

The Best Congress AIPAC Can Buy

By [L. Michael Hager](#) | Mar 22, 2016 | [US, Viewpoints](#) | 9 | ★★★★★



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry meets with leaders of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Conference at the Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C., on March 3, 2014. ([US State Department](#))

For the sake of our democracy, the flow of interest group money that is buying off our elected lawmakers must be stopped.

Nowhere is the influence and power of a political lobby more evident than in the annual Policy Conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

This year's Conference takes place in Washington, DC on March 20-22. An event that rivals the President's annual State of the Union message, the gathering has drawn nearly 400 confirmed speakers, including Vice President Joe Biden and Presidential candidates Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz and John Kasich, who will address more than 15,000 pro-Israel Americans (including 2/3 of the current Members of Congress). According to the Lobby's website, the event is the "largest gathering of America's pro-Israel community."

Among the confirmed speakers are 30 members of the U.S. Congress, 25 of whom received 2016 contributions from pro-Israel PACs and individuals, averaging \$36,000 per recipient (\$908,000 in total). From each of those speakers, AIPAC gains a public expression of high level support for Israel. [Note: the contribution figures come from opensecrets.org, a project of the nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics.]

Among the presidential candidates for 2015-16, AIPAC generated contributions in the amount of \$212,927 for Hillary Clinton and \$203,850 for Ted Cruz. Marco Rubio received \$132,552 and Lindsey Graham \$74,200. No surprise that all of those candidates have pledged “full support” for Israel.

There is nothing illegal or morally wrong with lobbying Congress or candidates for office. In fact, it can serve a useful purpose in educating members and candidates about matters subject to legislation. The problem comes when the lobbyists use money to secure access or buy support for proposed bills and resolutions.

AIPAC itself does not make political contributions and is in fact legally prohibited from doing so. Instead it uses its considerable resources (\$3 million annual lobbying budget) to link current and aspiring members of Congress with pro-Israel donors. AIPAC’s projection of invincibility encourages political candidates and officeholders to accept pro-Israel contributions or risk seeing those funds go to their opponents. For example, former Congressman Paul Findley and former Senator Charles Percy lost their seats for failure to adhere to the AIPAC line.

The AIPAC-led pro-Israel lobby is probably the strongest, best organized and most effective lobby network in Washington DC. For the 2015-2016 election cycle, the pro-Israel network has already dispensed \$4,255,136 in contributions. The largest single amount (\$259,688) went to Senator Charles Schumer of New York.

Among interest groups that lobby on behalf of a foreign government, none ranks higher in contributions to members of Congress than the pro-Israel lobby.

To illustrate how such contributions influence legislative action, take two pro-Israel bills introduced on February 10, 2016, one in the House and one in the

Senate, both with the title: "Combatting BDS Act of 2016." H.R.4514, introduced by Illinois Congressman Bob Dold, has 22 cosponsors; of those 23 members, 12 receive 2016 pro-Israel lobby contributions averaging \$23K. S. 2531, introduced by Senator Mark Kirk of Illinois, has 17 cosponsors; of the 18 cosponsors, 15 receive 2016 pro-Israel lobby contributions that average \$60K.

Several of those members of Congress who cosponsored the pro-Israel bill, but without 2016 contributions, received substantial gift money during the six years period 2009-2015. A maplight.org table shows that among House bill sponsors Bob Dold (who introduced the bill) received \$118K; Kathleen Rice \$49K; Jackie Walorski \$46K; Doug Lamborn \$37K, Trent Franks 19K; and Steve Stivers \$9K. Among Senate bill sponsors, Joe Manchin received \$122K; Orin Hatch \$92K; Ben Cardin \$241K; and Dean Heller \$71K. In sum, all of the Senate cosponsors and all but three of the House cosponsors are pro-Israel lobby recipients.

Israel gains additional paid support from Lobby-financed junkets for Congressional members and staff. See my earlier article entitled "[Ethics and Apartheid: How Israel Junkets Undermine U.S. Democracy](#)," *Foreign Policy Journal*, February 2, 2016.

The appearance of conflict of interest erodes citizen trust in government. Given the critical importance of money for reelection campaigns, political contributions such as mentioned above have the potential to corrupt or create the appearance of corrupting otherwise honest officials.

