When in his farewell address as president of the United States George Washington (1796) warned the American people against the dangers of foreign entanglements, he was most concerned that “inveterate antipathies” and “passionate attachments” might lead citizens to “betray or sacrifice the interests of their own country.” Since then, Americans have viewed with ambivalence the connections of their fellow citizens to ancestral homelands. On the one hand, as a nation of immigrants, Americans have accepted dual affections for both nations of origin and the United States as a common and expected aspect of hyphenated ethnic-American identities. On the other hand, Americans have also regarded persistent foreign ties suspiciously, seeing them as a reflection of potential disloyalty and a threat to national security.

Adding to contemporary concerns about foreign attachments has been the steady growth, particularly since the 1980s, of diaspora populations who have sought to influence US foreign policies toward their homelands. The potential members of such diasporas include not only recently settled immigrants, whose numbers the 2010 US Census reported had reached 38.5 million and 12.5 percent of the American population, but also multiple generations of previously established American ethnic groups. Recent immigrants from countries that began sending immigrants to the United States three or four generations ago, such as Irish youths seeking employment and Jews seeking asylum, have revived ethnic groups’ interests in their national origins and given new life to organizations that seek to shape US foreign policy toward
their homelands. New immigrant groups from nations without a history of substantial prior settlement in America, such as Iranians or Ethiopians, have also sought to influence US foreign policies toward their homelands, starting from scratch in learning how to do so. Finally, the children of immigrants who are born into US citizenship may take up their parents’ involvement in foreign policy making, as have some Cubans and Haitians, though they have done so with somewhat different attachments and goals than their parents.

Diasporas’ actual or potential influence on US foreign policies toward their homelands has been greatly controversial, particularly during times of crisis or war. Often diasporas whose many members have assimilated over multiple generations into American society and established a base of social and political power, such as Irish and Jewish immigrants and their descendants, seem to exert significant influence. But the Irish diaspora, while influential in many respects, has rarely been able to trump the United States’ alliance with Britain (see chapter 5 of this volume). In contrast, the Jewish diaspora has prevailed over other diasporas and, some claim, over the United States’ national interests, in shaping US policies toward the Middle East (Ahrari 1987; Terry 2005; Mearsheimer and Walt 2007). While it may seem unsurprising that some relatively recently arrived and smaller diasporas, such as those from Palestine, Haiti, or Ethiopia, have had only a limited impact on US policies toward their homelands (see chapters 4, 7, and 8 of this volume), others seem to have wielded significant influence, including the Iraqi lobby, which has been credited with pushing the United States into war in Iraq (Roston 2008; also see chapter 9 of this volume).

If the impact of diasporas in shaping US foreign policies is to be understood and assessed, then the relations they create with different branches of American government, the manner in which they exert their influence, and contexts within which their goals become the goals of US foreign policy must all be examined closely. But such influence should not be assumed to be unidirectional. As much as diasporas make an effort to shape the US foreign policy, government legislators and administrators also seek to enlist diasporas in furthering American interests. In taking such an interactive perspective, the essays in this volume respond to the need for clearer understandings of how diaspora lobbies and the government bureaucrats engage with one another and how the avenues of influence go both ways and vary over time. The authors focus not only on the arenas and processes through which diasporas and the US government influence one another in the formulation of US
foreign policy but also on the ways in which the resulting policies reflect and shape diaspora and US national interests and goals. To that end, each of the case studies presented in this volume explores the nature of diasporas and the history of their relations with the US government, takes into account the contexts within which diaspora-government relations have taken on prominent or diminished significance, and draws conclusions about how the lobbying efforts of relatively recent and long-established diasporas have affected US policies toward their homelands.

For inclusion in this volume, the editors selected case studies in which diaspora-government relations have been significant for the promotion, prevention, or resolution of conflicts in the diasporas’ homelands. The types and levels of policy-relevant conflicts range widely to include civil violence (the Irish Troubles), confrontations between governments (Israel and the Palestinian Authority), imposed economic sanctions (Cuba), military occupation (Haiti and Iraq), and postwar factionalism (Ethiopia). The comparative pairing of cases, each with distinct political dynamics and quite different approaches of US foreign policy, has been used as an analytic tool to underscore the different mechanisms, tools, and channels through which the diasporas and the US government interact. The authors examine how diaspora-government engagements respond to these political dynamics, reflect and shape government and diaspora interests and goals, and influence the formulation of US foreign policies.

**Convergence and Divergence of Interests**

To draw broader insights from each of the authors’ analyses of diaspora-government relations, we have organized their essays with reference to the extent that diaspora lobbies and government legislators and administrators have sought and been able to establish a convergence of interests in the design and implementation of foreign policies. From this starting point the processes by which diasporas and the US government engage with one another include not only how they try to identify mutual values and interests but also how they employ persuasion or coercion or at times ignore or override one another’s interests in seeking to formulate or sustain US foreign policies.

Two basic analytical approaches to understanding convergent and divergent policy making predominate in the essays: the first views policy convergence as a result of diaspora and government representatives’ identification of
overlaps between what seem to be essentially objective, preexisting national and group interests and goals. The second perspective, in contrast, views convergence and divergence as the result of a shaping of national interests in the give-and-take of democratic processes, including lobbying, and sees them as involving compromises and/or the predominance of one side over the other. Whether viewed from an essentialist or a constructivist perspective, the convergence or divergence of interests emerges through mutual engagement between diaspora lobbies and the members of the US government in forging foreign policies. To understand these relations and their dynamics, the volume’s essays examine not only diaspora groups’ lobbying of different branches of the US government but also outreach by officials of national political parties and representatives of US government legislative and administrative bodies as they seek to mobilize the support and assistance of diasporas in promoting or implementing particular foreign policy goals.

