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The Israeli lobby and the Iraq War: Connecting the dots between Iraq and Palestine

By Mazin Qumsiyeh
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The tour around the country by Cindy Sheehan, a team of veterans, and family members of veterans is covering lots of ground in 21 days (<http://www.bringthemhomenowtour.org/>). On Sunday, they spoke in Boston, Providence, New Haven, and NYC. In New Haven, we had a crowd of over 1000 (largest ever for an anti-war rally here). Now hundreds of thousands will converge on Washington DC this weekend to expose government lies and demand money for jobs and education not for wars and occupations. Like local events, many speakers will draw the links between Iraq and Palestine (e.g. >\$250 billion to Israel. 200 billion to Iraq) and some side events will relate to Palestine*. Some will not like even these moderate connections. But some will especially react strongly if there is any mention of the organic links between the war on Iraq and the war on Palestine.

To me the most interesting misinformation disseminated both among some in the left and the right is that US foreign policy in Iraq and in supporting Israel's destruction of Palestine are merely related to US "strategic interests." They may differ in their formulation of the main US "interests", but you hear the same argument from leftists like Noam Chomsky and Stephen Zunes and rightists like Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle. This mistaken notion in fact was pushed and articulated by the Israeli lobby and Israeli apologists in the media for decades well before neocons and some leftists adopted it. The Israeli lobby in Washington was never monolithic and new that to be effective it had to get into both major parties in the US. The lobby knew that the best way to advance closer working relationship with the right would be that Israel is a good and willing "tool" for advancing US interests. Such a formulation helps deflect criticism from patriotic Americans who worry about the growing influence of this lobby. On the other side, left leaning Zionists wanted to work with a democratic left that occasionally complained about "US Imperialism" and corporate interests. In that case, it was easier to claim Israel helps US public interests or that Israel is a democratic ally. When push comes to shove, even Zionists on the left would deflect any critique of the Zionist lobby claiming that criticism should be solely directed to the masters (corporate or other elites) who merely "use" Israel as a tool.

Senator Fullbright, Congressman Paul Findley, Jesse Jackson, Admiral Moorer, Jeff

Blankfort, Alison Weir, and hundreds of others have articulated in books and articles why the Israeli lobby's formulation (whether cast in left or right angles) is at best misleading and at worse false and dangerous. Clearly, those conscientious critics come at it from very different angles. Some argued that elites and those in power in the US can and have used Israel occasionally as a gopher but that this was a net loss for US elite interests. Israel's role as intermediary in the Iran Contra scandal is now well known even though at the time, congressional record referred simply to a "third country". It is also well known that Congressional prohibition on assassination and other basic human rights violations by US forces are "bypassed" by the executive branch relying on Israel to do so. But could such tasks have been accomplished by other puppet countries even cheaper and without hurting US interests in the Arab and Islamic world?

Other critics argued that the US showed it was very adept at finding other puppets when they need them: after the fall of the Shah's regime in Iran, the US supported Ba'athist Iraq and Saddam Hussain. And this was very profitable since most of the money for Saddam did not come directly from eth US but from US other puppet regimes in the oil rich Arab Gulf States. But then Saddam wanted to support the Palestinians and wanted to build a strong country (the rest as you know is history). They argued that history shows that the return on investment simply would not bode well for the disingenuous argument of people like Noam Chomsky that Israel is simply a wholly owned subsidiary of US imperialism.

Yet other critics pointed out to the alienation of 1.3 billion Muslims and hundreds of millions of Christians engendered by US support of Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Clearly this can't be in the interests of any segment in American society. Two thirds of the nine million Palestinians are now refugees and displaced people. Defending this indefensible behavior is difficult. Supporting it with billions of taxpayer money and US diplomatic and military power is even more difficult. So a concerted media campaign and strategy was needed to create the illusion that Israel is a strategic asset to US "interests".

The elephant in the room that is being hidden by this fig leaf is same pervasive Zionist lobby in the US that has pushed the argument for the fig leaf. According to Haaretz, Israel was really the only country to whole-heartedly push for the war in Iraq. Since the Israeli lobby is the most powerful foreign lobby in the US and is rated as among the top 5 most powerful lobbies in DC overall, it would be a legitimate question to ask what this lobby was doing in the months and years leading up to the Iraq war and what (if any) influence does it have. I think even a cursory review of the articles written in newspapers or "studies" done by think tanks would be sufficient to answer that question. Israeli apologists in these influential think tanks and in major editorial and columnist positions in mainstream media pushed for the war. But there were few Israeli apologists who either stayed silent on the war or even opposed it. This latter group became active in the anti-war movement but wanted to make sure that there is no linkage between Iraq and Palestine. They reacted vociferously and sometimes violently when writers brought up the role of the Israeli lobby and its extensions in pushing for the war on Iraq.

