

Institutions survive people

THE RESIGNATIONS A FEW days ago from what is ubiquitously termed "the powerful" Israeli-Jewish lobby — The American Israel Public Affairs Committee which goes by the popularly referred to acronym of AIPAC — prove some very important points that are too often overlooked.

One important key to lasting political power is the building of institutions that are not dependent on individuals; institutions which reflect a collective personae rather than a dependency on whomever happens to be on top at the moment.

Now first of all, anyone who believes these recent resignations from the AIPAC leadership were really for the reasons outlined in the newspapers is being naively foolish.

The game played at this high level, is all politics and imagery. What appears in the press, especially what appears in headlines at the time, is nearly always superficial and self-serving.

In the case of these AIPAC resignations if someone were wanted and needed badly enough he could have and would have survived a mistake or two. But if the powers that be really want someone to go, then any excuse can be manipulated to become the means of affecting that persons departure.

The AIPAC of Tom Dine — the well-known executive director who was forced to resign — was substantially built up during the past decade in which Dine was at the helm. Furthermore, one should not forget that these were precisely the years when Likud was dominant in Israel and Reagan-Bush commanded in Washington.

Now these years have fast receded.

The Clintonites rule in Washington, at least for a few more years, and whatever his problems in Israel Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin commands, with the Likud substantially confused, at least at the moment.

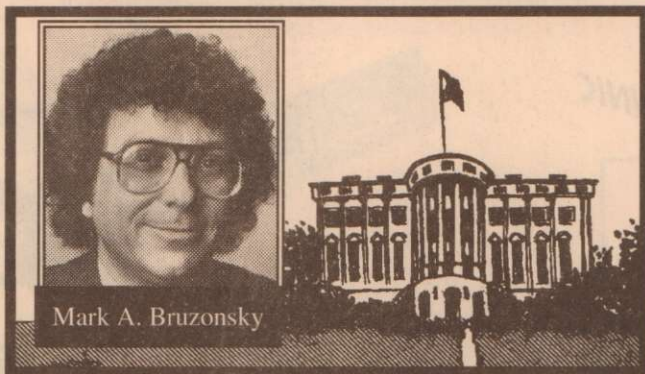
Under these overall political circumstances considerable forces have been building to make a change in the basic image and workings of AIPAC.

With "Peace-Now-nicks" surrounding President Clinton — even though the reality is that Peace Now has always been pretty much of a front for the Leftwing of Israel's Labour Party — recasting AIPAC in a more suitable mould has been in the works for some time.

Thus Dine's four-year-old negative remarks about Orthodox Jews became the excuse for these forces to assert themselves and push Dine out of the door. He had done an admirable job — substantially increasing AIPAC's membership and capabilities in the decade of his leadership. But he was no longer needed; indeed with new political leadership in Washington and with Camp David II

From

NOT EVERYWHERE THOUGH



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approaching, it was preferable to put new people into the AIPAC leadership; people with a lot less baggage.

No doubt whoever succeeds Dine will just somehow be someone with very good connections to the current occupants of the White House and Foggy Bottom (the Department of State) as well as those in the congressional leadership. The image will change from hard-line to something more akin to the Rabin approach. The good cop, rather than the bad cop is going to be on the beat.

Dine himself was perceived in the twisted minds of much of the Washington media as something of a centrist when it comes to Israeli matters. A "liberal Democrat", Dine even seemed to be in favour of what is called the "peace process" — something a vocal segment of the American Jewish establishment opposes for many

of the same reasons the Likud expresses.

Whether the forced resignation of AIPAC vice president Harvey Friedman in the days immediately following Dine's ouster was something of a quid pro quo is not known at this point. Friedman represented another wing of AIPAC — the real tough guys who have even been calling the Israeli prime minister and his aides names for even contemplating the quite minor concessions they have been.

Whatever the real lesson in all of this hasn't really been discussed very much. It is this:

Pro-Israeli institutions in the US as well as the Israeli government itself, have been structured in ways that make them quite independent of the persons who happen to be in control at any given time.

These are mature and highly sophisticated institutions that

There is no real crisis for AIPAC other than for some individuals. It was always a creature of the Israeli government which has had numerous ways to manipulate American Jewish organisations to do its bidding. On the other hand, the biggest problem of all for the Palestinians, and in general for all of the Arab interlocutors, is that in most cases the institutions that represent them have nowhere near the resilience of those they oppose — be it at the negotiating table or on the battlefield. On the Palestinian and Arab side there just isn't the kind of accountability and professionalism that exists on the Jewish and Israeli sides. Nor is there the kind of extreme competition for influence and power that pro-Israeli institutions demand and which often results in key people being pushed out and new people being brought in

are capable of playing diplomatic and public opinion games in extremely complex ways.

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In these simple but basic realities lies a considerable part of the explanation for why the Palestinians, as well as the Arab parties in general, are always being outmanoeuvred practically at every turn.

In short their adversaries have a far more complex set of institutions and organisations which hold people who have power to a far higher standard of accountability and a far greater measure of accomplishment.

As for AIPAC, there is no real crisis other than for some individuals.

AIPAC was always a creature of the Israeli government which has had numerous ways to manipulate American Jewish organisations to do its bidding. Now that Rabin and Labour are back on top in Israel it was inevitable that some restraints would be imposed on the overzealous and that a reformed image would be presented — just as Rabin has been busy doing when it comes to the Israeli government itself.

After all, the Clinton administration is infiltrated right on the inside by the Israeli-Jewish lobby. Martin Indyk represents the hardliners as the president's assistant for Middle East affairs on the National Security Council; and a panoply of others are associated with either Israeli Labour Party or its front the Peace Now organisation.

Thus AIPAC can well afford at this particular time to go through whatever forms of personnel changes are generated from inside or manipulated by Rabin from Israel. For in the end it's quite certain that little will really change when it comes to the Clinton connection to Israel — this president is in bondage to the Israeli-Jewish lobby so deeply it is most unlikely he will ever assert independence from it other than for show.