From the essays a general conclusion becomes apparent: the influence of diasporas and the US government on one another in shaping foreign policy increases when convergent interests and goals become recognized, whether these are preexisting or constructed, and decreases when interests and goals are seen to be divergent. But a complete convergence and divergence of values and interests between multiple actors is unlikely, if only because of the great social diversity and the complexity of policy making in a liberal democracy as large as the United States. Rarely do diaspora members, other Americans, or US government officials have single or unified interests. Analysts must take into account how government policies are determined through political processes that include narrow and targeted special interest lobbying as well as broad and open public debates. In this context, competing loyalties between a country of origin and a nation of settlement need not in and of themselves be either unusual or problematic. Although the civic virtue of multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism in politics is highly debated, most Americans recognize and accept that they and/or their neighbors will retain some level of sympathy and affective ties with their ancestral homelands. Concerns arise not so much from such foreign attachments themselves as from the perception or prospect that a dedicated minority’s pursuit of its own interests and goals might subordinate either the broader interests of the majority or the welfare of the nation as a whole; it is the potentially disproportionate impact of a minority group on foreign policy and national security relative to majority interest groups—political, business, military, religious, professional, and
the like—that provokes anxiety. Where this is the case, democratic processes that engage diaspora and government actors to negotiate and establish a convergence of values, interests, and policies are likely to reduce such concerns and strengthen support for the resulting policies.

The “Mischief of Factions”

Although this book takes a somewhat distinctive interactive approach to analyzing diaspora-government relations, it is not by any means the first study to view the convergence or divergence of interests as central to understanding relations between the US government and groups that seek to shape US foreign policies. The history of scholarship addressing such relations has largely been focused on the concern that James Madison (1787) identified in Federalist Paper No. 10 as the “mischief of factions”: that a minority group might impose its special interests in a manner “adverse to the rights of other citizens or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.” Madison argued that even in the absence of moral or religious restraints the constitutionally based form of federal republican government, by encouraging the democratic participation of “factions,” would keep any, whether a political minority or majority, from harming either the rights of others or the common good.

To what extent constitutional structures sufficiently ensure that democratic processes produce pluralistic foreign policies in the national interest has been a subject of considerable debate. American scholars have addressed the influence of “factions” from empiricist and normative perspectives. Empirically, researchers have explored whether diasporas or, more frequently, ethnic groups and their lobbies have in fact led the US government to adopt policies inconsistent with national interests. Normatively, they have focused on the moral obligation of minorities, including diasporas and ethnic groups, to subordinate their narrow interests to the broader common good. Although either perspective can be pursued independently, they tend to become combined in considerations of the nature or origin of national interests and the principles underlying democratic processes that produce policies.

The influence of the Jewish or Israeli lobby, which is widely viewed as the most powerful diasporic lobby seeking to shape US foreign policy, provides a good example of the ways in which empiricist and normative perspectives operate. Identifying containment of the Soviet Union during the Cold War as a strategic national interest shared by the United States and Israel,
Mohammed E. Ahrari (1987) sought to explain the relatively greater influence of Jewish, as compared to Arab, lobbyists on US policies toward the Middle East. Taking a similarly empiricist view of US national interests, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt more recently came to an opposite conclusion: “The Israeli lobby has successfully convinced many Americans that American and Israeli interests are essentially identical. In fact, they are not.” As a result, they contended, the US government has adopted policies toward Israel and the Middle East that “jeopardize U.S. national security” (2007, 8). From this perspective, once national interests are identified, whether they are promoted by particular policies can be determined objectively.

Not sharing Madison’s faith that the structures and processes of republican democracy result in pluralistically representative policies without moral restraints, James Petras criticized what he viewed as the Jewish lobby’s imposition of minority interests on US Middle East policies and cited the normative responsibility of intellectuals, including himself, to defend democracy by exercising freedom of speech to challenge the “tyranny” of the Israeli lobby (2006, 13–16). Implicitly taking a neutral moral stance, Janice Terry (2005) similarly recognized what she considered the disproportionate influence of the Israeli lobby in shaping US Middle East policies but nonetheless accepted the policies that resulted from democratic processes as a de facto representation of national interests. From this perspective Americans have moral obligations either to oppose or accept the influence of factions.

Others who have addressed the normative dimensions of the “mischief of factions” more broadly with regard to multiple diaspora or ethnic groups have more explicitly cited the ethical responsibility of minorities to subordinate their homeland interests to those of the United States. Reflecting his personal experiences as a Polish refugee and his political commitments as a naturalized American citizen, Louis L. Gerson drew attention to the corrosive effects that the attachments of “hyphenate-Americans” both to their homelands and to US ethnic political leaders have had on the “traditional principles and objectives of American foreign policy and their own political assimilation” (1964, vii). In context of the Cold War “struggle between freedom and totalitarianism,” he argued that, because all Americans have a stake in safeguarding freedom at home and abroad, they and their ethnic political leaders must take on the “responsibility and discipline” of pursuing the “priority of the general interest over particular interests of any given group” (1964, 236–37). In the post–Cold War context of increased immigration and
multicultural politics, Thomas Ambrosio came to a similar conclusion after weighing the advantages and disadvantages of ethnic interest group engagement in US foreign policy. Between the two extremes of excluding ethnic groups’ participation and allowing them to dominate foreign policy making, he suggested that ethnic groups have a “legitimate range of influence” so long as they recognize a “political, and indeed an ethical, obligation” to be “focused on the end goal of defining, protecting, and advancing the interests of the broader community” such as spreading democracy instead of shielding dictatorships (2002, 208–9).

