

# Blood Money: The Top Ten Politicians Taking the Most Israel Lobby Cash. “Is the Tail Wagging the Dog?”

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*As the Israeli attack on Gaza, Lebanon and Syria intensifies, the U.S. public watch on aghast. A new [poll](#) finds that Americans support a permanent ceasefire by a more than 2:1 ratio (including the vast majority of Democrats and a plurality of Republicans).*

And yet, despite this, only 4% of elected members of the House support even a temporary ceasefire, and the United States continues to veto U.N. resolutions working towards ending the violence. [Walter Hixson](#), a historian concentrating on U.S. foreign relations, told *MintPress News*:

Unfettered support for Israel and the lobby consistently puts the United States at odds with international human rights organizations and the vast majority of nations over Israel’s war crimes and blatant violations of international law. The current U.N. vote on a ceasefire in Gaza [which the U.S. [vetoed](#)] is just the latest example.”

Here, Hixson is referring to the pro-Israel lobby, a loose connection of influential groups that spend millions on pressure campaigns, outreach programs, and donations to American politicians, all with one goal in mind: making sure the United States supports the Israeli government’s policies full stop, including backing Israeli expansion, blocking Palestinian statehood and opposing a growing boycott divestment and sanctions movement (BDS) at home.

Internationally, Israel has lost virtually all its support. But it still has one major backer: the United States government. Part of this is undoubtedly down to the extraordinary lengths the lobby goes to secure backing, including showering U.S. politicians with millions of dollars in

contributions. In this investigation, *MintPress News* breaks down the top ten currently serving [politicians](#) who have taken the most pro-Israel cash since 1990.

## #1 Joe Biden, \$4,346,264

The largest recipient of Israel lobby money is President Joe Biden. From the beginning of his political career, Biden, [according to](#) his biographer [Branko Marcetic](#), “established himself as an implacable friend of Israel,” spending his Senate career “showering Israel with unquestioning support, even when its behavior elicited bipartisan outrage.” The future president was a key figure in securing record sums of U.S. aid to the Jewish state and helped block a 1998 peace proposal with Palestine.

The support for Israeli policies has continued into the present, with his administration [insisting](#) that there are “no red lines” that it could cross that would cause it to lose American support. In essence, Biden has given Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a carte blanche to break any rules, norms or laws he wishes to.

This has included ethnic cleansing and war crimes such as the bombing of schools, hospitals and places of worship using banned weapons like white phosphorous munitions. The arms Israel is using come supplied directly by the U.S. In November, the Biden administration [rubber-stamped](#) another \$14.5 billion military aid package to Israel, ensuring the carnage would continue.

For his staunch support, Biden has received more than \$4.3 million from pro-Israel groups since 1990.

## #2 Robert Menéndez, \$2,483,205

The New Jersey senator has received nearly \$2.5 million in contributions and, in the wake of the Hamas attack on October 7, has been a key figure in drumming up support for Israel. Describing Operation Al-Aqsa Flood as “barbaric atrocities” that were an “affront to humankind itself,” Menéndez gave an impassioned speech on the Senate floor where he addressed Biden directly, [stating](#):

Mr. President, in the face of unspeakable evil, we must not mince words. We must not waver in our resolve. Every single one of us in this chamber has a moral responsibility to speak out — unequivocally and unapologetically — as we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Israel and her people. I’ve been staunchly devoted to this cause for 31 years in Congress.”

He went on to claim that Israel and the United States are intrinsically linked and were founded on the same principles.

Menéndez also courted [controversy](#) after he demanded that the U.S. help Israel “wipe Hamas from the face of the Earth,” even as Israel was leveling Gaza by carpet bombing it.

In October, he co-sponsored a Senate resolution “standing with Israel against terrorism” that [passed](#) unanimously, without dissent.

### #3 Mitch McConnell, \$1,953,160

The Senate Minority Leader is one of the most powerful politicians in America and has used his influence to [attempt](#) to force through legislation criminalizing BDS. He has described the peaceful tactic as “an economic form of anti-Semitism that targets Israel.”

McConnell is known to be very close to Prime Minister Netanyahu and supported a bill condemning the United Nations and calling on the U.S. to continue to veto any U.N. resolution critical of Israel. Last month, he strongly opposed steps taken towards applying basic U.S. and international law on weapons shipments to Israel.

Under current U.S. law, Washington is duty-bound to stop supplying arms to nations committing serious human rights violations. McConnell, however, said that applying these standards to Israel would be “ridiculous,” [explaining](#) that:

Our relationship with Israel is the closest national security relationship we have with any country in the world, and to condition, in effect, our assistance to Israel to their meeting our standards it seems to me is totally unnecessary... This is a democracy, a great ally of ours, and I do not think we need to condition the support that hopefully we will give to Israel very soon.”

