

# The U.S. Senate & Israel Lobby: An Analysis of the Determinants of Congressional Support for Iranian Sanctions\*

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## Abstract

Since the late 1960's the US has maintained a relationship with Israel that is largely unprecedented in the history of US foreign policy. The United States Senate plays a role in maintaining this relationship and plays an essential constitutional role in foreign policymaking generally. Previous work on the determinants of congressional support of foreign policy initiatives focuses on the electoral connection, emphasizing a role for constituent-based variables when determining a Senators foreign policy votes. However this limited scholarship fails to account for a legislator's perception of the national interest and how this influences their foreign policy positions. Additionally, Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) note that the "Israel Lobby" sways US foreign policy but the extent of this influence on congress is unclear. Using the salient case of U.S. sanctions against Iran, this paper explores the role of constituent-level and elite level variables in determining an individual Senator's acquiescence to the "pro-Israel" position. These findings have implications for causes of the continued strength of the US-Israel relationship as well as implications for the determinants of congressional foreign policy positions more broadly.

Key words: legislative behavior, foreign policy, economic sanctions

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