ETHNIC LOBBYING AND ALLIANCE FORMATION: USINPAC AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE U.S.-INDO BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

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Jaideep Singh Dargan B.A.

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Jaideep S. Dargan, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Carol Christine Fair, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores whether or not the Indian-American lobby has been responsible for significantly influencing the evolution of the U.S.-Indo bilateral relationship since 1990. In this thesis, I argue that its influence has been marginal – a result of endemic constraints within the broader Indian-American diaspora and poor organizational culture within USINPAC – the diaspora's main lobbying arm since 2003. Rather, the traditional levels of analysis approach can help explain the alliance’s evolution since the end of the Cold War.
This research is dedicated to those whose unyielding support, generosity, and continued inspiration enabled my academic journey: family, friends, and classmates, from New York University to Georgetown University – and everywhere in between.

JAIDEEP S. DARGAN
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INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-90s, scholarly interest has grown on the influence of ethnic lobbies and the formulation of United States foreign policy. At their core, academic focus on the Armenian, Cuban, and Israeli lobbies have all sought to assess the ways in which domestic lobbies – organized along ethnic, nationalist, religious, and racial lines – have influenced official U.S. policy towards nations and regions for whom these organizations identify. The nexus between ethnic lobbying and Washington’s foreign policy received particular scrutiny in the aftermath of a 1997 article in Foreign Affairs, in which political scientist Samuel Huntington argued that America’s post-Cold War foreign policy was increasingly becoming dominated by “ethnic interests” at the expense of core, national concerns.\(^1\) The collapse of the Soviet Union removed the centrality of international communism as the orienting foundation for U.S foreign policy – an ideological vacuum, which, according to Huntington, enabled ethnic lobbies to advocate their own particular objectives.

While his claim had no shortage of detractors, Huntington’s piece sparked new focus from scholars and commentators about the perceived influence of lobbying groups with prominent and politically active diaspora communities within the United States. Subsequent studies on this relationship laid bare a central question: did ethnic lobbies have the potential to alter Washington’s alliances preferences through resource mobilization and the manipulation of public opinion? In 2005, political scientists John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt appeared to affirm this, arguing that the U.S.-Israeli

alliance was in part a function of domestic lobbying efforts. Likewise, case studies on the influence of the Armenian and Cuban lobbies on U.S. foreign policy demonstrated clear links between interest group lobbying and Washington’s foreign policy.

Curiously, while much of this literature has thus focused on the political activity of highly mobilized, well-resourced ethnic groups, surprisingly little has been written on the influence of the Indian lobby and its influence on U.S. policy towards New Delhi and South Asia at large. This absence is noteworthy precisely because the U.S.-Indo relationship blossomed as leading Indian-American interest groups emerged in Washington D.C. In particular, the relationship emerged from five decades of mutual distrust, distance, and “estrangement” into a consolidated alliance, marked by the passage of the landmark U.S.-Indo Civilian Nuclear Agreement in 2008. The passage of this historic accord, which granted New Delhi access to the nuclear energy market despite its long-standing refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), occurred amidst sustained lobbying from the Indian-American community’s leading lobbying arm: the United States India Political Affairs Committee (USINPAC).

The central question of this study is thus: has the Indian-American lobby been responsible for significantly influencing the evolution of the U.S.-Indo bilateral relationship since 1990? Jason Kirk has argued that the India lobby was “critical” for Congressional passage of the watershed agreement during President George W. Bush’s second term. In this thesis, I refute Kirk’s conclusion by arguing that the Indian-

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American lobby was only marginally responsible in not only securing the passage of the nuclear agreement, but also in the progressive evolution of the bilateral relationship. Alternatively, I contend that a combination of systemic, domestic, and individual factors facilitated rapprochement between the two nations since the end of the Cold War. I thus take aim at Kirk’s assertion, and, instead, offer a competing explanation – namely, that the three levels of analysis view is far more helpful in explaining the determinants of U.S.-Indo alliance formation, and for accurately gauging the India lobby’s relative influence on shaping this outcome.

In order to interrogate Kirk’s claim that the Indian lobby played a decisive role in advancing the U.S.-Indo relationship from 2001-2009, my paper will critically examine USINPAC’s principal strategies – namely, its fundraising efforts on behalf congressional candidates, and the methods the group has used influence policy outcomes on Capitol Hill. I will also examine the veracity of its public claims (whether, for example, USINPAC could verifiably claim credit for influencing the outcome of a Congressional race or a legislative outcome) in order to demonstrate that its political power is not as strong as the organization itself, and Kirk, claims. While not fool-proof, demystifying its alleged role in influencing Congressional races and legislative outcomes – the principal tactics of all interest groups – is one way of contrasting Kirk’s claim of the organization’s centrality in the consolidation of the bilateral relationship.

After making the case that the India lobby has not been as decisive as Kirk suggests in influencing Washington’s South Asia policies, I will demonstrate the merits of three levels of analysis view, which holds greater explanatory power in explaining how the United States and India managed to consolidate its alliance in the aftermath of the
Cold War. Instead of arguing that one factor (in this case, an ethnic lobby) outweighs all others in explaining the alliance’s evolution, my alternative argument underscores the importance of systemic, domestic, and individual determinants that facilitated a rapprochement between the two democracies.

The first section of this paper will discuss Data Methods, Sources, and Caveats; it will explain the principal social science methods that I use to make my argument, and will detail my primary sources, while acknowledging any perceived limitations within my research. Section Two will look at the existing literature on ethnic lobbying and foreign policy, including case examples of the Israel, Armenian, and Cuban lobbies, before discussing the contours of the Indian-American diaspora and its lobbying arms in Washington D.C. Section Three will highlight why USINPAC has only had marginal influence in achieving its objectives. Section Four starts with a discussion of the terms of the civilian nuclear agreement, and then shows why USINPAC was not a central factor in the agreement’s passage. Section Five details why a three levels of analysis perspective is more robust, and thus more refined, in explaining the alliance’s evolution. This paper concludes with a reiteration of the principal tenets of my argument, and includes potential policy implications.

