

MECHANISMS OF POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF PRO-ISRAEL INTEREST GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES

МЕХАНІЗМИ ПОЛІТИЧНОГО ВПЛИВУ ПРОІЗРАЇЛЬСЬКИХ ГРУП ІНТЕРЕСІВ У США

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Abstract. *The article analyses the historical origins of the Israeli lobby in the United States of America and outlines the peculiarities of the legal strategies of pro-Israeli interest groups aimed at avoiding registration under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), despite maintaining close coordination with Israeli interests. Significant financial activity during the 2024 election campaign indicates the growing concern of these structures about the possible loss of bipartisan consensus and a noticeable change in public sentiment, especially among young people and the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Uncovering of hidden disinformation operations, in particular, the Stoic Project, funded by the Israeli Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, and the use of fake accounts on social media to discredit American lawmakers, indicates a shift from legitimate mechanisms of political influence to practices that can be considered manipulative interference. Such instruments of hybrid information activity significantly change the nature of political influence.*

Keywords: *Lobbying, pro-Israel lobby, American Israel Public Affairs Committee, FARA, LDA.*

Анотація. У статті проаналізовано історичні витоки ізраїльського лобі у Сполучених Штатах Америки та окреслено особливості правових стратегій проізраїльських груп інтересів, спрямованих на уникнення реєстрації за Законом про реєстрацію іноземних агентів (FARA), попри збереження тісної координації з інтересами Ізраїлю. Значна фінансова активність під час передвиборчої кампанії 2024 року свідчить про зростаюче занепокоєння цих структур можливою втратою двопартійного консенсусу та помітною зміною громадських настроїв, особливо серед молоді та прогресивного крила Демократичної партії. Викриття прихованих дезінформаційних операцій, зокрема показовим є «Проект Stoic», що фінансуються Міністерством у справах діаспори Ізраїлю та використання

фейкових акаунтів в соціальних мережах для дискредитації американських законодавців, свідчить про перехід від законних механізмів політичного впливу до практик, що можуть розцінюватися як маніпулятивне втручання. Такі інструменти гібридної інформаційної діяльності суттєво змінюють характер політичного впливу.

Ключові слова: Лобіювання, проізраїльське лобі, Американський Ізраїльський Комітет зі зв'язків з громадськістю, FARA, LDA.

Introduction. The pro-Israel lobby is one of the most influential and resourceful lobbying structures in the United States, with an unprecedented impact on the formation of US foreign policy in the Middle East. Its institutionalisation began in 1954 with the founding of the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs (AZCPA), later renamed AIPAC, and was a response to the Israeli-American crisis caused by the Kibya massacre in 1953. This event stimulated the consolidation of the American Jewish community and its mobilisation in defence of Israel.

It is important to note that the lobby was formed not only to protect the interests of American Jews, but also through intensive transnational contacts with Israeli leaders, who actively intervened in the affairs of the American Jewish community to build support for Israel.

Lobbying activities in the United States are governed by two key acts: the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) and the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). Despite its significant influence on US foreign policy, the key organisation, AIPAC, avoids registration under FARA, which requires detailed disclosure from those acting on behalf of foreign governments. Instead, AIPAC functions as a domestic non-profit organisation, claiming to represent American citizens and not take instructions from any foreign person or government.

Recent literature review. Contemporary research, particularly the works of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, emphasises that Israel's leading role in US Middle East policy is primarily due to the activities of the pro-Israel lobby, rather than solely strategic interests. Researchers argue that these groups deliberately influence the formation of American foreign policy, directing it towards support for Israel.

The purpose of research. The purpose of this research is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the mechanisms, strategies, and institutional factors that ensure the stable and effective influence of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States of America.

Main research results. The institutionalisation of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States dates back to 1954 and was a response to the Israeli-American crisis caused by the Kibya massacre in October 1953, when the actions of Israeli soldiers were widely condemned internationally.

These events were an important factor in the consolidation of the American Jewish community and the establishment in 1954 of the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs (AZCPA), which was later renamed the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). The creation of AZCPA/AIPAC became a central element in the institutionalisation of the lobby. Thus, broad support was secured by uniting both Zionist and 'non-Zionist' groups. This gave impetus to the consolidation and mobilisation of the American Jewish community in defence of Israel in new, institutionalised forms.

