



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS  
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING



---

Paul Findley: Congress and the Pro-Israel Lobby

Author(s): Paul Findley

Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 104-113

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Institute for Palestine Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2536579>

Accessed: 27-08-2015 16:15 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press and Institute for Palestine Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Palestine Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## Paul Findley: Congress and the Pro-Israel Lobby

*Paul Findley served as a Republican Congressman from Illinois for twenty-two years before losing his seat by a narrow margin in 1982 to a candidate heavily backed by the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Congressman Findley recently completed a book, *They Dare to Speak Out* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill and Company), in which he documents how the pro-Israel lobby helps to shape important aspects of U.S. foreign policy, as well as how it influences congressional, senatorial, and presidential elections. JPS interviewed Congressman Findley on 6 September 1985.*

*JPS: Your book, *They Dare to Speak Out*, has been on the Washington Post bestseller list for several weeks. How do you explain the book's tremendous success?*

*Findley: Frankly, its arrival on that list is a surprise and a pleasant one. I received such candid rejections in my quest for an agent and a publisher that I expected enormous, continuing obstacles in marketing the book once it was out. These still exist in some parts of the country today, five months after the book made its appearance on the market. In the Washington area, most stores now seem to have it and some are displaying it prominently.*

*JPS: Isn't the Washington area, from your point of view, the most important area?*

*Findley: Yes, because it is from this city that much of the commentary about public affairs and about our society emanates. It's the political capital of the*

world, in a sense, and if I had to choose a city in which my book would be well read, it would be this one over any other. Last night I was at National Airport and I found my book on display in the window of the bookstore in the center of the main terminal. I think that is a breakthrough of immense importance. I hope this means that other airport bookstores will begin to handle it as well.

You asked why the book has done so well in this city. There are interest groups here that sympathize and support my endeavors. I'm sure that some of them have bought books, but I can't believe that that sort of supportive activity would sustain a book on the best seller list all these weeks. Last night a man from Utah, a Mormon, told me that he had bought one hundred of the books and had given one to each of the twelve apostles of the Mormon church. Each of them now has a copy from that prominent individual, and he's given the remaining copies to others of a similar standing. I think a lot of that has occurred here in Washington. A newspaperman that I never heard of told me that he had bought six copies to give to friends. That process is bound to stimulate interest in the book.

*JPS: Will a paper edition be coming out?*

*Findley:* I hope so. I've repeatedly encouraged the publisher to do so. I stipulated in the contract originally that he could not do so in less than six months after the publication of the hardcover without my permission. I didn't want the two to compete with each other. About a month ago I sent him a letter releasing him from any such obligation and urging him to go ahead. He's reluctant to at this stage, although I don't think he has any hesitation in the long term. He feels the momentum of sales of the hardcover is good and shouldn't be interrupted with the introduction of a paperback.

There are professors who have told me of their desire to have the book on the reading list for their classes. I think this almost requires a paperback as opposed to a hardcover. I also heard about an individual who is planning to sponsor a large-scale contest among college students, in which the contestants would write reviews of my book. The reviews would then be judged by a panel of scholars. Paperbacks would have to be available if that project is to succeed. There will be a paperback edition; it's just a matter of time.

*JPS: Do you have a sense of how well the book is selling elsewhere?*

*Findley*: Only by total sales. The publisher placed an order for 10,000 additional books, which brought the total order up to 32,000. Of the 32,000, two weeks ago he had about 5,000 left. So he's already thinking about another printing beyond the 32,000.

At a dinner last night, some people from Pittsburgh told me that the bookstores in Pittsburgh are finally displaying the book. Some women are planning to picket one store which does not have the book. People who have a keen interest in Middle Eastern affairs are seeing this book as a rallying point. That will inevitably help sales. I don't think it has really had much of a breakthrough on the West coast, but the way things are going elsewhere, I'm inclined to think the breakthrough will eventually occur. It's astonishing. When we first thought about the book, I thought it would be great if we'd somehow market 10,000 books.

*JPS*: You noted that you had such difficulties in finding a publisher. Why was this particular publisher willing to take a chance with your book?

*Findley*: He's a veteran publisher. He describes himself as a 1930s socialist, he's cause oriented, and he's a great believer in civil liberties and free speech. I think he was attracted to my book because its theme is free speech. His wife is Jewish, so no one could think of him as anti-Semitic. He's carried a variety of books on wide-ranging topics, so his publishing house is not identified as a pro-Arab or Middle Eastern publishing house at all. And he's well respected. His biggest successes so far have been a couple of books that sold about 30,000 copies. Mine is climbing to that point.

