

“The Israel Lobby”: A Comment

by

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*Written for a Presentation and Discussion of the Book “The Israel Lobby”
With the authors John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt*

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1. Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to be back in my university and to comment on the book “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy” by John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, a book which, as you probably know, is highly controversial, in the United States as well as in Germany.¹ The reactions cut across all the familiar political camps. Some reviewers from the left in the United States, including the Jewish left, while not denying the power of the Israel Lobby, have criticized the book, because it did not recognize the real big interests behind U.S. foreign policy.² Many from the Jewish right in this debate have reacted vehemently, some even calling “The Israel Lobby” a modern version of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.³ The blurb of the German edition claims, the furious opposition proved the book right. That is a very strange theory of scientific validation. One might as well conclude, as several critics have done, that the sometimes enthusiastic support from the non-Jewish far right proves it wrong. More moderate critics at least admit that the book addresses serious questions in the relationship between the United States and Israel, particularly the rationality, motivation, or legitimacy of the seemingly strongest American supporters of the Jewish state in America: the Jewish lobby, the Christian evangelicals, and the neo-conservatives.⁴

So do read the reviews, but please also read the book and make up your own mind. I have read the book, and I think it is important and interesting, which does not mean it is beyond criticism. I would like, first, to defend the book against four of the major criticisms, and then raise four sets of critical questions of my own.

¹ Since the occasion for my comment, which will be based on this paper, is a presentation of the German version of the book, I am using this one: John Mearsheimer/Stephen M. Walt, *Die Israel Lobby. Wie die amerikanische Außenpolitik beeinflusst wird*, Frankfurt am Main 2007. I am grateful to Reiner Bernstein and Richard Ned Lebow for critical remarks and suggestions to earlier drafts.

² See Stephen Zunes, *The Israel Lobby. How Powerful is it Really?*, Foreign Policy in Focus, Special Report, May 16, 2006 (www.fpif.org) or Michael Lerner, *Are We Exaggerating the Power of the Israel Lobby?*, www.tikkun.org, November 4, 2007.

³ To give just one example, see the interview with Gerald M. Steinberg, Dean and Executive Director of the Political Science Faculty at Bar Ilan-University, Ramat Gan, in: *Jüdische Zeitung*, October 2007, p. 10.

⁴ Hanno Loewy, *Kalkulierte Provokation*, www.fr-online.de

Criticism Which I Consider Invalid or Inappropriate

2.1 Anti-Semitism?

The book is definitely not anti-Semitic; it is not biased against Jews and it contains no stereotypes of Jews, it is a book about the “Israel Lobby”, an important part of which are the Christian evangelicals. Although the title is suggestive and invites misinterpretation, I have found not one sentence in the book which I would call anti-Semitic. There is one possible exception which concerns the German (also the Italian) cover of the book. It has a small American flag with discreet Shields of David (the Italian cover has one huge Shield of David on the U.S. flag) instead of the usual American stars. (The American original has the colours of the Israeli flag, i.e. blue and white instead of blue and red in the stripes, but it has the usual stars.) The German cover comes close to a classical anti-Semitic stereotype, and I regard this as all the more unfortunate as there is a precedent on a book from the Nazi era, published in 1941/1942.⁵ The author of “Kräfte hinter Roosevelt” (Forces behind Roosevelt) was Johann von Leers, an ardent Nazi and a vehement anti-Semite all his life. His book has a similar kind of flag on its cover, i.e. Shields of David instead of the usual stars. The Nazi cover is much more obviously anti-Semitic, because it also shows figures of supposedly typical Jews behind Roosevelt’s head. And in no way is Campus an anti-Semitic publisher, quite to the contrary; it is philo-Semitic and strongly pro-Israel. Campus also has a long tradition of supporting critical social science and freedom of speech and scholarship. Nevertheless, Campus publishers should have avoided the coincidence with the cover. One does not even play with anti-Semitic stereotypes, certainly not in Germany.⁶

In my view, “The Israel Lobby” is also not anti-Israel. The authors strongly support Israel’s right to exist and they state very clearly that the United States ought to support and defend the Jewish state, whenever its existence was threatened. They do not believe that this is currently the case, however, and take a strong position in the long-standing and drawn-out debate about the wisdom or rather the folly of the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. This occupation, as all of you also know very well, is highly controversial among Israelis themselves as it is among European and American Jewry. Many Israelis, many Jewish intellectuals, and I believe the majority of independent analysts of the Middle East conflict would agree with the authors that the on-going colonization of the areas mentioned

⁵ See www.hurryupharry.bloghouse.net

⁶ Listeners and readers ought to know that Campus published several of my own books in the 1980s.

has not only been highly dubious legally and morally, but also a serious political mistake for which not only the Palestinians but also Israel and the West as a whole are paying a heavy price, particularly in their relations with the Arab and/or Muslim world.

2.2 Discussing the Jewish Lobby – Politically Incorrect?

Last year, I wrote an article about “The United States, Israel, and the Middle-East Conflict” for a journal published by a German institution in civic education.⁷ In the publishing process the editor made a number of substantive changes in my paper which I did not accept. One of the sentences which he had taken out red: “Israel’s interests are well represented in the political system of the United States”. I told him that this was the consensus of the literature, and that it was a trivial statement. One of the reasons, by no means the only one, was the Jewish lobby, which almost everybody considered to be one of the strongest and most effective lobbies in the United States. Yet he felt it was not politically correct in this case to state the obvious.

Like the authors of “The Israel Lobby” I have no problem with the Jewish lobby in principle. I sincerely believe it is very good that Israel has friends, which it needs and deserves, and every American has the right to support whichever country he or she wants to, unless it is violently hostile to the United States, of course. And every American also has the right to organize in groups and lobby their politicians. The problem is not whether Israel’s interests are well represented in the American political system; the problem is whether they are represented well. And here the authors and I myself have serious doubts. The Jewish lobby in the United States is heavily skewed to the right. It is strongly biased against the Arabs and particularly the Palestinians, and it does not, certainly their leaders do not fairly represent the views of American Jewry on the Middle East conflict in general, which are much more moderate and balanced. Jewish Americans, e.g., were much less inclined to favour going to war against Saddam Hussein than the Jewish lobby, even less inclined than average Americans.⁸ The major Jewish lobby organizations in the United States are even biased in their support of Israel. Let me quote Yossi Beilin, who was a minister in Yitzhak Rabin’s cabinet and who later negotiated, together with other Israeli and Palestinian intellectuals and political

⁷ Gert Krell, *Die U.S.A, Israel und der Nahost-Konflikt*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 14/2006, pp. 25-31.

⁸ According to Christian Bala, *Konservatismus, Judentum, Zionismus. "Kulturkrieg" in der U.S.-Diaspora*, Baden-Baden 2006, p. 305-306, 62% of U.S. citizens supported the war in 2003, but only 52% of American Jews. Other figures have 54% of American Jews against the war in 2003 and 66% in 2004 (op. cit., p. 214).

figures, the unofficial Geneva Accords, the most detailed existing model of a peace treaty between Israelis and Palestinians:⁹

AIPAC [AIPAC is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the most powerful Jewish lobby group in the U.S., G.K.] claims to be merely an instrument of the Israeli government, but this is just not the case. They have their own ideology. They are financed by people from the extreme Right in American Jewry, and they use more liberal or democratic people as a fig leaf. Many people at the grassroots level are very moderate – it is not an organization of rightists, but it is led by Rightists. Many people involved in AIPAC are not even aware of how much of a Right wing organization they are in. When we in the Labour Party were in power, both Barak and Rabin were very critical of AIPAC. The leaders of AIPAC will pretend that they tried to support our government, but they did it half-heartedly, and privately they undermined us.

