
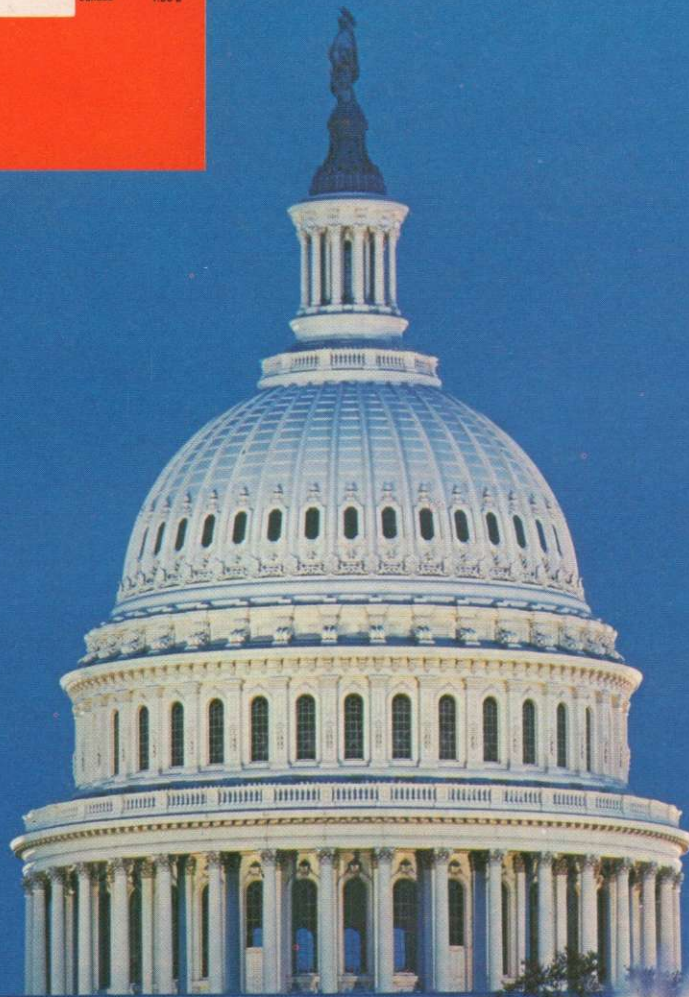



JULY 1978 No. 45 an  publication

THE MIDDLE EAST

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:
ABU-NIDAL



THE NEW BATTLEGROUND

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JULY ISSUE NO. 45



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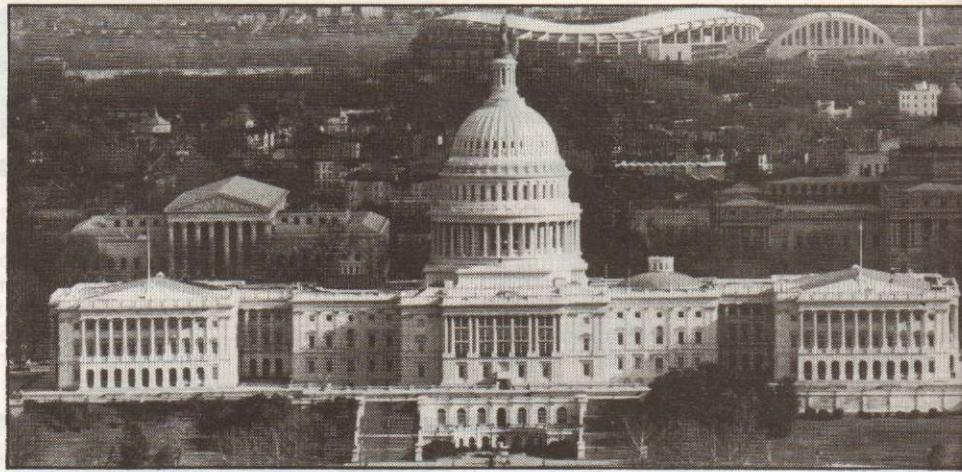
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Many people believe that the Middle East conflict will not be decided in the Middle East itself but in Washington. For this reason the battle between the Jewish and Arab lobbies for the support of Congress takes on considerable significance. The power and success of the Jewish lobby is well known and in the past it has faced little opposition from any Arab counterpart. Now, however, there is evidence that the Arabs are becoming aware of the importance of this theatre of operations with the revamping of the National Association of Arab Americans. It is largely because of the efforts of this organisation and its new Public Relations Director that Congress passed the controversial arms package including planes for Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It may only have been a narrow victory, but in view of the big guns brought to bear by the Jewish lobby, it was an important one and may be a pointer to the future.