This study attempts to fill a noticeable gap within the existing literature on domestic ethnic lobbying in the United States, by more closely scrutinizing the role of USINPAC, and the Indian-American diaspora more generally, in the passage of the civilian nuclear agreement and Indo-U.S. rapprochement. In addition, it attempts to offer a more nuanced understanding of ethnic lobbies and the way they may – or may not –
have an decisive impact on influencing U.S. policy towards a particular country or region.

I. DATA METHODS, SOURCES, AND CAVEATS

My research will largely employ process tracing, which Van Evera describes as exploring the “cause-effect link that connects independent variable and outcome.”

Process tracing has been the principal method in other assessments of the influence of ethnic lobbies and U.S. foreign policy, including John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt’s study on the Israeli Lobby and Heather Gregg’s examination of various Armenian lobbying groups. Discussing the research design that underpinned their 2006 text on the Israeli Lobby, Mearsheimer and Walt write: “gauging a lobby’s clout requires playing careful attention to the process by which decisions and outcomes were reached,” largely because there exists no “linear relationship between ‘lobbying activities’ and policy outcomes in the real world.” As they point out, interest group effectiveness cannot be measured purely by whether a group ‘won’ or ‘lost’ a particular policy dispute.” Elected officials have powerful incentives to mask the true motives behind their positions on issues, as “’policy makers rarely admit that their decisions were influenced by a lobbying group’s pressure, which can make it even more difficult to trace an interest group’s impact on policy.”

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6 Ibid, 260.
Given the inherent limitations of assessing interest group effectiveness, my research seeks to scrutinize cases where Kirk, USINPAC, or others have suggested that the lobby had a particularly pronounced influence on a congressional race or policy outcome. While not scientifically perfect, electoral outcomes are a useful proxy for assessing interest group influence, because campaign fundraising is a principal strategy for groups seeking to advance policy objectives with Congressional members whose professional existence is contingent upon securing reelection. As Mearsheimer and Walt note further note, while there are certainly cases when campaign contributions fail to “translate into political influence,” there is a major reason to believe that campaign contributions, on some level, influence the political process.\(^7\) Interest groups must have a fundamental reason to believe that their financial contributions will help advance their policy objectives, otherwise they would be “effectively throwing their money away.”\(^8\) Moreover, campaign fundraising been a particularly useful tool for the other big three ethnic lobbies, and, in well-documented cases, this tactic has been a decisive factor in the outcome of an electoral race, including the defeat of Rep. Paul Finley in 1982.\(^9\) I will look to official statements of USINPAC – in the forms of press releases, quotes attributed to officials in media reports, and through statements on Twitter – in order to assess whether its claims of influence gels with the historical record.

In Section V, I use official statistics from the Congressional Research Service and independent organizations in order to document the dramatic increase in U.S.-Indo

\[^7\] Ibid, 266.
\[^8\] Ibid, 266.
economic activity that took place after New Delhi’s internal economic reforms in 1991. Finally, while the third prong of the three levels of analysis argument is more subjective, I draw upon first-hand accounts in order to demonstrate the unique contributions of key Indian and American leaders in shaping the alliance’s evolution.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

What is a Diaspora?

A review of existing case studies on successful ethnic lobbies reveals a key commonality – namely, a degree of group cohesion within a lobby’s representative diaspora. The term ‘diaspora,’ as Robin Cohen elucidates, is more than the dispersion of a people from a homeland. While expatriate communities are surely not uniform, they often exhibit similar features, including a ‘memory and myth about the homeland,’ a pan-ethnic consciousness sustained over a long duration, an ‘idealization’ of the homeland, and a troubled relationship with host countries, among others. Violence and persecution have not always been the primary sources of dispersal, as search for work, trade, and colonization have been important causes of dispersal for numerous groups – including the Indian diaspora. In addition, the act of migration does not simply trigger the creation of diaspora, as group ‘consciousness’ often emerges over decades.¹⁰

Diasporas – and their Lobbies

Only a few authors have explicitly linked ethnic lobbies to their attendant diasporas. Huntington (1997) identified this relationship, noting that such ethnic group

‘consciousness’ directly facilitated the creation and efficacy of lobbying organizations seeking to advances policies on behalf of transnational counterparts or foreign nations. Likewise, Shain and Wittes properly identify the way collective violence as well as the sense of group endangerment can enhance this consciousness, as well as a community’s continued effort in advancing its objectives. This relationship between diasporas and their lobbies renders a degree of nuance within the broader question of whether success is contingent upon the presence of a numerically populous or cohesive diaspora. There is at least one example in which this link does not appear to hold. The Turkish lobby has been particularly effective in working against the passage of the Armenian Genocide resolution in the House of Representatives – an effort due in large part to the Turkish government spending nearly $3.5 million in 2007 in directly lobbying Executive and Legislative Branch officials against the inclusion of the word “genocide” in the text of the Resolution. Public reports indicate that nearly $1.9 million went directly to KLA Piper, a leading D.C. law firm, while the 2000 Census recorded roughly 117,000 person of full or partial Turkish descent in the United States. On the other hand, does the presence of nearly 2.6 million people of Indian descent in the United States qualify as a cohesive diaspora – and, does such numerical strength translate into successful political lobbying?

11 Ibid, 39.
Shain and Wittes (2002) draw an explicit link between ethnic diasporas and their lobbying arms. While they are focused on the particular issue on the role of domestic ethnic groups in resolving foreign conflicts, the authors highlight an important fact about why some diasporas are more successful in organizing lobbies, which she attributes to the “connection between a sense of endangerment to the homeland and the sense of diasporic peril.” ¹⁴ They acknowledge that the “psychological identification of diaspora communities with their kin states…lead diasporas to perceive high stakes in homeland conflicts and to try to play in active role in such conflicts’ resolution or continuation.” ¹⁵ Yet, as Turkey’s efforts against the House resolution reveal, while strong group cohesion may work to further a lobby’s goals, such self and group identification is not necessary for achieving desired policy goals. Even a group with a few supporters and affected stakeholders can take advantage of Washington’s open system of government by hiring well-connected lobbying firms to act as agents on their behalf of their agendas. As former Republican Congressman turned K-street maven Robert Livingston explains, “there’s unlimited business out there” for D.C.’s lobbying firms. ¹⁶ The business of domestic-based ethnic groups and even foreign governments are no exceptions.