2.3. The Iraq War as a Conspiracy?

Several reviews by journalists and political scientists criticize the book as presenting a conspiracy theory of the Iraq war, blaming it on the Israel Lobby (or even “the Jews”) as an easy scapegoat for all the things that went wrong in the American reaction to the attacks of September 9, 2001.¹⁰ Nowhere in the book do the authors say the decision to invade Iraq was a conspiracy. Conspiracies by definition are not open; they are secret and work in the dark. The neo-conservatives, who are the third pillar of the Israel Lobby and who were a decisive factor in the decision to go to war against Saddam Hussein according to Mearsheimer and Walt, make their views known, everybody can follow their ideas and political suggestions. This is not conspiracy.

In their analysis of the process of decision-making in the Bush-Administration for the Iraq war, Mearsheimer and Walt use open material which those involved have supplied themselves about their political ideas and strategies, and other open sources: analytical books, memoirs, newspaper reports and analysis about the actual decision-making process. I disagree with their weighing of the major factors behind the war, as you will see later. But their position is by no means absurd, and it is definitely not a conspiracy theory. In one of the best books on the neo-conservatives, Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke come to conclusions similar to Mearsheimer and Walt’s:¹¹

September 11 (...) found the neo-conservatives well prepared. Far better than anyone else, they had their response in place and targets fixed. In a very real sense, Saddam’s coordinates were already entered into the computer. (...) Theirs [the neo-cons’] was not the only voice in policy making after 9/11, but their ready-made plans for the Middle East were the ones adopted. We believe that we have shown that, had these plans not already been in existence and had the neo-conservatives not adroitly melded their agenda with other more permanent themes in U.S. national security thinking (...), events might have taken a very different course.

⁹ Interview with Yossi Beilin in Tikkun, November/December 2004. Thanks to Reiner Bernstein for this source.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Josef Joffe, *Das Komplott der Kosher Nostra*, in: DIE ZEIT No. 37, September 6, 2007 or Thomas Risse, *Verschwörungstheorie um ihrer selbst willen*, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, September 17, 2007.

¹¹ Stefan Halper/Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone. The Neo-Conservatives and Their Global Order*, Cambridge-New York 2004, pp. 33, 297.

2.4 Not a Serious Scholarly Book?

The final criticism which I want to address is the suggestion that “The Israel Lobby” was not a scholarly book, another reason why it need not be taken seriously. A specification of this accusation says the book was not based on genuine empirical research, with similar implications. Actually, Mearsheimer and Walt have done some empirical research of their own, at least in the broad but common sense of the term. Much of their analysis is based on their own vast collection of newspaper accounts of events, articulations, and decisions. Yet it’s true, the bulk of the book is based on secondary sources; it is not a dissertation with its own body of data, interviews, archival resources or other new material. (All their sources are listed in the footnotes as they would have to be in a scholarly book.) The book does not develop and test hypotheses as rigorously as one would find in basic academic research, yet the authors do not claim to do that. They describe, analyze, and argue about the relationship between the United States and Israel, sometimes more systematically, sometimes more impressionistic, integrating specialized literature. In political science, many books are produced this way, and legitimately so.

3. Additions, Qualifications, and Questions

3.1 Israel’s Moral Quality

I want to begin with chapter three, the chapter about the moral quality of Israel. I feel uncomfortable with this chapter and still do not quite understand its purpose. As far as I can tell, there is nothing factually wrong with it, but it lacks historical and comparative perspective. I think you could come up with a similar list of sins or deficiencies about almost any country, certainly many of America’s allies, including other democracies, and about the United States itself. If I were a Jewish Israeli, even a leftist Israeli, I would feel singled out.

Like many other modern nations, Israel was born in sin, as Shlomo Ben-Ami writes in his excellent new book “Scars of War, Wounds of Peace”.¹² For Zionism to succeed in establishing the Jewish state, another nation had to give way. Palestine was a beautiful bride, but already married to another man, as the rabbis from Vienna, who after the First Zionist Congress went to have a look at the envisaged Jewish national home, cabled back.¹³ So there will have to be some compensation to the Palestinians, symbolically as well as materially, in addition to an

¹² Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Scars of War, Wound of Peace. The Israeli-Arab Tragedy*, London 2006, p. 48.

¹³ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, New York-London 2000, p. 3.

end of the occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, for a stable and enduring peace between Jews and Arabs; a compensation which the already mentioned Geneva Accords do grant by the way.¹⁴ Yet many others have sinned in the process of establishing the Yishuv (i.e. the pre-state settlements during the British Mandate) and later Israel and in the course of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

To a large extent, Israel is a product of or a reaction to Europe's incompetence, inability, or unwillingness to peacefully integrate its Jewish co-citizens. Without European nationalism, anti-Semitism, and colonialism, Zionism would have remained an exotic minority movement among European Jewry; without the Eastern pogroms and the persistent discrimination in France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary in the late 19th and early 20th century no foundational ideas about a Jewish state; without the open pressure from Polish right-wing parties in the 1920s and 1930s much less immigration from Polish Jews. Without the Nazi-Germans, who murdered hundreds of thousands of potential Zionist immigrants, American Jewry would not have united behind Zionism and given all the support it could, financially and politically, to the birth of Israel. And without the holocaust, leading U.S. politicians would not have regarded the establishment of Israel as a moral and historical necessity, even if this involved "certain injustices to the Arab world", as John Foster Dulles, President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, once said.¹⁵

There would be no Israel without British imperialism and the Balfour declaration. In 1936-39, Britain brutally suppressed the Arab revolt in Palestine, one of the preconditions of the Arab's renewed defeat in 1947/48. And in the final phase, Soviet support was crucial. The Soviets voted for partition in the UN, they were among the first to recognize the Jewish state, and they allowed critical weaponry to be exported from Czechoslovakia to Israel in the first Israeli-Arab war. I had always thought the Soviets voted for a Jewish state because they wanted to create problems for British imperialism in the wider Middle East. That certainly was an important consideration. But new archival material shows that the Soviet Union began to think about such a state in 1943, because they also did not want too many uprooted Jews in their prospective East European sphere of influence after World War II.¹⁶ (Avoiding too much Jewish immigration to London from Eastern Europe also was one of several arguments for the

¹⁴ The complete text under www.geneva-accord.org. See also Reiner Bernstein, *Von Gaza nach Genf. Die Genfer Friedensinitiative von Israelis und Palästinensern*, Schwabach 2006.

¹⁵ David Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel*, New York-Oxford 1993, p. 62.

¹⁶ Dan Mishman, *The Causal Relationship between the Holocaust and the Birth of Israel. Historiography between Myth and Reality*, in: idem, *Holocaust Historiography—A Jewish Perspective. Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches and Fundamental Issues*, London-Portland, OR 2003, pp. 303-328, p. 320.

