

## *First National Demonstration*

### **Move Over, AIPAC**

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**by Harry Clark**

The annual conference of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee took place in Washington the weekend of May 21-22 and the following week. As usual, the top of the federal government paid tribute—President Obama addressed the 7,000 strong delegates, and over 350 senators and representatives attended. The Rapture may have failed to appear that weekend as scheduled by evangelist Harold Camping, but it descended on Capitol Hill Tuesday, when Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu addressed a joint session of Congress. Congress applauded almost every paragraph of Netanyahu's speech. For the first time ever, elements of the left, namely, Code Pink, organized a conference and a national demonstration against AIPAC, Move Over AIPAC; see <http://www.moveoveraipac.org/>. The conference featured Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, authors of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, which mainstreamed the idea, as well as perennial critics such as journalist Jeffrey Blankfort, Janet McMahon, of *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, and Grant Smith, author of several books on AIPAC based on documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. Several hundreds of demonstrators greeted the AIPAC delegates as they entered and exited the Washington convention center; some groups gained admittance and staged impromptu demos, to be muscled out like Communists from a Nazi rally. Rae Abileah, one of the chief organizers of the weekend, who exceeded much of it, was admitted to the visitors' gallery in Congress. Upon unfurling a banner and denouncing Israel's war crimes, she was assaulted by AIPAC minions before being hustled out by police. She was hospitalized with neck and shoulder injuries and arrested on her sickbed.

Apart from such heroism and the prodigious work to organize it, the MoveOver conference was weak in my jaded view, basically because the left has been running from the “Israel lobby” issue for 40 years. The first false step was buckling to liberal Jewish pressure and letting Helen Thomas bow out. The 90-yr old dean of the White House press corps lost her journalistic career after criticizing the colonial nature of Zionism; more recently she compounded the offense by blunt talk about the power of the Jewish community. One would think Thomas an ideal figure to speak at a rally opposing AIPAC. Her absence

sacrificed media attention and weakened the protest.

There was an “upstairs, downstairs” feel to the discussion of AIPAC. Upstairs, at the plenary session, Professors Mearsheimer and Walt gave their familiar talk. Their book was important, and they mainstreamed the question of the “Israel lobby,” but in the most narrow terms, which they reinforce with each appearance, the price they feel they have to pay to retain mainstream credibility. The left bears a large share of responsibility for this defensiveness, by not making the argument itself.

For example, Mearsheimer and Walt invariably say that AIPAC is just another interest group doing its job. It is nothing of the sort; it is a criminal organization which has operated at the edge of and beyond the law since its inception. Inter alia, Grant Smith has shown this in half a dozen books based on documents unearthed with FOIA. Grant Smith, with Jeff Blankfort and Janet McMahon spoke downstairs, after the plenary, at a crowded workshop on AIPAC. Alison Weir of If Americans Knew, moderated. Code Pink had contacted her about speakers. She tried to get some workshop speakers onto the plenary upstairs, but failed. She had also recommended Stephen Sniegowski, author of *The Transparent Cabal*, about neoconservative influence on foreign policy, but he was rejected.

To their credit, Professors Mearsheimer and Walt spoke to a meeting assembled by Code Pink, supporting democratic as well as elite outreach. Ambassador Chas Freeman, former diplomat in Arab countries, whose candidacy for a position in the Obama Administration was vetoed by AIPAC, appeared on an authors' panel. The US has lost national sovereignty to Israel and its US supporters, chiefly the organized Jewish community. Defense Secretary Gates can visit West Point and proclaim that the days of land wars in Asia are over. He cannot say that the US-Israel relationship is over. The foreign policy “realists” and Arabist establishment are deeply alarmed by that and must be embraced as allies. The AIPAC workshop presenters provided absorbing information. For example, Grant Smith has raised the issue of AIPAC's registration as a foreign agent with the Department of Justice. He met with Heather Hunt, head of the Foreign Agent Registration Act section, and Hunt seemed to warm up to his case and her responsibilities. Smith, Jeff Blankfort, and Hunt and two staffers were sitting at one end of the table. At the other end was an unnamed official, who did not give out his card, and interjected remarks like “AIPAC should have an opportunity to respond to your comments.” Not in court—but as part of the decision to investigate and prosecute. If FARA and FEC law were enforced, AIPAC would be dissolved, in Smith's view, copiously documented. Smith led a demo at Justice on May 23 with 70-80 people. We marched around the building chanting and wrote letters to Attorney General Holder and Heather Hunt at the main doors on Constitution

Avenue.

On Tuesday morning Smith and Blankfort met with the Section 301 Committee of the US Trade to file a petition for damages of \$6.64 billion sustained by US businesses from the 1984 US-Israel Free Trade Agreement. Confidential data submitted by the companies was used in a document drawing up the US negotiating position, which was leaked to the Israeli Embassy, as confirmed by declassified FBI files. The US-Israel trade balance has been consistently negative for the US, when most bilateral agreements are neutral. See Smith's web site <http://www.irmep.org/>.

Overall, the major drawback was that only a few hundred attended. In June 2007 the US Campaign to End the Occupation organized a protest about the 40th anniversary of "the occupation" that drew 5-6,000, still weak. We were told that Jewish Voice for Peace, United for Peace and Justice, American Friends Service Committee and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee did most of the work on that. The much weaker turnout for this suggests that some of these groups simply don't want a national protest directed against AIPAC, despite all the "endorsements."

In his presentation, Grant Smith cited the American Council for Judaism's contributions to the hearings on foreign agents convened in 1963 by Senator William Fulbright, chair of the Committee on Foreign Relations. These were an extraordinary, by current standards, investigation of the burgeoning Israel lobby, discussed in Smith's book *Foreign Agents*. ACJ was the anti-Zionist group headed by the late, great Rabbi Elmer Berger, whose entire outlook absolutely rejected Zionism and affirmed the obligations of liberal citizenship.

This sense is totally missing from the Jewish scene today, including the "left", which, no less than the mainstream, is immersed in what Judaic scholar Jacob Neusner called the "Zionism of Jewish peoplehood". "The Jewish people is my homeland. Wherever Jews live, there I am at home." Thus the event featured "young Jewish pride", singing in Hebrew and baking challah and performing other astounding feats while opposing AIPAC. There were assurances that "AIPAC is bad for the Jews" as if this makes protest permissible, as if protest is not an obligation of US citizens, as if Americans of Jewish background are obligated only as "Jews", which in secular terms is artificial and willfully constructed, Zionist essentialism.

The left is weak and confused about Palestine for lack of universalist convictions and analysis, recovering which is essential to thinking, let alone acting, at 59 minutes and 57 seconds through the eleventh hour.