Since Huntington’s Foreign Affairs publication in 1997, subsequent case studies on ethnic lobbies has demonstrated the degree to which politically-active populations within the United States have managed to influence policy towards particular countries and regions, in ways as small as Congressional proclamations honoring a foreign nation’s

¹⁴ Ibid, 173.
¹⁵ Ibid, 106.
day of independence, to ensuring that the Legislative and Executive Branches supply a
nation with a military and economic aid, while denying such benefits from its perceived
adversaries. At their core, these studies have explored not only how certain ethnic
communities have marshaled resources into the formation of politically-active interest
groups, but have also dissected their varying objectives in influencing Washington’s
foreign policy towards a particular nation or region. This literature thus reveals the degree
to which the contemporary Indian lobby is operating along a similar continuum as its
counterparts; as this paper makes clear, USINPAC has relied on the same interest-group
tactics – from campaign fundraising to issue advocacy and bandwagoning – as other
successful ethnic lobbies.

Ethnic Lobbies: The Case Studies

The cannon on ethnic lobbying literature is replete with cases of legislative and
policy success. Haney and Vanderbush (1999) provide the most useful framework for
assessing the relative impact of ethnic interest groups. The factors they have identified as
affecting the relative strength of ethnic groups have laid a baseline for subsequent
scholars. The salient factors they identify in determining a particular groups success are:

(1) organizational strength,
(2) membership unity, placement, and voter-participation,
(3) salience and resonance of the message
(4) ability to help advance a policy already in motion
(5) strength of the opposition
(6) permeability of and access to the government
(7) mutually supportive relationships

Patrick Haney and Walt Vanderbush, "The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in U.S.
Foreign Policy: The Case of the Cuban American National Foundation." International
These are useful variables in assessing group impact, and, as they demonstrate, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) – or the Cuban lobby – has been successful in large part as a consequence of these seven factors.

Mearsheimer and Walt’s text (2006) on the Israel Lobby gives credence to the utility of Haney and Vanderbush’s framework. As the authors show, AIPAC has emerged as the most formidable interest group Israeli and Middle Eastern issues since its inception in 1963. Their success is due not only to the group’s ability to move public and Congressional opinion, but also its wide network of members, donors, board members, and other affiliated individuals within the Executive Branch – including former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk and long-time Middle East peace negotiator and current National Security Council Director Dennis Ross. Their book provides a thorough analysis of the impact of a variety of pro-Israeli interest groups, and most importantly AIPAC, in influencing U.S. Foreign Policy towards the Middle East, and, to date, remains the most comprehensive study of an ethnic lobby to date. The authors persuasively argue that the role of domestic pressure on Congressional lawmakers, specifically through lobbying efforts by AIPAC and the American Jewish Congress, tilted U.S. Foreign Policy towards Israel and the broader Middle East to the right. While the scope of their text is narrowly focused, the authors broach the rising influence of other ethnic lobbies, and also make cursory mention of the way in which Indian-Americans are seeking to influence U.S. foreign policy in a “pro-India direction.” Mearsheimer and Walt do not substantiate the latter claim, beyond noting the efforts of Indian-Americans in helping to usher in the landmark Indo-Nuclear Deal of 2005.
Eric Uslaner (2005) expands the scope of Mearsheimer and Walt by comparatively assessing the influence of AIPAC and the Israeli lobby relative to other major ethnic groups. His work reiterates Mearsheimer and Walt’s findings about the success of AIPAC in influencing Congressional races and policy outcomes, and thus shaping U.S. policy towards the Middle East.

King and Pomper’s paper on the Armenian-American lobby adopts Haney and Vanderbush’s framework of analysis, and persuasively demonstrates, through rigorous process tracing, the effectiveness of the Armenian diaspora in the United States in affecting U.S. policy towards Armenia and the Central Caucuses. King and Pomper underscore geographic density, and the ability of a group to have an influential member of the House or Senate sit on a relevant committee (access to the government / mutually supportive relationships). The authors contribute to the literature by emphasizing the constraints of diaspora influence, while recognizing that simple luck often plays a role in legislative outcomes. On the former note, their discussion of how oil interests in the context of the Global War on Terror was the decisive factor in the unraveling of Section 907 of the 1992 Freedom Support Act (which favored US Development Aid to Armenia over Azerbaijan). On the subject of luck, their discussion of why former Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-KS) made a “personal crusade” of helping Armenian-Americans (since an Armenian-American doctor saved Dole’s life on the battlefield during World War II) is a critical element in identifying the power of human relationships as a variable in interest group success.¹⁸

Gregg’s case study (2002) goes one step further in her analysis of the Armenian Diaspora in the United States. While her thesis does not differ – that U.S. Aid differences to Armenia and Azerbaijan is a function of group lobbying – she concludes that the presence of two, major Armenian lobbying organizations has resulted in the “hyper-mobilization” of the group’s resources, translating into increased effectiveness in influencing Congress to adopt policies that favor Armenia. The existence of the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and The Armenian Assembly of America (AAA, or “The Assembly”), helps explain how this minority group has been able to raise more funds and resources on behalf of a common agenda.

On the subject of general Asian-American lobbying, Paul Y. Watanabe (1999) underscores historical impact of Asian migration to the United States and the evolution of U.S. Foreign policy towards different Asian nations. The added value of his essay is his thorough discussion of the shaping and conditioning of Asian-American identity in the United States, as a consequence of a history of discriminatory policies in the United States and the recent emergence of globalization and the rapid economic growth of Asian nations. His essay is limited inasmuch as it provides a generalized discussion of Asian-American identity, and makes no particular mention of South Asians or Indian-Americans.

Ambrosio (2002) appears to build on Haney and Vanderbush’s point of “pushing on an open door” by acknowledging that ethnic lobbies also reinforce ‘objective’ U.S. interests by augmenting U.S. policy and strengthening America’s commitment to its
allies.” While he draws upon the work of AIPAC, this point may be even more rigorously tested if applied to the contexts of the Cuban lobby, as well as the Indian-American lobby.