It should be noted that the Israeli lobby was formed not only to protect the interests of American Jews, but also through intensive transnational contacts with Israeli leaders who actively intervened in American Jewish affairs to build support for Israel (*Edge of the Abyss*, 2018).

Thus, the lobby was formed out of both American and Israeli needs, laying the foundation for its unprecedented influence on US foreign policy.

Lobbying activities in the United States are governed by two key acts: the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) and the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) (*Congress USA (n.d.)*).

Thus, according to FARA, since 1938, 'foreign agents' — individuals or organisations that engage in lobbying or advocacy on behalf of foreign governments, organisations or individuals ('foreign principals') — are required to register with the Department of Justice (DOJ) and disclose their relationships, activities and related financial compensation. FARA is therefore the primary legal instrument aimed at ensuring transparency of foreign influence (*Department of Justice (n.d.)*).

Despite its significant influence on US foreign policy, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) avoids registration under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which requires detailed disclosure from those who act on behalf of foreign entities, in particular those promoting the interests of other countries within the United States. Instead, AIPAC functions as a domestic non-profit organisation under the US Internal Revenue Code, claiming to represent millions of American citizens and not to take instructions from any foreign person or government. Guided by the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA), AIPAC regularly submits quarterly activity reports (Form LD-2) to the US Congress. An analysis of the reports shows that lobbying issues in areas such as defence, international relations and appropriations, specific bills (e.g., on military and economic aid to Israel), authorities contacted (House of Representatives, Senate, State Department), and an estimate of total lobbying expenses are provided. Thus, the transparency of AIPAC's activities is ensured through the LDA, which indicates the absence of foreign interest (*AIPAC Public Reports (n.d)*).

This allows the organisation to avoid registering under FARA and to operate under the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA), a less burdensome regulatory act governing lobbying activities at the federal level in the United States.

The strategic use of legal mechanisms to avoid FARA is one of the main factors in the political effectiveness of the lobby. By avoiding FARA, AIPAC is not required to disclose its ties to Israeli officials or sources of funding in detail, which allows it to exert powerful influence while enjoying the privileges of a domestic lobby. AIPAC's ability to consistently promote policies that are fully in line with the interests of a foreign government while maintaining its status as a domestic lobbyist, demonstrates the deep integration of lobbying goals into the American political landscape, ensuring maximum political effectiveness with minimal transparency regarding the ultimate beneficiary of the policy (*The Forward 2025*).

It should be noted that the pro-Israel lobby in the United States is not a monolithic structure, but rather a coalition of various organisations covering a broad ideological and religious spectrum. With significant financial resources and a developed organisational structure, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) remains the most influential pro-Israel lobbying organisation in the United States. According to Open Secrets, the total amount spent by leading pro-Israel lobby groups in the US from 2021 to 2022 was approximately \$35,280,906. AIPAC alone spent \$20,846,098 during this period, accounting for 59% of the total spending by leading pro-Israel lobbying groups. Interestingly, of the \$20,846,098, approximately \$7,807,707 was given to Democrats, \$8,500,000 to independents, and \$4,533,391 to Republicans. In addition, J Street spent \$5,879,332 during the same period, of which its contribution to Democrats amounted to approximately \$5,253,435 (*Pro-Israel Lobby, 2023*).

These statistics demonstrate the scale of AIPAC's institutional potential, which enables it to actively influence US political and strategic decisions regarding Israel. The organisation officially defines its mission as working with Congress and the executive branch to support stable and bipartisan US-Israel relations. In 2021, with the assistance of AIPAC, the Political Action Committee (AIPAC PAC) and the Super PAC — United Democracy Project (UDP) were established. According to Matthew Sanderson, a lawyer at Caplin & Drysdale, AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, is an influential pro-Israel lobbying group whose interests often coincide with those of the Israeli government. 'But because it does not receive money from the Israeli government and does not have Israeli government officials on its board of directors, it is not legally a foreign agent,' Sanderson said (*The Forward, 2025*).

