

# **A Special Relationship**

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**Pro-Israel Influence on US Foreign Policy**  
— an internal perspective

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# Abbreviations

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AIPAC: American Israel Public Affairs Committee

BDS: Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (movement)

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CLF: Congressional Leadership Fund

CJCS: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

IAC: Israeli-American Coalition

INARA: Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act

IR: International Relations

JCPOA: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

JCS: Joint Chiefs of Staff

PAC: Political Actions Committee

P5: Five permanent members of UNSC (China, Russia, USA, France, and Great Britain)

RJC: Republican Jewish Coalition

SLF: Senate Leadership Fund

UANI: United Against Nuclear Iran

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHRC: United Nations Human Rights Council

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

UNSCR: United Nations Security Council Resolution

US: United States of America

WWII: World War II

# Abstract

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The enduring US-Israeli relationship has been researched by IR scholars for decades. These studies have often focused on external factors in order to explain why the US continuously have been supportive of Israel. In recent years, however, the traditional focus of study has undergone a change. Prominent scholars within the field of the social sciences have increasingly turned their attention to internal factors within the US, to explain why the US, especially in recent decades, increasingly has strengthened its relationship with Israel, by making pro-Israel foreign policy decisions.

This thesis is based on the recent years' debates concerning internal factors shaping the US foreign policy to be pro-Israel. The thesis objective has been to contribute a new explanatory perspective to the continuous pro-Israel US foreign policy — particularly for the Trump administration. To do this, an explanatory, theoretical model has been constructed by drawing on some of the core aspects of the theories of *influence elites* and *political priming of public opinion*.

The notions of the explanatory, theoretical model point to several elite groups within the US as potential influencers on the pro-Israel US foreign policy. These elite groups include pro-Israel lobby organizations, wealthy individuals with pro-Israel interests, members of the political elite, including the executive and legislative branches, as well as key political and military advisors to the President. The influence of these elites is evident through their connections and interactions with one another, as well as through the various incentives, they present in order to ensure a pro-Israel US foreign policy. Additionally, the explanatory, theoretical model also entails that elites have sought to manipulate public opinion be positive towards the pro-Israel US foreign policy, in order to generate leeway for the elites' objectives concerning the pro-Israel US foreign policy to be fulfilled.

On the basis of the explanatory, theoretical model, this thesis examines a specific aspect of the Trump administration's pro-Israel US foreign policy, namely the decision to withdraw the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal. Through an in-depth empirical analysis of relevant actors

within the aforementioned elites, this thesis verifies the core notions of the explanatory, theoretical model. It demonstrates that an intricate and complex network of elites has worked to ensure the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. Additionally, the empirical analysis verifies that non-political elites have presented members of the political elite with strong incentives to ensure the JCPOA withdrawal and that it is likely that these incentives have been a factor in Trump's decision concerning the JCPOA. Furthermore, the empirical analysis verifies that public opinion towards the JCPOA withdrawal has been a secondary concern to the political elite, which has not acted in accordance with the general public opinion on the matter but rather attempted to shape public opinion among Trump's core voters to ensure the needed support for the JCPOA withdrawal.

Thereby, this thesis verifies the basic notions of previous scholars who have claimed that the pro-Israel US foreign policy is highly influenced by internal factors. Though, it has not been the objective of this thesis to claim that the examined internal factors are the only possible influencers on the pro-Israel US foreign policy. Rather, the thesis adds a new perspective from which to examine the internal factors through the constructed explanatory, theoretical model. Additional examination of both internal and external factors is necessary to fully comprehend the overall determining factors for the continuous pro-Israel US foreign policy.

# 1. A Special Relationship

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"We have a special relationship with Israel. It's absolutely crucial that no one in our country or around the world ever doubt that our number one commitment in the Middle East is to protect the right of Israel to exist, to exist in peace. It's a special relationship."<sup>1</sup>

— *United States President Jimmy Carter, 1977.*

Since the 1960s, a special relationship between the United States of America (US) and Israel has existed. While the international system, including Western states, repeatedly has condemned Israeli actions towards the Palestinian people through United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR)<sup>2</sup>, and Middle Eastern states have gone to war with Israel eight times to challenge Israel's right to existence,<sup>3</sup> the US support for Israel has been persistent. For example, since 1972, when the US cast its first veto after a UNSCR condemning Israel's actions towards the Palestinian people, 44 US vetoes have been cast in favor of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the US has contributed around \$134 billion in economic aid to Israel since 1949<sup>5</sup>, making Israel the largest total recipient of US foreign aid since World War II (WWII).<sup>6</sup>

Though, there are examples of US Presidents who have sought a more critical approach towards Israel. Most recently, during the presidency of Barack Obama, the US foreign policy was not exclusively pro-Israel. In 2016, the US abstained from vetoing a UNSCR critical towards Israel, and in 2015, the US engaged in the Joint

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<sup>1</sup> "211 Press conference with President Carter - 12 May 1977," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed November 3, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook2/Pages/211%20Press%20conference%20with%20President%20Carter-%2012%20May.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> "UN Resolutions Targeting Israel and the Palestinians," If Americans Knew, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://ifamericaknew.org/stat/un.html>

<sup>3</sup> "Israel's Wars," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed November 23, 2018, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/History/Pages/Israel-Wars.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> "U.N. Security Council: U.S. Vetoes of Resolutions Critical to Israel: 1972-Present," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed November 7, 2018, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/u-s-vetoes-of-un-security-council-resolutions-critical-to-israel>

<sup>5</sup> "Total US Foreign Aid to Israel: 1949-Present," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed November 7, 2018, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-u-s-foreign-aid-to-israel-1949-present>

<sup>6</sup> "Aid Trends," USAID Foreign Aid Explorer, accessed November 7, 2018, <https://explorer.usaid.gov/aid-trends.html>



Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) under protests from Israel.<sup>7</sup> However, notwithstanding this, the critical turn towards Israel was only evident in a few diplomatic instances, and the general financial and military support for Israel endured.

Today, any insecurities about the strong US-Israeli relationship have vanished. After Donald J. Trump became President in 2017, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has stated that Israel's relationship with the US is stronger than ever.<sup>8</sup> This is likely true. In 2017, the US withdrew from the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), arguing that the US could not accept its "continuing anti-Israel bias."<sup>9</sup> In May 2018, the US withdrew from the JCPOA, which Trump argued did not ensure the security of Israel,<sup>10</sup> and in June 2018, Trump announced that the US would withdraw from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) because of its "unfair bias against Israel."<sup>11</sup>

The enduring US support for Israel has been baffling to observers. While some recognize the strategic advantage of a US friendship with Israel, others perceive the US-Israeli relationship as a skewed partnership, where Israel increasingly stands as a recipient of goods, while the US, as the benefactor, lose money and international goodwill on this relationship.<sup>12</sup> Whether that is true or not, the US support for Israel now seems stronger than ever. Why is that? Why has this special relationship between the two rather mischief states again become a key objective for the US? Especially when considering that most other Western states increasingly have become more critical towards Israel?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Shimoni Stoil, "How The GOP Became A 'Pro-Israel' Party," *FiveThirtyEight*, December 8, 2017, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-the-gop-became-a-pro-israel-party/>

<sup>8</sup> "Excerpt from PM Netanyahu's AIPAC Speech," Israel Prime Minister's Office, accessed December 6, 2018, [http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Speeches/Pages/speech\\_aipac060318.aspx](http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Speeches/Pages/speech_aipac060318.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> Heather Nauert, "The United States Withdraws From UNESCO," US Department of State, October 17, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/10/274748.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Zurcher, "Three reasons behind Trump ditching Iran deal," *BBC News*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43902372>

<sup>11</sup> "President Donald J. Trump is Standing Up for Human Rights at the U.N.," The White House Presidential Statements, accessed November 22, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-standing-human-rights-u-n/>

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, (2006).

<sup>13</sup> 71% of the 193 member states of the UN has already recognized Palestine as an independent state: "Which Countries Recognize Palestine Already? - Interactive," *The Guardian*, accessed November 13, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2011/sep/20/palestinain-state-israel-un-interactive>

## 1.1 Research Question

On the basis of the puzzle of the enduring US support for Israel, this thesis will aim to answer the following research question:

*Why has the US foreign policy consistently been pro-Israel in general - and for the Trump administration in particular?*

## 1.2 Literature Review

This question of the pro-Israel US foreign policy is not a new puzzle within the field of International Relations (IR). On the contrary, scholars have sought to examine this for decades, though without reaching consensus. The following literature review presents an overview of some of the main scholarly opinions about the US-Israeli relationship, which will be used to place the approach in this thesis in context with previous research.

According to IR scholar Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, the special relationship between the US and Israel began at the beginning of the 1960s as the two states developed a patron-client relationship. Bar-Siman-Tov argues that then-President John F. Kennedy initiated the relationship between the two states when he made promises to aid Israel in protecting its claims in the region. In the following years, the relationship between the US and other Arab states deteriorated, which, according to Bar-Siman-Tov, was the main reason for the increased US support for Israel, rather than a US understanding of the potential geo-strategic importance of Israel.<sup>14</sup> Though, this understanding became central after the Six Day War in 1967, as Israel asserted itself as the strongest military power in the Middle East. The US now began to see the political and strategic attractiveness of Israel. The relationship developed to become what Bar-Siman-Tov calls a *special* patron-client relationship, which strengthened in the following decades, culminating during the Clinton era in the mid-90s where the interests of the two states almost fully converged.<sup>15</sup>

Correspondingly, Director-General of the Institute of Policy Studies, Khalid Rahman, argues that the US-Israeli relationship strengthened in the late 1960s. Rahman

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<sup>14</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (1998): 231-238.

<sup>15</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, *Ibid.* 240-241; 257.

describes how the conflicts in the Middle East during the Cold War, in combination with the US' "new" status as a hegemon after WWII, made the prospect of securing a strong ally in the region important to the US. The choice of Israel as an ally was made because the ideologies of Israel correlated with those of the US. Additionally, the US relations with Arab states had deteriorated because of conflicting interests, including the Soviet Union's alliances with some of these states.<sup>16</sup> When the Cold War ended, the US-Israeli relationship had reached a point where both states were dependent on one another. Israel had come to depend on the US foreign aid and the security promises made by the US, which in return had gained an important geo-strategic asset in Israel, ensuring the US access to military bases, intelligence, energy sources, etc. in the Middle East.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Rahman, argues that during recent decades, the relationship has developed even further. Through nearly fifty years of US alliance with Israel, the American people has increased its empathy and support for Israel, while interest groups within the US have worked hard to further this, making the interests of Israel a US domestic issue.<sup>18</sup>

The focus on internal factors shaping US foreign policy towards Israel has gained increased attention in recent years. Most notably is John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt's 2007 book about the Israel lobby and US foreign policy. In this, and several associated academic articles, the authors argue that the relationship between the US and Israel has become a disadvantage for the US, and the continuing US support for Israel, therefore, has become increasingly difficult to explain from an IR realism perspective focusing on external, geo-strategic factors.<sup>19</sup> Instead, Mearsheimer and Walt point to the influence of internal factors within the US, namely the Israel lobby, as the primary cause for the pro-Israel US foreign policy after the Cold War.<sup>20</sup> The authors conclude that the US foreign policy towards Israel has become a "strategic liability" to the US and that the Israel lobby is pushing US foreign policy in a direction that is in conflict with the national interests of the US.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Khalid Rahman, "US Middle East Policies and their Consequences," *Policy Perspectives*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2010): 34-35.

<sup>17</sup> Rahman, *Ibid.* 27-29.

<sup>18</sup> Rahman, *Ibid.* 48.

<sup>19</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *Den Israelske Lobby og Amerikansk Udenrigspolitik* (Gyldendal, 2007), 72-106.

<sup>20</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, *Ibid.* 146.

<sup>21</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, *Ibid.* 19.

Subsequent to the publication of Mearsheimer and Walt's articles and book, several scholars, diplomats, politicians, and foreign policy experts criticized the results. Some defended a realist perspective of the US' geo-strategic and geo-economic interests in the Middle East, claiming that the US relationship with Israel was shaped by security issues and economic incentives. One of these critics, historian Michael B. Oren, even named his responding article to the Mearsheimer and Walt book, "Quiet Riot: Tinfoil Hats in Harvard Yard", implying how outrageous he considered Mearsheimer and Walt's assumptions to be. Other critics focused on internal factors and claimed that the conclusions reached by Mearsheimer and Walt were inadequate or even plain wrong.<sup>22</sup>

From this brief literature review, it is evident that scholars have researched the US-Israeli relationship from various perspectives and, thus, with various outcomes. The literature review depicts a conflict between the internal and external perspectives of IR. Furthermore, it is apparent that scholars do agree that the US, historically, strengthened its relationship with Israel during the Cold War to ensure the US a strong strategic, political, and economic position in the Middle East. However, IR scholars seem to have conflicting views on why the relationship endured after the Cold War.<sup>23</sup>

It is on the basis of this puzzle, as well as the scholarly debates about external and internal factors shaping US foreign policy towards Israel, that this thesis takes its departure. The internal-external nexus of IR is extremely interesting, and it is my understanding that it is in the interplay between internal and external explanations that international relations is fully understood. Though, in this thesis, the focus will be solely on internal factors. This choice has been made on the basis of recent years' scholarly debates about how internal factors may be influencing the pro-Israel US foreign policy. This does not mean that I dispute an external IR perspective on US foreign policy towards Israel, nor do I reject any other possible external explanations for US behavior concerning Israel. Instead, the choice to focus on internal factors comes from a profound interest in this viewpoint, and from the impression that an internal perspective sometimes is neglected by traditional IR scholars. Thus, this thesis will aim to examine internal factors, while recognizing that this should be put in context with potential external factors if the research were to be taken further at a later point.

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Hays Gries, "How Ideology Divides American Liberals and Conservatives over Israel," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 130, No. 1 (2015): 51-51.

<sup>23</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, Op.cit. 19.

## 2. Methodology

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In order to fit the interest in this specific perspective into the framework of this thesis, further methodological considerations have been made. The approach taken in this thesis is based on the sole goal to answer the research questions as thoroughly and as comprehensive as possible. While I believe that one can reach an advantageous result in this endeavor by placing the researcher as an independent and objective observer of the facts presented by the empirical data, the implications of this subject, and the reality in general for that matter may prove to be too complex for this method. Thus, from the very get-go of the initial research, it has been evident that, while indicatory causalities may be verifiable through the empirical data, it will be challenging to confirm causal correlations without interpreting the findings of the empirical analysis. On this basis, this thesis will take an approach similar to many scholars within the social sciences, namely that hypotheses may not ever be fully proved, but they will be tested through empirical data, and the absence of contradictory evidence, will determine whether the findings may be accepted.<sup>24</sup>

To strengthen the value of this strategy, the research in this thesis will be based on a mixed methods approach. This entails that the research will be conducted through both qualitative and quantitative method simultaneously in order to continuously be able to “connect the dots” between the empirical data within the theoretical framework. This will further the objective to reach in-depth answers.<sup>25</sup> While some may argue that this strategy can be contradictory in itself, or that it is merely a method for covering up a lack of empirical evidence to support a claim through either a solely positivist or interpretivist approach, it is my conviction that this strategy actually allows for more thorough and comprehensive research.

On this basis, the approach in the thesis will be deductive - i.e. built around a top-down approach, focusing on theoretical reflections from which an explanatory model

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<sup>24</sup> James N. Druckman and Lawrence R. Jacobs, *Who Governs?* (The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 37-38.

<sup>25</sup> “Mixed-Methods Approach,” Statistics Solutions, accessed November 13, 2018, <https://www.statisticssolutions.com/mixed-methods-approach/>

will be created. This model will be examined through the chosen empirical data, which, according to the considerations in the previous paragraphs, will consist of both quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, the findings will be reflected upon in order to determine causal correlations to reach final conclusions.

## 2.1 Thesis Objective

The overall thesis objective is to answer why the US foreign policy continuously has been pro-Israel, specifically during the Trump presidency. Though, while hoping to add perspective to the reasons for the enduring pro-Israel US foreign policy during the Trump presidency, this thesis neither aspires to make generalizing assumptions about the overall, conclusive factors shaping the pro-Israel US foreign policy, nor the factors shaping US foreign policy in general. This task would be too comprehensive for a thesis of this scope, and would also require further studies of both external factors and, potentially, additional internal factors. Instead, the objective is to contribute perspective to the existing debates on the internal factors shaping US foreign policy towards Israel by examining specifically chosen empirical data within a theoretical framework.

