

Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan acknowledges longtime role as Israeli agent

Fred Mazelis
30 November 2013

Well-known independent film producer Arnon Milchan has acknowledged on an Israeli interview show what had been widely surmised in Hollywood circles for many years—that he worked as an Israeli intelligence operative for at least two decades.

As reported on CNN and elsewhere, Milchan, a citizen and a resident of Israel, told the interviewer that he helped Israel develop its nuclear weapons program in the 1980s. Milchan, now 68, has worked for more than 35 years in Hollywood, producing some 120 films, including commercial hits like *Once Upon a Time in America*, *Pretty Woman*, *L.A. Confidential*, and *Fight Club*. A multibillionaire, he is the fourth-richest man in Israel.

Milchan's role was gossiped about for years, especially after the 1985 indictment of a business partner when US authorities discovered one of Milchan's companies was being used to ship nuclear triggers to Israel illegally. It was not until the 2011 publication of *Confidential: The Life of Secret Agent Turned Hollywood Tycoon Arnon Milchan*, by Meir Doron and Joseph Gelman, that it was documented and widely known. Even then, Milchan, after providing some assistance to Doron and Gelman, did not authorize the book or speak publicly to confirm its claims.

As Milchan now confirms, he was recruited as an agent for Lakam, the acronym by which the spy unit the Bureau of Scientific Relations was known, at some point in the 1960s. "Do you know what it was like to be a 20-something guy whose country decided to let him be a James Bond?" he told his interviewer. "Wow! The action! That was exciting." This was long before he launched a career in Hollywood that would make him one of the most prominent names in the movie industry.

"I did it for my country and I'm proud of it,"

Milchan said on Israeli television. At the same time, he gave no indication of why he had remained silent until now. It is possible that he maintained official intelligence ties until very recently. An open acknowledgment of his role might also have complicated his Hollywood career, especially as opposition to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has grown in recent years.

According to the 2011 book, Milchan was recruited by none other than Shimon Peres, the current 90-year-old president of Israel. Peres is quoted in the book as paying tribute to Milchan's assistance in making the Zionist state the sole nuclear power in the Mideast. The future movie tycoon supervised front companies that were used to finance Israel's intelligence operations and to make weapons-related purchases. In the 1980s, this involved Israeli nuclear capability.

Milchan's long friendship with Peres would seem to place him on the "left" in the reactionary Israeli political spectrum. Milchan also counts among his close friends from his decades in Hollywood such actors and directors as Robert De Niro, Oliver Stone, and Brad Pitt.

The film producer's "moonlighting" to help the Zionist state obtain nuclear capability occurred in the period immediately leading up to the first Palestinian intifada, beginning in 1987, when the Palestinian people rebelled against decades of occupation and abuse, and as it became increasingly apparent that Israel was laying the basis for the permanent occupation of huge sections of Palestinian land.

The producer also admitted, in a comment that sheds particular light on the reactionary role of Zionism, that he had helped the South African apartheid regime with "public relations." In exchange for this assistance, the apartheid government had supplied uranium to the

Israelis.

Milchan appears to have worked as an agent from the 1960s until at least the mid-1980s. It is significant that the Reagan administration dropped plans to prosecute the film producer even though his associate Richard Kelly Smyth was indicted. Smyth became a fugitive, and eventually served several years in prison after he was arrested, more than 15 years later.

Another revealing aspect of Milchan's business dealings is the \$200 million payment by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, in the late 1990s, for a 20 percent stake in Milchan's Regency Enterprises. Murdoch's fanatical support for right-wing Zionist elements is longstanding and well known.

It is also significant that when Milchan finally decided to officially acknowledge his role, he coupled his admission with the disclosure that the late director Sydney Pollack was "my partner in export in aerospace, planes, all kinds of things, with license. He had to decide what he was willing and what he was not. On many things he said 'No.' Many things he said 'Yes.' "

Pollack, who died in 2008 after a long career as an actor and producer in addition to director, is not around to comment on or confirm this account. It isn't likely that Milchan is making it up, however, although he may be seeking to justify his record by associating himself with a well-known Hollywood liberal.

If Pollack did indeed provide the kind of assistance that Milchan suggests, it would not come as a great shock. The former remained a Democratic Party liberal throughout his career, and in those circles support for the state of Israel was overwhelming and may well, in Pollack's case, have been translated into assistance for an Israeli agent like the producer.

Pollack's films, including *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, *The Way We Were*, *Tootsie* and *Out of Africa*, were for the most part based upon a somewhat greater social and political awareness than typical Hollywood fare. They often evinced a sympathy for the downtrodden and oppressed, especially in his first major film, *They Shoot Horses*.

At the same time, they never go very much beyond the surface. There is a connection, although not a direct one, between the often bland and socially tame films directed by Pollack and his political outlook.

Even Pollack's best work is affected by the growing

conservatism within a layer of the intelligentsia and the artistic milieu that characterized roughly the three decades following the end of the Vietnam War. This conservatism certainly gripped many Jewish performers, writers and others in film and in theater, who were caught up in the Zionist triumphalism following the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War of 1967. This changed outlook was also rooted in their growing prosperity based on the stock market and real estate boom, as well as the fortunes to be made in their own industry.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)