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# The Role of the Jewish Lobby Toward US Foreign Policy Making on the 2023 Israel-Palestine War (Case of AIPAC)

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## Abstract

This paper examines the complex dynamics of the Israel-Palestine conflict, focusing on the role of interest groups, particularly the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in shaping US foreign policy. The conflict, rooted in historical and territorial disputes, has seen recurrent escalations, most recently triggered by Hamas attacks on Israel. The United States, a longstanding ally of Israel, provides substantial financial and military aid, with AIPAC exerting influence on policymakers to maintain and strengthen this relationship. Through qualitative research methods and literature studies, the paper analyzes the impact of AIPAC's lobbying efforts on US policy responses to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The article finds that the AIPAC lobby is deeply rooted in US policymaking structures, ranging from vice-president, and higher-echelon staff, to parliament members. This article also finds that since 2021, AIPAC has developed its policy to participate in political campaign contributions. Understanding AIPAC influences, the authors note that ethical considerations are crucial to maintaining a strong and representative democracy in the United States. This paper recommends the US to refocus its national interest because such overly foreign influence on national policymaking has the potential to harm America's long-term relationships and interests in the Middle East if the US can't make the barrier for foreign interference toward its national interests.

## Key Words

AIPAC, Interest Group, Israel-Palestine War, US Foreign Policy

## 1. Introduction

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has been a major concern for the international community for several decades. Currently, both countries are still pursuing their own interests and desires, which has prevented the conflict from finding a sustainable peace agreement. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict stems from a long-standing territorial dispute over the Holy Land in the Middle East, an area of religious and historical significance to Muslims, Christians, and Jews. The influx of Jewish immigrants to Ottoman Palestine, which was predominantly Arab, increased after the publication of Theodor Herzl's book, 'The Jewish State,' in 1896. The book introduced the concept of a sanctuary for Jews in their homeland to escape antisemitism in Europe. This migration accelerated after the Holocaust during World War II (Robinson, 2023). In 1947, the UN General Assembly decided to divide Palestine into two states: one Jewish state and one Arab state. Shortly thereafter, in 1948, the Jewish community declared the establishment of Israel as

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an independent state, which prompted increased Jewish immigration. After gaining independence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continued to escalate and eventually involved neighboring Arab countries. The 1967 Six-Day War was a pivotal event in which Israel successfully occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. This led to the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 242, which called for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories as a step towards achieving peace.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has escalated in recent months. On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched an attack into Israeli territory, resulting in the taking of more than 240 Israelis as hostages and the deaths of 1,200 civilians. Shortly after the attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared war on Hamas. This prompted Israel to carry out military strikes in the Gaza region under the pretext of self-defense. Since then, Israel has continued to respond to attacks from the Gaza region, resulting in the deaths of over 32,000 Palestinians, according to data from the Palestinian Ministry of Health (Al-Jazeera, 2023). The increasing number of Palestinian civilian casualties has elicited varied reactions from different countries. Most Muslim countries have condemned Israel's actions and called for an immediate ceasefire. Following Israel's attack on Gaza, the United States has vetoed three draft UNSC resolutions and abstained twice from supporting UN Security Council resolutions calling for a ceasefire, arguing that such resolutions would undermine negotiations on a hostage deal (Nichols & Mughrabi, 2024). This use of veto power was seen as an endorsement of Israel, a close ally of the United States. Furthermore, this action reflects the strong relationship between the United States and Israel.

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has frequently received assistance from the United States in areas such as economics, politics, and the military. This support has been a cornerstone of the relationship between the two countries for decades. Since 1985, the US has provided Israel with \$3 billion in annual aid, making it the largest cumulative recipient since World War II, totaling \$146 billion (not adjusted for inflation). Approximately 74% of these funds are allocated towards the purchase of American goods and services. Additionally, Israel receives approximately \$8 billion in loan guarantees from the US. It is important to note that while financial aid from the US is significant, the primary focus today is on military aid rather than economic aid (Warasti et al., 2022). In 2023, Israel received \$3.8 billion in aid from the United States as part of a 10-year, \$38 billion deal agreed upon during the administration of former US President Barack Obama in 2016. Some of the aid was designated for Israeli missile defense equipment (Al Jazeera, 2023).

