

The Rise And Coming Demise Of The Israel Lobby With Ilan Pappé

By Chris Hedges – August, 2024

Interview with Ilan Pappé

The Israel lobby wields some of the most influence over American politics than any lobbying group in Washington. As Ilan Pappé, the Israeli historian, professor and author, and host Chris Hedges detail in this latest episode of *The Chris Hedges Report*, the lobby's rise to power consisted of diverging ideological factions uniting in pursuit of their shared interests in controlling the land of historic Palestine. The history and manifestation of this systemic corruption of the Zionist lobby, hyper-dependent on coercion and total control, is thoroughly described in Pappé's new book, [*Lobbying for Zionism on Both Sides of the Atlantic*](#).

Through Pappé's historical accounts and analysis, he dispels the fabrication that Israel was created to protect the Jews of the world from systemic oppression. Those first involved in lobbying for Zionism were separated into two ideological groups; the religious Zionists, who actually believed in a messianic connection to historic Palestine, as well as protecting marginalized Jews, and those who the Israeli author describes as "more cynical"; the imperialists, or those "who saw the theological ideas as a good pretext for fulfilling more secular political roles...they wanted not only Palestine, but also Syria and Egypt to expand the British empire."

Even the Zionists who sincerely wanted to help the oppressed Jews of the world, however, found themselves working with antisemitic bigots to achieve their goal. As Pappé states,

"One of the major motives for leaders of the Jewish community in Britain to support the idea of the Jews going from Russia to Palestine was the fear that these Jews would come to London."

This sordid partnership highlights the way that the Zionist lobby has functioned since its inception. Pappé describes it as a system that **is "a solution for a certain group of Jews that is developed by a certain group of Jews who are not part of that project, but that project serves other interests that they have."**

This idea is embodied in the current state of Israel, and the lobby's obsession with controlling its "allies," as opposed to actually pursuing policies and partnerships that benefit it:

"As we've seen, the way AIPAC decided who Israel's enemies were often had very little to do with the actual policies, which were frequently to Israel's advantage—they decided simply based on how obedient an administration was to the lobby. America's endorsement of the Oslo

Accords was not a milestone on the road to peace for AIPAC, but a testimony to its own failure to influence America's policy."

It is through this endemic toxicity that Israel may very well be leading itself, and Zionism with it, to its demise.

Transcripts:

Chris Hedges: The Israel's lobby buying off of nearly every senior politician in the United States, facilitated by our system of legalized bribery, is not an anti-Semitic trope. It is a fact. The lobby's campaign of vicious character assassination, smearing and blacklisting against those who defend Palestinian rights—including the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé and university students, many of them Jewish, in organizations such as Students for Justice in Palestine—is not an anti-Semitic trope. It is a fact. The passage of Israeli-backed legislation requiring their workers and contractors, under threat of dismissal, to sign a pro-Israel oath and promise not to support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is not an anti-Semitic trope. It is a fact. The shameless cheerleading by most members of Congress of Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu when he addressed Congress in the midst of the Gaza genocide is not an anti-Semitic trope. It is a fact. The U.S. refusal, including in the United Nations and other international bodies, to criticize Israel's apartheid state and routine violation of international law is not an anti-Semitic trope. It is a fact. The well-funded campaigns by the Israel lobby, which works closely with Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs, to discredit any American politician or academic who even slightly deviates from Israeli policy is not an anti-Semitic trope. It is a fact. The massive interference in our internal affairs by Israel and the Israel lobby, far exceeding that of any other country, including Russia or China, is not an anti-Semitic trope. It is a fact.

Israel's lackeys in the political class, along with bankrupt courtiers in the U.S. press are making a serious mistake, however, in refusing to acknowledge Israel's outsized, transparent and often illegal meddling in the American political system and Israel's brutal oppression of Palestinians. It is too obvious and too egregious to hide. The longer the ruling elites ignore this reality and censor and target those such as Rep. Ilhan Omar or Jamal Bowman, who lost his Congressional seat after seeing the Israel lobby pour money into the race to defeat him, the more it gives credence to the racists, bigots, conspiracy theorists and white hate groups, many rooted in the Christian right, who are the real anti-Semites. Israel and its lobby, rather than protecting Israel and Jews, are steadily nullifying their moral and ultimately political force.

Criticism of Israel and the ideology of Zionism is not anti-Semitic. Criticism of Israel's influence and control over U.S. foreign policy, and of Israeli efforts to silence those who champion Palestinian rights, is not anti-Semitic. Criticism of the genocide in Gaza and occupation of Palestine is not anti-Semitic. The more Israel and the Israel lobby abuse the charge of anti-Semitism, a charge the Israel lobby has leveled against Jeremy Corbyn to defeat his bid to be prime minister and Labour Party leader, the more they lose their effectiveness against the dangerous anti-Semites.

But Israel and its lobby do not care if its political allies, including those in the Christian right and the Trump White House, possess warped and racist attitudes about Jews. The sole criterion of Israel and the Israel lobby in determining who to support and who to demonize is identifying who backs the far-right agenda of the apartheid state of Israel and who does not. Genuine anti-Semitism is irrelevant. For Israel, the world is divided along the fault line of Palestinian rights. Stand up for the Palestinians and you are an anti-Semite. Cheer their marginalization, oppression and murder and you are a friend of the Jews. Have Jewish leaders forgotten their own history? Anti-Semitism is wrong and dangerous not only because it is bad for the Jews, but because the dark forces of ethnic and religious hatred, used by Israel and the lobby against critics, are bad for everyone, including the Jews and the Palestinians. Israel has opened this Pandora's box of evils at your peril. Joining me to discuss the history and reach of the Israel lobby in the U.S. and the UK is the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, professor of history at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies and Director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies at the University of Exeter in the UK. who has long been a target for Zionists. His new book *Lobbying for Zionism on Both Sides of the Atlantic* explores how a century of aggressive Israeli lobbying has impacted and deformed the Middle East as well as the political landscape in the US and the UK.

Okay, so Ilan, in the beginning of your book, you write in a history of lobbying for Zionism, you call it a history of prophets, very committed individuals like the Earl of Shaftesbury, who believed they were guided directly by God, and who promulgated an idea that metamorphized into a political crusade. We've kind of come full circle, of course, with the seller movement. You say, before anything else, Zionism was a narrative. Can you unpack that for us?

