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JEWISH PACS: A NEW FORCE IN JEWISH POLITICAL ACTION

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More Than 75 Pro-Israel PACs Today / PACs Give 35 Percent to Republicans / PACs Support Incumbents / PACs or "Jobs For Your District"

Jews have always been active in American politics and government on two levels. Jewish organizations typically lobbied the government, but did not get involved as organizations in electoral politics. On the other hand, Jewish electoral involvement was heavy, but only by individual Jews on a personal basis.

More Than 75 Pro-Israel PACs Today

During the 1980s this situation changed radically with the formation of political action committees (PACs). Practically speaking, Jewish PACs did not exist in 1980. Today there are more than 75 pro-Israel PACs active in American congressional elections. (These PACS tend to have innocuous sounding names so that the political leanings will not be overly visible.) The very existence of these PACs has been controversial among Jews. To some extent, it seems that the first PACs were formed because some Jewish

activists thought the new campaign finance law meant that anyone who wanted to be influential had better be part of a PAC. At the same time, there was a greatly felt need to be influential because of Jewish dissatisfaction with President Carter in the 1980 election, the AWACs sale of 1981 and the problems Israel had with American public opinion after the 1982 war in Lebanon.

All this insecurity made 1982 a banner year for Jewish PACs. Eleven of the fifteen largest pro-Israel PACs were formed that year, and in their first election these PACs were able to claim a couple of major scalps as they helped Dick Durbin defeat Paul Findley of Illinois for the latter's seat in the House of Representatives and George Mitchell of Maine defeat David Emery for the Senate. In 1984, a major PAC victory was the defeat of Illinois Senator Charles Percy, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

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Who are these PACs and how have they grown so quickly? In the 1980 election, there were only seven pro-Israel PACs, and they contributed only \$310,000 to congressional candidates. Only two years later, PACs gave more than six times as much or \$1.9 million to congressional elections. That figure doubled again, to \$3.6 million for 1982-84 cycle. Although more than 70 PACs are identifiably pro-Israel, the action is concentrated in the hands of the largest. The top 15 PACs contribute more than 75 percent of the total financial outlay.

Whom do PACs support financially? Obviously, candidates have to be demonstrably pro-Israel to get anything, but is there any test beyond that? For some PACs, Israel is only a threshold question; candidates have to satisfy the PAC conditions on a range of other issues as well. Generally, PACs that have organized around a single issue are more likely to support Republicans and domestic policy conservatives than those PACs that use a multiple issue test. One good test to identify which category a PAC fits into is to look at the percentage of the PAC's contributions that went to Republicans.

PAC Contributions to Republicans

	1984	1986	% Repub.
National PAC	\$ 750K	446	36
Joint Action Cmte for Polit Affairs (JACPAC)	260	134	9
Washington PAC	192	238	33
Delaware Valley PAC	187	132	33
Citizens Organized PAC	174	121	35
Desert Caucus	142	117	31
St. Louisans for Better Govt	132	62	25
Florida Cong'l Cmte	115	64	49
Hudson Valley PAC	112	91	58
San Fran for Good Govt	111	72	44
Roundtable PAC	107	48	33
Americans for Good Govt	102	101	45
Nat'l Action Cmte (NACPAC)	85	50	10
Mass. Cong'l Campaign Cmte	66	3	4
Citizens Concerned for the National Interest	56	28	82
Total for 15 PACs	2.6M	1.7M	35%

Some reporters have looked at these numbers and concluded that the pro-Israel PACs are doing something unsavory by giving away so much money to Republicans. One hysterical headline on an article by Robert Kutner in The New Republic last May described the PACs as being in an "Unholy Alliance" and said that "Jewish PACs may save the Republican Senate."

