

The General Delegation of
Palestine to Australia,
New Zealand and the
Pacific



Intern Policy Research
Report

**The Efficacy of Lobbying in Australian-Arab
Communities in relation to the Israel-Palestine
Conflict**

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Executive Summary

This research undertakes an analysis of the strategies of various facets of the Australian-Arab community in regards to the Israel-Palestine Conflict (IPC). This is the first research of its kind, and is therefore an important stepping stone to further works and a strengthening of Australian-Arab lobbying within Australia. Secondary resources will be used in the setting of criteria for “effective” lobbying, and in the construction of the case study, examining the forced resignation of Vic Alhadeff. The remainder of the research will be founded on primary sources, namely interviews and a youth group. Through the identification and analysis of these lobbying strategies, it will be found that current lobbying is ineffective, and recommendations both for further study and for improvement will be provided.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine (herein named the IPC), centred on five issues outlined below, can be considered as one of the defining conflicts of our modern age. While many Arab communities within Australia are interested in this issue to varying degrees of engagement, no comprehensive study has been undertaken to examine their lobbying and advocacy methods in regards to the IPC. Arabs being one of the most populous immigrant groups within Australia, a lack of understanding of the positions and methods of communities to support the causes they believe in, coupled with an ignorance of the causes themselves, has led to both under- and misrepresentation by governing bodies.

This study aims to clarify the positions of various Arab organisations, analyse both their lobbying techniques and those of Arab youth, and offer recommendations in relation to proceeding with the strengthening of relationships between the community and these organisations vis-à-vis the IPC.

Methodology

Four methodologies will be used throughout the course of this research, split evenly between primary and secondary sources. Interviews will be conducted with relevant organisations and a youth focus group will be brought together in order to obtain relevant, primary data. It must be noted that, in order to preserve confidentiality and certain anonymities, direct quotations will not be used to large effect. The distinction will be made, however, between the representation of the opinions of a given organisation, those of a certain person, and analysis of any of these opinions. Secondary data will be found through two means. One of these will be the investigation of the case study of Vic Alhadeff's sacking from the NSW government, forced by a group of Arab academics and the Arab Council of Australia (ACA). The other will be a review of existing literature conducted in order to further substantiate any conclusions drawn, specifically as to the nature of 'effective

lobbying' and the underrepresentation of an Arab voice in Australia. The limitations to these methodologies will be presented in the relevant chapters.

A Brief Description of the Nature of the Israel-Palestine Conflict (IPC)

The IPC has been a dynamic situation for approximately 70 years. Much of the tension is focussed on five issues:

- Where the borders for Israel and Palestine should be drawn
- The question of population settlement and its legalities
- Management of the Right to Return
- The political situation of East Jerusalem
- The nature of Israel's security

It is often difficult to grasp the complexities of the situation, due to the intricate and inextricable relation between the four main forces at play: ethnicity, race, identity, and religion. This essay does not seek to separate these and identify methods in addressing such fundamental problems, though, in order to achieve a lasting bilateral peace, this is a study that must be pursued in the future. The Australian Government's official position in regards to the IPC is to formally recognise Israel as an official state, though not Palestine. The adoption of this position, both as a representation of the populace's views and as a response to lobbying, will be assessed throughout this essay. Lobbying methods used by the Arab community and relevant organisations to attempt to influence paradigm shifts will also be analysed, with relevance to the Australian context and Arab youth in Australia. Consequently, it is necessary to establish criteria for "effective lobbying".

Chapter 2: Criteria for Effective Lobbying

This section will cover the two integral assumptions necessary for this report: the nature of lobbying and criteria for effective lobbying.

The nature of lobbying always expresses, at minimum, a duality; one lobbies for an idea that one believes is under- or misrepresented in a given society, implying an overrepresentation of an opposing idea. In the case of the IPC, Australian-Arab lobbying is therefore necessarily placed in juxtaposition with Jewish lobbying (a term used in this report interchangeably with Israeli lobbying). Given the pro-Israel nature of Australia and the inherently polarised nature of the IPC, this comparison is even more imperative.

