

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

SEPTEMBER 3, 2018

by ALAIN GRESH

04.09.2018

The Truths That Won't be Told: How Israel Spies on US Citizens

An investigative documentary by Qatari broadcaster Al Jazeera scheduled for broadcast earlier this year was expected to cause a sensation. Its four 50-minute episodes centred on the young and personable James Anthony Kleinfeld, British, Jewish, an Oxford graduate who speaks six languages including Dutch and Yiddish and is well-informed about Middle East conflicts — seemingly a natural fit for a western foreign ministry or a major thinkthank.

The documentary showed Kleinfeld being enthusiastically recruited for his skills by The Israel Project (TIP), which defends Israel's image in the media, and associating with senior members of organisations that support Israel unconditionally, especially the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac), the powerful US lobbying group. For five months, he mixed with them at cocktail parties, congresses and conventions, and on training courses. He won their trust and they opened up to him, abandoning doublespeak and official lines. How, he asked, did they go about influencing the US Congress? 'Congressmen don't do anything unless you pressure them, and the only way to do that is with money' (1). How did they counter Palestinian rights activists on university campuses? 'With the anti-Israel people, what's most effective, what we found at least in the last year, is you do the opposition research, put up some anonymous website, and then put up targeted Facebook ads.'

Kleinfeld's contacts told him they were spying on US citizens with the help of Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs, founded in 2006, which reports directly to Prime Minister

Binyamin Netanyahu. One official said: 'We are a different government working on foreign soil, [so] we have to be very, very cautious.' And indeed some of the things they do could be subject to prosecution under US law.

At the end of Kleinfeld's time at TIP, his boss there, Eric Gallagher, was so happy with his performance that he wanted to hire 'Tony' (2) on a permanent basis: 'I would love it if you came to work for me. I need someone who's a team player, hardworking, excited, passionate, curious, well rounded, well spoken, well read. You're all of those things.' Kleinfeld turned down the job. His qualifications were genuine, but he was of course an undercover reporter, sent by Al Jazeera to investigate the pro-Israel lobby. He filmed conversations using a hidden camera and later, as part of an Al Jazeera investigations team led by executive producer Phil Rees, put together a spectacular documentary. There was all the more excitement over its impending broadcast, because a 2017 Al Jazeera report on the pro-Israel lobby in the UK (3) had revealed Israel's interference in Britain's internal affairs, and its attempts to bring down the deputy foreign secretary, Alan Duncan, whom it considered too pro-Palestinian. This had led to the Israeli ambassador in London making a public apology and a high-ranking diplomat being recalled to Tel Aviv.

The documentary was expected to be a media sensation, bringing outraged denials and intense controversy. But then the broadcast was postponed, with no official explanation. Eventually, articles in the US Jewish media (4) revealed that it would never be shown. Clayton Swisher, Al Jazeera's director of investigative journalism, expressed regret at the decision in a published article, and announced he was taking sabbatical leave (5). The documentary had been sacrificed to the fierce battle between Qatar on one side and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the other for US support in the feud that began in June 2017. What better way to do this than by winning the favour of the pro-Israel lobby, known for its influence on US policy in the Middle East?

Burying the project

To tip the balance in its favour, Qatar 'postponed' the broadcast, winning a halt to the campaign against Doha by a section of the right wing of an already rightwing lobby. Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organisation of America (ZOA) and a close friend of Donald Trump's former advisor Steve Bannon, flew to Doha and said he was delighted to see the documentary buried (see [Qatar charms and wriggles out of trouble](#)). That groups such as the ZOA, which had not long ago been accusing Qatar of funding Hamas and terrorism, should change sides in return for the documentary's suppression says a lot about its explosive revelations.

But burying over a year's work caused turmoil at Al Jazeera. Some were keen for the revelations not to sink into the quicksand of geopolitical compromise, which is why, thanks to a friend in the Gulf, I was able to watch all four episodes in their near-final version.

What was striking to see was the feverish mood of the pro-Israel lobby over the last few years due to a blind fear of losing its influence. How can that be, when support for Israel is massive in the US, and both Republicans and Democrats unfailingly back it, no matter what its ventures? And when, since Trump's election, Washington no longer wishes to act as 'unfair' broker in the Israeli-Arab conflict, and has sided with Israel's most rightwing government ever? Despite this apparently favourable climate, a spectre haunts the lobby: the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS).

