

There are two principles you learn on your first day in Politics 101. One, politics involves competition between interests. Name any issue, be it wind farms, English curricula, Aboriginal rights or farmers' subsidies, there are groups pushing opposing views. Once this is understood, it is clear the furore over the Mearsheimer/Walt paper on the "Israel lobby" is no more than a beat-up.

Of course there is an Israel lobby. But there is also an anti-Israel lobby, which takes various forms as diverse as pro-Palestinian voices, oil interests or just plain anti-semitism. This contest is inherent in the political process, particularly in democracies.

Two, as individuals and groups, people invariably act according to their perceived self-interest. Hence, if the US government favours Israel's narrative, this is neither altruism nor stupidity but, rather, hard-headed politicians and bureaucrats deciding this is the best course for them to follow. To suggest otherwise is, at best, foolishness. At worst, however, it is something far uglier.

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