

George Ball (1909-1994) was an influential figure in American foreign policy for several decades. As undersecretary of state for five years, he played a significant part in White House meetings and presented his own opinions to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. He answered calls for assistance and advice from Presidents Nixon and Carter as well as their secretaries of state and defense; Secretary of State Kissinger sought his input during the Ford administration.

Ball had been in the running to become Carter's secretary of state. While a combination of factors prevented this, an important one was that Ball had publicized his opinions on the Middle East in the spring and summer of 1976, with the presidential election coming up that November. Specifically, Ball had taken an unambiguous position that Israel needed to withdraw from the territories it had captured during the 1967 Six-Day War. Although Ball and Carter were probably in general agreement on this issue, Ball's outspokenness had the potential to become a political liability for Carter with Jewish voters.

During the last decade of his life, Ball and his son, Douglas, composed *The Passionate Attachment*, a book about America's "special relationship" with Israel. In analyzing America's extensive financial and military support for Israel, the authors emphasized the powerful role played by the Israel lobby or, more precisely, AIPAC. What follows is a revealing section from the book about AIPAC.

#### **George Ball on AIPAC**

(George W. Ball and Douglas B. Ball, *The Passionate Attachment: America's Involvement with Israel, 1947 to the Present*, W. W. Norton & Company, 1992, pages 209-211, 213-215.)

Today, the center of the complex system of Israeli organizations in the United States is AIPAC. According to I. L. Kenen, its founder and longtime director,

In 1950, Israel appealed for American financial assistance to help absorb the huge influx of Jewish refugees and immigrants between 1948 and 1950. Always worried about the Arab reaction, our State Department was then adamantly opposed to any economic aid for Israel, which, it insisted, would deepen Arab bitterness. Accordingly, Israel's American friends concluded that they must appeal directly to Congress for enabling legislation. That was the beginning of the pro-Israel lobby, now called the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

As AIPAC is specifically a lobbying organization, it is precluded by statute from making direct campaign contributions and thus it need not register as a political action committee (PAC). With an experienced staff of sixty presided over by a strong executive, Thomas Dine, who was once an administrative assistant to Senator [Edward] Kennedy, AIPAC pursues its goal of protecting the interests of a foreign government.

AIPAC finesses its inability to make direct campaign contributions by maintaining close communications with the eighty-plus PACs around the country that favor the Israeli cause. Its interlocking connections and directors with these PACs provide readily available funds when necessary.

AIPAC issues “Action Alerts” to more than a thousand Jewish leaders countrywide. An “Alert” will usually prod the sympathetic recipient into dropping in on his congressman or sending him a letter or a telegram. As if on command, legions of other supporters will buttonhole owners or editors of their local newspapers and bombard their representatives in Washington. Nor does any critical newspaper article, column, or advertisement ever lack a prompt answer by some prominent individual of some pro-Israeli organization.

AIPAC maintains a computer list of key contacts for every member of Congress—people who personally know or at least contribute heavily to the legislator and who can be counted on to reach him or her on issues of concern to Israel. The contact’s wealth is less important than his ease of access to the lawmaker, including the President of the United States.

Most of the AIPAC staff devote their time to mobilizing AIPAC members and writing propaganda pamphlets. The frontliners, a corps of skilled lobbyists, tirelessly roam the halls of Congress to press the point at hand. Publicity is AIPAC’s most effective weapon. AIPAC issues many propaganda tracts and publishes the *Near East Report*, a weekly newsletter mailed to about sixty thousand people and sent free to all congressmen, high government officials, and many media VIPs. A supplement called *Myths and Facts* is distributed to campuses. It attempts, for example, to dispel such “myths” as the accusation that the Palestinian refugees were deliberately frightened into flight during 1948-49.

Paul Weyrich, a political analyst and former Senate aide, explains how AIPAC uses these publishing assets:

It’s a remarkable system they have. If you vote with them, or make a public statement they like, they get the word out fast through their own publications and through editors throughout the country who are sympathetic to their cause. Of course it works in reverse as well. If you say something they don’t like, you can be denounced or censured through the same network. That kind of pressure is bound to affect Senators’ thinking, especially if they are wavering or need support.