BDS, launched in 2005, aims to use the non-violent methods that proved effective in South Africa under apartheid. It is growing in popularity on US campuses, but David Brog, director of strategic affairs of Christians United for Israel and executive director of the Maccabee Task Force, a group fighting against BDS, questioned whether it is really a cause for alarm. He said: 'Israel's booming. It's the startup nation. More venture capital is going into Israel today than at any other time in history. So why don't we just calm down, realise that BDS is worthless, it's losing, and ignore it ... I don't think BDS was ever supposed to be about getting colleges to take their money out of Israel. So if we focus on the dollars we can feel really good about ourselves. If we focus on the fact that an effort is being made to distance us, those who love Israel, from the rising generation, I think we need to worry. When you get to millennials and students, it's a bad situation. And it's getting to the point now where the majority is more favourable towards the Palestinians than the Israelis.' Jacob Baime, executive director of the Israel on Campus Coalition, a group of organisations that fights BDS in universities, is also worried: 'The one thing every member of Congress and president and ambassador and newspaper editors has in common is, by and large, they spent a little bit of time on campus and probably those were formative years.'

There's another worry for the lobby: support for Israel has traditionally transcended the Republican-Democrat divide, and a few months before the end of his presidency, Barack Obama unconditionally approved \$38bn of aid to Israel over 10 years, though his relations with Netanyahu were terrible. But the political landscape is changing, and the lobby's unconditional support for Trump is narrowing its base to the Republican Party and the evangelical right.

‘The bigger problem’

David Hazony, founding editor of The Tower Magazine and an influential member of TIP, said in the documentary: ‘The specific potential of an immediate boycott, that’s not a problem. What’s a bigger problem is the Democratic Party, the Bernie Sanders people, bringing all the anti-Israel people into the Democratic Party. Then being pro-Israel becomes less a bipartisan issue, and then every time the White House changes, the policies towards Israel change. That becomes a dangerous thing for Israel. There is actually an important battle being fought on the campuses.’ John Mearsheimer, co-author of a well-known book on the lobby (6), confirmed this in his frequent comments in the documentary. He said that support for Israel is now growing among Republicans and falling among Democrats: ‘There is a substantial difference in support for Israel in the two parties.’

How to halt this trend? It would be hard to do it through political debate. Since the failure of the 1993 Oslo accords, Israel has been led by far-right parties that reject any diplomatic solution. There is no question of any discussion of the fate of the Palestinians, the future of the settlements or the tragedy in Gaza. And the lobby’s support for Netanyahu and Trump is unlikely to generate much enthusiasm among US students. Journalist Max Blumenthal points out that the lobby took a similar approach to the documentary, refusing discussion and likening investigative journalism to espionage; discrediting Al Jazeera by dismissing it as a puppet of Qatar; and insisting that the documentary’s subject was ‘the Jewish lobby’ not support for Israel (Twitter, 15 February 2018). It could thus avoid any discussion of the details of the documentary’s revelations.

Noah Pollak, executive director of the Emergency Committee for Israel, said to a gathering of pro-Israel students: ‘You discredit the messenger as a way of discrediting the message. When you talk about ... BDS, you talk about them as a hate group, as a movement that absolutely endorses violence against civilians ... aka terrorism’— and of course as antisemitic. Pollak called Jewish Voice for Peace (a US leftwing organisation focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) ‘Jewish Voice for Hamas’. He told Kleinfeld: ‘The majority of Americans are pro-Israel. Whereas if you take a poll of Israel in the UK, it’s just pure hatred of Israel. Your country basically let half of fucking Pakistan move in. So you have a different problem than we do here.’

To discredit the messenger, as the documentary reveals, the pro-Israel lobby has built up a spy network over the last few years to gather information on opponents’ private lives, careers and political convictions. Baime said: ‘The research operation is very high-tech.

When I got here a few years ago the budget was \$3,000. Today it's like a million and a half, or more. Probably it's two million at this point. I don't even know, it's huge. It's a massive budget.' He and his colleagues are keen to stay invisible: 'We do it securely and anonymously. That's the key.'

