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The Power of Israel in the United States by James Petras; *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* by John J. Mearsheimer; Stephen M. Walt

Review by: Michael Neumann

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of the secular-nationalist identity and milieu" and the "secularization/nationalization of the Islamist identity and milieu." It would seem that more people have departed the secular/nationalist camp and joined the Islamist one, rather than the reverse.

Lybarger argues that "culture and structure are interrelated." If structure affects the emergence of certain culture, cultural factors can equally shape "network formations, constituency mobilization, and large historical transitions" (p. 15). Examining the dialectical relationship between "political culture and structure" in such volatile times (before and after Oslo, 1993-94), may well elucidate the "waxing and waning" of collective political agency and orientations. Lybarger's case studies suggest (as in the Thawra Camp, for example), that structure influences culture, however revolutionary this culture might be. For example, Khadija, a courageous left-wing activist, would "implicitly accommodate . . . the inherited structures of familial and gender authority" (p. 139). Gender mixing, feminist activism, and other dimensions of the secular milieu had a dramatic impact on traditional social structures. In the case of the Islamists and their milieu, however, the challenge of structure was easier to overcome, requiring a slight adjustment, rather than a revolutionary change, of existing social norms. Traditional structures have, in fact, played a key role in supporting the Islamist culture.

That said, Lybarger's case studies are drawn exclusively from refugee camps, which may render his conclusions inapplicable to urban settings in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, or in the various social matrices of the Palestinian diaspora. Would processes of identity negotiation and shifting loyalties occur in cities and among more privileged Palestinians in the same way that these processes have unfolded in the refugee camps? One weakness of Lybarger's argument is that he does not focus enough on the "hard-core" loyalists of either secular or Islamist milieu who have held fast to their political identities (and factions) despite changing circumstances and years of frustration. These are minor criticisms, however; the book itself remains an original and discerning study.

EXAMINING THE ISRAEL LOBBY

The Power of Israel in the United States, by James Petras. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2006. 187 pages. Index to p. 191. \$16.95 paper.

The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy, by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007. xxi + 355 pages. Notes to p. 463. Index to p. 484. \$26.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Michael Neumann

Books critical of Israel are bound to attract more than the usual share of scrutiny. Knowing this, one would expect the authors of such material to take care not only to support their arguments, but also to present only arguments worth making. Unfortunately, these expectations are often disappointed.

Much of James Petras's *The Power of Israel in the United States* is beyond serious dispute: Petras asserts that the Jewish or Israel lobby has enormous power; describes Israeli aggression and cruelty; and points out that Jewish and Zionist neoconservatives have had a very large presence in America's policy-making apparatus. Petras overreaches, however, going far beyond these assertions, resulting in a book that disappoints and misleads in a surprising variety of ways.

First, this short work is about 50 percent padding. Rather than focusing on the power of Israel in the United States, seven of thirteen chapters instead deal with such topics as torture, the invasion of Lebanon, terrorism "experts," suicide bombers, and Israeli intentions toward Iran. In these chapters, Petras does make a faint gesture toward his declared topic: Look, he says, at what Israel is able to convince the United States to countenance. But such statements are not nearly enough to justify what are essentially long digressions.

Second, Petras fails to provide references for numerous, rather astounding statements he makes throughout the work—the statements may be correct, but the author's sloppiness defeats his obviously political purpose. As an example: Petras cites J.J. Goldberg's *Jewish Power* in asserting that "45 percent of the fundraising for the Democratic Party and 25 percent of the funding for the Republicans came from Jewish-funded Political Action Committees." He adds that "a more recent survey by Richard Cohen of the Washington Post" puts these figures at 60 and 35 percent, respectively. Petras

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has a footnote to Goldberg, but he provides no page numbers, and I couldn't find the 45 and 25 percent figures in Goldberg's book. Goldberg's estimates are not, as Petras claims, based on data, but rather on conversations, and Goldberg stresses that the totals are uncertain and include "undisciplined" contributions from Jewish individuals. His high figure for Democratic contributions, "about" 50 percent, does not apply to the whole spectrum of congressional candidates, only to "individual legislators with close ties to the Jewish community" (Goldberg, p. 276). As for the Richard Cohen survey, no reference is given, nor have I been able to find any despite extensive searches. Petras's claims about Jewish funding for Republican candidates are equally shaky. Finally, and more generally, Petras is fond of referring to unnamed sources for such highly controversial matters as Israeli foreknowledge of the attacks of 11 September 2001; this amounts to little more than rumor-mongering.

