

# Registering Israel's "Useful Idiots"

FDD and AIPAC need adult supervision

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*Depending on what criteria one uses, there are between 200 and 600 groups in the United States that wholly or in part are dedicated to furthering the interests of Israel. The organizations are both Jewish, like the Zionist Organization of America, and Christian Zionist to include John Hagee's Christians United for Israel, but the funding of the Israel Lobby and both its political and media access comes overwhelmingly from Jewish supporters and advocates.*

Many of the groups are registered with the Internal Revenue Service for tax purposes as 501(c)3 "educational" or "charitable" foundations, which enables them to solicit tax exempt donations. One might dispute whether promoting Israeli interests in the United States is actually educational, but as of right now the Department of the Treasury believes it can be so construed, protected by the First Amendment.

But there is a more serious consideration in terms of the actual relationships that many of the groups enjoy with the Israeli government. To be sure, many of them boast on their promotional literature and websites about their relationships with the Benjamin Netanyahu and his cabinet, so the issue of dual loyalty or, worse, acting as actual Israeli government agents must be considered.

There is a legal remedy to hostile foreigners acting against American interests and that is the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 (FARA). Originally intended to identify and monitor agents of Nazi Germany propagandizing in the United States, it has since been applied to individuals and groups linked to other nations. Most recently, it was used against Russian news agencies RT America and Sputnik, which were forced to register. It is also being considered for Qatar based al-Jazeera.

[FARA requires](#) identified agents to be transparent in terms of their funding and contacts while also being publicly identified as representing the interests of a foreign nation. They must report to the Department of Justice every contact they have with congressmen or other government officials. The text of the Act defines a foreign agent as

"any person who acts as an agent, representative, employee, or servant, or any person who acts in any other capacity at the order, request, or under the direction or control, of a foreign principal or of a person any of whose activities are directly or indirectly supervised, directed, controlled, financed, or subsidized in whole or in major part by a foreign principal, and who directly or through any other person— (i) engages within the United States in political activities for or in the interests of such foreign principal; (ii) acts within the United States as a public relations counsel, publicity agent, information-service

employee or political consultant for or in the interests of such foreign principal; (iii) within the United States solicits, collects, disburses, or dispenses contributions, loans, money, or other things of value for or in the interest of such foreign principal; or (iv) within the United States represents the interests of such foreign principal before any agency or official of the Government of the United States.”

In spite of language that would presumably cover many of the hundreds of Jewish organizations acting for Israel, FARA has never been used to compel registration of any such groups or individuals even when it was public knowledge that they were working closely with the Israeli government to coordinate positions and promote other Israeli interests. That failure is at a minimum a tribute to Jewish power in the United States, but it is also due to the fact that the organizations are funded from within the United States by wealthy American Jews, not by Israel, which is the argument sometimes inaccurately [made by the groups themselves](#) to demonstrate that they are not being directed by the Israeli government.



The difficulty in proving that one is directed by a foreign government has been definitively resolved regarding one group the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), which has become the leading neoconservative bastion seeking a war with Iran, Israel’s *bête noir*. The recent al-Jazeera expose on the activities of the Israeli lobbies in both Britain and the United States, [which I wrote about last week](#), included a surreptitiously filmed conversation with **Sima Vaknin-Gil** (image on the right), a former Israeli intelligence officer who now heads the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, which is tasked with countering what is perceived to be anti-Israeli activity worldwide. The Ministry is particularly focused on the non-violent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), which is increasingly active in both the United States and Europe.

Vaknin-Gil was discussing his activities with **Tony Kleinfeld**, an undercover investigative reporter who was secretly recording and filming his encounters with various members of the Israel Lobby as well as of the Israeli government. Vaknin-Gil provided [explicit confirmation](#) that the FDD works directly with the Israeli government, making it an Israeli agent by the definition of FARA.

For those who are unfamiliar with FDD, it is probably currently the most prominent neocon organization though it nevertheless claims to be a non-partisan “research group.” It focuses on foreign policy and security issues by “Fighting Terrorism and Promoting Freedom,” as it informs us on its [website](#) masthead. It works to “defend free nations against their enemies,”

which frequently means in practice anyone whom Israel considers to be hostile, most particularly Iran. FDD's Leadership Council has featured **former CIA Director James Woolsey, Senator Joe Lieberman, and Bill Kristol**. Its Executive Director is Canadian import **Mark Dubowitz**, who is obsessed with Iran. Its advisors and experts are mostly Jewish and most of its funding comes from Jewish oligarchs.

FDD's auditorium has become a preferred venue for senior officials of the Trump Administration to go and make hardline speeches, just as the American Enterprise Institute was under George W. Bush. **Mike Pence, Mike Pompeo, John Bolton and Nikki Haley** have all spoken there recently, frequently focusing on Iran and the threat that it allegedly constitutes.

FDD aside, Vaknin-Gil [also confirmed](#) that there were other groups in the United States doing the same sorts of things on behalf of Israel. He said

"We have FDD. We have others working on this," elaborating that FDD is "working on" projects for Israel including "data gathering, information analysis, working on activist organizations, money trail."

So Vaknin-Gil was admitting that FDD and others were working as Israeli proxies, collecting information on U.S. citizens, spying on legal organizations, and both planning and executing disinformation at Israeli direction. Kleinfeld also spoke with a Jonathan Schanzer, a senior official in FDD, who filled in a bit more of what the foundation is up to in terms of discrediting groups in the U.S. that support the BDS movement.

Schanzer admitted "BDS has taken everybody by surprise" before complaining that the Jewish response has been "a complete mess. I don't think that anybody's doing a good job. We're not even doing a good job." He then complained that attempts to discredit Palestinian groups by linking them to terrorist groups had failed, as also had the use of the label anti-Semitism. "Personally I think anti-Semitism as a smear is not what it used to be."

So, when will the Justice Department move on FDD now that its true colors have been exposed by al-Jazeera? The group must be required to register if justice be done, but will it? Its principal partner in crime the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has avoided registering for more than sixty years by claiming that it is an American organization working to educate the U.S. public about the all the good things connected to Israel. Even though it meets regularly with Israeli government officials, it claims not to be representing Israeli interests. But just as in the case of FDD, it is time to require AIPAC to register as what it really is: a foreign agent. As a registered agent, it will still be able to exercise First Amendment rights to defend Israel but it would not be able to be involved in lobbying on Capitol Hill and directing money to politicians who are described as pro-Israeli, as it does now. Its finances will be transparent and it will be perceived as an official advocate for Israel, not as an educational resource for what is happening in the Middle East. Hopefully, when AIPAC stops throwing money around, the politicians and media types will find another place to roost.

To be sure the lovefest for Israel in government extends far beyond FDD and AIPAC. It can be found in many dark corners. National Security Advisor John Bolton [recently received](#) the "Defender of Israel" award from the Zionist Organization of America. And one might suggest that the U.S. United Nations delegation, headed by Ambassador Nikki Haley, is directed by

the Israeli government, particularly given [events of last Friday](#) whereby the U.S. voted against a motion condemning Israel's continued illegal occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights, thereby recognizing for the first time Israel's sovereignty over the area. Whether Haley was speaking for herself or for the administration was characteristically unclear, but it hardly matters. Nikki Haley might be referred to as a useful idiot, as Lenin put it, but her consistent pattern of extreme loyalty in defense of Israel marks her out as being particularly beholden to the Jewish state, which will no doubt arrange to richly reward her through some position in financial services for which she is totally unqualified when she leaves her post in January. And then she will be well funded to run for president in 2020. Having Haley in charge, one might just as well vote for Benjamin Netanyahu.

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