

'Israel is an albatross around our neck' - John Mearsheimer

International relations scholar and "The Israel Lobby" author John Mearsheimer explains to The Grayzone's Max Blumenthal and Aaron Mate how the Israel lobby's vast power enables it to undercut US imperial interests from within, even hobbling its ability to compete with China. ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at <https://thegrayzone.com> Support our original journalism at Patreon: <https://patreon.com/grayzone> Facebook: <https://facebook.com/thegrayzone> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews> Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews> Minds: <https://minds.com/thegrayzone> Mastodon: <https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone> #TheGrayzone

#Max

I wanted to ask you, though, about your broader theory before you wrote *The Israel Lobby*—the one that helps inform your understanding of the Ukraine proxy war and so many other conflicts, including U.S. relations with China, which you describe as great power competition. You argue that relationships between powerful states define international relations. How does that influence your understanding of the actions the U.S. is taking toward Iran right now, vis-à-vis Israel?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, you know, when Steve and I—who are card-carrying realists—wrote *The Israel Lobby* article and then the book, a number of our colleagues in the field said, "Do you realize that the thesis in your book on the Israel lobby contradicts your realist theory?" And they expected us to say, "No, it doesn't." But we said, "It absolutely contradicts our theory." Our theory is that the United States should behave in strategically smart ways on the world stage, and that great power-to-great power relations matter the most. There's no way the United States should let a minor power like Israel get in the way of behaving strategically.

But if you think about it, the argument that Steve and I are making is that our relationship with Israel is not in our strategic interest. Remember I said before, Israel is an albatross around our neck. That contradicts the basic thesis of my book and my writings more generally on great power politics—and Steve's as well. But it just goes to show you how enormously powerful the lobby is. I mean, just, Max and Aaron, think about the fact that the United States recognizes that if it has a peer competitor in the international system that it should worry about, it's China, right? And this is why Hillary Clinton announced in 2011 that we were going to pivot to Asia. China is seen as the most important threat to the United States inside the national security community.

Well, if you look at these various wars that we're fighting in the Middle East—the first one, of course, was the 12-day war last June—and now you look at this conflict, it's seriously eroding our capability to contain China in East Asia. We're pulling THAADs and Patriots out of South Korea and Japan. This is truly remarkable. We've been shortchanging East Asia—we've been shortchanging our containment policy in East Asia—for quite a while now because of Israel. And the situation is only getting worse from a strategic point of view, from a realist point of view, which, of course, is what Steve and I purvey in our writings. This makes no sense at all. So our relationship with Israel is a really cockamamie relationship that is not in the American national interest.

#Max

Yeah, if I were an imperialist from a realist perspective, I'd be furious right now about what the U.S. is doing, because it looks like the U.S. is on the precipice of losing its foothold in the Persian Gulf and losing all of its forward-position bases that encircle Iran. Yeah.

#John Mearsheimer

You know who really reflects this dissatisfaction with what's going on? Elbridge Colby. Yeah. Because Elbridge Colby is someone who wants to contain China. He has no interest in remaining in Europe and keeping forces there—Europe is a giant aircraft carrier—and he certainly has no interest in fighting wars against Iran. He understands that's counterproductive if you're interested in containing China. But you notice, a good article could be written on this. The lobby has gone to great lengths to go after Elbridge Colby, just as they've gone to great lengths to go after J.D. Vance, because the lobby understands that Vance and Colby are two people who think it's not in the American national interest to support Israel hook, line, and sinker.

#Aaron

And we should mention, in this connection, that when Tulsi Gabbard tried to bring on Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Davis—who you know, John, as her top advisor—the lobby essentially blocked his candidacy.

#John Mearsheimer

Oh, yeah. I think the best example of this, going back to when we wrote the book, is Chas Freeman.

#Max

Yeah.

#John Mearsheimer

I mean, Barack Obama was going to make Chas Freeman, I think, head of the National Intelligence Council, if my memory's correct. And they went to enormous lengths to prevent that, and Chas withdrew his name as a result. I mean, Chas is a remarkably smart man, remarkably experienced. He's a person of great integrity. He and I, by the way, disagree completely on the whole issue of containing China, so it's not like I agree with him on every issue. But man, when you start talking about the kind of people you'd want to have in the highest-level positions in any administration, Chas Freeman would be at the top of my list. But the lobby killed his nomination in the early days of the Obama administration. And, you know, they do this sort of thing all the time.

#Max

Well, now they're sort of trying to retrench their position through Mamdani. And they're attacking Mamdani's wife for liking comments around October 7th that weren't necessarily celebrating it, but they're framing it as a celebration of the worst terror attack in history. What they're trying to do is get a casualty in the New York mayor's office that will demonstrate that no U.S. public official should even dare to criticize Israel or harshly condemn Israel, because they're afraid of what's to come.

So I think they've lost a lot of ground, but they're still fighting this fight to take out anyone associated with any public official who even remotely edges toward our audience's position. And they're trying to make an example of them. It just seems endless—they will never, ever accept defeat. So, I guess my question is, how can we solve this problem of the Israel lobby? Is it simply by registering AIPAC as a foreign agent? What's the remedy?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, just very quickly, the two words I'd use to describe the lobby—which I think fit nicely with what you were just saying, Max—are relentless and ruthless. Yeah, those are the two words that always pop into my mind. And rich.

#Max

Endless money.

#John Mearsheimer

Yeah. Yeah. Money really matters here. Look, the truth is, there's going to be a huge battle over the lobby and over the U.S.–Israeli relationship moving forward. How it all plays out, I think, is very hard to say, but it's all out in the open now. And what's happening in the Iran war, as we've described it, is recognized by all sorts of people. And, you know, it's not just the three of us out there now exposing what the lobby's up to and how it's not in America's strategic or moral interest. People like Tucker Carlson and Megyn Kelly are now involved. I like to refer to them as people who've crossed the Rubicon.

There are a lot of people who will lightly criticize the lobby or lightly criticize Israel, but they won't do more than put an ankle in the water. Then there's actually quite a large group of people who've now crossed the Rubicon. That includes almost everybody who appears on the Judging show weekly—and of course that's the three of us, plus a lot of others. But it also includes people like Tucker Carlson and Megyn Kelly. I think once you cross the Rubicon, you can't go back to the other side. For example, we've all crossed the Rubicon—we're committed on this issue. And I think more and more people will cross the Rubicon. It'll be interesting to see what happens with people like Joe Rogan over time.

#Aaron

And, uh, the Democratic Party as well, where supporting Israel is becoming increasingly untenable if you want to be an elected politician. Yeah, I mean, look at Gavin Newsom.

#John Mearsheimer

It's kind of hard to believe what he's been saying. You know, going back to the top of the show, when we were talking about the differences between when Steve and I wrote the article and the book and now, I think you can see there's a world of difference in terms of the context. The Gavin Newsom business is evidence of that. I think this fight is going to play out over time, and how it goes is just very difficult to say. I would note that if the Iran war goes south, that will be terrible news for the lobby.

Because the lobby has played a key role in pushing this war forward. It's been the lobby and Prime Minister Netanyahu, as we said before, who have been the two principal forces driving this war and convincing Trump to do it. And if it turns into a fiasco, that's going to be a huge problem for the lobby. I don't know how it's going to play out, but I think it's imperative that all of us—and others who've crossed the Rubicon—keep focusing on this issue, pay close attention to it, and tell the American people as loudly and clearly as we can what's going on.