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For over three decades the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has been an effective lobby within Congress to ensure that Israel remains strong militarily and economically and endures as a national homeland for Jews. AIPAC possesses advantages in those key areas that are considered essential for an effective interest group. AIPAC has focused leadership; a large number of members who are wealthy and highly regarded in their communities; a grass roots organization that is large and vocal; significant access to political leaders; an issues oriented electorate that consistently votes; an effective training program to lobby legislators; and general public support.

While acknowledging its effectiveness, AIPAC critics maintain that AIPAC is an ex-officio arm of the Israeli government which shamelessly manipulates the political process whenever it decides that there is a perceived threat to Israel's interests. This paper will examine AIPAC's origins, its structure and agenda, and its lobbying techniques to better understand why AIPAC is considered by many to be the most influential Congressional lobby.

1993
Executive Research Project
S70

**The Agenda and Political
Techniques of the American
Israel Public Affairs Committee
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Never again! Never again! This phrase reflects two deeply ingrained Jewish commitments: (1) Jews will never again be subjected to another Holocaust, and (2) Israel must survive as a Jewish homeland. For over three decades the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has been an effective lobby within Congress to ensure that Israel remains strong militarily and economically, and endures as a national homeland for Jews. While acknowledging its effectiveness, AIPAC critics maintain that AIPAC is an ex-officio arm of the Israeli government which shamelessly manipulates the political process whenever it decides that there is a perceived threat to Israel's interests. This paper will examine AIPAC's origins, its structure and agenda, and its lobbying techniques to better understand why AIPAC is considered by many to be the most influential Congressional lobby.

AIPAC'S ORIGINS

The political climate following the creation of Israel fostered the birth of AIPAC. Almost immediately after Israel's establishment as an independent state in 1948, it became clear that Israel needed American Jewry's assistance to absorb nearly 600,000 Jewish immigrants who had been living in displaced persons camps in Europe and in squalid conditions in the Middle East. Population projections showed a tripling of refugees in six years. Besides incurring heavy personnel casualties in its war of independence, Israeli citizens had accepted enormous economic sacrifices: high taxes, wage and price controls, and rationing. United States Jewry

had responded with unparalleled contributions, but it was clear that neither Israel nor American Jews could absorb the huge immigration and economic development costs.¹

In late 1950 American Jewish leaders formulated a four point program to financially aid Israel. American Jews would "bite the bullet" and increase their personal donations, encourage private investment from United States firms, promote the purchase of Israeli bonds for both agricultural and infrastructure development, and request that the United States include Israel in its aid program to economic disadvantaged countries.²

The arguments to aid Israel were obvious--moral, economic, and strategic. Many Americans agonized over the vivid pictures and personal recollections of Nazi atrocities committed against European Jewry. Also, many Americans respected Israel for its fighting spirit in winning the 1948 independence war when it was invaded by its neighboring Arab states the day after it was established.

Economically, Israel--once developed through democratic principles--could be an enlightened example for a region that was highly undeveloped. Strategically, Israel was the only country in the Middle East that supported free institutions; Israel could be America's eye in the region, especially since the oil-rich Arab countries were vulnerable to external and internal upheavals.

¹Isaiah L. Kenen, Israel's Defense Line: Her Friends and Foes in Washington. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1981, pages 66-67.

²Ibid., page 66.

It quickly became clear in the American Jewish community that Israel's basic needs could not be satisfied by philanthropy alone. The economic and military support necessary for Israel to survive could only come from the United States government. Israeli leaders originally petitioned the State Department for direct foreign aid grants. While the United States provided a \$135 million Export-Import Bank loan (which was repaid) and surplus food commodities, the State Department refused to provide grants. Israel's 1948 independence coincided with the height of the Cold War: the Iron Curtain had fallen over Eastern Europe, the Soviets were blockading West Berlin, and Mao Tse-tung was threatening Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government. Fearing additional losses to Moscow, the State Department opposed any U.S. aid grants to Israel because Israel's resentful Arab neighbors, who were neither requesting nor accepting U.S. aid, might align themselves with the Communists. The State Department's attitude left open only one branch of the federal government for Israel and its agents to appeal to--the Congress.³

