

UK Israel Lobby Adds Muscle as US Lobby Weakens

British politics are being plunged into a stifling silence on the longest example of mass human rights abuses sanctioned by the West in modern history, writes Jonathan Cook.

By [JonathanCook](#)

[Jonathan-Cook.net](#)



For decades it was all but taboo to suggest that pro-Israel lobbies in the United States such as AIPAC used their money and influence to keep lawmakers firmly in check on Israel-related issues – even if one had to be blind not to notice that that was exactly what they were up to.

When back in February U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar pointed out the obvious – that U.S. lawmakers were routinely expected to submit to the lobby's dictates on Israel, a foreign country – her colleagues [clamored](#) to distance themselves from her, just as one might have expected were the pro-Israel lobby to wield the very power Omar claimed.

But surprisingly Omar did not – at least immediately – suffer the crushing fate of those who previously tried to raise this issue. Although she was [pressured into apologizing](#), she was not battered into complete submission for her honesty.

She received support on social media, as well as a wavering, [muted defense](#) from Democratic grandee Nancy Pelosi, and even a relatively [sympathetic hearing](#) from a few

prominent figures in the U.S. Jewish community.

The Benjamins Do Matter

Omar's comments have confronted – and started to expose – one of the most enduring absurdities in debates about U.S. politics. Traditionally it has been treated as anti-Semitic to argue that the pro-Israel lobby actually lobbies for its chosen cause – exactly as other major lobbies do, from the financial services industries to the health and gun lobbies – and that, as with other lobbies enjoying significant financial clout, it usually gets its way.

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erself in the firing line in February when she noted that what mattered in U.S. politics was “It’s all about the Benjamins” – an apparent reference to the 1997 [Puff Daddy song](#) of the same name in which Benjamins refer to \$100 bills. She later clarified that AIPAC leverages funds over congressional and presidential candidates.

The claim that the pro-Israel lobby isn’t really in the persuasion business can only be sustained on the preposterous basis that Israeli and U.S. interests are so in

tune that AIPAC and other organizations serve as little more than cheerleaders for the two countries' "unbreakable bond." Presumably on this view, the enormous sums of money raised are needed only to fund the celebrations.

Making the irrefutable observation that the pro-Israel lobby does actually lobby on Israel's behalf, and very successfully, is typically denounced as anti-Semitism. Omar's comments were perceived as anti-Semitic on the grounds that she pointed to the canard that Jews wield outsized influence using money to sway policymaking.

Allegations of anti-Semitism against her deepened days later when she gave a talk in Washington, D.C., and questioned why it was that she could talk about the influence of the National Rifle Association and Big Pharma but not the pro-Israel lobby – or "the political influence in this country that says it is OK for people to push for allegiance to a foreign country."

That pro-Israel lobbyists – as opposed to Jews generally – do have dual loyalty seems a peculiar thing to deny, given that the purpose of groups like AIPAC is to rally support for Israel in Congress.

Casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson, a key backer of Republican candidates for the presidency, has never hidden his passion not only for Israel but specifically for the ultra-nationalist governments of Benjamin Netanyahu.

In fact, he is so committed to Netanyahu's survival that he spent nearly \$200 million propping up an Israeli newspaper over its first seven years – all so he could assist the prime minister of a foreign country.

Similarly, Haim Saban, one of the main donors to Democratic presidential candidates, including Hillary Clinton, has made no secret of his commitment to Israel. He has said: “I’m a one-issue guy and my issue is Israel.”

Might Saban and Adelson’s “Benjamins” have influenced the very pro-Israel – and very anti-Palestinian – positions of Democratic and Republican presidential candidates? You would have to be supremely naïve or dishonest to claim not.

‘No Bernie-Like Approach’

This point really should be beyond doubt by now. This month *The New York Times* published an unprecedented essay in which author Nathan Thrall quoted political insiders and lobbyists making plain that, as one would expect, the pro-Israel lobby uses its money to pressure congressional candidates to toe the lobby’s line on Israel.

Some of the lobby’s power operates at the level of assumption about what Jewish donors expect in return for their money. According to the *Times*, some three-quarters of all donations over \$500,000 to the major political action committee supporting Democratic nominees for the U.S. Senate race in 2018 were made by Jews.

Though many of those donors may not rate Israel as their main cause, a former Clinton campaign aide noted that the recipients of this largesse necessarily tailor their foreign policy positions so as not to antagonize such donors. As a result, candidates avoid even the mild criticism of Israel adopted by Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Democratic party’s challenger to Clinton in the 2016 presidential race and a primary contender for 2020.

“There’s no major donor that I can think of who is looking for someone to take a Bernie-like approach,” said the aide. Sanders raised his campaign funds from small donations rather than these major funders, leaving him freer to speak openly about Israel.

Other insiders are more explicit still. Ben Rhodes, a former confidant of Barack Obama, says the lobby effectively tied Obama’s hands domestically on efforts to promote peace. “The Washington view of Israel-Palestine is still shaped by the donor class,” he told Thrall, adding: “The donor class is profoundly to the right of where the activists are, and frankly, where the majority of the Jewish community is.”

Joel Rubin, a former political director at lobby group J Street and a founding board member of the centrist Jewish Democratic Council of America, concurred: “The fight over Israel used to be about voters. It’s more about donors now.”

All of these insiders are stating that the expectations of major donors align candidates’ U.S. foreign policy positions with Israel’s interests, not necessarily those of the U.S. It is hard not to interpret that as reformulation of “dual loyalty.”

What’s so significant about the *Times* article is that it signals, as did the muted furor over Omar’s comments, that the pro-Israel lobby is weakening. No powerful lobby, including the Israel one, wants to be forced out of the shadows. It wants to remain in the darkness, where it can most comfortably exercise its influence without scrutiny or criticism.