Balfour Declaration in Britain.¹⁷⁾ And last but not least: about one third of today's Israelis are Jews or their descendants from Arab countries who migrated to Israel, many of them under pressure from their former home countries, in 1948 and later; a fact which anti-Israeli Arabs tend to forget. With a large grain of salt, one might even call the Israeli-Arab conflict at least in part a conflict *within* the greater Arab community. So there clearly is a wide historical co-responsibility of many other nations for the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It is true that many Israeli and American Jews, particularly nationalist Jews, have problems seeing their own country and its history in more or less objective terms, they still believe in many of the myths which – among others – Israeli historians themselves have exposed in the last 25 years. Yet myths are part of national folklore everywhere; nations almost define themselves through the creation of myths about their origin, development, and behaviour. Despite the singular monstrosity of Germany's crimes and its utter defeat in World War II, many Germans to this day believe that Hitler did at least some good. Far into the 1980s, many crucial German institutions such as the *Wehrmacht*, the universities, or professional associations had widely been considered essentially "clean", whereas in fact all of them had been involved in the machinery of discrimination, humiliation, expulsion, and even mass murder. The Quandts, one of Germany's major industrial families, which had been among the worst offenders under the Nazis, had remained silent or claimed innocence until a couple of weeks ago, when a new TV documentary forced them to state publicly that they were willing to have independent researchers look into family history.¹⁸

To this day, it is difficult and may be dangerous to your career, your freedom, or even your life to address war crimes in Japan or the Armenian genocide in Turkey. France has long had serious problems talking openly and honestly about French collaboration with the Nazis and about French crimes in the war of Algerian independence. Austria has only begun to distance itself from the established image as one of Hitler's first victims. The United States has a holocaust museum, which is appropriate and honourable; but as far as I know, it does not have a museum commemorating the genocide of the American Indians in the 19th century by the immigrants.

And not all national myths were obvious as myths at the time. Today we know that Israel was actually stronger than its Arab counterparts in the first Israeli-Arab war, it was not David against Goliath. But that was by no means evident to the Jews who were fighting for their independence in those days. The holocaust behind them, they genuinely believed to be standing with their backs against the wall and to be fighting for survival, victory not being assured.

¹⁷ Tom Segev, *One Palestine Complete. Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*, London 2000, pp. 40-41, 47.

¹⁸ Cf. *Thema des Tages*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, October 2/3, 2007, p. 2.

Let me add a few remarks about racism. There is racism in Israel, not only but particularly against Arabs. Unfortunate as this is, racism is again not typical of Israeli democracy alone. There is at least some racism in all democracies, there has been much racism in all settler-colonial societies – as in the history of Britain versus Ireland or France versus Algeria. The penal system in the United States is heavily biased racially against Afro-Americans. And while Israel does discriminate against its Arab minority (I am talking about Israel proper here, the situation in the West Bank is different and worse), structurally and individually, treatment of indigenous peoples in the United States, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand with their violent assimilation policies has probably been much worse at least into the 1970s. I feel this comparative perspective is important, because there has been a tendency particularly among developing and Arab countries to equate Zionism with racism. There is so much cynicism and hypocrisy in this debate that one should stay away from it as far as possible. Let me only remind you that the person who introduced the infamous UN resolution in the General Assembly was Idi Amin, one of the world's worst dictators and butchers.

3.2 Methodological Problems

In two important cases the book does not fully develop its concepts or provide theoretically informed models, with implications for the conclusions.

3.2.1 The Concept of National Interest

One of Mearsheimer and Walt's major points is that the strong alliance with Israel no longer is an asset but has become a liability for American foreign policy. To support their case, the authors provide what they call an analysis of an "objective" national interest of the United States. In my view, this analysis is objectivist and too materialist. Although the arguments in the book about the costs and benefits of the alliance between the United States and Israel are perfectly legitimate, I do not think such a thing as an objective national interest exists. National interests are variable, they are constructed and contested. Not even "survival" is an objective, i.e. context-free, national interest. Hitler, e.g., suggested towards the end of the "Tausendjährige Reich" (the "Thousand Years Empire") that it was in Germany's "national interest" to disappear from the map, because the German race had not stood the test of history and won the war. Even within Realism, the theoretical school in International Relations which Mearsheimer and Walt are mostly, and I believe correctly, associated with, the national in-

terest of the United States has often been controversial. Hans Morgenthau, one of the founders of the theory of political realism, was strongly against the Vietnam War, it was not in the United States' national interest, he said; other realists such as Henry Kissinger thought it was. The British elite were seriously divided about the value of the Mandate over Palestine for the United Kingdom's "national interest". Some thought it was just a waste of money, manpower, and energy; others believed it was strategically important for the life-lines of the empire.¹⁹ So there is room for legitimate controversy about the value of the alliance with Israel for the "national interest" of the United States; many people in the American elite obviously still believe it to be materially-politically beneficial, quite independent of the activities of the Israel Lobby.

Even if Israel no longer had any strategic value, there would be other, immaterial, ties binding the United States to the Jewish state. President Carter, who felt his efforts to bring peace to the Middle East thwarted by Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin and who lost many Jewish-American votes in his attempt to be re-elected, called the alliance with Israel a "moral obligation".²⁰ From what they write in their book I believe Mearsheimer and Walt would agree with that. The holocaust is a major factor behind this obligation, not only for Jewish-Americans but for most non-Jewish Americans as well. And there are affinities which may help explain why the American people, although they want a more balanced foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nevertheless clearly favour the Jewish party. One reason is the similarity of the political systems: Israel is a democracy; that at least is the consensus of the large majority of experts on democratic theory.²¹ Yet there is also an element of a "clash of civilizations" involved here, with the Judeo-Christian civilization on the one side and the Islamic on the other. (This again is a construction, of course, because it neglects the many positive historical interactions and mutual cultural penetrations of the Occident with Islam.) Christian sympathy for the Jewish national home in the "Holy Land" has always been very strong in the United States and one of the reasons behind American sympathy for Zionism, with recollections and even affirmations of the crusades woven into it, from the "re-conquest" of Palestine by the British in World War I to President Bush's casual labelling of the Iraq war as "Operation Crusade".²²

¹⁹ Segev, *One Palestine*, pp. 116-118.

²⁰ Steven T. Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences? The Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair With Israel*, Hanover-London 2003, p. 55.

²¹ There is legitimate room for debate here: Some analysts call Israel an "ethnocracy".

²² For the period until statehood see Lawrence Davidson, *America's Palestine. Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*, Gainesville-Tallahassee-Tampa 2001.

Other affinities between the United States and Israel concern similarities of historical experience, social structure, and political culture. Both are immigrant societies and states which arose from settler-colonies. Both are multicultural with large ethnic minorities. Both have somewhat messianic political ideologies with claims to universal applicability. And both are large projective shields for worldwide admiration and hate. And although they are considered developed countries, religion plays a much more important role in both, privately and politically, than in almost all other OECD countries.²³ 72% of American white evangelical Protestants believe God had granted the Land of Israel to the Jews, which is the kind of American fundamentalism Mearsheimer and Walt count under the Israel Lobby; but 44% of *all Americans* surveyed also believe that, a value which would be absolutely impossible in Europe and which reaches far beyond the range of the Lobby.²⁴

3.2.2 *The Lobby and Lobbying*

The Very Concept of the Israel Lobby

From my own reading it seems obvious to me that there are a number of very potent and very active individuals and organizations in the United States working against left-of-center political views on questions of peace-making in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the wider Middle East. On that I agree with Mearsheimer and Walt. Yet in my opinion, the book does not spell out the criteria for membership in the Lobby or the similarities/differences, cooperation/tensions/divisions of labour between its three major pillars (the Jewish lobby, the evangelical Christians or Christian Zionists, and the neo-conservatives) clearly enough. The authors define the Israel Lobby as a loose association of individuals and organizations actively working on steering the United States into a pro-Israeli direction.²⁵ Since that is much too broad a definition, the authors also say, in order to be a member of the Lobby a person's support for Israel should be permanent, unconditional, and predictable. Thus, Jewish-American peace groups, who openly argue against certain Israeli policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians and Israel's neighbours, and many liberal Jewish-American intellectuals, who are certainly not anti-Israel but very critical of the Bush-Administration and of recent Israeli foreign policy, would not count among the Lobby, or so it seems. Yet as shorthand for the Lobby, the authors

²³ See the brief but excellent paper by Ekkehart Krippendorff, *Die Vereinigten Staaten und Israel. Projektionsflächen für Hoffnung und Hass*, in: *Blätter für deutsche und Internationale Politik*, 47:8, 2002, pp. 943-953.