*JPS*: The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* both reviewed your book. What did you think of the reviews?

*Findley*: I was pleased the reviews appeared. I didn't expect positive reviews; nevertheless, I was disappointed, especially in the *New York Times* review. I thought it was a very brusque dismissal which didn't deal with the theme of the book at all. The *Washington Times* carried a review just three days ago. Again, it was a negative review and the final line was that Paul Findley is a poor loser. That was a theme that crept into both of the other negative reviews. If that's the worst they can say about the book, I guess I fared rather well, considering the general trend of both papers.

*JPS*: How do you answer the charge that you're a poor loser?

*Findley:* Anyone who has read the book and is open minded can't possibly reach that conclusion because I appear in the text only in an introductory way. My experience, although illustrative of the problem, is not the heart of the book. It is not an autobiography in any sense. It is about American society and how in all of its aspects—not just a congressman from the Midwest running for election, but the whole of the Congress, the whole of the executive branch, the whole of academia, the whole of mainstream America and suburbia—it has been affected by Israel's lobby. I knew it was inevitable that I would be accused of sour grapes because the Israeli lobby often tries to discredit its critics, to attack motives instead of arguments. Frankly, I have been neither surprised nor aggrieved by it at all. I expected a much harsher attack than I've encountered.

When people read the book, they can't possibly conclude that it's sour grapes. Nor can they conclude that it's anti-Jewish. I had the text of the book read carefully at various stages during its preparation by two Jewish friends—one of them experienced in Israeli lobby activity. I wanted to make sure that it was stripped of any accidental phrases that might convey the emotion of sour grapes or anti-Jewish feeling.

*JPS:* Could you very briefly outline the main themes of the book?

*Findley:* Our political system is seriously handicapped by the absence of unfettered discussion of what is best for United States Middle East policy. The Israeli side is the only one that is seriously considered. That's a very sweeping statement, but it's accurate. That is one of the themes of the book.

Another theme is that discourse has been handicapped principally by the extravagant and reckless use of the accusation of anti-Semitism. Our society has permitted the lobby to redefine the term to its advantage. It is an accusation that brings disdain and horror to just about everyone. No one wants to be accused of being anti-Semitic, and the accusation has been developed into the most odious attack that can be made on an American citizen. The lobby has effectively redefined the term so that it implies not just hostility to all Jews—which is the way the dictionary defines it—but also to questioning the policies of the government of Israel. For a while the redefinition was largely limited to equating anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism—an absurd parallel, but one which is, nevertheless, widely accepted: if you're against the Zionists you're anti-Semitic. Now, it's equated with criticism of Israel. Let me give an example.

Bob Dornan, a Republican congressman from California, took the floor a few months ago and criticized certain unnamed New York liberal Democrats. I don't have his precise words but, in effect, he accused them of being more interested in providing fighter planes to the state of Israel than to our own military forces. He made that comment because liberal New York Democrats often vote to cut military spending for this country but, like the rest of their colleagues, always support military spending for Israel. Because Dornan castigated his colleagues in that fashion, he was described on the public record by Barney Frank, a Democrat from the Boston area, as anti-Semitic. It's absurd, but the accusation was made and nobody challenged it.

The lobby's their most powerful instrument of intimidation is this reckless use of the charge of anti-Semitism. That's not just my conclusion; George Ball shares it and I'm sure many others do as well. One of the things that I try to do in my modest, limited way is to respond whenever I see what I perceive to be a misuse in public print of the term anti-Semitism. If someone is quoted in that way, I write to the publication as well as the person involved to make a case that they have misused the term. I think if others would join me in that endeavor, they could help to blunt the intimidating practices of Israel's lobby.

*JPS: Do you think that in the near future more open debate will become possible on the question of U.S. policy in the Middle East?*

*Findley:* It's unlikely on Capitol Hill or within the executive branch. I think there was some improvement in the media during the Lebanon War. It was a turning point for a number of news people. I detect a greater willingness to give balanced reporting and to give a balance to viewpoints in op-ed columns. Unfortunately, exactly the opposite trend has occurred in the governmental system. Thanks substantially to the defeat of Senators Charles Percy of Illinois, Walter Huddleston of Kentucky, Congressman Paul (Pete) McCloskey of California and me, there is less debate on Capitol Hill than ever before—and that's not saying much because there's never been much open discussion of Israel. Now there's no one on Capitol Hill who feels it's worthwhile to speak out. All are convinced they'll pay a price if they do. They look at what happened to Percy, they look at what happened to Congressman Nick Rahall when he offered his amendment, and they say, "What's the point?"

