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AIPAC, J Street, or JDate?

By [CHUCK FREILICH](#)

Israel's national security is predicated on three strategic pillars: The commitment, resolve and resilience of Israel's people, the IDF and other defense agencies, and the "special relationship" with the US. All three face serious challenges today.

The US-Israeli relationship is largely unparalleled in history, a relationship carefully nurtured over decades and in which AIPAC has played a vital role. It is a relationship under attack from numerous quarters, including pro-Arab and generally left-leaning groups, renowned scholars who write scurrilous attacks on the "Israel lobby," and others. It is a relationship showing increasing signs of "Europeanization," where Palestinians and Arabs can do no wrong, Israel no right, it seems. It is a relationship weakened by well-meaning but dangerously misguided Jewish Americans, who established the group J Street as a "moderate" alternative to AIPAC.

My beef is not over the issues. On some, I agree with J Street. It is about the best ways of ensuring the long-term vitality of the US-Israeli relationship and the security and well-being of Israel.

IT IS presumptuous of our brethren in the US, and frankly offensive, for them to believe that they "know better" what is right for Israel. The Jewish state is a vibrant, pluralistic democracy. Only Israel's citizens, who endure the consequences, bear the responsibility for its policies. The place to change Israel's policies is in Israel, not Washington. A corollary of sovereignty is the right to err. We waited for that right for 2,000 years.

J Street's stated position, that it "supports political solutions over military ones" regarding the Palestinians and "strongly opposes the use of force by Israel or the US" against Iran, is the height of presumption andchutzpa. So was its position earlier this year, during the Gaza operation, when it opined that "escalation will prove counterproductive" and called for an immediate cease-fire.

We all prefer diplomatic solutions. Sometimes it is not entirely up to us; sometimes there is no recourse but military action. The residents of Sderot, now enjoying their ninth month of relative quiet, might question the military expertise behind J Street's assessment. Israel - and only Israel - will decide whether to attack Iran's nukes.

Hopefully it will never come to this, but if it does, J Street had better be behind us.

This is not to dispute the right of Jewish Americans to express their views. Being pro-Israel, as J Street correctly states, does not mean blind support for every Israeli government position. Many Israelis are at least as critical.

I, for one, a fiercely patriotic Israeli, madly in love with this crazy place, have published numerous highly critical articles. Those Jewish Americans, who share a deep concern for Israel's trials and travails, have the right, even the duty, to express their criticism within the

Jewish community, the public at large, pretty much anywhere - except before the administration and Congress. There, we have to present one voice - not "pro" every Israeli policy, but united, unswerving support for Israel and a strong US-Israel relationship.

SOME HAVE criticized AIPAC's allegedly right-wing, "Likud-minded" tendencies, whereas a majority of Jewish Americans are more dovish. This is a fundamental misconception both of reality and of AIPAC's role, which is to promote the US-Israel relationship regardless of who is in office in either country. Some of Israel's policies may be mistaken, but they are Israel's, made by its democratically elected government. AIPAC does not and must not get involved in these battles, but simply do its utmost at all times to strengthen the relationship.

Only "the Jews," with their well-earned and arguably endearing reputation for fractiousness, could conceive of doing something that weakens AIPAC. A model to be emulated, the envy of virtually all other lobbies, AIPAC has been at the forefront of the bilateral relationship for decades.

AIPAC may have made mistakes over the years - who hasn't? But there is a wise, old American saying: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." AIPAC is definitely not broken, and for those who take issue with some of its positions and actions, the appropriate recourse is to work for change from within.

To date, despite the plethora of Jewish organizations in all other areas, the US-Israeli relationship has largely had one voice in Washington. This is as it must be. AIPAC has a devoted, sophisticated, often brilliant professional staff and lay leadership. It simply does not get better.

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The writer, a former deputy national security adviser in Israel and a senior fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School, is now completing a book on Israeli national security decision-making processes.