The pro-Israel lobby’s loyalty to Israel is no longer

unmentionable. But it is also not unique.

As *Mondoweiss* recently noted, Hannah Arendt, the Jewish scholar and fugitive from Nazi Germany, pointed to the inevitability of the “double loyalty conflict” in her 1944 essay “Zionism Reconsidered,” where she foreshadowed the rise of a pro-Israel lobby and its potential negative impacts on American Jews. It was, she wrote, “an unavoidable problem of every national movement of a people living within the boundaries of other states and unwilling to resign their civil and political rights therein.”

For that reason, the U.S.-Cuban lobby has an obvious dual loyalty problem too. It’s just that, given the Cuban lobby’s priority is overthrowing the Cuban government – a desire shared in Washington – the issue is largely moot.

In Israel’s case, however, there is a big and growing gap between image and reality. On the one hand, Washington professes a commitment to peace-making and a promise to act as an honest broker between Israel and the Palestinians. And on the other, the reality is it has offered full-throated support for a series of ultra-nationalist Israeli governments determined to destroy any hope of peace and swallow up the last vestiges of a potential Palestinian state.

The Lord’s Work

It’s important to point out that advocates for Israel are not only Jews. While the pro-Israel lobby represents the views of a proportion of Jewish Americans, it is also significantly comprised of Christians, evangelicals in particular.

Millions of these Christians – including Vice-President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo – can be accused of dual loyalty too. They regard Israel’s role in Biblical prophecy as far more important than the future of the U.S., or mankind for that matter.

For many of these evangelicals, bringing about the end of the world by ensuring Jews return to their Biblical homeland – triggering a final reckoning at the Battle of Armageddon – is the fulfillment of God’s will. And if it’s a choice between support for Washington’s largely secular elites and support for God, they know very definitely where they stand.

Again, the *Times* has started to shine a light on the strange role of Israel in the U.S. political constellation. Another recent article reminded readers that in 2015 Pompeo spoke of the end-times struggle prophesied to take place in Israel, or what is often termed by evangelicals as “The Rapture.” He said: “We will continue to fight these battles.”

During his visit last month to Israel, he announced that the Trump administration’s work was “to make sure that this democracy in the Middle East, that this Jewish state, remains. I am confident that the Lord is at work here.”

Divorced from Reality

If the debate about the pro-Israel lobby in the U.S. is for the first time making a nod to truth, the conversation about the pro-Israel lobby in the U.K. is becoming more and more divorced from reality.

Part of the reason is the way the Israel lobby has recently emerged in the U.K. – hurriedly, and in a mix of panic and

damage-limitation mode.

Given that for decades European countries largely followed Washington's lead on Israel, pro-Israel lobbies outside the U.S. were much less organized and muscular. European leaders' unquestioning compliance was assured as long as Washington appeared to act as a disinterested broker overseeing a peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. As a result, Europe was in little need of vigorous pro-Israel lobbies.

But that illusion has now been shattered, first by the explicit Greater Israel ideology espoused by a series of Netanyahu governments, and latterly by Donald Trump's occupancy of the White House and his vehement backing of Israeli demands, however much they violate international law.

That has left European policy towards Israel – and its enabling by default of Netanyahu and Trump's efforts to crush Palestinian rights – dangerously exposed.

Popular backlashes have taken the form of a rapid growth in support for BDS, a grassroots, nonviolent movement promoting a boycott of Israel. But more specifically in Britain's case, it has resulted in the surprise election of Jeremy Corbyn, a well-known champion of Palestinian rights and anti-racism struggles generally, to lead the opposition Labour Party.

For that reason, Jewish leadership groups in the U.K. have had to reinvent themselves quickly, from organizations to promote the community's interests into vehicles to defend Israel. And to do that they have had to adopt a position

that was once closely identified with anti-Semitism: conflating Jews with Israel.

This, we should remember, was the view taken 100 years ago by arch anti-Semites in the British government. They regarded Jews as inherently “un-British,” as incapable of assimilation and therefore as naturally suspect.

Lord Balfour, before he made his abiding legacy the 1917 Declaration of a Jewish “national home” in Palestine, helped pass the Aliens Act to block entry to the U.K. of Jews fleeing pogroms in Eastern Europe. Balfour believed Jewish immigration had resulted in “undoubted evils.”

Lobby Cobbled Together

Also significantly, unlike the U.S., where the pro-Israel lobby has maintained fervent support for Israel as a bipartisan matter over decades, the need for an equivalent pro-Israel lobby in the U.K. has emerged chiefly in relation to Corbyn’s unexpected ascent to power in the Labour Party.

Rather than emerging slowly and organically, as was the case in the U.S., the British pro-Israel has had to be cobbled together hastily. Israel’s role in directing this immature lobby has been harder to hide.

Most of the U.K.’s Jewish leadership organizations have been poorly equipped for the task of tackling the new sympathy for Palestinian rights unleashed in the Labour Party by Corbyn’s rise. The Board of Deputies, for example, has enjoyed visible ties to the ruling Conservative Party. Any criticisms they make of the Labour leader are likely to be seen as having an air of partisanship and point-scoring.

So unusually in Britain's case, the chief pro-Israel lobby group against Corbyn has emerged from within his own party – in the form of the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM).

The JLM is trumpeted in the British media both as a venerable Jewish group, more than a century old, and as one that is widely representative of Jewish opinion. Neither claim is true.

The JLM likes to date its origins to the Poale Zion organization, which was founded in 1903. A socialist society, Poale Zion affiliated itself not only with the British Labour Party but also with a wide range of anti-Palestinian Zionist organizations such as the World Zionist Organisation and the Israeli Labour Party. The latter carried out the ethnic cleansing of the vast majority of Palestinians in 1948 and the party's leaders to this day publicly support the illegal settlement "blobs" that are displacing Palestinians and stealing their land.

