

'Greatest threat to free speech is the Israel lobby' - Mearsheimer

International relations scholar and "Israel Lobby" author John Mearsheimer explains to The Grayzone's Max Blumenthal and Aaron Mate why he believes the Israel Lobby threatens the very fabric of liberal democracy with its ruthless drive for control. ||| 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

You know, I just want to make one other quick point here that I don't want to lose sight of, and that is that we talk about the strategic consequences of this—getting involved in wars like the Iraq War and the Iran War and whatnot, the genocide, and so forth and so on. But it's also very important to emphasize that what the lobby is doing threatens to undermine liberal values here in the United States. Just take the whole issue of free speech.

I think a very important argument could be made that the greatest threat to free speech in the United States today—certainly on university and college campuses—is the Israel lobby, because the lobby goes to enormous lengths to shut down discourse on Israel. Anybody who is critical of Israel today is likely to be smeared and have his or her career ruined. The lobby will go to great lengths to do that. So people self-censor. It's really quite remarkable. Shibley Telhami at the University of Maryland has done surveys of academics showing that, you know, around 80% of academics self-censor.

#Max

They silence themselves on the issue of Israel. They're just afraid to speak up. It's really quite remarkable. And this situation is only likely to get worse, because the lobby has to engage in smash-mouth politics more and more. This is going to undermine liberal values at home.

#John Mearsheimer

I've always said that the Israel lobby is the greatest threat to free speech in the U.S., because while there may be, I don't know, Christian conservative forces that want to ban certain books in red states, they always face a very strong challenge when they do so. When the Israel lobby does it, everyone—even liberals—is afraid to speak up. And, you know, the challenge to the deportation

orders and arrest of Mahmoud Khalil, or the woman from Tufts University who co-authored an op-ed criticizing Israel—what's her name, Rosmia Ozturk—I mean, you didn't see a very strong challenge from the liberal class there to this obvious assault on free speech, where people were actually being arrested for what they said and ordered out of the country when they had green cards and visas.

Now you're starting to see attacks on it in the New York Review of Books as Trump weakens and it becomes more of a partisan issue. But they've just run through—they've just shredded—the Constitution without a challenge. And so, yeah, I think the most important factor now is whether the liberal establishment is willing to recognize this, because it's the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights that have granted them their ability to project power around the world under the aegis of the U.S. as a shining city on a hill. And Trump has shredded that. You're going to see the Democrats try to come back and, you know, remake America's image and declare that we have rights again so that we can continue to arm Ukraine. I mean, will that even be possible after what we're witnessing now?

#Max

I just want to add something to what you were saying and talk about the genocide in Gaza. University and college campuses are full of human rights advocates. The political center of gravity in those places is far to the left of center. And as a realist, I can tell you I've been criticized over the years by all sorts of human rights activists in the academic world. So here you have a genocide in Gaza after October 7th, and what's truly remarkable is that hardly any of these human rights advocates speak out against it.

And the paramount example of that is Samantha Power, who wrote this very important book on genocide and lamented the fact that Americans hadn't moved to stop various genocides in the past, and how this was unconscionable, unthinkable, and should never happen again. And here she is in the Biden administration, which is complicit in a genocide. She is, in effect, complicit in the genocide—truly remarkable. And it's realists like me and Steve Walt who are actually speaking out about the horrors of the genocide, criticizing the Israelis for what they're doing, and criticizing the American government for being complicit.

Truly remarkable. What's going on here is that people are afraid of the lobby—they're afraid to criticize Israel. If Samantha Power were to criticize Israel, say that it's conducting a genocide, or even if she didn't believe it was a genocide but thought it was close to being one—if she criticized Israel, she'd never be Secretary of State someday. She'd never get promoted; she'd probably be fired from the administration. And it's this set of incentives that causes people not to criticize Israel when you would expect them to. Again, I'm truly amazed at how little criticism there was of the genocide—the crime of all crimes. Here I am, surrounded by all these liberal IR theorists who believe we should promote human rights around the world. Fine. But when you see a genocide, you should be first in line to criticize it. It shouldn't be people like me and Steve Walt who are first in line.