AIPAC traces its roots to 1951 and the establishment of the American Zionist Council (AZC) under the leadership of Isaiah Kenen in concert with nationally known Israeli leaders. AZC's sole purpose was to foster a pro-Israel lobbying campaign. Structured as a tax exempt organization, the Council could not legally lobby on Israel's behalf in the United States. Subsequently, in 1954, the AZC became

³ Ibid, page 67.

the focus of a possible investigation of alleged illegal lobbying activities on Israel's behalf. To diffuse charges, the Council formed a non-tax-exempt lobbying arm under Kenen's leadership called the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs, the forerunner of AIPAC. In 1959, the word Israel was substituted for Zionist to enlist the support of broad-based Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith. These organizations, which were unable to lobby on Israel's behalf because of their tax status, played a significant part in AIPAC's development.⁴ As Kenen stated in his book, Israel's Defense Line: Her Friends and Foes in Washington: *"We enlisted the cooperation of all major Jewish organizations, both 'Zionist' and 'non-Zionist,' such as the defense organizations. They were unwilling to lobby, but they agreed to find prominent constituents to open congressional doors for us."* ⁵

Since 1959, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee has been the only domestic organization registered to lobby for the American Jewish community in support of Israel. Unlike other Jewish organizations, donations to AIPAC are not tax exempt. Consequently, AIPAC does not have to abide by Internal Revenue Service restrictions that apply to tax exempt groups, which forbid direct lobbying of Congress and the Executive Branch. Moreover, unlike other domestic organizations that lobby for foreign governments and

⁴ Edward Tivnan, The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy. New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, pages 38-39.

⁵ Isaiah L. Kenen, Israel's Defense Line: Her Friends in Washington. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1981, page 69.

receive funds from them, AIPAC receives no funding from Israel. Rather, its funding comes from appeals to its thousands of members.⁶

AIPAC'S STRUCTURE AND AGENDA

AIPAC is governed by a group of eighteen officers, most of whom are leaders of major Jewish organizations. These offices are selected every two years by an executive committee comprising the presidents of thirty-eight major American Jewish organizations that claim a membership of nearly five million. The AIPAC officers meet monthly and only deal with high visibility issues. In reality, the officers are normally wealthy, influential, and widely respected members of the American Jewish community. Likewise, the office of AIPAC president is a titular position. The key position within AIPAC is that of executive director. The executive director is AIPAC's chief administrative officer who is responsible for the lobby's day-to-day operations. Kenen occupied the position from 1954-74. He was followed by Morris Amitay, who at his selection was a legislative aide to Connecticut Senator Abraham Ribicoff. Since 1981, the executive director has been Thomas Dine, who monitored national security issues for the Senate Budget Committee and was subsequently a legislative aide to Senators Edward Kennedy, Frank Church, and Edmund Muskie.⁷

⁶ David Howard Goldberg, Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups: American and Canadian Jews Lobby for Israel. New York, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990, pages 15-17.

⁷Ibid, pages 17-19.

AIPAC has a non-sectarian staff of 140 highly intelligent and committed individuals together with an annual budget of approximately \$15 million. The largest number of staff is centered several blocks from the Capitol in a non-descript mid-rise building. Even though it lacks identification as AIPAC headquarters, the building is tightly guarded with uniformed officers and remote control entering devices. The remaining staff members are in seven geographical regions around the United States plus an office in Jerusalem.⁸

While one-third of the Washington staff are clerical and administrative, the remaining staff members are specialists in fields ranging from conventional weapon transfers to advanced weapon systems technology. For example, during an interview conducted on 20 November 1992 with three AIPAC staff members, one was a former academic who specialized in Middle East policy analysis, another was a former United States air force colonel who thoroughly understood the military, and the third was a weapons expert who had previously worked in private industry. Even though one of the three was not Jewish, they were unified by their commitment to the survival of Israel. Basically, the Washington staff is divided into the following four departments:

Executive

⁸Personal Interview with Mitchell Bard, Barry Gold, and Charles Perkins, 20 November 1992.