To reach this objective, some demarcations have been made. As mentioned, the focal point will be an internal perspective. However, this perspective must be further clarified and demarcated to be able to conduct a coherent analysis. Therefore, a choice has been made to focus on two specific groups in society which may play important roles in the pro-Israel US foreign policy decisions, namely elites and the public. This choice is based on an assumption that US foreign policy is shaped within networks of the wealthiest and most powerful people, while public opinion also must play a role, as it is the public who elects the political decision makers.

Though, even with these demarcations, it may prove difficult to conclusively verify that specific groups directly have influenced pro-Israel US foreign policy decisions — i.e. it will be a challenge to determine when it is fair to conclude that A acted because of the influence by B? In the subsequent chapters, this challenge will be considered carefully throughout. Specifically chosen empirical data will be applied in a theoretical framework which will aim to ensure that causal correlations can be verified if present.

## 2.2 Choice of Theories

The choice of theories is, thus, based on the thesis objective, to examine specific internal groups in the US, which may have influenced the pro-Israel US foreign policy during the Trump presidency. While some demarcations have been made at this point, the following theoretical framework will aim to further specify the implications of the research of this thesis. Additionally, the objective of the chosen theoretical framework is to present a new perspective to the research of internal factors shaping the pro-Israel US foreign policy, in order to not follow in the direct footsteps of previous scholars. This entails, among other things, that the theoretical framework will be based on theories from the social sciences that does not fall within the scope of the traditional theories of IR. The reason for this is to conduct an examination of solely internal factors in the US utilizing theories that are meant for such a task. The following sections will briefly present the chosen theories and explain their applicability to the thesis objective. On this basis, an explanatory, theoretical model will be presented.

### 2.2.1 Power and Influence Elites

In order to map and understand the network of influential groups in the US, who actively work to promote a pro-Israel US foreign policy, elite theory has been chosen. Utilizing the notions of C. Wright Mills, who coined the term *power elites* in the 1950's<sup>26</sup>, and the recent work of Janine R. Wedel, who offers a modern interpretation of Mills' theory in what she calls *influence elites*<sup>27</sup>, the network of pro-Israel elites and their actions in the US political system will be examined. This theoretical approach is deemed applicable because it allows for an analysis of the elites on different levels. Whereas Mills holds a rather narrow perspective on who can be considered a member of the elite, Wedel broadens the concept by including more potential elite "members", while also widening the capacity for networking and interaction, and thus influence, between elites.

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<sup>26</sup> C. Wright Mills, "Power Elites," in *Critical Management Studies*, ed. Christopher Grey and Hugh Willmott (Oxford University Press, 2005), 50-51.

<sup>27</sup> Janine R. Wedel, "From Power Elites to Influence Elites: Resetting Elite Studies for the 21st Century," *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 34(5-6) (2017): 154.

Mills' definition of the power elites consists of three groups and their top leaders, namely the state, the military, and corporations. Other prominent groups in society are, according to Mills, merely used by the three elite groups to achieve influence.<sup>28</sup> Wedel, however, argues that while Mills' notions of the structures of elites may be correct, the number of elite groups, the way they are connected, and, thus, the way they enact influence over policy decisions must be broadened to include groups such as think tanks, lobby organizations, wealthy individuals, interest organizations, etc.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Wedel, in accordance with Mills, describes the media as a tool, elites use to influence the public opinion. Utilizing these approaches to elite theory will help determine and examine influential individuals and groups in the US, while also making it possible to consider the connections between these actors. This is important because, according to the theoretical framework of elite theory, potential influence on decisions regarding US politics, in this thesis the US foreign policy concerning Israel, is evident in the connections between the elites

### 2.2.1.1 Limitations and Critiques

While elite theory is able to describe the different influential groups that are part of shaping US foreign policy, and how these groups are connected, the theory has been critiqued for mistaking the potential for influence and control with actual control.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the theory may be useful to map an elite network and highlight their potential influence on US foreign policy through the elites' connections. Though, the theory does not make it possible to measure the "amount" of direct impact that elites may have had on foreign policy decisions. Therefore, it may be challenging to determine when the potential influence of elites has had an effect. However, this limitation will be considered throughout, and the choice of the second theory, as well as the methodological and empirical choices, will aim to set a framework for determining the influence of the elites.

The theory has also been criticized for making over-generalizations, meaning that if an elite is detected to have an influence on one policy area, one should not assume

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<sup>28</sup> Mills, Op.cit. 50-51.

<sup>29</sup> Wedel, Op.cit. 154.

<sup>30</sup> Robert A. Dahl, "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," *The American Science Review*, Vol. 52, No.2 (1958): 465.



that it has it in other areas.<sup>31</sup> However, the demarcations made through the choice of empirical data will all be related to a specific pro-Israel US foreign policy decision, and the conclusions of this thesis will only be made concerning empirically examined examples. Additionally, elite theory neglects the role of other groups in society, especially the public.<sup>32</sup> This, however, will be covered in the choice of the second theory.

## 2.2.2 Political Priming of Public Opinion

It seems obvious when examining internal factors that may play a role in the pro-Israel US foreign policymaking, to also include the perspective of public opinion. After all, it is the public who decides whether a political candidate obtains a position from which he or she is able to enact foreign policy. However, a returning problem in research on public opinion and politics has been to determine the connection between public opinion and actual political decisions.

Theories on public opinion have developed throughout the 20th Century, and today they are primarily focused on how mass media influence public opinion.<sup>33</sup> In recent years, however, scholars have increasingly focused efforts on examining how politicians make use of specific tactics to ensure public support for policy decisions. According to the theoretical notions, the purpose of ensuring public support is for members of the political elite to generate leeway for them to accommodate the objectives of other elites, who may present them with relevant incentives to do so. This means that the public does not necessarily dictate policy, but rather is influenced by politicians to support political initiatives. From this perspective, the mass media is merely a means to an end for politicians, meaning that politicians communicate to the public through the media to prime public opinion, while prioritizing the objectives of other elites.<sup>34</sup>

Drawing on these assumptions, the purpose of including notions of public opinion theory, is not to do a large-scale study of the mass media, its coverage of specific pro-

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<sup>31</sup> Dahl, Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Mills, Op.cit. 51-52.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Boy and Brandon Bosch, "Theories of Public Opinion," in *Handbook of Communication Science*, ed. Paul Coble and Peter J. Schultz (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2013), 294-297.

<sup>34</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, Op.cit. 22.

Israel US foreign policy issues, and how this may influence public opinion. Rather, the purpose is to examine whether elites, especially the non-political elite, may have presented members of the political elite with relevant incentives to ensure a pro-Israel US foreign policy. In this context, it will also be relevant to consider whether the political elite, may have pursued to influence public opinion to be supportive of the pro-Israel US foreign policy, to verify whether the elites can be placed as core actors in the influence on the pro-Israel US foreign policy. Thereby, the premise is that the public opinion is not shaping the pro-Israel US foreign policy, but rather is one of the tools, the elites use to ensure this policy direction.

### **2.2.2.1 Limitations and Critiques**

Choosing to focus on a rather specific concept within public opinion theory, presents some limitations. Especially when viewing this from the perspective of the political elite's strategy and not the media coverage in general. The theoretical framework is built around the research of first-hand sources of the White Houses' polling of public opinion. Such data will not be available to me. However, it is still possible to utilize the core notions of the theory by examining how the elites' communicate the pro-Israel US foreign policy to the public, and how this is received by examining polling data that is publicly available from independent institutions.

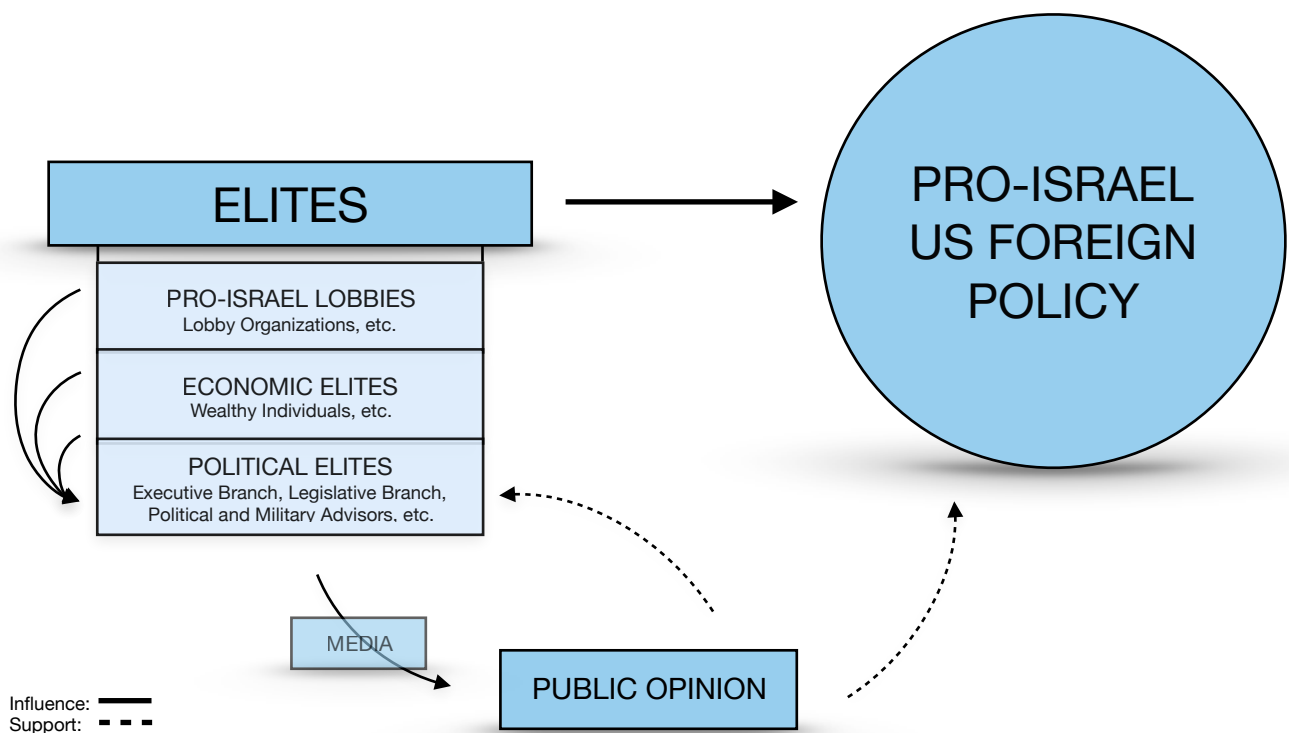
The research of political priming of public opinion is, furthermore, based on a large scale study. This is not possible to conduct in a thesis of this scope. However, the application of the core assumptions of the theory does not have the purpose of examining the longterm connection between the President's foreign policy decisions and the public. Rather, the purpose is to confirm the role of the elites as primary influencers on the pro-Israel US foreign policy through an examination of specific examples. Thus, it is possible to zoom in on specific elite actors to consider whether the President has prioritized accommodating their objectives while attempting to influence the public to be positive towards this.

### **2.2.3 Explanatory Theoretical Model**

Thus, on the basis of the chosen theories, an explanatory model may be presented to explain the internal factors influencing the pro-Israel US foreign policy. According to the chosen theories, the elites will be the main influencers on US foreign policy

concerning Israel, while the public will stand as a secondary concern to decision makers. Furthermore, the elites may be divided into sub-groups, which may include the President, leading politicians, political and military advisors, wealthy individuals, and pro-Israel lobby organizations. These elites will thus, according to the theoretical framework, aim to influence each other, as well as the public, through the media, to ensure a pro-Israel US foreign policy. On this basis, it is assumed that the elites are key actors in the pro-Israel US foreign policy decisions.

The illustration below is a depiction of an explanatory, theoretical model, based on the notions of the theoretical considerations made so far. The theoretical application in the theory chapter will further explain the reasoning behind this model.



## 2.3 Choice of Empirical Data

The empirical data in this thesis is chosen on the basis of its ability to reach the thesis objective by confirming the implications of the theoretical model. However, before describing the specific empirical data, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the term 'pro-Israel US foreign policy' in this thesis. For the sake of clarity, the determining factor for pro-Israel US foreign policy will be based on the perception by Israel. If the government of Israel agrees with a US initiative, it is considered to be pro-Israel.

On this basis, an array of pro-Israel foreign policy decisions have been enacted under the current US President. These include the US withdrawal from UNESCO, the UNHRC, and the JCPOA, as well as the decision to move the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, and the US initiatives to oppose the UNSCR 2334 and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. All of these decisions have been applauded by the Israeli government.<sup>35</sup> However, not all of these examples can be examined in-depth within the scope of this thesis, and the empirical analysis will, therefore, focus on the examination of events surrounding the US withdrawal from the JCPOA in the time period 2016-2018.

The JCPOA, in popular terms known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, was reached on July 14, 2015, between the US, China, Russia, France, Great Britain and Germany (UNSC P5+1), the EU, and Iran. The agreement, among other things, included the non-proliferation of Iran's nuclear development sites, as well as a 98% reduction of the regime's stock of enriched uranium. In return, the major powers engaged in the deal pledged to lift economic sanctions on Iran.<sup>36</sup> Though, while the JCPOA was praised by

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<sup>35</sup> John Irish, "U.S., Israel quit U.N. heritage agency citing bias," *Reuters*, October 12, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-unesco-election-usa/u-s-israel-quit-u-n-heritage-agency-citing-bias-idUSKBN1CH1YO>;

Gary Willig, "Israel welcomes Trump's decision to withdraw from JCPOA," *Israel National News*, August 5, 2018, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/245632>;

Peter Beaumont, "Israel rejects 'shameful' UN resolution amid criticism of Netanyahu," *The Guardian*, December 24, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/24/israel-rejects-shameful-un-resolution-amid-criticism-of-netanyahu>;

YNet, "Netanyahu on BDS: Attacks on Jews always preceded by slander of Jews," *AFP, YNet*, June 5, 2015, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4668771,00.html>;

Haaretz, "Trump, Netanyahu Talk Jerusalem, Iran, Mideast Peace at White House," *Haaretz*, March 5, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/full-text-trump-and-netanyahu-meet-at-the-white-house-1.5871031>;

Toi Staff, "Israel welcomes 'courageous' US pullout from UN Human Rights Council," *The Times of Israel*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-welcomes-courageous-us-pull-out-from-un-human-rights-council/>

<sup>36</sup> "The Iran Nuclear Deal: What You Need To Know About The JCPOA" (PDF), (The White House, July 14, 2015).

many world leaders, not all saw the deal as advantageous.<sup>37</sup> During Trump's presidential election campaign in 2016, he had promised to withdraw the US from the deal, if he were to become President. On May 8, 2018, Trump fulfilled his campaign promise by announcing the US withdrawal from the JCPOA.<sup>38</sup> This action was praised by the state of Israel.<sup>39</sup>

This choice to focus on the JCPOA withdrawal is mainly based on the fact that the JCPOA has been a high profile foreign policy issue in both the US and the World in general, and therefore there is a lot of publicly available data on the actions and reactions by both elites and the public on this matter. This makes it possible to conduct an in-depth study which is both interesting and relevant.

### 2.3.1 Demarcations

While the choice to focus on the JCPOA withdrawal presents a clear demarcation to the empirical analysis in itself, further demarcations have to be made. This is necessary because the theoretical model includes so many potential actors. In theory, hundreds of individuals and organizations may have worked to put an end to the US engagement in the JCPOA. Additionally, their connections have to be examined in-depth in order to not conduct unsubstantiated interpretations of what these connections might have meant for the JCPOA withdrawal. Therefore, not all involved actors will be examined in the analysis. Rather, the analysis will examine some specific pro-Israel actors who stand out in the initial research. The individuals or groups considered in the analysis will be chosen on the basis of their potential to influence US foreign policy to be pro-Israel, their potential to have a great interest in the issue of the JCPOA, and the amount of data available to back this up. This does not mean that other groups are irrelevant in relation to the pro-Israel US foreign policy, but rather that they have not been deemed applicable in this thesis due to lack of empirical data about them, or because other groups and individuals have been determined to be of greater importance.

Some specific demarcations concerning this approach are necessary to explain further. Since the chosen definition of a pro-Israel US foreign policy decision entails that Israel is supportive of it, the analysis will focus on elites that have the same opinion

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<sup>37</sup> Farhad Rezaei, *Iran's Nuclear Program: A Study in Proliferation and Rollback* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 218.

<sup>38</sup> Zurcher, Op.cit.