²⁴ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *American Evangelicals and Israel*, www.pewforum.org

²⁵ Summarized and retranslated from the German edition, pp. 162-163.

very often use “pro-Israel”, which I consider irritating, because being pro-Israel can mean different things. What they actually seem to have in mind are those individuals and groups in America who are connected with or favour the right of centre political spectrum in Israel. Until the foundation of Kadima, pro-Likud lobby may have been a better label.

That conception of the Lobby would still create problems for a number of groups and people in between, who are also undoubtedly pro-Israel but less strongly committed to one of the major camps on “the” right or “the” left. Where would the well-known journalist Thomas Friedman belong, e.g., who is definitely pro-Israel (and actively working for good relations between the United States and Israel), but who also is or has become very critical of the Bush-Administration and its Middle East policies? For an analysis of political preferences (in the United States, among the Lobby, and in Israel) concerning Israel’s relationship with the Arabs (and Iran), it might even be useful to distinguish between at least *three* camps, with different hierarchies of three values constituting major different policy options: land, security, and peace. Each, the land first, the security first, or the peace first camp poses different challenges to U.S. foreign policy.

Other problems arise from the very term Israel Lobby, which has often been translated too easily into Jewish Lobby, as the Shields of David on several book and magazine covers (Campus publishers are not alone) document. In fact, a major section of the Israel Lobby and in terms of sheer numbers in their grass-roots base by the far the largest are Christian evangelicals. So the publishers might as well have put Christian crosses on the flag instead of Shields of David. With their highly ideological fundamentalist and messianic land first position,²⁶ evangelicals can be a strong ally for conservative Jews, but their alliance is one of convenience rather than love. Christian evangelicals – even here we have hardliners and moderates – support Greater Israel not out of altruism; they have their own (strange) ideas about Jewish place-holding in Palestine. In the end, the evangelicals often come out on the same side as major sections of the Jewish Lobby as far as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the fight against terrorism, and a general scepticism about or aversion to Islam are concerned, but their sources and paths of influence are different. George H. W. Bush, the current president’s father, encountered opposition from both, conservative Jews as well as Christian evangelicals. George W. Bush, who is considered a new-born Christian himself, knows who elected him: One third of his voters were evangelical Christians.

²⁶ See, for example, the following statement by Senator Inhofe (R-MS), a Presbyterian, in 2002: “God appeared to Abram and said, ‘I give you this land’ – the West Bank. This is not a political battle at all. It is a contest over whether or not the word of God is true.” As quoted in Bala, *Kulturkrieg*, p. 320.

Although the neo-conservatives cooperate with both, the Jewish lobby and the Christian evangelicals,²⁷ I am also not sure I would consider them part of an Israel Lobby without qualification. Certainly, Jewish intellectuals are overrepresented among the neo-conservative movement, which presents an interesting research question in itself. Yet it has never been purely or even predominantly Jewish, neo-conservatism attracts adherents from a wide variety of backgrounds.²⁸ Non-Jews such as Albert Wohlstetter or Reinhold Niebuhr are important intellectual “fathers” of several prominent neo-cons. Many of them are concerned about Israel, and some hold far-right annexationist views and have positioned themselves radically against the peace process. For others, however, Israel does not form the centre of their world-view. After all, the genocidal persecution of Muslims in Bosnia and the Kosovo by radical Serbs under Milosevic and Karadzic was of major concern to the neo-cons.

Lobbying: Influence versus Power

The relationship between American Jewry and their lobby is not without tension, with trends and countertrends and their own dynamic, as Mearsheimer and Walt indicate but do not elaborate. In the cultural war within the U.S. diaspora, which conservative Jews are waging against the liberal Jewish-American majority, loyalty to Israel has become a test of Jewishness, which is under strong assimilationist pressures from mixed marriages (50% of American Jews marry non-Jews) and a general waning of religious activity. Between 25 and 30 % of American Jews feel fairly or very distant to Israel anyway.²⁹ One author has called the relationship between American Jewry and Israel “a waning love affair” as he describes the gradual disillusionment of American Jewry with the conservative camp in Israel. He even talks of potentially “Irreconcilable Differences”.³⁰ Nevertheless, the majority of American Jews are still reluctant to criticize Israel openly (a circling the wagons effect with deep roots in Jewish history) and they do not want the United States to put pressure on the Jewish state. There are not many religious-nationalist Neo-Zionists in the United States, but American Jews are genuinely concerned about Israel’s security and about anti-Semitism. After a more optimistic phase in the 1990s, this concern has grown again; American Jews are seriously worried about radical Islamic fundamentalism. In 1993, 42% of American Jews believed the Arabs wanted

²⁷ Cf. Bala, *Kulturkrieg*, p. 309: “The neo-conservatives, who used to distance themselves from the *New (Christian) Right*, have been working – together with the Radical Right – for accommodation and cooperation since the 1990s.”

²⁸ Halper/Clarke, *America Alone*, p. 58.

²⁹ Bala, *Kulturkrieg in der Diaspora*, p. 161.

³⁰ See the book quoted in footnote 20.

to destroy Israel; that figure had risen to 84% in 2004. Yet there is a majority for some kind of land versus peace deal, the number of those who do not want to give up any settlements came down from over 50% in 1994 to 29% in 2004.³¹

So there would be leeway for United States' politicians who wished to take the views of Jewish Americans into account. That leeway is restricted by the influence of the Israel Lobby, the authors suggest, one pillar of which are the more conservative organizations within the Jewish lobby which dominate their much weaker and much less influential liberal counterparts. In order to measure that influence, we would first have to distinguish between influence and power, however, something which is missing in the book. Power is the ability to make authoritative decisions, whereas influence is the attempt to broaden or to narrow a decision-maker's options, or to convince or persuade him or her to use an option he or she would otherwise not have taken. The authors do not claim, the Israel Lobby were in power, although some of its members or representatives do have positions in the decision-making process either in Congress or in the Administration. And they provide examples of successes and of failures of the Lobby. They do not, in my view, develop sufficient criteria for weighing these, i.e. for measuring the strength of the Lobby's influence.

As for Congress, more systematic studies of voting on Israel and the Middle East support Mearsheimer and Walt: There is a serious and unusual lack of variance in practically every vote on the subject; even moderate criticism of highly controversial actions by the Israeli government is either completely absent or will receive no more than around 10-20% of the votes.³² Another empirical study of the Lobby's weight in Congress partly based on insider interviews suggests that about 50% of the Congressmen and -women are under AIPAC's, i.e. the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's, influence, via cultural or ideological affinity, campaign money, or other services.³³ That is a very high figure, but what about the other 50%, why do they also vote for Israel on almost anything almost all of the time?

As for the Administration, the evidence is more mixed. There have been spectacular failures of the Lobby. Despite the most massive and sophisticated lobbying effort in American Jewish history, the United States sold AWACS airplanes to Saudi Arabia in 1981, even though many other sectors of American society opposed it, too. For all their alleged political power, American Jewry could not prevail on an issue that was of central importance to the President.³⁴ Is

³¹ Bala, *Kulturkrieg in der Diaspora*, pp. 248-249.

³² Helmut Hubel/Markus Kaim/Oliver Lembcke, *Pax Americana im Nahen Osten. Eine Studie zur Transformation regionaler Ordnungen*, Baden-Baden 2000, pp. 152-160.

³³ Michael Massing, *The Storm over the Israel Lobby*, in: *The New York Review of Books*, June 8, 2006, pp. 64-73.