US foreign policy towards Israel is influenced by interest groups, such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). AIPAC aims to influence both the US Congress and the executive branch of government to improve US-Israel relations and promote policies that support it (Tonce, 2016). This interest group seeks to support the state of Israel by utilizing financial and political influence in shaping US foreign policy, especially regarding Israel's interests in the Israeli-Palestinian war. Based on the described background, the authors then formulate the question "how does the Jewish lobby influence the US foreign policy decision making in response to the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian war?" Therefore, this research aims to examine the influence of Jewish lobby groups, particularly the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) on US foreign policy during the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian war. To provide a comprehensive analysis, the paper focus on interest group framework. This paper then will discuss US-Israel relations historically, the influence of the AIPAC group in the US political scene, the influence of the AIPAC lobby on US foreign policy, further examining its implications for the Israeli-Palestinian war in 2023, and the last part is a conclusion that summarizes the findings of this research.

## **2. Analytical Framework: Understanding the Role of Interest Group in Foreign Policy Decision Making**

Interest groups can be understood as an organized association that aims to influence government policies or actions. Interest groups can also be referred to as pressure groups. These groups can be non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multinational corporations, or even social movements. Although both aim at favorable political decisions, Interest groups are different from political parties. In the foreign policy context, some interest groups tend to choose to influence decisions from outside the formal political system through lobbying, rather than being directly involved in state administration. They focus on certain clear and narrow issues, with goals and interests focused on a single issue. These groups rarely have the clear programmatic characteristics of political parties, but they are generally organized into social movements with a wide range of formal organizations. This allows them to advocate for their cause through various means, such as public campaigning, lobbying, and directing public opinion, without being tied to formal structures that may limit their flexibility and focus (Heywood, 2013).

According to Dietrich (1999) interest groups play three significant roles that deserve attention in the US foreign policy decision-making. Firstly, they engage in the process of framing issues, strategically packaging them in a manner that captures media and executive branch attention. This process not only places the issue on the political agenda but also puts pressure on the administration and foreign governments to respond. By framing issues effectively, interest groups can influence the direction and priorities of foreign policy debates. Secondly, interest groups assist Congress in the crucial task of policy oversight, particularly in the realm of foreign policy where what is termed "fire alarm oversight" is often employed. In this system, Congress relies on private individuals and organized interest groups to monitor executive behavior and ensure alignment with congressional goals. When these groups identify perceived issues or problems, they bring them to the attention of Congress for redress through hearings, legislative action, or other means. This mechanism enables Congress to remain actively engaged and informed about foreign policy matters with minimal expenditure of congressional time and resources.

Linked to their oversight role, interest groups also serve as valuable sources of information and policy analysis. Leveraging their connections to constituent members and their capacity to conduct focused studies on specific issues, interest groups can often generate information more swiftly and comprehensively than government agencies. This informational advantage equips policymakers with the insights necessary to make informed decisions and formulate effective foreign policies. Interest groups in foreign policy not only shape the agenda through framing issues but also assist Congress in oversight functions and provide valuable information and analysis. Through these roles, interest groups contribute significantly to the formulation, scrutiny, and execution of foreign policy, thereby enriching democratic governance and ensuring accountability in international affairs.

## **3. Research Method**

This article uses qualitative research methods to explain how the application of the AIPAC pressure group lobby to US foreign policy in addressing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The research data is collected through literature studies which are considered to have a good level of reliability to be used as a reference source and proof of the validity of the phenomena that occur so that there is a correlation on the topic under study. The main documents used as data sources come from: (1) Article journals related to the keywords used in the writing, (2) News sources that discuss AIPAC and its influence in US politics. The data sources taken will be over a wide time span, but this article will remain focused on the corridor of AIPAC's influence. To analyze the data,

in the initial stage, data elimination is carried out from the collected materials. The eliminated data are sources that have little or no relevance to the research. In the second stage, the data was analyzed based on the chronology of events. In the third stage, categorization was carried out on the relationship between AIPAC and US policy, and in the fourth stage, conclusions were drawn.

