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counterpunch

edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair

Special Issue for CounterPunch Newsletter Subscribers!

The Battle Over the Israel Lobby

As John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's long awaited "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy" draws hysterical abuse, former CIA intelligence officers Kathy and Bill Christison define the Lobby's real nature, trace its history, and measure its actual power. **Get your copy today by [subscribing online](#) or calling 1-800-840-3683 Remember contributions to CounterPunch are tax-deductible. [Click here to make a donation](#).** If you find our site useful please: [Subscribe Now](#)

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Today's Stories

October 4, 2007

Uri Avnery
[The Power of the Israel Lobby](#)

October 3, 2007

Vijay Prashad
[Gang of Four](#)

Anita Sinha
[Black Ties and Bulldozers in New Orleans](#)

Winslow T. Wheeler
[Posturing at the Petraeus Hearings: Where was the Oversight?](#)

Sharon Smith
[The Kucinich Quandary](#)

Jeff Leys
[Our Bonhoeffer Moment](#)

Sen. Russ Feingold
[We Must End This Tragedy](#)

Mohamad Bazzi
[Playing Into the Hands of Ahmadinejad](#)

Brenda Norrell
[A Cry from the Top of the World](#)

Robert Weissman

October 4, 2007

Two Knights and a Dragon

The Power of the Israel Lobby

By URI AVNER Y

There are books that change people's consciousness and change history. Some tell a story, like Harriet Beech Stowe's 1851 "Uncle Tom's Cabin", which gave a huge impetus to the campaign for the abolition of slavery. Others take the form of a political treatise, like Theodor Herzl's "Der Judenstaat", which gave birth to the Zionist movement. Or they can be scientific in nature, like Charles Darwin's "The Origin of Species", which changed the way humanity sees itself. And perhaps political satire, too, can shake the world, like "1984" by George Orwell.

The impact of these books was amplified by their timing. They appeared exactly at the right time, when a large public was ready to absorb their message.

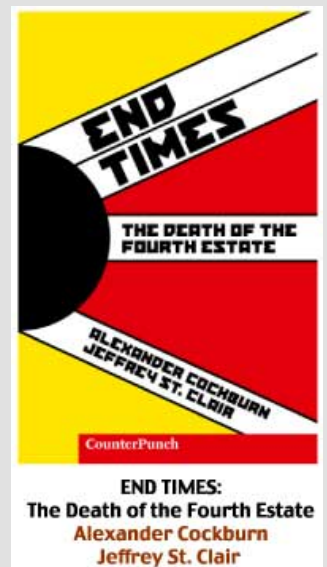
It may well turn out that the book by the two professors, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, "[The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy](#)", is just such a book.

It is a dry scientific research report, 355 pages long, backed by 106 further pages containing some thousand references to sources.

It is not a bellicose book. On the contrary, its style is restrained and factual. The authors take great care not to utter a single negative comment on the legitimacy of the Lobby, and indeed bend over backwards to stress their support for the existence and security of Israel. They let the facts speak for themselves. With the skill of experienced masons, they systematically lay brick upon brick, row upon row, leaving no gap in their argumentation.

This wall cannot be torn down by reasoned argument. Nobody has tried, and nobody is going to. Instead, the authors are being smeared and accused of sinister motives. If the book

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October 2, 2007

Ibrahim Warde
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October 1, 2007

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could be ignored altogether, this would have been done--as has happened to other books which have been buried alive.

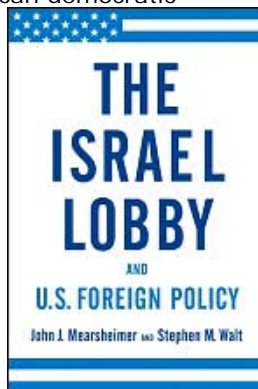
(Some years ago, there appeared in Russia a large tome by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the world-renowned laureate of the Nobel Prize for Literature, about Russia and its Jews. This book, called "200 Years Together", has been completely ignored. As far as I know, it has not been translated into any language, certainly not into Hebrew. I asked several of Israel's leading intellectuals, and none of them had even heard of the book. Neither does it appear on the list of *Amazon.com*, which includes all the author's other works.)