*JPS: Could you describe what happened to Rahall?*

*Findley:* Rahall offered an amendment in May 1984 to cut \$250 million from the appropriation bill for Israel because that sum was earmarked to be spent in Israel to help develop the Lavi fighter plane industry there. The Lavi is now receiving U.S. support amounting to about one billion dollars in aid from the U.S. Treasury. In his amendment, he sought to take out only the \$250 million which was earmarked in the pending bill.

I think he thought he had an amendment that would get substantial support and he had reason to. After all, it involved union labor jobs, because the Lavi is intended to compete in the world market with fighter planes produced by U.S. industry. It involves national security; it involves our military. Nevertheless, he got less than 10 percent of the vote: thirty-nine votes plus his own. The amendment was defeated despite what would seem to be the enormous nationalistic appeal built into it. It was defeated for just one reason: the enormous power of the lobby.

In the wake of the vote, the thirty-nine who voted with him got nothing but complaints from back home. They got no applause. They got complaints from pro-Israel constituents who objected because they had cast a vote that they thought was against the interests of Israel.

That episode illustrates several things. First of all, thanks to the media, the American people really knew nothing about the issue. You can search the files and have difficulty finding a single line reported by any newspaper about Rahall's amendment. It also illustrates the powerful momentum on Capitol Hill in support of whatever Israel wants, no matter what other considerations might be involved in an issue. If it's for Israel, it goes through. It also illustrates the effectiveness of the lobby network. They can tap key people in every congressional district of the country, whether there is a large Jewish population or not. They can get a few quality telephone calls made to members on very short notice either to protest, praise, or urge a course of action. It's a very instructive episode.

*JPS:* How do you respond to the argument that the Israel lobby is just like any other lobby? How does it differ from other lobbies?

*Findley:* It differs from other lobbies in that it is an instrument of a foreign government. It differs in tactics. I realize that some lobbies are given to rather disreputable tactics at times. Lobbies naturally go after their enemies and try to elect their friends. However, I don't know of any lobby that publishes books—enemies lists—intended to intimidate journalists, professors, news media people, people in public life, and retired diplomats from speaking out on the Middle East. The Anti-Defamation League publishes

such a book. So does the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee. I know of no other lobby that has a network on the campuses throughout the United States and trains college students in methods to keep critics of Israel off campus, or instructs students in how to harass speakers who do come on campus. I know of no other lobby that has been so overwhelming, so intimidating as to eliminate virtually all competition. There are many lobbies, but all of them face a countervailing lobby. They're pitched against each other. Lobbies are very important in our governmental structure. I don't want to see Israel's lobby disappear. It has a right to operate, but it should be required to play by decent standards of conduct. One of the methods or tactics it uses with great effectiveness is the reckless use of the charge of anti-Semitism.

*JPS: How does this lobby intimidate congressmen? What is the process involved?*

*Findley:* It operates at all levels. At a very public level, it will focus its enormous, diverse resources against a single candidate, like Charles Percy, and make an example of him, or of me, or of Paul McCloskey. Thomas Dine, who heads AIPAC, is the source of the estimate that 90 percent of the money that came to my last two opponents came from pro-Israel sources. He mentioned that, I'm sure, in order to warn other public figures that if they tamper with the lobby, if they go against its objectives, they can expect the same treatment. They are ready to pounce on and defeat legislators who have a 99 percent record of supporting Israel. They want 100 percent. They select their targets carefully, of course. They decided that I was vulnerable; they decided that Percy was vulnerable. They don't waste their money on elections they can't possibly win.

Those who might think of challenging the lobby see this record and shy away from any challenge to the lobby. Those who voted for Nick Rahall's amendment are probably not going to do that sort of thing again. After all, they didn't win any votes through their "buy America" vote; they just got trouble. I quote a number of people in my book, people on the Hill, who say that Percy's experience, my experience, and McCloskey's experience are intimidating to all candidates for public office.

The lobby's influence works in many other ways as well. It has its friends in every office of any importance on Capitol Hill, as well as elsewhere in government, especially in the executive branch. These people feel an obligation to Israel which others really can't understand. They feel it's their duty, I suppose, to transmit secret U.S. data to the lobby. This happens all the time. No congressman in a group of six or eight can feel sure that what



he says will be kept in confidence from the lobby. As a result, even in private conversations, no congressman from the House or Senate feels free to speak his mind on the Middle East. If he does, he has to assume the lobby will hear about it the next day.

