

From



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Washington

Jewish lobby—still alive

"America and Israel, now and forever, one and inseparable, will survive. And if it be necessary for survival, we will fight. And without question we will win!"

EACH year the umbrella organisation that brings together dozens of American Jewish organisations into a lean, fighting, political machine holds an annual convention in Washington. Popularly known as AIPAC, which stands for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the yearly gathering rallies Jewish activists from throughout the country.

Far and away the most highly organised and effective pressure group working to influence American policies in the Mid-east even under today's conditions of US-Israeli strain AIPAC wields tremendous clout.

Together with its cousin think-tank organisation, the Washington Institute On Near East Affairs, and sister publication, the *Near East Report*, AIPAC works most diligently and always on overtime to skew the Washington debate in

Israel's favour. And when it decides a fight is necessary to frighten Washington politicians into submission it not only always fights vigorously but rarely loses.

Indeed, since the days of President Eisenhower, no American President has been able to combat AIPAC effectively, except on limited issues for limited duration. And in recent years—since the Reagan Presidency and the formalisation of the US-Israeli "strategic alliance"—AIPAC has actually grown in clout to the point where AIPAC officials are often invited down to the White House or over to the State Department for "consultations" before new policy-decisions are taken.

Conference

The just concluded 1990 AIPAC conference—coming right in the midst of the public spats between the Bush and Shamir governments—only served to highlight the continuing power this Jewish/Israeli lobby wields over American foreign policy considerations.

The quote above, for instance, isn't that of an AIPAC

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James Baker

official or some organisation; but rather that of Senator Bob Packwood from Oregon who brought hundreds of the Jewish political activists to their feet in thunderous applause at the AIPAC banquet two weeks ago.

"When we talk about land for peace, they already gave up land for peace! Don't tell me we didn't give up land for peace!" Packwood declared, switching to the first person plural in order to further underscore his total identification with Israel.

"Israel would give up more than I would," Packwood added, alluding to the current political deadlock. "In the same situation as Israel is in, my policy would be: Not...One...Inch..."

Republican Packwood's speech in the packed ballroom at the huge Sheraton Washington Hotel was meant to be a clear and unambiguous warning to the Bush administration.

And he wasn't alone.

Democratic Party Senate Majority Leader, George Mitchell was at the AIPAC convention as well.

Key senior Bush administration officials appeared at the convention as well, making it very clear how much the powers that be in Washington realise that AIPAC is a power institution they cannot ignore and probably cannot defeat.

Both Vice President Dan Quayle and Secretary of Defence Richard Cheney assured the AIPAC attendees of their administration's unbreakable bonds with Israel, while at the same time continuing to push for the Israeli government to initiate some kinds of talks with the Palestinians, in Cairo.

According to the Vice President, "the fundamental news is good. When all is said and done the fact remains that the two allies...agree on many of the fundamentals of peace in the Mid-east."

"A Palestinian-Israeli dialogue in Cairo leading to elections and negotiations" is what Cheney noted Washington would like to see. "This process will enhance Israel's security. And this process, built on the premise of Israel's May 14, 1989 initiative, deserves a

positive Israeli response."

True, Secretary of State James Baker stayed away this year, conveniently having other obligations that took him away from Washington. But everyone was aware that it was just a year ago, at the previous AIPAC annual conference, that Baker called upon Israel "to lay aside, once and for all, the unrealistic vision of a Greater Israel."

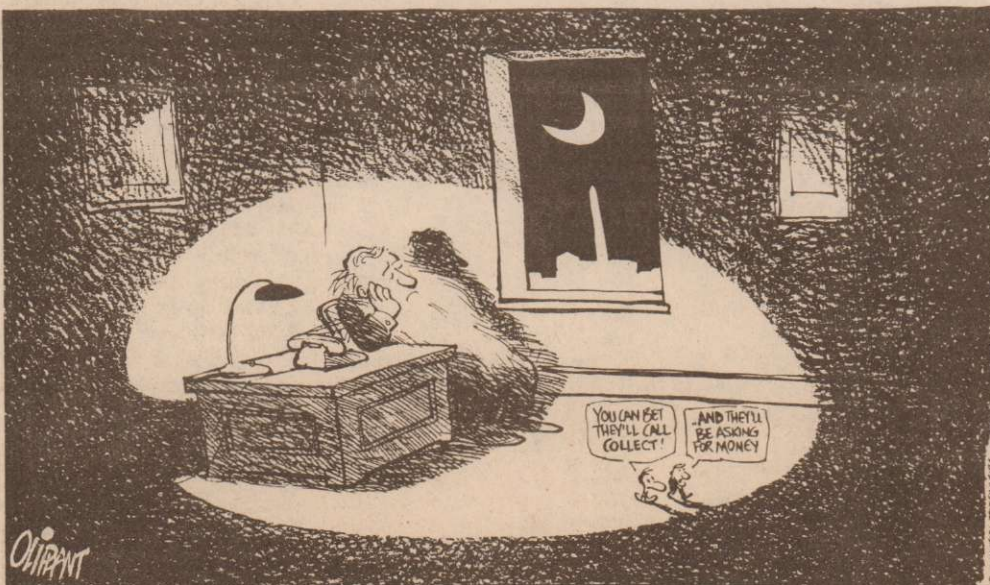
Political war

But this would be a serious misinterpretation of political realities in Washington. The Israelis are still riding high; regardless of some elements of public opinion and regardless of increasingly vocal calls from once politicians such as former Senator Charles Percy for a Palestinian state and South African-type sanctions against Israel.

Furthermore, in their political war with the Arab world, and especially with the Palestinians, the Israelis have already advanced so far forward that should they at some point have to consolidate, or even retreat a bit, it will not be very meaningful.

For even if the new right-wing government enters into some kind of a limited dialogue with Palestinians in Cairo, thereby soothing over tensions with the US and giving the impression of reasonableness after all, little will come of such talks other than buying more time for the consolidation of Israel's hold over the occupied territories, the immigration of what might be another million Jews in the next two years, and the further crushing of the Intifada.

In short, those who are predicting a major change in US-Israeli relations in the near future are fooling themselves and deluding their friends. That day is still far away. AIPAC and friends remain firmly in control...for now at least.



'HERE'S MY NUMBER,' SECRETARY BAKER TOLD ISRAEL, 'WHEN YOU DECIDE YOU WANT TO BE SERIOUS ABOUT PEACE, CALL.' THEN HE SAT DOWN TO WAIT.