Prior to the 1988 election, AIPAC had never directly lobbied the Executive Branch, assuming that it was insulated from public pressure and answerable only to the President. While AIPAC and Executive Branch officials exchanged information, AIPAC reasoned that appointed officials and advisers do not have to face reelection, can claim objectivity regarding their opinions, and serve at the pleasure of the President. But with the Republicans destined to control the Executive Branch for 12 consecutive years, AIPAC established an executive department with a staff of 7 as a lobbying arm to influence policies at their creation. Too often, AIPAC had found itself solely in a reactive mode dealing with Congress on issues originating in the Executive Branch.⁹

Yet, AIPAC recognizes that its effectiveness with the Executive Branch depends upon an issue's degree of importance. While AIPAC may be able to influence a Congressional decision, issues at the Presidential level--the Mid East peace process, the advisability of holding discussions with the Palestine Liberation Organization, or recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital--are more difficult to influence. AIPAC's ability to influence these types of decisions is a reflection of how consistent AIPAC's position is with the Administration's own ideology. *"So if what you're arguing is consistent with the President's foreign policy vision, he's likely to go along with it; if not, it's going to be impossible to overcome his objections."* ¹⁰

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

Besides focusing on policy formulation, the executive department lobby also concerns itself with the Executive Branch's sensibilities toward AIPAC's legislative agenda. *"If you have an audience (Executive Branch) that is not receptive to legislation, you have a problem. If you can avoid pushing something that is a problem, you try to avoid it. So sometimes you may have options on how legislation is steered, and it's useful to get with the Executive Branch to see which direction they are going in."*¹¹ Moreover, AIPAC concluded that even if it were successful in securing legislation favorable to its agenda, AIPAC had no barometers to indicate how expeditiously the Executive Branch would implement the legislation. The executive department lobby serves that purpose.

Legislative

With a significant number of professional staff, the legislative department continues to be AIPAC's key to influencing legislation favorable to Israel. In the early 1980s AIPAC openly targeted the reelection of Congressmen who had supported the sale of AWAC radar planes to Saudia Arabia. For example, many cite the lack of AIPAC support as central to the defeats of Senators Percy and Jepsen.¹² Recognizing that its tactics were considered too tough and fearing the threat of a potential

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Newsweek, 19 October 1987, page 46.

backlash against future aid to Israel, AIPAC's legislative department reverted to Isaiah Kenen's tenets for lobbying Congress:

1. Stand squarely behind legislation; never in front of it.
2. Vigorously lobby the Congress to urge the President to retract perceived anti-Israel Administration pronouncements or policies.
3. Secure bipartisan sponsorship and support.
4. Develop friendships in both parties.¹³

In contrast to other lobby organizations that may be seeking financial benefits for their constituencies, AIPAC's legislative department is united and focused on one simple coherent message-- support to Israel. This fact coupled with Congressional recognition that Jews vote and contribute to campaigns results in the legislative department starting with a solid base of support in Congress.

According to Morris Amitay, AIPAC's former executive director, any pro-Israel legislation starts with "*a consistent, reliable base of 200 supporters in the 435 member House and 40 to 50 of the 100 senators.*" ¹⁴ In addition, the legislative department's arguments for Israeli support may vary: United States national security interest is served by a strong Israel, the United States and Israel have shared values, increased Israeli aid creates United States' jobs, and Israel is a homeland for victims of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the

¹³Isaiah L. Kenen, Israel's Defense Line: Her Friends in Washington. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1981, page 108.

