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### Did Israel Lead the US into the War on Iraq?

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As the war on Iraq rages on with no end in sight, the scandals around its beginnings continue to proliferate. Because of these scandals, one question now being revisited is the role the state of Israel may have played in initiating the invasion of Iraq.

Israel's role is debated whenever American policy in the Middle East is discussed. This is inevitable,

because Israel is America's key ally in the region and because the Israel-Palestine conflict is the focal point of attention for virtually anyone who cares about the Mideast. Some critics of the war on Iraq maintain that the decision to go to war was made largely to advance Israeli interests. Others maintain that Israel had nothing to do with it. The evidence suggests, however, that neither of these views is accurate.

#### The neocons and Israeli support for the war

We know that the Iraq invasion was pushed forcefully by the neo-conservatives in the Bush Administration. Many of the neocons are Jewish, though not all of them. But when it comes to US Mideast policy, there is virtually no disagreement among them in relying on a powerful Israel as a key component. This, in and of itself, would fly in the face of the notion that Israel and Israeli interests were completely removed from the decision to invade Iraq. A number of key figures among the neocon wing of the Bush Administration were involved in writing an advisory paper for the Netanyahu government in 1996 entitled "[A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm](#)". This paper listed removing

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Saddam Hussein from power as an “an important Israeli strategic objective.” [It defies logic to believe that the same people, in their push toward war on Iraq, simply didn’t think about this.](#) Writers involved in the “Clean Break” paper included Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David and Meyrav Wurmser and James Colbert. All of them were powerful proponents, in and out of government, for the war on Iraq.

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Israeli support for the invasion was never a secret. Both the Sharon government and a clear majority of the Israeli populace [favored attacking Iraq.](#) [A Guardian \(UK\) report](#) on the undermining of US intelligence agencies in order to provide “evidence” to support the invasion describes how Americans working outside the CIA worked with Israelis operating outside of the Mossad to help produce that “evidence.” [Reports before the war](#) indicated that Israel was playing a key role in preparing for the invasion, [and other reports](#) indicate that Israeli operatives have been working among Iraqi Kurds.

### **Against the idea of a war for Israel**

But all of this is a far cry from proving that this was a “war for Israel.” While the results of the war don’t necessarily shed light on the intentions of the planners, the fact is that Israel’s position in the region is less secure as a result of the Iraq war, as many of us predicted. Some believed before the war that Israel would use the cover of the war to expel Palestinians from the West Bank en masse, but this never materialized. But the war has only increased mistrust in the United States’ ability to honestly broker the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the fact that the US allowed Sharon to count the unilateral disengagement from Gaza as being part of the “Roadmap” is perceived as an American agreement that Israel may impose facts and call it a “peace process.” The increase in both the number and the organization of terrorist groups like al Qaeda also increases the risk to Israel. Whatever gains Israel has made in advancing its policies in the Occupied Territories and the larger Middle East in the past three years have not come as a result of the war on Iraq, but despite it. (For views on this across the spectrum, see

[http://www.amconmag.com/2005/2005\\_11\\_07/article.html](http://www.amconmag.com/2005/2005_11_07/article.html)

<http://www.juancole.com/2004/06/situation-in-iraq-acutely-threatens.html>

The “Clean Break” paper, which is the cornerstone of the “war for Israel” theory, focuses on the idea of Israel as an independent actor. Where toppling Saddam is one point among many, promoting an independently-acting Israel is a major theme of the paper. Although constant lobbying to maintain and even increase aid to Israel is a permanent face of Middle East politics in America, the Israeli right, for whom the “Clean Break” paper was written, has always sought to move away from American aid so that Israel could act on its own, without

having to worry about Washington's reaction. Having America intervene so powerfully on Israel's behalf flies in the face of one of the "Clean Break" paper's central tenets, strongly implying that the decision to invade Iraq, though contemplated by these very same people, was not a primary way of advancing the goals set forth in the paper. Israel's position was certainly not ignored by the neocon planners of the Iraq war; but the war does not advance the vision promoted in the paper. and )

Further, while many may see George W. Bush as a figurehead whose advisers are really determining policy, few see Dick Cheney or Donald Rumsfeld that way, and they were the clear ringleaders beating the drums for war on Iraq. They may define America's "interests" differently from most of us, but do we really believe that they have put the interests of Israel before what they see as American interests? And, if protection of Israel was not the prime motivation for the war, then what American interests were thought of as being served by it?