<sup>39</sup> Willig, Op.cit.

as Israel. This means that proclaimed pro-Israel elites that have opposed the JCPOA withdrawal will not be considered. The reason for this is both to narrow in the analysis, but also because it does not seem likely that Trump would be connected to such elite groups when considering his staunch opposition against the JCPOA during and after the 2016 election.

Furthermore, since the focus of the theoretical model is the elites, the data concerning the President's potential attempts to influence public opinion on the matter of the JCPOA will be limited to a few empirical examples. These examples will predominantly function as a verification of the political elite's priority of the objectives of other elites.

### **2.3.2 Supporting Data**

The supporting data for the empirical analysis will consist of both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative data will predominantly be document-based, consisting of; official government and congressional documents; official statements by politicians; statements by pro-Israel elite groups and individuals; background info on elite actors, including their current and previous affiliations with other elites; as well as media articles. Additionally, relevant academic research will be included. The quantitative data, which will be used to further verify relevant connections between specific elite individuals, groups, organizations, and their actions, will predominantly consist of; data on pro-Israel lobby activities; polls on US public opinion concerning Israel; and financial records of economic contributions.

### **2.3.3 Limitations**

The choice of data offers a broad base of information and insights into the elites' potential for influencing the US foreign policy to be pro-Israel. Though, the data do have its limitations. While transparency laws about e.g. financial contributions and lobby activities make it possible to "follow the money", it is apparent, when reviewing this data, that the people involved, aim to hide the details of the process as much as possible, though, within the limits of the law. Therefore, while data may exist, the details are harder to deduce — especially when it comes to financial contributions to

political candidates where Political Actions Committees (PACs)<sup>40</sup> blur the image of who is actually contributing. Therefore, it will take several pieces of corresponding data to confirm causal correlations between actors on the matter of the JCPOA, because few, probably no, politicians will be willing to publicly state that they have pursued a pro-Israel foreign policy because a lobby group told them to or because an individual contributed money to their campaigns.

Additionally, a limitation to the chosen empirical example and the supporting data is lack of access. I do not have access to all relevant data from the US government, organizations, individuals, nor the media. Some may be classified to outsiders and some may only be found in physical versions in US archives. Furthermore, due to the scope and timeframe of this thesis, as well as my geographical location in Denmark, I am not able to interview relevant parties involved, nor conduct my own surveys. Therefore, I must rely solely on what is available to me through media reports, public databases and archives on the internet.

This means that especially articles from media sources will be utilized to a high degree as they often entail relevant descriptions of events, that are not necessarily available through other sources. In this context, the trustworthiness of the media sources will be thoroughly evaluated before being utilized, and so will the background of relevant actors, including the journalists and their sources. To ensure a critical approach to the media sources, the website [mediabiasfactcheck.org](http://mediabiasfactcheck.org) will be utilized. Though, it should be mentioned that in some instances it may be relevant to include empirical evidence from sources that are known to be biased, as the analysis will aim to prove that some groups in the US have worked to promote a pro-Israel US foreign policy with a specific agenda in mind. Additionally, other sources, such as academic articles and government reports will, of course, also be applied with a critical approach in mind.

## 2.4 Analytical Approach

The choice of a mixed method research strategy means that the empirical analysis will be characterized by a continuous crosschecking of both qualitative and quantitative data concerning actors that have aimed to ensure the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. On this basis, the empirical analysis will consist of detailed descriptions of the connections

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<sup>40</sup> PAC: Political Action Committee — an organization established by a corporation or other special interest to raise money from individuals for a political campaign or other political cause.

between specific actors in order to detect causal correlations concerning the JCPOA. The data will continuously be interpreted in relation to the explanatory, theoretical model, to verify the connections, i.e. the 'influence' arrows, in the model. Therefore, an emphasis will be put on proving connections between the various elites presented in the model, while examining whether there is evidence of specific incentives or actions that may explain the pro-Israel choices made in the US foreign policy concerning the JCPOA. As a secondary verification of elite influence, it will be determined whether there can be found evidence that elites have attempted to influence public opinion on the matter of the JCPOA.

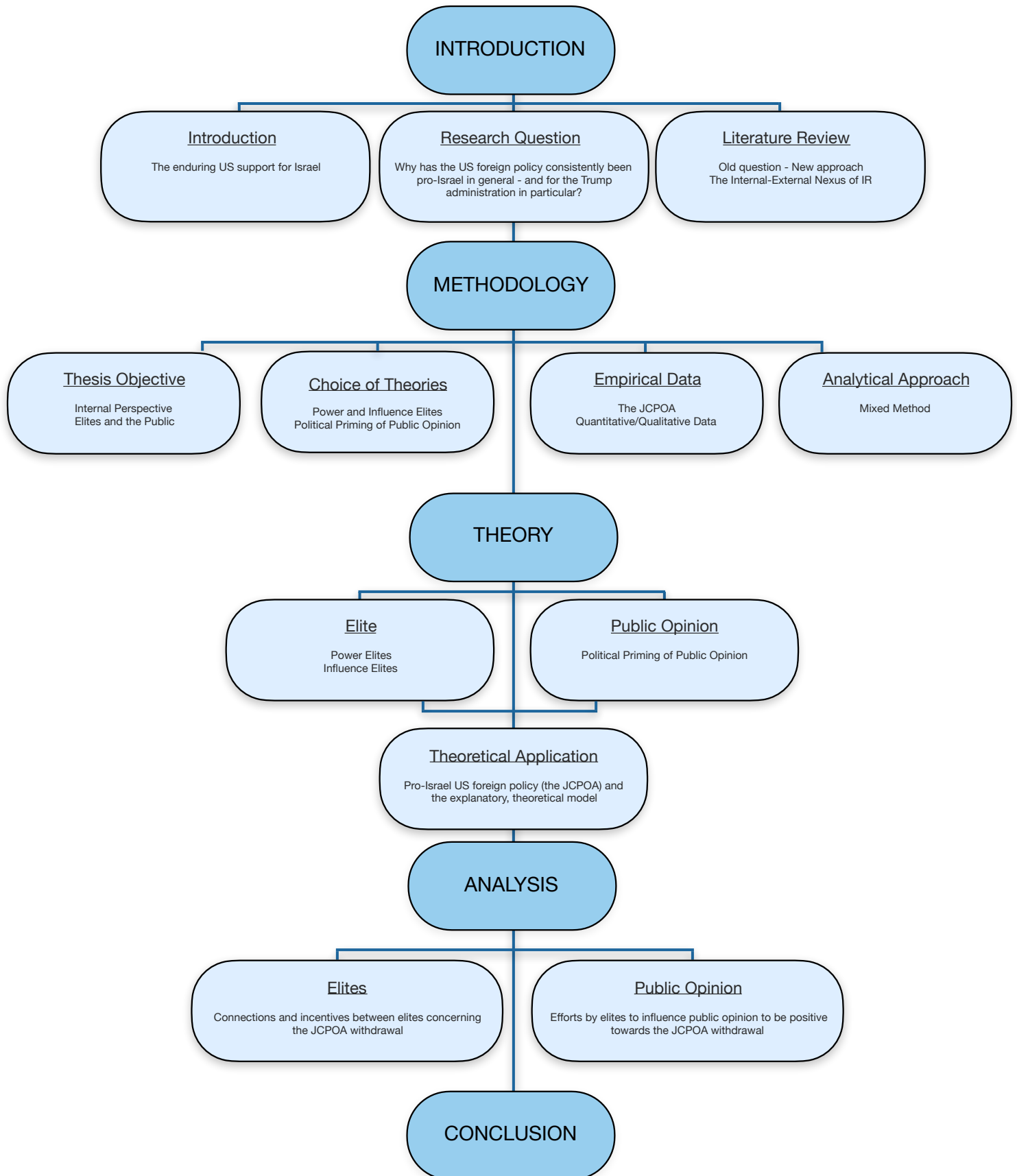
## 2.5 Thesis Structure Overview

In the following chapter, a description of the theories will be followed by a theoretical application, aiming to elaborate on the explanatory, theoretical model. Subsequently, the empirical data will be analyzed in accordance with the model, to examine the role of elites and the public in the JCPOA withdrawal. The two theories correlate in the assumption that policy is made in accordance with the wishes of elites. Therefore the analysis will have an emphasis on the elites, while public opinion will be a secondary focus with the purpose of verifying the assumption that elites are the focal influencers on the pro-Israel US foreign policy. On this basis, the main part of the analysis will focus on the elites, while a shorter section, succinctly, will examine whether there is evidence that elites have attempted to manipulate public opinion on the matter of the JCPOA. Furthermore, the structure of the analysis will resemble the nature of the connections between elites. According to the theoretical framework, elites will be connected on various levels and at various times.<sup>41</sup> On this basis, the analysis will have to jump back and forth between actors to connect the dots throughout. The following is a graphic depiction of the thesis structure.

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<sup>41</sup> Wedel, Op.cit. 157.





## 3. Theory

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### 3.1 Elite Theory

#### 3.1.1 Power Elites

In order to understand the power of elites in the US society, one must appreciate the major institutions of the modern society, namely the state, corporations, and the army. This notion was the basis of the theory of *power elites* as set forth by sociologist C. Wright Mills in 1956. Together, these three institutions hold crucial positions from which they are able to influence and shape the US society. Mills explained that these institutions are connected because the actions and decisions of one will affect the other two, which thus often will lead to coordination between the decisions makers of these institutions.<sup>42</sup> With this distinction, Mills argued that, while other prominent institutions and their leaders may play an important role in society, no other institutions than the state, corporations and the military are as influential in shaping it. Thereby, the policies of modern society are shaped by the three major institutions, which then "turn the lesser institutions into means for their ends".<sup>43</sup>

In order to further demarcate the actual elite, Mills presented a hierarchical perception of the three institutions and thereby categorized the top leaders in each as the power elite of the US. While Mills acknowledged that in each major institution there may be several ways of determining the top leaders, he roughly categorized them as following: in the state, the power elite consists of the members of the political directorate, in corporations it is the chief executives, and in the military, it is the people connected to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). These three groups of people, thus, make up the power elite, by which the modern US society is shaped.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Mills, Op.cit. 51-52.

<sup>43</sup> Mills, Ibid. 50-51.

<sup>44</sup> Mills, Ibid. 53.

### 3.1.2 Influence Elites

In recent years, however, scholars have come to rethink the traditional power elite approach as set forth by Mills. According to anthropologist Janine R. Wedel, developments in the conditions surrounding the traditional power elites, have caused for a need for new theoretical thinking about elites.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Wedel proposes a new concept for determining and examining elites. She calls it *influence elites*. Based on this concept, Wedel identifies the elites by how they operate in the new institutional ecosystem, which has developed since the 1980s. Wedel argues that the institutional changes which were caused by, among other things, the end of the Cold War, increased economic globalization, and the rise of technology, have changed the way elites operate — and thereby the very nature of the elites.<sup>46</sup>

Wedel defines the influence elites through four indicators: 1) They are flexible and have overlapping roles, which therefore makes it difficult to determine any fixed attachment to specific sectors and organization when pursuing strategic goals. 2) While they do take advantage of formal structures when it is beneficial to their causes, they are also able to function outside these set structures. 3) They mobilize several entities, including consultancies, think tanks and other non-governmental organizations and interest groups. 4) They are present at different levels in society, including the state, corporations, private organizations, and they are simultaneously able to act as connectors between these levels.<sup>47</sup> Because of the diverse organizational aspects and modus operandi of the influence elites, it has, according to Wedel, become more difficult to detect the actions of these elites, and thus it has become more difficult to hold them accountable for their actions.<sup>48</sup>

With the four characteristics of the influence elite, Wedel distinguishes her perception of contemporary elites from the theory of *power elites* as set forth by Mills. According to Wedel, the boundaries between entities, including states, corporations and nongovernmental organization have become blurred. Thereby, politics is now being shaped in private when, for example, elected politicians and economic elites interact.

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<sup>45</sup> Wedel, Op.cit. 153-154.

<sup>46</sup> Wedel, Ibid. 154.

<sup>47</sup> Wedel, Ibid. 154.

<sup>48</sup> Wedel, Ibid. 155.

With these assumptions, Wedel does not discard Mills determining factor that elites are based on structures of institutional hierarchies. Instead, Wedel argues that these structures have changed to become more complex, which means that several forms of power relations exist.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.2 Political Priming of Public Opinion

Many scholars have pursued to examine how public opinion influences US politicians in their policy decisions. Often, this research is based on the notion that in a representative democracy, politicians will seek to do what the public deems is in its own best interest. However, in a study published in 2015, James N. Druckman and Lawrence R. Jacobs challenge this notion. They argue that, while politicians are not indifferent to public opinion, they do not necessarily do what the public wants. Representation is not a one-way street where politicians consistently enact the policy preferences of the public to ensure voter support.<sup>50</sup>

Instead, politicians respond to public opinion by attempting to shape the public opinion on policies by using specific communicative strategies and by drawing focus to their personalities and abilities as leaders in general. The notions of the theory, thus, entail that politicians consider the public opinion to be moldable<sup>51</sup> On this foundation, the theoretical framework challenges traditional perspectives on politicians' responsiveness to public opinion, by debunking the assumption that politicians will aim to please the median voters.

Druckman and Jacobs argue that politicians will rather focus on abiding by the preferences of privileged groups in society, whose support is highly valued by politicians.<sup>52</sup> The privileged groups may be a part of the political elite, e.g. party activists or leaders, or a member of other relevant elites, such as donors. The value of these groups is determined by the incentives they may offer politicians in response to the politicians' enactment of policies that are in accordance with the privileged groups' objectives. These incentives may be power, access, influence, money, etc. This means

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<sup>49</sup> Wedel, *Ibid.* 157.

<sup>50</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, *Op.cit.* 137.

<sup>51</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, *Ibid.*

that, while a President may still seek the support of the public, the purpose of ensuring voters' appreciation of a specific issue is to make sure that the President has leeway to enact policies which pleases the elites. The objective for the President is to avoid having the public dictate policy decisions, in order for him to be able to meet the expectations of the privileged groups.<sup>53</sup>

So how is public opinion molded? For the President, a key tool is embedded in the fact that a President has immense resources and almost unlimited access to the media - this implies a high degree of control over what is presented to the public. When strategizing on how to manipulate public opinion, the President uses polls. The results of the polls are then transformed into a communication strategy by the White House. This strategy can be detected through the President's public statements on the specific issues in question. In this strategy, the President will attempt to persuade the public to approve of his policy decisions, by, among other things, highlight personal traits and leadership skills and use relevant rhetorical measures. Furthermore, the President's strategy will likely be targeted towards a specific group in the public, namely his core voters, as they are key for him to sustain his position of power, and thereby ensure that he has leeway to please the privileged groups in society.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the public opinion may also be shaped through efforts by non-political elites, who seek to manipulate public opinion to ensure support for specific issues and the politicians who are willing to carry out policies concerning these.<sup>55</sup>

On this basis, Druckman and Jacobs challenge traditional perceptions of Presidents as actors who pursue to fulfill the wishes of the people in order to maintain power. Instead, they argue that Presidents, in collaboration with their advisors and other elites, aim to influence public opinion of specific groups in society that are relevant to the Presidents' future success.

### 3.3 Theoretical Application

On the basis of the selected theories, some speculations can be made in order to expand the thoughts behind the explanatory, theoretical model described in the previous chapter.

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<sup>53</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, *Ibid.* 20-22.

<sup>54</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, *Ibid.* 56-57.

<sup>55</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, *Ibid.* 30-33.

Applying the thoughts of Mills and the concept of *power elites* to the theoretical model would entail that the people in the top of the hierarchies of three elite groups in the US, the state, military, and corporations, have influenced the US foreign policy to be pro-Israel through interactions with each other.<sup>56</sup> The basic notion of Mills theoretical approach has logical reasoning which may be applicable to the subject matter of this thesis because it is likely that these three groups are connected with each other, and that they all have interests in influencing US foreign policy.

Though, while these three elites represent a good starting point for a possible theoretical explanation for the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, the theory by Mills can be considered to be rather rigid for the modern day US society, where an influx of interest groups aiming to get their political objectives heard and fulfilled, has been observed. Therefore, it is advantageous to incorporate a modern interpretation of elites as presented by Wedel. Adding the layer of *influence elites* contributes an expanded and more nuanced perspective to the explanatory, theoretical model. Wedel argues that the changes in societal structures and global circumstances have caused for a more complex network of elites, where both horizontal and vertical power relations exists.<sup>57</sup> On this basis, a broader array of pro-Israel elites through their affiliations with one another have influenced the US withdrawal from the JCPOA.

