
The Organized Campaign against AIPAC

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Make no mistake: there's an organized campaign going on against AIPAC, and it is fueled by members of the Obama administration. So the plethora of articles and reports either calling to weaken AIPAC, or asking if AIPAC has already weakened, or reporting on the many recent failures of the organization – some real, some imaginary (AIPAC never opposed the appointment of Chuck Hagel) – is not a coincidence. It is a deliberate attempt to put the organization under stress, to force it to play defense, to keep it busy with having to take care of itself, rather than spending time on making life more difficult for the administration. The administration is busy with Iran negotiations and with an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and it wants AIPAC off its back. That's the natural tendency of every administration – to want its hands freed from legislative pressure. The campaign in the press is one way of getting to such a result.

Of course, the reports aren't all off the mark: AIPAC was recently forced into making concessions in its battle to pass more legislative sanctions against Iran. "Its top priority, a Senate bill to impose new sanctions on Iran, has stalled after stiff resistance from President Obama, and in what amounts to a tacit retreat, AIPAC has stopped pressuring Senate Democrats to vote for the bill", the New York Times reported (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/04/world/middleeast/potent-pro->

[israel-group-finds-its-momentum-blunted.html? r=0](http://israel-group-finds-its-momentum-blunted.html?r=0)). One can look at this and see a huge failure of historic proportions, as some observers have, or merely acknowledge that in political life you win some and you lose some and that it's not over yet.

So yes, an alteration (<http://www.jta.org/2014/02/11/news-opinion/politics/as-confab-nears-aipac-still-trying-to-figure-out-its-legislative-agenda#.UvqmFUr1SxQ.twitter>) of the agenda is needed. But no, "the illusion of its invincibility" has not "been shattered", as Trita Parsi suggested (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/trita-parsi/aipac-illusion_b_4751732.html). It wasn't "shattered" since such illusions of invincibility never existed. At least not in the mind of those with memories long enough to remember past achievements and failures. Running a lobby like AIPAC is like running a marathon; it takes patience, endurance, and the ability not to become breathless over every setback – quite the opposite of punditry.

The fight over Iran sanctions was a tough one to begin with. AIPAC was battling not just an administration but also the zeitgeist, the weariness of the American people of any sign of more conflict (this part Parsi gets right). Thus, AIPAC failed twice: once with the attempt to win votes for the approval of a strike on Syria, back in September – when it worked for the Obama administration. And once with the attempt to have stronger

sanctions on Iran – when it worked against the Obama administration. The current tide of public opinion makes it hard for AIPAC to advocate for certain causes.

Whether it should support more sanctions on Iran (or an attack on Syria) is another matter. A worthy debate. Yet assuming that AIPAC lost these battles because of its tendency to support misguided policies would be ridiculous. And making such a claim is just part of the campaign to weaken AIPAC, a campaign fueled by the government and assisted by groups of Jews who have little understanding of the topics and even lesser understanding of the long-term consequences for the Jewish world if AIPAC is truly weakened. Those Jews are also organized and are encouraged by political advocates close to the Obama administration. This isn't the first time they prove to be the most useful tool against AIPAC.

Some of those Jews wrote a letter (<http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new-york/liberal-jews-criticize-mayors-comments-aipac>) to the mayor of New York claiming that AIPAC "speaks for Israel's hard-line government and its right-wing supporters, and for them alone; it does not speak for us". Well: that's an impressive number of erroneous statements in just one sentence. Firstly, because Israel currently doesn't have a "hard line" government. Centrist YeshAtid

and Hatnuah are important members of the Israeli coalition.

Additionally, the government doesn't have only "right wing supporters".

In fact, the government is quite popular with the majority of Israelis, most of whom don't see an alternative to Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Current polls

(http://www.jewishjournal.com/rosnersdomain/item/partisan_poll_trend_stable)

give the Israeli left barely a quarter of the vote (about a third of the vote including the Arab parties). In other words: the Jewish attackers of AIPAC don't have an issue with a "hard-line" government – they have an issue with the people, with Israelis. To them, we are all "hard-liners" and hence, I assume, undeserving of their support. David Suissa was right to call this stance

(http://www.jewishjournal.com/david_suissa/item/why_i_love_aipac) a "narcissistic chutzpah of the highest order".

Of course, the critics of AIPAC would argue that for the organization to retain its power it has to alter its policies and be more "representative" of the views of most Jewish Americans. I truly don't know what this means – AIPAC officially supports the two state solution, like most American Jews do. It supports Israel's demand to be recognized as a Jewish state, like most American Jews do. It supports sanctions on Iran, like most American Jews do. Look

(<http://www.ajc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?>

c=7oJILSPwFfJSG&b=8479755&ct=13376311) at the polls: a (small) majority of American Jews even support – support! – a military attack on Iran if talks fail. So I have my suspicions: for many critics of AIPAC an alteration of its policies means that AIPAC should change its mission from generally supporting what Israelis support and believe is good for their security, to opposing every move and every policy of the Israeli government. Still, one failure of AIPAC I'm willing to concede is its failure to be more attentive to the voices of dissenters within the Jewish community, and to have a better strategy for embracing them rather than alienating them. AIPAC wasn't smart enough to prevent its opposition from becoming the fashionable and hip posture.

Still, those Jews on a quest to weaken AIPAC should know better. They aren't just weakening the support for Israel, they are also weakening the communal power of the American Jewish community. This community has had great achievements when it acted with a unified voice – just read the story about the battle to free Russian Jews from their forced imprisonment within their country. But a community that is fractured, that doesn't speak with one voice, that is constantly attacking its own immune system, will be a weakened community. If AIPAC is the most visible manifestation of unapologetic, self-confident Jewish political

power in America, weakening it would come with a price tag – and not just for those who want to see a robust Jewish support for Israel. It would come with a price tag for the American Jewish community.

Attackers of AIPAC are members of one of two groups: those who don't understand this simple fact – and those who don't much care for having a Jewish community. So yes, it is good news (reported (<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2014/02/10/the-rabbis-who-attacked-aipac-and-the-congregants-who-hit-back-bnai-jeshurun-de-blasio-israel/>) by Jonathan Tobin) that some members of the "community" are looking to fight back.

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