McConnell has received nearly \$2 million from pro-Israel groups.

### #4 Chuck Schumer, \$1,725,324

Next on the list is McConnell’s Democratic opponent, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who had taken over \$1.7 million from Israel lobbying groups. In recent weeks, Schumer has taken the lead in steering the public conversation away from Israel’s crimes and towards a supposed rise in anti-Semitism across America. “To us, the Jewish people, the rise in anti-semitism is a crisis. A five-alarm fire that must be extinguished,” the New York Senator [said](#), adding that “Jewish-Americans are feeling singled out, targeted and isolated. In many ways, we feel alone.”

The idea that anti-Semitic hate is exploding across the United States comes largely from a report published by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which claims that anti-Semitic incidents have risen by 337% since October 7. Buried in the small print, however, is the fact that 45% of these “anti-Semitic” incidents the ADL has tallied are pro-Palestine, pro-peace marches calling for ceasefires, including ones led by Jewish groups like If Not Now or Jewish Voice for Peace. (*MintPress* recently published an [investigation](#) into the ADL’s fudged numbers and its history of working for Israel and spying on progressive American groups.)

Schumer, however, has deliberately tried to conflate opposition to Israel’s bombardment of its neighbors with anti-Jewish racism, writing:

Today, too many Americans are exploiting arguments against Israel and leaping toward a virulent antisemitism. The normalization and intensifying of this rise in hate is the danger many Jewish people fear most.”

He has even gone so far as to [label](#) Dave Zirin – a Jewish journalist who supports justice for Palestinians – as an anti-Semite.

As Senate Majority Leader, Schumer has used his influence to push through military aid

packages to Israel, even as it carries out actions many have labeled war crimes, [writing](#) that:

One of the most important tasks we must finish is taking up and passing a funding bill to ensure we, as well as our friends and partners in Ukraine, Israel, and the Indo-Pacific region, have the necessary military capabilities to confront and deter our adversaries and competitors.”

He added that “Senators should be prepared to stay in Washington until we finish our work” and that they should expect to work “long days and nights, and potentially weekends in December,” until the deal was done.

## #5 Steny Hoyer, \$1,620,294

The former House Majority Leader is one of Israel’s most vocal supporters in the House of Representatives. Hoyer has [demanded](#) that “Congress must immediately and unconditionally fund Israel,” thereby giving the Netanyahu administration the green light to do whatever it pleases.

An ardent Zionist, the Maryland native [explained](#) that he believes it is:

...[T]he world’s duty that set aside a land, a land that Israel has occupied for millennia, and said: this is your place of security, this is your place of sovereignty, this is your place of safety.”



Hoyer speaks at the Jewish Community Relations Council’s Stand with Israel event on October 13, 2023.  
Photo | House.gov

Earlier this month, Hoyer also [voted](#) in favor of a bill stating that anti-Zionism is inherently anti-Semitic, thereby declaring all criticism of Israel to be invalid and racist.

Hoyer has received more than \$1.6 million in donations from pro-Israel lobbying groups.

## #6 Ted Cruz, \$1,299,194

Over his career, the Texas Republican has received \$1.3 million from the Israel lobby. After October 7, Cruz sprang into action, [announcing](#) that it was “critical” that every American supports Israel “100 percent.” “Israel is going to be demonized by Democrats in the current corrupt corporate media. We need to make clear that Hamas is using human shields and Israel has a right to defend itself,” Cruz said, hitting many of the classic pro-Israel talking points.

Cruz also went above and beyond in his defense of Israeli crimes in a [bizarre interview](#) with *Breaking Points*’ Ryan Grim. When asked if he opposes Israeli officials suggesting a nuclear attack on Gaza, Cruz replied:

I condemn nothing that the Israeli government is doing. The Israeli government does not target civilians; they target military targets... There is no military on the face of the planet, including the U.S. military, that goes to the lengths that the Israeli military goes to avoid civilian casualties.”

When confronted with statements from the IDF directly refuting his point, noting that their focus is on damage, not precision, Cruz flipped his answer around, replying, “Yes, damage to Hamas, to terrorists.” And when Grim gave him more statements from senior IDF officials explicitly contradicting his previous statement, Cruz retorted, “That’s simply not true. They are targeting the terrorists,” thereby defending the IDF even from itself.

