

# Source of Pro-Israel Guerrilla Warriors on Social Media Exposed

By [Nasim Ahmed](#)

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*A number of prominent Jewish-American leaders are funding covert, anonymous campaigns targeting pro-Palestinian student activists, The Forward has found. The Jewish daily newspaper, which has been publishing valuable information concerning the source of funding for these hyper-aggressive and shadowy groups – which spearhead coordinated hate campaigns against critics of the Zionist state – has uncovered the identities of those behind hidden social media accounts.*

Community heads and prominent Jewish organisations with a carefully-crafted, respectable public profile have donated millions to fund secret projects targeting students and lecturers, the report has found. On a number of occasions, their blind support for Israel has seen them bankroll far-right and anti-Muslim hate groups.

The latest pro-Israeli group to be [exposed by The Forward](#) is the campaign targeting the pro-Palestinian campus network Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). SJP is said to be the most well-known advocate of the Palestinian cause on US campuses. It has been the target of a pro-Israel group known as SJP Uncovered, which anonymously attacks student activists affiliated with SJP across the country. With more than 100,000 followers on Facebook, SJP Uncovered has gone after pro-Palestinian students by maintaining a veil of anonymity that is said to be all-but impenetrable.

Until now, the source of funding for SJP Uncovered had been a mystery. *The Forward* has now been able to shed light on the organisation to reveal that the site is a secret project of the Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC), a Washington DC-based pro-Israel organisation tied to most mainstream funders and organisations in the Jewish community.

On its official website, the ICC says that its vision is to create a campus environment where “dialogue and ideas are freely exchanged about Israel”. Publicly, the ICC presents a respectable face typical of nearly all pro-Israeli groups, but privately it is funding one of the most aggressive and shadowy student groups responsible for hateful campaigns against critics of the Zionist state. *The Forward* revealed that the ICC paid over \$1 million in the 2016/2017 fiscal year to SJP Uncovered, in that time also running vicious campaigns against students with the aid of political consulting firms.

Until around 2014, the ICC is said to have been a standard pro-Israel advocacy group receiving donations from the largest and most mainstream Jewish-American foundations. In 2015, its operations changed to “covert, anonymous campaigns targeting pro-Palestinian student activists, often with the help of top-tier paid professional political consultants,” according to the investigative report.

Describing the change in focus, one former pro-Israeli campus official said: “It was clear that the old way of doing business [...] was not making the cut, and was not enough, and there was a totally new offensive approach to things.” He added:

The overall framing was [that] the pro-Israel community is no longer going to sit back and let things happen, they are going to go on the offense [...] It was very clear that going on the offensive to them meant going after students and the organizations that were bringing BDS.

With the change in emphasis in 2015 towards more aggressive campaigns, the ICC began hiring paid political consultants – including opposition researchers – to work on campuses. It transformed itself into a cog in what is often described as Israel’s secret global war against pro-Palestinian activists, which is operated by a dedicated ministry in Tel Aviv known as the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. Its main function is to spearhead Israel’s overt and covert efforts to smear the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions ([BDS](#)) movement that is modelled on the global campaign that helped end Apartheid in South Africa. In November, the *Electronic Intifada* published in full an undercover *Al Jazeera* documentary that revealed some of the ministry’s tactics. The documentary was censored, allegedly after Israel lobby pressure on Qatar, which funds *Al Jazeera*.

SJP Uncovered is one of many pro-Israel organisations to emerge from a new consensus within sections of the Jewish-American community. They believed that defeating the global BDS movement was a key priority, which could only be achieved through aggressive means. Such tactics, however, not only risked falling foul of the rules of respectable public institutions, it was bad for their image. The solution for Zionist and pro-Israel groups, both in the US and Israel, was to adopt secretive and clandestine tactics against their targets in an effort to protect their reputation. One of the best known of these operations is the formerly-anonymous website Canary Mission, which posts political dossiers on college students. The site went live in 2015, and has since grown to include dossiers on thousands of students.

A series of [Forward exposés](#) in October revealed that a foundation controlled by the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, a major Jewish charity with an annual budget of over \$100 million, had donated \$100,000 to the website, whose work has drawn comparisons to a McCarthyite blacklist. An *Haaretz* [profile](#) of the Canary Mission found that, for three years, the website had spread fear among undergraduate activists by posting more than a thousand political dossiers on student supporters of Palestinian rights. At the same time, the website had gone to great lengths to hide the digital and financial trail connecting it to its donors and staff. Registered through a secrecy service, the site had been untraceable until recently.

While the federation had assured that it was a “one-time grant” that would never happen again, the uncovering of a publicly respectable pro-Israel organisations giving funds to operate clandestine hate campaigns against pro-Palestinian activists triggered further investigations. The Canary Mission was just the tip of the iceberg, as tax filings seen by the magazine [+972](#) showed that there was a pattern of systemic financing of radical right-wing and anti-Muslim groups.

Why was 2015 pivotal to this shift in strategy? Jewish leaders in the US, says *Forward* reporter Josh Nathan-Kazis, decided to spend significant communal resources attacking

college students in that year because there was a coming-together of Israel's spy culture and Jewish-American mega donors like Sheldon Adelson and Haim Saban. Both felt that the work being carried out by mainstream Jewish organisations was unsatisfactory. Wanting to shift the entire tenor of the Jewish communal approach to fighting anti-Semitism and BDS, major Jewish organisations were called to a secret meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada.

During this 2015 meeting, there was a consensus for a push towards more aggressive responses to BDS. A new initiative, named after Jewish guerrilla warriors Maccabees, was formed. On its website, the Maccabee taskforce – which claims that the BDS movement is spreading anti-Semitism across the world – says it is “determined to help students combat this hate by bringing them the strategies and resources they need to tell the truth about Israel”.

Strategies developed by Israeli think tanks like the Reut Institute became the playbook for the aggressive tactics that is said to have come into maturity during that period. These tactics, Nathan-Kazis explains, called for pro-Israel advocates to “out, name and shame” harsh critics of Israel, and to “frame them [...] as anti-peace, anti-Semitic, or dishonest purveyors of double standards”. They talked about “establishing a ‘price tag’” for attacks on Israel and “isolating” advocacy groups that attack Israel, while “organizing regular meetings of pro-Israel networks”.

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