³⁴ Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences?*, pp. 56-57.

that a possible criterion which would limit the Lobby's influence? Another case in point is the American embassy. For many years now, the Israel Lobby has tried via Congress and the Embassy Relocation Act to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. To this day, it remains in Tel Aviv. And as for Syria, the Bush Administration has so far resisted the approach suggested by the Syria Accountability Act, which the Lobby successfully brought through Congress. So when is the Israel Lobby successful and why, and when not? We still do not have convincing answers to that question.

The Legitimacy of Lobbying

As already mentioned, Mearsheimer and Walt are not against lobbying per se; but how does one distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate lobbying? The criterion "lobbying against the national interest of the United States" is questionable, as I have tried to show. And if the lobby was acting against the perceived national interest of so many Americans, why is there not more opposition against it, why are there no major counter-lobbies against the Israel Lobby or rather the right-wing Israel Lobby? The book does mention the problem of distributive effects. A lobby representing a small sector of societal interests may gain an advantage at the cost of the rest of the society; yet that cost is distributed so widely that it becomes marginal for every other American and does not raise much opposition. This effect may work with tax money, but not on immaterial issues, because the damage of a wrong foreign policy would affect all Americans equally. Differences in attentive focus may be another reason for the mal-distribution resulting from lobbying effects or their lack of representativeness, which is also mentioned in the book. The relationship to Israel, including the preservation of a Greater Israel, is more important to conservative than to liberal American Jews who have more domestic concerns, or than to other Americans; so the Israel Lobby has an advantage in the political correlation of forces. The peace camp among American Jewry has never been as sure of itself as their more vocal and more confident opponents, and it has suffered greatly from the collapse of the peace process. The Israeli right has also been much more successful in its transnational networking with the Jewish lobby in the United States than the left.

Cultural factors also play a role in the success of lobbying, as one can see in the case of gun control. Most experts would agree that American gun laws are highly dysfunctional, yet one cannot explain them with the efforts of the gun lobby alone. Too many Americans still believe in the right to bear arms. I have already mentioned cultural factors which work as a diffuse support for the Israel Lobby.

Conclusion

Structural deficiencies in the United States' political system favour small voting groups which can tip the scales in an electoral stalemate, or rich lobbies. Altering the constitution away from the winner-take-all rule would be difficult, but campaign finance laws could be changed, although not easily, as is also stated in the book. This raises the question who bears final responsibility for the success of lobbies which otherwise would not have majority support. When decision-makers follow the options suggested by lobbies, they may be genuinely convinced of their options' value or may follow them because they appeal to their own mind-set. Another reason may be that they are not willing to search for alternatives. And they may follow them because they do not want to pay the price of not following them, or the give-and-take is just too attractive, promising votes or other electoral support. Yet, the costs or the deals are within their own control, at least to some extent. When President George W. Bush stood vis-à-vis Ariel Sharon and looked him in the eye, he blinked first; at least that is the usual story. Did George W. Bush *have to* blink first? When Vice President Richard Cheney did everything Sharon wanted, as Mearsheimer and Walt say, did he *have to* do that? And when President Bill Clinton reneged on the solemn promise he had given to Yasir Arafat not to enter into the blame game, if the Camp David negotiations were to fail, and joined Ehud Barak's public relations campaign against the Palestinian leader blaming him and only him for the imputed collapse of the talks, thus adding to the poisoning of the atmosphere, did he *have to* do that?³⁵

3.3 Weighing the Causes of the Iraq War

Much if not most of the criticism of the book is directed against another of its central arguments, the role of the neo-conservatives, Mearsheimer and Walt's third pillar of the Israel Lobby, in the decision-making for the Iraq war. I do not think anybody would deny the importance of neo-conservative ideology and political activity in and outside of government for the making of foreign policy in the George W. Bush-Administration. Yet the weight of their influence remains controversial. While the authors seem to believe that the United States would not have gone to war without the neo-cons' influence, I am more reluctant in my distribution of responsibility. To be sure, the framework of legitimation which the neo-cons provided was important, but it was more like a highly welcome lubricant for a decision which

³⁵ Cf. Clayton E. Swisher, *The Truth About Camp David. The Untold Story About the Collapse of the Middle East Peace Process*, New York 2004, pp. 242, 353, 399.

those in the centre of power made for their own reasons. Theoretically as well as empirically, the decision to go to war against Iraq can be explained by a number of factors.

Inconsistencies in the Book

Mearsheimer and Walt are not consistent in their own weighing of the determining factors. The authors state clearly that the neo-cons' position on Iraq had no chance to be accepted during the Clinton Administration. They also demonstrate that, before 9/11, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, and George W. Bush himself were against conquering Iraq. Yet the tragic events of 9/11 made Bush and Cheney change course completely, they became determined to fight a preventive war against Saddam Hussein.³⁶ These are Mearsheimer and Walt's own words implying that while 9/11 may not have been the only it certainly was the major cause of the war. On the other hand, the authors suggest the Israel Lobby was the variable without which the war would almost certainly not have taken place. Pressure from Israel and the Lobby was not the only factor, but it was decisive;³⁷ or was it a necessary, although not a sufficient condition?³⁸ Then they say, Israel plus pro-Israeli groups, particularly the neo-cons, played "a major role" in the decision; or pro-Israeli hardliners were "the driving force", without them the United States would "presumably" not have gone to war.³⁹ Towards the end of the book the authors only claim the Lobby had "contributed" to leading the United States into a catastrophic war in Iraq.⁴⁰ And in a footnote they quote Thomas Friedman in the affirmative who wrote it was not only the neo-cons who brought the United States into Baghdad but a very American combination of fear and arrogance.⁴¹

Democratic Peace Theory and Saddam Hussein as the "Unjust Enemy"

Recent modifications in democratic peace theory have improved our knowledge about why democracies got to war not only if they are attacked by a non-democracy (democracies almost never fight wars against each other), but also when they are not attacked. Liberalism is actually more ambivalent towards peace than many proponents of democratic peace theory had suggested, there even is a "specific democratic militancy" (Harald Müller). Immanuel Kant

³⁶ Mearsheimer/Walt, *Die Israel Lobby*, pp. 341-342.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 321-322.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 324-325.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 321, footnote 2.

himself had introduced the notion of the “unjust enemy” (ungerechter Feind), who is considered dangerous not because of a direct attack, but because his political will is directed against the “project of reason”. The “unjust enemy” deliberately obstructs the extension of the rule of law and of political institutions and thus the development of domestic as well as international peace. Here we have an obvious early parallel to the current debate about rogue states. If a regime can be constructed as an “ungerechter Feind”, i.e. a terrorist or a rogue state prone to violence, then a democracy may feel justified to use violence against it.⁴² Although this requires a process of social construction, it does not demand a particular lobby.

Saddam Hussein provided a convincing target as such an “unjust enemy”. He really was an ugly and brutal dictator who not only oppressed his own people and murdered thousands of them but also attacked Iraq’s neighbouring states; and he had already once tried to develop nuclear weapons, even though Iraq had been a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty. So it was tempting, in the almost hysterical atmosphere after 9/11, to see him as one of the masterminds behind the attack and as one who might try again. Many people around the world not related to the neo-cons and thus the Israel Lobby were in favour of military intervention against Saddam Hussein: many prominent European politicians such as Tony Blair, who tried to convince President Bush to engage in peace-making between Israel and the Palestinians in order to protect their flank vis-à-vis Arab criticism; the prominent Czech writer and civil rights activist turned politician Vaclav Havel; political scientists who participated in the debate about world order and the new American empire such as Herfried Münkler, a German “Realist”, or liberal imperialists such as Niall Ferguson in Great Britain; prominent human rights activists such as the Iraqi Kanan Makia; and last but not least, at the beginning the majority of the Iraqis themselves. In 2004, only 39% percent of all Iraqis said it had been wrong for the United States to invade, 63% said so in 2007. Among Shiites, the negative figure was still as low as 29% in March 2007; it had risen to 51% only in September 2007. At that time, 71% of the Kurds still supported the intervention.⁴³ In the end, the most neo-conservative reason for the invasion may have been the least wrong one.