¹⁴ New York Times, 7 July 1987, page A8.

arguments must demonstrate solid merit to secure support. Barry Gold of AIPAC emphasized this when he stated:

*The product itself--the latest public opinion poll--shows that 80 percent of the American people support aid to Israel. We have a product that the average American is willing to support. We get involved with all (members) regardless of party, but the issue is that the product is a sellable product. We don't convince them of things if they didn't think it made sense.*¹⁵

The legislative department is so proficient at advocating arguments for Congressional support that the *"average member of Congress has very little incentive to be anti-Israel...there are rewards for being pro-Israel--not directly from AIPAC but from their constituency."*¹⁶

One of the rewards is election to office. While the Jewish population in the United States is under 6 million or roughly 3 percent of the population, Jews have the highest percentage of actual voters of any ethnic group. While no exit polls ask the religion of voters, AIPAC estimates that 90 percent of Jews voted in the 1988 election. Consequently, instead of reflecting 3 percent of the population at the polls, Jews actually reflected 6 percent. Also a significant corps of Christians are more staunch in their advocacy of Israeli support than avid Zionists. Combined, it is clear that Israel's advocates claim a solid block of support in Congress. In fact, 89 percent of the American Jewish population lives in 12 key electoral college states. To illustrate this fact, AIPAC estimates that if 7 percent of the New

¹⁵ Personal Interview with Mitchell Bard, Barry Gold, and Charles Perkins, 20 November 1992.

¹⁶ Ibid.

York Jewish population had switched and voted for President Bush in 1992, he would have won the state. Facts such as these are reinforced by the legislative department in their dealings with Congress and Congressional candidates.¹⁷

Research

With a staff of 10 the Research Department is the second largest department within AIPAC. The Research Department thoroughly monitors Congressional actions relating to Israel. For example, it keeps extensive records not only of members' votes relating to issues involving foreign aid and arms sales but also members' speeches, informal statements, and even constituent letters pertaining to Israel. The Congressional Record is monitored daily, and attention is focused on any committee hearing that could directly impact Israel.¹⁸

A lobby organization is only as good as the quality and timeliness of the information it supplies. AIPAC's Research Department consistently stands out for its ability to provide in-depth policy position papers in a timely manner that focus on Israel's strategic importance to the United States. As AIPAC's Barry Gold stated:

We provide position papers to lots and lots of people, individuals, and organizations to keep them abreast of what is taking place. Timely information is important; we try to stay up to speed on the latest developments.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

It's useful to have a little information on time rather than a lot of information two weeks late. ¹⁹

Mr. Gold's observations were reinforced by AIPAC's Mitchell Bard when he stated:

More importantly, it [AIPAC information] is viewed as credible information. Everyone recognizes there's a point of view, but they know it's not distorted to minimize its value. If you look at our counterpart's [Arab Lobby] it usually has very little credibility to those that matter because they recognize it as not true or too badly distorted to be persuasive.

Whether it's strategic issues or military technology, journalists or Hill staffers know they can call me and get a quick response and a credible one. They know I have a point of view, but they depend on the credibility of the information. ²⁰

Senator Bill Bradley succinctly cited the Research Department's skills when he wrote: *"They know how to lobby the right way. They provide the most important thing you can give the Congress-- accurate balanced information."* ²¹

Political Development

The political development department has a staff of 15 and is the largest AIPAC department. The staff provides information to Congressional incumbents and challengers on Israeli issues, mobilizes constituent involvement, promotes fundraising, provides training, and develops future leaders on colleges across the United States through a political leadership development program that

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ AIPAC pamphlet entitled "What is AIPAC?"

emphasizes pro-Israel attitudes. All of these categories can be categorized under a broad umbrella called "grass roots" lobbying.²² According to Thomas Dine, the current Executive Director of AIPAC, educating candidates about AIPAC's positions is *"a function that we take very seriously. Before giving a speech, a candidate might ask us how it would play in the Jewish Community."*²³ Likewise, the political development staff urges AIPAC members to become Jewish community activists or "citizen lobbyists" by involving themselves in the political process. Thomas Dine emphasized that *"issues are won or lost on Capitol Hill not because of what takes place in Washington, but because of what constituents want."*²⁴ Former Senator Robert Kasten summarized AIPAC's political development arm when he wrote: *"As a grassroots movement, AIPAC is well-nigh unsurpassed in its ability to mobilize an articulate, informed citizen network."*²⁵

Regional Centers

In the 1980s AIPAC established seven regional offices in the United States: Florida (Sunrise, Florida), New York (New York City), the Midwest (Chicago), the Southeast (Atlanta), the Pacific Northwest (San Francisco), Southern Pacific (Los Angeles), and the Southwest (Austin, Texas). While the staffs are limited, the regional offices play a key role in cultivating "grass roots" involvement.