Like Madison perhaps, Ernest J. Wilson III relied less on moral persuasion and more on the efficacy of democratic processes to redress the disproportionate influence of individual factions, particularly what he viewed to be the traditional predominance of the East Coast elite in formulating US foreign policy. Stressing values of democratic inclusion, he endorsed the expanded representation of diverse groups and perspectives. Beginning with the premise that increasing globalization and the emergence of multicultural politics have created a challenge and an opportunity of linking the “double diversity” of international and domestic politics, he argued that the increased engagement not only of ethnic groups but also of diverse gender, racial, religious, ideological, and other groups can contribute to “a favorable rebalancing of priorities for U.S. foreign policy” (2004a, 12). The “core contention” underlying the various perspectives presented in his book is, he said, that “principled arguments derived from diverse life experiences are valuable, indeed imperative, for the design and conduct of American foreign policy in the world of the twenty-first century” (2004b, xii).

Approaching the “mischief of factions” as an empirical question rather than a moral conundrum, some scholars have designed and undertaken research to determine whether in fact diasporas or ethnic groups have actually promoted policies that run contrary to national interests. Responding to deep concerns expressed by Peter Brimelow (1996), Samuel P. Huntington (1996), and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (1992) that recently increased immigration and the formation of ethnic communities give Latinos “enough political clout to be effective advocates for policies favoring their countries of origin against U.S. interests,” Rodolfo O. de la Garza and Harry F. Pachon (2000, 3) reviewed previous studies and sponsored, through the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, four new investigations of related issues. After considering Latinos’ expressions of patriotism in attitude surveys, participation in and support for
US military incursions in Latin America, preferences toward immigration and border control policies, involvement in foreign policy lobbying, roles in implementing US policies as foreign service officers in Latin America, and other factors, De la Garza and Pachon found no empirical evidence that Latino lobbying was adversely affecting US interests. Rather, they found that Latinos were not actively engaged in foreign policy and that there was no clear pattern in Latinos’ relationships with their countries of origin. They concluded that their empirical research, as an approach toward determining whether Latino diasporas were engaged in “factional mischief,” “should be seen as the first systematic effort to establish an empirical baseline against which future Latino foreign policy activities may be compared” (2000, 15).

Finally, taking a somewhat different empiricist approach, David M. Paul and Rachel Anderson Paul undertook to identify influential ethnic group lobbies, explain what factors contributed to their clout, and assess whether their influence was excessive or counter to US national interests. To determine which organizations were most influential, they interviewed forty-one government officials (members of Congress, legislative staff and aides, committee staff, and both career and appointed administrative bureaucrats) and fifteen ethnic group leaders, whom they asked to rank the influence of thirty-eight ethnic organizations. To explain those groups’ relative influence, using least square regression analyses, they compared data about the groups’ population size and concentration, access to monetary and organizational resources, interest in foreign policy issues, extent of assimilation (measured by English language proficiency), and degree to which their lobbying efforts sought to alter the policy status quo. Although the researchers intended their study to measure the effectiveness of ethnic lobbies empirically, they also hoped their analysis would help determine whether such influence “may or may not be a normative concern for Americans” (Paul and Paul 2009, 29).

From their investigation and analysis, the Pauls determined that, while ethnic groups clearly affect foreign policy, their influence is not undue or disproportionate, especially in comparison with that of other business, trade, union, religious, human rights, or ideological groups. While the policy makers they interviewed tended to agree that three ethnic organizations, which they identified as Israeli or Jewish American, Cuban American, and Armenian American, held too much influence, the Pauls found no corroborating empirical evidence for these evaluations other than the observation that the influence of the Armenian American lobby seemed to exceed the group’s
relative population size and access to resources. Mixing moral and empirical perspectives, they concluded generally that their research not only “supports the broader pluralistic ideal that ethnic groups can and should compete in the foreign policymaking process” but also, they added, “confirms the need for critical analysis of the role and influence of ethnic groups in the pluralistic universe” (2009, 213).

Although in the final chapter of this volume Tony Smith addresses these empirical and normative issues and how they have evolved historically through different periods of US foreign policy making, the essays in this volume, instead of focusing empirically on whether the lobbying efforts of diasporas have contradicted essential US interests or normatively whether they should conform to broader national interests, central as these questions have been in American foreign policy debates, approach the “mischief of factions” by asking a somewhat different but complementary question: Under what circumstances do the interests and policy goals of diasporas and the US government converge or diverge, and what are the arenas and mechanisms of engagement between diaspora lobbies and government officials that shape that outcome? Our purpose is not to determine whether the interests and policy goals of diasporas and the US government are essentially similar or in conflict but rather to understand the processes by which they have established a convergence or divergence of interests, goals, and policies. To explain these dynamics, each of the case studies in this volume takes two complementary analytic approaches. The first focuses on the nature of each of the diasporas and the broader international foreign policy contexts that shape diaspora-government interests. The second focuses on the engagements between diasporas and the US government as they have taken shape in relation to long-standing issues and specific crises or conflicts that have been crucial in shaping American foreign policies toward the diasporas’ homelands. Comparisons between these case studies shed light and raise questions about how diaspora members and government officials mobilize resources and seek to influence each other in order to establish convergence or divergence between their interests and the legitimacy of their goals and policies.

The Nature of Diasporas and the Foreign Policy Context

Diaspora-government relations are shaped by the nature of diasporas and their participation in the broader context of foreign relations and policy making of
the US government—issues that are explored respectively by Gabriel Sheffer and Tony Smith. As suggested by its title, Sheffer’s introductory essay, “The Effects of Diasporas’ Nature, Types, and Goals on Hostland Foreign Policies” (chapter 2 of this volume), defines ethno-national-religious diasporas, particularly in contrast to transnational communities, then analyzes how in the American context their nature and types motivate and structure the convergence and divergence of interests in foreign policy making with the US government. Smith’s concluding essay, “Convergence and Divergence Yesterday and Today in Diaspora–National Government Relations” (chapter 10 of this volume), examines how the United States’ place and role in international affairs affect the potential for convergent interests between the government and individual diasporas and limit the extent of government tolerance for diasporas’ dual national loyalties.