Ilan Pappé: Yes, definitely, I think, in the history of all ideologies that do transform realities, at the end of the day, you don't start with an institution. Sometimes you start with ideas that are being conceived by individuals, but if they are powerful enough and networking properly with alliances, ideas which might seem very abstract and theoretical, are translated into reality on the ground. Now, these particular people I'm talking about in the early history, if you want, of lobbying for Zionism, were probably made of two kinds of personalities. You had, the more religious ones who were very closely connected to evangelical Christianity, not to all evangelical Christianity, but one particular kind of stream within Christianity. You could call it the restorationists, people who were very busy writing and thinking about the connection between what they would call the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, and the end of time, the return of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead and so on. So this was one group of people who were devoting much of their life, their public life, sometimes even their private life, to push forward something that they believed was a religious assignment. Next to them, people were a bit more cynical about it.

And these were people, you could call them imperialists, who saw the theological ideas as a good pretext for fulfilling more secular political roles. In the case of Palestine, these were people who were not very comfortable or did not support the basic British policy throughout the 19th century to keep the

Ottoman Empire intact, because people in Britain were worried that once the empire collapses, there will be a total war in Europe over the spoils of the empire, especially the provinces in Europe. And they thought that it was good actually, to hasten the fall of the Empire, and they wanted, not only Palestine, but also Syria and Egypt, to expand the British Empire over those areas in order to strengthen both the land and other kind of connections between Britain and its South Asian colonies or interests. So you had these people that probably at the time, did not look very important because they didn't have institutions behind them or organizations, but when we read them in retrospect, we see how their ideas, once they have institutions behind them, become strategies, programs and then affect the life of people in a very significant way.

Chris Hedges: There were two aspects of this in the early years of Zionism that I found fascinating. One is that it was a top down movement. Very little popular support. A lot of this, especially by the wealthy European Zionists, was about moving people under Russian occupation or in Eastern Europe from the shtetls, but not going themselves. And the second was an absolute misreading of the power of, let's call it what they called it, world Jewry. Can you talk about those two aspects?

Ilan Pappé: Yes, definitely. There was again here, I think a mixture of a genuine concern and a more cynical one. I think some of the people, such as the one who is regarded as a founding father, or the main prophet of the Zionist movement on the Jewish side, Theodor Herzl, who I think were genuinely moved by the plight of Europeans, of Jews, I'm sorry, especially in Eastern Europe under the Russian Empire, that as it became more and more nationalistic, that kind of Russian nationalism was also more antisemitic than the previous kind of czarist overall ideas of what Russia was. So I think there was a genuine wish to help the Russian Jews. But at the same time, there was a great worry that the kind of antisemitic policies of Russia, the more nationalist Russia, would push these Jews into the West, into Germany, Britain, and even to the United States. And by the time that these, I call them, the Anglo Jewish aristocrats and the non Jewish Anglo aristocrats, were kind of looking at the idea this mixture of a genuine concern for people who are under persecution, on the one hand, and more cynical worry from waves of immigration, when they were sort of thinking about these issues, the first groups of Jews have already arrived in London, especially from Romania and Russia.

And we have to all remember that we are talking about Russia with the beginning of also Bolshevik ideas and socialist ideas. So they didn't only see them as an economic burden because most of them were very poor, but also people who were motivated by revolutionary ideas that could undermine the political stability in Britain and later in the United States. So you had this kind of mixture of concern and cynical ideas. And I think that some of the people who were involved in this, these aristocrats, you know, especially, I think second sons and third sons, who had more time to deal with this issue, even in this scholarly way, if you want to, fell in love with the idea that maybe the Jews were a nation to themselves, which was both an antisemitic idea and a philosemitic idea, namely, if the Jews are a nation to themselves, they're not British, but if they are a nation to themselves, they can still serve a very important role in

history, especially if you are a religious, pious Christian or Jew for that matter. So you had this kind of mixture of imperialist impulses, antisemitic, philosemitic, I would call it even Islamophobic when it came eventually to decide who would rule Palestine and this genuine care for people who were suffering from racist persecution, and it served different purposes for for different people.

But the most important thing is, of course, and that's what you mentioned, and I think that's very important and I'm not sure how many people understand that. That the one of the major, I'm not saying the only one, but as I say in the book, one of the major motives for leaders of the Jewish community in Britain to support the idea of the Jews going from Russia to Palestine was the fear that these Jews would come to London. This is important, because this is where they would connect with someone like Arthur Balfour, who, in 1905, 1906 was passing legislation in Parliament to make sure the Jews would not be able to enter Britain. This went together between antisemite non-Jews, and Jews who were, I would call them antisemite to a certain extent, against Jews who were not like them, for centuries part of the British society. So Palestine became this receptor for these people, for good reasons and for more cynical reasons, this was supposed to be the place where the problem of Jews, if you really cared about it in Russia would be solved, where the problem of Jews that might come and undermine your social and economic and political stability would be solved, and where Jews might even contribute to the end of time, if you were a restorationist evangelical Christian.

Chris Hedges: And there was a political divide because socialism was an ideology that much of the working class embraced on the eve of World War I, both in Britain and the United States, but the hierarchy, or the leaders of the Zionist movement, were very wary of socialism. And I just want to throw in, because it's a fascinating point that you make in the book, is that eventually the socialist, European socialist movements embrace the Zionist project, and the only people that call it out for the settler colonial project that it is are the Marxist-Leninists.

