

# The 'Israel Lobby': A Realistic Assessment

by [Ben Fishman \(/experts/ben-fishman\)](/experts/ben-fishman)

Mar 1, 2008

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Ben Fishman \(/experts/ben-fishman\)](/experts/ben-fishman)

Ben Fishman is a Senior Fellow in The Washington Institute's Program on Arab Politics.

---



Articles & Testimony

The following is an excerpt of this article. [Read the full text](#) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/opedsPDFs/47d7e8ee283f8.pdf>) (PDF).

When John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt published a paper decrying the influence of the Israel lobby on American foreign policy in March 2006, they received a torrent of criticism from former policymakers, historians, politically-inclined academics, and several of the Jewish organizations their paper cited. The professors maintained that support for Israel damages America's interests in the Middle East, and that the collective activities of Israel's supporters in the United States -- the Israel lobby -- largely determine American policies in the region. Mearsheimer and Walt adamantly defended their thesis and expanded their paper into a bestselling book titled, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*.

The varied reactions to *The Israel Lobby* stem from the number and scope of controversial issues the book addresses: the definition of the Israel lobby; the description of its operations; the argument that Israel is a "strategic liability" to the United States; the depiction of Israel's "dwindling moral case"; the lobby's efforts to stifle public criticism of Israel; and, five chapters devoted to allegations of how the lobby has shaped the Bush administration's policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the Lebanon War. Although the initial reviews of *The Israel Lobby* have been generally more restrained in tone than the burst of criticism aimed at Mearsheimer and Walt's earlier paper, critics have widely noted the professors' biased presentation of history and their uninformed characterization of the policymaking process. Some reviewers, such as former Secretary of State George Shultz and former Bush administration speechwriter Michael Gerson offered rationalizations for American backing of Israel.

Arguing the merits of the U.S.-Israel relationship is certainly a valid focus, but condemning the alliance is not unique to Mearsheimer and Walt. Rather, what distinguishes *The Israel Lobby* is its claim that advocates and defenders of Israel in the United States shape not just America's close relationship with the Jewish state, but the totality of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Therefore, the standard by which the professors should be judged is whether the evidence in the book about the lobby's actions and the responses by the U.S. government actually supports this purported causal relationship between the lobby and the lobbied. Do the U.S. officials

responsible for shaping the policies described by Mearsheimer and Walt even remotely agree with the professors' depiction of the lobby's influence? Had Mearsheimer and Walt conducted any interviews with current or former Bush administration officials, they would have learned that their characterization of events and the role of the Israel lobby differs substantially from those actually engaged in policymaking. Yet the professors have insisted "we felt we already had sufficient information about the lobby's operations," and such interviews "would not have altered our conclusions." . . .

Ben Fishman is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at The George Washington University and a research associate at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. An [abbreviated version \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1082\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1082) of this article appeared in The National Interest Online, August 27, 2007. ❖

Orbis

---

## RECOMMENDED

---



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Coordinated Iran Sanctions Require Coordinated Enforcement](#)

Apr 19, 2024

◆  
Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/coordinated-iran-sanctions-require-coordinated-enforcement\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### [China's Military Objectives and Operational Experience in the Middle East](#)

Apr 19, 2024

◆  
Grant Rumley

[\(/policy-analysis/chinas-military-objectives-and-operational-experience-middle-east\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## The Middle East's Perilous Moment: Policy Implications and Escalation Risks

Apr 18, 2024



Dana Stroul,  
Zohar Palti,  
Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/middle-east-s-perilous-moment-policy-implications-and-escalation-risks)

### TOPICS

U.S. Policy (/policy-analysis/us-policy)

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Israel (/policy-analysis/israel)