LOBBIES ON THE HILL



THE NEW BATTLEGROUND

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has long been an influential body in the US Congress supporting policies favourable to Israel. Now it is being challenged by an Arab organisation, the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA), which could in time counter the pro-Israeli bias in the US Congress which AIPAC has brought about. Mark Bruzonsky, in Washington, looks at the aims and methods of both groups.

A few days before the US Senate endorsed the Carter Administration's sale of military aircraft to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel, a unique event with considerable symbolic importance took place on Capitol Hill.

Testifying and being questioned together on the arms package before the Senate Foreign Relations committee, two lobbyists faced the divided senators.

One was well known — Morris Amitay, Executive Director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Washington umbrella for over 30 American Jewish organisations which has earned the title "the Jewish lobby".

The other was a newcomer, John Richardson, Director of Public Affairs for the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) — the only Arab American organisation devoted to political affairs and registered to lobby the Congress.

For the first time, the once invincible "Israel lobby" — "We've never lost on a major issue," Amitay told *The New York Times* in 1975 shortly after taking his job — was required to share the stage with an upstart Arab American counterpart. This symbolism reflects what the *National Journal*, in a major review of the Jewish lobby, termed "fundamental shifts in attitudes and perceptions" regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict.

"I hope we are becoming known as 'the Arab lobby'," NAAA's former President, Joe Baroody, said a year ago. The NAAA, though still unable to mobilise the two-and-a-half-million-strong Arab American community as efficiently as AIPAC enlists American Jews, has in the past year become an embryonic Arab American counterpart whose activities are beginning to be felt, and in some quarters, including the White House, appreciated.



**John Richardson (top);
from left, Hisham Sharaki, Sen. James
Aburezk and Joseph Baroody;
AIPAC boss Morris Amitay (bottom)**

"The voice of the Arabs is heard more clearly in the corridors of power today," a recent lobby comparison in *Atlantic* magazine concluded. "But their lobby remains a distant second to Israel's when it comes to size, efficiency and fire power."

During the days of the Senate's historic debate on the arms package in early May, both NAAA and AIPAC held their annual membership conferences. The contrast between the two was striking.

For NAAA it was only its sixth annual convention. It holds the convention every other year in Washington, and this year's was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. With less than 2,000 members, only 300 of whom assembled in Pittsburgh, its grass roots support is weak. More important, NAAA's membership — largely of Lebanese Christian ancestry — is politically conservative and rather unsophisticated about the Washington scene.

Although NAAA's leadership and staff are more politically astute, John Richardson felt it necessary to warn even his most active members: "If we can't deliver this constituency for which we speak, we're going to look like a paper tiger. AIPAC is

effective because when Morris Amitay testifies on the Hill he has a constituency whom he represents and which will back him up."

Baroody and Richardson have been the key architects of NAAA's recent success. Previously it had primarily been an elaborate social club concentrating more on joyous "haflis" than brutal "realpolitik".

Shortly after becoming president in April 1977, Baroody purged the Executive Director, Michael Saba, and engaged John Richardson, (formerly President of the American Near East Relief Agency, a Palestinian relief organisation) as Public Relations Director. Throughout his tenure, Baroody had directed an exhaustive search for a good Executive Director — a position now redesigned to handle mostly organisational affairs. Jean Abinader, a young, personable and energetic specialist in intercultural communications, was selected at the Pittsburgh meeting from a group of five.

Thanks largely to Baroody's decisive leadership, NAAA has now established itself in a modest suite of offices and has raised its operating budget beyond \$200,000.

AIPAC's Annual Policy Conference, attended by some 700 delegates, was its 19th and was held, as always, where the power is in Washington. With about 10 times NAAA's membership, AIPAC is able to enlist the efforts of dozens of well-established American Jewish organisations, their staff and their members. Its research capabilities and organisational facilities are unmatched by any Washington foreign-policy organisation. *Atlantic* concluded that AIPAC, with an annual budget of around \$750,000, continues to create "an impact that others could not achieve with millions more".

While the NAAA conference was partly an exercise in public relations — the press was eagerly courted and all meetings were open — AIPAC's affair was a highly politicised, unusually secret gathering. The press was barred from most sessions and only AIPAC members were allowed to pass special security guards.

It was a difference of style reflecting the political realities facing the two competing lobbies. NAAA is still feeding on publicity and operates with a candour befitting a political group whose fortunes are on the upswing. AIPAC's leadership, on the other hand, has developed a somewhat paranoid vision which neatly divides the world into "us against them" — "them" being everyone, press and presidents included, except the hard-core applauders of Israeli policies.