Ilan Pappé: Yes, it's quite incredible, isn't it? It's like you worry that socialism will be brought by these Jewish immigrants into the heart of Britain, but if these socialists want to try and play, if you want, with socialism in Palestine, that's fine. That's actually less dangerous. And I think that's why you had these kinds of aristocrats or the political elite of Jews who really made it in Britain to the highest positions in government or in businesses, who definitely, if you would talk to them in principle about socialism, they will be very much against it. But if you would tell them that the Zionist settlers in Palestine are trying to create socialist havens like a kibbutz or something similar to that before the kibbutz came into being, they would have nothing against it. And this is the whole game of Zionism. It is a solution for a certain group of Jews that is developed by a certain group of Jews who are not part of that project, but that project serves other interests that they have. And of course, as I all the time mention every 10 pages, so that I don't forget it and that the readers don't forget it, all this is about the country where already someone else lived in it, right? We should never forget that this whole game, whether it was an abstract intellectual imagination or emotional imagination, when it becomes real, political programs all the time

in the background, we should remember this is about a place where already someone else lives as an organic society. But that seems to be a total irrelevant fact to those who try to think of Palestine as a solution, from a theological point of view, imperialist point of view, or even a genuine humanist point of view, looking for a solution for people who suffer from antisemitic persecution.

Chris Hedges: And when it does come up, the Zionist argument, and the argument of those who support Zionism, is that the indigenous population will be better off because of the settler colonial project.

Ilan Pappé: Yeah, absolutely. And I think the other tactic is to kind of downplay the indigeneity of the population by sort of referring to its nomadic nature by less of development, you know, so they can't really have the same aspiration for self determination and nationalism as the Jews. It's kind of a native that is not European, and therefore their collective aspirations do not have to play a very important role, even if they are recognized, in some cases, they're not even recognized. But as I say in the book, some of the family members of the same Jewish aristocrats who supported Zionism, one of the reasons they were against Zionism, the main reason was that they worried that Jews would be blamed for having dual nationality, dual loyalty. But some of them, in their writings, are also against it because they are aware that this is not the land without people waiting for people without land, and they warn that actually Jews would be part of a project, very early on, so to my great surprise, when I found it, that this would be at the expense of the people who lived there. And this was in the very beginning when they heard about Zionism and understood what this ideology means for the people in Palestine itself.

Chris Hedges: Talk about the shift of power. So eventually you have figures like David Ben-Gurion, who lives in Palestine and is organizing he, himself, as a socialist, the settler colonial project and power shifts away from these European aristocrats, these European Zionists, into the hands of figures like Ben-Gurion, that's a very important moment in the history of the Zionist movement. Explain what happened.

Ilan Pappé: Yeah, that is very, very important, because I think they were and I described what I thought was a very important moment, very important meeting in London, in the headquarters of the Zionist movement when they're actually all these members of the Anglo-Jewish elite are being actually told by emissaries on behalf of David Ben-Gurion that they are not leading the Zionist movement. They will not determine what Zionism is or what the Jewish state would be, and their role is really to be a lobby, a propaganda machine for Zionism. There was a very important moment, because what Ben-Gurion understood as, I suppose, some of the leaders of the white settlers in America understood, that while you need the British Empire to set a foothold in Palestine, there will be a moment when the interests of the empire and your own interests will clash. And he didn't want these Anglo-Zionists, who might still be also loyal British citizens, to interfere in the Zionist plan not only to colonize Palestine and to de-Arabize it, but also to cede it from the British Empire and make it an independent Jewish state. So this is the moment where they have to decide whether they are willing to be advocates for a policy that is formulated by Jews that, just 20, 30 years

before that, they had a very lofty attitude towards them as Eastern European Jews, uneducated and just poor people who needs a safe place to be in. But they are becoming their own, they are actually becoming employed by these Jews who are now running the show in Palestine. Some of these Anglo-Jewish members of the elite would distance themselves from Zionism because of that. They will not become anti-Zionists, but they didn't want to serve as the part of this, what I call, the pro-Zionist lobby in Britain.

Chris Hedges: I mean, we'll talk about this later, but at the end of the book, you really talk about the Zionist lobby perpetuating itself at this point, at the expense of Israel, is the argument that you make. But let's go back to what's happened in Palestine on the eve of World War II. You write the catastrophe that befell the Palestinians in 1948—this is the Nakba, when 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed and the Jewish state was founded—was not because Britain decided sometime between 1915 and 1917 to take over Palestine, but because it was persuaded to make Palestine Zionist. I think that's a very important point, because superficial reading of history is often that because of the mandate, Britain controlled Palestine, seizing it from the Ottoman Empire in World War I up until 1948 but you argue that it was always about the Zionist project.

Ilan Pappé: Absolutely. You have to remember that, from a British strategic point of view, before the First World War, the parts of the Ottoman Empire which were important were parts that had strategic value for the empire, like Iraq and Egypt, because they were the connection to India. Or later on when oil is discovered in the Arabian Peninsula, or in Persia, in Iran, that is, then these become very important places. If you would have asked anyone who was kind of involved in strategizing for the empire, they would tell you that Palestine has very little strategic value. So yes, if you were a devout Christian, you would say it has a lot of value because of its religiosity, but strategically speaking, it was not that important for Britain. So I think that there was always a danger from a Zionist perspective, that unless you convince Britain that a Zionist state is good for the British imperial set up, that Britain would be willing, for instance, as it was at times, to share the rule of Palestine with France, or making it a more international place, because it is so holy to all three religions. But I think that's the greatest success of the Zionist lobby, of finding enough important people, among the policy makers in Britain, to convince them that the British interest would be best served not just by having Palestine, but making Palestine a Jewish state.

And I claim in the book that every now and then, more reasonable, I would say, kind of British policy makers were not totally convinced, and that's why the lobby was very intensively working on it, and needed very strong believers in Zionism. And it's very interesting to compare, for instance, how they worked with David Lloyd, who was a liberal and Christian, and how they worked with the emerging Labor Party. So to one side, they sold the idea of the kind of end of time, of the fulfillment of the end of time prophecy, if you David Lloyd would support the idea of a Jewish state, and this would return the days of the Crusaders, bringing back the holy land to Christianity. And to the Labor Party, they sold it as a paragon of socialism. They were very clever, and I have to give it to them. And they really kind of tailored the narrative of what the Jewish state

is to the to the potential allies they needed, first of all in Britain, because Britain was most important until 1948 for the faith in Palestine, and then afterwards, when they understood that the power shifted to America, they did the same in the United States.