In order to assess lobbying, however, criteria for “effective lobbying” must be established. Through the synthesis of various sources¹, this research posits that a given lobbying strategy is effective if the following criteria are fulfilled:

- A reliable source of fiscal support
- Perseverance, including in the pressure and quantity of actions taken
- Consistency in promoting the cause whenever relevant
- A clear and well-maintained focus (including a cohesive front)
- Level of engagement with the topic and relevant parties
- Knowledge of the subject matter, important players in the field, and necessary processes
- Successful results

Throughout subsequent analysis, the fact will be demonstrated that Australian-Arab lobbying, in a variety of communities, fulfils very few of these requirements.

Recommendations as to how to improve are presented in the penultimate chapter,

Recommendations.

¹ Noted in **References**

Chapter 3: Organisations

Two organisations were interviewed directly for this study. The two primary sources were opposite in nature, with the Australian Arab Council for Commerce and Industry (AACCI) being a strictly “apolitical organisation”, and the Arab Council of Australia (ACA) being actively involved in political lobbying and advocacy for the views of Arab communities in Australia.

This chapter will seek to analyse the effectiveness of each organisation’s lobbying methods, and introduce seminal ideas, recurrent throughout all forms of Arab community lobbying within Australia. It must be acknowledged, however, that two primary sources may not accurately represent Australia-Arab lobbying within communities².

As mentioned above, the AACCI and the ACA fall on opposite ends of a spectrum defined by a level of political involvement in lobbying. As an apolitical organisation, the AACCI does not actively lobby the government in relation to the IPC or, indeed, any other aspect of societal discourse. That being said, if they believe that governmental decisions will impact trade, meetings will be organised so as to demonstrate why such decisions may be detrimental. Interestingly, salient during the interview was the split between the interviewee himself, who presented as pro-Palestine, and the views of the organisation, which strives to remain as apolitical as possible: a self-imposed dissonance. Due to this, the AACCI does react morally against the Parliament’s pro-Israel stance; at the declaration of this stance, meetings were set up and an attempt was made to demonstrate that supporting Israel over Palestine could lead to adverse effects on trade with many pro-Palestine Middle-Eastern countries. Similarly, letters were sent and attempts to persuade a reconsideration of the decision were made. Regardless of these efforts, it is clear that the parliament’s stance

² Despite only two organisations being interviewed, over six organisations were contacted for the purposes of this research.

regarding Palestine has not changed, and so this can be seen as an example of ineffective lobbying, in accordance with the criteria established in **Chapter 2**. It can also be seen that lobbying for the AACCI is carefully kept separated from political affairs; the mission statement of the AACCI necessitates an overwhelming focus on commerce and industry, to the exclusion of all else.

However, this is not without reason. During the interview, it was stressed that the AACCI is a professional, business driven organisation. Community driven actions, therefore, are necessarily kept to a minimum; while internships are offered, direct engagement with Arab communities, and particularly their youth, is scarce. That is not to say that AACCI does not involve itself in the community, but rather that it plays more the role of participant than that of instigator where such public events are concerned. Connections with other organisations, however, are seen as “very strong, though everything has room for improvement”³. Due to its nature, the AACCI has close links with other Arab organisations, Australian organisations, and the Arab ambassadors.

Representing the other end of the spectrum, the ACA is heavily involved in community action, lobbying, media, and engagement of youth. The stark contrast between vocabulary used by the interviewees, their intensity of both verbal and physical expressions, and the conclusions drawn in terms of successful lobbying, demonstrate the opposite essence of their organisations.

The ACA is highly visible via visual media, newspapers, community events, and workshops with youths. Randa Kattan, CEO of the ACA and subject of the interview for this research, said that in order for Arab voices to be heard, “we have to push”. With strong views about the perceived place of Arabs in Australia, living as “second-class citizens”⁴, ignored

³ Asghar, A. Representative of the AACCI.

⁴ Kattan, R. Representative of the ACA.

and underrepresented by the majority of the ruling class, and used only as “stepping stones”⁵ in a politician’s political agenda, Kattan criticised the management of Australian-Arab lobbying. By comparing the “fragmented”⁶ nature of Arab lobbying with the solidified nature of Israeli lobbying, the greatest flaw in the former is evident.

