

Why Not a Probe of “Israel-Gate”? Israeli Meddling...

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The other day, I asked a longtime Democratic Party insider who is working on the Russia-gate investigation which country interfered more in U.S. politics, Russia or Israel. Without a moment's hesitation, he replied, "Israel, of course."

Which underscores my concern about the hysteria raging across Official Washington about “Russian meddling” in the 2016 presidential campaign: There is no proportionality applied to the question of foreign interference in U.S. politics. If there were, we would have a far more substantive investigation of Israel-gate.

The problem is that if anyone mentions the truth about Israel's clout, the person is immediately smeared as “anti-Semitic” and targeted by Israel's extraordinarily sophisticated lobby and its many media/political allies for vilification and marginalization.



Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaking to the AIPAC conference in Washington D.C. on March 21, 2016. (Photo credit: AIPAC)

So, the open secret of Israeli influence is studiously ignored, even as presidential candidates prostrate themselves before the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. [Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump both appeared](#) before AIPAC in 2016, with Clinton promising to take the U.S.-Israeli relationship “to the next level” – whatever that meant – and Trump vowing not to “pander” and then pandering like crazy.

Congress is no different. It has given Israel's controversial Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [a record-tying three invitations](#) to address joint sessions of Congress (matching

the number of times British Prime Minister Winston Churchill appeared). We then witnessed the Republicans and Democrats competing to see how often their members could bounce up and down and who could cheer Netanyahu the loudest, even when the Israeli prime minister was instructing the Congress to follow his position on Iran rather than President Obama's.

Israeli officials and AIPAC also coordinate their strategies to maximize political influence, which is derived in large part by who gets the lobby's largesse and who doesn't. On the rare occasion when members of Congress step out of line – and take a stand that offends Israeli leaders – they can expect a well-funded opponent in their next race, a tactic that dates back decades.

Well-respected members, such as Rep. Paul Findley and Sen. Charles Percy (both Republicans from Illinois), were early victims of the Israeli lobby's wrath when they opened channels of communication with the Palestine Liberation Organization in the cause of seeking peace. Findley was targeted and defeated in 1982; Percy in 1984.

Findley recounted his experience in a 1985 book, *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby*, in which Findley called the lobby "the 700-pound gorilla in Washington." The book was harshly criticized in a New York Times review by Adam Clymer, who called it "an angry, one-sided book that seems often to be little more than a stringing together of stray incidents."

Enforced Silence

Since then, there have been fewer and fewer members of Congress or other American politicians who have dared to speak out, judging that – when it comes to the Israeli lobby – discretion is the better part of valor. Today, many U.S. pols grovel before the Israeli government seeking a sign of favor from Prime Minister Netanyahu, almost like Medieval kings courting the blessings of the Pope at the Vatican.

During the 2008 campaign, then-Sen. Barack Obama, whom Netanyahu viewed with suspicion, traveled to Israel to demonstrate sympathy for Israelis within rocket-range of Gaza while steering clear of showing much empathy for the Palestinians.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at AIPAC conference in Washington, D.C., on March 4, 2014.

In 2012, Republican nominee Mitt Romney tried to exploit the tense Obama-Netanyahu relationship by stopping in Israel to win a tacit endorsement from Netanyahu. The 2016 campaign was no exception with both Clinton and Trump stressing their love of Israel in

their appearances before AIPAC.

Money, of course, has become the lifeblood of American politics – and American supporters of Israel have been particularly strategic in how they have exploited that reality.

One of Israel's most devoted advocates, casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, has poured millions of dollars in "dark money" into political candidates and groups that support Israel's interests. Adelson, who has advocated [dropping a nuclear bomb](#) inside Iran to coerce its government, is a Trump favorite having donated [a record \\$5 million](#) to Trump's inaugural celebration.

Of course, many Israel-connected political donations are much smaller but no less influential. A quarter century ago, I was told how an aide to a Democratic foreign policy chairman, who faced a surprisingly tough race after redistricting, turned to the head of AIPAC for help and, almost overnight, donations were pouring in from all over the country. The chairman was most thankful.