Chris Hedges: You're talking about David Lloyd George, the former prime minister who ended up embracing the Zionist project, and as you note in the book, he was also employed by the Zionist's law firm, so he had a financial interest in the perpetuation of Zionism. And it's also interesting that although he was a socialist, his vision or view of Palestine in the Middle East was really colored by the very Christian household in which he had grown up. And he would use these kinds of biblical terms to refer to what was happening in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration, it's well known, this is the commitment, the very short but the commitment on the part of the British government in the middle of World War II to build a Zionist state and appeal to the kind of conspiracy theories that worldwide Jewry in America and could bring America into the war, and the Germans might co-opt worldwide Jewry. I mean, it was a complete fantasy, but it should be noted because it colored British policy. Let's talk about what was happening on the ground in Palestine. So on the first anniversary, this is from your book of the Balfour Declaration, Palestinians demonstrated in large numbers all over Palestine against it.

From that moment onwards, a consolidated Palestinian national movement led by a younger generation of urban professionals and intellectuals, alongside traditional heads of rural and urban clans, commenced an anti-colonialist struggle for nine years, 1920-1929. The activity consisted of petitions, participation in negotiations with the British government, while building a democratic political structure where parties could elect their representatives to an annual National Conference. The consensual position was clear, total rejection of the Balfour Declaration and opposition to Jewish immigration to Palestine, the Zionist purchase of land and colonization from the moment it began. And I think this point is an important one, because much of the argument by Zionists is that the Palestinians had no national identity.

Ilan Pappé: That's right. And I think, as I said before, this is one of the arguments that their supporters used to say, you don't have to worry about the aspirations of the local people, because they don't have these national aspirations. Now, like anyone else in the area, the national aspirations were not, there was no need to, at first, there was no need to articulate them in such an assertive way, because if you look at Iraq, Jordan or Lebanon, it was clear that, yes, you had colonial or ex-colonial powers now having a mandate from the League of Nations, and eventually these countries would become nation states. And you could have expected, from a Palestinian point of view, that the same thing would happen in Palestine, and therefore you don't have a very active, intensive need to articulate a Palestinian national identity until the Balfour Declaration comes with a British occupation, when the Palestinians realize, or their leaders and activists realize, that it will not be a case like Iraq Syria or Lebanon, where Iraqis would get Iraq and Lebanese would get Lebanon, no.

Palestine was promised to the Jewish national movement, Zionism, and that kind of turned an already existing, I would say, more dormant, more evolutionary, Palestinian national movement, and turned it into more revolutionary one, one that understood, as the years go by, during the mandate, that if it remains passive, Palestine would never be their homeland, let alone, they will never be their nation state, and maybe even not their homeland. And that's when they become actively involved in trying to persuade Britain to retract from the Balfour Declaration and actually be loyal to the principle that supposedly, after the First World War, the victorious Allies promised people who were under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire, namely, two principles, the principle of self determination and the principle of democracy, namely, that the majority would decide how self determination would look like. And they said, why don't you apply it in Palestine? Let's apply the majoritarian idea in Palestine and the self-determination for the native, indigenous people of Palestine. And they were told by the British, in your case, this is impossible, because of the pledge the British Empire made to the Zionist movement.

Chris Hedges: Now also because David Lloyd George really saw the expansion of empire as a plus for Britain, the irony of the socialist Prime Minister. We did finally have a revolt in 1936, 1937 I think the British have to deploy about 100,000 troops to crush it. It essentially made the 1948 effort to defy the armed Zionist movement that seized most of Historic Palestine, but it was timing. I mean, that revolt, which was crushed, essentially weakened the Palestinians to such an extent that by 1948 there was very little they could do to resist. And we can talk about that mythic narrative of, what is it, six Arab nations attacking, and that's, of course, hyperbolic rhetoric, given the reality of what happened on the ground. But that resistance, as you point out in your book, was from the inception, originally, it was nonviolent, and then, of course, being cut off right and left and ignored, it erupted into violence.

Ilan Pappé: Absolutely. I mean in the history of anti-colonialist movements, in very few cases, you have pacifist, anti-colonialist movements. So yes, violence eventually is employed by those who rebel against colonization and oppression. But this is a violence which is employed for existential reasons, in order to prevent being colonized, and in the case of Palestine, not just being colonized, but being ethnically cleansed from Palestine. So nobody says that they haven't eventually used, didn't use an armed struggle, but what is, for me, so interesting, and again, this comes to me as one of the achievements of the lobby, that even years later, when you narrate anti-colonialist movements in Africa, Latin America and Asia many years later, people say, no these were noble movements of liberation, whether they were more violent or less violent, and they were right to demand that the colonialist empires would leave the colonies and would allow them to be independent. The great success of the lobby was that many years later, this natural, justified impulse of people to revolt against an attempt to both colonize them and then uproot them, for years, was still regarded as terrorism, for the sake of terrorism, something that comes out of a culture of violence, and not out of the reality of oppression.

And I would say that even today in Britain and the United States, I can find a lot of educated people who would still say, well, what the Palestinians are doing is

really terrorism. And it goes back to that period, because definitely in pro-Israeli narratives in American and British academia, the revolt we are talking about 1936 to 1939 and even the Palestinians attempts to prevent the ethnic cleansing of 1948 are still narrated as the early acts of terrorism motivated by antisemitism and by culture of violence, rather than a classical case of colonized people trying to prevent the colonization of their homeland.

Chris Hedges: Well, when the Zionist militias, pre-1948, attempt to drive the British out, they employ the tactic of terrorism, like all resistance movements, like Hamas. The terrorism, unfortunately, the ANC, the FLN in Algeria, that is in the tool bag, unfortunately, of anti-colonial resistance forces. But, of course, they put a bomb in a satchel or a suicide vest because they don't have an air force. They don't have the tools of, let's call it, state or industrial terror.

Ilan Pappé: But I do think the Zionist terrorism is more like the one used by the French settlers in Algeria when the French government decided to end French rule in Algeria. So this is where the settlers feel that the empire, according to them, should do two things. It should, of course, leave but it should help them to take over the country, which the British didn't do. Contrary, by the way, to history books that claim that Britain, kind of in '48, helped the Zionists to take over Palestine. No, their sin was being actually neutral and not doing anything, which was as bad as doing something. But this is really what is so fascinating about it, that again, the narrative then becomes of the Jewish terrorists becoming the freedom fighters of the future, and the Palestinians still remain in the image in the West of continuing being a terrorist, rather than being transformed in the public eye as so many people were transformed eventually, like Mandela or the leaders of the FLM or Nkrumah, people who were fighting against the, not to mention Gandhi, people who were fighting against the British Empire, and later on, were recognized as leaders of the independent, decolonized world. Somehow, and I think this is the success of the lobby, was not allowing the Palestinians to fall into that category, where you are being seen differently once there is a healthy moral objection to colonialism, when the world is being decolonized.