Third, Petras persistently overstates his case. He speaks, for instance, of "Israeli tyranny over Washington" (p. 75) and Israel's "hegemony over Congress" (p. 127), a problematic claim implying that Israel is able to get whatever it wants from the United States. It is well known, however, that the Israeli government would like to make war on Syria, bomb Iran, destroy the refugee camps in Lebanon, expel the Palestinians into Jordan, sell high-tech arms to China, have the United States recognize the legitimacy of the occupation, and above all, make Jerusalem its capital. If Israel enjoys such "hegemony" over the United States, why doesn't all this happen?

Finally, there is a pervasive flaw in Petras's approach: In evaluating Israel's influence in U.S. policy-making, Petras takes into account only Israel and the United States. The rest of the Middle East, both lands and peoples, make only cameo appearances, primarily as victims. A broader perspective would make it clear that Petras's "hegemony" claim needs a far stronger defense.

For example: Gamal Abdel Nasser makes no appearance in Petras's work, even though the nature of the United States' relationship with Israel had much to do with American fears that Nasser would bring revolution to the Arab world (and bring the Soviets in its wake). From the late 1950s into the late 1980s, Israel functioned as a counterweight to Soviet influence; the U.S.-Israel alliance may thus have emerged from a real

community of interest, one that vanished with the fall of the Soviet Union. As for the massive amount of U.S. aid to Israel, Petras fails to mention that despite Israel's lobbying efforts, more U.S. military hardware goes to Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Jordan, and Egypt. The significance of these points is certainly debatable, and perhaps Israel does indeed dominate U.S. policy-making. Petras, however, does nothing to establish this.

By contrast, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, by Harvard professor Stephen Walt and University of Chicago professor John Mearsheimer, is a much more powerful work. The authors surpass most interpreters in establishing that U.S. support for Israel, at least in the post-Soviet era, often runs contrary to American foreign policy interests. They further hypothesize that the Israel lobby distorts U.S. policy objectives by pressuring both the legislative and executive branches.

This is a reasonable supposition, but Walt and Mearsheimer are distracted from their agenda by their eagerness to fend off accusations of anti-Semitism. Regrettably, these efforts have proved futile and do considerable damage to the book itself.

For one thing, Walt and Mearsheimer descend into nonsense such as: "We fully agree with [American Jewish leader] Malcolm Hoenlein . . . that 'it is safe to say that American Jews are among the most patriotic and loyal of American citizens'" (p. 147). No basis is offered for this kind of statement.

Or: "trying to restrict support for pro-Israel groups would clearly be anti-Semitic, as all Americans are within their rights to contribute to any legitimate cause" (p. 349). Anti-Semitism and opposition to Israel are distinct phenomena, however; such measures would therefore neither stigmatize nor harm the many Jews who—as the authors themselves note—do not support Israel. The statement further introduces the question of "legitimacy," and, illogically, it offers unconstitutionality as evidence for racism.

Worse, caution induces the authors to water down their hypothesis to the point of triviality. They define the "Israel lobby" as a diffuse group of Israel supporters, not all of whom, by any means, are Jewish. In other words, their thesis is that Israel's supporters have a lot of political clout—which is pretty much already known. Much of the book is devoted to expanding on this theme under nebulous headings like "dominating public

discourse" followed by unsurprising material about pro-Israel types pushing for the United States to attack much of the Middle East.