Annual morale boosters are held in Washington, where AIPAC’s members listen to speeches by major politicians and the Israeli ambassador. At one AIPAC meeting, then Vice President George Bush attacked the Democrats for being “soft on anti-Semitism” and reassured the membership about the administration’s continuing battle against it. Nearly two thousand AIPAC members, including a small group of Christians, attend these affairs.

One conference highlight is the invariably upbeat annual report of Thomas Dine. He recites, by rote, that U.S.-Israeli relations have never been better. With sincere conviction, he asserts that “a whole new constituency of support for Israel is being built” in precisely the areas where “we are weakest—among government officials in the state, defense and treasury departments, in the CIA, in science, trade, agriculture and other agencies.” Israel, Dine reiterates, is now treated by the United States as an “ally, not just a friend, an asset, rather than a liability, a mature and capable partner, not some vassal state.”

Thus bolstered, the AIPAC members return to their homes rededicated to promoting the well-being of a foreign country in which they assiduously refrain from living. To keep them “up to speed,” AIPAC conducts tightly scheduled annual workshops in its five regions.

AIPAC provides ongoing intelligence about congressional activities. It keeps track of how every congressman and senator votes, and it concentrates on the chairmen and other leading members of key committees that pass on legislation which affects Israel.

As a result:

- It can and does target available resources through political action committees.
- It provides speech materials and background guidance for sympathetic legislators during relevant committee hearings.
- And it systematically provides election-year help to marginal members and discourages backsliding by threatening to support rival candidates against congressmen who do not toe AIPAC’s line.

...Dine explained how much progress AIPAC has made: “We are not a PAC, we’re a movement, a political factor, neither liberal nor conservative, neither Democrat nor Republican. We’re the top of the iceberg of the pro-Israeli community. We figure to expand support for Israel through the rest of the century.”

AIPAC does not try to influence Israeli policies vis-à-vis America’s interests; it simply seeks to accommodate whatever Israeli government is in power. That point was well made by Kenneth Bialkin, a principal spokesman for the Jewish American community. Before the 1984 Israeli elections, Bialkin was quoted in *The Jerusalem Post* as stating, “If the Alignment wins and changes Israel’s policies, we will support them; if the Likud wins and pursues a strong line in the West Bank, we will get behind them.”

Although Bialkin was paraphrasing, perhaps unconsciously, Stephen Decatur’s theme of “our country, right or wrong,” there was a significant difference. Stephen Decatur was speaking of his *own* country, America. Bialkin apparently neither knew nor cared that Israel’s pursuit of “a strong line in the West Bank” contravened an expressed objective of American policy.

The Israeli lobby’s hold over Congress was described by Robert G. Kaiser, then an editor of *The Washington Post*. On May 27, 1984, in an article titled “The U.S. Risks Suffocating Israel with Kindness,” he wrote that the House and Senate were competing over which “would give more to Israel this year.” The Reagan administration had requested \$850 million in economic aid (in addition to military aid), and he notes:

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee—whose chairman and ranking Democrat are both up for reelection this November ... quickly upped the ante to \$1.2 billion, an increase of nearly 50 percent. This worried members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee... “We can’t let them be more generous to Israel than we are,” some said. In

the end, the House committee proposed \$1.1 billion, “but it will come out of conference at \$1.2 billion,” a knowledgeable member predicted.

Kaiser points out that such episodes are rarely covered by the media, since “in Washington, reporters and politicians share a cynical understanding that Israel and its American friends constitute probably the single most effective lobby in the country; they take its victories for granted.” He then adds: “Ask a senator or congressman on one of the committees involved if anyone this year seriously questioned whether the huge amount of American aid to Israel was a good idea, and you are more likely to get a laugh than an answer.”

It is not surprising, therefore, that Dine has been singled out as one of the most influential men in the capital, and that AIPAC has been described by *The New York Times* as “the most powerful, best run and effective foreign policy interest group in Washington.”

Beyond AIPAC, there are thirty-eight major Jewish organizations and scores of smaller ones nationwide. Although each has its own specific program, they are all more than willing to assist AIPAC. Leaders of the major groups sit on AIPAC’s board, which enables it to exert grass-roots pressure far beyond its own membership. The major groups also belong to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Heretofore, the Presidents’ Conference has focused primarily on the executive branch while AIPAC concentrates on the Congress, a division of labor that, with AIPAC’s increasing strength, now seems redundant.