## #7 Ron Wyden, \$1,279,376

Senator Ron Wyden (D—OR) has long been one of Israel’s staunchest advocates in Washington, supporting President Trump’s decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem and opposing BDS in all its forms.

In 2017, he co-sponsored a [bill](#) that made it a federal crime, punishable by a maximum prison sentence of 20 years, for Americans to participate in or even encourage boycotts against Israel and illegal Israeli settlements.

On the settlements, he was one of the most vigorous opponents of UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which describes them as a “flagrant violation” of international law.

For his troubles, Wyden has received \$1,279,376 from pro-Israel groups.

## #8 Dick Durbin, \$1,126,020

In some ways, Dick Durbin owes his political career to the Israel lobby. In 1982, the then-obscure college professor benefitted enormously from AIPAC money to [defeat](#) incumbent Paul Findley, a strong proponent of the Palestinian people.

The Illinois Democrat has [called](#) for immediate military aid to Israel and co-signed a Senate resolution reaffirming Washington’s support for Israel’s “right to self-defense” in the wake of October 7.



Despite this, he has angered some in the pro-Israel crowd by supporting President Obama's initiatives to reduce tensions with Iran and has now come out in favor of a ceasefire in Gaza.

### #9 Josh Gottheimer, \$1,109,370

Despite only being in office since 2017, Gottheimer has already received more than \$1.1 million from pro-Israel lobbying groups. The New Jersey Congressman has served as a pro-Israeli attack dog in Washington, co-sponsoring the bill equating opposition to Israeli government policy with anti-Semitism and introducing legislation to block and criminalize boycotting the state of Israel.

In the wake of October 7, Gottheimer has attempted to cancel a number of public figures. Earlier this month, for instance, he tried to [pressure](#) Rutgers University into calling off an [event](#) on Palestine featuring former CNN anchor Marc Lamont Hill and organizer and journalist Nick Estes, both of whom support Palestinian rights and statehood.

Gottheimer has even caused rifts within his own party, attacking the small, progressive wing of Democrats who have failed to toe the line on Israel and Hamas. "Last night, 15 of my Democratic colleagues voted AGAINST standing with our ally Israel and condemning Hamas terrorists who brutally murdered, raped, and kidnapped babies, children, men, women, and elderly, including Americans. They are despicable and do not speak for our party," he [wrote](#), making a number of highly incendiary and questionable assertions.

### #10 Shontel Brown, \$1,028,686

Perhaps no other political case reveals the power of the Israel lobby than Shontel Brown. In 2021, Nina Turner, a democratic socialist, national co-chair of Bernie Sanders' 2020 election campaign, and an [outspoken advocate](#) for justice in Palestine, ran for election in Ohio's 11th congressional district. Her opponent was the little-known but strongly [pro-Israel](#) Brown.

Brown [received](#) more pro-Israel money than any other politician nationwide during that two-year election cycle, helping her overcome a double-digit polling deficit to defeat Turner. Over \$1 million was spent plastering Cleveland with attack ads against Turner. In her acceptance speech, Brown [praised](#) Israel and later [thanked](#) the Jewish community for "help[ing] me get over the finish line"

Since then, she has supported Israeli actions in Gaza and rejected the idea of Israel as an apartheid state, [writing](#):

Let's be clear: Israel is not an apartheid state. Any mischaracterizations otherwise attempt to delegitimize Israel, a robust democracy, and will only serve to fuel rising antisemitism. I will always advocate for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship founded on our shared values."

Check out the bag dropping ahead of tomorrow's [#OH11](#) primary. DMFI has spent more opposing Nina Turner than nearly all other outside spending combined. [pic.twitter.com/2QC8py0sWu](https://pic.twitter.com/2QC8py0sWu)

— Kirk A. Bado (@kirk\_bado) [August 2, 2021](#)

## A Dark Force in US Politics

The most well-known and likely most influential group in the loose coalition referred to as the Israel lobby is AIPAC. With a staff of around 400 people and annual revenues that [frequently top](#) over \$100 million, the organization is a huge, conservative force in American politics, flooding the system with gigantic amounts of money. Worse still, the group does not disclose the sources of its funding.

AIPAC's stated [goal](#) is:

To make America's friendship with Israel so robust, so certain, so broadly based, and so dependable that even the deep divisions of American politics can never imperil that relationship and the ability of the Jewish state to defend itself."

Yet Israel is widely recognized by international bodies such as the [United Nations](#) and human rights groups like [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) as an apartheid state. It has near total control over the Gaza Strip, which, even before the latest attack, was an "[unlivable](#)" "[open-air prison](#)." It is this state and these injustices that AIPAC and others seek U.S. support for.