⁴² Harald Müller, *Kants Schurkenstaat: Der „ungerechte Feind“ und die Selbstermächtigung zum Kriege*, in: Anna Geis (ed.), *Den Krieg überdenken. Kriegsbegriffe und Kriegstheorien in der Kontroverse*, Baden-Baden 2006, pp. 229-250. See also the summary in Claudia Baumgart-Ochse, *Demokratie und Gewalt im Heiligen Land. Politisierte Religion in Israel und das Scheitern des Osloer Friedensprozesses*, Dissertation Manuscript, Goethe-University Frankfurt/Main 2007, pp. 55-58 and 283.

⁴³ www.thecarpetbaggerreport.com, October 31, 2007.

Grand Strategy and the Core Decision-Makers

Many studies analyzing the course of U.S. foreign policy in the last fifteen years and the development of “Grand Strategy,” employ a broader focus than Mearsheimer and Walt’s concentration on the role of the neo-conservatives (and Israel) in the decision for the war against Iraq. The switch to a neo-imperial global strategy away from liberal institutionalism – which had formed the basis of United States’ world order policies after World War II, had only partially been retracted because of the Cold War, and then been taken up under George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton – began in Congress in the mid-nineties with the victory of the militant right in the Republican party. It was completed under George W. Bush and his societal coalition of big business, particularly the oil and the arms industry, the neo-cons, and the religious fundamentalists. This coalition’s grand strategy established a new paradigm which it presented as an answer to terrorism, but which had deeper roots. Under the neo-imperial paradigm, the U.S.A would feel less obliged to cooperate with its allies and less bound to international rules. It would rather use its singular military status to fashion the world to its own ideas, and it would operate in the world on its own terms. The new grand strategy was based on lasting military superiority combined with a greater readiness to use military force. It also contained a dramatisation and integration of new threats, which could not be dealt with by deterrence alone. Potential threats might or had to be fought preventively.⁴⁴

The neo-conservatives, who were part of the coalition, helped the core of the decision-makers, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Cheney, and George W. Bush, to convince themselves that Saddam Hussein had not only been involved in the attack on the United States, but that he might do so again, perhaps using weapons of mass destruction. Yet they also wanted to be convinced, because that conviction served their own mind-sets and important psychological needs. Donald Rumsfeld was an old Cold War hawk; worst casing and threat inflation had become habitual with him. He also was an authoritarian bureaucratic control person. He could have chosen a brilliant, independently-minded Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, e.g., who had learned from the Vietnam War and would have given unbiased advice to the Secretary of Defence. Yet he chose a yes-sayer who toed his line and kept doubts to himself.⁴⁵ Richard Che-

⁴⁴ See my summary in Gert Krell, *Arrogance of Power – Arrogance of Impotence. The Iraq Conflict, U.S. “Weltpolitik”, and Transatlantic Relations*, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Report No. 67, Frankfurt/Main 2003, pp. 20-22. See also Ernst-Otto Czempiel, *Weltpolitik im Umbruch. Die Pax Americana, der Terrorismus und die Zukunft der internationalen Beziehungen*, München 2002; Harald Müller, *Amerika schlägt zurück. Die Weltordnung nach dem 11. September*, Frankfurt/Main 2003; David Held/Mathias Koenig-Archibugi (eds.), *American Power in the 21st Century*, Cambridge–Malden, MA 2004; and G. John Ikenberry, *America’s Imperial Ambition*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, 81:5 (Sept./Oct. 2002), pp. 44-60.

⁴⁵ Bob Woodward, *State of Denial. Bush at War, Part III*, New York–London–Toronto 2006, pp. 60-61.

ney had also been socialized in the national security state, and he developed an obsession with the new enemy.⁴⁶ As he summarised the change in the threat before the Council on Foreign Relations in early 2002:⁴⁷

When America's great enemy [the Soviet Union, GK] suddenly disappeared, many wondered what new direction our foreign policy would take. We spoke, as always, of long-term problems and regional crises throughout the world, but there was no single, immediate, global threat that any roomful of experts could agree upon. [...] All of that changed five months ago. The threat is known and our role is clear now.

The feeling of a diffuse and vague threat situation combined with the consciousness of an exceptional power position found a focus in the shape of a new enemy, personified by Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, enemies which had to be and could be extinguished.⁴⁸ The fight against terrorism offered just an extensive goal as did the containment of communism, and it fitted in nicely with the law and order instincts of the President himself and his grandiose fantasies of ridding the world from evil and of reordering it in America's image, "messianic big ideas not properly thought through".⁴⁹ The bias of these core decision-makers and the false loyalties of the more moderate George Tenet, Condoleezza Rice, and Colin Powell, their misperceptions and false judgments, were heavily motivated by psychological needs. The mixture of blindness and rage against an enemy, who in this case really was innocent, reminds one of people with post-traumatic stress syndrome. Attacking Saddam Hussein also functioned as a kind of substitute: Iraq was attacked not only because it seemed a serious risk but also because it seemed a relatively easy target where the U.S. could demonstrate resolve and activity against terrorism.

Oil

And – to come back to more material dimensions – oil *did* play a role in the decision for the war, contrary to what Mearsheimer and Walt suggest. Not in the sense of the short-term interests of individual companies. Concern about the reliability of Saudi-Arabia, which had in fact been involved in the attacks of September 11, at least indirectly, much more than Saddam Hussein, also made the Bush-Administration think about "liberating" Iraq by force, in order to

⁴⁶ See Joan Didion, *Cheney. The Fatal Touch*, in: New York Review of Books, 53:15, October 5, 2006. There is also some tragic in this, since Cheney had experienced the CIA's failure to recognize Iraq's nuclear weapons program in the early 1990s; he was deeply concerned the CIA might make the same mistake again, which unfortunately led to a heavily biased overcompensation.

⁴⁷ As quoted in Frances FitzGerald, *George Bush and the World*, in: The New York Review of Books, September 26, 2002, pp. 80-86, p. 84.

⁴⁸ Pierre Hassner, *The United States: The Empire of Force or the Force of Empire?*, Chaillot Papers No. 54, September 2002, Paris 2002, pp. 38-39.

⁴⁹ Brian Urquhart, *A Cautionary Tale*, in: New York Review of Books, June 10, 2004, pp. 8-10, p. 10.

establish more enduring and mutually agreed control over one of the most important oil producers or at least avoid dominance over the Persian Gulf oil resources by a hostile power.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The neo-conservatives, who had been arguing and working for an attack against Saddam Hussein since 1993, definitely influenced the legitimizing framing of the United States' response to the challenge which Saddam Hussein seemed to have mounted. Yet the major causes of the final decision of the Administration to intervene were the attack of September 11, 2001 and the (mis)perceptions, strategies and psychological needs of those core decision-makers who bore the major responsibility for the reaction to this crisis. The neo-cons could play a successful part around these core decision-makers only because their agenda appealed to the mind-frames of these decision-makers and to large sections of American politics in general and the American people as well.