* * *

THE TWO professors take the bull by the horns. They deal with a subject which is absolutely taboo in the United States, a subject nobody in his right mind would even mention: the enormous influence of the pro-Israel lobby on American foreign policy.

In a remorselessly systematic way, the book analyzes the Lobby, takes it apart, describes its *modus operandi*, discloses its financial sources and lays bare its relations with the White House, the two houses of Congress, the leaders of the two major parties and leading media people.

The authors do not call into question the Lobby's legitimacy. On the contrary, they show that hundreds of lobbies of this kind play an essential role in the American democratic system. The gun and the medical lobbies, for example, are also very powerful political forces. But the pro-Israel lobby has grown out of all proportion. It has unparalleled political power. It can silence all criticism of Israel in Congress and the media, bring about the political demise of anyone who dares to break the taboo, prevent any action that does not conform to the will of the Israeli government.



In its second part, the book shows how the Lobby uses its tremendous power in practice: how it has prevented the exertion of any pressure on Israel to for peace with the Palestinians, how it pushed the US into the invasion of Iraq, how it is now pushing for wars with Iran and Syria, how it supported the Israeli leadership in the recent war in Lebanon and blocked calls for a ceasefire when it didn't want it.

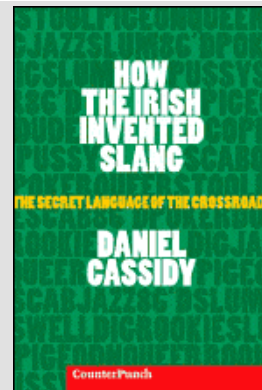
Each of these assertions is backed up by so much undeniable evidence and quotations from written material (mainly from Israeli sources) that they cannot be ignored.

* * *

MOST OF these disclosures are nothing new for those in Israel who deal with these matters.

I myself could add to the book a whole chapter from personal experience.

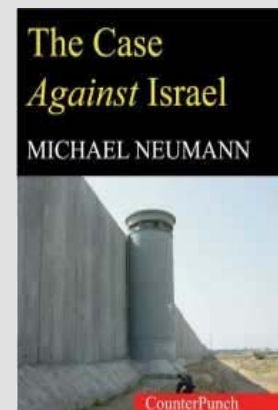
In the late 50s, I visited the US for the first time. A major New York radio station invited me for an interview. Later they cautioned me: "You can criticize the President (Dwight D. Eisenhower) and the Secretary of State (John Foster Dulles) to your heart's content, but please don't criticize Israeli leaders!" At the last moment the interview was cancelled altogether, and the Iraqi ambassador was invited instead. Criticism was apparently tolerable when it came from an Arab, but absolutely not coming from an Israeli.



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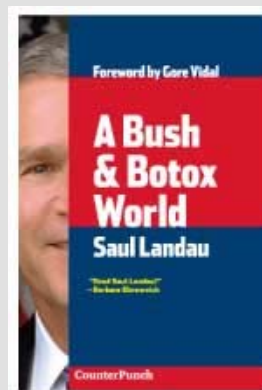
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September 29 / 30, 2007

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Uri Avnery
[So What About Iran?](#)

Andrew Cockburn
[Iraq's WMD Myth: Why Clinton is Culpable](#)

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[Through the Gates of Lodore](#)

Wajahat Ali
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[The Curse of the Military Commissions](#)

Don Santina
[Ethnic Cleansing in San Francisco](#)

Ralph Nader
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[The Man Behind the MoveOn Ad](#)

Seth Sandronsky

In 1970, the respected American "Fellowship of Reconciliation" invited me for a lecture tour of 30 universities, under the auspices of the Hillel rabbis. When I arrived in New York, I was informed that 29 of the lectures had been cancelled. The sole rabbi who did not cancel, Balfour Brickner, showed me a secret communication of the "Anti-Defamation League" that proscribed my lectures. It said: "While Knesset Member Avnery can in no way be considered a traitor, his appearance at this time would be deeply divisive" In the end, all the lectures took place under the auspices of Christian chaplains.