These case studies suggest a few points that are relevant within the context of the Indian lobby. First, while many of these groups have utilized similar interest-group tactics to advance their goals, they all retain important distinctions concerning their history of migration to the United States, the size of their attendant populations, and, importantly, the substance of their policy goals. Most of the efforts of the Cuban lobby, for example, have focused on sustaining U.S. sanctions against the particular regime of Fidel Castro – a wholly different agenda than, for example, AIPAC, which seeks to expand America’s military and economic engagement with Israel. These differences on the substance of preferred policy matter because, as Ambrosio notes, it is often easier for a group to support a policy that’s already in motion (pushing on an ‘open door’) than to further an agenda that is not germane to broader U.S. goals, or is, at worst, counter to Washington’s perceived interests. Second, these case studies reveal that a lobby’s ability to bandwagon with other lobbies is often a useful and successful strategy for policy advancement. The powerful K Street firms and former Secretaries of State and Defense that have lobbied on behalf of Turkey, especially during the recurrent Armenian

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Genocide debates, is one example of such bandwagoning. These groups actively lobbied AIPAC and other pro-Israel organizations in their opposition to the legislation. USINPAC, as the next section reveals, is not immune to such cross-lobbying pollination. The common practice of bandwagoning among interest groups of all varieties is another reason behind the difficult in ascertaining causality in the policy process.

The Indian-American Diaspora and its Lobbies

India’s emergence as a major player in the post-Cold War international system, coupled New Delhi’s nascent-yet-nuclear partnership with Washington, and the maturation of the Indian diaspora within the United States, are three important historical developments that underpin the need to more closely scrutinize the Indian diaspora and its lobbying arm. Moreover existing case studies of the Indian-American diaspora – a group that first migrated to the United States in the late 19th Century – have remained limited in scope. The most relevant piece of scholarship on the subject of the Indian lobby is Jason Kirk’s 2008 essay in the journal Foreign Policy Analysis. His central question is whether the advancement of the U.S.-India Nuclear Agreement represents the consolidation of the Indian ethnic lobby, and argues that Indian-American mobilization was the “critical factor behind overwhelming congressional support” for the nuclear

\[21\] A host of former Secretaries of State, Defense, and other National Security officials within the United States government have been involved in lobbying efforts against the Congressional Resolution identifying World War I atrocities in Armenian as “genocide.” See Hart Sassounian’s article on the Huffington Post for more information, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harut-sassounian/secretaries-albright-and-_b_73628.html

\[22\] Ibid.
deal. His paper is well researched and his discussion of the history of Indian immigration to the United States provides a useful backdrop for understanding the group’s ‘coming of age’ in the political scene. He also pays much-needed attention to the particularities of the demographic group, highlighting its geographic density, and tracking its rapid growth since the changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965.

While Kirk examines the specific case study of the U.S-Indo Nuclear Deal, Anwar and Michaelowa (2006) tackle the question of whether the extent of ethnic lobbying is a determinant of bilateral aid flows to India and Pakistan from 1980 to 2002. They contrast various regression analyses of aid flows to India and Pakistan during this duration and conclude that Indian and Pakistani lobbying has constituted a “relevant influence” on aid distribution overtime. While the time period they assess is prior to the creation of USINPAC, their quantitative-based conclusions remain relevant especially if one is seeking to disprove the claim that outcome of Indian-American lobbying has historically been marginal.

The relationship between corporate interests (domestic and multinational) and the development of U.S. policy towards India is the scope of Dossani’s paper (2009). He sheds important light on the Indian government’s efforts to woo non-resident Indians (NRIs) in efforts to project Indian culture in the United States, and also deconstructs the various immigration waves to show a general trend of increased NRI visibility over the past two decades. While he focuses on a unique angle of the immigrant settlement

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23 Kirk, 276.
24 Ibid, 287.
experience in the United States, his paper falls short largely because of its lack of evidence in his generalized discussion of Indian ethnography.

III. THE U.S. INDIA POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE (USINPAC)

In 2002, Sanjay Puri, a Washington D.C.-area corporate executive, founded USINPAC and an affiliate organization, the U.S.-India Business Alliance, with the goal of promoting the interests of “India and Indian-Americans in Congress.”26 As Kirk points out, Puri garnered the assistance of AIPAC in creating an Indian counterpart, and took advantage of the political climate in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 to stress areas of common interest between New Delhi and Washington in combating Islamic extremism.27 USINPAC opened an office with full-time staff in the nation’s capital three years later, and quickly emerged as a leading voice on Congressional Hill in support of the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement from the bill’s introduction in 2005, to its passage in 2008. On its website, the organization publicly boasts its role on the “forefront” in advancing the U.S.-India Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, marking its preeminent legislative victory, while making other claims about its role in influencing the outcomes of different Congressional races, including the 2006 Virginia Senate Race between incumbent Senator George Allen (R-VA) and James Webb (D), and the ouster of Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-GA) from the House of Representatives four years earlier.28

26 Kirk, 291.
27 Ibid, 284.
For over a decade, analysts and commentators have made broad claims about the influence of Indian-Americans on particular electoral outcomes. Samuel Huntington claimed that the 1996 Senate race that led to the defeat of incumbent Senator Larry Pressler (R-ND) was a “contest between Indians and Pakistanis” as the outcome of the race – given the Pressler Amendment’s ban on economic and military assistance to Pakistan – had direct implications for New Delhi and Islamabad. While not mentioning a specific case of Indian-American lobbying success, Mearsheimer and Walt cited the efforts of Indian-American to shift U.S. foreign policy in a “pro-India” direction in their 2006 text. The central conclusion that Kirk reaches in his assessment of USINPAC is that “Indian-American mobilization was the critical factor behind overwhelming congressional support for the controversial Bush-Singh” nuclear agreement in 2008.29 USINPAC itself claims broad credit for passage of the nuclear accord, and also points to its influence in shaping outcomes of various electoral races as an index of its organizational strength. Yet relevant questions remain: to what degree has Indian-American voter mobilization actually occurred over the past two decades? And, more specifically, to what extent should USINPAC be credited electoral and policy success?