#### **4. Results and Discussions**

##### **4.1. Understanding the US-Israel Relations Since Balfour Declaration**

In 1917, the British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour sent a letter to Lionel Walter Rothschild expressing the British government's support for the establishment of a Jewish state in the Palestinian territories by the Zionist group. This letter is known as the Balfour Declaration, which was also supported by US President Woodrow Wilson. President Wilson supported the Balfour Declaration, which marked the first step in the relationship between the United States and the establishment of the state of Israel, even decades before its founding (History.com, 2018). The Holocaust during World War II forced Jews to migrate from Europe to various countries, including Palestine. Two years after the end of World War II, the United States supported the UN Resolution that encouraged the establishment of a Jewish state in the Palestinian territories. On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion declared Israel's independence, which was recognized by President Harry S. Truman as the first country to do so. Truman's decision to recognize Israel's independence was controversial and surprising, and it faced opposition from Arab countries. One of the factors that influenced Truman's decision was the lobbying and pressure from leaders of Zionist organizations in the US (Meier, 2020).

Truman's successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, wanted to prevent the USSR gaining influence in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the Suez-Sinai Crisis of 1956-1957 involved Israel, France, Britain, and Arab countries. President Eisenhower was surprised to learn of the coordinated attack by his allies on Egyptian territory. He considered the invasion counterproductive and feared it would result in the closure of the shipping lanes in the Suez Canal. In response to the conflict, the US prioritized a policy of neutrality. Eisenhower was concerned that the actions taken by its allies in Egypt could cause parts of Africa and the Middle East to fall under the influence of the Soviet Union, as they saw the invasion as a form of Western imperialism. To prevent the Suez Crisis from becoming a protracted conflict, Eisenhower urged Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to withdraw Israeli troops from the Sinai region. Israel withdrew all its troops from Egypt unconditionally, marking the end of the Suez Crisis after Eisenhower threatened to stop providing aid if the demand was not met (Gilboa, 2023).

Israel is recognized as a country with a special relationship with the United States. This was confirmed by President John F. Kennedy's statement in December 1962, during his meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir. Kennedy directly told Meir that 'the United States has a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East, comparable only to the relationship it has with Britain in international affairs.' In addition to President Kennedy's emphasis on the US relationship with Israel, President Jimmy Carter also publicly acknowledged the special relationship. Carter stated that 'The US has a unique relationship with Israel. It is crucial that no one in our country or around the world doubts that our top priority in the Middle East is to protect Israel's right to exist, exist permanently, and exist peacefully.' These statements from the two Presidents of the United States confirm the strong relationship between the US and Israel and the widely accepted special relationship between the two countries is widely accepted by the leader, people, and many scholars of other countries (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1998). The close relationship between the US and Israel is characterized by a high level of political and military cooperation.

Military cooperation between the US and Israel intensified when President Lyndon Johnson viewed Israel as a strategic partner. He sent advanced offensive weapons to the country and supported Israel's involvement in the Six-Day War in 1967. Israel managed to expand its territory by taking control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during this conflict. As a result, Arab countries demanded the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of a peace deal, which was realized through UN Resolution 242 in November 1967. This resolution was also supported by President Johnson. Israel's victory in this conflict changed the dynamics of US-Israel relations, making Israel an important component of American Jewish identity and strengthening pro-Israel policies in Washington. Under the leadership of President Richard Nixon, the United States provided significant financial aid to Israel in response to their claim that the Soviets were responsible for tensions in the Middle East. In 1973, during the Arab-Israeli War, President Nixon continued to support Israel with aid. Following Nixon's presidency, Jimmy Carter assumed office and played a key role in brokering peace between Israel and Egypt in 1979. After Jimmy Carter's presidency ended, he was replaced by Ronald Reagan. The United States then shifted its focus to the Soviet Union and improved its strategic relations with Israel, raising the relationship between the two countries to a new strategic level (Hammad, 2023).