²² Personal Interview with Mitchell Bard, Barry Gold, and Charles Perkins, 20 November 1992.

²³ New York Times, 6 July 1987, page A8.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ AIPAC pamphlet entitled "What is AIPAC?"

Through close cooperation with the Washington staff, the regional offices ensure that AIPAC members "*get a direct hands on relationship so they don't feel like they only get a letter once a year for money.*" ²⁶ The regional offices have a two-fold purpose: (1) to conduct training sessions about issues affecting Israel, and (2) to cultivate activism by urging its members to become involved in local and national politics, and by using their personal contacts effectively on Israel's behalf.

Most recently, an eighth office was established in Jerusalem. Though the staff is much smaller than the Washington office, it performs similar functions. Besides providing logistics support for visiting dignitaries, it provides AIPAC with an effective intelligence capability so that AIPAC has "*the best inside information about the Israeli political scene.*" ²⁷

AIPAC Funding

When Isaiah Kenen became AIPAC's chief lobbyist in 1954, his annual salary was \$13,000, which was nearly 20 percent of AIPAC's annual budget. AIPAC struggled in its early years to properly fund an effective lobby for several reasons: (1) AIPAC lacked a tax - exempt status; (2) individuals supported their own tax-deductible Jewish community organizations; and (3) American Jews initially felt

²⁶ Personal Interview with Mitchell Bard, Barry Gold, and Charles Perkins, 20 November 1992.

²⁷ Ibid.

that Israel should subsidize AIPAC since it was lobbying directly on Israel's behalf. This attitude completely changed in 1967 when pro-Israel support significantly increased in the United States during the Arab-Israeli war.²⁸ Today, AIPAC's budget is estimated in the range of \$10-\$15 million. While AIPAC officials would neither confirm nor deny any exact figure, they appeared to delight in the perception and power that a multi-million dollar budget brings to their cause.²⁹

AIPAC is funded by dues and non-tax-deductible contributions from Jewish individuals and organizations. Currently, AIPAC has 55,000 members, each paying a minimum annual dues of \$50. However, a majority of AIPAC's budget comes from its ability to target large individual patrons for membership in its three exclusive clubs: the Capitol Club with a minimum donation of \$3600, the Senate Club with a minimum donation of \$10,000, and the President's Club with a minimum donation of \$25,000. AIPAC has consistently been able to secure increased annual donations because of its reputation for delivering results. Likewise, AIPAC's political clout has been enhanced by its members' generous financial support. ³⁰

AIPAC LOBBYING TECHNIQUES

It's no great secret how to influence a Congressman. You

²⁸ Isaiah L. Kenen, Israel's Defense Line: Her Friends in Washington. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1981, pages 107, 198.

²⁹ Personal Interview with Mitchell Bard, Barry Gold, and Charles Perkins, 20 November 1992.

³⁰ AIPAC pamphlet entitled "Rub Elbows With Some Very Interesting Characters."

can't buy a Congressman. Access is the name of the game. You can get access and try to influence that vote. You get access by establishing personal relationships, developing friendships and participating in a member's campaign by contributing money to the campaign. That's not unique. We are more successful because of our commitment and the disproportionate level of activism. If you look at money given to campaigns and the people involved in campaigns, they are disproportionately Jewish. ³¹

AIPAC's effectiveness is based on the application of two long-tested lobbying techniques: networking--the cultivation of influential and/or powerful allies; and constituent strength--a concentrated group that is actively involved in the political process.

