

USINPAC: Buying Zionist influence, selling Indian interests

By Zeeshan Farees

The United States India Political Action Committee (USINPAC [www.usinpac.com]) was formally formed as an Indian American lobby group in September 2002. Since then it has managed to attract a surprising amount of attention. In a short span of time it has made its presence felt on Capitol Hill. It has acquired political access by buying power breakfasts with Senators like Richard Lugar and Orrin Hatch. It also throws ‘power luncheons’ for Senate and House Committee staffers. But it wasn’t just the money that bought it the US politician’s attention. USINPAC has been hoisted to its success by two very influential Jewish lobbies, the American-Jewish Committee (AJC) and the American-Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC).

USINPAC has closely modeled AJC and the American Israel Political Action Committee’s political schema and has been working in concert with them in pushing various issues. While the two powerful Zionist organizations have been helping USINPAC navigate the US political scene, it has responded to this nurturing by wholly supporting their agendas, even when those agendas are contrary to Indian political ideology or detrimental to the Indian American Diaspora.

AJC and AIPAC had organized the first-ever joint Capitol Hill forum on July 16 2003 along with the US Indian Political Action Committee. The event featured nearly a dozen Congress members from across the US, diplomats from the Indian and Israeli embassies, and political activists from both communities speaking about the mutually beneficial nature of Israeli-Indian relations. The congress members included Republican Tom Lantos (D-CA) and

Republican Gary Ackerman (D-NY). Congressman Tom Lantos summarized the binding issue of the evening and of the alliance, when he said, "We are drawn together by mindless, vicious, fanatic, Islamic terrorism." Congressman Ackerman then underlined the concerns bringing together the Zionist and Indian lobbies. He said that Israel was "surrounded by 120 million Muslims" while "India has 120 millions Muslims [within]". The conference continued in this tenor with numerous speakers using the words "Muslim" and "terrorist" interchangeably.

Mr. Sanjay Puri, Executive Director of USINPAC, had defined its mission as strengthening US-India bilateral relations in defence, trade, and business. But, as the joint forum with the Jewish lobbies indicated, USINPAC has made Israel the gateway to the US administration. The common ground between Israel and India is being built by defining Muslims as the shared problem.

Human Events, a conservative opinion magazine, had recently highlighted USINPAC under its 'Conservative Watch'. It hailed the Indian American lobbying group as part of 'another new world order' comprising of Neo-Con America and Israel, standing in opposition to the 'New World Order of the United Nations, European Union, and other such organizations'. The American Right-Wing media has good reason to believe that USINPAC is with them in opposition to the rest of the world. Sue Ghosh Stricklett, an attorney and member of USINPAC's Defense and Strategic Affairs Committee, stated, "The terrorism directed against India is the same as that directed against the United States and Israel." USINPAC has helped strengthen the Zionist efforts to equate the Palestinian struggle with 9/11 by adding various Indian conflicts to the mélange. This despite the fact that India has traditionally favored the Palestinian right to sovereignty and the Israeli occupation is becoming increasingly unpopular in most parts of the world. The pro-Zionist stance adopted by USINPAC is a reflection of its sympathy with the Indian communalists who have been brandishing Zionism as an inspiration for an Indian identity based on a mythical (Vedic) history and singular in character.

This political action committee which claims to be 'pro-India' has adopted the Neo-Conservative definition of 'terrorism' as its cause celebre, and has declared the latter to be its

primary legislative concern this year. Sunjay Puri finds no distinction between terrorism in India, Israel and/or the United States of America. "I would argue that the people who bombed the World Trade Center are terrorists and the people who attacked the parliament in Delhi are terrorists and the people who make those attacks in Jerusalem and other parts of Israel are terrorists," he stated.

The US India Political Action Committee's sympathy for and solidarity with the Neo-Con agenda is quite apparent in its support of AJC's backing of the USA Patriot Act. This political stand has cost AJC some of its allies among civil rights groups who have been condemning the Patriot Act as an assault on civil liberties. USINPAC, on the other hand, has consistently failed to condemn the Patriot Act despite the fact that immigrants, including those in the Indian immigrant community, have proven extremely vulnerable to its excesses. USINPAC's support at such a time has prompted AJC to call it one of the most important relationships for American Jewish lobbying groups.