President Bill Clinton facilitated the Oslo Accords, which required Israel to cede part of its sovereignty to Palestinian sovereignty and withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, the peace negotiations were unsuccessful. According to a US negotiator, Clinton's administration favored Israel, hindering the peace process. After 9/11, President George W. Bush supported Israel's fight against terrorism. In response to negotiations with the Palestinians, President Bush stated that new talks would not occur until there was a change in leadership. Despite Bush's call for a Palestinian state and the election of Mahmoud Abbas as President of the Palestinian Authority, an agreement was not reached. In 2006, shortly after Hamas' victory in the Palestinian legislative elections, the United States and Israel imposed sanctions on the Palestinian Authority and refused to negotiate with them (Hammad, 2023). During the Obama administration, the US aimed to maintain a balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while also negotiating the nuclear deal with Iran. This approach signaled a shift in US policy towards Israel (Looney, 2019). In recent years, the United States has continued to be involved in Arab-Israeli peace efforts, including the Abraham Accords initiated by President Donald Trump and diplomatic talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia under the Biden administration.

The commitment in the bilateral relationship between the United States and Israel stems from several factors, including the strong support of the American public for Israel's security, a shared commitment to democratic values, and a historical relationship rooted in US support for the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. A majority of US lawmakers and officials have long considered Israel an important partner in the region. Foreign aid has been a crucial element in strengthening and cementing this relationship, both in military and economic aspects (Sharp, 2023).

**Table 1.** Total U.S. Foreign Aid Obligations to Israel: 1946-2023 (Current, or non-inflation-adjusted, U.S. dollars in millions)

Fiscal Year	Military	Economic	Missile Defense	Total
<b>1946-2020</b>	104,506.200	34,347.500	7,411.409	146,265.110
<b>2021</b>	3,300.000	-	500.000	3,800.000
<b>2022</b>	3,300.000	-	1,500.000	4,800.000
<b>2023</b>	3,300.000	-	500.000	3,800.000
<b>Total</b>	<b>114,406.200</b>	<b>34,347.500</b>	<b>9,911.409</b>	<b>158,665.110</b>

Source: U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook), the U.S. State Department, and the Missile Defense Agency.

The United States is committed to Israel's security and provides significant security assistance, including \$3.3 billion in foreign military financing annually and an additional \$500 million in missile defense funding. This includes support for Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow, Arrow II, and Arrow III, as outlined in the \$38 billion Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2016. These measures are crucial to ensuring Israel's security. In 2022, the United States will provide Israel with an additional \$1 billion to upgrade its Iron Dome missile interceptor arsenal. The United States and Israel also collaborate on security-related activities, including weapons research and development and joint military exercises.

The economic relationship between the US and Israel is strong, with an annual bilateral trade of nearly \$50 billion in goods and services. This relationship is supported by several treaties and agreements, including the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed in 1985. Since the FTA took effect, the United States has become Israel's largest trading partner. The U.S.-Israel Joint Economic Development Group (JEDG) holds an annual meeting to discuss economic partnership and potential areas of growth, while the US and Israel also engage in scientific and cultural exchanges through various organizations, including the Binational Industrial Research and Development Foundation, the U.S.-Israeli Education Foundation, the Binational Science Foundation, and the Binational Industrial Research and Development Foundation (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

#### **4.2. AIPAC as a Key Actor behind US Politics**

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) wields considerable influence in shaping US politics, particularly concerning matters pertaining to Israel and the broader Middle East region. AIPAC's influence permeates various facets of American political life, ranging from congressional lobbying and campaign contributions to policy formulation and public relations efforts (Lieberman, 2009). At the heart of AIPAC's influence is its adept lobbying machinery, which enables the organization to maintain a strong presence on Capitol Hill. Through strategic engagement with lawmakers, AIPAC advocates for policies that align with Israel's interests, shaping legislation, influencing committee hearings, and rallying support for resolutions supportive of Israel. By leveraging its extensive network of supporters and allies, AIPAC effectively navigates the intricate landscape of Washington politics, ensuring that Israel remains a top priority on the congressional agenda.