But as the investigative journalist Asa Winstanley has shown, before the unexpected ascent of Corbyn to the Labour leadership in 2015, the JLM had largely fallen into dormancy.

It was briefly revived in 2004, when Israel was facing widespread criticism in Britain over its brutal efforts to crush a Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories. But the JLM only really became active again in 2015.

According to a covert recording of a private JLM event in late 2016, its then chair Jeremy Newmark said he and other activists had agreed to reform the group in September 2015

in response to “the rise of Jeremy Corbyn” and “Bernie Sanders in the States.” Corbyn has been elected Labour leader only days previously. According to the transcript, Newmark told the other activists that it would be the “start of a struggle and a battle we will all be engaged in for months and probably years ahead of us.” He added that the JLM would be a suitable vehicle for their work because of the “rights and privileges” it enjoyed as a Labour Party affiliate organization.

Front for Israeli Embassy

The motive behind the JLM’s resuscitation was also revealed by an undercover documentary made by *Al-Jazeera*, aired in early 2017. It showed that the JLM was acting as little more than a front for the Israeli embassy, and that the mission it set itself was to weaken Corbyn in the hope of removing him from the leadership.

Early on, the JLM and other pro-Israel lobbyists within the party realized the most effective way to damage Corbyn, and silence solidarity with the Palestinian cause, was to weaponize the charge of anti-Semitism.

Support for Palestinian rights necessarily requires severe criticism of Israel, whose popular, rightwing governments have shown no interest in making concessions to the Palestinians on self-determination. In fact, while Westerners have debated the need for urgent peacemaking, Israel has simply got on with grabbing vast tracts of Palestinian land as a way to destroy any hope of statehood.

But pro-Israel lobbyists in the U.K. have found that they

can very effectively turn this issue into a zero-sum game – one that, in the context of a British public conversation oblivious to Palestinian rights, inevitably favors Israel.

The thrust of the lobby's argument is that almost all Jews identify with Israel, which means that attacks on Israel are also attacks on Jewish identity. That, they claim, is a modern form of anti-Semitism.

This argument, if it were true, has an obvious retort: if Jews really do identify with Israel to the extent that they are prepared to ignore its systematic abuse of Palestinians, then that would make most British Jews anti-Arab racists.

Further, if Jewish identity really is deeply enmeshed in the state of Israel, that would place a moral obligation on Jews to denounce any behavior by Israel towards Palestinians that violates human rights and international law.

And yet the very Jewish leaders claiming that Israel is at the core of their identity are also the ones who demand that Jews not be expected to take responsibility for Israel's actions – and that to demand as much is anti-Semitic.

Could there be a clearer example of having your cake and eating it?

Nonetheless, the JLM has very successfully hijacked the debate within Labour of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to silence criticism. It has worked hard to impose a highly controversial new definition of anti-Semitism that conflates it with criticism of Israel. Seven of the 11 examples of anti-Semitism used to illustrate the new definition relate to Israel.

Arguing, for example, that Israel is a “racist endeavor,” the view of many in the growing BDS movement and among Corbyn supporters, is now being treated as evidence of anti-Semitism.

For this reason, the JLM has been able to file a complaint against Labour with the Equality and Human Rights Commission arguing that the party is “institutionally anti-Semitic.”

Labour is only the second political party after the neo-Nazi British National Party to have been subjected to an investigation by the equality watchdog.

Despite its claims, the JLM does not represent Jewish opinion in the Labour Party. The JLM says it has 2,000 members, though that figure – if accurate – includes non-Jews. Attendance at its annual general meeting this month could be measured in the dozens.

As one Jewish critic observed: “There are some 300,000 Jews in Britain. The Jewish Labour Movement claims to represent us all. So why were there fewer people at their AGM [annual general meeting] than at my Labour Party branch AGM?”

Many Jews in the Labour Party have chosen not to join the JLM, preferring instead to act as a counterweight by creating a new Jewish pressure group that backs Corbyn called Jewish Voice for Labour.

Even a new JLM membership drive publicized by former Labour leader Gordon Brown reportedly brought only a small influx of new members, suggesting that support for the JLM’s anti-Corbyn, pro-Israel agenda is very limited inside

Labour.

Speaking for 'the Jews'

The re-establishment of the JLM has one very transparent aim in mind: to push out Corbyn, using any means at its disposal. At its annual general meeting, the JLM unanimously passed a motion of no confidence in Corbyn, describing him as "unfit to be Prime Minister." The resolution declared that "a Labour Government led by (Corbyn) would not be in the interests of British Jews."

One Jewish commentator derisively noted the JLM's arrogance in speaking for all British Jews at a time of Conservative government-imposed austerity: "I would not presume to proclaim what is in the interests of 'the Jews', but I really cannot imagine that the person who drafted this resolution had any real experience of meeting unemployed Jews, Jewish pensioners and single mothers just scraping by, or Jews who are struggling as they use under-resourced mental health services."

In other circumstances, a group of people operating inside a major political party using underhand methods to disrupt its democratic processes would be described as entryists. Some 2,000 pro-Israel fanatics within Labour are trying to overturn the overwhelming wishes, twice expressed at the ballot box, of the Labour membership, now numbering more than 500,000.

Nonetheless, last week the JLM started to show its hand more publicly. It has been noisily threatening to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. In the circumstances that would at least be an honorable – if very unlikely – thing for it to

do.

Instead it announced that it would begin scoring local and national Labour politicians based on their record on anti-Semitism. After the JLM's frantic lobbying for the adoption of the new anti-Semitism definition, it seems clear that such scores will relate to the vehemence of a candidate's criticism of Israel, or possibly their ideological sympathy with Corbyn, more than overt bigotry towards Jews.