Warning against the danger of generalizations that ignore the heterogeneity of internationally dispersed peoples, Sheffer points to the analytic utility of distinguishing between “transnational communities” and “ethno-national-religious diasporas”—the latter including the groups examined in this volume—with regard to motivations and engagements with the US government. He argues that while the identities, goals, and international activities of transnational communities are varied and can change, particularly as their members become assimilated into their host societies, ethno-national-religious diasporas persistently identify with their national homelands and, as a result, resist aspects of assimilation that might diminish either their identities or their involvements in homeland politics. While transnational communities create and recreate hybrid identities based on different social, cultural, and economic interests that extend variously within and across national borders, ethno-national-religious diasporas seek to strengthen the unity of their ethnic and national identifications with their homelands’ borders and politics. Though the identities and memberships of transnational communities transform as group interests evolve, Sheffer contends that ethno-national-religious interests persist, sustained by a combination of primordial, psychological, mythological, or religious beliefs and by instrumental contacts and exchanges with their homelands.

Sheffer’s main contribution in basing his definition of ethno-national-religious diasporas on their political relations with their homelands comes from its focus on the different ways in which diaspora lobbies seek to enlist US government support for their homeland-related goals, ties, and activities,
which can be social, economic, or political. Although Sheffer notes the growing importance of economic issues for diasporas in both their homelands and the United States, he gives most attention to the range of diasporas’ homeland political activities, which may coincide with US interests and thus benefit from US foreign policies but are likely to become increasingly problematic in winning US government support if they involve long or short-term conflicts, violence, illegal activities, or terrorism.

Refining his typology to distinguish between different types of ethno-national-religious diasporas, Sheffer suggests that those linked to existing nation-states are likely to seek the resolution or management of conflicts, while those that seek to create new sovereign powers are more likely to engage in conflict and violence against existing state regimes and thus are more likely to disrupt US foreign relations. Sheffer intends for his typology to be used, not to predict or explain diaspora-government relations, but rather to identify the basic views, positions, and needs of diasporas and the government that, through various mechanisms of foreign policy negotiation, become recognized as the basis of convergent or divergent interests and mutual influence.

In contrast to Sheffer’s typological analysis, Smith’s is historical and situational. He examines three stages of American foreign policy during which diasporas have played important roles. During the first stage, from 1900 to 1941, the attachments of diasporas to homelands engaged in World War I led some diaspora members to oppose both US neutrality toward the war and US support for the creation of the League of Nations. If divergence between diaspora and government interests characterized this first stage, the second stage, from 1941 to 1989, was a period of convergence brought about largely by the global implications of Cold War politics, which pitted US interests against Soviet communism. The use of immigration and refugee policies as tools to promote foreign policy interests tended to reinforce the support of growing diaspora communities for US policies toward their ancestral homelands. But in the third and contemporary stage, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989, acceptance of the rights of minorities to organize politically on the basis of racial, religious, or national identities has become increasingly common and has given legitimacy to multiculturalism in domestic politics. Smith argues that although in the first stage the primary loyalty of diasporas to the United States over their homelands was expected and required, such loyalty is no longer mandatory, and he discerns no overall pattern of either convergence or divergence of interests in diaspora-government relations. “Here we
find the worm in the fruit of diasporic arguments,” he warns, “based on celebrating the rights and powers of an ethnic community while omitting any corresponding discussion of their obligation as citizens of democratic states.”

As the world’s remaining superpower, the United States, by engaging with all nations of the world, puts greater demands on Americans to define and balance national interests in relations with other countries. This imperative in turn becomes particularly significant for diasporas, whose membership and diversity of national origins have increased through immigration, when they seek to influence US policies toward countries they view still to be their homelands. Within this contemporary context, Smith raises two questions about the role of diasporas in US foreign policy that are fundamental to the place of minority interest groups in a democratic polity: First, when can US government policy be characterized as either subservient to diasporic influence or consonant with the national interest? And second, what are the rights and obligations of diasporas toward the “reasonable construction of the common good”? While Smith points out the threats that diasporic conflicts of interest pose to national security and the extent to which legitimate security concerns have been dismissed by political commentators and in public policy debates, he does not pretend to be able to provide an authoritative or final resolution to the issues, which he believes are likely to remain with us so long as the United States has so dominant a role in world affairs. Rather, he concludes, the resolution of this difficult moral political quandary must come from citizen engagement in foreign policy debates over the relations between specific diaspora goals and national interests.

Smith’s emphasis on the importance of democratic debate draws our attention to the arenas and forms of engagement through which US foreign policy is negotiated—to the mechanisms by which diasporas and other interest groups negotiate the terms of foreign policy with relevant offices and agencies of the administrative and legislative branches of government. On one side of such engagements are the organizations created by some diaspora members to pursue particular policy goals along with other Americans who have similar interests. On the other side are the elected and appointed government officials who in turn seek to carry out the foreign policy goals as understood and formulated by the particular political party or government in power. One of the goals of the case studies prepared for this volume is to examine how these engagements and alliances take shape and how their manner affects the relative influence of diasporas and the outcome for US foreign policy.
The Relative Influence of Diasporas in Shaping US Foreign Policy: Jewish and Palestinian Diasporas

One reason for comparing the relations of Jewish and Palestinian diasporas with the US government is that the conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians over population and territory in the Middle East make the diasporas rivals for US government support, a competition in which the success of the Jewish lobby in establishing a convergence of interests with the US government results in a divergence from Palestinian interests. Beyond this competition, the authors writing in this volume provide contrasting perspectives regarding the effect that lobbying is either perceived or misperceived to have on US policies and their impact in Middle Eastern affairs. At question is how to determine which party in a diaspora-government relationship has greater influence on the other and what circumstances permit one or the other to take a predominant role.