Chris Hedges: I mean, the only difference is that, of course, the French settlers in Algeria were angry because [Charles] de Gaulle and the French planned to leave, whereas the Zionists wanted the British to leave.

Ilan Pappé: That's right.

Chris Hedges: So throughout this period, and this has crippled the Palestinians, you write, they had nothing equivalent to the Zionist lobby and their leadership had no idea what a powerful enemy they were facing. I, of course, covered [Yasser] Arafat, that was as true for the PLO as it was in the 1920s.

Ilan Pappé: Absolutely, it's quite incredible. And I think part of this naive belief that the leaders had that, after all, they were the majority of the land, of the people in the country, they had promises from the international community, the Arab world was around them and would certainly help them. All that led to

certain passivity compared to the very effective mechanism of the Zionist lobby. But I think I can, in retrospect, unravel, unpack how powerful the Zionist lobby was. I don't underestimate how difficult it would have been for Palestine to understand it. 70% of the Palestinians were living in rural Palestine in villages. World politics were hardly of any interest to them. The idea that someone in London, in Washington was helping other people, foreign people, to plan their uprooting, their displacement, was very far from their agenda that they could not even begin to think about it. And it's very interesting to compare the kind of negotiations which the Zionist leaders had with the British Empire and later with the United Nations and the Palestinian leaders had with them.

The Palestinians kind of keep repeating this idea that, surely, the principle of democracy and self-determination is on their side, as if there is no cynical game that could really be more important than the pledges made to them by the international community, whereas the Zionists all the time assume that what matters is hardly any pledges or any international decisions. You know, even the Partition Plan is very clear that Ben-Gurion tells the people in London, forget about the Partition Plan, what was important is recognition of the Jewish state. But the Partition Plan itself was not important because Israel's border would be determined by the army and the alliances that he would have in the world and so on. It was a very different take on the code of behavior in the region and in the international community that allowed the Zionist movement to build a very strong alliance, and the Palestinians were not able to match it in any way.

Chris Hedges: Before we go on, there's an important point you make, because the Christian lobby, Christian-Zionist lobby, which, of course, is huge today within the Christian right, is a natural kind of ally with the Zionists, perhaps at this point, Israel's most important ally in terms of popular support in the United States. You write an important pillar of this coalition was the white settler colonial community in the U.S., I think that's extremely important, whose elite segments were now easily convinced of the religious basis of another settler colonial project, this time in Palestine. So from the beginning, let's call them Christian-Zionists or Christian fundamentalists, their interests, and of course, they deify our own white settler colonial project. It's been a powerful force in shaping the creation of modern Israel.

Ilan Pappé: Absolutely. If you look at the discourse, the language, the images the early European settlers, some of them, used when they arrived in what became the United States and Canada later on, you can see how much the Bible was a source of inspiration. By naming the new settlements places like Zion and on the names of biblical names and therefore, the identification with a similar act by Jewish settlers came, first of all, from the idea that you are actually creating two Zions or two Jerusalems, one on the mountain and one and one on the land, if you want. And therefore there was this identification of Judeo-Christian kind of assignment to create a new Holy Land, one where the Holy Land was originally and one in a new place. And also it was very easy to associate the Palestinians with the natives that the European settlers met in North America, and that created this kind of ideological, I would say, even mental, kind of association between the two projects, the project of creating the United States and the creation of Palestine.

And then you know, even if you go to higher resolutions, you begin to see similarities in the way the frontier is discussed, the frontier where you know you are meeting the savages or the non-civilized people, and you fight in order to civilize the next space where still the natives are controlling. There's even kind of similar, quite chilling for me, in a way, appropriation of the indigenous peoples' dress code, some of their folklore, food and even a kind of code of behavior, and you appropriated yourself in order actually to destroy the native people through such an appropriation. Noam Chomsky once commented cynically that, at least, unlike the Americans, the Israelis have never called their lethal weapons in the names of Native American tribes that they have eliminated like, you know, like the Apache helicopter. But yes, these similarities in the narrative that justifies the settler colonial project, the attitude towards the natives and the indigenous people, the appropriation of the indigenous history and customs, and eventually, the most important thing, the right to eliminate them, and the justification for that elimination are so similar despite the different historical periods in which these two settler colonial project occurred.

Chris Hedges: So let's go to 1948, and let's focus on the importance of the lobby in the creation of the State of Israel. We should note that at the time of the Balfour Declaration, what was it, 1917 was that the Balfour, year of Balfour, I can't remember. So 1917, so 10% of the population in Historic Palestine is Jewish. Half of them are settlers. Of course, the genocide carried out by Germany, by the Nazis, and then those who survived that genocide, the Jews who survived, often were unable to return home, especially to places like Poland, their houses were occupied. Very similar to what happens, of course, after 1948 with the Nakba, they have nowhere else to go. And this, in a dark way, thrills Zionists like David Ben-Gurion. And so you have the lobby, in the name of the Holocaust, Norman Finkelstein wrote his book, of course, "The Holocaust Industry" and the sort of appropriation of Jewish suffering. But that's an extremely important moment, and here the lobby is key. So let's talk about the lobby, what it did with 1948.

Ilan Pappé: Yeah, the lobby became very effective in several ways. First of all, those who operated the lobby, mostly David Ben-Gurion, but all the people who helped him, they already identified, I think back in 1942, that there is a shift of power as far as the Zionist interest is concerned, from London to Washington. And gradually they understand that they don't have to work that hard in London anymore, but they have to work hard in Washington, because that's eventually where the more important decisions about the future of Palestine would be made and this is when they begin to Zionize, I call it in the book, the American-Jewish community. Which, until then, is not totally thrilled by Zionism in large numbers and its more established institutions are not necessarily...