Thus, adding the layer of the influence elites makes it possible to envision that more actors will have played a role in the decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA. These would likely consist of lobbies with pro-Israel interests, as they have been deemed highly relevant in this context by scholars in recent years.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the definition of economic elites who may have influenced the JCPOA withdrawal may be specified on the basis of Wedel's assumptions, which contends that the economic elite may consist of wealthy individuals with certain political preferences, which are not necessarily connected with corporative objectives.<sup>59</sup> Finally, Wedel's assumptions would also imply that the political elite can be expanded to include key political and

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<sup>56</sup> Mills, Op.cit. 50-51.

<sup>57</sup> Wedel, Op.cit. 157.

<sup>58</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, Op.cit. 72-106.

<sup>59</sup> Wedel, Op.cit. 171.

military advisors and officials as a part of the influence elites concerning the JCPOA withdrawal.<sup>60</sup>

Wedel's notions of the intricate connections between influence elites<sup>61</sup> mean the elites will have worked on many different levels both between and within elite groups, to ensure the JCPOA withdrawal. Furthermore, the connections between these elites will be somewhat 'blurred.' For example, members of one elite may be affiliated with a second elite, while pursuing to influence a third elite. Therefore, the elites' role in the decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA will be evident through an array of intricate connections between elites. The binding feature of these connections will be the objective to ensure the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. Furthermore, the elite groups will consist of a variety of actors who may play different roles in the influence on the JCPOA withdrawal. One member of an elite may both function as an influencer and an influencee, while others may merely represent relevant links between elites.

On this basis, the explanatory theoretical model could have been depicted as a complex web of lines and arrows between, potentially, hundreds of actors within pro-Israel elites. Though, to simplify the model, in order to make it feasible to verify it in the empirical analysis, specific connections between elites have been highlighted on the basis of the theoretical framework. However, despite the simplified interpretation of the theoretical framework's application, it is the assumption that each connection between actors in the theoretical model, may imply that several complex interactions have taken place in relation to the JCPOA. For example, the arrow from the economic elite to the political elite does not mean that the pro-Israel economic elite as a whole consistently has pursued to influence the entire political elite to oppose the JCPOA. Rather, the arrow indicates that complex connections between specific actors within the two elites have played a role in the US withdrawal from the JCPOA.

However, according to Wedel's assumptions, the actual consequences of these connections may be challenging to detect because of the 'blurred' connections between elites. Therefore, it is expected that the consequences of these connections in relation to the JCPOA withdrawal only will be evident through the determination of several causal correlations between the elites' interactions and the timing of events concerning the JCPOA.

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<sup>60</sup> Wedel, *Ibid.* 157

<sup>61</sup> Wedel, *Ibid.* 171.

The key role of the elites can further be backed up by applying core notions of *political priming of public opinion*. According to this theoretical framework, the political elite, in collaboration with other elites, will have aimed to influence public opinion to be positive towards the JCPOA withdrawal. The political elite, primarily the President, will do this to ensure leeway to satisfy the wishes of the aforementioned pro-Israel elites. In compliance with the theoretical framework of *influence elites*, this theoretical perspective, thus, implies that elites are a key influencing force behind the JCPOA withdrawal. According to the theoretical framework of *political priming of public opinion*, the elites' central role can be explained by the strong incentives they present decision makers with.<sup>62</sup> Thereby, an important addition to the connections between elites in the theoretical model may be added. This entails that a member of one elite, e.g. a wealthy individual in the economic elite, has been able to present a member of the political elite, e.g. the President, with an economic incentive that would make the President inclined to accommodate the wealthy individual's objective for the US withdrawal from the JCPOA.

On this basis, the connections between elites in the theoretical model, do not only imply that elites' general interactions with one another have played a role in the JCPOA withdrawal, but also that elites may have presented members of the political elite with specific incentives to ensure the JCPOA withdrawal, thereby 'pressuring' the political elite to adhere to a pro-Israel US foreign policy. Thus, in the theoretical framework of *political priming of public opinion*, the elites are the focal group, while public opinion is a secondary concern — though, not an arbitrary one.

In accordance with the theory, the political elites still need the support of relevant groups in the public to ensure that they are not punished for their political decisions at the next election.<sup>63</sup> This means that the Trump administration will have sought the support of the public for the JCPOA withdrawal while having responded to the elites' objectives concerning a pro-Israel US foreign policy. Therefore, Trump will have attempted to ensure support for the JCPOA withdrawal among his core voters, as they represent the group that the President needed in order to maintain his party's majority position in Congress in the midterms in 2018 and in future elections. This entails that the President, in his official statements concerning the JCPOA withdrawal, will have

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<sup>62</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, Op.cit. 20-22.

<sup>63</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, Ibid.



utilized strategic measures that he knows to have an effect on his core voters. Furthermore, according to the theoretical framework, Trump will also have made sure that his communicative efforts concerning the withdrawal will present him as a great and decisive President.

This will mainly have been done in public statements through the media. While it is likely, the media plays a key role in the US when policy is formulated and decided upon, in the theoretical framework of *political priming of public opinion*, the media is merely seen as a tool, through which the political elite shape public opinion. A study of the media's role in the pro-Israel US foreign policy would be relevant to implement in the theoretical model, though it would require a separate study, which would entail extensive research to examine in-depth. In this thesis, from the perspective of the chosen theoretical frameworks, the media are, therefore, merely perceived as a means to an end when elites attempt to shape public opinion in their favor.

By ensuring the support of his core voters, Trump will have had leeway to fulfill the objectives of the privileged groups in society — i.e. the elites. On this basis, the President will have ensured relevant public support for the JCPOA withdrawal. At the same time, he will have accommodated members of the elites, who resoundingly are expected to have presented the President with relevant incentives that would make Trump inclined to adhere to their objectives, rather than to the wishes of the American people.

## 4. Empirical Analysis

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### 4.1 The JCPOA Withdrawal

The US withdrawal from the JCPOA had been expected for months when Trump announced the decision on May 8, 2018. However, in the spring of 2016, Trump announced that he would “dismantle the disastrous deal” if he were to become President. Since then, Trump reiterated his intentions to withdraw the US from the JCPOA throughout his presidential campaign and during his first year in office.<sup>64</sup>

The first blow to the deal came in October 2017, when Trump announced that he would decertify the US law *Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act* (INARA), which gave Congress oversight rights of the JCPOA. Under INARA, the President was obliged to certify every 90 days to Congress that Iran complied with the provisions of the JCPOA. By decertifying INARA, Trump left it up to Congress to decide whether to reimpose sanctions on Iran. This, however, did not happen in 2017, nor in the winter or spring of 2018, where Trump decertified the law two more times.<sup>65</sup> Some observers argued that the decertifications were attempts by Trump to not take responsibility for the US decision concerning the JCPOA, and to pressure international leaders, including the Iranian regime, to renegotiate the JCPOA.<sup>66</sup> After neither Congress nor the international system had acted on Trump's decertifications of INARA, Trump put an end to debates about US involvement in the JCPOA by announcing the US withdrawal in May 2018.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4.1.1 The Question of Influence

In the case of the JCPOA withdrawal, the US President had the sole power to withdraw the US from the deal. While Congress had some say in the verification of the JCPOA

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<sup>64</sup> Zurcher, Op.cit.

<sup>65</sup> Kenneth Katzman, Paul K. Kerr, and Valerie Heitshusen, “U.S. Decision to Cease Implementing the Iran Nuclear Agreement,” *Congressional Research Service* (May 9, 2018).

<sup>66</sup> Zack Beauchamp, “What Trump's decision to “decertify” the Iran nuclear deal actually does,” *Vox*, October 13, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/10/13/16464084/trump-iran-nuclear-deal-decertify>

<sup>67</sup> Zurcher, Op.cit.

through legislation related to the deal, Trump did not directly need congressional approval to withdraw. Therefore, this analysis will begin from the perspective of the President. According to the theoretical model, as explained in the theoretical application, Trump may have been influenced by an array of pro-Israel elites, including wealthy individuals, lobby organizations, foreign policy advisors, government officials, congressional politicians, and military advisors.

Though, before examining the pro-Israel elites' influence on Trump's actions concerning the JCPOA, it is relevant to consider, whether it is even possible that outsiders could influence the US President. In the case of Trump, it would initially seem like he could be difficult to influence - at least through financial efforts. At the beginning of his presidential campaign, Trump repeatedly stated that he would rely as little as possible on outside donations in order to not owe anything to anyone. Though during his campaign, Trump increasingly received financial donations from outside interest groups, and in his years as President, Trump has embraced the need for fundraising in politics.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, scholars have suggested that Trump's lack of political experience, especially when it comes to foreign policy issues, may actually make him increasingly susceptible to influence by both outside actors and close advisors.<sup>69</sup>

## 4.2 The Economic Elite and The President

So, how can the potential influencers on Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA, and thus their involvement in the pro-Israel US foreign policy during the Trump presidency, be verified in accordance with the theoretical model? A discernible place to start is to examine the money trail. Three US billionaires, Paul Singer, Bernard Marcus, and Sheldon Adelson, have been highlighted by US media as central, wealthy individuals involved in Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA.<sup>70</sup> During the 2016 election, they accounted for over \$40 million in direct support for Trump.

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<sup>68</sup> Maggie Severns, "Trump learns to love megadonors." *Politico*, June 8, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/06/08/trump-megadonors-gop-fundraising-632671>

<sup>69</sup> Pierre Guerlain, "US Foreign Policy of Chaos under Trump: the Wrecker and the Puppeteers," *Literature, History of Ideas, Images and Societies of the English-speaking World*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (2018): 1.

<sup>70</sup> Eli Clifton, "These Three Billionaires Paved Way For Trump's Iran Deal Withdrawal," *LobeLog*, May 9, 2018, <https://fpif.org/these-three-billionaires-paved-way-for-trumps-iran-deal-withdrawal/>; Paul Blumenthal, "Republicans And Iran Deal Opponents Are Funded By The Same Mega-Donors," *Huffington Post*, March 10, 2015, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/10/iran-deal-republicans\\_n\\_6841976.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/10/iran-deal-republicans_n_6841976.html)

Furthermore, they also accounted for 44% of individual donations for the Congressional Leadership Fund (CLF), 47% for the Senate Leadership Fund (SLF), which both supported elections of Republicans.<sup>71</sup>

From this data, it is apparent, that wealthy individuals, i.e. members of the economic elite, can be connected to Trump and the Republican party, i.e. members of the political elite. While this connection may not be surprising, it is crucial for the further analysis, because it is the assumption of the theoretical model, that it is in the interactions and connections between elites, influence becomes evident. Furthermore, the donations verify that these wealthy individuals have presented the political elite with a financial incentive to accommodate their political preferences. This is relevant because the theoretical model contends that the political elite will be inclined to accommodate the objectives of other elites if presented with relevant incentives to do so. To determine whether this is accurate in the context of the JCPOA withdrawal, it is necessary to determine whether the JCPOA withdrawal was considered a key objective by the aforementioned members of the economic elite.

Several pieces of evidence verify Paul Singer's interest in Israel and the JCPOA. Singer initially contributed \$5 million to the Conservative Solutions PAC in 2016, which exclusively supported Republican Senator from Florida, Marco Rubio's bid for the US presidency.<sup>72</sup> Aside from his financial donations, Singer voiced his support for Rubio in a letter to donors, in which he "praised the senator's [...] support for Israel."<sup>73</sup> The year before, in 2015, Singer had founded the Philos Project, a conservative group aiming to build opposition against the JCPOA within the US.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, Singer is affiliated with several conservative, pro-Israel lobby organizations, including the Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC)<sup>75</sup>, which has publicly announced its opposition to

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<sup>71</sup> Clifton 2018, Op. cit.

<sup>72</sup> "Conservative Solutions PAC: Contributors, 2016 cycle," Center for Responsive Politics, Open Secrets, accessed December 3, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/pacgave2.php?cycle=2016&cmte=C00541292>

<sup>73</sup> Theodore Schleifer, Sungen Serfaty, and Dana Bash, "Top Republican billionaire Paul Singer endorses Marco Rubio," *CNN Politics*, November 1, 2015, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/30/politics/marco-rubio-paul-singer-endorsement/index.html>

<sup>74</sup> Eli Clifton, "The Jewish Billionaire Behind A New Christian Anti-Iran Group," *LobeLog*, March 6, 2015, <https://lobelog.com/the-jewish-billionaire-behind-a-new-christian-anti-iran-group/>

<sup>75</sup> Clifton, March 6, 2015, Ibid.

the US engagement in the JCPOA.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the examples of Singer's affiliations with pro-Israel lobby organizations, both verify that Singer's network expands into other pro-Israel elites, and confirm that Singer has been invested in ensuring the US withdrawal from the JCPOA.

Singer's determination to make the JCPOA withdrawal a reality becomes further apparent when observing his actions when Rubio lost the bid to become the Republican party's presidential candidate in 2016. In a matter of months, Singer shifted from being a pronounced Trump opponent to donating \$1 million to Trump's inauguration fund, which rendered Singer a meeting with the President in February 2017.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, around the time when Trump announced the JCPOA withdrawal, in May 2018, Singer donated \$240,000 to the Republican party. A few weeks later he "chatted with the president [...] during a fundraiser for Trump's reelection campaign."<sup>78</sup> The timing of these donations and meetings correlate with Singer's continued focus on backing "the push to withdraw from the Iran Nuclear Deal."<sup>79</sup>

Thereby, Singer's turn from Rubio to Trump implies that members of non-political elites let their money and attention flow in the direction of power, suggesting that they primarily donate to political candidates to gain support for their key political concerns, rather than to consistently back a candidate, whose character they generally believe in. This confirms a key aspect of the theoretical model, which contends that members of the economic elite, in accordance with their specific political preferences, will aim to ensure a pro-Israel US foreign policy by attempting to influence the political elite. Thus, in compliance with the theoretical model, Singer, who is affiliated with both the pro-Israel economic and lobby elites, actively opposed the US engagement in the JCPOA. The data indicates that he sought to do so by, among other things, aiming his financial contributions towards the members of the political elite who he deemed capable of ensuring the US withdrawal from the JCPOA.

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<sup>76</sup> "Republican Jewish Coalition," Right Web, accessed December 5, 2018, [http://rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/republican\\_jewish\\_coalition/](http://rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/republican_jewish_coalition/)

<sup>77</sup> Michelle Celarier, "Paul Singer's Fight for the Soul of the GOP," *Institutional Investor*, October 30, 2017, <https://www.institutionalinvestor.com/article/b15d9s2xbmkr99/paul-singers-fight-for-the-soul-of-the-gop>

<sup>78</sup> Severns, Op.cit.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Weiss, "'New Yorker' profile of Paul Singer plays down Israel and can't say, 'neoconservative'," *Mondoweiss*, August 25, 2018, <https://mondoweiss.net/2018/08/yorker-profile-neoconservative/>

Furthermore, in addition to Singer's financial support for Trump and the Republican party, other factors indicate that Trump considered it to be relevant to accommodate Singer on the matter of the JCPOA. Here, Singer's meetings with Trump are relevant. Access to Trump is known to correlate with whether he foresees that financial benefits, for either himself or the Republican party, will materialize from the encounters.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, Singer's meetings with Trump verifies that Singer's financial support was important to the President, and he, therefore, had a strong incentive make political promises that would ensure this. This can further be backed up by the fact that Singer is known to be an extremely popular donor due to his immense network and his reputation for being talented in attracting additional financial support for political candidates.<sup>81</sup> Singer's popularity, thereby, further confirms that Trump had a strong incentive to satisfy Singer's political objectives concerning the JCPOA to ensure and maintain the billionaire's support.

While it is challenging to verify that Singer directly has influenced Trump to withdraw the US from the JCPOA, the empirical data confirms the notions of the theoretical model concerning the connections and interactions between elite actors. Therefore, on the basis of the theoretical model, it can be verified that there is a reasonable causal correlation between Singer's objectives and actions, the timing of events, the financial incentives presented, and Trump's announcement to withdraw the US from the JCPOA.