Since Amitay's takeover, AIPAC's hold on the American Jewish community can be compared to the more recent Likud grasp on Israeli politics. Neither has majority

support but both maintain control by appealing to emotion and fear and lack any populist opposition.

Amitay has become inaccessible to the press. His abrasive personality and belligerent views have earned him a rather sinister reputation. Hyman Bookbinder, representative in Washington of the American Jewish Committee, and one of the most respected Jewish "diplomats" there, has indicated that Amitay "has personal qualities which are outrageous and very harmful to the cause we all share". Even more cutting are the recent public remarks of Senator Abraham Ribicoff — Amitay's former employer. He told *The Wall Street Journal* that AIPAC does "a great disservice to the US, to Israel and to the Jewish community". Upon hearing this Amitay was said to be uncontrollably enraged.

With the crisis felt by American Jewry in the wake of the arms package sale, the opposition to AIPAC's leadership and attitudes may become less soft-spoken. But, the American Jewish community has little tradition of removing entrenched bureaucrats. Other officials — such as the Executive Director of the President's Conference, Yehuda Hellman, whose job it is to lobby the White House — are widely criticised but remain in power. Amitay's grasp may therefore remain firm.

Ironically, many American Jews may privately agree that NAAA may be one of the main beneficiaries of Amitay's continuing reign. Richardson's calm, reasoned attitudes are in such contrast to Amitay's behind-the-scenes, fist-pounding approach that there is bound to be an effect as issue after issue pits the two against each other. Furthermore, while NAAA is reaching out to embrace a large network within the Washington scene, AIPAC is increasingly turning inward, refusing to breathe the new atmosphere of "even-handedness".

In time AIPAC could become the victim of its own inbreeding — its once expansive base of support seriously eroded. Fear of such a development may be leading to a basic transformation of the "Jewish lobby", with various functions being divorced from AIPAC without an actual purge of the organisation's leaders.

World Jewish Congress President Philip Klutznick may have had this in mind when he told *The Middle East* last month: "I think the worst lobbies are those that become known as such. The best lobbies are the ones that do their work and don't become identified."

With registration as a lobbyist a few months ago, Richardson has increasingly given NAAA the task of acting as AIPAC's nemesis. NAAA's entrance into lobbying was best symbolised last December by its co-ordination of the first

meeting between Arab Americans and an American president. Then came its major effort on Capitol Hill on behalf of the arms sale package.

In endorsing the sale, NAAA indicated "that much of the opposition to the Arab portion of the proposed arms sale is an attempt to thwart a shift in American political relations in the region rather than fear for the military security of Israel". It was a truthful deflation of AIPAC's primary argument.

Taking a long-term view, NAAA added a call for the Administration "to build into its arms policy a schedule for systematic reduction in total transfers to the Middle East over a 5-10 year period and to seek commitments from other major manufacturers to do so too". NAAA's statement showed an awareness of congressional anxieties about the ever-increasing American role as arms arsenal and was an imaginative move designed to build credibility.

NAAA's most recent major effort involves a court challenge to block American arms to Israel until Israel completely withdraws from southern Lebanon. The suit, filed in a US District Court on 11 May, names Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the US Government as defendants. It seeks a halt to all further arms sales or deliveries until Israeli violations of the conditions under which it receives arms have ceased — meaning that Israel must move back across its northern border.

With Israel now pledged to do so, it is unlikely that the NAAA action, even if it should survive in the courts, will have any effect. But here, too, NAAA has given Israel notice that there are vigilant and capable opponents able to exploit the American legal and political systems to thwart Israeli designs.

There is concern in Washington that the arms package defeat may make AIPAC especially determined to prove itself in the next few tests of strength on the Hill. In April 1977, *The Middle East* quoted a senior American journalist, Joseph Harsch, to the effect that the new American president would have to face up to "the Jewish lobby" as all former presidents had tried to do.

Middle East policy "really comes down to a test of strength in Washington between the White House and the Israeli lobby," he noted. "The lobby has won most rounds since the days of Lyndon Johnson. Which will win this new round? It will be a fascinating test of Carter's political skill and strength."

To the surprise of many, Carter has won an important round, but the real test of his abilities will be whether he can enlist Congress to support his overall peace plan — now being formulated for public presenta-

tion within a few months. He would also need agreement on a strategy for nudging the parties to accept it, and there is considerable doubt here that his arms victory portends dethronement of the still potent Jewish lobby to such an extent.

One early sign of Administration squeamishness came a few days after the Senate vote when Vice President Mondale addressed the American Jewish Congress. He deleted from his prepared text the statement that America's "commitment (to Israel) will never be properly defined by a single or monolithic lobby". Domestic political considerations apparently caused him to feel constrained about publicly pronouncing in diplomatic phrases what has become a constant White House refrain.

