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Sep 12

### ★ Strangler Fig Nation: The unique national strategy for the state of Israel

September 9, 2014 0 comments

by Paul Larudee  
Source: [Dissident Voice](#)

*Strangler fig is the generic name given to a class of vines that sprouts high in the canopy of trees in tropical forests. It is deposited by birds that eat its fruit. Its roots envelope the tree and feed off it, weakening the tree. If the process is allowed to continue indefinitely, it sinks its roots into the ground at the base of the tree and destroys it completely but takes its form, creating a hollow shell of living vines where the tree once stood.*

On Friday, July 18, 2014, as one of the most powerful military forces in the world laid waste to the besieged and impoverished Gaza Strip, leaving widows and orphans in its wake while nevertheless killing a significant number of them, the United States Senate, without objection and by unanimous consent from all 100 senators, passed a resolution supporting this act of genocide and condemning its victims for provoking the powerful aggressor by trying to resist.

At that point, Israel had killed more than 250 Palestinians, mostly civilians, while the resistance forces in Gaza had killed one Israeli, who had been delivering food to troops at the time. The Senate resolution had been drafted by the AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, one of the pillars of the Israel Lobby. Fifty days later more than 2000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, and 72 Israelis, mostly soldiers, lay dead.

How did the Israel Lobby come to so totally dominate the US Senate and in fact the entire US government?

The story goes back more than a century, to the early years of the Zionist movement to create a Jewish state. Zionism grew out of the 19th and 20th century European racist and nationalist philosophies like Fascism, Nazism and Falangism, which promoted the idea that each race in the world needed a homeland and should seek to fulfill its national destiny there.

The definition of both race and homeland were given much latitude. Despite all genetic evidence to the contrary, Jews were considered a race, and after considering Uganda and Argentina as potential homelands, the Zionists settled on Palestine.

In order to fulfill its "destiny", however, the Zionists realized that they would need the support of at least one great power in order to force themselves upon an unwilling population in Palestine and ultimately expel or eliminate them, as the Europeans had largely accomplished in the great genocide of indigenous peoples in the western hemisphere. For this purpose, they selected Great Britain as it was about to take control of Palestine, and when the Zionists might be able to argue that their support could be critical to British ambitions, both during and after the Great War.

Indeed, Britain served their purpose well, facilitating the settlement of Palestine with Zionist Europeans. Zionist leaders also assisted Nazi Germany in removing its Jewish population and transferring them to Palestine, arguing that Nazism and Zionism had complementary interests. Before long, however, the relationship with Britain turned adversarial when Zionist terrorist groups began attacking the British in Palestine, with a view toward forcing the creation of an independent Jewish state in a territory where they constituted a minority of the population.

Although the Zionists continued to maintain an important support community in Great Britain, they knew that they would need other sponsors, and found their warmest welcome in the United States, starting in the late 19th century. Following World War II, President Harry Truman considered the Zionists to be important enough to his 1948 election campaign that he showered them with whatever they wanted, and especially immediate recognition of their declaration of statehood on May 14, 1948. This event set a pattern for Zionist influence in the US that would be repeated on a vast scale decades later.

During the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, the Israel Lobby, though powerful, could not act with impunity. Eisenhower suspended aid to Israel and forced it to pull back from its invasion of Sinai in 1956. Kennedy supported Senator J. William Fulbright's hearings to force AIPAC to register as a foreign agent.

Those hearings were cut short in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, and Lyndon Johnson proved much more compliant, twice ordering the US sixth fleet to recall its aircraft sent to defend the US naval ship Liberty, which was attacked by Israeli air and naval forces in June, 1967. The Liberty sustained 34 dead and 171 wounded US military personnel, and barely avoided being sunk with all lives lost. However, the entire affair was quashed, with the Johnson administration foisting flimsy excuses upon a compliant American press and public, which accepted them with little question.

Since then, the Israel Lobby has grown with few constraints, fed by its domination of the American Jewish community, extensive control of publishing and the media, the establishment and control of strategic think tanks that provide governmental advisers, and by a well-coordinated and lavishly funded political campaign machine. This machine is now sufficiently influential to assure huge congressional appropriations to Israel that are filled by contractors who in turn show their gratitude by donating to the lobby that feeds them.