Paul Krugman recently suggested that neo-con Norman Podhoretz, one of the founding fathers of the movement, was engaging in "crazy talk".⁵¹ Norman Podhoretz has said several times – he has recently published a book about it – we already are in World War IV.⁵² In late October 2007 he demanded Iran should be bombed as soon as it was logistically possible. Norman Podhoretz no doubt is an influential intellectual; yet he does not have power. Potential power rests with Rudolph Giuliani, who hired him as an advisor, and other Republican candidates who talk just as crazy. These candidates do not appeal to the Israel Lobby, they appeal to the hearts and minds of right-wing Republicans: to fear, to militant and unilateralist nationalism, to a Manichean world view, and to the arrogance of power. Afghanistan, the original source of the 9/11 attack, is still unstable. Osama bin Laden remains a fugitive in Pakistan, another instable Islamic country which already has nuclear weapons. Stability in Iraq remains elusive, in spite of heavy U.S. military, financial, and political involvement. And yet, Cheney and Bush are talking about going to war against Iran, ignoring the suggestions by the Baker/Hamilton report. They bear responsibility for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, not the Israel Lobby. It was above all the President who wanted the war against Saddam Hussein. He did not wait for the evidence, because he believed he could not be falsified anyway. He wished to be regarded as a strong, decisive, and action-oriented man. And it is not only his

⁵⁰ See the summary of motivations for the war in Müller, *Amerika schlägt zurück*, pp. 146-151.

⁵¹ Paul Krugman, *Fearing Fear Itself*, International Herald Tribune, October 30, 2007, p. 5.

⁵² Cf. Ian Buruma, *His Toughness Problem—and Ours*, in: The New York Review of Books, September 27, 2007, pp. 10-18 (Review of Norman Podhoretz, *World War IV: The Long Struggle against Islamofascism*).

Administration or the Israel Lobby; it is Bush himself who regards the conflicts in the Middle East as part of a fundamental antagonism between “freedom and terror”.⁵³

3.4 Pressing Israel into Peace-Making?

Introduction

I agree with Mearsheimer and Walt that the long-drawn out and on-going colonization of the occupied territories, particularly the West Bank, is the most serious impediment to a peaceful solution of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and the other Arab neighbours. It is the most important impediment, because the second most important impediment, Arab terrorism, is related to it. To what degree can be debated, and I believe a legitimate position would be: not completely, but to a large extent. It is no coincidence that leading American politicians have been saying for about 30 years now, the settlements must stop. Unfortunately, with the exception of the Gaza strip, over which Israel still claims sovereignty even after the withdrawal of 2005, they have not stopped. And, through government and private funds, the United States has in fact supported the settlement process, at least indirectly. That explains much of the cynicism and anger not only in the Palestinian territories, but in the whole Arab and Islamic world against the United States, although it does not explain Osama bin Laden’s violent fundamentalist doctrine. (Here I disagree with Mearsheimer and Walt to some extent.) As the book correctly emphasizes, Israel could have had peace with Syria, had Ehud Barak been willing to give up all of the Golan Heights and not retreated in the negotiations when he ran into strong opposition from the public and the Golan lobby, which is very strong in his own party.⁵⁴ With the Arab League and Saudi initiatives, it could have peace with almost all Arab or Islamic countries, if it was willing to give up the occupied territories; that includes the great majority of the Palestinians.

So why does the United States not put more pressure on Israel in a direction which seems so obviously in everybody’s “national interest”? Because of the Lobby, Mearsheimer and Walt answer. I agree that U.S. foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be different, if the Israel Lobby did not exist. Israel has often used the Lobby to deflect pressure, or

⁵³ Peter Rudolf, *Imperial Illusionen. Amerikanische Außenpolitik unter George W. Bush*, Baden-Baden 2007, p. 156.

⁵⁴ Swisher, *Truth About Camp David*, pp. 61-130. See also Itamar Rabinovich, *Waging Peace. Israel and the Arabs, 1948-2003*, Princeton-Oxford 2004, pp. 126-140. The Golan lobby also mobilized a campaign against U.S. support for an Israeli-Syrian agreement via its allies in the Jewish-American community (*ibid.*, p. 135).

the Lobby has created enough noise by itself to achieve a similar effect.⁵⁵ Yet again, I see several other theoretical and empirical problems involved in the triangle between Israel, the Lobby, and the United States government.

Alliance Theory

Alliance theory tells us that, quite independent of transnational lobbying, client states can and do resist pressure from their patrons. Even such an authoritarian and powerful country as the Soviet Union made that painful experience. Often enough it felt blackmailed and gave in, and sometimes lost its client anyway. Israel could not threaten to defect, which was the strongest weapon of clients during the Cold War. Yet it can threaten to do other things which the patron does not want it to do, if it feels pressed; as when David Ben-Gurion sent thinly veiled threats to U.S. President Eisenhower that Israel would go to war in the Middle East, if the Americans persisted in refusing to supply arms.⁵⁶ We have examples of both, compliance and resistance. When Sharon wanted to chase Arafat out of the West Bank, the U.S. said no and Arafat remained in Ramallah. When President Carter put pressure on Menachem Begin to give the Palestinians political rights, the Israeli Prime Minister reacted with an increase in settlement activities. When Benjamin Netanyahu tried to escape President Clinton's pressures through contacts with the Lobby and Congress, he still had to accept the Hebron Protocol and the Wye River Memorandum; it was his right-wing coalition which prevented their implementation. This ambiguity works not only on the elite level. Depending on the circumstances, a majority of the Israeli population will fear abandonment from America and be prepared to make concessions; that was the case towards the end of the Shamir-Government and before the election of Yitzhak Rabin. Yet resistance may also stiffen, if a differently composed majority does not feel secure enough to make the concessions which the United States is asking for.

Retrenchment in Settler Colonial Societies

One of the best, unfortunately also one of the least read books about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is Ian Lustick's *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza*.⁵⁷ By providing a theoretically informed comparative

⁵⁵ Newt Gingrich, the Republican speaker of the House between 1995 and 1999, once called Madeleine Albright "Arafat's agent". Was Gingrich a member of the Lobby, or just another right-wing politician?

⁵⁶ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 158.

⁵⁷ Ithaca, N.Y. and London 1993.

historical-analytical perspective, Lustick can demonstrate structural similarities in political and ideological processes of colonial/empirical expansion/annexation on the one hand and re-trenchment on the other. Successful incorporation of a settler colony requires a “hegemonic project”, by which Lustick means the construction of a consensus in the “mother country” that the colony is justly theirs. In the case of Great Britain and Ireland this construction was successful for a while, but it broke down in the face of growing resistance from the colonized Irish. (Interestingly, many of the early Protestant colonizers, mainly from the nobility and gentry, had switched sides in favour of Irish independence.) In France versus Algeria and in Israel versus the West Bank and Gaza, the settlers and their allies tried very hard to establish that consensus, but they both failed.

Without hegemony of the conception and with resistance from the colonized peoples, disengagement becomes a possibility; “wars of position” between those willing to disengage and those holding on to the colony (not only the settlers themselves but also their nationalist allies in the “mother country”) begin. These “wars of position” contain serious risks of regime crisis or coup d’état, which was the case in France, or of civil war, which was the case in both Great Britain and France. Colonial settlers and their allies belong to the most unscrupulous sectors in democratic societies; they do not hesitate to employ undemocratic methods, even to attack the regime or use violence. The murder of Yitzhak Rabin, although it brought parts of the right-wing in Israel to their senses, is an indication of the challenges any Israeli government wanting to withdraw from the West Bank will be facing.