Leaders of many diasporas view the Jewish lobby to be a model for emulation because it seems to have mobilized a broad and unified Jewish American constituency and attained influence necessary to ensure the United States’ unswerving support for Israel throughout decades of conflict with Palestinians. Mohammed Bamyeh seems to embrace this view when in his essay “Palestinians, Diasporas, and US Foreign Policy” (chapter 4 of this volume) he states, “The influence of the pro-Israel lobby on US foreign policy is an established, demonstrable, documented, and clear fact.” Bamyeh argues that the Jewish lobby has been able to wield disproportionate foreign policy influence because the US government, since the end of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, has failed to develop an alternative and independent strategic perspective toward international relations. In other words, it is the absence of a defined national interest and a meaningful national policy that permits the Jewish diaspora to wield uncontested influence. According to Bamyeh, the fundamental question that should be asked is how the United States can formulate a foreign policy that reflects both its own national interests and its international responsibilities. Such policies will not be produced out of the “reality” of structural necessity or objective conditions, he contends; rather, they must emerge from political leadership, will, and breadth of perspective in a discussion of the appropriate role of the United States as the world’s unrivaled superpower. The imperatives of a rational, coherent, and independent foreign policy will then, he concludes, guide rather than be determined by diaspora initiatives.
In contrast, Yossi Shain and Neil Rogachevsky, authors of “Between JDate and J Street: US Foreign Policy and the Liberal Jewish Dilemma in America” (chapter 3 of this volume), argue that Americans have greatly exaggerated the influence of the Jewish lobby in shaping US policy, largely as a result of their unrealistically high and characteristically “can-do” expectations that, through diplomacy and action, the United States should be able to bring about an enduring solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. They contend that, as part of the broader and conflicted Arab-Israeli relations in the Middle East, Israel-Palestinian problems are more complicated than Americans realize and are perhaps intractable to a “top-down” approach. So when American-led negotiations break down or fail to find a resolution, Americans conclude that “something nefarious must be blocking its way” and place blame on the Jewish lobby. Shain and Rogachevsky label this explanation a “theory of everything” that both overestimates and misrepresents the strength of the Jewish diaspora and lobby.

Though the authors of these two case studies disagree about the power and influence of the Jewish diaspora lobby, both seek to clarify differences between diasporas and the lobbies that claim to represent them. Bamyeh contends that the claims of lobbies generally, and of the Jewish lobby in particular, to represent diasporas or their home nations as a whole are a “construct” by a minority that seeks to exclude other opposed or simply disengaged elements of a diaspora. Shain and Rogachevsky point out that the Jewish diaspora is far from monolithic and that the assimilation of the youngest generation of liberal Jewish Americans is leading them to adopt universalistic rather than religious values. This shift in values is reflected in young American Jews’ direct intervention into Israel’s social welfare activities and the formation of a new “J Street” lobby, which Bamyeh characterizes as “perhaps the only inlet Palestinians may have in the lobbying game” because the organization defines itself as pro-peace rather than simply pro-Israel.

When Diasporas Shape US Foreign Policy:
Irish and Cuban Diasporas

The Irish and Cuban diasporas provide examples of groups’ becoming able to establish a convergence between diaspora and government policies through their use of electoral power and their members’ integration into branches of government responsible for designing US foreign policy—cases in which
differences between diasporas and the government are somewhat blurred and interests unified. The influence of the Irish diaspora has in large measure grown out of their long history of immigration and ethnic group integration into American society. That history, according to Joseph E. Thompson’s essay “America’s Role in the Northern Ireland Peace Process” (chapter 5 of this volume), has resulted in a loosely connected but electorally significant membership of forty million Irish American citizens. The Cuban diaspora is more recent and geographically restricted in its settlement, but according to Lisandro Pérez, in his essay “Cuban Americans and US Cuba Policy” (chapter 6 of this volume), its members have had perhaps an even more determinative voice in shaping US foreign policy toward their homeland, not only because of their concentrated electoral power in Florida, but also because of the absence of competition in identifying alternative national interests. Given the electoral power and positioning of diaspora members within the legislative and administrative branches of government, various US governments have adopted the interests and goals of the Irish and Cuban diasporas as the interests of the United States in formulating foreign policy, although this congruence has not always been predominant in the past and may not remain so in the future.

The long-standing support that Irish Americans have given to the independence and unification of Ireland has throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries diverged from the United States’ national interests in building strong economic and political ties with the United Kingdom, which historically has resisted relinquishing its role in the governance of Ireland. As a result, says Thompson, both Irish Americans and officials of various US government administrations formerly assumed that, because their interests diverged, they could have little influence over one another’s goals and policies, particularly regarding conflicts in Northern Ireland and political relations with the British government. Mutual disengagement began to change, however, after the British government took extreme measures to repress not only violent tactics of the Irish Republican Army but also more peaceful political efforts of moderate republicans, and this enabled diaspora organizations to mobilize broad support among Irish American citizens and congressional representatives of Irish descent for a peaceful resolution of “the Troubles.” As an umbrella organization claiming to represent the interests of Irish Americans, the Irish National Caucus became a centralized source of both information and a moderate republican perspective for the US media.
and the government. The electoral potential of this popular mobilization was extended into the legislative branch with the formation of the Ad Hoc Congressional Committee for Irish Affairs and the Friends of Ireland, which consisted of seventy members of Congress and sought to expand American collaboration with Northern Irish moderates.