The ACA lobbies through press releases, sending letters to Members of Parliament, organising meetings, marches, protests, and attempting to engage the wider community in education. It also draws upon its extensive connections with all kinds of organisations, political or otherwise, decision-making bodies, Arab diplomats, and the Australian-Arab community. Kattan stated that these methods, especially education, have often worked; once non-Arab Australians learn the ‘facts’, they inevitably become pro-Palestine. An area for further study would be to investigate the nature of information disseminated, because of the intrinsic bias that ‘facts’ presented by the ACA will contain. Whether or not this lobbying is effective, therefore, is harder to ascertain. Whilst these strategies are supposedly working on the community at large, there has been little discernible effect on parliamentary policy. It was also mentioned that one of the major impediments is funding: “the Jewish lobbying organisations are all funded by the Israeli Government, but we have to find the money ourselves.”⁷

Despite what could be called effective but unsuccessful lobbying on behalf of both the ACA and the AACCI, the former has enjoyed some success. One of the most publically successful achievements of the ACA was its involvement in the resignation of Vic Alhadeff, discussed in the following section.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter 4: Case Study

Beyond the organisational level, however, more publically visible lobbying and action can be seen. An example of how this type of Arab lobbying was successful on a more mainstream scale will be discussed in the following case study. This will include a solidification of ideas presented thus far, and an extension of analysis into patterns of behaviour within Arab communities in Australia, particularly in relation to the IPC. While secondary sources such as media articles are used, points from an interview with Randa Kattan, CEO of the ACA, will also be provided. An email conversation between the involved lobbyists will also provide a basis for analysis, however due to the confidential nature of this communication, no direct quotes, references, or names will be used.

This case study focuses on the resignation of Vic Alhadeff in July 2014. Alhadeff was forced to resign from his position as the chairman for the Community Relations Commission (CRC) after much public pressure – specifically from members of the Arab community – regarding certain comments sent from his personal email. These comments involved his controversial defence of Israeli attacks on Gaza, and subsequent statements damning certain Palestinian factions and vaunting a blame-free Israel. While public pressure forced his resignation as CRC chairman, it must be noted that these comments were made in his role as a member of the Jewish Board of Deputies.

These comments created a reaction in the Arab community that some media outlets called a “furor”⁸, though the extent of the actual effects of this outrage is most likely overrepresented. Consequently, a combination of the ACA and some 45 Australian-Arab academics directly lobbied the minister for New South Wales’s office until Vic Alhadeff resigned. Whether this lobbying resulted in Vic Alhadeff being fired or instead voluntarily resigning, a politically important difference, is less clear; statements to the public are

⁸ Notably the Australian Muslim Times and the Sydney Morning Herald

supportive of the latter. However, the result of this pressure undisputedly caused the goal of the activists to be fulfilled and therefore, by our above criteria, can be called “effective lobbying”.

The question therefore remains as to why and how this lobbying process was both initiated and successfully carried out. The main argument used in pressuring Vic Alhadeff to resign from his position as CRC chairman, despite the comments not being made in this capacity, was exactly that: the fact that he is always the chairman, that he cannot pick and choose when he is ‘on the job’, especially due to the extremely public nature of the position.

The validity of these arguments was recognised because they demonstrated an adverse effect upon members of the community, a result entirely contrary to his role. It is interesting to note here that this is very much an administrative and *reactive* reason, not one that can be used as a precedent to establish lobbying techniques for other Australian-Arabs in other areas.

The reasons that this lobbying was successful are threefold. Primarily, as has just been mentioned, administrative right was on the side of the Arabs, in that Alhadeff was acting in a manner contrary to that required by his job. Secondly, a constant pressure was applied by involved lobbyists. It is relevant to note that the lobbying is not directly pertinent to Australia’s stance on the IPC, as can be said for lobbying presented by the ACA and the AACCI. This reluctance to engage directly with the question on a large public scale can be considered as symptomatic of a fear that the pro-Palestinian lobbying of a pro-Israel Australia will cause further marginalisation of Australian-Arab communities. This will be addressed in further depth when examining the responses of the youth group.

The third and perhaps most important reason for the success of this lobbying, however, and the distinguishing factor from the lobbying strategies of various organisations, was the solidarity demonstrated by those involved. In an interview with Randa Kattan,

heavily involved in the Alhadeff controversy, she stated that the weakness of Arab lobbying in Australia lies not in the validity of their arguments but in their fragmented nature. A display of “togetherness” in response to the ex-chairman’s comments demonstrates the veracity of her statement. In fact, this overabundance of fragmented communities has been remarked upon by all sources, and is further testified to in this case study; once the community presented itself as a united front, they were able to lobby ‘effectively’.