American intransigence on Israel has helped make it a pariah nation, one that constantly has to veto U.N. resolutions and has [lost](#) its voting rights at UNESCO.

Not only does it give more money to Republicans than Democrats, but AIPAC also floods conservative Democrats' coffers with funds, especially when they are up against progressive, pro-Palestine challengers.

In 2022, it [spent](#) \$2.3 million in a (failed) bid to stop leftist Summer Lee from being elected to Congress. However, it fared better in North Carolina, where \$2 million was given to Valeria Foushee over Nida Allam, the director of Sanders' 2016 campaign. Meanwhile, \$1.2 million in donations to Henry Cuellar might have been the deciding factor in an extremely close win over progressive activist Jessica Cisneros in Texas' 28th congressional district. And a number of prominent Michigan Democrats have come forward [claiming](#) that AIPAC offered them \$20 million each to primary Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian-American in Congress.

"Certainly the lobby can influence elections, but it doesn't win them all," Hixson, the [author](#) of "Architects of Repression: How Israel and Its Lobby Put Racism, Violence and Injustice at the Center of US Middle East Policy," said, adding:

It targets the aforementioned House progressives every two years but can't always dictate the outcome of localized elections. They do better with broader canvasses; hence, no one in the Senate other than Bernie takes them on. When it comes to Israel, most American politicians are craven hypocrites."

Yet Sanders' recent refusal to endorse a permanent ceasefire (a position held by virtually the entire world) has earned him AIPAC's [praise](#).

Thank you [@SenSanders](#) for your strong opposition to a permanent ceasefire with Hamas. [@FaceTheNation pic.twitter.com/78PdsAKm1D](#)

— AIPAC | Text ISRAEL to 24722 | #StandWithIsrael (@AIPAC) [December 10, 2023](#)

## Is the Tail Wagging the Dog?

As such, AIPAC acts as a bulwark against progressive political change. In such a divisive political environment, few political issues unite Democrats and Republicans, as well as Israel and shutting down anti-establishment figures. As Hixson told *MintPress*:

Other than a handful of progressives (Bernie Sanders, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, etc.), the U.S. Congress invariably gives the lobby everything it wants, namely massive regular funding for Israeli militarism and an endless series of resolutions condemning Israel's international foes and domestic critics."

The question that arises from this is why? Why does Israel always seem to receive full support from Washington? Is the lobby really that effective? Why do so many U.S. politicians go along with it? [Mazin Qumsiyeh](#), a professor at Bethlehem University, characterized Washington as full of amoral careerists, telling *MintPress* that:

They [Senators and Congresspersons] do not buy the Zionist argument. It is strictly personal interest: money and good media coverage and avoiding blackmail, as the Zionists have their dirty secrets which they could expose if they step out of line."

Yet Israel also serves a vital purpose for the American empire. The region is not only geographically strategic but home to the world's largest resources of hydrocarbons. Washington has always made it a top priority to control the flow of oil around the world, and Israel helps them do this. Militarily, Israel serves as a conduit the U.S. can work through, farming out its dirty work to Tel Aviv. It, therefore, represents an unofficial and beneficial "51st state." As Joe Biden [said](#) in 1986 and has regularly [repeated](#), Israel is the best investment the U.S. makes. "Were there not an Israel, the United States of America would have to invent an Israel to protect our interests in the region," he added.

Many other nations or industries have lobbied in Washington, D.C. But few have proven to be as organized or effective as the pro-Israel one. Nevertheless, public opinion, particularly among young people, has begun to drift away from it. The [Overton Window](#) is shifting; Professor Qumsiyeh told *MintPress*. "When I first went to the U.S. in 1979, the average citizen did not know anything about Palestine or knew only a negative, distorted picture driven by Hollywood and biased media. Things [have] changed," he said.

Things have indeed changed. The streets of America have been filled with demonstrations against Israeli aggression. Millions of Americans have participated in Palestine solidarity protests, including hundreds of thousands in [Washington, D.C.](#) alone. Celebrities have [spoken out](#) against injustice. And social media is filled with posts showing sympathy for Gazans. There, too, Israel and pro-Israel groups have attempted to use their financial clout to [influence](#) the conversation, but to limited effect.

Fortunately for Israel, for now, at least, they can still rely on the unwavering support of senior American politicians, their pockets filled with AIPAC money, turning the other way as Israel carries out another genocide against Palestine.

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Featured image: President Joe Biden participates in a restricted bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Hotel Kempinski in Tel Aviv, Israel, Wednesday, October 18, 2023. (Official White House Photo by Cameron Smith)

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