

Biden raises the bar

A war of words has broken out between the Democratic Vice Presidential nominee, Senator Joseph Biden and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

During a teleconference between Senator Biden and members of the Jewish press yesterday, the Democratic Vice Presidential candidate stated his candid opinion that AIPAC does not speak for the government of Israel. Biden's frank comments about AIPAC raised eyebrows in Israel as well as amongst the tiny nation's supporters in America.

The backstory to yesterday's teleconference between Biden and a group of Jewish news organizations involves a broadcast that took place earlier this week in Israel.

One of the most influential news organizations in Israel, Israel Army Radio, broadcast details of a briefing that occurred some time ago during which Senator Biden allegedly told officials in Israel that they should reconcile themselves to the concept of Iran eventually obtaining nuclear weapons.

According to the broadcast, Senator Biden said that he was opposed to opening a new front in the Iraq war -- and he was opposed to opening a new diplomatic front -- due to America's already complicated and costly involvement in Iraq.

In a statement following the Israeli Army Radio broadcast, a spokesman for Senator Biden stated that the report was a "lie."

Yesterday's teleconference was an attempt by several pro-Israeli news agencies to clarify Senator Biden's position on what many in Israel perceive as a threat to their national security by the government of Iran. Sources in Washington report that individuals linked to officials of AIPAC orchestrated the teleconference with Senator Biden.

In Israel the right wing of the political spectrum fears the regime in Tehran. The leaders of Likud, a right-wing party, advocate a pre-emptive attack on Iran to destroy its nuclear facilities. Reports of an imminent US and Israeli attack on Iran persist, and some of the most detailed accounts of this story have been broadcast on Israel Army Radio.

Following Senator Biden's candid press conference, the subject of peace in the Middle East and Israel's diplomatic status vis a vis the United States is moving toward center stage in the Vice Presidential campaign. Senator Biden is now on a collision course with Governor Sarah Palin, who supports pre-emptive military action against Iran.

In her acceptance speech, the Governor of Alaska belittled Senator Obama's preference for diplomatic negotiations with Iran and other states deemed problematic. Governor Palin is well known as an evangelical supporter of AIPAC's ideological cant who is sometimes labeled a "Christian Zionist." Thus, Senator Biden has just maneuvered to Governor Palin's left.

The political fallout may eventually accrue to the benefit of the Obama-Biden ticket, as an increasing number of Americans have read Palestine: Peace not Apartheid by former President Jimmy Carter who has published his criticism

of successive governments of Israel for failing to recognize the human rights of Palestinians. During his term, former President Carter made history by engineering the historic Camp David Accords that established peace between the nations of Israel and Egypt.

Boredom is displacing alarm in the minds of many Americans as voters become weary of the aggressive policies of the governments of Israel. Other American scholars, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt published their studies of the workings of AIPAC in their bestselling book, *The Israel Lobby*.

Another complicating factor for America's perception of AIPAC involved prominent espionage cases such as those of Jonathan Pollard and Lawrence Franklin that involved Israel's intelligence agents engaged in spying against America. These espionage cases have contributed to the transformation of public opinion with many Americans now taking a more circumspect view of the tiny but heavily armed nation that is frequently described as one of America's strongest allies. More cautious views of Israel and AIPAC are now spreading throughout the body politic of Middle America.

There is little doubt that there is now a growing dissatisfaction in America with Bush Era foreign policy that appears to have been driven by exaggerated concerns over the national security of Israel rather than realistic concerns for the national security of the United States. Many scholars of international relations including Mearsheimer and Walt have scrutinized the role of AIPAC in nurturing fears about the national security of the United States that have proven to be unrealistic as in the case of the war in Iraq.

In the United States, AIPAC enjoys a diverse group of supporters that includes the colorful Pastor John Hagee, an evangelical minister from San Antonio who preaches fiery sermons about the Rapture, the Second Coming, the Apocalypse, the conversion of the Jews to Christianity and Hitler's role in biblical prophecy as well as the central role of Israel in the End Times prophecies that appear in the Christian Bible.

In 2007, Pastor Hagee delivered the keynote address to AIPAC during its annual conference in Washington. Earlier this year, Pastor Hagee endorsed the presidential candidacy of Senator John McCain. However, following revelations about the unorthodox theological views of Hagee, Senator McCain rejected the controversial endorsement. More recently, Franklin Graham and his father, Billy Graham, who are both Christian Zionists and strong supporters of AIPAC met privately with Senator McCain, a gesture that is tantamount to their political endorsement.

Many experts believe that President Bush's evangelical ideology influenced his approach to foreign policy. Some commentators have focused on the Islamophobic writings of President Bush's namesake, Reverend George Bush, who was a cousin of one of the president's ancestors who lived in the nineteenth century. Reverend George Bush authored , *The Life of Mohammed*, an antiquated rhetorical attack on the founder of Islam.

President Bush, Senator McCain and Governor Palin enjoy the warm admiration and gratitude of AIPAC, a lobbying group that is now becoming a focus in the Vice Presidential campaign because of the defining comments about the limits of its role in foreign policy made by Senator Joe Biden who is Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In another comment yesterday, Senator Biden raised the possibility of seeking criminal indictments against President Bush. In the campaign to succeed Bush, Joe Biden just raised the bar.