This history is well documented in works like *The Lobby: Jewish political power and American foreign policy*, by Edward Tivnan (1987), *The Israel lobby and U.S. foreign policy*, by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt (2008), *Against Our Better Judgement*, by Alison Weir (2014), and other publications and articles. Today, Israel oversees the careers of politicians throughout the US from the city and county level up to state and national races to make sure that no one hostile to Israel achieves significant political office and that its agenda receives overwhelming approval. It prevails upon the gratitude of elected officials to appoint its candidates as staffers throughout Congress as well as state and local offices. It maintains control of news, cinema, television, publishing and other media, so that its narrative will dominate public portrayal of Middle East issues. It even implants both volunteers and paid staff to populate web comment lists.

As a result, Israel is now much more than a lobby. Powerful lobbies may bend a government to their benefit, but their strength and survival ultimately depend upon the health of the country or countries that are their home. In a sense, therefore, they serve the national interest, even if they serve the interests of certain segments of society more than others. This is also why they care little for the health of the countries that they exploit, which are not their home.

It also explains why Israel increasingly treats the US like an exploited colony: the Israeli elite can use the US to their benefit, but it is not their home. Israel now controls US policy in the Middle East much more than it ever did Great Britain, to such an extent that it can often use US resources and power even in defiance of US national interest.

Trillions of dollars and thousands of American lives have been expended to destroy Iraq, Libya, Syria and Lebanon. Did these wars strengthen or weaken the strategic interest of the US and its economy? Would these wars have been fought if not for the Israel lobby in the US? While Israeli policy has been to weaken and destroy its neighbors, it is far from obvious that the same policy is in the US national interest.

To the contrary, until the end of World War II and even until the 1960s, the US was widely regarded in the Arab world as the "good" western power, untainted by colonialism in the region and without Arab blood on its hands. As John Sheehan, SJ said, "Every time anyone says that Israel is our only friend in the Middle East, I can't help but think that before Israel, we had no enemies in the Middle East."

Of course, some will argue that these and other US government policies and actions are in fact consistent with some definition of national interest. That is necessary, because anything that is obviously destructive to the well-being of the country will encounter too much resistance to implement. Every policy benefits someone. However, there is an important difference between those who benefit more than others from enterprise that in fact strengthens the nation and those who benefit from the sacrifices – and to the detriment – of the rest of the nation.

The Middle East wars of the G.W. Bush and Obama administrations are different from earlier ones, including the first Iraq war, primarily with respect to the degree to which Israel supplied the intelligence on which they were based and the extent to which their lobby influenced Congress to act. The Bush administration, for example, is notable for the Office of Special Plans, which was a veritable Israel liaison office in the heart of the Pentagon with extraordinary access to top secret information and in fact set up by Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense.

In fact, the G.W. Bush administration marks the maturation of a program of Israel-nurtured neoconservative influence and control that began at least a decade earlier and coalesced into the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), a Washington think tank that brought together many of the principals that would hold high office in that administration. Although initially derided as fanciful in the Clinton administration and its predecessors, it constituted the first open presentation of plans to orient and ultimately subordinate U.S. policy to the goals and policies of the state of Israel.

The plans took shape as part of what became known as the neoconservative agenda. This was a major departure from the paradigm that began in 1947 with the publication of George Kennan's seminal work counseling the projection of American power in order to maintain an equilibrium of power, (known as the "containment" principle) in international relations, so as to avoid disastrous and dangerous confrontations of the type that characterized the first half of the twentieth century. One may argue the extent to which such policy was effective, but the neoconservatives in PNAC argued that the end of the Soviet Union and the advent of the unipolar world provided the US with an unprecedented opportunity for domination, if only it would pursue a policy of military intervention and adventurism.

It is no accident that the early movement found favor with Israel. Israel quickly saw that neocon interventionism could be made to use American military might to serve Israel's agenda of crushing its real, potential and perceived opponents in the Middle East. The Israel lobby therefore invested heavily in university departments and think tanks devoted to strategic studies and promoting the careers of neoconservatives that became advisers and appointed officials throughout government.