In its official document, AIPAC has formed policy agenda to advance US-Israel relations. The listed points outline a comprehensive set of policy objectives related to U.S.-Israel relations and the broader Middle East region. These objectives include providing security assistance to Israel as per the agreed Memorandum of Understanding, preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, opposing Iran's ballistic missile program and regional activities supporting terrorist groups, promoting direct talks between Israel and Palestinians for a two-state solution, supporting normalization between Israel and Arab states, enhancing missile defense cooperation, ensuring Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME), supporting foreign aid budget, boosting civilian cooperation with Israel, and countering efforts to isolate and delegitimize Israel, such as the BDS campaign and anti-Israel efforts at international forums like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court (AIPAC, 2023).

A key component of AIPAC's influence lies in its ability to mobilize financial resources to support political candidates sympathetic to its cause (McGreal, 2022). While AIPAC itself does not make direct campaign contributions due to its status as a lobbying organization, its members and affiliated political action committees (PACs) play a pivotal role in financing political campaigns. By channeling funds to candidates who align with its pro-Israel stance, AIPAC cultivates relationships with lawmakers and influences their positions on Israel-related issues.

This financial backing serves as a potent tool in AIPAC's arsenal, allowing the organization to wield influence beyond the confines of Capitol Hill and shape the broader political landscape.

In US Politics, the AIPAC plays a significant but indirect role. It does not endorse or donate directly to political candidates. However, it is actively involved in educating candidates and elected officials on issues related to Israel and the Middle East. One of the ways AIPAC influences US politics is through its educational efforts and candidate forums. AIPAC organizes events such as AIPAC Political Leadership Forum where politicians can discuss their positions on Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, providing them with an opportunity to articulate their views and engage with voters who care deeply about these issues. These forums can help shape public opinion and garner supports, particularly within constituencies with a significant interest in Israel-related matters. Furthermore, while AIPAC does not make direct endorsements or contributions to political campaigns, many of its members are politically active and may individually support candidates who align with AIPAC's positions. As part of it, this endorsement came from Israel lobby groups which also use public opinion as their lobbying tool. The public opinion they always use is about anti-Semitism. This anti-semitism propaganda plays an important role in the political careers of policy makers in the US. Those who are politically opposed to Israel will be labeled anti-semitic and this will have an impact on their political careers. Public opinion is used by Israel lobby groups to lobby the US political elite through the mass media, which is predominantly controlled by other sympathizers. This can translate into campaign donations and grassroots organizing efforts that indirectly benefit candidates supportive of AIPAC's agenda (Anderson, 2022).

In addition, AIPAC plays a significant role in shaping US foreign policy towards Israel and the Middle East. Through its advocacy efforts, AIPAC influences decision-making processes, including the allocation of foreign aid, diplomatic initiatives, and military cooperation agreements. By fostering bipartisan support for policies that bolster the US-Israel alliance, AIPAC strengthens ties between the two countries and enhances Israel's standing as a key strategic partner in the region. Moreover, AIPAC's influence extends to shaping public opinion through extensive public relations campaigns aimed at presenting Israel in a positive light and garnering support for its policies. Through media outreach, educational programs, and advocacy initiatives, AIPAC seeks to shape public sentiment and create a favorable environment for its lobbying activities (Qaddoura, 2017).