'If you're a racist, the world should know'

One of the groups most feared by Palestinian rights activists is Canary Mission (7), whose funding, members and methods are shrouded in secrecy. A journalist with close links to the lobby said: 'People who hate it, the people who are being targeted by it, call it a blacklist. You have names here that show up on this database. Students and professors, faculty, speakers, organisations that have ties to terrorism, outright ties to terrorism, or terrorists who have called for the destruction of the Jewish state.' Canary Mission's website describes its aim as being to 'ensure that today's radicals are not tomorrow's employees'. Above the biography of each victim is the slogan 'If you're a racist, the world should know'.

Kleinfeld managed to talk to Canary Mission's founder and financial backer, Adam Milstein, chairman of the Israeli-American Council (IAC). Milstein was jailed briefly for tax fraud in 2009, but that didn't prevent him from carrying on his activities from prison. He explained his philosophy to Kleinfeld: 'First of all, investigate who they [the pro-Palestine activists] are. What's their agenda? They're picking on the Jews because it's easy, because it's popular. We need to expose what they really are. And we need to expose the fact that they are anti everything we believe in. And we need to put them on the run. We're doing it by exposing who they are, what they are, the fact that they are racist, the fact that they are bigots, [that] they're anti-democracy.'

Students recounted in the documentary exactly what they faced. Summer Awad, who took part in a campaign for Palestinian rights in Knoxville, Tennessee, was harassed on Twitter, and information about her, some of it dating back a decade, was posted online: 'They are digging and digging. Somebody contacted my employer and asked for me to be fired. If they continue to employ me they will be denounced as antisemitic.' Denunciation can end careers or make it hard for students to find a job after graduation. To get their names off the blacklist, some victims write messages of 'repentance', which Canary Mission posts on its site (8). These anonymous confessions, whose writers explain that they were 'deceived', are much like those of suspected communist sympathisers under McCarthyism in the US in the 1950s, or victims of authoritarian regimes today. Baime said: 'It's psychological warfare. It drives them crazy. They either shut down, or they spend time

investigating [the accusations against them] instead of attacking Israel. It's extremely effective.' Another person told Kleinfeld: 'I think antisemitism as a smear is not what it used to be.'

These campaigns, based on personal information gathered about US citizens, would not be possible without the resources of Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs. Its director-general, Sima Vaknin-Gil, said in a talk at the IAC annual conference shown in the documentary: 'The fact that the Israeli government decided to be a key player means a lot because we can bring things that NGOs or civilian entities involved in this thing [don't have] ... We've got the budget. We can bring things to the table that are quite different. Everybody out there who has anything to do with BDS should ask himself twice: should I be on this side or do I want to be on the other side?'

'A destabilising force'

Vaknin-Gil admitted that to gather information, 'we have FDD. We have others working on this.' The Foundation for the Defence of Democracies (FDD) is a conservative thinktank that has played an important role in the recent rapprochement between the UAE and Israel. It took part in the 2017 campaign against Qatar and Al Jazeera, which was accused of being a destabilising force in the region. Under US law, organisations and individuals working for foreign governments must register with the Department of Justice. Would the DOJ dare take the FDD to court for failing to register (9)?

As Ali Abunimah, co-founder of the website The Electronic Intifada, says, 'if you had on tape a statement of a senior Russian or Iranian or even Canadian official saying that they were running covert operations, to spy on Americans, and using an organisation like the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies as a front ... it would be a bombshell.' This kind of cooperation is not limited to the FDD, and many of the people Kleinfeld talked to, including Baime, told him so in confidence, though they didn't want to elaborate on such a sensitive subject.

There are other revelations, like the way that TIP takes charge of US journalists visiting Jerusalem and feeds them ready-made stories for publication on their return to the US; how the lobby pays for upscale holidays in Israel for US Congress members, circumventing US law; and how it pressures the media, including news agencies, to amend wires and copy.

Everything seems to be going well for Israel, but its American supporters, despite their extensive resources, are nervous. The future seems dark to them, and even those most likely to support them are wavering. The documentary shows Vaknin-Gil admitting in a

Knesset hearing: ‘Today we [have] lost the second generation of Jews, which are the millennial generation of Jews. I hear this from their parents, who come and explain to me what a hard time they’re having with their kids at Friday dinners. They don’t recognise the state of Israel and don’t see us as an entity to be admired.’

This article originally appeared on [Le Monde Diplomatique](#).