in the Middle East worthy of serious debate? Absolutely, and we should defend the right of academics to question it.

But let that debate go forward with a clear mind and an understanding heart. And let us remember that our friendship with Israel has always been rooted in noble values - just as our friendships have been with

other outposts of freedom.

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