Sometimes the reaction is even faster than that. I cite in my book an experience in which a colleague of mine passed the word to the lobby that I was thinking about an amendment to the aid bill and within a few minutes, two other members of the committee had calls from their home districts from pro-Israel constituents who had been informed about this “Findley Amendment” and were worried about it and wanted a report. The congressmen came to me asking questions. It was a dramatic illustration of the effectiveness of the lobby in getting information, passing it out quickly, and getting a reaction from the precincts very rapidly. The lobby helps its friends; and it has almost instant access to members of the House and Senate. One of the lobbyists told me candidly that he can walk in and see just about any congressman he wants. No other lobbyists that I know of can do that. Most lobbyists figure they’re lucky if they can get in to see two legislators a day. Not so with Israel’s lobby.

*JPS: How do you respond to the charge that American policy regarding the Middle East is—if not totally run by Jewish or pro-Israel forces in this country—at least is influenced to such an extent by them that one can say that it is almost 100 percent in support of, or not in conflict with, Israel’s official policy?*

*Findley:* I talked to Donald McHenry on the phone a few weeks ago. He’s a career public servant, a foreign service officer who served as Jimmy Carter’s ambassador to the UN. He told me that the simple and sad fact is that the United States today is unable to pursue its own interests in the Middle East. That’s a profound and disturbing statement, but it comes from an unimpeachable source. He knows the facts.

*JPS: How long can this go on without its being challenged?*

*Findley:* It could lead us into an awful situation. We’ve had some narrow escapes already. We have one thousand U.S. troops on the border between Egypt and Israel right now. They’ve been there for years, and they’ll be there indefinitely. We lost nearly three hundred Marines in Lebanon—deaths that would not have occurred had it not been for Israel’s military adventurism in that country.

That region has the makings of another Vietnam, or even a much larger conflict involving even the superpowers. If we continue our present course, allowing a small state in the region to control public discourse in this country, in effect decide what U.S. policy will be, we're putting ourselves in the hands of foreigners who could easily lead us into a terrible war.

How long can it go on? I don't think anyone can answer that. My hope is that my book will help break the ice. I hope it will be read by many people in this country, but I also hope it will encourage others to write books and speak out. I'm an optimist and I believe it's possible that the course of events can be changed, that the American people can be informed about what's going on. If they are informed, I have no doubt that there will be decisive political action in this country to bring about a change.

*JPS: There have been comments to the effect that your book might have a negative, unintended result: namely, that it would show to what extent the lobby is powerful, or what it is capable of achieving, and in that way intimidate people and thereby service its ends.*

*Findley:* On the humorous side, a Jewish congressman was outraged—not because his name appeared in the book but because it did not. Those whom I mentioned as effective spokesmen for Israel can use that publicity as a means of raising money for the next campaign; about that I have no doubt. But the lobby is not ten feet tall. It gets more horsepower out of a few people in this country than any lobby in history.

Is the answer to that to let it continue on its course? I think that would be the worst of all possibilities. Will my book discourage people from meeting this challenge? I think not. The fact is that hardly anyone is taking on the challenge today. So what is really to be lost? To the contrary, I receive phone calls and letters—not a great flood of them—but a steady stream from people who are astonished by the revelations in the book and want to know what they can do about it.

We need to face the truth, whether it hurts or not, and rely upon the abiding good sense and resourcefulness of the American people to meet that challenge when they're aware of it. But as Admiral Thomas Moore said when I interviewed him, the American people today don't know what's going on. He said if they had any idea of the grip this lobby has on their government, they'd rise up in arms. I believe there's a lot of truth in what he said; not that they'd literally take arms, but they'd rise up and make a change. So I have never had any doubts about the importance of going ahead with this book.

I.F. Stone told me in an interview that he was afraid my book might lead to an increase in anti-Semitism. But I did my best to write the book in a fashion so as to minimize that danger. It would be unfortunate if people took out their vengeance on all Jews. Many Jews oppose certain Israeli policies. Many have grave reservations about what's going on.

*JPS: What about the potential of the Arab lobby, or the Arab-American lobby?*

*Findley:* It has great potential, but it doesn't have the influence today it could have. I am convinced that a relatively small number of motivated American citizens could counterbalance the lobby. It would take only a few thousand of them, scattered around the country—people who are willing to give to candidates, to keep the heat on them, to run for office themselves, if need be. For example, if the thirty-nine people who voted for Rahall's amendment had received even three or four phone calls or letters from home saying, "Terrific, sure glad you voted for that amendment," it would have taken the sting out of the complaints they got. But they didn't get praise.

The other comment I have is that I don't feel Americans of Arab ancestry have any greater obligation to take on this cause than people of Scottish or Irish ancestry like myself. This is an American issue, and all of us have a stake in it. We shouldn't leave it only to those with ethnic ties to the Middle East to resolve.