#### **4.3. AIPAC Lobby to Influence US Foreign Policy Concerning Palestine-Israel Conflict**

AIPAC's role in lobbying policymakers in Congress, the Senate and the executive branch is significant. As the only pro-Israel lobby group that is able to compete among other lobbies, AIPAC only ranks second in lobbying ability after the US Pensioners Foundation. AIPAC's lobbying is able to bridge between the national interests of the United States and the interests of lobby groups. The implementation of a pro-Israel foreign policy means that the United States has acted in accordance with their "national interest". For example, AIPAC has a program to make Israel a strategic and rational asset of US foreign policy and to achieve the national interests of both countries in fighting terrorism and preventing Iran's nuclear development. This common vision and mission is used as a legitimizing tool by AIPAC to convince US political elites that Israel is a strategic partner. In reality, the lobby aims to safeguard the interests of Israel, not the US (Mearsheimer & Waltz, 2009). They lobby policymakers within the US government by positioning Israel as a strategic partner of the US and the two countries do have common enemies. Broadly speaking, both countries have poor bilateral relations with Iran, Iraq and Palestine as well as transnational actors such as Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. These similarities are often used by Israel lobby groups to justify why Israel should be prioritized in US foreign policy towards the Middle East.



The Israeli lobby group understands that in making a foreign policy, a president needs advisors and other stakeholders in the executive branch. Lobbying activities are then directed at the vice president and the NSA as part of the decision makers. The lobby group provides information and education to them as input for discussion with the president. This is an indirect method of lobbying the president. The input is in the form of demands to support Israel's sovereignty in the Middle East region because both countries have the same interests. The input will certainly be considered by the president as commander in chief. In making foreign policy in the executive order, not only the president is involved. In addition to political bargaining with lobby groups, policymakers see US hegemony as necessary for anyone, including its allies. Thus, US foreign policy to the Middle East is indeed inseparable from the role of the Israel lobby group. Apart from the executive, the Israel lobby is also important in the legislature. In order for the US government's policy to have formal legal content, the congress and senate must agree to support the policy. It is at this legislative level that high-level lobbying activities usually begin. Israeli lobby groups will try to lobby their sympathizers in the legislature to pass government policies (Ramadhan, 2017).

The influence wielded by the AIPAC lobby transcends mere bilateral relations between the United States and Israel, extending to broader international dynamics through its engagement with influential figures. A notable instance is AIPAC's advocacy for fostering closer ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia under the leadership of Prince Muhammad bin Salman. Known for endorsing Jared Kushner's decision, as a senior adviser to Donald Trump, to recognize Jerusalem and parts of the West Bank as Israeli territory, Prince Muhammad bin Salman's alignment with Israel's agenda in the Middle East is evident. This strategic alliance, encouraged by AIPAC, holds implications beyond immediate diplomatic ramifications. By bolstering relations with a key regional player who shares Israel's stance on Palestinian issues, AIPAC seeks to further solidify support for Israel's interests. The outcome, if successful, could render Palestine politically and strategically weaker, thereby advancing Israel's position in the region. Hence, AIPAC's influence reaches far beyond conventional US-Israel relations, shaping broader geopolitical dynamics through its strategic engagements with influential actors like Prince Muhammad bin Salman (Warasti et al, 2022).

In a recent development, AIPAC established a political action committee in 2021 that allows the organization to contribute directly to political campaigns in US elections. AIPAC and its associated PACs allocated close to \$50 million in political donations and independent expenditures during the 2022 election cycle, coinciding with the establishment of its AIPAC political action committee. This figure is projected to double to \$100 million for the 2024 primaries. Notably, during the 2022 election cycle, the AIPAC-affiliated United Democracy Project, a super PAC aimed at promoting "strong supporters of the U.S.-Israel relationship," invested over \$26 million in independent expenditures to endorse or oppose federal candidates. AIPAC itself contributed \$10.5 million to the United Democracy Project, accounting for nearly one-third of the super PAC's total funds. Throughout 2022, the United Democracy Project concentrated solely on Democratic races, backing candidates who align with AIPAC's views and opposing those perceived to impede congressional support for Israel (Schumer, 2023). AIPAC's aggressive efforts in the early 2020s became the cornerstone to strengthen the influence of Jewish groups in US politics, which is likely to exacerbate the scale of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, especially against Palestinians who are always victimized in this issue.