Thus, PAC is considered the largest pro-Israel committee in America, which has invested the most resources directly in candidates' election campaigns. UDP is actively used to support pro-Israel candidates and, more importantly, to target progressive candidates whom the lobby considers hostile to Israel's interests. For example, in 2022, the UDP directed its lobbying campaign to oust Israel critics Marie Newman and Andy Levin.

The strategic communication of these electoral tools is key: the UDP positions itself as an organisation that supports 'democracies around the world' and strategically avoids mentioning Israel in its advertising campaigns, despite direct funding from AIPAC.

Christians United for Israel (CUFI) occupies a key position among pro-Israel lobbying structures and brings together approximately 10 million evangelical Christians, making it the largest pro-Israel organisation in the United States. CUFI's primary mission is based on the theological belief that unwavering support for Israel is a biblical requirement linked to end-time prophecies. Their lobbying efforts focus on securing US military aid for Israel. Thanks to powerful lobbying efforts, support was secured for key political decisions, including the historic relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem. After the attacks on 7 October 2023, CUFI intensified its lobbying for accelerated arms deliveries to Israel and tougher sanctions against Iran (*AIPAC & Zionist Lobby Groups, n.d.*).

J Street represents the liberal wing of the lobby, positioning itself as a hub for 'pro-Israel, pro-peace' Americans. The organisation advocates a two-state solution as a necessary condition for Israel's survival as a Jewish democracy. Unlike AIPAC, J Street publicly criticises Israeli settlements and takes a more moderate stance on borders and aid to the Palestinians. Although J Street has much in common with AIPAC on Israel's security, their priorities and methods differ, leading to open political struggle (*InfluenceWatch, n.d.*).

The structure of the pro-Israel lobby, consisting of three heterogeneous but functional blocks (institutional AIPAC/UDP, theological CUFI, and liberal-critical J Street), ensures the stability of its influence. This fragmentation allows the lobby to cover the entire political spectrum in the United States – from ultra-conservative Christians to centrist Democrats. As a result, support for Israel has different ideological and electoral 'anchors,' making it truly bipartisan and resistant to significant internal political shifts.

The financial power of the pro-Israel lobby allows it to exert direct political influence on legislators, especially through its political committees.

Since the establishment of the Super PAC United Democracy Project in 2021, lobbying expenditures have increased significantly. The financial resources involved in shaping the party landscape are compelling evidence of the extraordinary activity of pro-Israel PACs. In 2022, the six candidates who accumulated the largest amounts of funding represented the centrist wing of the Democratic Party and competed with candidates from the left wing in the party's primary elections. Collectively, they received about \$25 million, which accounted for approximately 42% of all donor spending (*Perkins, 2024*).

In 2024, pro-Israel organisations announced their intention to invest more than \$100 million in the political race. According to analysts, the scale of this unprecedented spending was aimed at limiting the influence of pro-Palestinian positions in Congress and maintaining the current political status quo. Such funding is a decisive tool of political selection. In 2024, 96% of candidates supported by AIPAC won their elections (*Beckett, L., 2024*).

This high success rate confirms that financial investments effectively determine the composition of Congress. The main mechanism of influence is the use of Super PACs to target progressive candidates, especially members of the 'Squad' who openly criticise Israel's military actions in Gaza. Super PACs, unlike traditional PACs, can receive and spend unlimited funds, allowing the lobby to direct huge sums to defeat specific opponents (*Marcetic, 2024*).

An important element of pro-Israel groups' activities is the bipartisan nature of their funding. AIPAC PAC and UDP provide funds to both Republicans (Michelle Steel, Young Kim, Ken Calvert) and Democrats (Nancy Pelosi, Eric Swalwell, Jimmy Panetta), ensuring that support for Israel is politically safe for lawmakers regardless of their party affiliation (*Perkins, 2024*).

The use of Super PACs' financial resources as a tool for political pressure sends a clear political signal and effectively turns financial support for candidates into a means of influence. Such structures are capable of investing significant resources in promoting the desired politicians, and those who do not demonstrate consistent support for Israel risk facing a well-organised and financially secure campaign by their opponents. As a result, many lawmakers refrain from making public statements or avoid difficult topics in order to avoid additional political pressure. The lobby has been highly successful in shaping US foreign policy through key legislation and diplomatic instruments that ensure long-term support for Israel.