#### 4.2.1 The Adelson Effect

When zooming in on one of the other billionaires' connection to Trump and his political decision concerning the JCPOA, the economic elite's influence seems to be confirmed. Sheldon Adelson is a Jewish, Las Vegas Casino Mogul, the founder of the pro-Israel, conservative lobby organization, Israeli-American Coalition (IAC), and member of the board of directors of the RJC. He was one of Trump's largest campaign donors in the

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<sup>80</sup> Isaac Arnsdorf, "Trump rewards big donors with jobs and access," *Politico*, December 27, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/donald-trump-donors-rewards-232974>

<sup>81</sup> Maggie Haberman and Nicholas Confessore, "Influential billionaire Paul Singer throws support to Marco Rubio for president," *The Tampa Bay Times*, October, 2015, <http://www.tampabay.com/news/politics/stateroundup/influential-billionaire-paul-singer-throws-support-to-marco-rubio-for/2252037>

2016 election<sup>82</sup>, contributing more than \$20 million to PACs devoted to getting Trump elected.<sup>83</sup> Overall, Adelson and his wife donated about \$83 million to Republicans during the 2016 election.<sup>84</sup> On this basis alone, Adelson represents an economic incentive, which according to the theoretical model, would make Trump inclined to accommodate the political preferences of Adelson. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine Adelson's political preferences in relation to the JCPOA.

Adelson has openly announced his opposition against the JCPOA. He has even suggested that the US should conduct a nuclear attack on Iran to remove the regime's security threat to Israel.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, Adelson is a key funder to the anti-Iran pressure group, United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI), which works exclusively to oppose Iranian nuclear proliferation and the JCPOA.<sup>86</sup> This verifies that Adelson was devoted to opposing the US engagement in the deal.

When digging deeper into the potential economic incentives that may have made Trump inclined to accommodate Adelson's preferences specifically concerning the JCPOA, the presumption of Adelson's influence on the JCPOA withdrawal becomes even more compelling. The day after the announcement of the JCPOA withdrawal, on May 9, 2018, Adelson met with Trump at the White House<sup>87</sup>, and a week later, Adelson made financial contributions to five Republican congressional candidates who were up for election in the midterms in 2018. The five candidates, who all struggled in the polls, were outspoken opponents of the JCPOA. In addition to direct contributions to the five

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<sup>82</sup> Eli Clifton and Jim Lobe, "Trump Ignores Advisers On Iran Deal, Follows Money," *LobeLog*, October 14, 2017, <http://lobelog.com/trump-ignores-advisers-on-iran-deal-follows-money/>

<sup>83</sup> "Future45: Contributors, 2016 cycle," Center for Responsive Politics, Open Secrets, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/pacgave2.php?cycle=2016&cmt=C00574533>

<sup>84</sup> "Trump's top donors: Where are they now?" Center for Responsive Politics, News, Open Secrets, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2018/01/trump-donors-1-year-later/>

<sup>85</sup> Jason Zengerle, "Sheldon Adelson is Ready to Buy the President," *New York Magazine*, September 9, 2015, <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2015/09/sheldon-adelson-is-ready-to-buy-the-presidency.html?utm=bottom&utm=bottom>

<sup>86</sup> Eli Clifton, "GOP Mega-Donor Sheldon Adelson Funds Mysterious Anti-Iran Pressure Group," *The Nation*, January 14, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/gop-megadonor-sheldon-adelson-funds-mysterious-anti-iran-pressure-group/>

<sup>87</sup> Sabrina Siddiqui, "GOP defends US exit from Iran accord," *The Guardian*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2018/may/08/iran-nuclear-deal-donald-trump-latest-live-updates?page=with:block-5af1ef7ee4b0123ab0021a15#block-5af1ef7ee4b0123ab0021a15>

candidates, Adelson also agreed to donate \$30 million to the CLF.<sup>88</sup> These examples of donations to Republicans have led observers, including the Washington-based, democracy watchdog organization, Common Cause, to conclude that Adelson was deeply involved in Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, in accordance with the theoretical model, it can be verified that Trump had a strong economic incentive to accommodate Adelson's key political objective — to ensure a US withdrawal from the JCPOA. Thereby, on the basis of the data so far, both Singer and Adelson stand as wealthy individuals, i.e. members of the economic elite, who have pursued to ensure a pro-Israel US foreign policy by presenting the President, i.e. the leading member of the political elite, with economic incentives to do so.

#### 4.2.2 The Expansion of Influence Through Political Advisors

The notions of the theoretical model also suggest that elites' influence on the pro-Israel US foreign policy may not only be detectable through actions that are directly related to the President. Intricate connections between and within elites will also be an indicator of whether specific elites, e.g. the economic elite, have influenced the decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA. On this basis, an additional layer of evidence concerning Adelson's potential influence on the JCPOA withdrawal may be added.

Adelson can be connected to some of Trump's most outspoken anti-JCPOA foreign policy advisors. For example, in 2016, Adelson contributed \$250,000 to Nikki Haley's bid to become the US Ambassador to the UN. Haley has reportedly been a devoted proponent for Trump's decertification of INARA and the JCPOA withdrawal. She has even been called Trump's "Iran Whisperer" by a journalist at the magazine *Politico*.<sup>90</sup> The assumption of Haley's ability to influence the President concerning the JCPOA will be further elaborated on later. At this point, it is merely relevant to

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<sup>88</sup> Brian Schwarz, "Megadonor Sheldon Adelson rewards GOP candidates in tight races who opposed Iran deal." *CNBC*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/25/adelson-backs-candidates-who-oppose-iran-deal-a-week-after-withdrawl.html>

<sup>89</sup> Dale Eisman, "Trump's Threat to Quit Iran Deal Reflects Desires of His Biggest Donor," *Common Cause*, October 16, 2017, <https://www.commoncause.org/democracy-wire/trumps-threat-to-quit-iran-deal-reflects-adelsons-desire/>

<sup>90</sup> Eliana Johnson, "Nikki Haley was Trump's Iran whisperer," *Politico*, October 12, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/10/13/nikki-haley-trump-iran-whisperer-243772>



highlight, that Haley is considered to be a trusted advisor to the President on foreign policy issues pertaining to Israel and Iran.<sup>91</sup>

Though, Haley is not the only key advisor to the President who can be connected to Adelson. When Trump announced the decertification of INARA in October 2017, he included in his statement that, while he did not seek to withdraw from the JCPOA at that moment, he could do so “at any time.” This ‘threat’ was added under the advice of former US Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, who is an outspoken proponent of the JCPOA withdrawal. Bolton reportedly called Trump to persuade him to add the ‘threat’ of withdrawal in the speech, while Bolton was on a friendly visit with Adelson in Las Vegas.<sup>92</sup> Six months later, in April 2018, the RJC, in which Adelson is a member of the board of directors, was one of the pro-Israel lobby organizations who publicly congratulated Bolton on his appointment as National Security Advisor.<sup>93</sup> Adelson’s connection with Bolton on the matter of the JCPOA is further interesting when taking into account that Bolton is known for having an immense influence on Trump. The White House Chief of Staff, John Kelly, even tried to get Bolton banned from the White House in August 2017, because of his ability to influence the President.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, in accordance with the theoretical framework of *influence elites*, it is evident that Haley and Bolton can be considered members of the political elite by virtue of their positions as trusted advisors to the President on foreign policy issues. Furthermore, it is apparent that they have been active in their opposition against the US engagement in the JCPOA. Thereby, the data on Bolton and Haley’s connection to Adelson strengthens two assumptions of the theoretical model. Firstly, it indicates that Adelson, a member of the economic elite, has sought to ensure a pro-Israel US foreign policy, through his connections with relevant members of the political elite who shared his political preferences concerning the JCPOA. Secondly, Adelson’s donation to Haley’s bid to become the US Ambassador to the UN as well as his close relationship

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<sup>91</sup> Eliana Johnson, “An affair with Trump? Nikki Haley on ‘disgusting’ rumors and her rise to a top foreign policy role,” *Politico*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/01/26/nikki-haley-trump-foreign-policy-370851>

<sup>92</sup> Johnson 2017, Op.cit.

<sup>93</sup> “RJC Applauds the Appointment of John Bolton as National Security Adviser,” Republican Jewish Coalition, accessed December 6, 2018, <http://www.rjchq.org/rjc-applauds-the-appointment-of-john-bolton-as-national-security-adviser>

<sup>94</sup> Julian Borger, “Iran nuclear deal talks persist as Trump looks poised to kill it,” *The Observer*. April 1, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/31/iran-deal-donald-trump-john-bolton-mike-pompeo>

with Bolton, indicate that Adelson may actually have strengthened the advisors' inclination to oppose the JCPOA by presenting them with relevant incentives to do so. Overall, in relation to the theoretical model, this means that Adelson has worked to ensure the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, by targeting members of the political elite on different levels. He has directly presented the President with a strong financial incentive to withdraw the US from the JCPOA, while also having ensured important relations with some of Trump's key advisors on this issue.

## 4.3 The Pro-Israel Lobbies

### 4.3.1 The RJC's Congressional Focus

The notion of the theoretical model, that the elites are connected in intricate networks when pursuing to influence the US foreign policy to be pro-Israel, can further be backed up by the fact that Adelson is affiliated with several pro-Israel lobbies, including the RJC, in which the billionaire is a member of the board of directors.<sup>95</sup> In accordance with the theoretical model, it is, therefore, pertinent to consider whether pro-Israel lobby organizations have played a role in the JCPOA withdrawal, by examining their positions and actions concerning the JCPOA.

The RJC has been clear on its opposition against the JCPOA for years. Already in 2015, when Obama engaged the US in the deal, the executive director of the RJC, Matthew Brooks, announced that the organization would stand “with Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu in opposition to a nuclear Iran [...]”<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, in 2016, the RJC donated a total of \$262,250 to Republican candidates. In the Senate, the 14 Republicans, who received a share of the donation, were all outspoken proponents for the JCPOA withdrawal. Actually, the 14 Senate candidates represent a diverse group of politicians, who, besides being Republicans, only had one common issue that they were all completely aligned on — their support for the JCPOA withdrawal.<sup>97</sup>

The commitment of the RJC to react to political candidates' standpoints on the JCPOA is also evident in the lobby's actions after the US withdrawal from the deal. In June 2018, the RJC announced that it would spend \$530,000 on ads in Philadelphia to

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<sup>95</sup> Clifton and Lobe, Op.cit.

<sup>96</sup> “Republican Jewish Coalition,” Op.cit.

<sup>97</sup> According to their official campaign- or senate websites, all 14 candidates were JCPOA withdrawal proponents.

oppose the Democratic candidate for the House of Representatives, Scott Wallace because he was considered to be anti-Israel. Wallace had supported the US engagement in the JCPOA.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, in September 2016, the RJC launched a \$1 million media campaign in North Dakota, directly criticizing Democratic Senator Heidi Heitkamp's support for the JCPOA.<sup>99</sup>

The empirical data concerning the RJC and the JCPOA, thereby, demonstrate that the RJC was targeting members of the political elite, by either rewarding or punishing them in correlation with their stance on the JCPOA. In relation to the theoretical model, this, firstly, verifies that members of the pro-Israel lobby elite have presented members of the political elite with economic incentives to support the US withdrawal. Secondly, the data show that the RJC's target group within the political elite was not necessarily the President, but rather relevant congressional politicians. However, the RJC's support for congressional Republicans may still be considered an incentive for Trump to accommodate the lobby organization because the President has a political interest in ensuring support for his fellow Republicans in Congress. Thereby, in coherence with Adelson's connection to Trump's advisors, the data on the RJC's actions concerning the JCPOA correlates with the theoretical model, which implies that members of one elite may target other elites on various levels to influence the US foreign policy concerning the JCPOA.

The inclination by the RJC to focus on influencing members of the congressional political elite may be further be explained by the lobby organization's relationship with the President. Initially, the RJC was hesitant to forge bonds with Trump. Early in the presidential election campaign, in December 2015, Trump spoke at the RJC. Here, he guaranteed to renegotiate the JCPOA if he were to become President. While the message was perfectly in line with the position of the RJC, it drowned in Trump's rhetoric, which has been known to be insensitive towards Jewish stereotyping. Trump, for example, referred to the Jews' ability to negotiate.<sup>100</sup> On this foundation, it was not

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<sup>98</sup> "Republican Jewish Coalition targets Philadelphia Democrat over his charity's donations to anti-Israel groups," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.jta.org/2018/06/20/news-opinion/politics/republican-jewish-coalition-targets-philadelphia-democrat-over-his-funds-donations-to-anti-israel-groups>

<sup>99</sup> "Republican Jewish Coalition launches \$1 million ad campaign against senator who backed Iran deal," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.jta.org/2018/09/17/news-opinion/republican-jewish-coalition-launches-1-million-ad-campaign-senator-backed-iran-deal>

<sup>100</sup> Jeremy Diamond, "Trump to Republican Jewish Coalition: 'I'm a negotiator like you'," *CNN*, December 3, 2015, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/03/politics/donald-trump-rjc-negotiator/index.html>

unwavering support, Trump received from the RJC at the time, and this was especially evident in the RJC's lack of financial support for Trump's presidential campaign in 2016.<sup>101</sup>

Though, after Trump had won the Presidency evidence points to a more positive relationship between Trump and the RJC. By December 2017, the RJC had changed its skeptic attitude towards Trump. When Trump announced the move of the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, the RJC bought a full-page ad in *The New York Times*, where the organization praised Trump for his decision.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, in May 2018, when Trump announced the JCPOA withdrawal, the RJC publicly thanked Trump for his decision and stated that this would potentially lead to a new "deal that creates the necessary pressure on Iran."<sup>103</sup> On the basis of these examples, it seems apparent that the positive development in the relationship between the RJC and Trump can be directly connected to Trump's pro-Israel foreign policy decisions, including the JCPOA withdrawal.

Furthermore, though the move of the American embassy to Jerusalem is not directly related to the JCPOA, both examples illustrate that the connections between elites, as depicted in the theoretical model, represent complex relations, where support, pressure, and incentives concerning foreign policy issues are based on palpable actions. In the case of the RJC, it has meant that only when the President has acted in accordance with the objectives of the RJC, he has been rewarded with the lobby's support. Considering that the RJC showed remarkable little support for Trump during the election in 2016, especially compared to its strong financial support for previous Republican presidential candidates<sup>104</sup>, it is likely that Trump has seen the prospect of the RJC's support as an incentive to act in accordance with the lobby's objectives concerning the JCPOA.

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<sup>101</sup> Haaretz, "Few Donations for Trump From Republican Jewish Coalition Leaders," *JTA*, November 3, 2016.

<sup>102</sup> "RJC Applauds Trump For Recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's Capital, Releases NY Times Ad Thanking Him," Republican Jewish Coalition, accessed December 7, 2018, [http://www.rjchq.org/rjc\\_applauds\\_trump\\_for\\_recognizing\\_jerusalem\\_as\\_israel\\_s\\_capital\\_releases\\_ny\\_times\\_ad\\_thanking\\_him](http://www.rjchq.org/rjc_applauds_trump_for_recognizing_jerusalem_as_israel_s_capital_releases_ny_times_ad_thanking_him)

<sup>103</sup> Schwarz, Op.cit.

<sup>104</sup> Haaretz November 3, 2016, Op.cit.

### 4.3.2 The Growth of the Conservative Pro-Israel Lobby

Another pro-Israel lobby that is interesting to examine in the context of the JCPOA withdrawal is the Israeli-American Coalition (IAC). It seems relevant to include the IAC in the analysis of the lobbies because the organization is closely connected to Adelson, who founded the organization with his wife in 2007. Though, when examining the activities of the IAC in relation to the JCPOA withdrawal, the data seems somewhat inconclusive.

Like Adelson and the RJC, the IAC has actively worked to oppose the JCPOA since 2015. The IAC has, for example, urged its members to call their congressional representatives to pressure them to oppose the deal.<sup>105</sup> This verifies that the IAC had an interest in convincing members of the political elite to push for the JCPOA withdrawal. However, when examining the data on the IAC's lobby activities, the organization has presumably not focused its efforts on issues pertaining to the JCPOA, but rather on other pro-Israel initiatives such as the US UNESCO withdrawal and the fight against the BDS movement.<sup>106</sup> While this confirms that the IAC actively has attempted to influence the US foreign policy to be pro-Israel, it does not verify a direct connection between the organization and relevant decision makers, i.e. the political elite, on the matter of the JCPOA. Actually, the only connection between the President's decision and the IAC is Adelson's affiliation with the organization as the founder. Considering the theoretical model, the IAC, therefore, can not be confirmed to have had relevant interactions with other elites in relation to the JCPOA.

The reason for still including the IAC in the empirical analysis, however, is that when examining the IAC in general, an interesting perspective concerning the organization's potential for influencing the political elite on issues pertaining to a pro-Israel US foreign policy becomes evident. By now it has been verified that the connections between elites are complex and that relevant members of the political elite have been presented with strong economic incentives by non-political elites who are proponents of the JCPOA withdrawal. The data concerning the IAC, indicate that

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<sup>105</sup> Shawn Evenhaim and Sagi Balasha, "Tell Congress: Vote no on the Bad Deal with Iran," Israel-American Council, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.israeliamerican.org/tell-congress-vote-no>

<sup>106</sup> "Israeli-American Coalition, Bills Lobbied," Center for Responsive Politics, Open Secrets, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/clientbills.php?id=F213558%20%20%20&year=2018>

financial benefits may not be the only incentive members of the political elite may have been offered.