Recognizing the growing popular and congressional support for the US government’s taking a role in Northern Ireland peace negotiations and the importance for Democrats of winning over Catholic voters in the coming elections, President Bill Clinton appointed a special envoy who has been widely credited with facilitating the signing of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement and eventually the Good Friday Agreement, which established a basis for ending violent political conflicts in Northern Ireland. The convergence between diaspora and government policies resulted not so much from an overlap between diaspora and national interests as from the mobilization of the political power of the Irish American diaspora within both the electorate and legislative branches of government, through which diaspora interests became recognized as national interests.

Although the population of Cuban Americans in the United States comprises fewer than two million people, their concentration within Florida and their positions within the US government legislative and administrative branches have enabled them to wield perhaps an even greater influence than that of Irish Americans in shaping US policies toward their homeland, an influence enhanced by the absence of rival interests or policies toward Cuba since the end of the Cold War. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, the US government’s interest in containing communism in Latin America and the Caribbean was closely aligned with the goals of Cuban refugees who sought to overthrow the regime of Fidel Castro in Havana. This congruence led various administrations to back, implicitly or explicitly, marginal or shadowy paramilitary and political activities aimed at overthrowing the Cuban government. It was the Reagan administration that urged the Cuban diaspora leaders to form the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) as a lobby that would subsequently take the lead in shaping US policies. Over time, Pérez observes, “Cuban Americans have gone from being mere agents of US Cuba policy to being key actors and shapers of that policy.” The influence of the diaspora was increased not only by the electoral power of Cubans in local and national elections in Florida but also by the election and appointment of Cubans to important posts in the US government, including, during
the Bush administration, two presidential cabinet members; policy makers and analysts in the Department of State and National Security Council; four members of Congress; two senators; and more. “This level of representation,” says Pérez, “blurs the lines between the diaspora and the US government” and, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, has enabled Cubans “to influence from within the formulation of US policy toward the island.”

While there have been recent signs of potential modification of US policies toward Cuba with the goal of bringing about change by promoting social and economic reform as opposed to imposing political and economic isolation, the impulse seems to come more from generational shifts within the Cuban diaspora than from the government’s independent identification and pursuit of alternative national interests. More recent refugees and immigrants from Cuba, many of whom have grown up during the revolution, seem to share traditional immigrants’ interest in supporting the welfare of family members back home more than they share the goal of the “historical exiles” of overthrowing the revolutionary government—a less monolithic approach seemingly shared by a growing portion of the generation of Cuban Americans who were born and raised in the United States. With some “exhaustion” regarding the thus far ineffectual impact of American policies in overthrowing the Cuban regime and with Cuban Americans’ initiation of debates about alternative approaches, the goals and role of the Cuban diaspora may in the future cease to be an overriding factor in maintaining the US policy of isolating Cuba. The extent to which the Cuban diaspora, through its electoral power in Florida and integration into political circles in Washington, D.C., will continue to dominate the formulation of new policies remains to be seen.

Both the Irish and Cuban cases seem to serve as illustrations of Smith’s notion of “negotiated convergence,” in which diasporas define US interests and shape foreign policy toward their homelands. But there are also cases of convergence in which the influence of diasporas has been limited and the US government has independently defined its national interests, as in the cases of US policies toward Haiti and Ethiopia.

When the Government Defines US Foreign Policy Independently of Diasporas: Ethiopian and Haitian Diasporas

The Ethiopian and Haitian diasporas provide cases in which their lobbies have struggled unsuccessfully to establish common interests with the US
government and to exert influence over the US government in designing its policies. The lack of diaspora-government convergence in these instances seems to be in part a result of the limited resources and influence of diaspora lobbying organizations but more importantly a result of the overriding importance of alternative US national interests and goals. Considering their dim prospects of affecting US foreign policy, these diasporas’ organizations have tended to intervene directly into their home country’s affairs rather than to continue seeking influence through US policies.

In characterizing the relations between the Ethiopian diaspora and the US government, Terrence Lyons, in his essay titled “Diaspora Lobbying and Ethiopian Politics” (chapter 7), describes a lack of convergence in interests and policies. Diaspora lobby organizations in the United States have tended to be dominated by adherents to Ethiopian political parties opposed to the party currently controlling the Ethiopian government. Pointing to US values and the need for long-term stability in Ethiopia in order to gain leverage with US administrations, leaders of diaspora organizations have promoted US policies of democratization and respect for human rights in Ethiopia. But since the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front came to power in 1991, the executive branch has viewed the exile diaspora groups as extremist and out of date in refusing to seek incremental changes through collaboration with the Ethiopian government. Targeting congressional members who are involved in US policy making toward Africa and represent districts where Ethiopians were concentrated, the lobbies had some success in the House of Representatives in 2007 when they succeeded in getting approval for the Ethiopian Democracy and Accountability Act over objections of the US State Department and Ethiopian government. However, the act never reached the Senate for a vote and did not become law. Instead of shaping policy in response to the Ethiopian diaspora, US administrations gave greater priority to policies that would strengthen broader counterterrorism efforts in the Horn of Africa and would maintain a strategic partnership with the regime in Addis Ababa.

As a result of their limited capacity to influence US policies, Ethiopian diaspora organizations have pursued other strategies to affect politics in Ethiopia, including lobbying international organizations and intervening directly in Ethiopian domestic affairs by sending remittances to support parties, engaging in Ethiopian public debates, and returning home and running for elective office. Lyons concludes from this case that lobbying the US
government should be viewed as only one of a number of transnational strategies that diasporas can consider in pursuing their homeland goals.