The October Surprise Mystery

Israel's involvement in U.S. politics also can be covert. For instance, the evidence is now overwhelming that the Israeli government of right-wing Prime Minister Menachem Begin played a key role in helping Ronald Reagan's campaign in 1980 strike a deal with Iran to frustrate President Jimmy Carter's efforts to free 52 American hostages before Election Day.

Begin despised Carter for the Camp David Accords that forced Israel to give back the Sinai to Egypt. Begin also believed that Carter was too sympathetic to the Palestinians and – if he won a second term – would conspire with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to impose a two-state solution on Israel.



President Jimmy Carter signing the Camp David peace agreement with Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Israel's Menachem Begin.

Begin's contempt for Carter was not even a secret. In a 1991 book, *The Last Option*, senior Israeli intelligence and foreign policy official David Kimche explained Begin's motive for dreading Carter's reelection. Kimche said Israeli officials had gotten wind of "collusion" between Carter and Sadat "to force Israel to abandon her refusal to withdraw from territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, and to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Kimche continued,

“This plan prepared behind Israel’s back and without her knowledge must rank as a unique attempt in United States’s diplomatic history of short-changing a friend and ally by deceit and manipulation.”

But Begin recognized that the scheme required Carter winning a second term in 1980 when, Kimche wrote,

“he would be free to compel Israel to accept a settlement of the Palestinian problem on his and Egyptian terms, without having to fear the backlash of the American Jewish lobby.”

In a 1992 memoir, *Profits of War*, former Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe also noted that Begin and other Likud leaders held Carter in contempt.

“Begin loathed Carter for the peace agreement forced upon him at Camp David,” Ben-Menashe wrote. “As Begin saw it, the agreement took away Sinai from Israel, did not create a comprehensive peace, and left the Palestinian issue hanging on Israel’s back.”

So, in order to buy time for Israel to “change the facts on the ground” by moving Jewish settlers into the West Bank, Begin felt Carter’s reelection had to be prevented. A different president also presumably would give Israel a freer hand to deal with problems on its northern border with Lebanon.

Ben-Menashe was among a couple of dozen government officials and intelligence operatives who described how Reagan’s campaign, mostly through future CIA Director William Casey and past CIA Director George H.W. Bush, [struck a deal](#) in 1980 with senior Iranians who got promises of arms via Israel in exchange for keeping the hostages through the election and thus humiliating Carter. (The hostages were finally released on Jan. 20, 1981, after Reagan was sworn in as President.)

Discrediting History

Though the evidence of the so-called October Surprise deal is far stronger than the current case for believing that Russia colluded with the Trump campaign, Official Washington and the mainstream U.S. media have refused to accept it, deeming it a “conspiracy theory.”



President Ronald Reagan, delivering his Inaugural Address on Jan. 20, 1981, as the 52 U.S. hostages in Iran are simultaneously released.

One of the reasons for the hostility directed against the 1980 case was the link to Israel, which did not want its hand in manipulating the election of a U.S. president to become an accepted part of American history. So, for instance, the Israeli government went to great lengths to discredit Ben-Menashe after he began to speak with reporters and to give testimony to the U.S. Congress.

When I was a Newsweek correspondent and first interviewed Ben-Menashe in 1990, the Israeli government initially insisted that he was an impostor, that he had no connection to Israeli intelligence.

However, when I obtained documentary evidence of Ben-Menashe's work for a military intelligence unit, the Israelis admitted that they had lied but then insisted that he was just a low-level translator, a claim that was further contradicted by other documents showing that he had traveled widely around the world on missions to obtain weapons for the Israel-to-Iran arms pipeline.

Nevertheless, the Israeli government along with [sympathetic American reporters](#) and members of the U.S. Congress [managed to shut down any serious investigation](#) into the 1980 operation, which was, in effect, the prequel to Reagan's Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal of 1984-86. Thus, U.S. history was miswritten. [For more details, see Robert Parry's [America's Stolen Narrative](#); [Secrecy & Privilege](#); and [Trick or Treason](#).]