Yet, the problem remains that, as has been previously mentioned, this is very much a *retroactive* form of lobbying, in that it is a reaction to events that have already occurred rather than an attempt to influence future events. This is typical of lobbying within Arab communities in Australia, as was also demonstrated by interviews with both organisations in **Chapter 1**. While this may stem from a fear of recrimination against speaking out in opposition to a community of which they do not fully consider themselves a part⁹, Australian-Arab leaders have demonstrated that it is only by speaking out that results may be achieved.

In this case study, therefore, a further cementation of methods for lobbying in Australian-Arab communities can be seen, as well as a clarification as to their retroactive nature. The successfully forced resignation of Vic Alhadeff demonstrates a potential strength in unity that currently remains underutilised, according to all sources, by the Australian-Arab community at large. However, neither the organisations interviewed nor the Alhadeff affair involve the perspective of Arab youths, who are arguably the best placed to effect change within the wider Australian community. The next section will assess this aspect of the community and the effectiveness of its lobbying strategies.

⁹ Further research on Arab identity in Australia is needed

Chapter 5: Youth Group

The purpose of the youth group was to gather together Australian-Arab youths and discuss their position and background on the IPC, methods they used to challenge relevant prevailing ideas in Australia, and how they themselves identified as Arabs in Australia. The group lasted for 97 minutes, with three participants, all of whom were female and below the age of 20.

This section will offer a completed view of the relationship between Australian-Arab communities' lobbying strategies and results, as well as a further concretisation of potential lobbying improvements in relation to the IPC. Analysis will be conducted based on comments from the youth group, and in the context of conclusions that have already been drawn in the previous two sections. The restricted scope of the group in terms of number, age and gender, however, must also be acknowledged.

Primarily, it is key to note that the standard Arab youth does not operate within the same spheres of influence as any sort of organisation – a fact made abundantly clear when conducting the youth group. The vast majority of conversation in relation to lobbying and activism on behalf of the Palestinian question was concerned with the use of “social media, and getting the information out there”¹⁰. According to the youths, social media is powerful because it has “much less filter than other kinds of media”¹¹. When engaging with the public through other means, such as newspapers and television, they feel as if they are facing an insurmountable bias in favour of Israel. Whether this reluctance is well founded or not, it does create an imbalance within the representation of the opinions of Arab youths in the media. However, by resorting to social media and attempting to connect on a more “familiar”

¹⁰ Youth Group Participant

¹¹ *Ibid.*

level with various communities, they address two main areas to which formally cemented organisations may pay less attention: education and media.

Education:

Much of the focus of their advocacy is promoting education and an awareness of the “facts of the situation”¹². Whereas organisations may focus on networking and outright lobbying, the youth seems more interested in convincing people that their cause is just and that it should be given more attention because of its inherent truth, not because of bias. Were there more communication between Australian-Arab organisations and Australian-Arab youths, this technique would be much more powerful and yield greater results in their favour than is currently occurring.

Media:

The youth’s use of media is also distinctly different to that of organisations; social media is recognised as a tool that may be just as effective as articles published in newspapers. This approach is less focused on lobbying governmental, parliamentary, or decision-making bodies, but rather about founding a support base within the general community. Participants mentioned that the general populace follows the pro-Israeli views of the Australian Parliament, until they “learn a bit more”¹³.

By using a combination of media and education, the three Arab youths seem to have found results that are favourable to their cause. Their results can therefore be classified in part as coming from ‘effective’ lobbying, as outlined in previous sections. However, this study has not investigated the nature of information being distributed by participants, only the

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

method of distribution; this would be a worthwhile area to develop in order to better understand the perception of the situation by the Australian community as a whole.

The question remains, therefore, as to why Arab-Australian youths do not seek to engage the public in more open and perhaps aggressive lobbying, such as the lobbying demonstrated by the ACA, AACCI, and in the case study presented above. Conversely, we are also left to wonder why such organisations do not seek to use social media to the same extent as the youth.

This was also addressed by the participants in the youth group. All three expressed the sentiment that, against an overwhelming and immovable bias in Australian media in favour of Israeli perspectives, any attempt to access the public through such means would inevitably lead to a demonisation and “misrepresentation of [their] perspective”¹⁴. This feeling of the futility of attempting to engage official organisations and leaders is also the reason for which youths do not tend to send letters to ministers, or attempt to pressure members of parliament. In addition to this lies the fact that the youth do not have the same degree of access to monetary support, and therefore feel as if they have much less ability to effect change¹⁵.