Networking

From its inception AIPAC has used its contacts with Jewish organizations and business people to gain bipartisan Congressional access. AIPAC is particularly astute in ensuring that its friends and supporters consistently reflect bipartisanship. Isaiah Kenen's 1950 campaign to secure Congressional approval for a \$100 million grant to Israel is a perfect illustration of AIPAC's influential contacts. To open Congressional doors to hear AIPAC's arguments, Kenen contacted Barney Balaban, the Jewish head of Paramount Pictures. In turn, Balaban contacted Republican Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon, who endorsed the grant after meeting with Kenen. Likewise, Kenen also contacted William Bloom, a Jewish businessman

³¹Personal Interview with Mitchell Bard, Barry Gold, and Charles Perkins, 20 November 1992.

and campaign contributor from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, who opened Democratic Senator John Sparkman's door to Kenen. Similarly, Sparkman endorsed the aid package.³²

Even with a Jewish population that is concentrated in key electoral states, Jewish voters only represent 3 percent of the voting population. Therefore, AIPAC has actively worked to form coalitions with non-Jewish groups that reflect broad segments of the United States. Included in the coalitions are unions, black leaders, entertainers, scholars, and fundamentalist Christians. As some of Israel's strongest supporters, fundamentalist Christians view Israel as the embodiment of Biblical prophecy. Through these non-Jewish coalitions, AIPAC is able to demonstrate a broad consensus that favors support of Israel.³³

AIPAC is extremely effective in using its Congressional influence to defend Israeli interests. In fact, "*AIPAC has a near stranglehold over Capitol Hill policies relating to Israel,*" stated a former legislative director to a powerful senator. The staffer continued by stating that:

*Everyone recognizes that it is in the United States' interest to support Israel for strategic reasons, but the question is how much aid is sufficient. AIPAC effectively muzzles criticism and precludes any sort of balanced approach.*³⁴

³² Isaiah L. Kenen, Israel's Defense Line: Her Friends in Washington. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1981, pages 69-70.

³³ Mitchell Bard, "Israeli Lobby Power," Midstream, January 1987.

³⁴ Personal interview with confidential source, 12 January 1993.

This source spoke on a non-attribution basis, a reflection of AIPAC's power, because she feared that negative comments about AIPAC could jeopardize a possible position in the Clinton Administration. The staffer added that AIPAC often skews the United States' policy options in the Middle East. For example, if Israeli interests are challenged in the Senate, AIPAC immediately organizes a Senate resolution, sponsored by a pro-Israel senator. Then through its personal and constituent networks, AIPAC secures the support of at least two-thirds of the Senate to forestall any perceived anti-Israeli issues. ³⁵

According to the staffer, AIPAC is considered successful because it is sophisticated in picking and choosing only those issues that are winnable. *"They don't use a scatter shot approach; they don't take on everything,"* said the staffer. Most recently, AIPAC demonstrated this technique by not opposing the sale of F-15 fighter planes to Saudia Arabia. Fearing a backlash because of a stagnant defense industry economy, AIPAC concentrated instead on ensuring that the F-15s would not contain sophisticated electronic capabilities. Likewise, there was a mutual understanding in the Bush Administration and Congress that any sale would have to withstand AIPAC scrutiny, so that *"AIPAC didn't get bent out of shape."* ³⁶

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

AIPAC actively recruits a portion of its staff from political campaigns and from both parties in Congress. AIPAC is keenly aware that House and Senate Members are extremely dependent on their aides to be their "eyes and ears." Consequently, Congressional aides play an important behind-the-scenes role in researching and presenting the pros and cons of various policy positions to the Members. AIPAC not only knows how the levers of power operate, but AIPAC has maintained and nourished key contacts with pro-Israel Congressional aides. Morris Amitay, a former AIPAC Executive Director, explained AIPAC's connection to Jewish congressional staffers when he stated:

There are a lot of guys at the working level up here [Capitol Hill] who happen to be Jewish, who are willing to make a little bit of extra effort and to look at certain issues in terms of their Jewishness, and this is what made things go in the last couple of years. These are all guys who are in a position to make the decisions in these areas for those senators. You don't need that many to get something done in the Senate. All you need is a certain commitment to get something done and, if guys are willing to put time into that instead of a million other things they have to do, if they're willing to make a couple of calls, if they're willing to become involved, you can get an awful lot done just at the staff level...The senators have a million things to do and they'll take the recommendations [of their aides] most times. ³⁷

The networking paradigm includes cultivating key media people; hosting dinners and meetings for key United States officials with their Israeli counterparts; ensuring close consultation and

³⁷ Mitchell Bard, "Israeli Lobby Power," Midstream, January 1987.

coordination with key lay and Congressional supporters; and sponsoring Congressional trips to Israel for freshmen House and Senate members.