#John Mearsheimer

I think Samantha Power's presence in those institutions discredits them, along with the genocide they supported. Watching the EU leadership refuse to condemn the bombing of the girls' school in Minab, Iran, while condemning Iran—it's just like Kallas and von der Leyen. It's too obvious now that they have no credibility left, and they never will regain it. I remember back when Samantha Power was vying to become U.S. ambassador to the U.N. She enlisted Shmuley Boteach as her fixer because she had previously criticized Israel a few times and needed to get on the good side of the Israel lobby and the Zionist movement. Shmuley was the guy who would appear with her everywhere when she met with senators, saying, "I pledge to do whatever."

"I won't preach human rights on Israel. I'm going to be Israel's slave at the U.N." And now here she is again. I mean, it should have been so discrediting for her. But you're the one who's paid the price, along with Steve Walt, for being out ahead of the pack and stating the obvious fact that the Israel lobby existed—that there even was an Israel lobby, that it was powerful, and that the United States does have its own interests, which the Israel lobby's objectives often contravened. I know we've kept you for about an hour. I said it was going to be a half hour, so I want to be mindful of your time. But Aaron, if you have any—if you want to ask any last question or make any final comments?

#Aaron

I wanted to tell a quick anecdote about Samantha Power. She was recently speaking at the University of Notre Dame, and someone in the audience asked her about her silence on the Gaza genocide. She said, "Well, you know, when you're serving a president, unfortunately, you don't make foreign policy." That was her excuse—that she was just following orders, essentially, that there were limits on what she could do as the head of USAID. Then, just a few minutes later, she was reflecting on her time in the Obama administration, when there were allegations of a chemical attack by the Assad government in Syria—which I think, based on the evidence, was a false flag. But that aside, Samantha Power said that at the time she was lobbying Obama to bomb Syria over that allegation.

I thought that was such a revealing answer. When there's a genocide going on, Samantha Power's excuse is, "Well, I'm not the president, so I can't do anything." But when there's the possibility of bombing a foreign country, she's actively lobbying the president to carry out a strike. So, in fact, when you're in government, you can do something if you want to—you can advocate policy. She just chose to advocate military strikes, not stopping a genocide in Gaza.

#Max

You know, Aaron, just to make her case even worse, I bet she didn't even go to Biden and plead with him to stop the genocide. In other words, she didn't resign. OK, but did she go to Biden and say, "This is a genocide," or, "It's approaching a genocide, and we have to stop it"? And he overruled her? Did that happen? I bet that didn't happen. And I think that's even more damning—that's additional damning evidence about her behavior. Now, I may be wrong; we may find out that

she went and protested. But I think if she had gone and protested, she would tell us that. In fact, the fact that she's not telling us that tells us she didn't go and protest. The word I'd use to describe it is "reprehensible."

#Aaron

Yeah. We also know that experts at her agency wrote reports saying Israel was deliberately starving the people of Gaza, blocking aid. And Antony Blinken essentially kept those reports from being made public. I never heard Samantha Power advocate for her own staffers or the evidence they gathered.

#John Mearsheimer

She's really representative of that whole class of liberal IR people—the humanitarian interventionists and activists. They're discredited at this point. I don't know who else could come into a Democratic administration, though, and that's the issue. But, John, I want to be respectful of your time. We'll let you go unless there's anything you want to add. Just make one final point, Max.

#Max

Yeah, please. You know, a lot of people said, "Wow, this is terrific research. You really found something that nobody knew about," and so forth. But I think, in a very important way, we were just stating the obvious facts. There was no great research involved here—it was easy to figure out what the lobby was doing. What we did was actually tell the story, whereas others had been unwilling to tell it up until that point, or most others had been unwilling to. But the story was right there, the facts were right there. You didn't have to be a genius to figure out what was going on. It was just a case of being willing to step up to the plate, and we did that. Thankfully, I think it opened a crack, and all sorts of other people—you two included—have poured through that crack. Hopefully more people will pour through that crack, or, to use the words I used before, cross the Rubicon. Yeah.

#John Mearsheimer

Well, you definitely stepped up to the plate and delivered. And twenty years later, the book is a classic. I think it's beyond criticism, while so many other books by your critics just fall flat today—they look discredited. So thank you for your service, Professor John Mearsheimer.