Whilst current methods have resulted in success, according to youth group participants, there is a clear distinction between success on an individual level and success on a policy level. The lack of youth lobbying on the latter would seem to indicate ineffective lobbying. This could further be reinforced by the idea that, as mentioned in other sections, educating through social media appears much more fragmented than a given organisation providing a solid front. Similarly, this is shown through the lack of funding received. Once more, it is clear that two major impediments to the effectiveness of Australian-Arab lobbying in regards to the IPC are solidarity and money.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ A point repeatedly mentioned during the youth group, and addressed in **Chapter 6**

Chapter 6: Recommendations

Taking into account all of the above sections and the analyses of various facets of lobbying for the IPC within the Australian-Arab community, there are certain seemingly universal problems that can be observed, and subsequent recommendations to be made. The following list will restate, in logical progression, the five major hurdles faced by Australian-Arab lobbying, and will elucidate the relevant recommendations posited by this research.

1. The fragmented nature of Australian-Arab lobbying

This issue stems in part from the comparative nature of lobbying; with two opposing parties, the success of one is dependent on the strategies of the other. When viewed next to Israeli lobbying for the IPC, the image of Arabs as fragmented and disorganised is an understandable conclusion. Randa Kattan evokes this, as did the youth group. An evident answer to this is seen in the case study, demonstrating that solidarity leads to results. An umbrella organisation dedicated entirely to the unification and streamlining of lobbying for the IPC would easily solve this and see a greater number of successes, such as the forced resignation of Vic Alhadeff.

2. Lack of funding

Both interviewees and the youth group noted that one of the differences between effective and futile lobbying is the amount of funding – a criterion also presented in **Chapter 1: Effective Lobbying**. Due hurdles 3 and 4, presented below, receiving funding similar to that of Jewish organisations will be extremely difficult. Or at least, difficult on a national level. Similar to the Israeli government's support of Israeli lobbying overseas, if Arab governments were to dedicate a small amount of money to increasing the efficacy of Australian-Arab lobbying, further vitality and potential would be added to current projects. In conjunction with the previous suggestion, this would lead to an extremely unified front and more effective lobbying.

3. The lack of connection between organisations and youth

Following on from the previous two suggestions, the divide between organisations involved in lobbying for the IPC and youths of the Australian-Arab community can be solved by a umbrella organisation devoted to the Palestinian cause. Both the current fragmented nature of lobbying and the lack of funding mean that youths are left confused as to where to go, and how to proceed from there – thoughts reflected in the youth group. Organisations have also expressed favourable views towards youth leadership programmes, internships, and a greater level of collaboration between youth and established communities. This would be beneficial to both parties; organisations would teach youths how to engage in more politically weighty for a, and youths would teach organisations how to effectively use social media in order to expand education.

4. The retroactive nature of Australian-Arab lobbying

As has been made clear in previous sections, Australian-Arab lobbying tends to be a reaction to an event than an attempt to avoid the event. This can be easily solved by lobbying even when nothing has happened, demonstrating solidarity, awareness, and a perseverant will to induce change within decision-making bodies. In short, lobbying *proactively*.

5. *An overwhelming social and politically entrenched bias towards Israel

An asterisks has been affixed to this ‘hurdle’, because it is extremely important to note that this has been **incorrectly** identified as a hurdle. This bias is, in fact, the very perspective which Australian-Arab lobbying attempts to attack. Therefore, all four of the above suggestions working in tandem would lend credence to a balancing of bias. Feeding back in on itself, creating a larger platform for Australian-Arabs to express their opinions would lead to more effective lobbying.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This report has sought to clarify, analyse, and improve upon the lobbying of Australian-Arab communities in relation to the IPC. Throughout **Chapters 2, 3 and 4**, a deepening of understanding about Australian-Arab lobbying and its shortcomings was provided. Through the use of both primary and secondary sources, it is clear to see that Australian-Arab lobbying can be considered ineffective. However, recommendations in **Chapter 6** would greatly strengthen this lobbying. It must be noted it is not a comprehensive list, as this is not an exhaustive report. In the future, more detailed studies as to the nature of information disseminated by lobbying organisations on both sides of the IPC are recommended. Additionally, a repeat study with larger sample sizes – both organisationally and with Australian-Arab youth – would lend further integrity to the results and recommendations provided above.

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