Constituent Strength

Isaiah Kenen stressed that an effective lobby needed a base of support that was both sensitized to issues and politically active. *"It's always necessary to appeal to the constituency. I urged the other Washington representatives to discuss the problems of legislation and to stimulate their constituents to act."* ³⁸ Echoing Kenen's comment, AIPAC's Mitchell Bard noted that *"every Jew must be deeply involved in the political process."* ³⁹ To mobilize its supporters on political issues affecting Israel, AIPAC depends upon its own 55,000 members and approximately 75 other organizations, such as the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League. Most of these other organizations cannot legally lobby because of their tax status. However, they and AIPAC possess sophisticated public relations machinery that allows AIPAC to quickly disseminate information to the organizations' members and develop quick individual constituent responses reflecting a single voice on Congressional issues affecting Israel. Mr. Steven Lowe,

³⁸ William J. Lanouette, "The Many Faces of the Jewish Lobby in America," National Journal, 13 May 1978, page 751.

³⁹ Personal interview with Mitchell Bard, Barry Gold, and Charles Perkins, 20 November 1992.

Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Southern Illinois, Southeast Missouri, and Western Kentucky, explained the process:

If there's an issue that AIPAC wants a Congressman or Senator to hear about, I'm immediately contacted, and I get the word out to the six synagogues and the SIU [Southern Illinois University] Hillel that are in our Federation. The area synagogues, Hillel, and B'nai Brith lodges will immediately initiate a letter writing campaign. ⁴⁰

Mr. Ronald Rubin, a former president of the same Federation, emphasized AIPAC's local impact:

AIPAC is in contact with some of our Federation members--people like Sandy Korein in Belleville--who have personal relationships with politicians like [Congressmen] Jerry Costello and Richard Durkin. Sandy can pick up the phone, call Washington, and his call is taken. ⁴¹

A Capitol Hill staffer explained AIPAC's public relations apparatus from a Congressional perspective:

It's a remarkable system they have. If you vote with them, or make a public statement that they like, they get the word out fast through their own publications and through editors around the country who are sympathetic to their cause. It's an instantaneous reward with immediate positive feedback, where the Senator's name, attached to a proposal or idea, becomes the subject of laudatory editorial or news show comment. Of course, it works in reverse as well. If you say or do something they don't like, you can be

⁴⁰ Telephone interview with Steven Lowe, 6 January 1993.

⁴¹ Telephone interview with Ronald Rubin, 4 January 1993.

denounced or censured through the same network. That kind of pressure is bound to affect Senators' thinking, especially if they are wavering or need support. ⁴²

In a 1981 Foreign Affairs article, then Republican Senator Charles Mathias elaborated on AIPAC's clout:

I know of few members of either House of Congress who do not believe deeply and strongly that support of Israel is both a moral duty and a national interest of the U.S. It is rather to suggest that, as a result of the activities of the lobby (AIPAC), congressional conviction has been measurably reinforced by the knowledge that political sanctions will be applied to any who fail to deliver...signs of hesitation or opposition on the part of a Senator or Representative can usually be relied on to call forth larger numbers of letters and telegrams, or visits and phone calls from influential constituents. ⁴³

Because it does not want to alienate possible allies in Congress, AIPAC does not endorse or rate candidates. In fact, AIPAC personnel are emphatic that AIPAC is not involved in any campaigns. However, during an election year AIPAC tries to meet and review the Israeli position of every incumbent and challenger running for election. Even though AIPAC disclaims endorsements, AIPAC subtly endorses by providing its members with challengers' Israeli positions and incumbents' voting records on Israeli issues. Through its constituent network, AIPAC urges its supporters to remember Israel's friends at the voting booth. Furthermore, while

⁴² William J. Lanouette, "The Many Faces of the Jewish Lobby in America," National Journal, 13 May 1978, page 751.