There are attempts to hide the evolution and increasing strength of this lobby in the US (and before that in British imperial designs in the Middle East). So let us review a few example of how this lobby operated over the years and even challenged imperial interests on some occasions.

- 1) In 1930 after career British diplomats issued a governmental backed white paper suggesting tying Jewish immigration to Palestine to Palestinian economic interests not just the Yishuv capacity, all hell broke lose. Weissman and other British Zionist mobilized their forces en masse and the effort succeeded in reversing this policy quickly (well discussed in Tom Segev's excellent book on this period).

- 2) When there was strong sentiment in the US to help European Jews fleeing Nazi Germany, the Zionist lobby both in Britain and the US lobbied to limit Jewish immigration to the west and keep the door open only for one destination: Palestine (see Naeim Giladi's book "Ben Gurion Scandals" and Lenni Brenner's "51 Documents: History of the Nazi-Zionist collaboration).

3) When the State Department, the Pentagon, and all major career diplomats in the US stood against support for establishment of Israel, President Truman explained his decision to his cabinet (privately) very clearly as relating to the lobby and voting adding that "I have no Arab constituency" (Truman papers and many history books). The US went on to twist the arms of other countries to support partition and imposing of a Jewish state on Palestine.

4) When Israeli forces attacked the USS Liberty in International waters in 1967, the white house aided by Congress pushed the Navy to hide the facts. Senior Navy officers (and all survivors of the attack) were angry but could do nothing in the face of a consorted media silencing campaign. Even in 2003 when new evidence emerged little is reported on it (see <http://www.usliberty.org/>)

5) When George Bush 41 received a barrage of media questions in a Press conference in 1991 (after Baker earned the ire of the lobby by suggesting linking expending in growing settlements with foreign aid), Bush uttered his famous line "I am only this little guy in the white house there are these thousands on Capital Hill..." so much for the grand leader of the Military/Industrial complex. Bush and Baker backed down and building went on to increase the number of colonists/settlers on occupied Palestinian areas from <200,000 in 1991 to over 450,000 in 2000. This was the main reason for collapse of the peace process and increased resentment and anger in the world.

6) President Clinton brought to high office people who were previously employed by the various Israeli lobby groups. Dennis Ross who worked for WIMEP then appointed as US Envoy to the Middle East and then returned to work for WINEP (see <http://www.activistsreader.com/articles%20folder/thinktankwatch-winep2.html>). Martin Indyk worked for AIPAC and to my knowledge is the only lobbyist for a foreign country ever appointed ambassador to that same foreign country. These folks and many others made clear their interest in merging US policy and Israeli policy. Thus it was not surprising that Clinton issued assurances saying that if the Camp David meetings fail, no one will be faulted. But even as negotiations continued in Taba, Ross, Clinton, and Indyk blamed Arafat. The Clinton administration under influence of these lobbyists continued to support aggressive policy in Iraq and tried valiantly to thwart the International community (and US businesses) who pushed for letting go of the sanctions that were killing 6000 children every month.

7) When GWB 43 appointed people like Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, Douglas Feith, and Richard Perle to high offices, there was no questioning the affiliation of those folks to the Zionist lobby. Cheney was for example in the board of the so called "Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs" (JINSA). Perle and Wolfowitz were active in Zionist think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute. Those are the folks who pushed for war on Iraq and their paper records show their rationing includes supporting Israel (<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/706/op60.htm>).

There is a myth that weapons and oil industries support Israel. The fact is that most of the time Israeli/Zionist interests and those interests of weapons/oil companies are completely divergent See http://www.ifamericansknew.org/us_ints/ In fact many argue that without the lobby, there would not be support for Israeli colonization nor for an illegal and illegitimate war on Iraq and certainly not from companies that are suffering because of this close relationship. Israel in fact is now directly competing with US Weapons manufacturers in exporting high tech weapons (most of it made possible by US transfer of military technology and money to Israel). Congress and the White House frequently have had to interfere to protect Israel from any repercussions by its violations of US and international laws regarding proliferation, arms export, use of arms against civilians etc.