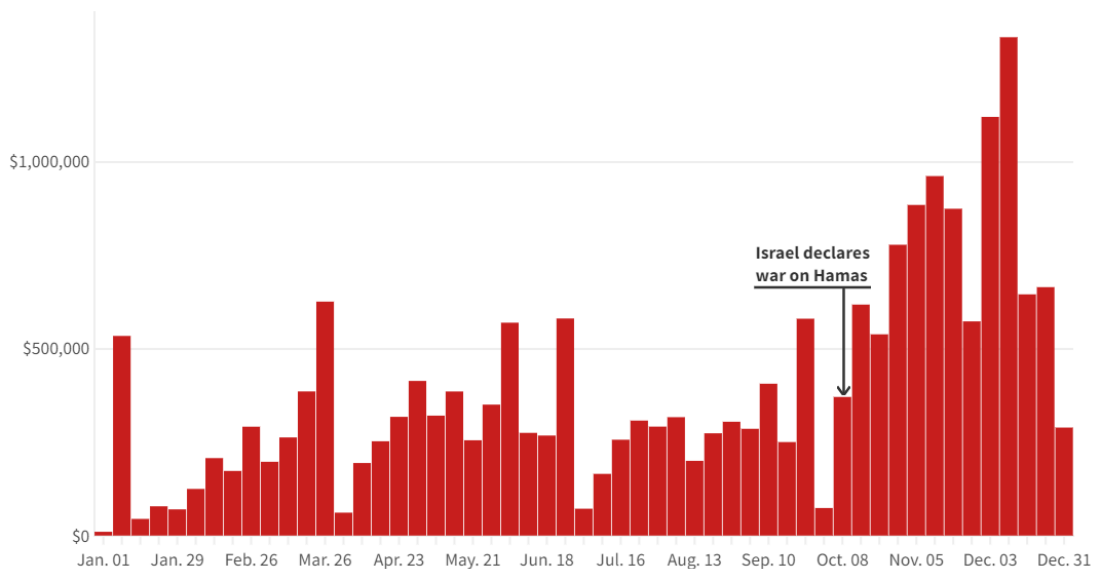
#### **4.4. AIPAC Lobby on US Foreign Policy Making and Its Implications Toward 2023 War**

When Israel began attacking Gaza in response to Hamas' incursions into its territory, the United States continued to provide support to Israel. The US government argued that Israel had the right to defend itself against Hamas attacks, backed by evidence showing that Israeli civilians were threatened. This evidence is used to legitimize the attack on Gaza. President Biden has said that Washington will continue to support Israel's right to self-defense "in accordance with international law" and the US will ensure it continues to work to increase humanitarian assistance for civilians in Gaza (Magid, 2023). However, as the situation has evolved, the military operation in Gaza has been criticized for turning into 'mass punishment', resulting in the loss of many civilian lives and the targeting of civilian infrastructure. Houses of worship, schools, hospitals were affected by the Israeli armed forces' airstrikes. However, US officials have little or no authority to condemn Israel's violations of international humanitarian law. This proves the consistency of the US in emphasizing its support for Israel as a close ally.

Lobbying has a significant impact on the political landscape, policy decisions, and elections in the United States. Organizations such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) have considerable influence on Israel-related policy through campaign donations, media influence, financial support, and opinion-mongering. AIPAC called for increased military aid to Israel in response to recent Hamas attacks on Israeli territory on October 7, 2023. AIPAC identifies itself as a bipartisan organization, and the bills they lobby for in Congress receive support from both Democrats and Republicans (Yuksel, 2023). The Guardian analyzed data from the 2024 US election campaign and found that members of Congress who supported Israel at the start of the war received more than \$100,000 in donations from pro-Israel groups. These members often demanded US military aid and supported Israel's actions in the Gaza region, despite the increasing death toll in Gaza.