I especially remember a depressing experience in Baltimore. A good Jew, who had volunteered to host me, was angered by the cancellation of my lecture in this city and obstinately insisted on putting it on. We combed the streets of the Jewish quarters--mile upon mile of signs with Jewish names--and did not find a single hall whose manager would agree to let the lecture by a member of the Israeli Knesset take place. In the end, we did hold the lecture in the basement of the building of my host's apartment--and functionaries of the Jewish community came to protest.

That year, during Black September, I held a press conference in Washington DC, under the auspices of the Quakers. It seemed to be a huge success. The journalists came straight from a press conference with Prime Minister Golda Meir, and showered me with questions. Almost all the important media were represented--TV networks, radio, the major newspapers. After the planned hour was up, they would not let me go and kept me talking for another hour and a half. But the next day, not a single word appeared in any of the media. Thirty-one years later, in October 2001 I held a press conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, and exactly the same thing happened: many of the media were there, they held me for another hour--and not a word, not a single word, was published.

In 1968, a very respected American publishing house (Macmillan) brought out a book of mine "Israel Without Zionists", which was later translated into eight other languages. The book described the Israeli-Arab conflict in a very different way and proposed the establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel--a revolutionary idea at the time. Not a single review appeared in the American media. I checked in one of the most important book stores in New York and did not find the book. When I asked a salesman, he found it buried under a heap of volumes and put it on top. Half an hour later it was hidden again.

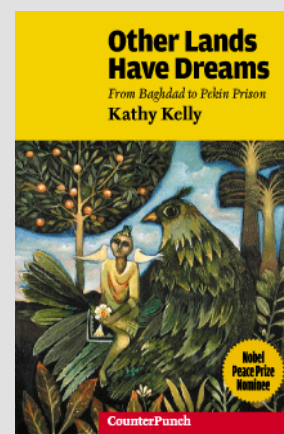
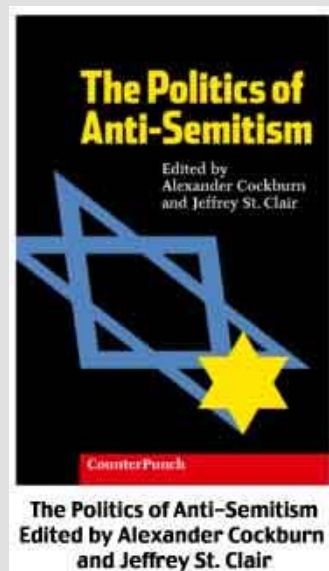
The book dealt with the "Two States for Two peoples" solution long before it became a world-wide consensus, and with my proposal for Israel's integration in "the Semitic Region". True, I am an Israeli patriot and was elected to the Knesset by Israeli voters. But I criticized the Israeli government--and that was enough.

* * *

THE BOOK by the two professors, who criticize the Israeli government from a different angle, cannot be buried anymore. This fact, by itself, speaks volumes.

The book is based on an essay by the two that appeared last year in a British journal, after no American publication dared to touch it. Now a respected American publishing house has released it--an indication that something is moving. The situation has not changed, but it seems that it is now possible at least to talk about it.

Everything depends on timing--and apparently the time is now ripe for such a book, which will shock many good people in America. It is now causing an uproar.



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September 28, 2007

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[September, the Cruellest Month in Chile](#)

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Dave Zirin
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The two professors are, of course, accused of anti-Semitism, racism and hatred of Israel. What Israel? It is the Lobby itself that hates a large part of Israel. In recent years it has shifted even more to the Right. Some of its constituent groups--such as the neo-cons who pushed the US into the Iraq war--are openly connected with the right-wing Likud, and especially with Binyamin Netanyahu. The billionaires who finance the Lobby are the same people who finance the extreme Israeli Right, and most of all the settlers.

The small, determined Jewish groups in the US who support the Israeli peace movements are remorselessly persecuted. Some of them fold after a few years. Members of Israeli peace groups who are sent to America are boycotted and slandered as "self-hating-Jews".

The political views of the two professors, which are briefly stated at the end of the book, are identical with the stand of the Israeli peace forces: the Two-State Solution, ending the occupation, borders based on the Green Line, and international support for the peace settlement.

