

The "Israel Lobby" and the Persian Gulf Wars

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An Egyptian papyrus containing a lost gospel written some 1,700 years ago, The Gospel of Judas, was recently discovered offering an alternate version of the crucifixion of Jesus which, as told by the New Testament, helped fuel centuries of Christian persecution of Jews. Now we learn that when Judas Iscariot turned Jesus over to the Romans, he was acting on orders from Jesus, making Judas not the great traitor, but Jesus' most favored disciple and his willing collaborator.

Judas had become emblematic of Judaism throughout history, of the Jew who would do anything for money, including betray Christians. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* refined the classical antisemitic image of the treacherous, evil, self-aggrandizing Jew into the modern agent of a conspiracy to subvert the great powers of the world to serve Jewish ends.

Now come two of the most distinguished political scientists in America, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt of Harvard, to enlighten us in "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," a "working paper" posted on the website of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, excerpted in the *London Review of Books*. This new gospel bears the revelation that the US embarked on what is now widely viewed as a disastrous war in Iraq largely thanks to the perverse influence of a vast coalition they dub the "Israel Lobby." "The Lobby," we learn, succeeded in skewing the foreign policy of the United States to wage a war motivated mainly by the desire to make Israel more secure while willfully sacrificing America's own national interests. It is this "Lobby," consisting of all the major Jewish organizations, pro-Israel media, Christian Zionists and others, the authors warn, which is now pushing America into an unnecessary and catastrophic clash with the fundamentalist Islamic, terrorist supporting and nuclear arming Iran.

But "the Lobby" could not have succeeded in its grand act of perfidy, we further learn, were it not for the presence in high places in the Bush Administration of a coterie of "fervent advocates of the Israeli cause" a small band of neoconservatives, many with ties to Likud," until recently Israel's dominant right-wing political bloc. The Jewish neocons steered the US military into a Middle East morass out of loyalty to Israel and in betrayal of their sworn duty to serve the U.S. national interest, say these eminent scholars. Indeed, there are Jewish senators and congressmen who work to ensure that US foreign policy supports Israel's interests," rather than America's, they charge. The Jewish pro-Likud neocons, and Jewish organizations, left, right and center, have betrayed the United States and its interests. They are, for Mearsheimer and Walt, the Judases of America, who would drag their government into wars to serve their pro-Israel Jewish agenda.

But like the new Judas, the Jewish neocons are no traitors: their affinity to Israel is not the source of their scheme to transform the Middle East by force of arms. Nor is it their Jewishness which caused them, or their many non-Jewish superiors in the administration, from Bush to Cheney, Rumsfeld to Rice, to pursue their Mideast regime change agenda. Like the new Jesus of the Judas Gospel, who is the real prime mover of the action, the Jewish neocons' Christian leaders have followed a long-standing American tradition of forcibly overthrowing regimes which are hostile to America. Theirs was a gambit to roll back the forces of radicalism and Islamic terrorism in the Arab world by forcibly implanting democracy or America-friendly rule. Their project may be delusional, dangerous and inimical to a clear-headed picture of our best interests, as many now have come to believe. But that same clarity requires us to see that their flawed perspective on America's security stems from a time-honored worldview shared by Jewish and non-Jewish hawks alike, spawning a hundred years of American military interventions and coups d'état in over a dozen countries, including oil-rich Iran in 1953.

Despite their reputation as "realists" in foreign policy, Mearsheimer and Walt give short shrift to an array of material interests which many observers see as heavily influencing US global conduct: the need to secure the flow of affordable oil from the Middle East, given the growing US dependence on imported petroleum as an energy source, and to curry favor with Arab states like Saudi Arabia whose oil production affects energy prices and the overall health of the US economy. Dismissing the leverage of the Saudi, US oil and defense industry lobbies on an administration led by a former Texas oilman and the ex-CEO of Halliburton—one of the world's largest providers of products and services to the oil and gas industries, which has reaped billions of dollars in no-bid government contracts for rebuilding Iraq's oil refineries and other post-war reconstruction—is hardly realistic.

Consider: fully two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves lie in just seven Muslim-ruled Persian Gulf countries (Iran and 6 Arab states, with Saudi Arabia and Iraq the top two). Of the seven major Persian Gulf oil producing states, only two were not US allies, and instead were leaders of the radical anti-American front in the Arab and Muslim worlds: Iraq and Iran. Both have sought to dominate their Muslim Arab neighbors in the Persian Gulf, and Israel, as Mearsheimer's own theory of regional hegemony predicts.

All this is swept under the rug by the new gospel of Mearsheimer and Walt, who prefer to exaggerate Jewish influence by largely blaming Israel and American Jewish leaders for snookering the US into war in Iraq—and next Iran—for Israel's sake. Their polemic echoes antisemitic stereotypes and diverts our attention from the real motives driving our leaders down the perilous path on which America now finds itself.

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