There were rare times when the lobby was not as powerful in pushing the myth of equivalency of US and Israeli interests. In 1956 President Eisenhower listened to career diplomats and US elites, and pressed for Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza and Sinai despite rumblings from Congress (itself influenced by the lobby). But any such minor resistance vanished after 1967 when the lobby pushed the idea that US weapons in Israeli hands are keeping the Soviets/Communism out of the Middle East

(a lie because communism could never get a hold in Arab society). Now do not misunderstand anything I said. It is misleading to say that Israel rules US foreign policy. But it would be even more misleading to ignore the central role of this lobby in shaping US foreign policy in the Middle East and in building support by various means. Nor would it be fair to ignore the PR aimed at exaggerating the "strategic use" argument to outright misinformation about threats and responses to promoting a particular and false view of Christianity ("Christian Zionism"). For those of us interested in freedom and equality (i.e. human rights), it is simply not correct to try to ignore history and facts and accept the language of our oppressor. It is playing into both Zionist and Imperial hands by accepting their claim that the reason for support of Israel (and for the war on Iraq) is a "strategic relationship" directed to serving only US elite interests (oil, military, and other corporate interests).

The hypocrisy in US foreign policy is now visible to most people around the world and even here in the US with a self-censoring media it is hard to avoid it. Take this simple Israel has WMD, has violated 65 UN Security Council Resolutions and was shielded from 35 others by a US Veto (because of the strong lobby), discriminates against people based on religion and the US supports it. Iraq violated very few UN SC resolutions by invading Kuwait and the US bombed Iraq to a pre-industrial age (destroying water purification, sewage, electrical, transportation and other critical facilities), subjected it to sanctions (even after the withdrawal from Kuwait) that killed over 1 million civilians, and then bombed and occupied Iraq intending to build 14 permanent military bases in Iraq and installing a new Israel-friendly regime!! Is it any wonder that people ask why we have such hypocrisy and question the given answers formulated in Tel Aviv. After all, Iraq will continue to be a magnet of resistance fighters pouring in from other Arab and Islamic countries as long as Israel is supported in its continued ethnic cleansing of Palestinians (i.e. As long as this hypocrisy is evident).

Some democrats believe the attack on Iraq was for corporate profits. Some republicans believe it was WMD, defeating terrorism, and most lately bringing "democracy" and freedom. Many US TV and newspapers consider a discussion outside this permissible duality as taboo. But people are getting facts about the Israeli lobby from international media, books, and most importantly the Internet. This explains why an increasing number of democrats, republicans, greens, and independents in the US asking some serious questions that go beyond this duality that misses so much. More people are realizing that without explaining the role of the Israeli lobby in pushing for this war, the story would be very incomplete at best and misleading at worse.

Many within the lobby are also finally seeing the light and leaving that destructive work. Thousands of Jews are now openly speaking about the destructive power of the lobby. The ground is shifting as Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others who believe in human rights and do not support Zionism join hands not only to point out the elephant in the room but also to take the old elephant out of the room and to an overdue retirement.

Links for resources on this issue:

Can We Talk, Eric Alterman, The Nation Magazine
<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20030421/alterman>

NeoConservatives and their Blueprints on US Policy, CSM
<http://search.csmonitor.com/specials/neocon/index.html>

US Think Tanks Behind US Foreign Policy
<http://www.sovereignty.org.uk/siteinfo/newsround/iraq4.html>

Selective Intelligence by Seymour Hirsch
<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20030324/lustick>

OK President Bush, What if...Fred M. Donner, Chicago Tribune <http://www-news.uchicago.edu/citations/03/030310.donner.html>

The Strong Must Rule the Weak: A Philosopher for an Empire, Jim Lobe
http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2003/0305strauss_body.html

Its Not Just the Oil

<http://www.antiwar.com/orig/heller1.html>

Invading Iraq: Converging US and Israeli Agendas, Ronald Bleier
<http://desip.igc.org/ConvergingAgendas.html>

The Axis of War and Mischiev in the Middle East
<http://www.payvand.com/news/03/aug/1036.html>

Their dog-eat-dog world by Mazin Qumsiyeh, Al-Ahram Newspaper
<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/706/op60.htm>

Neo-Cons, Israel and the Bush Administration By Stephen Green
<http://qumsiyeh.org/neoconsisraelandthebushadministration/>



Military Occupation with a difference by Mazin Qumsiyeh
<http://justicewheels.org/news/archives/000104.html>

War for Israel by Jeff Blankfort
http://site.www.umb.edu/faculty/salzman_g/Strate/Discus/2005-04-14.htm

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