Convicted Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard in the photo from his U.S. Naval Intelligence ID.

Looking back over the history of U.S.-Israeli relations, it is clear that Israel exercised significant [influence over U.S. presidents since its founding in 1948](#), but the rise of Israel's right-wing Likud Party in the 1970s – led by former Jewish terrorists [Menachem Begin](#) and

[Yitzhak Shamir](#) – marked a time when Israel shed any inhibitions about interfering directly in U.S. politics.

Much as Begin and Shamir engaged in terror attacks on British officials and Palestinian civilians during Israel's founding era, the Likudniks who held power in 1980 believed that the Zionist cause trumped normal restraints on their actions. In other words, the ends justified the means.

In the 1980s, Israel also mounted spying operations aimed at the U.S. government, including those of intelligence analyst [Jonathan Pollard](#), who fed highly sensitive documents to Israel and – after being caught and spending almost three decades in prison – was paroled and welcomed as a hero inside Israel.

A History of Interference

But it is true that foreign interference in U.S. politics is as old as the American Republic. In the 1790s, French agents – working with the Jeffersonians – tried to rally Americans behind France's cause in its conflict with Great Britain. In part to frustrate the French operation, the Federalists passed the Alien and Sedition Acts.

In the Twentieth Century, Great Britain undertook covert influence operations to ensure U.S. support in its conflicts with Germany, while German agents unsuccessfully sought the opposite.

So, the attempts by erstwhile allies and sometimes adversaries to move U.S. foreign policy in one direction or another is nothing new, and the U.S. government engages in similar operations in countries all over the world, both overtly and covertly.



Wanted Poster of the Palestine Police Force offering rewards for the capture of Stern Gang terrorists: 1. Jaacov Levstein (Eliav), 2. Yitzhak Yezernitzky (Shamir), 3. Natan Friedman-Yelin

It was the CIA's job for decades to use propaganda and dirty tricks to ensure that pro-U.S.

politicians were elected or put in power in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa, pretty much everywhere the U.S. government perceived some interest. After the U.S. intelligence scandals of the 1970s, however, some of that responsibility was passed to other organizations, such as the [U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy](#) (NED) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

NED, USAID and various “non-governmental organizations” (NGOs) finance activists, journalists and other operatives to undermine political leaders who are deemed to be obstacles to U.S. foreign policy desires.

In particular, NED has been at the center of efforts to flip elections to U.S.-backed candidates, such as in Nicaragua in 1990, or to sponsor “color revolutions,” which typically organize around some color as the symbol for mass demonstrations. Ukraine – on Russia’s border – has been the target of two such operations, the Orange Revolution in 2004, which helped install anti-Russian President Viktor Yushchenko, and the Maidan ouster of elected pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014.

NED president Carl Gershman, a neoconservative who has run NED since its founding in 1983, openly declared that [Ukraine was “the biggest prize”](#) in September 2013 — just months before the Maidan protests — as well as calling it an important step toward ousting Russian President Vladimir Putin. In 2016, Gershman [called directly for regime change](#) in Russia.

The Neoconservatives

Another key issue related to Israeli influence inside the United States is the role of the neocons, a political movement that emerged in the 1970s as a number of hawkish Democrats migrated to the Republican Party as a home for more aggressive policies to protect Israel and take on the Soviet Union and Arab states.

In some European circles, the neocons are described as “Israel’s American agents,” which may somewhat overstate the direct linkage between Israel and the neocons although a central tenet of neocon thinking is that there must be no daylight between the U.S. and Israel. The neocons say U.S. politicians must stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel even if that means the Americans sidling up to the Israelis rather than any movement the other way.



Prominent neocon intellectual Robert Kagan. (Photo credit: Mariusz Kubik, <http://www.mariuszkubik.pl>)

Since the mid-1990s, American neocons have worked closely with Benjamin Netanyahu. Several prominent neocons (including former Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser, Meyrav Wurmser and Robert Loewenberg) advised Netanyahu's 1996 campaign and urged a new strategy for "securing the realm." Essentially, the idea was to replace negotiations with the Palestinians and Arab states with "regime change" for governments that were viewed as troublesome to Israel, including Iraq and Syria.