On the basis of his comparative analysis, Lustick comes up with six scenarios for Israeli re-trenchment from the West Bank and Gaza, which are all the more fascinating since his book was published in 1993. Option one is an anti-annexationist majority risking anti-regime confrontation from the annexationists. This is close to what happened to the Oslo process. Option two is centrist realignment, the option which de Gaulle used successfully in France; the foundation of Kadima may be a step in that direction. Option four is spatial decomposition, the strategy used in Great Britain versus Ireland: the colony was divided; Sharon seemed to have something similar in mind. It risks, as it did in Ireland, permanent irredentism. Option three is pressure from outside, in the case of Israel from the United States. Lustick argues such pressure was unlikely, but he also says, and that is my point here, it would not be sufficient.

Politicized Fundamentalist Religion

The problem of veto groups resisting colonial retrenchment is made even more difficult in the case of Israel, since the ideological hard core of the settlers (about 20% of the Jews living in the occupied territories) holds radical, illiberal views. For religious Zionist fundamentalists, Eretz Israel, the Tora, and the People of Israel are one. The Jews are God's chosen people, and through the bible He has granted them Eretz Israel. The historical developments leading to Zionism, immigration, the foundation of Israel, and the re-conquest of what they call Judea and Samaria are considered manifestations of God's involvement. Arabs and Muslims are their ultimate enemies; a Palestinian nation does not exist nor has it any legitimacy. But there is another enemy: the Israeli left, which supposedly controls the media and the state bureaucracy. The left does not understand the intrinsic worth of Eretz Israel and of the settlement project, which follows God's will. Giving "land for peace" is thus a crime against God, and fighting against territorial concessions a central dimension of the radical settlers' ideology and activities.⁵⁸

Although the politicized religious fundamentalists in Israel have failed to establish the occupied territories as a consensual "hegemonic project", they have positioned themselves well in the state bureaucracy, in the military, and in the educational system. On that basis, they were instrumental in subverting the Oslo process, as Claudia Baumgart-Ochse, a young scholar from the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt, has recently shown in a brilliant dissertation about "Democracy and Violence in the Holy Land".⁵⁹ They also successfully "securitized" the debate about the territories, thus bridging the divide between their fundamentalist views and other, non-fundamentalist or less fundamentalist Israelis who are less concerned about the occupied territories and more about the security of Israel proper.

The Strength/Vulnerability Paradox

On several occasions, Mearsheimer and Walt emphasize Israel's military power. I have no problems with their data and the general thrust of their argument. In "objective" terms, Israel has been stronger than its Arab neighbours and has used its strength not only for defensive purposes, as is often suggested. The 1956 War with France and Great Britain against Egypt,

⁵⁸ See the summary in Baumgart-Ochse, *Demokratie und Gewalt im Heiligen Land*, pp. 166-168; Bernstein, *Der verborgene Frieden*, has more on that in his chapter III.

⁵⁹ For the full title see footnote 42.

e.g., was an expansionist war.⁶⁰ Only because of the strongest possible opposition from both superpowers did Israel give up the territories conquered in the war and did the European powers finally end their imperialist history in the area. There is another side to the coin, however, which Mearsheimer and Walt might have dealt with to some more length. In spite of its strength and superiority, Israel feels more vulnerable than other states with a different history probably would. It is very important, not only on the personal or intellectual but also on the political level, to recognize the deep sense of vulnerability of many Jewish Israelis resulting from Jewish history, a history of discrimination and persecution culminating in the holocaust. Non-Jews can get at least a glimpse of that burden, if they study that history or read books or plays by survivors. To give just one example, I would like to quote from an interview with Aharon Appelfeld, whose mother was murdered by the Nazis, who escaped after a period of hiding to Palestine as a boy, and who later became a famous novelist:⁶¹

Where will the next bomb blow up? It could be here in the coffee house. One does not want U.S. Jews as neighbours. Emotionally this is as it used to be. (...) We are close to six million Israelis in the midst of 250 million Arabs. Israel is a ghetto, too—an armed ghetto.

To be sure, the tragic experiences of the Jewish people may lead to different kinds of conclusions. Many Jews who survived the horrors of a concentration camp or lost relatives do criticize Israel, particularly its human rights violations in the occupied territories. Yet one must understand and accept, at least take into account the strong sensitivity about security among a large majority of Jews in Israel and of others who feel close to the Jewish state.⁶²

Real Dangers

This holds all the more true since many threats to Israel are real, and not all of them are a response, however legitimate or not, to Israel's occupation of Arab territories. Even if Israel were to reach a comprehensive settlement which would satisfy the great majority of the Palestinians (but which it may no longer want), it would still face unmitigated and potentially violent hostility from radical minorities, secular or religious, who are not prepared to compromise. This was the case during the Oslo peace process, when these radicals deliberately created problems for Israeli moderates by spreading terror in Israel proper. In more recent years,

⁶⁰ Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, pp. 143-185.

⁶¹ DIE ZEIT, March 15, 2007, p. 12, my translation. I recommend his *The Story of a Life* and *Elternland*, which is situated in a fictional village near Cracow; about Polish anti-Semitism see the excellent study by Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other. The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*, Lincoln-London 2006.

⁶² See also Ben-Ami, *Scars of War*, p. XII: "Zionism was the territorial answer to the Jewish fear and this fear has never subsided since." Ben-Ami has also said, Israel must choose between being a state or a Yishuv (ibid.).

Hezbollah and Hamas have been sending hundreds of rockets into Israel; and there are still governments with more than negligible power which openly declare they would like Israel to disappear from the map. While Mearsheimer and Walt take all these problems seriously, perhaps not seriously enough, the data they use probably underestimate the extent of anti-Semitism. According to several reliable monitoring groups, anti-Semitic incidents have increased considerably in the 21st century, not only in Europe.⁶³ Anti-Semitism is wide-spread in Arab and other Islamic countries. The Islamic world would be in flames, were Western journals to publish only a tiny fraction of anti-Islamic caricatures compared to the abundance of their anti-Semitic ones. To be sure, Arabs, particularly the Palestinians, have real grievances against Israel. That, however, is no reason for anti-Semitism, just as Islamic terrorism is no reason for anti-Arabism or anti-Islamism.

4. Conclusion

I agree with almost everything the authors say in their own conclusions, although I don't think classical Realist offshore-balancing will be enough in a globalized world with societies becoming as important as states.⁶⁴ I particularly agree with their emphasis on enlightened and open debate of all the issues mentioned here, a debate to which their book, I hope, will contribute. Let me only add one concern at the end. In my view, peace in the Middle East can only be achieved, if the majority of the Israelis (and Palestinians for that matter) can be convinced of its advantages. For such a peace, which will demand substantial concessions from Israel, to come about, the fundamentalist religious and the more secular far right need to be isolated politically. Since the left in Israel is too small to do that, it needs the centre and the moderate right in a coalition for peace. The centre, however, will only join such a coalition, if it gets iron-clad security guarantees for the Jewish state. The United States can put some pressure on Israel, depending on the circumstances. But it will have to produce an end to Arab or Islamic terrorism against Israel at the same time, or at least a drastic reduction and more effective controls by the Arabs themselves. Unfortunately, the present U.S. Administration has manoeuvred itself into a highly unfavourable position for doing that.

⁶³ See U.S. Department of State, *Global Report on Anti-Semitism*, Washington, D.C. 2005, www.state.gov. Some of the best articles on both sides of the debate, the abuse of the accusation of anti-Semitism and trends in real anti-Semitism, see Doron Rabinovici/Ulrich Speck/Natan Sznaider (eds.), *Neuer Antisemitismus?*, Frankfurt/Main 2004.

⁶⁴ See Ernst-Otto Czempel, *Kluge Macht. Außenpolitik für das 21. Jahrhundert*, München 1999, particularly chapter 1: Ist die Realpolitik wirklich realistisch? (Is „Realpolitik“ really realistic?)