Approximately 82% of Congress members have expressed support for Israel, while only 9% have expressed support for the Palestinians since the war. The remaining members have expressed mixed views. It is worth noting that members of Congress who are categorized as supporters of Israel received an average of around \$125,000 in their last election, while those who supported Palestine received only around \$18,000. Analysis indicates that donations from pro-Israel lobby groups have influenced strong congressional support for Israel (Craft, 2024). There has been a shift in the stance of some members of Congress regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Senators Raphael Warnock and John Fetterman, as well as Representative Maxwell Frost, who were previously supportive of the Palestinian cause or neutral, have now taken a more pro-Israel stance. This change in position came after receiving donations and facing threats of involvement in the election from pro-Israel groups.

Following Hamas' attack on Israel in October 7, 2023, AIPAC's political spending nearly tripled, according to an analysis of the organization's year-end filing with the Federal Election Commission. A spokesperson for AIPAC stated that their goal for the 2024 elections is to enhance and reinforce pro-Israel bipartisanship in Congress while defeating anti-Israel critics. During the current election cycle, AIPAC's political action committee (PAC) has spent nearly \$23.4 million, including \$18.9 million in contributions to political campaigns. The committee spent almost half of its annual total in the three months following the Hamas attack, primarily on lawmakers who support aid to Israel. AIPAC's PAC spent an average of over \$275,000 each week in 2023. Before October, this average nearly tripled to over \$740,000 during the fourth quarter of 2023 (Schumer, 2024).



**Figure 1. AIPAC Spending in 2023**  
Source: Federal Elections Commissions (2024)

In late 2023, AIPAC made its largest donation to Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson, exceeding \$246,000. This amount was a significant increase compared to the \$5,000 in donations received during the previous nine months. The surge in donation receipts coincided with Johnson's ascension to Speaker of the House on October 25. The majority of AIPAC's contributions were made in November and December, following Johnson's efforts to pass a special defense package for Israel worth over \$14 billion. In the last quarter of 2023, AIPAC's fundraising increased significantly as the group's spending rose after the events of October 7. Following the Hamas attack, the group raised about \$750,000, more than doubling its weekly average compared to the first nine months of the year. According to the lobbying disclosure form for the fourth quarter of last year, AIPAC increased its federal government lobbying spending. In that quarter, the group spent over \$800,000 lobbying for resolutions and measures that addressed US collaboration with Israel and denounced Hamas and Houthi.

## 5. Conclusion

The recent escalation of the conflict (which has become war) between Israel and Palestine is attributed to Hamas attacks on Israel. In response, the Israeli government launched a military offensive into the Gaza region. The United States has expressed its support for Israel's right to defend itself, as Israel is a close ally of the US in the Middle East region. The relationship between the United States and Israel has a long-established history, with the US being the first country to recognize Israel's independence. Cooperation between the two countries is evident in various fields, including the military and economy. It is important to note that pro-Israel interest groups, such as AIPAC often influence US foreign policy in favor towards Israel. The group assists Congress in oversight and provides information, as well as contributes to the formulation of foreign policy. AIPAC aims to improve US-Israel relations and influence policies favorable to Israel through lobbying, campaign donations, and mobilizing financial resources for political candidates. While lobbying or interest groups are legitimate in American politics, the authors notes that ethical considerations are crucial to maintaining a strong and representative democracy in the United States, acknowledging the AIPAC as a pro-Israel lobbying group that holds significant influence in Washington. The United States' unwavering support for Israel, without balancing Israel's tough

stance and proposing genuine peace initiatives, exacerbates regional problems and makes peace nearly impossible. Therefore, according to the authors, this approach has the potential to harm America's long-term relationships and interests in the Middle East if the US can't make the barrier for foreign interference toward its national interests.

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