PACs Give 35 Percent to Republicans

One may seriously question whether there is anything wrong with the PACs giving about 35 percent of their money to Republicans. After all, about that percentage of Jews voted for President Reagan over Walter Mondale in 1984. Kutner's view that it is somehow wrong for pro-Israel PACs to reflect the diversity of political opinions among American Jews resembles the oft held opinion that the only legitimate Jewish position is the one the speaker himself happens to hold.

The New Republic was not only wrong in principle, it was incorrect on the facts of where the money is actually going. A look at which Senate candidates have received the largest contributions (as of September) from the 15 largest pro-Israel PACs combined make this error clear.

PAC Contributions to Senate Candidates

Candidate	Amount
INCUMBENT	
Alan Cranston (D-CA)	\$ 81,250
Patrick Leahy (D-VT)	52,000
Paula Hawkins (R-FL)	38,500
Robert Kasten (R-WI)	76,500
Bob Packwood (R-OR)	34,500
Arlen Specter (R-PA)	57,500
CHALLENGER	
John Evans (D-ID)	84,500
Tom Daschle (D-SD)	75,000
OPEN	
John Breaux (D-LA)	24,500
Henson Moore (R-LA)	10,000
Harry Reid (D-NV)	52,000
Harriet Woods (D-MO)	50,500

PACs Support Incumbents

One can see that when the PACs support Republicans, they tend to be incumbents. Challengers and open seat candidates, with a few exceptions, tend to be Democrats. This is made even more clear when one looks at the dozen or so races that really will decide whether there is going to be a Republican or Democratic Senate in 1987. For the Democrats to control the Senate in 1987, they need a net gain of four seats on election day.

Races Crucial for Control of Senate

R-HELD

ID (to Evans, D)
NV (to Reid, D)
SD (to Daschle, D)
FL (to Hawkins, R)
NC (to Sanford, D)
MD (not giving in primary)

D-HELD

LA (to both)
MO (to Woods)
CO (to Wirth)
CA (to Cranston)
VT (to Leahy)
Pro-Israel PACs giving to 9 Ds, 2Rs in above 11 races.

The press has been as hysterical about the PACs' growth as they have been about who is getting Jewish PAC money. There is no question that these PACs grew rapidly between 1980 and 1984, but there seems to be a considerable slowing down or perhaps even a contraction this year. If this trend continues through Election Day, it would be perfectly understandable in light of the general state of United States/Israeli relations. The PACs grew, as noted previously, at a time when the relationship seemed a bit shaky. Now, people in both parties are saying that the United States/Israel relationship may be stronger than under any president since Truman.

A pause in the growth of the PACs at this point could be very useful. The assumption behind the growth of many PACs, not just the pro-Israel ones, has been that legislators could easily be bludgeoned or cajoled by campaign contributions. This is a vast oversimplification of the reality of

Washington lobbying, as the realtors, oil company executives and other large contributors, who took it on the chin in the new tax bill, would be the first to acknowledge. Campaign money and active lobbying can be important at the margins or on low visibility issues, but only within a context whose basic framework is set by real world events and by the general state of public opinion.

PACs or "Jobs for Your District"

It would be dangerous for Israel if the general public began to get the impression that the main reason Israel receives so much foreign aid from the US -- fully one-fifth of the total US foreign aid budget -- is because of lobbying by a "special interest group." This feeling is already widespread in some farm belt states. It would be especially tragic if American Jews helped feed this perception. What should Israel's supporters do? I do not advocate the contributors reducing their support for the PACs, but American Jews and Israel would be served better if these organizations were a bit more low-key in their lobbying efforts. In addition, an effort to improve the more fundamental ties that shape the realities which strengthen public opinion context regarding Israel is even more important. The most promising development of recent years is the free-trade zone agreement between the United States and Israel. Why? Because the most compelling lobbying argument for any member of Congress is not "I gave at the office" but "this action will gain or lose jobs for your district." Should one give to a pro-Israel PAC? I would say go ahead, give a little, but to really help United States/Israeli relations, it is better to start a business that either exports to Israel or one that imports Israeli parts for products made in the USA.

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