⁴³ Charles Mathias, "Ethnic Groups and Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs, Summer 1981.

AIPAC is not involved in political campaigns, AIPAC members are encouraged to become involved as individuals to help elect pro-Israel candidates and to generate increased public support for pro-Israel positions. ⁴⁴

AIPAC views its annual convention differently from typical conventions. AIPAC's Annual Policy Conference's objective is to educate its members on political issues affecting Israel and to involve them in actual lobbying. Each spring approximately 2,000 AIPAC members come to Washington to hear Administration and Congressional speakers and to undergo training sessions on topics such as the following:

Making Your Mark With The Media

Prominent journalists and media observers will show you how to identify anti-Israel bias and respond in pro-active ways.

Responding to Anti-Israel Activities In The U.S.

For 25 years, the anti-Israel campaign has been trying to drive a wedge between the U.S. and Israel. This session suggests countermeasures.

Fighting Isolationism: Forging New Coalitions In Support Of Foreign Aid

The recent resurgence of isolationism threatens foreign aid to Israel. This session focuses on ways to help unite the pro-foreign aid forces in this country.⁴⁵

In addition, AIPAC makes appointments on the Hill for the conference's participants and strongly encourages them to lobby

⁴⁴ New York Times, 7 July 1987, pages A8-9.

⁴⁵ AIPAC's 34th Annual Policy Conference Bulletin.

their Senate and House representatives. However, before sending the conferees to Capitol Hill, AIPAC conducts intense strategy sessions. AIPAC members are provided with arguments and specific courses of action for each AIPAC position. Barry Gold explained AIPAC's overall goal when he stated:

The primary objective is to get two thousand people to go up to Capitol Hill to show the strength of the organization and to make sure that these people will remain involved in the political process. If a Congressman hears over and over from his constituency the same message, he's more apt to support something. If it's somebody from the community who is well respected, he's more apt to carry weight with the Congressman, especially over someone who has no game plan. ⁴⁶

Prior to 1978, Jewish campaign contributions were often weak in targeting pro-Israel positions. As a result of federal election reforms, Morris Amitay left AIPAC in 1978 as Executive Director and formed the Washington Political Action Committee. By 1982 there were over 30 pro-Israel Political Action Committees that contributed nearly \$2 million to that year's political campaigns. By 1988 the number of pro-Israel Political Action Committees (PACs) had doubled and the contributions to that year's elections neared \$5 million. The pro-Israel PACs focus on races where the candidates are

⁴⁶ Personal interview with Mitchell Bard, Barry Gold, and Charles Perkins, 20 November 1992.

pro-Israel and where their contributions can make an election difference. ⁴⁷

While AIPAC is legally prohibited from contributing money to campaigns, the PACs allow AIPAC members and non-profit Jewish organizations affiliated with AIPAC to contribute. Moreover, AIPAC influences campaign contributions by its "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval." Yet, officially AIPAC is adamant that:

We have nothing to do with them [PACs]. We don't give money to candidates. But the reality is there are overlapping constituents--people who are pro-Israel and support AIPAC are logically the people who are going to be pro-Israel and support political action committees. AIPAC doesn't direct its members and friends to give money to a specific candidate. But it doesn't require direction. You don't have to be a political scientist to know who is pro-Israel and who is not. All AIPAC does is research the public record and let our friends know who is pro-Israel. ⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

AIPAC is a powerful and influential lobby because it possesses advantages in those key areas that are considered essential for an effective interest group. AIPAC has focused leadership; a large number of members who are wealthy and highly regarded in their communities; a grass roots organization that is large and vocal;

⁴⁷ Wall Street Journal, 26 February 1989.

⁴⁸ Personal interview with Mitchell Bard, Barry Gold, and Charles Perkins, 20 November 1992.

significant access to political leaders; an issues oriented electorate that consistently votes; an effective training program to lobby legislators; and general public support. AIPAC is effective in ensuring continued United States support to Israel not only because it is well organized but because it is effective in promoting shared democratic values and identifying Israel as a strategic national interest to the United States.