Chris Hedges: So let me just interrupt Ilan. I mean before the Holocaust, before World War I, Zionism, especially in the United States, had very little support.

Ilan Pappé: Exactly, exactly. And even the Holocaust itself did not create, necessarily, among Jews in America, support for Zionism. It was, of course, a real, genuine concern for the Jews who were genocided in Europe, but the

lobby was working very hard and effectively to connect the Holocaust, or the fight against the possibility of another Holocaust, with American Jewish support for a Jewish state in Palestine. Now, the problem for the lobby was on several fronts. One, that not all the American Jewish community was convinced that building a Jewish state in Palestine would either solve antisemitism or was the right response to the Holocaust. Secondly, in those days, and I think some of your viewers and listeners would find it difficult to accept, but in those days, American policy towards places such as Palestine were still very much formulated by the State Department, rather than by the White House. And the State Department had people that later on, those who liked them and those who disliked them equally would call them the Arabists. Namely, people who knew Arabic, who knew the Arab world and these people identified more than the Palestinians, one should say. And also so the total American support for a Jewish state in Palestine is undermining American interest in the region as a whole. So you had also a much more neutral and professional, if you want, State Department that created a problem to the Zionist lobby, in fact, to the point that even after the Partition Plan was adopted, because the Partition Plan led to violence on the ground in Palestine. Immediately after it was adopted in the end of November 1947, the State Department advised the president and for a while, Harry Truman accepted it, that maybe America should withdraw its support for partition and support one democratic state in Palestine, which, for a few months, was the official American position, until the lobby succeeded pressuring Truman, in an election year, to retract his support for the one state and go back to support partition.

So they had, this is not the America of today. This was a United States where politically, ideologically, you still had some forces at the policy making level that were still doubtful about the wisdom, even the strategic wisdom, some of them even about the moral wisdom, of supporting a Jewish state at the expense of Palestine, and therefore it was very important for the lobby to work hard. Another and final example is the vote in the United Nations that eventually decided to recognize the right of the Jews to have a state in at least half of Palestine, and later also legalized the takeover of 80% of Palestine, although most of the colonized world was still not represented in the United Nations General Assembly. So despite the fact that the United States has a lot of influence on the General Assembly, at that time, even then, there were some member states who were not entirely convinced about the idea of a Jewish state, especially those who were aware about the reality in Palestine. So the lobby was working day and night to A. persuade the president to not to follow the advice of the State Department. Secondly, to use American resources to pressure reluctant countries to vote for a Jewish state, and to make sure that the United States, despite moments of unpleasantness, and I mentioned them in the book, where the United States thinks that the Israeli policy is unacceptable, especially not allowing the refugees to return, despite these moments that the U.S. would maybe talk the talk, but not walk the walk.

Mainly, they can condemn but not do anything significant to change the course of history. This was a volatile moment for the lobby, and this is, maybe we should say this, this is before AIPAC. In fact, I think AIPAC eventually was established in '54 as a far more effective lobby, understanding that they were

very volatile from a lobbyist perspective, there were very volatile moments before 1954 when AIPAC was established. And this is one of the conclusions for that period, that you need a far more aggressive and far more effective lobby so that the bad period of not only Harry Truman, but specifically the Dwight Eisenhower administration will not repeat itself.

Chris Hedges: And we just throw in 1956, the Israelis, the French and the British attempt to seize the Suez Canal. Gamal Abdel Nasser wants to nationalize the canal and Eisenhower intervenes and stops that. That was kind of the end of the British Empire. We should also note that the Arabists, who you talk about, they were one of the first targets of the Zionist lobby, and they were purged from the State Department in the 1950s, Robert Kaplan writes a book about it called "The Arabists," and that's how you essentially, since then, turn Israel-Palestine policy over to figures like Martin Indyk, Tony Blinken and others who are really, in essence, committed Zionists, and their perspective is completely distorted throughout the Middle East by Zionism. Let's talk about 1954, AIPAC is founded. That really is the creation, certainly in the United States, we can talk a little bit about Britain, and I do want to talk about Tony Blair, which I didn't know until I read your book, his political fortunes were essentially underwritten by the Zionist lobby and allowed him, as you point out in the book, to ignore the traditional base of labor, which were unions, which, of course, Blair betrayed the working class of Britain and the union movement.

But let's talk about the lobby, the creation of the lobby, and how it works. We just saw Prime Minister Netanyahu address Congress. I think it was the fourth time, The Congress was, you know, rapturous. I mean, this is a guy, there's a warrant for his arrest, of course, as a war criminal, his ongoing genocide in Gaza. But Congress was always the key. You know, maybe the media was very important, but clearly within the US system, the Zionist lobby realized they had to own Congress, which they do to this day. And if you oppose, even teepidly, the Zionist project, Jamaal Bowman and others, you are targeted and often pushed out of the political system. So let's talk about the machinery of the lobby from '54 onwards, and how it works.

Ilan Pappé: What is so interesting that actually they got the idea from a failed attempt back in 1900, when the Zionist lobby began in Britain, when the first lobbyist in Britain decided to write to every candidate for the national elections in Britain and telling them that they would support them or the rivals if they support the Zionist project in Palestine. Now, in the British electoral system, it didn't work that well, because it's a constituency, kind of, you know, parliamentary system. But this kind of method, which is not the only method, as you say, but it was definitely the principal method was adopted by [inaudible] the early lobbyist for Zionism who worked a little bit with the Israeli delegation in the United Nations, in the trade unions, a guy from Cleveland, originally from Canada, who really developed this idea that you need to connect yourself to early career politicians at the regional level, at the national level, even at the municipal level, and follow their career from the very beginning and offer help or threaten to withdraw help, or give help to their rivals in order to create a long life commitment to Israel. We're talking already about Israel, not just Zionism. And it's incredible, because I think what happened is that it worked. The first fruits

probably were already in the midterm elections in 1954 but definitely through the campaigns that Nixon was trying to, I'm sorry that Kennedy was using the lobby against Nixon in the early '60s and so on. Sorry. The more they see it's working, the more they invest in this kind of system. So it's really, it sounds simple, but it's not that easy to do this, but they perfect the system as they go along, they perfect it. They perfected it. If one can use this term to say this and then there is something that is added.