**USINPAC: How Strong?**

As Mearsheimer and Walt note, ethnic lobbies have many avenues to influence the policy process in a democratic system of government. A principal method is for a lobby or interest group to raise and direct campaign contributions towards candidates who hold sympathetic views on issues of concern, while working to “defeat candidates

29 Ibid.
whose views are suspect.”30 This has been a primary strategy of all the major ethnic
lobbies, including USINPAC. While a group’s ability to shape the outcome of an
electoral race is one measure of its effectiveness, proving a counterfactual – that an
outcome would not have occurred absent organizational involvement – is not
scientifically possible. As mentioned in Section II, there is no fool-proof way of
ascertaining complete causality of interest-group influence on a policy process, or of
determining the counterfactual, namely, whether an electoral outcome would have been
had a lobbying group not campaigned on behalf of a candidate or raised funds in a race.
While mindful of this limitation, it’s still useful to more closely scrutinize the three
electoral races for which USINPAC and commentators have attributed success to the
lobby. Making the case that USINPAC may in fact be a relatively weak organization
helps add credence to the three levels of analysis perspective – the alternative rationale in
explaining the passage of the agreement and the alliance’s consolidation.

Case I: Cynthia McKinney vs. Denise Majette

The 2002 Congressional Democratic Primary election between incumbent
Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney and Atlanta-area attorney Denise Majette is perhaps
the first instance in which USINPAC is credited with shaping the outcome of a
Congressional race. Congresswoman McKinney (D-GA) had cultivated a reputation for
being “pro-Pakistan” by siding with Islamabad in the dispute over Kashmir, which
created an opportunity for USINPAC to exert its influence in the primary match up
between McKinney and Majette. Evidence suggests, however, that the organization

30 Ibid, 140.
played only a minor role in advancing this outcome. First, data from the Center for Responsive Politics indicates that USINPAC donated no funds to either candidate in the race. Second, crossover voting, in which voters of opposing parties can vote in each others primaries, gave Majette a significant boost in the primary. The USA Today reported that on rare instances in which crossover is a decisive factor, it “usually rewards moderate candidates and penalizes those outside the mainstream – such as conservative Barr and Liberal McKinney.” Third, McKinney, who lost 58%-42%, solidified her controversial reputation in the weeks after 9/11, exemplified by her suggestion that the Bush Administration might have been responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center. Perhaps most importantly, McKinney had drawn the ire of AIPAC with her vocal support of Palestinians during the second intifada. Her campaign manager at the time publicly stated that her loss was on account of AIPAC, which donated nearly $200,000 to Majette, while out raising McKinney’s total contributions by more than $1,000,000.

While Robert Hathaway of the Woodrow Wilson Center argues that the combined efforts of USINPAC and AIPAC helped lead to the defeat of Cynthia McKinney, the influence of the former in advancing this outcome appears weaker when looking at the totality of the political circumstances stacked against the incumbent in this race. 31 To be sure, USINPAC could have diverted collective resources from other Congressional races that year order to expel one of India’s chief critics. This is a highly common interest group strategy. Moreover, USINPAC could have reoriented its focus for a number of strategic reasons: the organization could have perceived special concern over

McKinney’s continued service in the lower chamber; USINPAC may have found it optimal to pull its resources in achieving one, certain high-profile victory over questionable success in other efforts; or the group may have found it beneficial for its long-term brand recognition to bandwagon with AIPAC on a race in which the outcome was certain. In the even that these factors did not drive USINPAC’s strategy, it seems unlikely that a nascent Indian lobbying organization could play a decisive role in Majette’s favor.

Case II: George Allen vs. James Webb

The 2006 Senatorial race between incumbent Senator George Allen (R) and former Navy Secretary James Webb (D) acquired national prominence after Senator Allen was videotaped calling a 20-year old Webb campaign worker of Indian descent macaca – a derogatory racial slur. The staffer, 20-year old S.R. Siddarth, had been traveling around Virginia videotaping Senator Allen’s public appearances for the Webb campaign.

Allen, who had long been considered to be the front-runner for the 2008 GOP Presidential nomination, narrowly lost the race by less than .3%. The “macaca” incident and Allen’s narrow loss, quickly sprung attention to the suburban D.C. communities of Fairfax, Loudon, and Prince William Counties, with sizable and growing populations of Asian and South-Asian Americans. Writing in the Washington Post, Mira Kamdar of the Asia Society claimed that USINPAC could credibly “take some credit” for Allen’s
While political scientist Marc Hetherington argues that Allen would “almost certainly” have won the election if it were not for his racist remark, there are numerous reasons to believe that USINPAC had only a minor, if insignificant role in shaping the outcome of the race. First, as a non-partisan political action committee, USINPAC played no role in the recording, transmitting, or raising significant awareness of the tape, which was subsequently streamed throughout the duration of the campaign in national media outlets. Webb campaign staffers publicly acknowledged posting the tape on YouTube in an effort to make it “go viral” while the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and influential grassroots groups like MoveOn.org disseminated it in fundraising queries through the internet.

Second, Webb campaign consultant Steve Jarding noted in the Washington Post that the videotape nationalized Webb’s campaign, and had the effect of tripling donations to the Democratic candidate. USINPAC did not donate funds directly to either candidate in the race. Third, despite raising twice as much as Webb, Allen’s campaign was marred by repeated public gaffes, in which allegations of his fondness for the Confederate flag, nooses, and the N-word reinforced a bigoted perception of the Senator. While this doesn’t disclose the possibility that Indian-American voters may

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have independently tipped the balance in favor of Webb, the suggestion that USINPAC was a key driver in this effort is tenuous, at best.

Case III: Efforts to Defeat Congressman Dan Burton (R-IN)

Since its inception, USINPAC has spent significant resources in an effort to oust Congressman Dan Burton (R-IN) from his seat in the House of Representatives. Throughout much of his career, Rep. Burton has attracted notoriety for statements on the House floor, in which he has routinely called attention to India’s record of human rights violations in Punjab and Kashmir.35 In particular, Burton has a long and public relationship with the Council of Khalistan, a Maryland-based organization headed by Dr. Gurmit S. Aulakh, which since the 1980s, has sought to raise awareness of India’s gross human rights violations committed against Sikhs during and after Operation Blue Star (1984).36

By default, Burton’s success in the past three elections confirms USINPAC’s failure to affect the outcome of this race. But, it should be noted that in the 2008 Republican primary in Indiana’s 5th district, Burton defeated challenger John McGoff, who USINPAC supported, 52% to 45% -- the closest race in the Congressman’s career.37 And, despite the organization’s endorsement and contribution of $3,500, McGoff was unable to defeat Dan Burton in the 2010 Republican primary, as Burton garnered 30% of

the vote in a field of five other challengers. The incumbent retained his seat in the November 2010 elections. 