That was underscored this week when a senior Labour politician, Richard Burgon, the shadow justice secretary, came under fire from the JLM and Board of Deputies for comments he made in 2014, during Israel's attack on Gaza, that only recently came to light. He was recorded saying: "The enemy of the Palestinian people is not the Jewish people, the enemy of the Palestinian people are Zionists." He had previously denied making any such comment.

Mike Katz, the JLM's new chair, responded: "Insulting a core part of their [Jewish people's] identity and then dissembling about it is shameful behaviour from a senior frontbencher in our party, let alone someone who aspires to administer our justice system."

According to the Labour Party's own figures, actual anti-Jewish prejudice – as opposed to criticism of Israel – is extremely marginal in its ranks, amounting to some 0.08 percent of members. It is presumably even less common among those selected to run as candidates in local and national elections.

The JLM has nonetheless prioritized this issue, threatening that the scores may be used to decide whether activists will

campaign for a candidate. One might surmise that the scores could also be serve as the basis for seeking to deselect candidates and replace them with politicians more to the JLM's liking.

"We have got elections coming up but we are not going to put that effort in unless we know people are standing shoulder to shoulder with us," said Katz.

Need for Vigorous Debate

Paradoxically, the JLM appears to be preparing to do openly what pro-Israel lobbyists in the U.S. deny they do covertly: use their money and influence to harm candidates who are not seen as sympathetic enough to Israel.

Despite claims from both U.S. and U.K. pro-Israel lobby groups that they speak for their own domestic Jewish populations, they clearly don't. Individuals within Jewish communities are divided over whether they identify with Israel or not. And certainly, their identification with Israel should not be a reason to curtail vigorous debates about U.S. and U.K. foreign policy and Israeli influence domestically.

Even if the vast majority of Jews in the U.S. and U.K. do support Israel – not just in a symbolic or abstract way, but the actual far-right governments that now permanently rule Israel – that does not make them right about Israel or make it anti-Semitic for others to be highly critical of Israel.

The overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews support a narrow spectrum of politicians, from the militaristic right to religious fundamentalists and fascists. They view

Palestinians as less deserving, less human even, than Jews and as an obstacle to the realization of Jewish rights in the whole of the "Land of Israel," including the Palestinian territories. Does that make them right? Does their numerical dominance excuse their ugly bigotry towards Palestinians? Of course not.

And so it would be the same even were it true that most Jewish members of the Labour Party supported a state that proudly upholds Jewish supremacism as its national ideology. Their sensitivities should count for nothing if they simply mask ugly racist attitudes towards Palestinians.

Lobbies of all kinds thrive in the dark, growing more powerful and less accountable when they are out of view and immune from scrutiny.

By refusing to talk frankly about the role of pro-Israel lobbies in the U.K. and the U.S., or by submitting to their intimidation, we simply invite Israel's supporters and anti-Palestinian racists to flex their muscles more aggressively and chip away at the democratic fabric of our societies.

There are signs that insurgency politicians in the U.S. are ready for the first time to shine a light into the recesses of a political system deeply corrupted by money. That will inevitably make life much harder for the pro-Israel lobby.

But paradoxically, it is happening just as the U.K.'s Israel lobby is pushing in exactly the opposite direction. British politics is being plunged into a stifling, unhealthy silence on the longest example of mass human rights abuses, sanctioned by the west, in modern history.

Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. He blogs at [Jonathan Cook.net](http://JonathanCook.net).

THE ANGRY ARAB: Why Ilhan Omar is a Dangerous Woman for the US

Washington doesn't like its Muslims or Arabs to take pride in their heritage or oppose the Israeli occupation, writes As'ad AbuKhalil.

By [As'ad AbuKhalil](#)

Special to Consortium News



Washington was not expecting the arrival of Reps. Ilhan Omar or Rashida Tlaib. The nation's capital has seen Arabs and Muslims before but they were not like these two new assertive and defiant members of Congress.

The White House, under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, hosted Iftar dinners for Ramadan and invited a variety of Muslims (including of course the Israeli ambassador because he is wildly popular among the world's Muslims), but they were of a different brand. The Bush administration even employed Muslim Arabs or Muslim-born Americans who preached Bush's doctrine to anyone who would listen in the Middle East.

But those were different Arabs. They were the "non-threatening" Arabs who made Westerners feel comfortable in their racism and bigotry. The Arabs who are welcomed in the halls of Congress are usually mimics of the late president

of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, and the current king of Jordan. They are the type of Arabs who praise Western wars and downplay Arab anger at the long record of Israeli occupation and aggression.

Some of those Arabs in D.C. are employed as correspondents for Gulf-regime media. Some had even received their training at the research arm of the Israeli lobby, while others work for racist Congress people. They are the kind of Arabs who are paraded before Western audiences to show them that there are Muslim Arabs who are exceptions: the ones who are willing to insult other Arabs and Muslims, and who tell tales about how they were saved from the terrorism of the religion or the culture of the region.

But Minnesota's Ilhan Omar and Michigan's Rashida Tlaib are different. The Muslims whom Washington has been used to receiving from Lebanon or from Gulf embassies are Muslims who are embarrassed about their religion and about their culture. They are the Muslims who apologize day and night for the terrorism of Muslims, as if all Muslims are responsible for the crimes of the few. (The blaming of all Jews for the crimes of Israel is certainly anti-Semitic—just as the blaming of all Muslims for the crimes of the few Muslims is Islamophobic.)

Ilhan Omar, from the second she entered Congress, has made her audience feel uncomfortable, and the press has had a hard time dealing with her.

Acceptable Extremism

Acceptable and subservient Muslims or Arabs are allowed to hold extremist views and to express hatred and hostility to

Jewish people as long as they don't offend Israel or Western governments. Anwar Sadat's background as an anti-Semitic Nazi was never an issue for Israel or Western Zionists. In fact, Stuart Eizenstat, Jimmy Carter's domestic policy advisor, downplays the Nazi sympathy of Sadat and attributes it dismissively to anti-British sentiments, in his [recent book](#), "President Carter."