The IAC gained increasing strength and support in the years leading up to the Trump presidential victory in 2016, and as of 2017, it has been deemed the fastest growing Jewish organization in the world.<sup>107</sup> The exponential growth of a *conservative* Jewish lobby organization is quite noteworthy. For years, the Jewish community and pro-Israel lobbies in the US have predominantly been connected to the Democratic Party and its voter base. However, as Obama chose a more critical approach to Israel, causing the US relationship with Netanyahu and Israel, to suffer, a change began to take place within the Jewish community. While the Jewish voters still predominantly are Democrats, the Republican Party has seen an influx of Jewish voters who are seeking a more pro-Israel US foreign policy — meaning a foreign policy which increasingly correlates with Israel's self-proclaimed rights. As a consequence, several conservative pro-Israel lobby organizations, especially the IAC, has grown larger and stronger.<sup>108</sup>

This is interesting in the context of Trump's pro-Israel foreign policy decisions because it implies that the President may have had a non-economic incentive to decide on the JCPOA withdrawal. As conservative, pro-Israel lobby organizations grew stronger, the political elite will have had an increasing incentive to accommodate them to ensure the support of these organizations' growing voter base. At this point, the data concerning the IAC cannot verify this perspective directly in relation to the JCPOA. However, it does represent an interesting perspective which is relevant to the implications of the theoretical model.

### 4.3.3 The Power of AIPAC

When researching Israeli interests within the US, one organization stands out, namely the biggest pro-Israel lobby in the US, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Therefore, to confirm the theoretical model concerning the influence of pro-Israel lobbies on the JCPOA withdrawal, it seems apparent that AIPAC must be examined.

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<sup>107</sup> Adam Milstein, "The IAC's Third Annual Conference: Embracing a New Identity, Building a Movement and Changing the Jewish Future," *The Huffington Post*, October 11, 2016, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/adam-milstein/the-iacs-third-annual-con\\_b\\_12441592.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/adam-milstein/the-iacs-third-annual-con_b_12441592.html)

<sup>108</sup> Stoil, Op.cit.

Unlike the IAC, AIPAC proclaims to be a bipartisan lobby organization, though historically it has predominantly been associated with the Democratic voters.<sup>109</sup> AIPAC is considered to be one of the most influential pro-Israel lobbies in the US. According to people close to the organization, AIPAC's influence stretches into all corners of the US Congress. The former leader of AIPAC, Steven Rosen, has proclaimed that AIPAC is able to get 70 US Senators aboard on a pro-Israel political initiative within 24 hours, while an anonymous pro-Israel congressional employee once told a journalist that around 250-300 of the 435 members of the House of Representatives instinctively act in accordance with AIPAC's interests.<sup>110</sup> However, AIPAC's actual influence is difficult to measure because it does not make direct financial contributions to political candidates. Therefore, the political elite's economic incentive to accommodate the objectives of AIPAC is challenging to verify in relation to specific political issues.

Notwithstanding this, there is evidence that such an incentive exists. AIPAC annually spends millions of dollars on lobby efforts, including lobbying for specific pro-Israel legislative initiatives and establishing relations between pro-Israel PACs and political candidates in order to secure financial support for them.<sup>111</sup> According to Center for Responsive Politics, AIPAC spend \$3,4 million on lobby activities in 2017, making it the number one pro-Israel lobby organization that year. In comparison, the IAC, which came in second that year, spend \$560,000.<sup>112</sup> The money AIPAC spends on lobby efforts reportedly generates hundreds of millions of dollars<sup>113</sup> in support for political issues and candidates.<sup>114</sup>

In relation to the theoretical model, the general data on AIPAC's financial and influence capabilities, thereby, verify that Trump had strong incentives to seek the endorsement of AIPAC. Further data also indicates that he did in fact attempt to do so. In the 2016 election, both leading presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald

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<sup>109</sup> Ron Kampeas, "What is AIPAC's role in the age of Trump?" *Times of Israel*, February 28, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/what-is-aipacs-role-in-the-age-of-trump/>

<sup>110</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, Op.cit. 26.

<sup>111</sup> Michael L. Hager, "The Best Congress AIPAC Can Buy," *Foreign Policy Journal*, March 22, 2016, <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2016/03/22/the-best-congress-aipac-can-buy/>

<sup>112</sup> "Pro-Israel. Industry Profile, Summary 2017," Center for Responsive Politics, Open Secrets, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/indusclient.php?id=Q05&year=2017>

<sup>113</sup> The US legislation concerning reporting on lobby spending, does not require organizations to disclose how much money their budget on lobby efforts generate. The organizations merely have to report on their lobby budgets.

<sup>114</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, Op.cit. 26.

Trump, spoke at AIPAC's annual policy conference, seeking an endorsement from the powerful organization. However, the data so far merely depicts a general objective by AIPAC to ensure a pro-Israel US foreign policy as well as an overall financial incentive for the political elite to accommodate such an objective. In the context of the JCPOA, it is therefore pertinent to conduct a closer examination of AIPAC's position and actions concerning the JCPOA.

Since 2006, AIPAC's spending on lobby efforts has hit records in years where issues pertaining to Iran have been in focus. In 2014, AIPAC surpassed \$3 million in lobby spending. The same year, reports show, AIPAC had spent most of its efforts lobbying for bills that opposed Iran's nuclear programme.<sup>115</sup> When the US engaged in the JCPOA in 2015, AIPAC repeatedly urged Congress to reject the deal,<sup>116</sup> and the organization even launched a \$20-40 million ad campaign against the JCPOA, while meeting with more than 400 congressional politicians to convince them to oppose the deal.<sup>117</sup> On this basis, it is evident that AIPAC actively worked to ensure a US disengagement in the JCPOA. Though, to determine whether AIPAC has had an influence on the actual decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA, it is crucial to examine Trump's connection to AIPAC on this matter.

In his speech at the AIPAC conference in 2016, during the election campaign, Trump directly attacked the JCPOA, stating that his "[...] number one priority is to dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran." This verifies that Trump wished to communicate to AIPAC that he was on the same page as the powerful lobby organization. The fact that Trump's announcement at AIPAC came during an election could also imply that he wished to do so because he wanted an endorsement from AIPAC. Thereby, a causal correlation between the objectives of AIPAC and the actions of Trump concerning the JCPOA does exist. However, even though it aligned with the

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<sup>115</sup> "AIPAC Posts Biggest Lobbying Year in 2014 as Netanyahu goes to Congress," Center for Responsive Politics, accessed December 7, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2015/03/aipac-posts-biggest-lobbying-year-in-2014-as-netanyahu-goes-to-congress/>

<sup>116</sup> "Nuclear Deal with Iran: Congress must Reject this Deal," American Israel Public Affairs Committee, accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.aipac.org/learn/issues/~media/Publications/Comms/RejectDeal.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> Alisa Chang, "Lobbyists Spending Millions To Sway The Undecided On Iran Deal," *NPR*, August 6, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/08/06/429911872/in-iran-deal-fight-lobbyists-are-spending-millions-to-sway-12-senators>



objectives of AIPAC on the matter of the JCPOA, Trump's speech at AIPAC did not generate instant support from the lobby organization and its members.<sup>118</sup>

Just like at the RJC in 2015, the AIPAC appraisal for Trump was characterized by division. In his AIPAC speech, Trump had also criticized then-President Obama, stating that Obama was probably "the worst thing that had ever happened to Israel." While some in the audience cheered, many were offended, and in the days after, AIPAC issued an official apology for Trump's remarks.<sup>119</sup> The reason for this reaction may be explained by the previously mentioned fact that many pro-Israel elites, including AIPAC, for many years predominantly have been associated with the Democratic party and its position on Israel.<sup>120</sup> Thus, AIPAC initially struggled to fully support Trump, who on the one side promised the organization to fulfill its pro-Israel US foreign policy objective concerning the JCPOA, and on the other side, voiced other ideological and political standpoints, which were not in line with the common AIPAC member.<sup>121</sup>

So, while the data show a connection between Trump and AIPAC on the matter of the JCPOA, it is also evident that Trump did not initially achieve the support of AIPAC, and he was, therefore, not able to get a share of the influential and financial benefits that AIPAC had to offer. This is interesting in the context of the potential incentives, the President might have had to accommodate the wishes of the pro-Israel lobby elite. When considering the immense financial and influential power, AIPAC is known to hold in the US political system, it seems apparent that Trump had a strong incentive to continuously attempt to strengthen his bond with this lobby organization, even after he became President. An apparent way to achieve this would be to put action behind his words and actually accommodate AIPAC on its objective of the JCPOA withdrawal.

While the empirical data cannot directly confirm that Trump had AIPAC's support in mind when he decided to disengage the US from the JCPOA, there is evidence that his actions concerning the JCPOA were a key factor in repairing the relationship with AIPAC in the years after his presidential victory. In October 2017, AIPAC applauded

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<sup>118</sup> Haaretz, "Trump Wins Over AIPAC Audience With Strong pro-Israel Stance," *Haaretz*, *JTA* and *Reuters*, March 22, 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/trump-takes-strong-pro-israel-stance-at-aipac-1.5420950>

<sup>119</sup> Kampeas February 28, 2018, Op.cit.

<sup>120</sup> Kampeas February 28, 2018, Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Kampeas February 28, 2018, Ibid.

Trump for the decertification of INARA,<sup>122</sup> and in March 2018 at the AIPAC annual policy conference, it was evident that Trump, in fact, had gained the support of AIPAC. While Trump did not attend the conference that year, his pro-Israel foreign policy decisions, including his stance on the JCPOA, were applauded by a collective AIPAC.<sup>123</sup> This unanimous support for Trump in 2018 even occurred at an AIPAC conference where the agenda being debated was the opportunity to reinstate sanctions on Iran.<sup>124</sup> This was just a few months before the President announced the JCPOA withdrawal in May 2018. Here, AIPAC issued an official statement, expressing that;

“the administration’s decision today provides an important opportunity to address the shortcomings of the deal and to confront Iran’s escalating regional aggression.”<sup>125</sup>

On this basis, it is evident that Trump did succeed in his efforts to ensure the support of AIPAC, and that a key reason for this was his continued opposition to both INARA and the JCPOA. Thereby, a causal correlation between AIPAC and Trump on the matter of the JCPOA is evident. This includes that AIPAC represents strong incentives of influence, power and wealth which could make the political elite inclined to attempt to ensure the support of this organization. The data further show, that Trump did achieve public recognition by AIPAC based on the President’s stance on the JCPOA. Thereby, the notions of the theoretical model concerning connections and incentives between elite groups are apparent in the matter of the JCPOA when examining the relationship between AIPAC and Trump.

#### 4.3.4 The AIPAC Speakers

Even though a causal correlation between Trump and AIPAC may be evident concerning the JCPOA, it is challenging to determine direct interactions between the

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<sup>122</sup> “AIPAC Statement in the President’s Iran Address,” American Israel Public Affairs Committee, accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.aipac.org/learn/resources/aipac-publications/publication?pubpath=PolicyPolitics/Press/AIPAC%20Statements/2017/10/AIPAC%20Statement%20on%20the%20Presidents%20Iran%20Address>

<sup>123</sup> Kampeas February 28, 2018, Op.cit.

<sup>124</sup> Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “AIPAC Launches Conference with Appeal to Progressives,” *The Jerusalem Post*, March 4, 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/AIPAC-launches-conference-with-appeal-to-progressives-544169>

<sup>125</sup> “AIPAC Statement in Iran Nuclear Announcement,” American Israel Public Affairs Committee, accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.aipac.org/learn/resources/aipac-publications/publication?pubpath=PolicyPolitics/Press/AIPAC%20Statements/2018/05/AIPAC%20Statement%20on%20Iran%20Nuclear%20Deal%20Announcement>

two elite members on this matter. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine whether additional actors may be involved in the interactions between AIPAC and Trump in relation to the JCPOA withdrawal. The theoretical model contends that the political elite may be made up by several relevant actors, including political advisors, and, furthermore, that the connections between elites may be 'blurred' because many elite actors may be connected on different levels. On this basis, additional events that occurred in the days of the 2018 AIPAC conference, represent an interesting perspective.

Two names stand out when considering previous sections of this analysis. Both Nikki Haley and John Bolton spoke at the 2018 AIPAC conference about Iran.<sup>126</sup> This is interesting, because it verifies the notions of the 'blurred lines' between elites in the theoretical model, as both Haley and Bolton previously have been connected to a member of the economic elite on the matter of the JCPOA. Now, a connection between the two political advisors and the pro-Israel lobby elite can also be established. On this basis, Haley and Bolton represent a link between AIPAC and Trump, which strengthens the assumption that AIPAC could be an influencing factor in the decision of the JCPOA withdrawal. However, it is crucial to examine the actions of the political advisors further to determine whether they represent a direct connection between Trump and AIPAC on the matter of the JCPOA.

While Bolton had not yet been named Trump's National Security Advisor at the time of the AIPAC conference on March 4-6, 2018, it has previously been established that he had an immense influence on the President, while also being an outspoken opponent of the JCPOA. Furthermore, Bolton actually met with Trump to interview for the job as National Security Advisor, a prominent position where Iran is a reoccurring issue, in the days of the 2018 AIPAC conference about Iran, where Bolton spoke.<sup>127</sup>

Bolton, thereby, represents a direct link between AIPAC and Trump at a crucial time when AIPAC had put the issue of the US relationship with Iran on its agenda, and merely three months before the announcement of the JCPOA withdrawal. The data on Bolton's connections to the two elites, thereby, strengthen the assumption of a causal correlation between AIPAC and Trump on the matter of the JCPOA. Though, the data

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<sup>126</sup> "2018 Speakers," American Israel Public Affairs Committee, accessed December 6, 2018, <http://www.policyconference.org/gallery/speakers2018.asp>

<sup>127</sup> Justin Rosario, "With Gary Cohn Out, How Much Worse Can The Trump White House Get? TwoWords: John Bolton," *The Daily Banner*, Opinion, March 6, 2018, <https://thedailybanter.com/2018/03/07/gary-cohn-john-bolton/>

does not depict what role Bolton may have played in the interaction between AIPAC and Trump at the time. However, considering Bolton's active opposition against the JCPOA in general, and the fact that Bolton is a reoccurring actor in the network of elites who opposed the US involvement in the deal, it is apparent that Bolton likely has been a relevant actor in the JCPOA withdrawal. This correlates with the basic notions of the theoretical model, which contends that it is in the intricate connections between elites that influence on the pro-Israel US foreign policy may be conveyed.

The same may be true concerning Haley, who also can be connected to both Adelson and AIPAC while being a trusted advisor to the President on foreign policy. Additionally, the data on Haley also point to a connection between her and Netanyahu, who has praised her actions as the US Ambassador to the UN on several occasions.<sup>128</sup> Thereby, Haley represents yet another example of the intricate connections between relevant actors in relation to the pro-Israel US foreign policy, because she can be connected to several relevant elite members who were all determined to ensure the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. Furthermore, even though Haley's connection to Netanyahu is not related to the examination of the internal elite groups within the US who may have influenced the US foreign policy to be pro-Israel, the connection indicates that Haley had a strong position from which she was able to influence the pro-Israel US foreign policy, including issues concerning the JCPOA. In relation to the theoretical model, this places Haley as a powerful member of the political elite who may have influenced the President to ensure the JCPOA withdrawal.