Thus, USINPAC has been displaying unequivocal support to its political mentors. One of the latest in that series is its controversial support for the HR3077 bill, titled The International Higher Education Act of 2003 [<http://www.theorator.com/bills108/hr3077.html>]. The bill proposes amendments to Title VI funding for international studies programs at U.S. universities. It is a measure to convince the House of Representatives to create a monitoring committee for controlling the work of university professors focussing on world affairs. The bill is being promoted by groups whose main goal is to effectively police academic work and impose an ideological agenda on university teaching, research and writing about issues affecting the US policy on foreign affairs.

Section 6 of HR 3077 establishes an International Higher Education Advisory Board, which "shall provide advice, counsel and recommendations to the Secretary and the Congress on international education issues for higher education." The apparent intent of this 'advisory board' is to provide a limitation of programs that teach the accepted ruling party doctrine. The seven members of such an 'advisory board' will have investigative and monitoring powers. The 'advisory board' envisioned by the Bill would be independent from

the Department of Education, which has thus far been responsible for overseeing the federal funding of educational programs. This creates a potential for skewing academic study in particular ideological directions and making it very difficult for independent and critical voices to be heard. These powers are meant to intimidate US academics and administrators. Some institutions are already talking of turning down Federal money, preferring to cut back on their programs instead of putting up with such potentially intimidatory tactics.

The Subcommittee on Select Education, which presented the bill to the Congress, used the testimony of people like Stanley Kurtz

[<http://edworkforce.house.gov/hearings/108th/sed/titlevi61903/kurtz.htm>] to convince the Representatives of the need for such a monitoring body. In addition to Kurtz, this legislation is being pushed by a number of other neo- conservative personalities, including Martin Kramer and Daniel Pipes [www.danielpipes.org]. While the direct target of these testimonies are the Middle East centers of international studies, centres of South Asia Studies will also be equally vulnerable. ¹

The Federal funding provided by Title VI has helped the benefiting centers in playing a central role in developing public understanding of economic, defense and foreign policy issues. These studies programs help in preparing diplomats and other experts in foreign affairs and in providing critical analysis for US national decision-making. University programs that provide training in the less commonly taught languages and world areas,

¹ Editorial note: South Asia Studies in the American academy has recently, and not coincidentally, been the target of severe criticism by other ‘soft-Hindutva’ forces/individuals of the American Diaspora such as Rajiv Malhotra of the **Infinity Foundation** [<http://infinityfoundation.com/index.shtml>] for being too critical of Hinduism and India. The forces of hard and soft Hindutva have in fact been marshalling their forces against ‘Left’ (which they read as communist, anti-Hindu and anti-Indian) academics and intellectuals and coordinating their efforts in India and abroad. The organised reaction to the appointment of Romilla Thapar as the first holder of the prestigious Kluge Chair at the Library of Congress earlier this year was one example of this attack; the razing of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune by Shiv Sena goons in retaliation for a book on Shivaji which was based on sources preserved at the Institute, and the reaction to Paul Courtwright’s recently-published book on Ganesh yet another].

including those of strategic interest, would not exist without Title VI funding. These programs train 78% of the graduate students in the least commonly taught languages, such as those for which national security agencies have identified shortfalls (Hindi and Urdu are two such languages). The already under-funded South Asia Studies programs will suffer immensely if federal funding for them is controlled by a select group's narrow world view; the increased political control will adversely affect teaching and research by scholars of South Asia at US universities. USINPAC's support of such a measure which is of no benefit to India-US relations; in fact, by undermining the objective and critical study of South Asia (and particularly India) it is actually a potential threat to the interests of the Indian Diaspora.

The US Indian Political Action Committee's website carries the slogan, "Let Indian American voices be heard". So far it has pumped the Zionist shill, accepted the Neo-Conservative propaganda as its speaking point, made India a big market for US-Israeli weapons and trampled over the concerns of the secular Indians. If anything, the voice that it has consistently ignored in this orchestra of power is the Indian voice – the voice of the millions of Indians and Indian Americans who do not subscribe to the narrow, chauvinistic politics of USINPAC and its Zionist and Neo-Conservative allies.

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