
The Lobby Like No Other Wants A War Like No Other

By Michael Scheuer
Antiwar.com - 14/8/2008

Having watched John McCain and Barack Obama resolutely pledge their allegiance - and their countrymen's lives and treasure - to the defense of Israel via AIPAC, the media, and personal meetings with Israeli leaders, it is worth asking what could possibly drive these men to so ardently commit America to participation in other people's religious wars. This question is particularly important today as the Bush administration and the Israel-firsters continue to push for an unprovoked U.S. attack on Iran.

Let me say that I harbor no resentment over the actions of Israel's leaders. For more than 60 years, they have knowingly made their country a pariah in the Arab and Islamic worlds, just as the Palestinians have made themselves pariahs in much of the West. This is, of course, the right of both parties, but neither seems to want to face the consequences of their decisions. With demographic realities and increasingly radical, well-armed Arabs making them panicky about Israel's security, Israel's leaders naturally to try to lock down as much U.S. support as possible. Having consciously - if unwisely - put all their eggs in the U.S. basket since the 1973 War, Israel's leaders must do everything possible to protect their relationship with Washington.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq, it seems, was not enough for the Israel-firsters. Now, according to Sen. Joseph Lieberman, a U.S.-launched war on Iran is needed because "the threat that the U.S. and Israel face from the Islamic Republic of Iran is today greater than ever." Though based on the fantasy that Ahmedinejad's tin-pot regime is a threat to the world's only superpower, this is a perfectly commonsense position for Israel and its U.S.-citizen backers in AIPAC to champion. In their view, U.S. wars with Muslims are the ultimate good for Israel. Recall, if you will, the perfectly accurate April 2008, words of Benjamin Netanyahu, likely Israel's next prime minister: "We [Israel] are benefiting from one thing, and that is the attack on the twin towers and the Pentagon, and the American struggle in Iraq." These wars, Netanyahu said, have "swung American public opinion in our favor." How much more must Netanyahu and AIPAC believe that a U.S. war with Iran would add to this "swing" in Israel's favor?

My own anger falls not on Israel, then, or on Palestine, for that matter; as I have written elsewhere, America would do just fine and would be better off without either or both. It falls rather on the lobbying efforts of AIPAC, that organization's blatant purchasing of fealty from U.S. politicians in both parties, and the media's obsequious parroting of specious canards about "Israel's right to exist" and "the duty of Americans to support an island of democracy in the Middle East."

While few would question the right of AIPAC leaders to lobby U.S. politicians, legally bribe them with campaign contributions, or limit their right to speak as they please in public, not matter how scurrilous or libelous their words, I sometimes wonder if Americans have focused on what AIPAC lobbies for and what its acolytes in politics and the media support.

It is a commonplace to say that lobbying is a pervasive activity in U.S. politics at all levels of government, especially at the federal level. People lobby for tax advantages for business or tax breaks for individuals; for the right to own guns or laws to ban them; for subsidies for agriculture or vouchers for private schools; for universal health care or smaller government. Across this diverse array of lobbyists there are two common threads: (A) None are working to push the United States to participate in

other peoples' wars; and (B) All are arguing for things that will - from their perspective - improve America, whether by making it richer, better protected, more competently educated, healthier, freer, etc. The anti-gun lobby, for example, is no less confident than the NRA and its affiliates that they are working for the best interests of Americans. One or the other is wrong, but their activities are shaped by their perception of what is best for America.

It is this last point that separates the lobbyists working for and with AIPAC - most of whom are U.S. citizens - from almost all other U.S.-based lobbyists. AIPAC does not lobby, bribe, and libel to make Americans and America better off. It lobbies solely, forthrightly, and cynically to make Israel richer, better protected, and able to do as it pleases in its relations with Muslim states. AIPAC makes no pretense of doing things meant to benefit America; rather, its members take pride in seeking a goal that runs directly counter to the economic welfare and physical security of almost all other U.S. citizens by seeking to keep them involved in a religious war in which no U.S. national interest is at stake.