And when Mahmoud Abbas, the president of Palestine, agreed after the assassination of Yasser Arafat to serve Israeli occupation interests, his anti-Semitic past (his PhD dissertation in Moscow contained Holocaust denial) was also forgiven. The Saudi regime, the largest-by far-purveyor of anti-Semitic propaganda among Muslims in the last century is also forgiven.

It is not about anti-Semitism, as evidenced by Israeli alliances with evangelical Christians and European far-right groups. Zionists object to anti-Semitism—real or concocted as is the case with Omar—when there is criticism of Israel and calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions on Israel, or BDS.

Ilhan Omar also doesn't look the part. Westerners prefer whiskey-drinking Muslims who are willing to mock fellow Muslims, and who are willing to denigrate Palestinian political aspirations for the amusement of the Zionist think-tank crowd in D.C.

And what is rarely mentioned about Ilhan Omar is that she wears the veil. At least in France, where Islamophobia has become the national secular religion of the republic, the hostility to the veil has become unmasked at all points of

the political spectrum, left, right and center.

Hostility to the veil has been less vocally expressed in D.C. (veiled Muslim women have numerous stories of harassment and abuse to tell). But Congress had to change its rules to allow Omar to wear the veil under its roof, even though exceptions to the longstanding hat ban had reportedly been made for the wearing of yarmulkes.

It would have been less irksome for Omar's haters if she did not wear the veil. Westerners prefer Muslims to be atheists or non-practicing Muslims. (In the second teaching position I held at Tufts University, the most senior member of the department of political science once rushed to my office and asked me hurriedly: "You are not Muslim, are you?" I said: "Well, I am from a Muslim family but I am personally an atheist." He said: "Oh, that is good," and left.)

Unacceptable Candor

And Omar speaks in a refreshingly candid language that does not stick to the rhetorical clichés of D.C. politicians.

By contrast, New York's Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has learned to censor herself. Ever since she was attacked for previous remarks she had made about Palestinians, Ocasio-Cortez has resorted to speaking in the vague generalities that U.S. diplomats also use to avoid the wrath of Israel and its supporters. She no longer seems to even utter the word Palestine. She has become too aware of the price to be paid.

Omar and Rashida Tlaib have also supported BDS, which is the biggest sin, as far as Israel and AIPAC are concerned. The

U.S. has made it very clear that BDS has emerged as the second danger to Israel after the threat of military resistance to Israeli occupation and aggression.

The endorsement of BDS by two members of Congress bestows official legitimacy on a movement that Israel has been desperately trying to paint as an anti-Semitic reincarnation of Nazism. But this has been the history of Israeli propaganda: all enemies of Israel, communists, Arab nationalists, Palestinian nationalists, rightists, leftists, have been labeled as anti-Semitic. Even the secular Arab nationalist leader, the late Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, was accused of anti-Semitism by Israel when none of his speeches ever contained an anti-Semitic word.

And now, the U.S. Congress, which sat silent about the wave of Islamophobia unleashed during and after the Trump campaign, suddenly sees the need to issue a proclamation against religious bigotry and racism.

It is a bitter irony that the U.S. Congress has, for the first time, condemned Islamophobia in a statement widely understood to be an attempt to discipline the first Muslim American female member of Congress. The resolution had nothing to do with ostensible congressional outrage against Islamophobia. (Since Sept. 11, many members of Congress have become vocal anti-Islam bigots, as is U.S. President Donald Trump, who advocated a ban on all Muslim visitors to the country). The reference to Islamophobia was added to appease those new progressive members of Congress and the African American members who protested against a very selective standard of outrage.

Weeks after Omar's election to Congress, the Zionist lobby succeeded in turning her into a caricature. They inserted the word "Jewish" every time she spoke against support for Israel (she did not once refer to Jews in her discourse about Israel and its supporters).

The word "trope" is now a convenient tool to turn someone's criticisms of Israel into grotesque anti-Semitic hatred. Even the progressive Michele Goldberg, one of the few refreshingly courageous columnists in *The New York Times*, [insisted](#) that Omar resorted to anti-Semitic "tropes."

The Israeli lobby and the government want to send a clear message through the mistreatment and abuse of Ilhan Omar: that progressive members of Congress, especially if they are Muslim Arab women of color, won't be allowed to express their views on Israel without mobilizing the entire AIPAC machinery in Congress against them.

Ilhan Omar is indeed dangerous. She has broken taboos, along with her colleague Rashida Tlaib. She is dangerous to the hegemony imposed on the nation's capital by the supporters of Israel (and evangelical Christian, not Jews, are now the most fanatical Zionists in U.S. politics). Because Omar is seen as dangerous, the abuse won't end. It has just started.

As'ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the "Historical Dictionary of Lebanon" (1998), "Bin Laden, Islam and America's New War on Terrorism (2002), and "The Battle for Saudi Arabia" (2004). He tweets as [@asadabukhalil](#)

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THE ANGRY ARAB: Camp David and the Ongoing Crisis of Palestine

Recently published book by Carter official says the president was initially hostile to Sadat's initiative toward Israel because Carter saw it as "the end of any hope of a comprehensive peace," says As'ad AbuKhalil in this review.

