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HEADLINE: Bush signals U.S. won't desert Israel

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BODY:

President Bush plays super-power lobbyist for Israel at the United Nations today.

He's expected to call on the U.N. General Assembly to repeal a 1975 resolution defining Zionism as a form of racism.

U.S. officials in New York believe they've already lined up a slim majority of General Assembly votes to override the resolution. They expect some quiet resistance from hard-line Arab states, but a strong majority publicly.

Bush's appeal to the world community is his way of salving hurt feelings among Jews at home.

It comes almost two weeks after Bush thundered against "powerful forces" pressing Congress for immediate approval of \$10 billion in loan guarantees for Israel to build housing for Soviet Jews.

On Sept. 12, Bush pounded the lectern, vowing to veto any Israeli loan guarantees sent to him before next year. "And I think the American people will support me!" he said.

By taking the fight public, Bush put Israel - and many of its supporters - on the defensive. Calling himself "one lonely little guy," Bush framed the debate as one between the U.S. president and a foreign country and its backers.

Both Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, D-Maine, and GOP leader Robert Dole, R-Kan., say Bush has the backing to defeat any quick vote on housing aid for Israel.

Sen. David Boren, D-Okla., head of the Senate Intelligence Committee, supports Bush, but understands Israel's concern: "They're beginning to ask themselves: Are we going to be deserted by the United States?," he said Sunday on NBC's Meet the Press. "I think we do need to send them a very strong message that that's not going to happen."

Bush's plea to revoke the U.N. denunciation of Zionism as racism would make the point more strongly than the apology he sent Jewish leaders last week.

"I'm not sure we asked for an apology," says **Shoshana Cardin**, head of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "It's important he conveyed that some of his words could have been misinterpreted."

Cardin was among 1,000 Jewish leaders from 40 states who went Sept. 12 to lobby Congress to act immediately on loan guarantees to help Israel house Soviet Jews. Bush wants the issue put off until after a Mideast peace conference opens.

Bush's description of the lobbyists as "powerful forces" enraged Jewish leaders, including those who support him on the issue. But more than hitting a nerve, Bush called attention to the lingering question of what, or who, the "Jewish lobby" really is.

The major lobby representing Israeli interests on Capitol Hill is unquestionably big, with 50,000 members - and powerful, with a \$13 million budget.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is not a political action committee by the usual definition. It does not finance political candidates, but it works closely on policy with about 70 Jewish interest groups.

The pro-Israel lobby spent more than \$11 million on House and Senate candidates in elections since 1985, according to Sunshine Press Services, a finance-tracking service on Capitol Hill.

Business PACs, by comparison, contributed more than \$300 million to House and Senate candidates between 1985 and 1990; labor PACs gave \$115 million. Pro-Israel PACs came in third.

But the lobby's power rests on more than cash, says Thomas Mann, a congressional scholar at the Brookings Institution.

"The reason the so-called Israeli lobby has been influential has more to do with the moral claim of Israel, and its position as a loyal ally ... than to the ways and means of AIPAC."

Government professor Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia, author of *Paying for Elections*, sees a more tangible force at work. "The real source of strength is votes as much as money. And that's as American as apple pie. Jewish citizens tend to vote at a rate far higher than almost all (other) segments."

Politicians who've crossed the pro-Israel lobby say cash counts:

- Former Illinois GOP senator Charles Percy says his support for the 1981 sale of AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia helped lose him the pro-Israel lobby's support - and his 1984 race to Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill. Simon's winning margin was 89,000 votes.

- Former Illinois representative Paul Findley says AIPAC poured money into his opponent's war chest, leading to his 1982 defeat. "Thomas Dine (AIPAC director) said U.S. Jews provided 90% of the money that went to my opponent," Findley says.

He says a 1978 visit to PLO chairman Yasser Arafat triggered his problems. He says he was trying to be "a bridge of information" between Arafat and the U.S., and "that really ticked them off. They set about to get me out of Congress."

Findley managed to win re-election in 1980, but only after "the most expensive race in Illinois history." Tab for the two candidates: \$1.5 million - "astronomical" at that time. He lost two years later.

Dine declined to be interviewed.

"AIPAC is not the issue," says its spokeswoman Toby Dershowitz. "We don't seek press for ourselves. We prefer to focus on the issues. We don't have enemies. We have friends and potential friends."

Not everyone who cares about Israel supports AIPAC, says Jerome Segal, who heads the 2-year-old Jewish Peace Lobby.

"We believe AIPAC more often than not is counterproductive," says Segal. The peace lobby supports conversing with the PLO and ending settlement in the occupied territories - both anathemas to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and AIPAC.

A critic of the pro-Israel lobby says the Jewish groups "picked the wrong adversary" when they challenged Bush.

"He's the victor in the gulf war, and the man who's putting together the pieces of the peace process," says David Bowen of the Council for the National Interest. He says the group lobbies "for a balanced approach to Middle East policy."

"He's coming out first, and they're coming out second. ... The unquestioning obeisance to Israeli wishes has now been broken."