

The Wrong Villain

by [Kendra Mallock](#) (February 2026)



From Salvador Dalí's "Aliyah, the Rebirth of Israel" series

AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) has become a favorite villain of the left. In their telling, it represents

shadowy money, foreign control, and the corruption of American democracy. This narrative only works if you refuse to look at where real foreign influence in Washington comes from.

AIPAC is not a foreign agent. It is not registered under the [Foreign Agents Registration Act](#) (FARA). It is funded by American citizens who support a strong U.S.–Israel relationship and choose to advocate for it openly, through legal political channels. This may irritate its critics, but irritation does not make something illegitimate. This is civic participation in a democracy.

If the concern is truly “foreign influence,” the real story lies elsewhere.

Under FARA—the law that tracks foreign governments paying for influence in the United States—the biggest spenders are not Israel, but [wealthy Gulf states](#). Qatar alone has spent [hundreds of millions of dollars](#) hiring elite lobbying and public-relations firms to shape U.S. policy and perception. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have done the same, retaining top Washington firms to advance their strategic interests. This is documented, registered foreign influence—state money deployed deliberately to gain access and shape outcomes.

That number alone should force an honest reset. If AIPAC were the problem, critics would be obsessing over these figures. They rarely do.

Why? Because AIPAC's influence is visible. It operates in the open. Its donations are reported through the [Federal Election Commission](#). Its positions are public. That makes it an easy target. But real power often prefers to operate quietly.



Unfortunately, the criticism doesn't come from the left alone.

Recently, parts of the right have joined in as well. Media figures such as [Tucker Carlson](#) and [Megyn Kelly](#), along with political voices like [Thomas Massie](#), [Matt Gaetz](#), and [Marjorie Taylor Greene](#), have folded AIPAC into broader critiques of "establishment power" or "foreign influence" in Washington. But if you step back, a pattern shows up. What really unites these critiques is hostility toward Israel itself. They say they're just objecting to "policy," but the policies they mean are always the same—Israel defending itself against people who openly want it destroyed. No real alternative is ever offered, because the only alternative is obvious: letting Israel take more attacks and casualties. So "policy disagreement" ends up doing a lot of heavy lifting here. It sounds *reasonable*, it sounds *measured*. But what it really masks is opposition to Israel's right to defend itself at all.

And with Carlson in particular, you see this move in another way. He doesn't usually state replacement theology outright, but he repeatedly brings on guests who push it, lets them lay it out at length, and rarely challenges it. Over time, that moves the conversation from politics to something

deeper—questioning whether Jewish national existence is legitimate in the first place. Once you get there, attacking AIPAC isn't about lobbying—it's about delegitimizing Israel.

Consider CAIR, often described as the “Muslim equivalent” of AIPAC. Even setting aside the well-documented controversies surrounding its historical ties to networks associated with the Muslim Brotherhood—including its listing as an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation [terror-financing case*](#) (a designation CAIR disputes)—the comparison still collapses. CAIR simply does not operate at AIPAC's scale. It lacks the deep donor infrastructure, bipartisan relationships, and political machinery that AIPAC has built over decades.

While CAIR participates actively in advocacy and outreach, there's no public evidence that it commands a vast donor base comparable to major lobbies; its relatively smaller organizational scale reinforces this difference in influence.

But this does not mean Muslim influence in America is small. It just operates differently.

Rather than centralized lobbying, influence increasingly flows through demographic and institutional channels. Massive investments in property acquisition, mosque construction, and community infrastructure reshape neighborhoods and local politics. Zoning boards, school districts, city councils—these are long games. Influence built through population and real estate is far more durable than a campaign donation.

At elite institutions, the pattern becomes even clearer. Foreign Muslim-majority governments fund entire university buildings, endowed chairs, and academic departments—especially in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies. Qatar alone has [poured billions](#) into Western universities, shaping hiring, research agendas, and curriculum framing. These are not neutral gifts. When a regional studies center carries Gulf-state funding, it inevitably reflects donor priorities. This influence happens

upstream, long before public opinion ever reaches Congress.

Notice what we don't see.

Israel does not fund American universities this way. Individual Jewish donors may fund hospitals, medical research, or law schools—projects aimed at universal benefit. There is no Israeli state program underwriting “Israel Studies” departments across the country to control narrative framing.

And then there is media influence.

Qatar and other regimes have spent enormous sums not just on lobbyists, but on [PR firms, consultants, and media strategy](#). When a trusted outlet or recognizable anchor consistently echoes a regime's preferred framing, that influence is worth far more than a campaign donation. It shapes public perception itself. By the time legislation is debated, the narrative terrain has already been prepared.

This kind of influence is harder to trace. It does not show up neatly in campaign finance reports. But it is arguably the most consequential form of power there is.

So let's be honest.

AIPAC's money is domestic. It comes from American citizens and is disclosed. It can be countered at the ballot box and people can argue against it publicly. That is *democracy*.

Qatar's money is foreign. It flows through lobbying contracts, university endowments, media shaping, and institutional capture. It is strategic, quiet, and long-term. That is *power*.

When critics fixate on AIPAC while ignoring: massive Gulf-state lobbying operations, university funding that shapes curriculum, real estate consolidation, and media influence campaigns, it becomes clear this isn't about principle—it's about narrative.

AIPAC is powerful because many Americans support the U.S.–Israel alliance. That’s the part critics refuse to acknowledge. It is easier to believe in conspiracies than to accept that voters might genuinely disagree with you.

If the concern is foreign influence, start where the foreign money actually is.

[*] Legislative context: In June 2025, Rep. Randy Fine (R-FL) introduced [H.R. 4097](#), titled “Designate CAIR as a Terrorist Organization Act,” which directed the Secretary of State to review whether the Council on American-Islamic Relations met the criteria for designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. The bill was referred to the House Judiciary Committee but never advanced to a hearing, markup, or floor vote and ultimately died in committee. Source: [congress.gov](#)

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