

# FBI Files Reveal Anti-Defamation League Spied on Arab Students

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*In 1969, the [Anti-Defamation League](#) infiltrated and spied on a national gathering of Arab students in the United States, newly released [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) documents show.*

Obtained in April after an Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy (IRMEP) freedom of information request, and reviewed by The Electronic Intifada, [one declassified file](#)[PDF] contains Anti-Defamation League reports held by the FBI.

The documents reveal how ADL surveillance against the Organization of Arab Students (OAS) in 1969 coalesced into plans for infiltrating the OAS national organization in [New York](#). The files also give an insight into why the entire effort eventually backfired, ultimately leading to raids on ADL offices involved in intelligence-gathering through illegal means, and a lawsuit against ADL in the early 1990s — ultimately settled out of court in 2002.

The FBI responded to the IRMEP request that it at one time possessed up to 10,800 pages of information about the ADL, but that some of these had been destroyed. So far approximately 1,000 pages have been released (see [The FBI's Anti-Defamation League File](#) on the IRMEP site).

## Organization of Arab Students

In the late 1960s, the OAS worked hard to unite visiting Arab international students studying in the US with Arab-American counterparts interested in connecting to developments in the region, primarily in Palestine. Formed in 1952 as the nonprofit Organization of Arab Students of United States and Canada, by the late 1960s OAS was hosting its eighteenth annual national conference with a reported 200 participants. OAS was not at all shy about criticizing US media coverage of the region or issuing direct challenges to the propaganda of the Israel lobby.

The ADL agents talk of alleged OAS links to armed Palestinian group [Fatah](#), seemingly skeptical of one OAS spokesperson's claim that "there was no real relationship between them, that the OAS was merely letting them sell their literature there." The name of the spokesperson has been redacted by the FBI, along with most other names in the file.

The OAS's growing capacity to organize major events eventually sounded alarm bells at the ADL, which dispatched undercover investigators to penetrate the OAS national convention held in 1969 at Ohio State University.

The ADL's agents assigned to the convention filed reports under the codenames Buckeye,

Adam and Eve. "Buckeye" tirelessly worked the entire seven days of the event presenting himself as a reporter, often for the *Spectator* newspaper. He claimed to be sympathetic to OAS objectives in order to gain access to events and high officials and have a pretext for inquiring about "back office" issues and OAS finances.

Buckeye's reports sounded an ADL red alert: "The political activity of Arab students in the US will increase significantly in the coming school year (1969-1970) with increasing effectiveness. They are beginning to display a much greater understanding of how to present their arguments to the various levels of the American public (church groups, new left, lower middle class, etc); and any successes are certain to increase their confidence and, hence, their activity."

Buckeye recommended this "threat" had to be confronted "directly" as growing numbers of OAS chapters achieved and shared successes with other student groups, especially those on the left.

### **Fake journalist**

In those pre-Internet days, Buckeye had to manually compile information on the location, officers, phone numbers and membership strength of each OAS chapter. To ingratiate himself with a group of Buffalo University students, Buckeye claimed all his questions were for a future *Columbus Citizen Journal* story.

Even so, students were candid in telling Buckeye they increasingly viewed such major media with skepticism. They claimed *The Christian Science Monitor* and [The New York Times](#) were biased in their coverage of the Middle East, and the OAS attendees urged Buckeye to read *The Guardian* and *Le Monde* to get a more balanced view of regional issues.

Buckeye carefully noted the most effective Arab public relations strategies, the main points of Arab media critic presentations, counter-strategies to negative media and each session speech from [Palestine Liberation Organization](#) and Arab Information Office representatives.

### **AIPAC envy**

Buckeye reported competition and enviously noted that "the attached article from the Near East Report indicates that the [American Israel Public Affairs Committee](#) had somebody on the inside of the OAS who covered the convention." Buckeye recommended that the ADL recruit an Arabic-speaking agent from the nonprofit Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to work inside the OAS national headquarters in New York, in order to be "privy to important national OAS information."

On his own, Buckeye had a hard time penetrating closed OAS sessions. Security at the 1969 OAS conference was tighter than previous years. Only Arab students who had been members of a local OAS chapter for one year could attend closed sessions. Non-Arab members needed the recommendation of five Arab chapter members to enter closed sessions. Buckeye's wife attempted to enter closed OAS convention meetings posing "as a Canadian divorcee and assumed an alias for which she had proper identification."

But the spies also saw such security mechanisms as an opportunity to wage an attack on OAS chapters: "On many campuses there are rules against discriminating on the basis of race, etc. Therefore it is illegal for the OAS to require its membership to be of Arab descent.

In these places pro-Israeli forces could join and take over the machinery of the organization, its funds, etc. and at the same time dismantle it as a base for dissemination of propaganda.”

The recommended strategy was to “concentrate on getting an Arabic-speaking Jew into the national machinery of the OAS. At the recent convention, for example, we had difficulty finding anyone who could attend and understand the arabic [sic] sessions where finances, policy, etc. were discussed. This is a crucial factor in combating the students.”

By the late 1980s, coordinated OAS media pronouncements, sharing and national organizing waned as chapters dedicated themselves more toward social and education functions than politics and opened up to all students claiming an interest in Arab culture. Many OAS chapters even passed individual charters renaming their organizations, presenting new logos and severing national affiliations. Few conducted any major political events, particularly beyond the campus boundaries.

### **“Our official friends”**

But even as OAS power waned, FBI interest in the ADL gradually intensified.

After obtaining the ADL’s OAS report in 1969, the FBI — which had also surveilled the conference — came to its own “more objective” conclusions. The FBI felt not only that the ADL report was “biased,” but such ADL-sanctioned activity “possibly represents a violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act.”

The FBI, based on its own long term observations of the ADL, felt it would be incredible “to assume it [the ADL’s report on the OAS] is not furnished to an official of the government of Israel due to the extremely close ties between ADL and Israel.” Buckeye had indeed suggested in his report that “this information may be of interest to our official friends.” Though it could be that this was a reference to US law enforcement, the FBI’s suspicion of Israeli involvement seems credible.

The FBI also seemed to resent the ADL’s self-appointed authority as a competing counter-intelligence agency — even though the ADL had long fought to ingratiate itself with the FBI and form liaisons. “This report shows investigation conducted by the ADL, using codename sources, pretexts such as local news reporters ... recruiting of [Arabic speaking] Jewish refugees ... to infiltrate the OAS in New York.”

When hard evidence surfaced that the ADL was illegally obtaining confidential information about pro-Palestinian and anti-apartheid activists, the police raided the ADL’s major California offices, after FBI investigations. Covert ADL agent Roy Bullock had also worked closely with apartheid [South African](#) intelligence services (Robert I. Friedman, “[The Enemy Within: How the Anti-Defamation League turned the notion of human rights on its head](#),” *The Village Voice*, 11 May 1993).

According to Friedman in 1993: “Investigations by the FBI and police in San Francisco have revealed that the ADL has shared at least some of its spy gathering material with Israeli government officials. What’s more, Israel apparently used tips from the ADL to detain Palestinian Americans who traveled there.”

Civil suits against Bullock and the ADL in the 1990s were eventually settled out of court in 2002 for tens of thousands. But the ADL never admitted to doing anything wrong, and never had to face any serious penalty. Palestine solidarity activists may well wonder what the ADL

is doing in secret today.

Although confidentiality agreements are normal in such settlements, the plaintiffs did not agree to keep quiet. IRMEP has now published [depositions and files from this investigation and successful lawsuit, so they are available online for the first time](#).

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