_The Utility of Campaign Contributions as a Proxy of Influence_

On account of the inherent limitations of assessing the political influence of campaign contributions, the preceding cases cannot overwhelmingly demonstrate USINPAC’s failure or inability to influence Congressional races. A number of other factors may explain these different electoral results. First, in instances in which USINPAC did not directly support a selected candidate with PAC funds, it may have played a role in advertising on behalf of a certain candidate – or urging supporters, through letters and appeals, to donate directly to the favored candidate. Such contributions would thus not be listed under USINPAC filings within Federal Election Commission, and a relationship would be difficult to discern. Additionally, USINPAC, like all major political action committees, sends political donations to official party organizations (e.g. DNC, DSCC) for purposes that the party deems necessary. Such funds often are often diverted to hotly contested races, but there’s simply no way of attributing their source. Likewise, as FEC data shows, USINPAC has often donated to the campaigns of incumbent candidates who rarely face difficulty in securing reelection, like Senators Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Chuck Grassley (R-ID). 

Even though such contributions are unlikely to have a decisive impact in races in which the incumbent is clearly favored, it is nevertheless impossible to rule out any link. After all, incumbents

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38 See USINPAC filings on Federal Election Commission website, available at: www.fec.gov

39 Ibid.
retain wide electoral advantages, including the ability to raise significant contributions towards reelection efforts, which often deters potential rivals from entering the race.\textsuperscript{40} In that vein, USINPAC could technically claim credit for the 2010 reelectons of Senators Mikulski and Grassley, even though funds raised were part of a larger patchwork of incumbent bandwagoning. Nevertheless, close scrutiny of the three selected cases is intended to illuminate the factors that cast a more balanced, and therefore appropriate, understanding of the extent of USINPAC’s influence. This discussion also reveals the tendency of PAC leaders to often overstate, and sometimes fabricate, their role in influencing Congressional races. Since interest groups care deeply about access to lawmakers, as well as Congressional staff taking their organizations and agendas seriously, such groups retain powerful incentives to inflate past successes, their ability to mobilize constituents, and shape public opinion. The perception of interest group efficacy is thus almost as important as a group’s ability to deliver.

IV. EXAMINING THE CASE: USINPAC AND THE U.S.-INDIA CIVILIAN NUCLEAR DEAL

Was USINPAC-inspired mobilization of the Indian-American community, as Jason Kirk argues, the critical factor behind the passage of the 2008 U.S.-Indo Civilian Nuclear Agreement? Contrary to this claim, available evidence does not suggest that USINPAC was the critical -- or even a major – factor behind the passage of this legislation.

\textsuperscript{40} Mearsheimer and Walt (2009): 8.
Kirk’s advances his conclusion by pointing to the activities USINPAC utilized to marshal support of the legislation on Capitol Hill. While he correctly highlights the different lobbying strategies the organization used (from fundraisers on behalf of elected officials, to the use of electronic media to rally the community on behalf of lawmakers), his analysis fails to meet the key threshold in assessing the interest group effectiveness: namely, what “the outcome would have been had interest group pressure been absent.”

Kirk points to the statements of members of Congress, who explicitly referenced USINPAC’s efforts on behalf of the legislation, as evidence of a link between the member’s vote and the lobby’s political activity.

Unfortunately, Kirk does not acknowledge the limitation of using speeches from Congressional members as substantive evidence; elected officials have many incentives to obfuscate their motives behind voting for or against a particular bill. In other words, a Senator or Representative’s floor statement congratulating USINPAC and the Indian-American community may have simply amounted to good politics. Likewise, USINPAC’s lobbying efforts may have been tailored towards simply creating political cover – or the perception thereof – in order to stymie opposition to the agreement.

Kirk also cites an *Indian Express* article written by Walter Anderson, a Professor of South Asia Studies at Johns Hopkins University and a former regional analyst at the State Department, who claimed that Administration’s nuclear deal “galvanized the usually fractured Indian American community into united action like no previous issue.” Unfortunately, Anderson does not substantiate his claim about voter mobilization and USIPAC effectiveness. Thus, while his claim sounds plausible, closer scrutiny of Kirk’s evidence suggests that his conclusion is specious at best.

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41 Ibid, 206.
42 Ibid, 294.
Moreover, Kirk’s analysis fails to consider the significant monetary stakes that American nuclear corporations and other relevant companies had in securing the passage of this deal. India’s nuclear energy market has been estimated to be worth roughly $150 billion – a market that, prior to the passage of this agreement, remained outside the reach of U.S. corporations. New Delhi recently tendered an agreement to two U.S. corporations, GE-Hitachi and Westinghouse Electric, for the construction of two nuclear plants in India – a deal worth about $10 billion. This is significant, not least because formal nuclear exchanges between Washington and New Delhi have yet to take place, on account of a dispute over India’s Civil Liability legislation.\(^\text{43}\) Given the significant financial interests at stake with the passage of this bill, it is hard to claim that the political influence of the lobby amounted to the ‘decisive’ factor in the legislation’s passage.

In short, it is hard to defend Kirk’s central claim because it overstates USINPAC’s role in corralling support for the legislation, while failing to acknowledge the confluence of material and financial interests that drove the agreement’s passage. Since the lobby-centered hypothesis does not full explain the deal’s introduction and the consolidation of the bilateral relationship, I propose an alternative view derived from Kenneth Waltz – an assessment that underscores the centrality of systemic, state, and individual-level factors in shaping international politics.

V. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION: THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Since USINPAC-inspired mobilization of the Indian-American community is insufficient in explaining the nuclear accord’s passage, I argue that this agreement – which consolidated a gradual, nearly two-decade rapprochement between New Delhi and Washington – should instead be analyzed through Kenneth Waltz’s three levels of

analysis perspective. Indeed, this framework is significantly more robust, and therefore accurate, in explaining the multiple factors that drove the introduction and passage of this legislation, as it recognizes the numerous necessary conditions that paved the wave for the Henry Hyde Act.