But I think that only comes after '67, it's not enough to have these connections with the candidates and you hope, of course, that some of them would be really influential people. In the end of the day, they're adding two more elements which are very effective, taking a very active role in presidential elections, almost as I show in the book, sometimes offering to do the more dirty work for the candidates in order to smear the other candidate. And secondly, they begin to understand that they need a permanent presence on Capitol Hill. And as one of them said to me, you needed that to remind our allies, should they forget who we are, it's good for them, you know, to pass over the door he gave a credible kind of image. He said it was important for them to go next to a door to see one of their colleagues being reprimanded by someone from the lobby for not doing the job. You know, it's kind of a system that needs to be maintained at the level of intimidation, also, definitely in the '60s and the '70s, I think later on, it's just by inertia. They're not worried. They think that people know what they should say or should not say, without any need to exert direct pressure on them, and you just have to deal with those who do not understand the message.

Chris Hedges: And of course, they're highly funded. You have these figures, modern figures like Haim Saban and others. We're talking about massive amounts of money. And the American system is a system of legalized bribery, and if you defy the lobby, and we can, let's talk a little bit about Senator [J. William] Fulbright, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He decides to investigate AIPAC's financial affairs and you can lay out what happens.

Ilan Pappé: Absolutely. His main worry there is not antisemitic or anti-Israeli, he's worried of any foreign country that interferes through lobbying in American policy, because he's very much devoted to shaping American foreign policy according to what he thinks are moral values and so on. So he investigates professionally the lobby, and what he reveals, more than anything else, that the lobby is using money that supposedly is being recruited for the less fortunate sections of the Israeli society, the money goes to Israel, but instead of being invested in the poorer areas of Israel, some of it, not all of it, some of it goes back to finance the lobby itself, which is a total violation of the American law. And he publishes, through Newsweek, his findings. And then it becomes the arch enemy of the lobby, and the way to destroy someone is, of course, to help the rival in the next elections, he was a senator for the Senate. And I bring a quote from his rival in Arkansas, who says, well, you know, the Zionist filled my coffers with money. I had no problem, I had no issue with money, he said, in my elections, and he defeated Fulbright. But it's more than that. They kind of defame him, destroy his reputation, and in many ways destroy his political career for exposing the less legal aspects of their activity, and he is one of

many to come, of course, who would suffer a similar fate for daring to challenge the lobby.

Chris Hedges: Before we go into where we are today, because it's an important point you make in the book. The lobby used the arms sales to Jordan, we're talking about the other Arab countries, as a pretext for demanding more arms for Israel. Even today, this quid pro quo continues to be plan B for the lobby. You either stop arms sales to the Arab world, or you concede, but demand compensation for Israel, even after the Abraham Accords, this was under Trump, a set of peace agreements between Israel, the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco, were concluded in 2020, arms deals for Arab countries continued to be balanced by more aid to Israel, making sure the arms race never ended.

Ilan Pappé: This is very interesting. What the lobby found out that the arms industry in the United States does have vested interest in the Arab world, and they are sacred to them, namely the Arab clients, despite their support for Israel, they don't want to lose their Arab clients, and some of their Arab clients, and I talk about states, not about persons, right, some of these clients become richer and richer because of oil and petrol and fossil energy, they can buy a lot of weapons. And therefore, the lobby finds out that even if Israel demands that a certain kind of very important weapons, or the most updated weapons, will not be sold to Arab neighboring countries, the counter lobby of the arms industry is powerful enough to convince presidents not to do that despite the demands of the lobby. So what they do, they say, okay, if we can't prevent sales to Jordan, we can demand selling more weapons and more modern weapons, you know, kind of cutting edge weapons to Israel. So the kind of, and I call it the mentality of the lobby, you need to feel that you are winning. Sometimes, I was very surprised, sometimes these demands to increase the weapon supply, or the arm supplies to Israel are not even a request that comes from Israel. It is what I call the power for the sake of power.

If they cannot do that they might, in their own eyes, they are losing their grip on the Congress. They are not powerful enough. So sometimes they ask for more weapons to Israel in order to show to themselves that there's still a very powerful lobby, because they did not succeed in the first round to prevent the arms sales to Saudi Arabia or Jordan. This is incredible, because the longevity of this lobby is also its weakness, because it becomes an animal by itself. It's not only serving the interests of Israel, it is a powerful mechanism that is living for power, enjoys power and sometimes even forgets what the power is needed for, and wants to maintain the power as its main priority.

Chris Hedges: I think you argue at the end of the book that, and let's put it in the context of the current genocide, where I think that they mask Israel's attempt, and you write about these investing all sorts of money to change perception, control academic studies, intimidate the media, that mask has really dropped away with this live streamed genocide. I don't think it's coming back, but you argue at the end of the book that, in essence, the lobby is counterproductive to Israeli interests itself. So let's talk about since October 7, the role of the lobby, what it's done and I think it's kind of spinning its wheels in the mud. I don't think that it's working.

Ilan Pappé: No, it's not. It's kind of decided to frame as its enemies, young people, conscientious sections of the American civil society, minority groups, people who maybe people mainstream America may consider some of them naive, but very few people would regard them as immoral or enemies of the state. And this is the main problem of the lobby now. Its enemies are people that actually have a spirit that, in the past, America used to admire. Secondly, some of them belong, actually to the American elites, definitely the students and the whole discourse that is brought that the lobby is trying to fight is a moral discourse. Yes, you can bomb a moral discourse to a certain extent. We saw it in the pressure to, you know, on the presidents of universities, or we or Jewish alumni withdrawing money from certain universities. Or can you still use money and force, but you don't really kill a movement of solidarity that has the same impulses that the anti-Vietnam movement had, that the Civil Rights Movement had. You cannot kill it with money. And therefore you're right, they're stuck in the mud, because it's not a question of convincing the American Congress to give more money to Israel or sell more arms.