If this is anti-Semitism, then we here are all anti-Semites. And only the Christian Zionists--those who openly demand the return of the Jews to this country but secretly prophesy the annihilation of the unconverted Jews at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ--are the true Lovers of Zion.

* * *

EVEN IF not a single bad word about the pro-Israel lobby can be uttered in the US, it is far from being a secret society, hatching conspiracies like the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion". On the contrary, AIPAC, the Anti-Defamation League, the Zionist Federation and the other organizations vociferously boast about their actions and publicly proclaim their incredible successes.

Quite naturally, the diverse components of the Lobby compete with each other--Who has the biggest influence on the White House, Who scares the most senators, Who controls more journalists and commentators,. This competition causes a permanent escalation--because every success by one group spurs the others to redouble their efforts.

This could be very dangerous. A balloon that is inflated to monstrous dimensions can one day burst in the face of American Jews (who, by the way, according to the polls, object to many positions adopted by the Lobby that claims to speak in their name.)

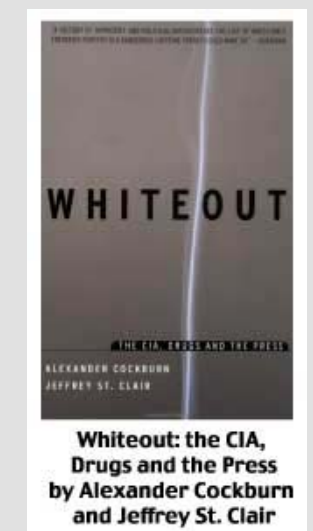
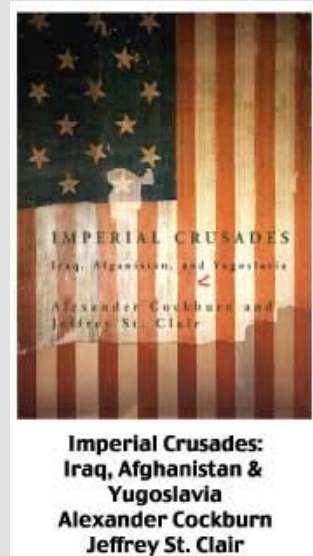
Most of the American public now opposes the Iraq war and considers it a disaster. This majority still does not connect the war with the actions of the pro-Israel lobby. No newspaper and no politician dares to hint at such a connection--yet. But if this taboo is broken, the result may be very dangerous for the Jews and for Israel.

Beneath the surface, a lot of anger directed against the Lobby is accumulating. The presidential candidates, who are compelled to grovel at the feet of AIPAC, the senators and congressmen, who have become slaves of the Lobby, the media people, who are forbidden to write what they really think-- all these secretly detest the Lobby. If this anger explodes, it may hurt us, too.

This lobby has become a Golem. And like the Golem in legend, in the end it will bring disaster on its maker.

* * *

IF I may be permitted to voice some criticism of my own:



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September 27, 2007

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September 26, 2007

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[Wreckers](#)

[Paul Craig Roberts](#)

When the original article by the two professors appeared, I argued that "the tail is wagging the dog and the dog is wagging the tail". The tail, of course, is Israel.

The two professors confirm the first part of the equation, but emphatically deny the second. The central thesis of the book is that the pressure of the Lobby causes the United States to act against its own interests (and, in the long run, also against the true interests of Israel.) They do not accept my contention, quoted in the book, that Israel acted in Lebanon as "America's Rottweiler" (to Hizbullah as "Iran's Doberman").

I agree that the US is acting against its true interest (and the true interests of Israel)--but the American leadership does not see it that way. Bush and his people believe--even without the input of the Lobby--that it would be advantageous for the US to establish a permanent American military presence in the middle of this region of huge oil reserves. In my view, this counter-productive act at was one of the main objectives of the war, side by side with the desire to eliminate one of Israel's most dangerous enemies. Unfortunately, the book deals only very briefly with this issue.

That does not diminish in any way my profound admiration for the intellectual qualities, integrity and courage of Mearsheimer and Walt, two knights who, like St. George, who have sallied forth to face the fearful dragon.

Uri Avnery is an Israeli writer and peace activist with Gush Shalom. He is o a contributor to CounterPunch's book [The Politics of Anti-Semitism](#).

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