The cornerstone of US-Israeli relations is long-term military aid, which has been institutionalised through a series of ten-year Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). The current

MOU, in effect from 2019 to 2028, sets a minimum annual funding level of \$3.3 billion under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programme. \$500 million is allocated for joint missile defence programmes.

In total, this guarantees Israel at least \$3.8 billion in annual aid.¹⁸ Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of US foreign aid, having received over \$150 billion as of February 2022 (*Rosen, n.d.*).

AIPAC's key lobbying priorities include ensuring full legislative funding of MOU commitments, expanding joint innovation, and ensuring Israel's continued 'Qualitative Military Edge' (QME).¹⁹ QME is a legislative principle that obliges the US to provide Israel with access to the most advanced military technologies (such as the F-35 Lightning) to ensure its military dominance in the region.¹⁸

According to the US State Department, lobbyists have demonstrated their ability to quickly mobilise Congress to approve additional, unscheduled appropriations. A notable example was the allocation of \$1 billion to strengthen the Iron Dome missile defence system. This additional funding, approved within a single year, exceeded the amount provided to the system over the previous decade and was in addition to the already guaranteed \$3.8 billion in annual military aid (*Nichols, 2021*).

The institutionalisation of US foreign policy at the MOU level is the highest achievement of lobbying. It transfers military aid from an annual discretionary budget item to a long-term, quasi-contractual format, minimising the political vulnerability of aid to short-term changes in administrations or fluctuations in public opinion. In this way, the lobby secures US strategic commitments until 2028, which are highly likely to be extended.

The lobby also successfully influences US domestic legislation, particularly through its fight against the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Pro-Israel groups have pushed for the passage of laws aimed at punishing those who participate in boycotts of Israel or its affiliated organisations. As of 2025, thirty-eight US states have already implemented anti-BDS laws. However, opponents view these laws as 'lawfare' that violates the right to freedom of speech, which protects boycotts as a form of political expression. Under a number of US regulations, government contractors, companies, and even individuals may be prohibited from entering into contracts with government agencies if they participate in the boycott of Israel (*Moskowitz, 2025*).

At the federal level, the lobby supports bipartisan initiatives such as the Countering Hate Against Israel by Federal Contractors Act, which aims to prohibit the federal government from contracting with organisations that support BDS. Proponents of these laws often argue that the BDS movement is a form of anti-Semitism (*U.S. Congress, 2025*).

The success in passing anti-BDS laws demonstrates the lobby's deep integration into local and federal legislative processes. The lobby is effectively exporting Israel's internal conflict to the United States, using American legal and financial mechanisms to punish political activism in American society.

U.S. political support in the international arena plays a key role in securing Israel's interests, largely thanks to the influence of lobbying structures. The United States provides Israel with comprehensive diplomatic support, the most notable manifestation of which is the regular use of its veto power in the UN Security Council.

The United States has imposed its veto 42 times on resolutions condemning Israel. Between 1991 and 2011, 15 of the 24 vetoes imposed by the US were used to protect Israel. These vetoes blocked resolutions condemning violence against protesters, illegal Israeli settlements, or calling for investigations into military actions.² This unwavering diplomatic support provides Israel with immunity from international pressure and condemnation (*Newton, 2021*).

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in lobbying efforts towards the digital space. This process encompasses both open, albeit legally controversial, campaigns involving influencers and completely covert state disinformation operations.

The Israeli government, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has begun to directly fund communication campaigns in the United States. Firms such as Genesis and Consulting have been hired for 'strategic communication support, content creation and influencer outreach.'

In particular, Bridges Partners managed the 'Project Esther' campaign, in which 14–18 influencers were paid up to \$7,000 to post pro-Israel content on social media (*Cleveland-Stout, 2025*).