The most significant demonstration of the lobby’s power came in 1981, when President Reagan, at the beginning of his administration, encountered opposition to the sale of AWACs [military aircraft that provide an early warning system against attack] to Saudi Arabia. By any measure, the deal was good for the United States. It would, as the President saw it, help the Saudis defend their oil fields on which Europe and Japan depend, guard against attacks from Iran, and it would enrich the American economy by \$8.5 billion from the sale of planes and spare parts. Thus the sale had everything going for it—except AIPAC.

AIPAC was dead set against the deal, ostensibly because it endangered Israel’s security, but more likely because the AIPAC leaders wished to teach the new administration a lesson. It was not that the AWACs posed a threat to Israel. Indeed, former Israeli Defense Minister Ezer Weizman denied any dangers, because the planes were slow and could be easily shot down. Nonetheless, pitted against the sale, the lobby deployed its formidable forces.

As Roberta Feuerlicht, a Jewish American writer, recounts, AIPAC’s campaign even intruded into her synagogue. On Yom Kippur, the rabbi’s sermon before the prayer is usually devoted to a text in the Talmud. But in 1981, the pre-prayer sermon in her synagogue was devoted to a denunciation of AWACs. The rabbi told the congregation that “Jews must fight the ‘outrageous’ charge that there is a Jewish lobby... At the same time, he inconsistently urged his congregants to fight against the sale of AWACs.”

Congressmen were bombarded by petitions and by anti-AWACs tracts written by AIPAC staffers. They were lectured endlessly by AIPAC representatives. AIPAC sent every member

of the relevant committee a free copy of the novel *Holocaust*. Full-page ads appeared in major newspapers denouncing the sale to “an oil arrogant, oil greedy nation.”

The confrontation ran from April to October and became so nasty that the exasperated President on October 1, 1981, complained at a press conference that “it is not the business of other countries to make American foreign policy.” Because of AIPAC’s campaign and in spite of White House pressure, on October 14 the House overwhelmingly voted 301 to 111 to turn down the sale. One naysayer was the influential [Democrat] Daniel Rostenkowski, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, who later admitted that, while he favored the sale as a matter of policy, he had voted against it to avoid tangling with the Jewish lobby.

Since it requires both houses to reject a weapons sale, the [Republican] President had to invest considerable time and prestige over the next two weeks pressuring the Republican-controlled Senate. Although AIPAC had managed to induce fifty-four senators—more than a majority—to sign a letter publicly opposing the sale, the President personally lobbied those senators, warning them against succumbing to AIPAC. In the end, the sale was approved on October 28 by a narrow 52 to 48 vote.

The approval came with restrictions that seemed to question the Saudis’ honor as well as infringing on their sovereignty. The restrictions (in the form of a presidential letter to the Senate) promised that the AWACs would be deployed only within the boundaries of Saudi Arabia; that the security of American technology would be protected; that the Saudis would share any AWACs information only with America; and that the sale would assure “substantial assistance” from Saudi Arabia to the Middle East peace process.

Congress was thoroughly brainwashed by the AWACs incident. Some legislators who had yielded to Reagan’s importunings and voted for the sale suddenly found themselves labeled “anti-Semites,” a favorite lobby tactic. Thus, a New York Jewish newspaper wrote of Maryland Senator Charles Mathias, a highly principled man who regarded the sale as in America’s interest, that “Mr. Mathias values the importance of oil over the well-being of Jews and the State of Israel. The Jewish people cannot be fooled by such a person, no matter what he said, because his act proved who he was.”

AIPAC treated its near defeat of the bill as a victory, and as soon as it was passed established a new publication, *Saudi (AWACs) Watch*, ostensibly to monitor Saudi compliance, but in reality to undercut Saudi Arabia. Saudi oil policy was called anti-American; Saudi aid to the Palestinians was labeled support for “PLO terrorism”; the Saudis were chided for not bullying other Arab states to surrender on Israel’s terms.

AIPAC later bragged about its AWAC fight in letters soliciting new members. In a 1982 mailing, it noted that “we almost won!” and went on to declare:

To look at this figure in terms of what *your own membership in AIPAC means in aid to Israel, consider this: On a budget of just \$1.8 million, AIPAC successfully lobbied Congress in 1981 for \$2.2 BILLION in foreign aid. This means that every membership gift of \$35 to AIPAC resulted indirectly in \$42,777 of US AID TO ISRAEL!* (emphasis in original)