Carter Worried Bilateral Israel-Egypt

Deal Would Undermine Regional Peace

By [As'ad AbuKhalil](#)

Special to Consortium News



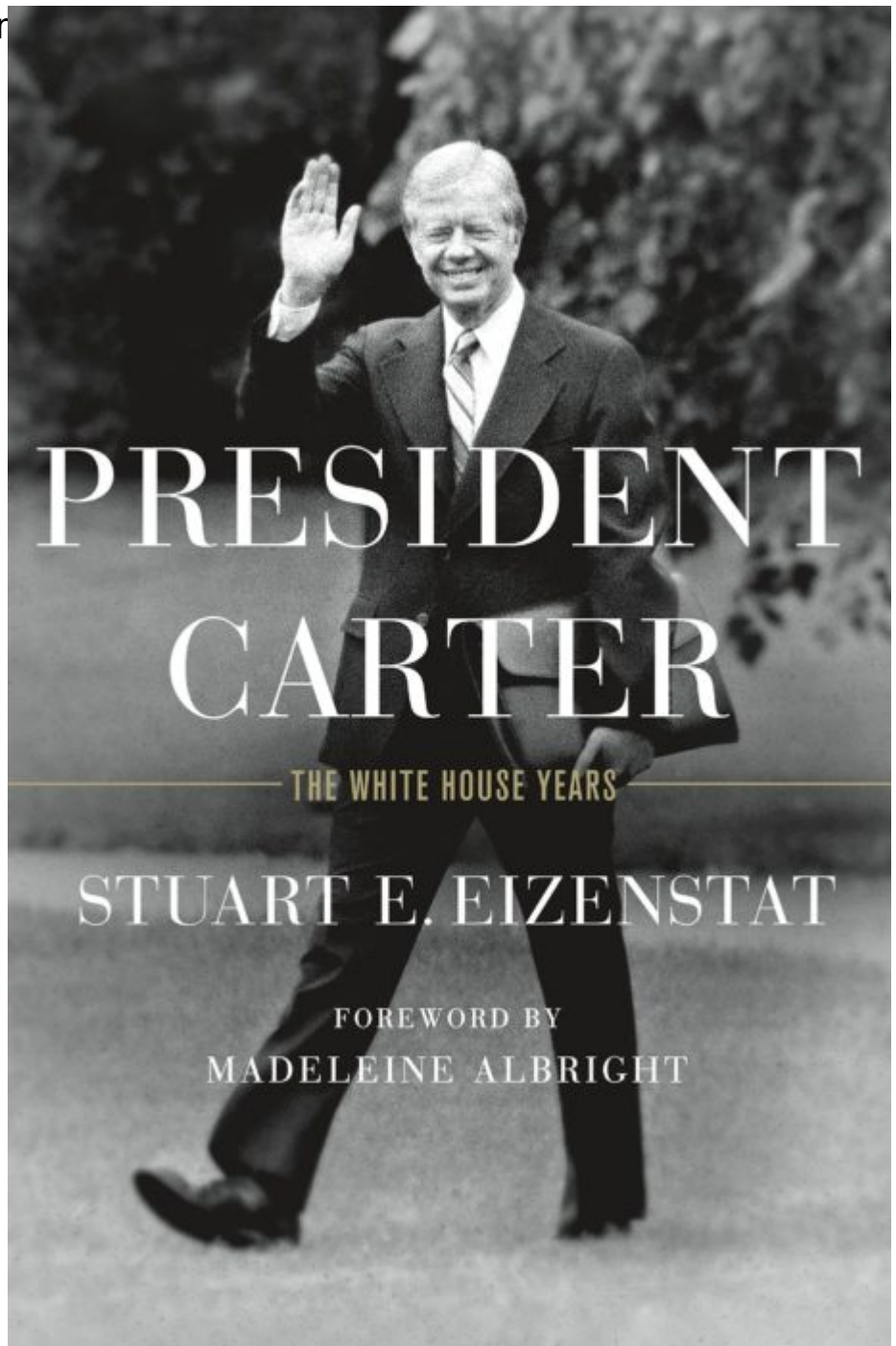
One would think there isn't anything new to be said about the Camp David negotiations of 1978. There are enough books about the accords and about Egyptian-Israeli peace to fill a book case.

But the recent book by Stuart Eizenstat, *President Carter: the White House Years* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2018), adds information and insights to the plethora of works on the subject. It's clear Eizenstat, a domestic policy advisor to Jimmy Carter, kept copious notes (as detailed as the notes of H. R. Haldeman in Nixon's White House) during his years of service. And he supplemented his account by conducting interviews with Carter and other U.S. and foreign officials.

This book could emerge as one of the definitive accounts (in over a 1000 pages) of the Carter White House years, as far as the Middle East is concerned. Eizenstat was heavily involved in Mideast policy making though he wasn't a specialist in foreign policy. But the administration relied on him as a liaison with U.S. Jewish organizations and as a back channel to the Israeli government.

Eizenstat admits "there is no other issue in American foreign policy where domestic politics intrudes more directly than the Middle East" (p. 409). While Eizenstat has a record of staunch support for Israel and hostility to its enemies—whenever they are—he does offer a few criticisms of

the Israeli lobby ar



At a time when Rep. Ilhan Omar has been accused of anti-Semitism merely for suggesting that AIPAC uses its financial muscle to promote its congressional agenda, Eizenstat's statements in this regard would have been characterized as anti-Semitic if articulated by Omar or her other fellow Muslim representative, Rashida Tlaib.

He says he helped draft a speech on Arab-Israeli issues to

be delivered in "New Jersey," he wrote, "because it would be crucial to Jews in key northeastern states, as well as Florida and California" (p. 412). Of course, one can't today speak of a "Jewish lobby." It could be perceived as anti-Semitic. It's also inaccurate because the pro-Israeli lobby extends far beyond the Jewish community.

Evangelical Christians, on the whole, appear to be more fanatical supporters of Israel than Jewish Americans. On the subject of Israel, there is more diversity of opinion inside the Jewish community than there is among Southern Baptists.

Carter Camp Divisions

The book explains clearly that the administration was divided between two camps: National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Vance was motivated more by human rights while Brzezinski spoke for a less pro-Israeli foreign policy, largely from the standpoint of securing Arab support against the USSR.