As Kenneth Waltz outlined in his seminal text, *Man, The State, and War* (1959), the three levels of analysis (or images) is an important window into examining international politics, and specifically, the causes of war. According to Waltz, the international, domestic, and individual levels are the critical thresholds for examining international conflict. This section will address these three levels, starting with a discussion of systemic changes in the international environment (third level), followed by a discussion of state-level factors that enhanced rapprochement (second level), concluding with a discussion of the role of individuals in shaping the U.S.-Indo alliance (first level).

*Third Level: Shifts in the International Security System*

According to Waltz, the anarchic nature of the international system is the key driver of international politics. Without a higher authority to govern the behavior of individual states, nations are forced to reconcile competing interests among themselves – a reality that drives uncertainty and thus conflict. The third level of analysis therefore captures dynamics within the domain of the international system. Indeed, the structure of the international security environment in the Cold War’s aftermath, made U.S.-Indo rapprochement possible over the next two decades. While formally a member of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) during the Cold War, New Delhi benefited from Moscow’s patronage from India’s inception in 1947. Post-Partition South Asia quickly became a proxy theatre for influence between Washington and Moscow, with the United States formally cementing a bilateral relationship with Islamabad through the inking of the

Throughout much of this period, relations between India and the United States remained distance, not just because of Washington’s formal relationship with Pakistan, but also because of Moscow’s economic and military assistance to New Delhi.  

Moreover, the United States was a key driver behind the military’s ascendency in Pakistan; between 1954 and 1961, U.S. military assistance to Pakistan totaled $508 million, while granting the military regime of General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq $2.5 billion from 1978-1988 – the decade in which Washington covertly supplied arms to the Afghan mujahideen.

The backdrop of sustained ideological divides in South Asia help explain why the breakup of the Soviet Union, along with Washington’s shunting of Pakistan in the immediate post-Cold War period, removed the key obstacle to U.S.-Indo rapprochement. As Raja Mohan notes, the Cold War was one of the principal barriers for India’s realization of its grand strategic ambitions, which became apparent with India’s rapid economic growth and military modernization in ensuing years. As Kapur and Ganguly have pointed out, Soviet collapse “forced India’s policy makers to recalculate their strategy options” which entailed finding ways to enhance their regional security. New Delhi, the authors point out, moved to enhance relations with China, while also abandoning what they call a “reflexive opposition to American strategic, economic, and diplomatic policies.”

44 Talbott, 10.
Another shift at the international level occurred in 1990, when President George H.W. Bush reasserted Washington’s nuclear nonproliferation objectives at the expense of the strategic relationship with Pakistan. As Christine Fair has noted, Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan sustained Congressional funding to Pakistan from 1979-1989 despite Executive Branch knowledge of Islamabad’s active nuclear program.\(^48\) Indeed, Congress’s passage of the Pressler Amendment in 1985, conditioned U.S. aid to Pakistan on an annual Presidential certification that Islamabad did not retain nuclear weapons. While President Reagan certified this stipulation during his second term, in 1990, President Bush declined to assent, as U.S. geopolitical interests in South Asia receded with the Soviet extrication from Afghanistan—a move that triggered sanctions against Pakistan. A further consequence of President Bush’s certification was Washington’s denial of 28 F-16 combat fighters for which Pakistan had made payments until 1993.\(^49\)

The 1999 Kargil War further strained the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, while deepening Washington’s strategic preference for New Delhi. As C. Raja Mohan points out, the Clinton Administration “acted decisively” in India’s favor by persuading Islamabad to “unconditionally and unambiguously” curtail its aggression across the disputed Line of Control (LIC). Strobe Talbott, who served as Deputy Secretary of State during the Kargil crisis, echoes Mohan’s assessment, noting that the Clinton Administration’s pressure against Pakistan secured India’s trust of U.S. intentions on the Subcontinent.\(^50\) Building on the nascent, diplomatic good will, the U.S. and Indian governments agreed to conduct a joint case study of the Kargil Crisis—aimed in part as a ‘confidence-building measure’—which continued under the Bush Administration.\(^51\) Diplomatic maneuvers during the Kargil event thus marked a significant break in the

\(^{49}\) Ibid, 157.  
\(^{50}\) Ibid, 175.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid, 176.
diplomatic history of these two nations, paving the way for rapprochement over the next decade.

Second Level: Economic Modernization, Democratic Affinity, and Institutional Reform

Whereas the third level of analysis captures structural dynamics that impact state behavior, Waltz’ second level looks towards the internal character of states as determinants for peace and conflict. Structural changes in the international security environment were closely related to state-level reforms that India undertook starting in 1990. The loss of the Soviet Union as a nominal patron not only forced India to look for other sources of security, but it underscored the futility of socialist economic planning. This, coupled with a foreign exchange crisis that occurred after New Delhi purchased oil on the global market prior to the outbreak of the Gulf War, directly led to a series of state economic reforms launched under the guise of then-Finance Minister Manmohan Singh. Reforms within India’s regulatory system, and its over-reliance on industrial imports, led to the abatement of decades-long economic stagnation, as growth rates averaged 6% per year during the 1990s, and far surpassed the growth of Pakistan’s economy.  

Comprehensive deregulation, in addition to reforms in the financial sector and the removal of barriers to foreign trade and investment, created opportunities for foreign capital investment, which many U.S. corporations quickly recognized; the South Indian cities of Bangalore and Hyderabad emerged as major business process outsourcing (BPO) centers after economic liberalization. Likewise, by 2006, the United States became India’s largest export market and its third largest source of imports. And, India’s rapid

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54 Ibid, 32
economic growth throughout the 1990s facilitated New Delhi’s increased military spending and plans for “substantive military modernization” in 2001 and 2002.\(^5\)

*First Level: The Power of Individuals*

While the third and second levels of analysis stress the relationship between the Soviet Union’s collapse and necessary changes that facilitated rapprochement, the first level underscores the power of individual decision-makers in allowing this alliance to come into fruition. Principally, and as Ganguly and Kapur argue, much of the Bush Administration’s success in consolidating the alliance in the first decade of the 21st Century is attributable to the leadership of President Bill Clinton, who made a number of moves in the last few years of his Administration which paved the way for the subsequent civilian nuclear deal. In particular, the authors recognize Clinton’s actions during the 1999 Kargil conflict, including the President’s tough diplomacy with then Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, as signaling to the Indian’s that it would not ‘reflexively’ side with a historical ally. Clinton’s castigation of Pakistan in breaching the Line of Control (LoC) that triggered the conflict, signaled “America’s good faith to the Indians” while atoning for U.S.-imposed economic sanctions in the wake of India and Pakistan’s 1998 nuclear tests. In addition, Ganguly and Kapur credit former Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and then-Finance Minister Manmohan Singh with significant credit for ensuring the early 90s economic reforms despite stiff political opposition.\(^6\)

