

UK: May and Corbyn suppress scandal over Israel's role in anti-Corbyn coup

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14 January 2017

Shai Masot, an Israeli embassy staffer in London, was caught on camera in a sting operation plotting to “take down” Members of Parliament perceived as hostile to Israel.

Initial revelations from *Al Jazeera* showed secretly filmed discussion between Masot and Maria Strizzola, a former parliamentary assistant to Robert Halfon, a junior education minister and former Conservative Party deputy chairman.

At one point, Masot asks, “Can I give you some MPs that you can take down?”

Strizzola replies, “Well you know, if you look hard enough I’m sure that there is something they are trying to hide.”

Masot continues, “Yeah, I have some MPs.”

His “hit list” included Deputy Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan, one of a handful of Conservative MPs who has criticized Israel’s settlement policy and occupation of the West Bank for preventing the realization of a two-state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. The Board of Deputies of British Jews accused him of being “breathhtakingly one-sided,” while the Community Security Trust, a pro-Israel lobby group, equated his criticism of Israeli policy with anti-Semitism.

Strizzola helpfully suggested “a little scandal maybe?” to Masot.

The “hit list” also included Crispin Blunt, the Conservative chair of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, because his views were “strongly pro-Arab rather than pro-Israel.”

The revelations are taken from a four-hour series entitled *The Lobby* to be screened by the Emir of Qatar’s *Al-Jazeera* news channel on January 15, as well as leaks published by the *Mail on Sunday*. Since last June, *Al-Jazeera* has used an undercover reporter posing as a pro-Israel activist working with Labour Friends of Israel.

The tapes reveal that the Israeli embassy helped to establish, and in some cases directly funded, several “independent” organisations including the Union of Jewish Students and a network for aspiring diplomats called Young Diplomats in London, on whose executive committee Masot

served.

Here was a very real example of a foreign government seeking to influence the foreign and domestic affairs of the UK government, including suggestions of manufacturing a scandal to remove government ministers. Yet the response of Prime Minister Theresa May’s government could not be more starkly different to the furor over the entirely unsupported accusations of Russian attempts to subvert the US presidential elections by Russia.

A Foreign Office spokesperson said, “The Israeli ambassador [Mark Regev] has apologised and is clear these comments do not reflect the views of the embassy or government of Israel. The UK has a strong relationship with Israel and we consider the matter closed.”

These events follow the recent United Nations Security Council resolution 2334 condemning Israel’s settlement policy, in which the US abstained in a last-ditch attempt by President Barack Obama to present Washington as an honest broker in the Middle East and provide some cover for his reactionary allies in the region—who play the Palestinian card for their own domestic purposes.

However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lashed out against Obama and made an appeal for support to president elect Donald Trump to intervene. Trump’s administration is expected to inaugurate a major shift in US foreign policy in the Middle East and give Israel a free hand. Nevertheless, Washington allowed the resolution to go ahead, with all the other 14 members approving.

May, notwithstanding Britain’s role in drafting the resolution and her support for it, has come to the same conclusion—seeing the cultivation of economic and political relations with the US through Trump as essential—post-Brexit—in countering the loss of relations with Europe. Therefore, when Secretary of State John Kerry made a speech criticising Israeli settlements a few days later, May performed one of the fastest volte-faces on record, swinging behind Netanyahu with an open and unprecedented criticism of Kerry’s speech. She has since then dispatched Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson for a series of meetings with

Trump's team.

The government's limp response to the *Al Jazeera* revelations is of a piece with this craven submission to the incoming administration in Washington.

Equally craven, however, and to some extent more politically significant, is the reaction of Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Al Jazeera's undercover reporter poses as a member of the Labour Party Friends of Israel (LFI). The LFI, dominated by Labour's right wing, was at the centre of efforts to whip up allegations of anti-Semitism within the Labour Party, as part of the broader campaign to oust Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party.

Masot is shown at the 2016 Labour Party conference, shortly after Corbyn won a resounding victory in his re-election against the attempted right-wing coup against him, telling Ryan of his plans to set up an LFI youth wing.

He explained that Corbyn's election in 2015 had made it harder to influence the Labour Party and establish an LFI group, complaining that his supporters were "weirdos" and "extremists." This made it vital to establish apparently "independent" pro-Israel groups within the Labour Party in order to undermine Corbyn's leadership.

Ryan, speaking of a planned visit by LFI members to Israel, asks Masot, "What happened with the names that we put into the Embassy, Shai?"

Masot replies, "Just now we've got the money, it's more than one million pounds, it's a lot of money."

He made clear he had received approval from the Israeli government to spend the extraordinary sum of £1 million (\$1.2 million) on ferrying the 60 or so Labour MPs to be wined and dined in Israel.

In response to this extraordinary proof that the coup against him was sponsored by Israel and organized by someone whose job was to bring down anyone seen as its political opponent by fair means or foul, Corbyn said nothing for days.

He left it to Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry, who backed Corbyn in the leadership election, to describe the affair as a "national security issue." Late Friday, Corbyn belatedly sent a letter to May also stating that the issue was "clearly a national security issue," while saying nothing about its connection to the campaign to remove him as the elected Labour leader.

"The exposure of an Israeli embassy official discussing how to bring down or discredit a government minister and other MPs because of their views on the Middle East is extremely disturbing," Thornberry declared, denouncing "Improper interference in our democratic politics by other states" and calling for "an immediate inquiry into the extent of this improper interference..."

Nothing was said by Thornberry about Israel's efforts to "take down" her own party's leader.

Just a single article, bereft of serious analysis, on the issue has appeared on the pro-Corbyn news web site, *The Canary*.

While May's silence is bound up with her attempts to cultivate Trump, Corbyn's is part of his ongoing efforts to appease his party's right wing.

For months, Corbyn and his supporters faced slanderous accusations of anti-Semitism, focusing almost exclusively on any criticisms made of Israel's brutal treatment of the Palestinians. Many were summarily suspended or expelled from the party on the basis of such trumped-up charges.

This manufactured scandal was used to prepare the way ideologically for the adoption, expected later this year, by the May government of a definition of anti-Semitism drawn up by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The definition opens the way to widespread criminalising of political criticism of Israel, including as examples of anti-Semitism, "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour" and any comparison made between "contemporary Israeli policy" and "that of the Nazis."

Corbyn's reaction to this witch-hunt was to urge everyone to unite once more in the interests of "the party". For the same reason, the last thing he would want to do now is expose how his Blairite opponents conspired to remove him from office with the government of the arch war criminal Netanyahu.

The author also recommends:

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