### **What matters are US interests**

Oil is both the obvious and correct answer; specifically, American control over the region's oil resources, which also motivates many policymakers' support for Israel. It also motivates other policymakers' urging greater American distance from Israel. The neocons, on the other hand, are ideologically supportive of Israel, as well as strategically, but this does not dictate all of their politics.

In a [February 14, 2003 article in \*Foreign Policy in Focus\*](#), Michael Renner describes in detail just how huge the oil stakes were in Iraq and how big a difference for the US a client government replacing Saddam Hussein would make. The impact would be enormous, both for big oil companies and for many individuals connected to them in the Bush Administration. This is a much more obvious and clear reason for the war than Israeli interests. Berkeley political scientist Peter Dale Scott runs down a [list of the geo-political and financial potential of US control over Iraq](#), as well as some of the challenges the US faced from nationalized oil and competition from the euro that framed the decision to go to war. [supportFootnotes\]](#)--> These are just two of many sources that document a case, based on hard evidence, for why America went to war.

One major problem with the oil analysis is that it doesn't bother to consider the question of Israel. The same problem is mirrored on the other side—those advancing the "war for Israel" theory either ignore or dismiss other arguments. That's the sort of environment in which conspiracy theories flourish. Israel has always been a special concern of the United States, for strategic reasons, and so has oil. Any explanation for why we went to war in Iraq has to address the consideration of these two most important factors in American Middle East policy.

Perhaps [Michael Kinsley](#), writing for slate.com, put it best: "The president's advisors, Jewish and non-Jewish, are patriotic Americans who sincerely believe that the interests of America and Israel coincide. What's more, they are right about that, though they may be wrong about where that

shared interest lies. Among Jewish Americans, including me, there are people who hold every conceivable opinion about war with Iraq with every variation of intensity, including passionate opposition and complete indifference." <!--[if !supportFootnotes]--><!--[endif]-->

Or there is [Juan Cole's summation](#): "Most of the members of Cheney's inner circle were neoconservative ideologues, who combined hawkish American triumphalism with an obsession with Israel. This does not mean that the war was fought for Israel, although it is undeniable that Israeli concerns played an important role. The actual motivation behind the war was complex, and Cheney's team was not the only one in the game. The Bush administration is a coalition of disparate forces -- country club Republicans, realists, representatives of oil and other corporate interests, evangelicals, hardball political strategists, right-wing Catholics, and neoconservative Jews allied with Israel's right-wing Likud party. Each group had its own rationale for going to war with Iraq." <!--[if !supportFootnotes]--><!--[endif]-->

As usual, neither extreme is correct. Nothing involving the US and the Middle East happens without consideration, if not the actual involvement, of Israel. Israel is always a factor in American strategy in the region, both as a tool and ally and as a friend whose interests are a concern. For some in policymaking positions, Israel's interests are America's interests—not because they favor Israel, but because they believe (quite incorrectly, we would contend) that America's interests are best served by having their staunchest ally as the dominant force in the region.

The decision to invade Iraq was motivated by many factors. These included the fact that the relationship with Saudi Arabia was shaken by 9/11, a desire for more direct control over Iraqi oil (and the untapped reserves, which are thought by some to be the largest in the world), concern over the direction Latin American oil producers were going (particularly Venezuela), the feeling that the first Gulf War left "unfinished business" and the propaganda uses in terms of the "war on terror", among others. Israeli desires were certainly a factor, as was the perception that the invasion of Iraq would advance Israeli interests. Israel's lobbyists here in the US were understated in their support for the war, possibly because they knew it would go through without much effort on their part, but certainly were supportive of it. On a number of levels, Israel was a factor in the disastrous decision to invade Iraq. But to say it was the major or decisive factor is enormously out of line with the evidence. Iraq was a war for American interests as perceived by those who have the power to make those decisions. It was not a "war for Israel".

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