In addition to the actors Ganguly and Kapur have noted, a few other individuals deserve significant credit for advancing the Indo-U.S. alliance as well for securing the passage of the nuclear agreement. First, former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who served as Prime Minister from 1998-2004, played a key role by signaling India’s unique support to the United States after the Bush Administration decided to abandon the

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\(^5\) Mohan, 180.
\(^6\) Kapur and Ganguly, 649.
Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in December of 2001. Three years later, Bush announced the Next Steps in the Strategic Partnership (NSSP) with the Vajpayee government.  

Finally, a persuasive argument can be made that the Henry Hyde Act would not have even come to fruition, let alone conception, if it were not for the presence of Dr. Ashley Tellis on the National Security Council during the Bush Administration. Tellis is widely considered to be the principal architect of the U.S.-Indo Civilian Nuclear Agreement. Tellis served as a Special Assistant to President Bush on the National Security Staff in the early years of the Bush Administration, and then served as a Senior Advisor to U.S. Ambassador to India, Robert Blackwell, and was subsequently commissioned into the U.S. Foreign Service as a Senior Advisor to Undersecretary of State R. Nicholas Burns. Indeed, as Undersecretary Burns told an Indian Newspaper in 2006, the Bush Administration tapped Tellis because he knew “more about India’s nuclear program than any other living American” and was thus “instrumental” in securing the deal’s passage.  

Well before the introduction of Henry Hyde Act, Tellis was a vocal supporter of redefining Washington’s relationship with a nuclear-armed New Delhi. In a 2001, Tellis wrote of the need for the U.S. to abandon the traditional policy of “resolving nonproliferation issues as a precondition to deepened bilateral relations” towards India, instead urging Washington to adopt a “reorientation in its strategic attitude” by

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58 Ibid, For further evidence, see S. Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, 2009. Authors state that the agreement was not the end product of an interagency process within the USG, but rather the innovation of a small handful of individuals within the State Department and NSC.
59 See comment by R. Nicholas Burns, “Ashley J. Tellis: Key Figure in the U.S.-India Nuclear Deal,” Carnegie Middle East Center Website, reprinted from rediff.com
“accepting the fact that India will maintain a nuclear deterrent of some sort for some time to come.”

The idea of embracing a nuclear-armed state that had not signed the NPT was anathema to U.S. nonproliferation policy since the treaty’s inception over three decades earlier. Four years later, and one month before the historic meeting between President Bush and Prime Minister Singh, Tellis squarely addressed the tension between engaging India at the expense of the nonproliferation regime, writing:

Washington ought to support New Delhi simply because India’s continued presence outside the global nonproliferation architecture will be increasingly dangerous for U.S. interests, given India’s vast and growing indigenous capabilities…[T]he United States ought to increase India’s access to controlled technologies as an incentive for New Delhi—despite its currently impeccable record—to scrupulously control outward proliferation in perpetuity… The solution cannot consist of jettisoning the regime; instead the regime should be selectively applied in practice.

This vision would ultimately become the basis for the Bush Administration’s nuclear engagement strategy with India – a strategy that Tellis would frequently defend while testifying on behalf of the nuclear accord on Capitol Hill.

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60 Tellis, 761.
VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has refuted Jason Kirk’s claim by underscoring the role that a combination of systemic, domestic, and individual-level factors played in facilitating the U.S.-Indo alliance formation since 1990. By casting doubt on USINPAC’s perceived role in influencing Congressional races, I have attempted to undermine the organization’s argument that it is particularly effective political organization and it’s own claims that it is representative of the broader Indian diaspora. By turning to the three levels of analysis perspective, this paper has sought to illuminate the necessary international, domestic, and individual factors that paved the way for Indo-U.S. rapprochement, and ultimately, the passage of the landmark civilian nuclear cooperation agreement in 2008. The latter view is far more thorough in explaining the factors that drove the formation of this alliance – and ultimately, the determinants of the civilian nuclear agreement – a policy that stood in stark contrast to four decades of U.S. nonproliferation strategy.

Beyond undermining Jason Kirk’s argument, this discussion has sought to add to the existing case studies of domestic ethnic lobbies and their impact on foreign policy. In addition, this paper seeks to add a refinement to the cannon of ethnic lobbying literature by suggesting that time is a key determinant for ethnic lobby success – a variable that does not appear to be directly addressed in existing case studies. The Armenian lobby, in particular, has been in existence in some form since after World War I; the Israeli lobby (and AIPAC, in particular) emerged shortly after World War II, while Cuban migrants and exiles to the United States mobilized in opposition to Cuban President Fidel Castro during the Cold War. In short, preexisting studies all deal with diasporas that have well-established lobbying arms. For interest groups, the perception of success matters as much
as an ability to effectively influence outcomes, and longevity can often help strengthen such perceptions. Thus, while USINPAC does satisfy much of Haney and Vanderbush’s criteria for interest group success, its relative infancy appears to be a missing variable. Its continued presence on Capitol Hill, as well as its organizational durability, can only help bolster its lobbying activities in the short and long term.

For policy-makers and observers, this argument strongly suggests that elected officials should not axiomatically believe the claims that a particular ethnic lobbying group broaches about the degree to which it represents a particular community. USINPAC’s questionable impact of domestic Congressional races buttresses the point that while an ethnic lobby may try to deter legislators from voting against their interests through the threat of electoral punishment, these threats may often be hollow. Second, this analysis should also lend a degree of skepticism to claims that ethnic lobbies are uniquely powerful and positioned to influence U.S. foreign policy. All ethnic lobbies are not created equal, not least with the same resources, strategy, culture, and influence, thereby undermining a central claim Huntington advanced in 1997.


Giroux, Greg. “Burton is So Vulnerable He Just Might Win,” Congressional Quarterly /