This can further be backed up when considering how AIPAC perceived Haley in contrast to Trump. At the 2018 AIPAC conference, Haley was reportedly received like a rock star and got bigger applause than the US Vice President, Mike Pence, who also spoke at the conference.<sup>129</sup> The reason for this reception may be explained by Haley's political position on international affairs in general. All of the pro-Israel actions taken by Haley in the UN have been completely aligned with Trump's position on these

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<sup>128</sup> Ron Kampeas, "Five Times Nikki Haley Delighted the Pro-Israel Community," *The Jerusalem Post*, October 10, 2018, [https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Operation-Northern-Shield-expected-to-take-weeks-to-complete-573547#spark\\_wn=1](https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Operation-Northern-Shield-expected-to-take-weeks-to-complete-573547#spark_wn=1)

<sup>129</sup> Amir Tibon, "With Haley's Exit From UN, pro-Israel Groups Lose Their Favorite Trump Official," *Haaretz*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-with-haley-s-exit-from-un-pro-israel-groups-lose-their-favorite-trump-official-1.6546128>

matters. This has made her a trusted advisor to Trump, who has praised Haley publicly on several occasions.<sup>130</sup>

However, the examples of political alignment between Haley and Trump are almost exclusively connected to Haley's efforts concerning Israel. On most other political matters, for example, in relation to the US relationship with Russia, there are examples where the two disagree.<sup>131</sup> Actually, Haley has been in opposition to Trump for a long time. As Republican Governor of South Carolina, 2011-2017, Haley made clear that she "was not a fan of Trump."<sup>132</sup> Several public statements during her time as US Ambassador to the UN verifies that this may still be true — except on the issue of Israel, and accordingly Iran, where the two maintain to be completely aligned.<sup>133</sup>

On this basis, it can be argued that the mixture of Haley being tough on Iran, friendly towards Israel, and cautious about Trump's policies on other matters, has made her the perfect figurehead for AIPAC.<sup>134</sup> As mentioned, the organization initially struggled to find an ideological standing point between the Democrats and the Republicans after Trump's victory in 2016. By embracing Haley, AIPAC had found a way to maintain a conservative pro-Israel stance, without also becoming an exclusively pro-Trump organization.

Thus, it is evident that Haley, an outspoken opponent of the JCPOA, has been in a unique position where she has had the backing of one of the most powerful pro-Israel lobby organizations in the US — an organization which Trump had a strong incentive to seek the support of. Therefore, the connection between Haley and AIPAC indicates that Trump also has had an incentive to follow Haley's political objectives concerning the JCPOA in order to ensure support from AIPAC through Haley. Thus, when considering the immense power that AIPAC holds in the US political system, it can be argued that the organization's support for Haley has put her in a powerful position to influence Trump on the JCPOA withdrawal. This can be affirmed by the fact that Trump

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<sup>130</sup> Johnson 2018, Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Jonathan Lemire and Greg Kinnard, "I don't get confused': Nikki Haley's response to Trump's White House draws notice," *Global News*, April 21, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4159351/nikki-haley-response-trumps-white-house/>

<sup>132</sup> Johnson 2018, Op.cit.

<sup>133</sup> Lemire and Kinnard, Op.cit.

<sup>134</sup> Kampeas February 28, 2018, Op.cit.

continuously has praised Haley's actions, even when he disagreed with her on other political matters.

Thereby, the theoretical model, which contends that intricate relations between elites exist and that there may be several different incentives for the President to accommodate the objectives of other elites seem to be verified. In the example concerning Haley, it is evident that she can be connected to several elites, and that both AIPAC and Haley represents relevant incentives for Trump to have accommodated their views on the JCPOA when he made his decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA.

The analysis of AIPAC, and specifically the 2018 speakers, thereby, confirm the notions behind the theoretical model concerning the intricate network of elites which constitute a possibility for political influence. The connections between the elite members who have been examined in this section may not be concise, and the influence that these members may have had concerning the JCPOA is not conclusively detectable through the individual examples. However, when observing the overall relevant events and actors during the days of the 2018 AIPAC conference, the data show a powerful pro-Israel lobby organization with connections to an array of high profile members of other elites who all align on the matter of the JCPOA. Simultaneously, many of these actors had meetings with the President, who had a strong incentive to accommodate the objectives of these actors because of their close affiliation with the powerful AIPAC.

## 4.4 The Advice Against Withdrawal

### 4.4.1 The Secretary of State

Until now, the notions of the theoretical model have been verified through examples of intricate elite networks who have pushed to influence Trump's decision on the JCPOA withdrawal on different levels and by presenting different incentives. However, while Trump had several close advisors who urged him to withdraw the US from the JCPOA, others were more reluctant to do so. A key person in this regard is Trump's former Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson. While he defended Trump's decision to decertify INARA in October 2017, Tillerson also stated that neither he nor Trump wished for Congress to reimpose sanctions on Iran<sup>135</sup>, despite the fact that Trump had implied

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<sup>135</sup> Demetri Sevtopulo and Michael Peel, "Tillerson says in US interest to stay in Iran nuclear deal," *Financial Times*, October 15, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/c01ba300-b1c2-11e7-aa26-bb002965bce8>

otherwise in his statement on the decertification of INARA.<sup>136</sup> Instead of complying with the President's message, Tillerson stated to the media;

“Let's see if we cannot address the flaws in the agreement by staying within the agreement, working with the other signatories, working with our European friends and allies within the agreement.”<sup>137</sup>

On this basis, it is apparent that the political elite connected to Trump did not act with unanimous support for Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA.

However, Trump's reaction to the lack of support for the JCPOA withdrawal by Tillerson, indicates that the President prioritized to stay in line with the elites who presented him with incentives of power, influence, access, or money to do so, rather than to listen to an official in his administration, who he had hired to advise him on issues pertaining to Iran and the JCPOA. Five months after Tillerson's remarks about the decertification of INARA, in March 2018, Trump announced that Tillerson would be replaced by former Republican House Representative, then-Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Mike Pompeo. When asked to explain his decision, Trump directly stated that he had the JCPOA in mind when replacing Tillerson;

“When you look at the Iran deal, I think it's terrible. I guess he [Tillerson, red.] thought it was OK. [...] So we were not really thinking the same. With Mike, Mike Pompeo, we have a very similar thought process. I think it's going to go very well.”<sup>138</sup>

Pompeo's stance on the JCPOA was much different than Tillerson's soft approach. As CIA Director, at an event in October 2017, Pompeo compared Iran with ISIS, and called the regime "a thuggish police state." A week later, at a conference, he stated that the President had a similar perception of Iran.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, on April 30, just a week before the withdrawal, Pompeo, who then had been appointed Secretary of State, put out a statement in reaction to the discovery of files which Israeli special forces

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<sup>136</sup> “Remarks by President Trump on Iran Strategy,” The White House, accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-iran-strategy/>

<sup>137</sup> Sevtopulo and Peel, Op.cit.

<sup>138</sup> Robert Windrem and William M. Arkin, “What Mike Pompeo means for the Iran nuclear deal,” *NBC News*, March 14, 2018.

<sup>139</sup> Windrem and Arkin, *Ibid.*

reportedly had retrieved on a special mission in Iran. According to the files, Iran had continued to enrich nuclear material. On this basis, Pompeo stated;

“Now that the world knows Iran has lied and is still lying, it is time to revisit the question of whether Iran can be trusted to enrich or control any nuclear material.”<sup>140</sup>

Pompeo's view on Iran and the JCPOA, thereby, confirms that the President wished to have a Secretary of State who would make the JCPOA withdrawal a reality. This, thereby, indicates that Trump wished to stay in line with the objectives of the US disengagement in the JCPOA, which had been presented by elite members who had presented the President with incentives to do so. This assumption can further be backed up by the fact that Pompeo had a good relationship with the pro-Israel elite during his time as a Representative in the US Congress, 2011-2017. In 2015 and 2016, Pompeo sponsored six bills in opposition to Iran and the JCPOA. Pompeo's pro-Israel stance in both Congress and as a CIA Director did not go unnoticed by the RJC who congratulated Pompeo on his pick for Secretary of State in an official statement in which they reiterated the importance of the appointment of Pompeo because he had “proven to be a bulwark against the aggression of Iran, and a great friend to Israel.”<sup>141</sup>

Thereby, Pompeo was not only a ‘puppet’ who could fulfill the wishes of the President concerning the JCPOA. He was also well-liked by the RJC, which Trump had a strong incentive to accommodate on the matter of the JCPOA. In correlation with the theoretical model, this, again, indicates that the elites were central actors in the pro-Israel US foreign policy concerning the JCPOA, and, furthermore, that the elites were connected in intricate networks from which they presented the President with various relevant incentives to ensure the JCPOA withdrawal.

#### 4.4.2 The Armed Forces

Thus, it is evident that Trump has taken actions to disregard the advice from people within his own administration. Tillerson argued that the JCPOA was better than no deal,

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<sup>140</sup> Mike Pompeo, “Iran Atomic Archive,” U.S. Department of State, Press Statement (April 30, 2018), accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/281345.htm>

<sup>141</sup> “RJC Congratulates Mike Pompeo on his Appointment to be Next Secretary of State,” Republican Jewish Coalition, accessed December 6, 2018, [http://www.rjchq.org/rjc\\_congratulates\\_mike\\_pompeo\\_on\\_his\\_appointment\\_to\\_be\\_the\\_next\\_secretary\\_of\\_state](http://www.rjchq.org/rjc_congratulates_mike_pompeo_on_his_appointment_to_be_the_next_secretary_of_state)



but instead of listening to him, Trump has disregarded his advice. The same seems to be true for Trump's closest military advisors. The Chairman of the JCS (CJCS), General, Joseph Dunford, and the US Army General, Joseph Votel have both aligned with Tillerson on the issue of the JCPOA withdrawal. Votel, who is a ranking commander in the US Army expressed his concern about the expected withdrawal from the JCPOA to the media in March 2018, stating that there had to be a viable alternative to the JCPOA if the US were to withdraw.<sup>142</sup> When asked about his opinion of Votel's statement, the CJCS stated that he agreed.<sup>143</sup>

Though, while Trump's unwillingness to follow the advice of his military advisors, weakens the verification of the theoretical model in relation to the influence of military advisors, it may strengthen it in other ways. Trump's unwavering compliance with several other pro-Israel elites' objectives on the matter of the JCPOA withdrawal, may verify that the incentives to follow the recommendations from these elites were more attractive than the incentives to follow those of the military advisors. The other elites include wealthy individuals, lobby organizations, and high profile policy advisors, and it has been confirmed that they are all able to offer Trump access to either power, money, or public exposure. These are the types of incentives that the President has been known to respond well to throughout his life and political career.<sup>144</sup> On this basis, it seems apparent why Trump chose the path of the pro-Israel elites rather than the one his military advisors presented him with.

## 4.5 The Influence of Congress

By now, several aspects of the elites have been examined in accordance with the theoretical model. However, one group still needs to be further examined. Throughout this analysis, there have been examples of how pro-Israel elites within the US have pushed their anti-JCPOA agenda by targeting congressional politicians. This may seem somewhat baffling, considering that Trump did not actually need congressional approval for the JCPOA withdrawal. Therefore, it is pertinent to consider what role Congress may have played in this, and whether relevant politicians have been influenced to be

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<sup>142</sup> Idrees Ali, "U.S. general signals support for Iran nuclear deal," *Reuters*, March 13, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-nuclear/u-s-general-signals-support-for-iran-nuclear-deal-idUSKCN1GP203>

<sup>143</sup> Ali, *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Severns, *Op.cit.*

pro-Israel on the matter of the JCPOA, and also whether this has influenced Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the deal. Firstly, it is pertinent to consider the congressional support for the JCPOA withdrawal in general.

At first glance, it does not seem like Trump had strong backing in Congress for his decision to withdraw from the JCPOA. First of all, the mere fact that Congress did not act on the opportunity to reimpose sanctions on Iran in the time period where Trump decertified INARA, even though the President's party, the Republicans, held a majority in both chambers in the US Congress, indicates that the leading politicians were hesitant to support a withdrawal from the deal.

On this basis, it does not seem likely that members of the congressional political elite have played into Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA. However, if the congressional politicians did not have a say in this, it seems rather surprising that members of the economic and pro-Israel lobby elite pursued to influence them concerning the JCPOA withdrawal by representing them with relevant incentives in this context. Therefore, it is relevant to conduct an examination of some of the congressional politicians who did support Trump on the matter of the JCPOA in order to determine whether their actions and connections may have influenced the pro-Israel US foreign policy concerning the JCPOA withdrawal.

#### 4.5.1 The pro-Israel Congressional Support

In fact, a strong base of Republican politicians in Congress did back the JCPOA withdrawal. Notably, some of these politicians were members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a core political organ in which congressional foreign policy is conducted.<sup>145</sup> The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, however, consists of several potential influencers on US foreign policy. Therefore, to conduct an in-depth analysis, it is necessary to zoom in on specific individuals who stand out in the research of the JCPOA withdrawal.

A relevant politician in this context is Republican Senator from Florida, Marco Rubio. Rubio was one of the contestants for the Republican party's presidential

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<sup>145</sup> "Senate Foreign Relations Committee," Center for Responsive Politics, Open Secrets, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/cong-cmtes/overview?cmte=SFOR&cmtename=Senate+Foreign+Relations+Committee&cong=115>

nomination in 2016.<sup>146</sup> This alone would indicate that had built a strong network and a certain degree of political and public clout in the years leading up to 2016. Though, it is pertinent to consider his position concerning the JCPOA withdrawal, to verify his relevance in relation to the theoretical model.

Rubio voiced this opposition against the JCPOA during the presidential election campaign in 2016. Though, already in 2015, Rubio actively worked to oppose the US engagement in the JCPOA by introducing an amendment to INARA that would demand Iran to recognize Israel as a state. In the end, Rubio voted for INARA without his proposed amendment under pressure from Republican colleagues.<sup>147</sup> However, Rubio's active opposition towards the JCPOA did not stop there. In October 2017, when Trump decertified INARA, Rubio again expressed his opposition against the JCPOA.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, on May 7, 2018, the day before Trump announced the JCPOA withdrawal, an op-ed by Rubio was published by *Fox News*. In this, Rubio stated that Trump should "not hesitate to nix this flawed and dangerous agreement that is beyond fixing."<sup>149</sup> Rubio's actions thereby confirm that a member of the congressional political elite sought to influence the US foreign policy to be pro-Israel concerning the JCPOA. While this is in accordance with the theoretical model's assumptions, it does not verify that the decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA was directly related to Rubio's, or other congressional politician's, opposition towards the deal. However, the empirical data display that Rubio did not work alone in this endeavor.

Rubio was part of a prominent group of leading politicians working to oppose the JCPOA. This group included, among others, Republican Senator from Texas, Ted Cruz who was also a leading contestant in the 2016 presidential primary election. While not being a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Cruz is a common voice in

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<sup>146</sup> "CNN Delegate Estimate," *CNN*, Politics, accessed November 28, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/election/2016/primaries/parties/republican>

<sup>147</sup> Jennifer Steinhauer, "Marco Rubio's Push to Amend Iran Measure Threatens a Fragile Balance in Congress," *The New York Times*, April 29, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/30/world/amendment-threatens-bill-giving-congress-a-voice-in-iran-nuclear-negotiations.html>

<sup>148</sup> Rebecca Kheel, "Rubio expresses 'serious doubts' on Iran deal's future in the Senate," *The Hill*, October 13, 2017, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/355398-rubio-expresses-serious-doubts-on-senates-iran-deal-plan>

<sup>149</sup> Marco Rubio, "Senator Marco Rubio: President Trump should nix the Iran nuclear deal," *Fox News*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/senator-marco-rubio-president-trump-should-nix-the-iran-nuclear-deal>

the foreign policy debate in the US.<sup>150</sup> Cruz and Rubio were backed up by leading Senate politicians. Already in June 2015, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Republican Senator from Tennessee, Bob Corker, expressed his opposition to the JCPOA in a letter addressed to then-President Obama, urging him to walk away from the negotiations with Iran to avoid engaging in a bad deal.<sup>151</sup> A couple of months later, he was backed by Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Republican Senator from North Carolina, Richard Burr, who publicly announced his opposition against the JCPOA.<sup>152</sup> The two chairmen also joined the appraisals of Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA in 2018.<sup>153</sup>

Thus, a group of politicians, which, by virtue of their positions in relevant committees and their public exposure, can be categorized as a part of the political elite on US foreign policy, has worked to influence the US foreign policy to be pro-Israel by supporting the JCPOA withdrawal. Now, the question arises about why these politicians pursued to utilize their political positions to advocate for the JCPOA withdrawal.