One of the Administration's greatest anxieties is that the Jewish community will turn to the Republican Party, which is already running advertisements in Jewish newspapers outbidding everyone in allegiance to Israel. Here too there is a considerable irony, for Morris Amitay, only two years ago, led the Jewish community in a major effort to defeat Ford and bring Carter to power.

As for NAAA's importance in this White House-Jewish lobby wrestling match, so far the going has been easy. "People are looking for an Arab point of view: it's great," Richardson recently exclaimed. But NAAA's influence will not become really significant until Arab Americans act upon the realisation that they are up against a commitment far surpassing their own.

While NAAA members were entertained by the Royal Jordanian Folk Troupe and wined and dined by Alia Airlines, AIPAC members were attending two congressional receptions and spent an afternoon deluging congressional offices with home-town constituents. Whatever one thinks of the Jewish lobby, the dedication of its broad-based membership is to be admired and remains completely unmatched by that of NAAA.

With Joe Baroody's resignation and Hisham Sharabi's election as NAAA president, there is, however, a sign of maturity. Baroody represented a kind of Arab-WASP image — he is a member of a prominent Republican family and heads a public relations company. Sharabi, who holds an endowed chair in Arab Culture at Georgetown University's Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies, is of Palestinian origin. He remains highly active in Palestinian intellectual and political circles and is editor of the well-respected *Journal of Palestine Studies*. Sharabi brings to NAAA a much more visible "Arab image" and probably a more positive attitude towards the PLO than the organisation has hitherto been willing to express. □

NAAA vs AIPAC

The Arab lobby tunes in

The NAAA has scored one success in its fight for a more even-handed Middle East policy on the part of the US. But it has a long way to go before it can match the efficiency of its Jewish counterpart, AIPAC. Mazin Omar assesses the NAAA in the light of the US's traditional support for Israel and discusses the reasons for the impotence of other pro-Arab groups.

It was coincidental, but the fact that the Senate vote on 15 May allowing President Carter to go ahead with his sale of advanced war planes to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel fell on Israel's 30th anniversary celebration jolted the Zionists.

Another anniversary was also dampened by the precedent-setting decision. Three years ago last May, 76 senators sent a letter to President Ford urging him "to make it clear, as we do, that the United States, acting in its own national interests, stands firmly with Israel in the search for peace in future negotiations, and this promise is the basis of the current reassessment of US policy in the Middle East".

The so-called "reassessment" came on the heels of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's failure to make any headway in his "shuttle diplomacy", when Israel was blamed by both President Ford and Kissinger for the stalemate.

Thus the senators' letter, an observer wrote, "was a stunning triumph for the (Jewish) lobby, a capital rebuke for Kissinger in Congress". In effect it nipped in the bud the much-trumpeted reassessment which was the Administration's way of inducing Israel to adopt a more moderate stance.

But not this time. The tables have been turned. American policymakers have argued convincingly in the furious debate over the sales of the F-15s to Saudi Arabia and F-5Es to Egypt that it is now necessary to work with moderate Arab forces if peace is to be achieved in the Middle East.

Top White House aide, Hamilton Jordan, said, according to his one-time Jewish assistant, that the Administration's commitments to Egypt and Saudi Arabia "are as strong as US commitments to Israel".

But it would be foolhardy for the Arabs to see this admittedly severe blow to the formidable Jewish lobby as the abandonment of pro-Israel sympathies or the weakening of Jewish influence in the US. After all, Carter was supported by only 28 of the 61 Democrats who voted, the other votes coming from the 26 Republican senators, many of whom were influenced by business interests.

US support for Israel

US support for Israel has been staggering. In the last four years US military and economic assistance totalled \$10 billion — more than for any other nation. Of total US security assistance proposed in next year's budget, 42 per cent of aid, 48 per cent of military sales credits and 56 per cent of all military grants are for Israel. Repayment on half those credits, which total \$1 billion, is waived. "That's a benefit enjoyed by no other nation on earth," declared Vice President Walter Mondale



Mondale reassured Jews (Central Press)