This activity raised concerns about FARA compliance. Although Bridges Partners registered, none of the influencers who received direct compensation from a foreign principal publicly registered as foreign agents as required by law. Organisations such as the Quincy Institute and Public Citizen filed a formal complaint with the Department of Justice, demanding that Bridges Partners disclose the identities and contracts of these influencers. If influencers knowingly accept money from the Israeli government to create content that is viewed by millions of their American followers, it is unclear why they should not be required to register under FARA (*Public Citizen, 2024*).

The most significant and alarming development is the discovery of covert influence campaigns funded directly by the Israeli government. Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs allocated \$2 million to the Israeli firm Stoic to conduct a digital communications campaign targeting American lawmakers.

This information campaign aimed to shape public opinion and influence African-American Democratic Party lawmakers Hakim Jeffries and Raphael Warnock in order to secure funding for the Israeli army. The influence network included hundreds of fake accounts on X, Instagram, and Facebook (*Lyons, 2024*).

The exposure of the direct involvement of Israeli government agencies in covert operations targeting American lawmakers represents a qualitatively new stage in influence strategies. It goes beyond traditional lobbying, as it involves manipulation and disinformation using methods typically associated with hostile or illiberal states. This approach reflects the Israeli government's growing concern about losing public support in the US, especially among young people. Legal lobbying tools (AIPAC) are now complemented by a state apparatus of covert influence.

The specific targeting of Democrats underscores that Israel's political opposition is growing within this progressive coalition. The Stoic campaign was designed to create internal conflicts within the Democratic Party's key coalition in order to insulate centrist political providers from pressure from the progressive base, ensuring political stability of support.

The revolving door phenomenon is a key mechanism ensuring the long-term integration of pro-Israel priorities into the US policy-making process. This phenomenon involves former high-ranking government officials, diplomats, and military officials moving to work for private lobbying firms or think tanks associated with the lobby (*Fisman et al., 2025*).

Think tanks that promote pro-Israel foreign policy interests play a central role in this process. One key example is the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA). JINSA's mission is to promote US national security interests in the Middle East, primarily by positioning Israel as 'the most capable and critical security partner of the United States in the 21st century.' JINSA conducts educational programmes and in-depth research to influence US policy.

The organisation actively involves former high-ranking officials in its advisory councils and expert groups. For example, Elliot Abrams, who previously served as Deputy National Security Advisor, is involved in key JINSA projects, including initiatives on Iran policy and the Task Force on the Future of Gaza. Such structures effectively create a platform for officials who supported pro-Israel policies during their government service to continue to exert influence after leaving office. This allows their approaches and analytical frameworks to be preserved within the US military-political elite. (*JINSA, n.d.*).

The phenomenon of the 'revolving door' is an important element of political influence mechanisms. The transition of former high-ranking officials, especially from the defence and foreign policy sectors, to think tanks that support Israeli interests creates conditions for influencing policy formation at the stage of its development, and not only during its consideration in Congress. The professional experience and access that such experts possess give pro-Israel initiatives additional legitimacy and 'strategic depth,' strengthening their position in the American political process.

Therefore, key provisions, such as maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge (QME) and the policy of containing Iran, are not political slogans, but deeply rooted and conceptually sound elements of American strategy, backed by think tanks. Academic assessments, particularly those of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, argue that Israel's central place in US Middle East policy is

primarily due to lobbying rather than hard strategic interests, and that these groups are actively working to shift US foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. (*Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007*).

Conclusions

The pro-Israel lobby in the United States influences policy through a combination of different approaches, including the open activities of organisations such as AIPAC and CUFI, as well as active participation in election campaigns through significant financial contributions to Super PACs. Separately, it is worth noting reports of possible covert disinformation operations linked to foreign actors.

The influence of pro-Israel interest groups at the federal level is evidenced by long-term commitments in the area of military aid and the adoption of laws restricting criticism of Israel. Another important factor is that these structures avoid registration under FARA, which allows them to maintain a high level of influence without extensive disclosure requirements.

Significant financial contributions to the 2024 election campaign (over \$100 million) demonstrate concern about the loss of bipartisan consensus on support for Israel, especially among young people and the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. That is why resources are being directed towards maintaining political influence and curbing internal opposition.

Reports of alleged covert information operations targeting American politicians may indicate a shift from traditional forms of lobbying to practices that are seen as interference in US domestic politics.

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