#### 4.5.2 The Elite's Interests in Congress

Let us zoom in on Rubio again to examine this in-depth. By examining his network, some possible explanations for Rubio's stance on the JCPOA become evident. According to Center for Responsive Politics, the mere fact that a politician is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee makes him a target for "certain ideological contributors, such as pro-Israel PACs."<sup>154</sup> This may explain why Rubio, during the election in 2016, received \$468,307 from pro-Israel lobby organizations, making him

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<sup>150</sup> "Ted Cruz (R-Texas)," ProPublica, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://projects.propublica.org/represent/members/C001098-ted-cruz>

<sup>151</sup> Mary Troyan, "Corker warns of 'breathtaking' concessions on Iran deal," *USA Today*, June 15, 2015, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/06/15/corker-says-back-away-from-iran-deal/71260448/>

<sup>152</sup> Richard Burr, "Burr on Iran Deal: American People Aren't Buying Into Bad Deal," Press Releases (August 5, 2015), accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.burr.senate.gov/press/releases/burr-on-iran-deal-american-people-arent-buying-into-bad-deal->

<sup>153</sup> Bob Corker. "Corker Statement on Trump Decision to Withdraw from Iran Nuclear Deal," News (May 8, 2018), accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.corker.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2018/5/corker-statement-on-trump-decision-to-withdraw-from-iran-nuclear-deal;>

Richard Burr, "Burr Statement on U.S. Withdrawal from Iran Deal," Press Releases (May 8, 2018), accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.burr.senate.gov/press/releases/burr-statement-on-us-withdrawal-from-iran-deal>

<sup>154</sup> "Senate Foreign Relations Committee," Op.cit.

the number one recipient of financial contributions from the pro-Israel industry<sup>155</sup> in the Senate.<sup>156</sup> This alone represents a strong financial incentive for Rubio to accommodate the objectives of the pro-Israel elites in the US.

To confirm the notions of the theoretical model in relation to the JCPOA, it is pertinent to examine Rubio's relations with these elites further. Rubio can be connected to several pro-Israel lobby organizations, including AIPAC, at which he spoke at the 2018 conference.<sup>157</sup> Additionally, Rubio is affiliated with billionaire auto dealer Norman Braman, who is the former President of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation, a Florida based pro-Israel organization.<sup>158</sup> In 2016, Braman donated \$7 million to the Conservative Solutions PAC, which exclusively supported Rubio's bid for the US presidency.<sup>159</sup> Braman has also been involved in financing Rubio's legislative agenda, he has traveled with Rubio in Israel, and Rubio has previously worked as a lawyer for Braman.<sup>160</sup> Rubio has even categorized the relationship between him and Braman as a father-son relationship, while continuously reassuring the public that he always evaluate the legislative suggestions, that Braman presents him with, on the basis of their merits, rather than the interests of one of his biggest donors.<sup>161</sup> Notwithstanding this, there are several examples where Braman has announced his positions on foreign policy issues involving Israel, and where Rubio has reacted in correlation with Braman's positions.<sup>162</sup>

Because of Braman's pro-Israel stance and his known influence on Rubio, many observers have credited him for being the initiator behind Rubio's opposition against the

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<sup>155</sup> The term "industry" is based on the categorization by Center for Responsive Politics which uses "industry" to cover both individuals and PACs registered under specific industries, including e.g. law firms, unions, and real estate, but also ideological issues, such as human rights and pro-Israel.

<sup>156</sup> "Pro-Israel: Top Recipients. Top 20 Senate Members, 2016," Center for Responsive Politics, Open Secrets, accessed November 28, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/industries/recips.php?ind=Q05&cycle=2016&recipdetail=S&mem=Y&sortorder=U>

<sup>157</sup> "Full Program, 2018," American Israel Public Affairs Committee, accessed December 6, 2018, <http://www.policyconference.org/article/Schedule.asp>

<sup>158</sup> Uriel Heilman, "Marco Rubio's big Jewish backer and 7 other things to know about him," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 29, 2015, <https://www.jta.org/2015/10/29/news-opinion/politics/marco-rubios-big-jewish-backer-and-7-other-things-to-know-about-him>

<sup>159</sup> "Conservative Solutions PAC: Contributors, 2016 cycle," Op.cit.

<sup>160</sup> Heilman, Op.cit.

<sup>161</sup> Steve Eder and Michael Barbaro, "Billionaire Lifts Marco Rubio, Politically and Personally," *The New York Times*, May 9, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/us/billionaire-lifts-marco-rubio-politically-and-personally.html>

<sup>162</sup> Eli Clifton, "Meet Marco Rubio's Far-Right Neocon Donors," *The Nation*, December 11, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/meet-marco-rubios-far-right-neocon-donors/>

JCPOA. Thus, the data concerning Rubio's connections indicates that he may have been influenced by the pro-Israel opinions of his long-term friend and financial contributor, Braman, on issues concerning the JCPOA. The presumption that Rubio is susceptible to influence in response to financial donations, can further be backed up by Rubio's connections to other pro-Israel individuals and groups who publicly have opposed the JCPOA. As mentioned previously, another major donor to Rubio's presidential campaign was Singer, who contributed substantially to Rubio's campaign, while advocating for the JCPOA withdrawal.<sup>163</sup> Thus, in accordance with the theoretical model, it is likely that Rubio has been influenced to support a JCPOA withdrawal by members of the economic elite because of the financial incentive they represent.

Though, when examining the connections between the congressional political elite and the non-political pro-Israel elites it becomes pertinent to consider why the economic elite even chose to focus on a congressional politician such as Rubio when Trump was the person with the final say in the matter of the JCPOA. A possible explanation may be that they believed that Rubio would become President, and thereby would obtain the power to carry out the JCPOA withdrawal. However, Rubio was not the only politician who gained the interest of pro-Israel elites. As mentioned previously, both Adelson and the RJC spend a lot of money on respectively rewarding and punishing political candidates who had been either for or against the JCPOA withdrawal.<sup>164</sup> So, why have pro-Israel elites shown interest in Congress in this matter?

An explanation may lie in the fact that Congress was responsible for an array of legislative measures pertaining to anti-Iran efforts. For example, while Congress did not act on the opportunity to reimpose sanctions on Iran when Trump decertified INARA in October 2017, other legislative measures were taken, to oppose Iran and the JCPOA in this time period. The interest by lobby organizations in such legislation can be backed up by the fact that between 2016 and 2018, the RJC lobbied for a range of pro-Israel legislative initiatives, including 10 bills related to Iran and the JCPOA.<sup>165</sup> This verifies that congressional influence on policies pertaining to the JCPOA was of importance to pro-Israel economic elites and lobby organizations, even though the congressional

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<sup>163</sup> "Conservative Solutions PAC: Contributors, 2016 cycle," Op.cit.

<sup>164</sup> Schwarz, Op.cit.

<sup>165</sup> "Republican Jewish Coalition, Bills Lobbied," Center for Responsive Politics, Open Secrets, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/clientbills.php?id=D000028612&year=2018>

influence on the actual decision to withdraw is not directly detectable. Furthermore, the Congress may also be relevant to these elites in the context of the necessity for legislative measures after the JCPOA withdrawal, when sanctions were to be reimposed on Iran.<sup>166</sup>

## 4.6 The Manipulation of Public Opinion

By now it has been established that pro-Israel elites have pursued to ensure the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. Furthermore, it has become evident that Trump has been presented with strong incentives to act in accordance with the objectives of these elites. Thus, in accordance with the theoretical assumptions the President has carried out the objectives of relevant elites. Though, to confirm that the objectives of the elites have been the President's primary concern on the matter of the JCPOA, the theoretical model contends that the President will have attempted to influence public opinion on this matter, in order to generate leeway for him to abide by the wishes of the elites. Therefore, it is pertinent to, briefly, examine the public opinion concerning the JCPOA withdrawal, as well as potential efforts by elites to mold public opinion on this matter.

### 4.6.1 The Polling Results

On the day of the President's announcement of the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, the well-renowned Pew Research Center published the results of an extensive survey concerning the public opinion on this issue. The survey was conducted in the weeks leading up to the announcement, between April 25 and May 1, 2018. Overall, the American people seem to be a bit more inclined to disapprove of the JCPOA than to approve of it. 40 % disapprove and 32 % approve, while 28 % have no opinion about the issue. Pew Research center has interpreted this result as the public being skeptical towards the JCPOA.<sup>167</sup>

Thus, the results could imply that a narrow majority of the American public would be supportive of the decision to withdraw from the JCPOA. However, when the respondents were asked to evaluate Trump's handling of the Iran issue, a majority had a

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<sup>166</sup> Rachel Oswald, "Trump Pulls Out of Iran Deal, Reimposes Sanctions," *Roll Call*, May 8, 2018.

<sup>167</sup> "Public Is Skeptical of the Iran Agreement – and Trump's Handling of the Issue," Pew Research Center, accessed December 11, 2018, <http://www.people-press.org/2018/05/08/public-is-skeptical-of-the-iran-agreement-and-trumps-handling-of-the-issue/>

negative perception of how the President was doing. 48 % said they had no confidence in him at all, and 17 % did not have too much confidence in him. This amounts to 65 % of the respondents who either had no or only little confidence in the President's actions concerning the JCPOA.<sup>168</sup> This result exhibits that opposition to the JCPOA may not necessarily have meant support for Trump's decision to withdraw. This can be backed up by a similar poll made by SRSS for CNN between May 2 and May 5, 2018. The results of this poll show that 63 % of Americans did not believe that the US should withdraw from the JCPOA. At the same time, 62 % believed that Iran had actually violated the JCPOA.<sup>169</sup>

Overall, the results of the two polls conducted in the weeks before the announcement of the JCPOA withdrawal show a picture of a public that is inconsistent in its answers, meaning that opposition against the JCPOA and a belief that Iran had violated the deal, did not amount to support for the withdrawal. A reason for this may be that the public does not know enough about the JCPOA. The polling results indicate that this is true. As mentioned, 28 % of respondents in the Pew Research Center poll had no opinion on the JCPOA. Furthermore, the same poll shows that 26 % had heard nothing about the JCPOA.<sup>170</sup>

The polls, therefore, back up the assumption that Trump did not decide to withdraw from the JCPOA as a reaction to an overwhelming, general public demand. This correlates with the notions of the theoretical model, which contends that the political elite, and the President, in particular, does not necessarily decide on policy issues as a response to the public opinion about this matter. Rather, according to the theoretical framework, the President and other elites may have pursued to influence specific groups in the public to generate leeway to enact the pro-Israel US foreign policy concerning the JCPOA withdrawal.

## 4.6.2 The Elite's Attempts to Manipulate

In previous sections, it has been determined that several pro-Israel lobbies have attempted to influence the public through media campaigns against members of the political elites who were proponents of the US engagement in the JCPOA. These

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<sup>168</sup> "Public Is Skeptical of the Iran Agreement – and Trump's Handling of the Issue," Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> "Poll for CNN," SRSS, accessed December 11, 2018, <http://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2018/images/05/07/rel5c.-iran.pdf>

<sup>170</sup> "Public Is Skeptical of the Iran Agreement – and Trump's Handling of the Issue," Op.cit.



campaigns were interpreted as potential incentives for the President to accommodate the pro-Israel lobbies in their objective to ensure the JCPOA withdrawal. By accommodating the elites on this objective, the President could help ensure that political power would stay in the hands of his Republican Party. Though, these actions by pro-Israel lobbies may also be perceived as attempts to sway the public to support the JCPOA withdrawal. This assumption can be backed up by the previously mentioned fact that AIPAC, in 2015, spent between \$20-40 million on general ad campaigns against the US engagement in the JCPOA.<sup>171</sup> This indicates that members of the pro-Israel lobby did attempt to build opposition against the JCPOA in the American public. This confirms the notion of the theoretical model, that the pro-Israel elites will attempt to influence the public to ensure that the objectives of these elites can be fulfilled without overwhelming public opposition.

The theoretical model further implies that the President likely will have targeted specific groups in the public whose support he finds relevant. Furthermore, the model contends that the President's persuasion of the public will have been attempted by communicating through the media, using specific tactics that he knows to have an effect on his target group, including focusing on his abilities as a leader.<sup>172</sup> When examining the actions of Trump towards the public, there is evidence which indicates that he has pursued to influence the public, and especially his core voters, on the matter of the JCPOA.

This evidence can be found in the rhetorical measures, Trump has utilized when making official statements about the JCPOA at media press conferences. For example, when announcing the JCPOA withdrawal, Trump continuously referred to the JCPOA as a "disastrous deal," while also stating that withdrawing from the deal made him a man of his words.<sup>173</sup> This example is merely one out of many, that depicts the strong rhetoric that Trump utilized when speaking to the public about the JCPOA. In general, it has been observed that Trump increasingly has strengthened his rhetoric concerning the JCPOA in the time leading up to and after the withdrawal. In July 2018, Trump said that;

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<sup>171</sup> Chang, 2015, Op.cit.

<sup>172</sup> Druckman and Jacobs, Op.cit. 56-57.

<sup>173</sup> "Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," The White House, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/>

“that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani must ‘never ever threaten the United States again or else suffer consequences the likes of which ‘few have ever suffered before’.”<sup>174</sup>

These examples of Trump's communicative strategy are important in the context of this analysis, because of the theoretical assumptions that Trump may have sought to ensure the support of his key voters on the matter of the JCPOA. Research shows that Trump's strong rhetoric has been an effective tool to sway his core voters. Some scholars have even argued that the reason for Trump's victory in the presidential election in 2016 was directly connected to the effect his communicative strategy had on the conservative Republicans who chose to vote for him.<sup>175</sup> Additionally, the previously mentioned poll by Pew Research Center shows that Republican voters display strong support for Trump's handling of the JCPOA, compared to the general public. Eight in ten Republicans said they were very or somewhat confident in Trump on this matter. In comparison, only one in ten Democrats said the same.<sup>176</sup>

This very brief examination of the public opinion on the matter of the JCPOA, as well as the elites communicative strategies towards the public on this matter, thereby indicates that Trump did in fact attempt to ensure support for the JCPOA withdrawal among his core voters by utilizing the rhetorical measures he knows to have a great influence on this group. At the same time, the data also verifies that it was not on the basis of an overwhelming public demand that Trump decided to withdraw the US from the JCPOA. Thereby, the notions of the theoretical model in which the elites are the main influencers on the pro-Israel US foreign policy have been verified.

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<sup>174</sup> Kelsey Davenport, “Trump Escalates Rhetoric on Iran,” *Arms Control Association*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2018-07-30/trump-escalates-rhetoric-iran-p41-iran-nuclear-deal-alert-july-30-2018>

<sup>175</sup> Mark Hooghe and Ruth Dassonneville, “Explaining the Trump Vote: The Effect of Racist Resentment and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments,” *American Political Science Association*, July 2018.

<sup>176</sup> “Public Is Skeptical of the Iran Agreement – and Trump's Handling of the Issue,” *Op.cit.*

## 5. Conclusion

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This thesis aimed to answer why the US foreign policy continuously has been pro-Israel in general — and for the Trump administration in particular. To answer this question, an internal perspective was chosen. Built around an explanatory, theoretical model, which was based on the theories of *elite influence* and *political priming of public opinion*, an analysis was conducted on the basis of specific empirical examples concerning the JCPOA withdrawal.

The findings of the empirical analysis confirm the notions of the theoretical model. While it is extremely challenging to verify that elite group A directly has made elite group B act in accordance with the objectives of A, the verified causal correlations between elite actors concerning the JCPOA strongly indicate that the pro-Israel elites within the US have been an influencing factor in the decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA. This conclusion is based on the empirical evidence of an intricate network of different pro-Israel elites who have aimed to ensure the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. Additionally, the analysis has shown that the non-political elites' influence is based on presenting the political elite with relevant incentives to make decision makers inclined to ensure the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. The empirical analysis has further shown that the political elite likely has acted on these incentives while having disregarded the advice of other elite members, who did not match such incentives, as well as the general public opinion.

On the basis of the findings of causal correlations between elite actors on the matter of the JCPOA in the empirical analysis, it can, therefore, be concluded that it is likely that Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA, at least partly, was based on the strong incentives of money, influence, access, and power, which members of especially the pro-Israel economic and lobby elites have presented him with. This conclusion is a cautious one. While there is no doubt that elite actors actively have been devoted to ensuring the US withdrawal from the JCPOA by utilizing their immense wealth and extensive networks, the empirical analysis is still based on the evidence of causal correlations between timing of events, actions of elite members, as well as

background information on relevant individuals, groups, and organizations. Therefore, a lot of missing links have been 'filled out' through thorough interpretations of the data.

On this foundation, this conclusion will not attempt to make over generalizations on the basis of the findings concerning the JCPOA withdrawal. It will merely conclude that an intricate network of pro-Israel elites, which expands into the very core of US foreign policy making, exists, and that the empirical data concerning the JCPOA withdrawal indicates that the efforts by these elites have played a role in the executive power's decision to withdraw the US from the JCPOA. On this basis, it is likely that the internal elite actors have played an important role in the continuous pro-Israel US foreign policy. Though, to determine the degree to which these elite actors influence the pro-Israel US foreign policy in general, further research and studies must be conducted to unwrap the entire web of connections, interactions, and incentives that shape the pro-Israel US foreign policy.

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