The history of the Haitian diaspora’s relations with the US government presented in Daniel P. Erikson’s essay, “The Haitian Diaspora: Building Bridges after Catastrophe” (chapter 8), focuses on two separate but interrelated foreign policy concerns: US relations with the government of Haiti and with Haitian migrants. Because Haiti has offered little economic or political strategic value to the United States as an ally since the end of the Cold War, American policy has been “primarily geared toward making modest, as opposed to transformative, investments in Haiti.” With regard to policies toward Haitian migrants, Erikson says that US policy makers “have made avoiding a refugee crisis a top priority”—a goal that has led the government to seek, above all, political stability in Haiti and control over irregular flows of boat people and others seeking asylum and residence in the United States. To ensure stability, the United States has made promoting democracy and economic sustainability the core of its foreign policy but has done so only reactively and intermittently, thereby undermining its policies’ effectiveness. Although the US government has sought to include the Haitian diaspora in its vision for Haiti’s future, Erikson has found that diaspora leaders have generally assumed an oppositional stance toward US policies, which they view as pursuing US goals that are inconsistent with Haiti’s and the diaspora’s intertwined best interests.

The skepticism of diaspora leaders regarding US policies toward Haiti and Haitian migrants is rooted in their perception that the United States has shored up repressive, corrupt, and incompetent military and civilian governments while also discriminating against Haitians seeking asylum in the United States. Although the Clinton administration intervened to return to office President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had been popularly elected in part with support from the diaspora but then ousted by a military coup, the US government—along with other international donors—also withdrew financial and political support following Aristide’s subsequent reelection and ended up, at the least, facilitating Aristide’s second overthrow and exile from Haiti. In response to Haitians who have fled Haiti’s political chaos and poverty to seek asylum in the United States, the US government has interdicted and returned the vast majority to Haiti through a program widely viewed by diaspora members as unjustly targeted and discriminatory toward Haitians. Even though diaspora members have been grateful when the United States
has provided much-needed relief and development assistance, particularly following the 2010 earthquake that killed hundreds of thousands of people and leveled much of the capital city, Port-au-Prince, they have also feared and resisted the prospect of Haiti’s evolution into a dependent client state and resulting loss of national sovereignty.

As a result of their differences, there has been little sustained interaction between the Haitian diaspora and the US government, although the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake did provoke greater convergence around the core goal of rebuilding Haiti. Prior to that event, Haitian diaspora organizations tended to focus their limited resources and energies in programs that intervened directly in their communities in Haiti or, discouraged about Haiti’s future, in programs that advanced the welfare of the diaspora in the United States. Lacking a unified vision, resources, and, because of their dispersed settlement in different cities, the electoral power necessary to create an effective lobby, diaspora leaders have tended to operate more as individual political entrepreneurs and to rely upon American church, union, and rights organizations to represent Haitian interests to the US administration or, particularly, to the legislature, through the Congressional Black Caucus. Overall engagement between the Haitian diaspora and US government has been episodic and has lacked the “deeply woven interconnections” found in other cases, particularly of the Jewish, Cuban, Irish, and Iraqi diasporas. However, Erikson notes that “the Haitian earthquake provided a new opportunity for the country’s diaspora to reassert itself as a key partner in rebuilding the troubled country.”

When Diaspora and Government Foreign Policy Goals Converge: The Iraqi-Neoconservative Alliance

The success of some members of the Iraqi diaspora and some members of the US administration in together bringing about regime change in Iraq seems to exemplify the great extent to which a convergence between diaspora and government goals can determine US foreign policy. However, in retrospect, their success in taking the nation to war raises questions about the role of the media in enabling the public to monitor the arenas within which diaspora-government relations are formed and to understand the effect minority views can have on policy formulation.

Walt Vanderbush’s essay, “The Iraqi Diaspora and the US Invasion of Iraq” (chapter 9), traces the collaboration between leaders of the Iraqi diaspora
and neoconservative Americans, many of them linked to the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), to convince the US government to wage war and bring about “regime change” in Iraq. With support from the CIA during the presidency of George H. Bush, who had sent US troops to the Middle East to force the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait, Ahmed Chalabi, who had been forced into exile by Saddam Hussein, created the INC and then undertook a two-part strategy of winning wider American support by allying with neoconservatives and lobbying Congress. In the mid-1980s the neoconservative academic Albert Wohlsetter had introduced Chalabi to Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle, who had left the government during the Clinton presidency to join the PNAC. These two lobbying groups played key roles in convincing the Congress to pass the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act, which established regime change in Iraq to be the goal of US foreign policy. Then, with the election of George W. Bush, at least ten of the original twenty-five members of the PNAC took up positions within government with the intention of toughening US policies toward Iraq. Following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon orchestrated by the al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, Bush sought to have Hussein held responsible. Chalabi played a very important role in establishing Hussein’s alleged culpability by providing an “inexhaustible” supply of Iraqi defectors and experts who served as informants to the media and as witnesses in congressional hearings, giving what later proved to be misleading information that was used to bolster mistaken beliefs: that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, that because Hussein was allied with al-Qaeda he might provide those weapons to anti-American terrorists, and that, if the United States were to invade Iraq and disarm Hussein, its troops would be welcomed by Iraqis with “sweets and flowers.”

In marketing the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the diaspora lobby and like-minded government officials were able to frame debates as a choice between invasion or appeasement, thus sidelining alternative perspectives and silencing voices of opposition. The INC claimed credit for placing 108 articles in the news media, including the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Times (of London), during a nine-month period before the war. Despite the impression of diasporic unity given by the mainstream press in the United States, hundreds of prominent diaspora Iraqis from different social and political backgrounds had signed a petition initiated in the United Kingdom opposing both the Hussein dictatorship and the impending war, and many predicted
the reception of American troops would be far different from the welcoming reception projected by the administration. According to Vanderbush, by being able to manipulate the press, the Iraqi diaspora and neoconservative officials within the administration were able to convince not only a majority of Americans but also members of the Congress that the lobbyists’ goals and policies of regime change in Iraq were in America’s national interest.

