

The Other Israel Lobby in Washington

J Street has created a different political space for American policy makers

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TO DISPEL THE MYTH OF the mysterious, all-powerful Jewish lobby in America is not an easy task, especially in the wake of recent books by Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, as well as by former U.S. president Jimmy Carter.

As defined by the two professors, the Israel lobby, in reality a loose assortment of groups and people, has effectively controlled America's foreign policy for decades.

Traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes work simultaneously for the lobby's success often in counterintuitive fashion. The perceptions about its power can result in crude expressions of Israel-bashing, summarized in this quote from a 2004 article posted on an extreme right-wing website: "Our entire government is controlled by Israel. Through a small, rich and powerful Jewish-supported, tax-exempt lobby, the America Israel Public Affairs Committee, known simply as AIPAC, virtually all American domestic and foreign policy is now controlled by a foreign government entanglement."

On the other hand, the same perceptions bring to Israel's doorstep many governments and individuals eager to benefit from what they see as Israel's influence in Congress. Aspirants to a House or Senate seat make similar calculations. Even in Congressional districts where there are few Jews, candidates are impressed by dreams of Jewish money and influence in the media. Where Jews are plentiful, candidates will be even more reluctant to dis-



OVERRATED: AIPAC is neither a sacred monster nor is it always successful

agree with policies advocated by AIPAC.

The merit of Dan Flesher's book "Transforming America's Israel Lobby" is that it tries to set the record straight. Yes, the mainstream Israel lobby has power, but this has been grossly overrated. AIPAC is neither the sacred monster everyone fears, nor has it been successful in everything it has attempted. With courage, candor and extraordinary intellectual honesty, Flesher, a former media strategist for the Israel Policy

Forum and a consultant to many Jewish groups and organizations, analyzes AIPAC's apparatus, modus operandi and its successes, while pointing out its limitations.

True, AIPAC may go too far at times: It bullies the wrong congressman and sometimes steps on the wrong toes. Even though it has supported, by and large, all Israeli governments, whether left or right, it has had a propensity to adopt hard-line Israeli positions. At times, it has acted on its own