This is all very well, but from first-rate political scientists, we have a right to expect hard answers to hard questions. By choosing a safe, broad definition of the lobby—to ward off suggestions of a "Jewish cabal"—the authors essentially changed the subject. There is, after all, an "Israel lobby" in the narrowest sense of the term, consisting of AIPAC and its cognate organizations. Does this lobby do an effective job of backing its congressional supporters and breaking its congressional opponents? Does it have a real voice in executive branch decisions? *The Israel Lobby* provides anecdotes and isolated cases, but no systematic tally of seats won or lost, no actual record of lobbyists dominating policy meetings.

Perhaps such a tally is unobtainable. Perhaps we're not privy to the deliberations that would settle the issue of executive influence. But certainly there is an issue to be settled. What, for instance, of Ezra Klein's claim that

[AIPAC has] a reputation for defeating any and every politician who crosses [it]. But as one senior house aide argued to me, "The idea that members who cross AIPAC are defeated is very rarely true, but it's nevertheless an effective myth." What AIPAC actually does, he said, "is shoot the dead and the wounded," attacking already-weakened politicians who AIPAC knows can be defeated—and thus used to bolster its image. When it goes after strong incumbents . . . AIPAC can and does fail. Nor does AIPAC support spell certain success. Indeed, one analysis found that, in 1992, five of the top 10 recipients of pro-Israel donations lost their elections." (Ezra Klein, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad AIPAC?" *The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*, 28 October 2005.)

If Mearsheimer and Walt were unwilling or unable to evaluate these counter-claims, they may have been too quick to write a book on the lobby.

The authors disappoint most when they follow Petras in neglecting the Arab Middle East. They see Israeli triumphs but not Arab gains, and therefore they miss Israeli failures. The perfunctory examination of U.S.-Arab relations leads them to find one Saudi victory: "the sale of AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia in 1982 despite AIPAC's strong opposition" (p. 144). "Even so," they tell us, "the sale barely squeaked through . . . and Reagan was forced to withdraw several subsequent arms packages." But 1982 was also when Reagan imposed a six-year ban on further sales of cluster weapons to Israel. Besides, the his-

tory of U.S.-Arab arms deals hardly begins or ends with Reagan. In 2001, for example, the lobby failed to prevent the sale to Egypt of 53 Harpoon Block II missiles as well as four naval patrol craft. Like Petras, the authors hardly notice the multibillion dollar U.S. arms transfers to Arab countries, including those involving the advanced weapons that Israel hates to see in Arab hands. Yet we can't really assess the strength of the lobby unless we face these awkward truths.

EVOLUTION OF THE GUARD

A Police Force without a State: A History of the Palestinian Security Forces in the West Bank and Gaza, by Brynjar Lia. Reading, U.K.: Ithaca Press, 2006. xvi + 433 pages. Appendices to p. 437. Bibliography and sources to p. 467. Index to p. 477. \$54.50 cloth.

Building Arafat's Police: The Politics of International Police Assistance in the Palestinian Territories after the Oslo Agreement, by Brynjar Lia. Reading, U.K.: Ithaca Press, 2007. xviii + 326 pages. Appendices to p. 329. Bibliography and sources to p. 352. Index to p. 362. \$54.50 cloth.

Reviewed by Sarah Salwen

In this pair of meticulously researched books, Brynjar Lia, an analyst and professor at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment, seeks to redress the dearth of literature on the Palestinian security agencies and to examine how a workable national police force can be developed in the absence of the basic framework of a state. Although the overall topics of the two books (published within a year of one another) may at first appear very similar, their substantive foci differ significantly. *A Police Force without a State* presents a detailed history of the development of the Palestinian police, tracing the evolution of various security institutions from the outbreak of the first intifada in 1987 through the Oslo peace process, to the beginning of the Aqsa Intifada in 2000, concentrating in particular on the formative period of the PLO's police apparatus from 1992 to 1996. In contrast, *Building Arafat's Police* explores the role of international donors from 1993 to 2000 in

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