Despite its current success in promoting anti-BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction) resolutions and bills, the AIPAC juggernaut may be starting to weaken. For example, it failed to block the Defense Secretary nomination of Chuck Hagel in 2013. Even with enhanced lobbying money from Israel, it failed to scuttle the Iran nuclear deal in 2015. And significantly, it has seen the number of Americans holding favorable views toward Israel decline by 16% (to 59%).

The funds generated by AIPAC and its donor network are only one part of a larger picture, dominated by congressional fundraising and lobby contributions. Defense, pharmaceuticals, the NRA and other lobbies are just as guilty as AIPAC for corrupting our government representatives with money to fuel their legislative agendas.

For the sake of our democracy, the flow of interest group money that is buying off our elected lawmakers must be stopped.

RATE: 

Tags: [AIPAC](#), [Israel](#), [Israeli Lobby](#), [US Politics](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



L. Michael Hager

L. Michael Hager is cofounder and former Director General of the International Development Law Organization in Rome.

9 Comments



Patsy Lowe on September 4, 2016 at 12:33 pm

opensecrets.org is a website that will tell you what the crooks in D.C. take in.

★ Loading...

REPLY



BT on December 30, 2016 at 9:25 am

The difference being "Defense, pharmaceuticals, the NRA and other lobbies are just as guilty as AIPAC" none of the other lobbyists are representing an entire sovereign nation that through this lobbying causes the loss of American blood and treasure. The NRA supports the American Constitution, Defense supports American defense and sovereignty, pharmaceuticals supports the health and well being of Americans and people around the world, what does AIPAC do "for" America?

★ Loading...

REPLY



Maybell on October 2, 2017 at 8:48 pm

What's up, for all time i used to check blog posts here in the early hours in the daylight, since i enjoy to find out more and more.

★ Loading...

REPLY



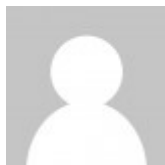
Bill Paul on November 28, 2017 at 8:54 am

So true! Both parties are caught up in this out of greed or fear of money used against them. Candidates are taking money personally as well. Example: Hillary Clinton personally pocketed \$400k for one day of speaking, from an American Jewish organization that supports expanding settlements in disputed land. She did this while publicly planning her second run for president.

American fundamentalist church leaders have been bribed to lead their flocks into blind support for Israeli policy. This past year they have begun to work on the African American Christian churches as well.

★ Loading...

REPLY



laughatbabyboomers on March 13, 2018 at 11:14 pm

Don't forget this :

" The best way to help Israel deal with Iran's growing nuclear capability is to help the people of Syria overthrow the regime of Bashar Assad. "- Hillary Clinton

<https://wikileaks.org/clinton-emails/emailid/18328#efmADMAFf>

★ Loading...

REPLY

laughatbabyboomers on March 13, 2018 at 11:15 pm



Or this one :

" I am a Zionist" – Uncle Joe

★ Loading...

REPLY



Idavis on January 8, 2019 at 6:51 pm

I have been following this topic since I read The Passionate Attachment by George Ball. Although I agree that AIPAC's financial donations to presidential Congressional candidate is the major influence on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, I think that Christians, particularly right wingers, are the other major factor. The latter group feels that it has a moral and spiritual responsibility to protect Israel despite its many violations and racism because they truly believe the Jews to be their god's "chosen people". Then there the typical American who is still stuck on the European Jewish holocaust and see Israelis as a victim, again, despite its military might, hence, occupation. I fear that America is prepared to shed blood, treasury, and her position in the role to protect and aid this country. No other country in U.S. history has receive such unilateral support from the U.S.

★ Loading...

REPLY



Jon Skeed on February 12, 2019 at 4:29 pm

AIPAC did not make ONE contribution to a Congressional candidate. This article is full of a lot of half-truths (as is your comment)!

★ Loading...

REPLY



firstdrafthistorian on April 11, 2019 at 2:40 am

You know how AIPAC works. Of course they don't. They organize others to donate the money to a candidate or for

another if one does not comply to their wishes. That's how they get around the law.

★ Loading...

REPLY