Now, there are a few other similar anti-American lobbies - those for Armenia, Lebanon, Greece, etc. - but AIPAC is clearly primus inter pares in this dastardly group. And given that every AIPAC success is a net loss for U.S. security and the U.S. Treasury, it seems odd that our so-called political leaders take orders and funds from this fundamentally anti-U.S. organization. Odd or not, however, that is the reality. Senators Obama and McCain have become AIPAC poster boys, each strengthening his support for Israel over the course of the current presidential campaign. Obama's position, in fact, has changed so drastically in a pro-Israel direction that the Illinois senator appears to have no mind of his own on this issue. He has simply and obsequiously adopted the Democrats' traditional abject subservience to their small but powerful pro-Israel constituency.

McCain is an Israel-firster of the deepest hue. Coached by Joe Lieberman - who argues there is a U.S. duty to ensure God's promise to Abraham about Israel is kept - McCain is now considering Republican Congressman Eric Cantor for his running mate. Rep. Cantor, needless to say, is eager to spend American blood and treasure to secure Israel. Speaking in Israel, Cantor pushed the same false assertion that is the staple of U.S. leaders in both parties. "What befalls Jerusalem," Cantor said, "threatens the security of the United States and its allies worldwide. That's because Jerusalem and Israel are Ground Zero in the global battle between tyranny and democracy, radicalism and moderation, terrorism and freedom."

This, of course, is nonsense of a high order, and Lieberman and Cantor know it. Both men are committed to Israel as a religious idea, not because it has anything to do with U.S. security. According to Lieberman, "The rabbis say in the Talmud that a lot of rabbinic law is to put a fence around the Torah so you don't get near to violating it. Well, McCain has a series of very clear-headed policies toward terrorism and Islamic extremism [that put] extra layers behind his support for Israel." He also told a conference of Christians United for Israel that he was pleased they recognized it was America's duty to defend Israel, blithely lying to them that "President Washington and the Founding Fathers" would support America fighting Israel's wars. Cantor, playing to both the Israel-firsters and their U.S. evangelical allies, also has made clear where his primary loyalty lies:

"Jerusalem is not merely the capital of Israel but the spiritual capital of Jews and Christians everywhere. It's the site of the First and Second Temples, which housed the Holy of Holies, and it's the direction in which we Jews face when we pray. This glorious City of David is bound to the Jewish people by an undeniable 3,000-year historical link."

My own view is that if God promised Palestine to the Israelis, God is perfectly capable of keeping that promise, and America is no way committed to expend the lives of its soldier-children in a war over conflicting interpretations of God's word. The Israelis and the Muslims should be perfectly free to fight over whether Yahweh and Abraham or Allah and Mohammed are right, and Americans should be perfectly free to draw the correct conclusion, that the United States does not have a dog in this fight. In addition, there is a genuine constitutional question of church-state separation on this issue. Why should American taxpayers have their earnings and children's lives spent to defend a theocracy in Israel or, for that matter, to protect an Islamic theocracy in Saudi Arabia.? (Imagine the howls of protest and torrents of church-state separation rhetoric from the media and both parties if a congressman introduced a bill calling for the U.S. to designate that an amount equivalent to what's spent to protect Israel and Saudi Arabia be sent to the Vatican - a nation-state like Israel and Saudi Arabia - to improve its defenses against the now well-articulated threat from al-Qaeda and other Islamists.)

Objectively, three realities are clear: (1) U.S. survival is not at stake in the Israeli-Muslim war; (2) the taxes of Americans should not be spent to defend theocratic states; and (3) holy books are insane tools to use as guides for U.S. foreign policy. In America, however, these realities lie unspoken because of the lobbying efforts of AIPAC and the pro-Israel mantras of the politicians it purchases with campaign contributions and promises of media exposure, including McCain and Obama. By their consistent anti-American actions, AIPAC and the U.S. politicians who do its bidding have fully validated the words of the real George Washington - not the figment of Washington painted by Joe Lieberman. "Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence," President Washington wrote in 1796, "the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government."