Domestic policy advisors were solidly in support of the traditional pro-Israel line because they feared the impact on Carter's prospects for re-election. Carter wavered between the two groups, Eisenstat writes. But he eventually surrendered to Israeli dictates in the negotiations. Even that wasn't sufficient politically: Carter was perceived as hostile to Israeli interests and his support among Jewish voters, according to the author, plummeted to 40 percent in 1980.

Eisenstat reveals that Carter was initially hostile to Sadat's initiative toward Israel in November 1977 because the president saw it as "the end of any hope of a

comprehensive peace and will result only at best in a bilateral agreement between Egypt and Israel.” (p. 472). Carter was right but he went along with the initiative anyway.

Eizenstat's account reflects the typical American bias of favoring pro-U.S. despots over despots who are not aligned with the U.S. Egyptian dictator, Anwar Sadat, receives glowing treatment by the author—who bizarrely insists on referring to him as “general” (p. 430) when Sadat never commanded troops in his life and his military role in his youth was rather minimal. It is possible that Eizenstat was deceived by Sadat's fancy and elaborate military uniform, which was designed for him by Pierre Cardin.

Worse, he glosses over, or ignores, the anti-Semitism of Sadat, who referred to the Israeli lobby as “US Jews lobby” (p. 482), and who designed his overture toward Israel purely out of his “perception of the political influence of American Jews.” (p. 471) But what is disturbing is that Eizenstat justifies Sadat's famous admiration for Hitler by maintaining that it was “less for his violent anti-Semitism than his opposition to the British.” (p. 430).

But that lame excuse could apply to the meeting between Hajj Amin Husseini (leader of the Palestinian national movement prior to the founding of the state of Israel) and Hitler, which has been used for decades to discredit the Palestinian national movement and to frame it as anti-Semitic. If the opposition to the British was the motive for Sadat's admiration for Hitler, could that factor not also apply to Hajj Amin too? Surely, Hajj Amin could not admire the Nazi ideology where Arabs were perceived as an inferior race,

described by Hitler as “painted half-apes.” And if the author describes Hafidh Al-Asad of Syria as a “brutal dictator”—which he was—he should have used the same term for Sadat.

3-Way Special Relationship

The author does not shy away from underlining the role of the Israeli lobby. He refers to the “special triangular relationship among Israel, the American Jewish leadership, and the Congress in effectively applying pressure on the presidency to modify U.S. policy to Israel’s benefit.” (p. 437). If Ilhan Omar or another Arab member of Congress were to offer such an explanation of the role of the lobby there would have been a hue and cry and calls for resignation. And Eisenstat was wrong in referring exclusively to the Jewish leadership in this regard when Evangelical Christians have become the guardians of Likud interests in the Republican Party.

Eisenstat, however, does not shy away from expressing outrage at Israeli interference in U.S. domestic politics; he writes about Moshe Dayan’s offer to help Carter with his domestic problems, “This was an amazing intrusion into domestic politics by a foreign minister, even from a friendly country,” Eisenstat writes (p. 466).

The author reinforces the view that then Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin fiercely defended the interests of the occupation state during the Camp David negotiations, while Sadat was casual about the whole process and disregarded his own advisors when they tried to defend Egyptian interests and sovereignty.

It also becomes clear that the PLO's stance against Sadat and the talks was correct and that neither Sadat nor Begin were serious about offering meaningful sovereignty to the Palestinian people. While Carter initially sought to offer political rights to the Palestinians, he quickly abandoned the goal once he saw that Sadat and Begin were only interested in a bilateral agreement.

Eisenstat confirms that Begin did indeed lie to Carter: that he initially offered a settlement freeze for 5 years not for 3 months—as Begin later claimed. The author says that Carter took this lie as a personal insult and it affected his view of Israel, although he never spoke about that while president. What is disturbing about this book is that Eisenstat confirms what we have known all along: that the idea of a Holocaust museum (which came out of the office of Eisenstat during Carter's administration) was not motivated by a desire to inform Americans of the horrific tragedy, but was instead a cynical manipulation of "Jewish American voters" who were disenchanted with Carter(p. 487).

This book underlines the devastation that the Camp David accords afflicted on the Middle East region. The U.S. secured the withdrawal of Egypt and its army from the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to permit Israel to commit more aggression and occupation against a variety of Arab territories without worrying about retribution from the Egyptian army. Far from being proud of his peace achievement, Carter should be ashamed of his role in brokering an expensive bilateral treaty—against the wishes of the Egyptian people, and contrary to the vision of a Palestinian "homeland"—which Carter had promised back in

March 1977.

As'ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the "Historical Dictionary of Lebanon" (1998), "Bin Laden, Islam and America's New War on Terrorism" (2002), and "The Battle for Saudi Arabia" (2004). He tweets as [@asadabukhalil](#)

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Newly Elected Progressives Face Palestine Taboo

After they won their primaries, some young progressives curbed their pro-Palestine rhetoric. Now they are in Washington getting oriented. Next up: early test votes in the new year sponsored by the pro-Israel lobby, writes As'ad AbuKhalil.

Newly-Elected Progressives Confront AIPAC Test

By As'ad AbuKhalil

Special to Consortium News



People in the pro-Palestinian community worldwide will be watching to see if any of the new left-wing progressives elected in the midterms will dare speak out—and vote against—the wishes of the Israel lobby.

The answer will likely come early next year, in test votes sponsored by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, after the 116th Congress convenes. If the past is any guide, Democratic leaders will insist on strict subservience from newcomers to the party's foreign policy priorities, which include U.S. sponsorship and defense of the Israeli occupation and war crimes.

Some members-elect voiced remarkable criticism of Israel in the primaries. Rashida Tlaib, from Michigan, may have gone the furthest, by calling for one state in Palestine. Ilhan Omar, from Minnesota, referred to Israel's "evil doings" and condemned apartheid in Israel. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, from New York, spoke against the occupation of Palestine.