Yes, they can still do that, but they have never had the right methods, and they will never have, I think, the right weapons, if you want, to fight against systemic changes in public opinion that are based on moral values or knowing the reality, or, as you say rightly, on the daily images of a genocide. There is a limit in the 21st century how much you can do that. And they don't have the kit of tools anymore to deal with it, and therefore, I don't think they will be succeeding unless other factors would not change public opinion in a direction that I think is changing. And of course, they still have the chunk of call it maybe the Trump base in America. They can still unite with them. There's no need to pressure these guys, but they understand that they're losing a very important section of America, that they divided American society.

Chris Hedges: And they've lost the facade. I mean, they may get support from Trump, but they've lost that facade. And just to buttress that point, you write the way AIPAC decided who Israel's enemies were often had very little to do with the actual policies, which were frequently to Israel's advantage. They decided simply based on how obedient an administration was to the lobby. America's endorsement of the Oslo Accords was not a milestone on the road to peace for AIPAC, but a testimony to its own failure to influence American policy. And you make that point throughout the book, that it no longer becomes whether it's good or bad for Israel, but they have to constantly assert their hegemony within the American political system.

Ilan Pappé: Absolutely. And I think on the way, they lost some of their own people, especially those who were more bipartisan in their view, people who were more democratic, or came from the Democratic Party into AIPAC. You know, even Martin Indyk, who just passed away this year, eventually was more against the lobby, and we remember him being a pillar of the lobby.

Chris Hedges: He worked for AIPAC, didn't he?

Ilan Pappé: He worked for them and then he became quite a strong critic of AIPAC later on. So they are even losing some of their own, you know, stars, if

you want, of the past, because they are going too far as a mafia kind of organization.

Chris Hedges: So let's talk about, just to close, where you think we're headed. And I just want to be clear, I mean, you've been, you and I have both been targeted. But this is not a disinterested discussion. We have both been targeted by AIPAC. I think you were denied. Where was it you were...

Ilan Pappé: I was detained in Detroit for two and a half hours, yes.

Chris Hedges: Yeah. I was detained in Newark for about two and a half hours too, even though I had a valid American passport. But let's talk about where you think we're headed. I mean, I think you and this book and Mearsheimer's book are very, very important for people who want to understand how the machinery works. Where are we going?

Ilan Pappé: I think in terms of the lobbying in America in particular, but also in Britain, in a way, I think the lobby is losing its efficiency and efficacy, although it still has the power, of course, to change policies. And I think its major problem in America, and I'm not an expert on American politics, but I think its major problem in America is that although it allied itself now totally with the Republican Party, the Republican Party itself has very strong elements of isolationists, isolationism that even led to a very different kind of more careful policy towards military aid to the Ukraine, not only to Israel. I think the main problem for AIPAC is that not only Israel is not considered anymore a moral asset to a young American generation. I think the most cynical parts of the United States may not think about it anymore as a strategic asset or economic asset, given the way Israel is imploding from within, its inability to deal with its own kind of right wing, the emergence of strong right wing elements that are usurping the government and the state, and therefore, I think we're heading into a very volatile chapter in history of modern Israel and Palestine, where Israel is going to be a very fierce, cruel, brutal force, whose victims would be mainly Palestinians, but not only Palestinians, and it would be very difficult for American administration to consider it as a reliable ally or an easy ally to deal with, although they will be still committed because of their own interests in the area. But I think because of that, the lobby would find it far more difficult to find allies beyond Christian-Zionists, you know, the most basic base of Trump.

They're losing the Jewish community. They're definitely losing the young Jewish community. So in the long run, I do think that lobbying for Israel and Zionism, 10 or 15 years from now, the way Israel is developing, will be a far more difficult job to do, even in an America that may not go the progressive, democratic way, even if it, for a while, will go towards the direction of Trump or the Republicans and so on. It's not an asset anymore for the cynical Americans, for the more conscientious American. I think that we are witnessing the last chapter in the history of that lobby. But I'm a historian, when I say last chapter, unfortunately it means few years, not one year or two.

Chris Hedges: And how do you see the genocide playing out? I don't have an answer to that question, and you may not either. How do you see it? You know, what is the denouement? What are we 10-11 months now?

Ilan Pappé: Yeah, well, I'm afraid to say that the next 10-11 months are much of the same, in the sense that Israel has taken half of its army out of the Gaza Strip, and it's now allowing a kind of an attrition war between itself and what remains of the military force of the Hamas. I don't think they have a strategy beyond that, because they are not willing to go along with the idea, at least Netanyahu is not willing, to go along with the idea of replacing Hamas with another Palestinian government or an Arab-Palestinian government. And anyway, I don't see the potential partners for this anyway. It's a [inaudible] less intensified one than we have seen. But it's incremental, it continues, and I think in the end, and I don't know if it's a year or two or three years from now, it would be something that important regional and international actors would not tolerate. They're still tolerating it, but will not tolerate it now. Not tolerating the genocide could be a regional war with Iran and Lebanon and maybe other factors. Not tolerating could be something we're hearing now from the Labour government, maybe, you know, from the back benches and so on. And we should pay attention to this, of even people in the global states, in the Global North thinking that Israel needs to be treated differently. We definitely already heard it from the ICJ and the ICC.

I really believe that Israel as it stands now doesn't stand a chance of surviving in the long run as a Jewish state. But again, I'm warning that this, before that would happen, before there is a collapse or disintegration, there is a very dangerous period of that state trying to do all it can without any inhibitions, to maintain its power, its survival, and I'm very worried for the short run, including a continuation of the genocide, and not just in Gaza, also in the West Bank. But I really think that if I were a young Palestinian, I would hopefully believe that I'm young enough, hopefully, to see something else in the more distant future. And I really believe in it, not just, you know, it's not wishful thinking. It's not a word of an activist, really someone who follows the history of Israel and Zionism. I'm 100% convinced we are at the midst of the last chapter in this Zionist project in Palestine. And last chapters are violent, they are decolonization kind of chapters. I'm worried and at the same time I'm more hopeful for the long distance.

Chris Hedges: Great. That was historian Ilan Pappé on his book, "Lobbying for Zionism on Both Sides of the Atlantic." It's a tremendous work, I devoured it whole. I want to thank the production team Diego [Ramos], Max [Jones], Sophia [Menemenlis], Thomas [Hedges] and Shawn [Caple]. You can find me at ChrisHedges.Substack.com.