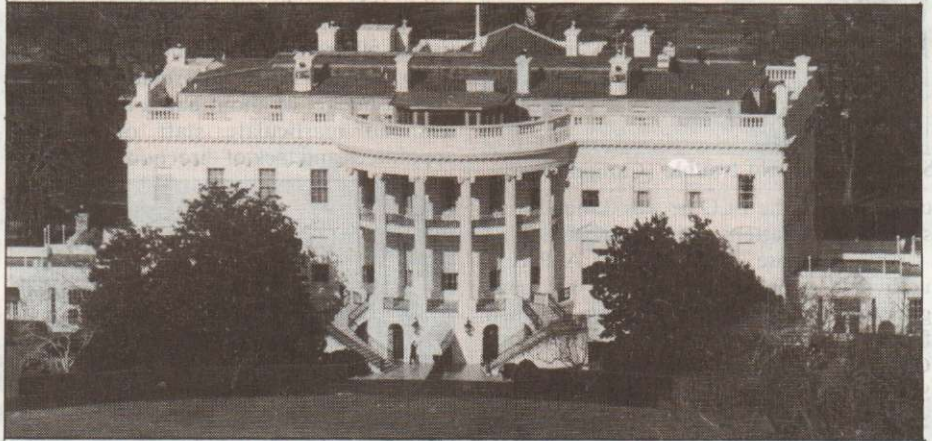
to Jewish leaders meeting in New York shortly after Carter's startling victory in the Senate.

The influence of the Jewish lobby and its abrasiveness cannot be over-rated. In a speech during the debate on the arms sales, Senator Mike Gravel, a Democrat from Alaska, said that he understood this vote to be "the litmus test" for many Jewish individuals and groups. "This vote, if it is not done properly, kisses away in the future all kinds of financial support..." He continued: "I think this will be the watershed year of Jewish influence in this country. When you deliver an ultimatum you cannot deliver it twice or three times."

Senator George McGovern, warned "Israel's most outspoken American advocates" not to press their case "to the point where America loses its capacity to influence the Arab leadership towards the

peace table". This could "set in motion a backlash both in the Middle East and in the United States that can only harm the Israeli cause," he said.

I. F. Stone, a respected Jewish journalist and recipient of an Israeli medal for his coverage of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, wrote that whenever he spoke up for the Palestinians he found himself ostracised. "On the Middle East, freedom of debate is



The White House... Arab lobby winning more influence (Camera Press)

not encouraged," he said. "Much ill will has been piled up on the streamroller tactics of the hardliners."

Seth Tillman, a former congressional aide of ex-Senator J. Williams Fulbright, has no illusions about the power of the Israeli lobby. "It's fear of political reprisals, loss of funds — in some cases just fear of abuse and unpleasantness."

Of the 12 Democratic senators running for re-election this year, only three voted for the sales, all from states without significant Jewish populations. According to the *Washington Post*, four to six senators prepared to vote with President Carter for the package deal if their votes were crucial, in the event they voted against it.

How then did Carter score his triumph? No doubt the concessions — an increase in planes for Israel, and restrictions on the Saudis — were a factor, and there were also contradictory signals from Israel on the package.

When the senators were told that according to Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan Israel wanted the planes even if Saudi Arabia and Egypt got their share, the opponents of the package lost one of their major arguments. Many legislators were convinced that there would be havoc in the Middle East if Saudi Arabia and Egypt were denied this symbolic gesture of American support.

Jewish support for the Carter Administration is falling. John C. White, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, has acknowledged that the Administration's Mideast policy has resulted in a decline of financial support from Jewish

contributors. American Jews have formed an important part of the Democratic Party's "constituency" since the 1930s, however, and Carter is obviously keen to retain as much of his support as he can. Vice President Mondale was quick to reassure the Jewish community of continued US support for Israel. "Let no one doubt this nation's commitment to the strength and survival of Israel. It was forged in 30

years of partnership under seven American presidents. It is a special relationship and it will not be undermined."

The pro-Israel lobby, unlike the Arab League's five information centres and the newly-founded information office in Washington of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), is not "a foreign agent". It does not have to register with the Justice Department and to face periodic Government scrutiny.

Jewish lobbyists have over the years established excellent access to people in Congress and within the administration. They deny the common belief that they are like "a monolithic giant with agents scurrying around Capitol Hill." But one lobbyist was quoted as saying, "We can get to see them (congressmen) when we want to, and if that's clout then we have it."

AIPAC, with its budget of \$700,000 and an unrivaled research library, reportedly keeps a computer list of "key contacts" for every congressman, and they will be called upon whenever there is a need to apply pressure. Often support for Jewish causes can be orchestrated through a recently revealed device called telegram banks. Under this system, American Jews and their friends allow AIPAC and other Jewish groups to send telegrams on their behalf and charge the cost to their individual telephone bills. So whenever a protest is deemed necessary, the bank is activated with the result that thousands of telegrams descend on the key official.

When Senator Charles Percy said in early 1975 after a tour of the Middle East that Israel was being unrealistic in avoiding