After the primaries, however, Tlaib, Omar and Ocasio-Cortez softened their rhetoric. In a post-victory interview, Tlaib said that both sides (occupiers and occupied?) have "so much more in common." Ocasio-Cortez was quoted as favoring a two-state solution and believing "absolutely in Israel's right to exist" (as an apartheid occupation state?). She has expressed faith in U.S. legitimacy as "a force of good" in the world and shrugged off any serious understanding of the Middle East.

Antonio Delgado, who upset a GOP incumbent in upstate New York, caught heat during the general campaign for his

positions on Israel. When he rejected the “democratic” label for Israel, his comment was widely described by news media as a regrettable gaffe.

The one Palestinian-American male candidate, Ammar Campa-Najjar, a Democrat who campaigned in San Diego, was the least critical of Israel and the only one who lost. He went to lengths to ingratiate himself with the Israel lobby, having changed his religion and name in the past. He even condemned his grandfather, Abu Yusuf An-Najjar, a PLO diplomat killed by Israeli terrorists in Beirut in 1973, as a “murderer.”

The nature of U.S. public attitude towards Israel is changing. A few decades ago, isolationist conservative Republicans were the most likely to be detractors. That role has shifted to liberals in big cities. These days, southern Baptists and conservative Republicans in rural America are providing Israel some of the staunchest support.

Automatic Support for Israel

But this change doesn't mean much in Congress. On Middle East issues, Democrats and Republicans remain ardent and automatic supporters of Israel.

Despite the War Powers Act of 1973, designed to check the president's power to commit the country to an armed conflict, the president retains quasi-imperial powers of foreign policy making. Given voters' worship of the military, representatives are often afraid to reject wars and interventions that presidents seek. To be accused of “failing to support the troops” is fatal to candidates from both parties. California Rep. Barbara Lee famously cast the

lone vote against the authorization of military force following Sept. 11, 2001.

The two ruling parties, meanwhile, muzzle democratic discussion of their foreign policy agenda. Through the nominating process, the big wigs of the Democratic Party are able to sideline dissent. The Republican primaries, meanwhile, can seem like contests for the greatest show of fanaticism in supporting Israel. Even in local elections—for mayors and city council—defiance of AIPAC can kill off contenders' chances. Some members of the Congressional Black Caucus, dominated by Democrats, break with AIPAC influence on votes, but the caucus leadership is closely aligned with the pro-Israel lobby.

The internal Democratic split (between its leadership and the liberal base) on Israel is comparable with that of liberal European political parties. The Socialist Party of France, for instance, pursues a traditional pro-Israeli agenda despite pro-Palestine sympathy within its ranks. The same had been true of the Labour Party in the U.K., until the rise of Jeremy Corbyn as leader. The United States has come to insist on a pro-Israeli plank from its European allies. In the 1970s, European nations often held positions on the PLO and on Palestinian self-determination that broke with U.S. doctrine. Since then, however, European disagreement with the U.S. on the Arab-Israeli question has diminished.

AIPAC, and its unofficial research arm, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, have managed to establish themselves as the moral and authoritative sources of legislation and information on all matters related to the

Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East. The lobby has succeeded through intimidation, as detailed in "They Dare to Speak Out," a book by former Illinois Rep. Paul Findley, a Republican. One successful method has been conflating any criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. This tactic has been most effective in discouraging U.S. politicians from opposing Israel.

Not a 'Jewish Lobby'

It must be stressed that AIPAC is not a "Jewish lobby," but a pro-Israel lobby. Its champions are not exclusively Jewish. Anti-Semites wish to portray the lobby in classically bigoted terms, as a Jewish conspiracy. But some of its most ardent adherents have been non-Jewish U.S. presidents, members of Congress and administration officials.

On Palestine, Congress has changed substantially over the years. In the early 1980s, a few lawmakers, from both parties, still dared to challenge AIPAC, which was founded in 1963. In his 1985 [book](#), former Congressman Paul Findley, now 97, describes some of them. Back then, a wing of the Republican Party even stood for "even-handedness" in the Middle East.

By the end of the 1980s, few of these moderating voices on Israel were left. They'd either retired or lost their seats.

Since the 1990s, dissent on Israel is virtually absent in the upper house of Congress. The late Robert Byrd, from West Virginia, who died in 2010, was the last senator who dared to vote against legislation favored by AIPAC.

Sens. Patrick Leahy of Vermont and Diane Feinstein of California, both in their 80s, are mildly critical of Israel, but still vote with AIPAC most of the time. (Feinstein only recently started criticizing Israel perhaps because support in her state is secure). “Social Democrat” Sen. Bernie Sanders [gets heralded for challenging Israel](#). But that only shows the depth of the general silence. In fact, Sanders usually criticizes Israel in the most restricted terms: (“I am not a fan of Netanyahu.”)

In the House, in recent years the number of members who—on rare occasions—vote to defy the Israeli agenda, has risen. But unlike in previous years, little is ever said about the rights of Palestinians or directly against AIPAC.

Dennis Kucinich, former member of Congress from Cleveland, and a former presidential candidate, may have been the last member to publicly champion the Palestinians. (He once told me that he made it a point to speak about Palestine weekly.) He lost his seat after redistricting in 2012.

The question now is whether some of those new faces in Congress, who carried the progressive torch in the campaigns, have the courage of a Kucinich on Israeli matters. Will any of them break the taboo against speaking for Palestine or against AIPAC? Their silence regarding the on-going Israeli assault on Gaza so far is deafening.

As’ad AbuKhalil is a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University, Stanislaus. He is the author of the Historical Dictionary of Lebanon (1998), Bin Laden, Islam and America’s New “War on Terrorism” (2002), and The Battle for Saudi Arabia (2004).

He also runs the popular blog [The Angry Arab News Service](#).

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