By 1998, the Project for the New American Century (led by neocons William Kristol and Robert Kagan) was pressuring President Bill Clinton to invade Iraq, a plan that was finally put in motion in 2003 under President George W. Bush.

But the follow-on plans to go after Syria and Iran were delayed because the Iraq War turned into a bloody mess, killing some 4,500 American soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. Bush could not turn to phase two until near the end of his presidency and then was frustrated by a U.S. intelligence estimate concluding that Iran was not working on a nuclear bomb (which was to be the pretext for a bombing campaign).

Bush also could pursue "regime change" in Syria only as a proxy effort of subversion, rather than a full-scale U.S. invasion. President Barack Obama escalated the Syrian proxy war in 2011 with the support of Israel and its [strange-bedfellow allies](#) in Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni-ruled Gulf States, which hated Syria's government because it was allied with Shiite-ruled Iran — and Sunnis and Shiites have been enemies since the Seventh Century. Israel insists that the U.S. take the Sunni side, even if that [puts the U.S. in bed with Al Qaeda](#).

But Obama dragged his heels on a larger U.S. military intervention in Syria and angered Netanyahu further by negotiating with Iran over its nuclear program rather than bomb-bombing Iran.

Showing the Love

Obama's perceived half-hearted commitment to Israeli interests explained Romney's campaign 2012 trip to seek Netanyahu's blessings. Even after winning a second term, Obama sought to appease Netanyahu by undertaking a three-day trip to Israel in 2013 to show his love.

Still, in 2015, when Obama pressed ahead with the Iran nuclear agreement, Netanyahu went over the President's head directly to Congress where he was warmly received, although the Israeli prime minister ultimately failed to sink the Iran deal.



Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In Campaign 2016, both Clinton and Trump wore their love for Israel on their sleeves, Clinton promising to take the relationship to “the next level” (a phrase that young couples often use when deciding to go from heavy petting to intercourse). Trump reminded AIPAC that he had a Jewish grandchild and vowed to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Both also bristled with hatred toward Iran, repeating the popular falsehood that “Iran is the principal source of terrorism” when it is Saudi Arabia and other Sunni sheikdoms that have been the financial and military supporters of Al Qaeda and Islamic State, the terror groups most threatening to Europe and the United States.

By contrast to Israel's long history of playing games with U.S. politics, the Russian government stands accused of trying to undermine the U.S. political process recently by hacking into emails of the Democratic National Committee — revealing the DNC's improper opposition to Sen. Bernie Sanders's campaign — and of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta — disclosing the contents of Clinton's paid speeches to Wall Street and pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton Foundation — and sharing that information with the American people via WikiLeaks.

Although WikiLeaks denies getting the two batches of emails from the Russians, the U.S. intelligence community says it has high confidence in its conclusions about Russian meddling and the mainstream U.S. media treats the allegations as flat-fact.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu making opening remarks at a joint White House press conference with President Donald Trump on Feb. 15, 2017. (Screenshot from White House video)

The U.S. intelligence community also has accused the Russian government of [raising doubts in the minds of Americans](#) about their political system by having RT, the Russian-sponsored news network, hold debates for third-party candidates (who were excluded from the two-party Republican-Democratic debates) and by having RT report on protests such as Occupy Wall Street and issues such as “fracking.”

The major U.S. news media and Congress seem to agree that the only remaining question is whether evidence can be adduced showing that the Trump campaign colluded in this Russian operation. For that purpose, a number of people associated with the Trump campaign are to be hauled before Congress and made to testify on whether or not they are Russian agents.

Meanwhile, The Washington Post, The New York Times and other establishment-approved outlets are working with major technology companies on how [to marginalize independent news sources](#) and to purge “Russian propaganda” (often conflated with “fake news”) from the Internet.

It seems that no extreme is too extreme to protect the American people from the insidious Russians and their Russia-gate schemes to sow doubt about the U.S. political process. But God forbid if anyone were to suggest an investigation of Israel-gate.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, America’s Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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