Arenas and Mechanisms of Diaspora-Government Relations

The essays in this collection contribute to our understandings of diaspora-government relations by examining the nature of diasporas and the strategies they adopt to influence their homelands through US foreign policy and by placing their relations with the US government in broader historical and contemporary foreign policy contexts. Individual case studies indicate that, where there is a convergence between a diaspora’s goals and what the US government has taken to be its national interests, the diaspora’s lobbying efforts can indeed influence US policies toward their homelands. When there is a distinct divergence between the diaspora’s agenda and American interests, these groups have relatively little influence, particularly when specific government policies are framed by broader national agendas, such as opposing communism or confronting terrorists. More complicated and difficult to assess is how a convergence of interests has been created or, in contrast, how the US government and diasporic groups have failed to establish common interests upon which to base foreign policy goals and policies.

As noted above, the essays in this volume focus on what Sheffer has defined as “ethno-national-religious diasporas.” Factors that affect diasporas’ ability to establish their interests and goals as the basis of US policy include their numbers, concentration, mobilization, and integration into American society and politics. But diasporas’ interests and goals change over time, particularly as the first-generation members give way to second and succeeding generations born in America and, sometimes as well, to new waves of immigrants. The nature of the ties between ethno-national-religious diasporas and their homelands varies significantly, from aiding a homeland government in reducing poverty to seeking the overthrow of an existing regime. The goals and strategies of diasporas toward their homelands, and thus their attempts to influence US policies, are also affected by whether their ethno-national-religious identity connects them to a state, as in the case of Jews to Israel, or to a stateless nation, as in the case of Palestinians, with their divided allegiance to the Palestinian Authority.
The receptiveness of the US government to the initiatives of diasporas in defining a convergence with US foreign policy interests, goals, and policies is affected by the wider foreign policy context. Broad national policy concerns have historically placed limits on the extent to which diasporas, such as those of Ethiopians or Haitians in recent years, can realize narrower homeland goals through American policies. Such was the case during the world wars in Europe and the Cold War and is even perhaps the case now, when the government is preoccupied by threats of international terrorism. Government receptiveness has varied depending on the type of policies in question, which have ranged from fixing the immigration status of diaspora members to supporting economic development, protecting human rights, or advocating for regime change in the home country. The extent of US government support has been also affected by the extent to which a policy sought might challenge broader US national interests, require American military or economic resources, or create international political risks. Within these limitations, when there are no clearly established alternative national interests, diasporas may have considerably greater influence in establishing their own goals as US policy, as with the Cuban and, perhaps at times, the Jewish diasporas. Conversely, when the government seeks support from a diaspora, it may for its own reasons adopt policies that coincide with diaspora interests, as seems to have been the case with the Clinton administration’s intervention into Northern Ireland peace talks, which it hoped would secure Irish Catholic votes. When there is a congruence of goals between a diaspora and an influential part of the US government, even if not of underlying national interests, then a mutually supportive alliance can have an enhanced and perhaps disproportionate impact in shaping US policy, as was the case with the Iraqi diaspora and, some argue, the Jewish diaspora.

Regardless of their importance, the characteristics of diasporas or broader foreign policy contexts cannot in and of themselves predict the extent of convergence or divergence in diaspora-government relations or the influence that diasporas and the government will have on each other in shaping US foreign policy. Long-established and large diasporas, such as the Irish diaspora, may have relatively less influence over US government policies than more recent and smaller diasporas, such as that of Iraqis. Conversely, the US government may have limited ability to obtain the cooperation of diasporas in pursuing its own agenda, as with Haitians or Ethiopians. A more significant impact on US policy seems to result from
instances in which diasporas and the government can establish and pursue convergent interests and related policy goals.

The cases of diaspora-government relations examined here provide insights into the processes by which different arenas and mechanisms are employed by diasporas and the government to negotiate and establish convergent and divergent interests, goals, and policies. Diasporas’ relations with the government are forged within two major arenas of interaction, with the executive and legislative branches of government. We adopt the term arena because it suggests a public opportunity, even if not a physical location, within which multiple actors in addition to diasporas and government agencies can lobby and debate. The executive arena includes interactions between diasporas and offices of administration, such as the president, the Department of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Council, and other agencies that inform and implement US foreign policy. The legislative arena includes interactions between diasporas and members of the House of Representatives and the Senate and their different foreign-policy-related subcommittees, within which US foreign policies are set in law.

Within these arenas diaspora leaders and government officials adopt particular strategies and mechanisms of influence as they aim to shape foreign policy. One of the most important of these mechanisms is diasporas’ use of their electoral power and campaign donations to elect or win over public officials sympathetic to their cause. Other significant strategies used both by diasporas and by government officials include the provision of information to their counterparts and/or the media in an attempt to frame foreign policy agendas and to shape opinion. Finally, the members of diasporas and government officials can seek to influence each other through intermediaries, whether leaders of national organizations or representatives of friendly states or international organizations. Our aim in this volume is not to catalog all the interactions and mechanisms that shape the dynamics of diaspora-government relations so much as to indicate significant factors that influence policy making in addition to the nature and types of diasporas and broader foreign policy contexts.

The issues and cases that the authors address in this volume are intended, not so much to be comprehensive and to fully represent the wide diversity of diasporas, their relations with the US government, and resulting policy outcomes, as to identify some of the important factors that must be taken into account in assessing and understanding those relationships. This collection is
not the first to examine the role of diasporas in shaping US foreign policy, but its analytic focus in bringing together an understanding of the contemporary nature of diasporas, historical contexts, and the individual dynamics in convergent and divergent relations between diasporas and government do offer innovative perspectives to guide researchers and policy makers in analyzing and negotiating diaspora-government relations.

References