Examples of these are the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, the Hudson Institute, the Brookings Institution, the Cato Institute, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, the Project for a New American Century, the Hoover Institution, the American Enterprise Institute, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (founded by AIPAC) and others. Through their doors have passed the likes of Richard Perle, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Elliott Abrams, John Bolton, Dennis Ross, Douglas Feith, Robert Kagan, Martin Indyk, David Wurmser, Michael Ledeen and many others that have achieved high government office, especially since the start of the G.W. Bush administration in 2001.

Israel's investments have paid off in a big way. Today, all officials elected or appointed to national office are either pro-Israel or must say they are. In fact, they cannot deviate or dissent or disagree with the Israel lobby in any way without risk of losing their career, as Cynthia McKinney, Paul Findley, Earl Hilliard, Pete McCloskey, William Fulbright, Roger Jepsen, Adlai Stevenson III and others have discovered to their dismay. Other prominent figures, like Vanessa Redgrave and others in entertainment and the arts, that have dared to criticize Israel, also find themselves pilloried in the press and subject to fewer opportunities for their professional practice. Those aspiring to careers in mainstream film, journalism and even sports or music may find the doors closed to them if speak out in any way against Israel.

Israel has thus constructed a strangler fig network of roots and vines that is feeding itself from the resources of world's most powerful nation while gradually starving that nation. It is placing itself inside the workings of the US government and society so as to hobble its workings to Israel's requirements under the carefully crafted illusion that they are serving the US national interest.

An example of this is the US relationship with Iran, and specifically the Iranian nuclear program, as set forth in Gareth Porter's book, *Manufactured Crisis* [Just World Books, 2014]. As Porter meticulously shows, although Iran has no nuclear weapons program, never had one and never proposed to have one, and although the US has repeatedly found no evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program and only evidence to the contrary, the US continues to impose sanctions against Iran for the sole reason that Israel wants to do as much damage as possible to Iran and to prevent good and productive relations between Iran and the United States.

Porter shows that Israel has brought to bear its skill in creating forged documents, its influence in American intelligence, its threat of Congressional opposition to administration policies and other instruments of deception and coercion in order to prevent a rapprochement between the US and Iran. Israel's hand can also be seen in US policy toward Syria, the rise of ISIS, the overthrow of Egypt's very first democratically elected government, the destruction of Libya and many other of the developments in the Middle East. If we ask cui bono, Israel will be at the top of the list, at least from its own definition of objectives. Whether the US benefits from a strategic and economic viewpoint is highly questionable, although Israel's allies in the US rarely fail to come out ahead.

There are of course limitations to Israel's power. Even a strangler fig cannot change the shape of the tree. The US has thus far resisted the Israeli attempt to create an actual war with Iran, and it barely skirted direct intervention in Syria, which continues to be on Israel's wish list. Nevertheless, the power of Israel over the workings of the US government and society is unprecedented in international relations that are otherwise as asymmetrical as those of the US and Israel.

Ordinarily the relation is the reverse: powerful nations are infamous for manipulating their vassals and colonial nations for exploiting their colonies. Yet Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu famously bragged that "America is a thing you can move very easily." What Israel has done is to create the potential for a new type of superpower, a small nation that survives and advances its interests by penetrating the workings of nations that have larger economies and militaries, and harnessing those resources.

In fact, Israel appears to be applying this model to other countries. In England, for example, a majority of the MPs of the three major parties belong to the "Friends of Israel" societies within those parties. Similarly, the BBC coverage of Israel and the Middle East is controlled by appointees that are invariably selected for their bias towards Israel. Canada and India are two formerly nonaligned nations that are now governed by parties and coalitions that have sworn allegiance to Israel. In India's case, Israel's promotion of Islamophobia has created an alliance with racist Hindu nationalist parties while making India the world's largest customer of the Israeli arms industry.

Where will it end? Will Israel exhaust the economic and military resources of the US for its own perceived benefit? To what extent did it already contribute to the economic problems of the last decade? Or will Israel overextend its reach and find that the Zionist experiment to create and perpetuate a nation based on dubious historical, ethnic and religious claims and at the expense of other peoples will precipitate the very reaction that it was ostensibly formed to prevent?

This much we know: that if a strangler fig is allowed to thrive, its host will wither and die, and only its form will remain as an empty shell for as long as the parasite continues to survive.

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