

Patel resignation exposes UK's covert support for Israel and Islamist proxies

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The sordid tale of the Department for International Development (DFID) Secretary Priti Patel's fall from grace and resignation highlights the methods and true content of Britain's "aid" policy.

Forged by lobbyists and fixers behind the backs of the British public, it contrasts sharply with both the official line on aid and the propaganda of the "war on terror."

Patel, an ambitious politician tipped as a future prime minister and a vehement advocate of Brexit, is a longstanding supporter of Israel and a former vice-chairperson of Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI). She was forced to resign on November 8. Eight days earlier, the BBC's diplomatic correspondent James Landale reported that she had held 12 meetings with top Israeli officials—including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, opposition leader Yair Lapid of the Yesh Atid party and Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan—while supposedly on a 12-day "family holiday" to Israel in August.

The list of engagements, at least one of which was arranged by Israel's ambassador to London, reads like the official state visit of a top diplomat. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that she was on a mission that could not be publicly acknowledged. But Patel had allegedly failed to inform Prime Minister Theresa May, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson or Britain's ambassador to Israel of her meetings.

According to *Ha'aretz*, she also visited the Golan Heights and the Israeli army's field hospital, which it uses to treat Al Qaeda linked forces fighting the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, enabling them to return to the battlefield. As Israel's illegal annexation of the Golan in 1981 is not internationally recognised, she broke the rule that no British politician visits the Golan (or the West Bank and East Jerusalem).

On November 7, the BBC revealed that on her return, Patel had lobbied to divert part of the UK's international aid budget to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operations

in the Golan, and a joint project with Israel in Africa. It is widely reported that Israel has been aiding the Al Nusra Front and other Al Qaeda linked fighters, treating wounded fighters in Israeli hospitals, and providing them with training and reconnaissance information for their targets. Israel has worked closely with Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, the CIA and their proxies in their bid to topple the Assad regime.

Patel thus sought to use her department's aid budget for IDF field hospitals to support Islamist fundamentalist forces prepared to use atrocities to achieve their objectives. It was nothing but an attempt to launder money to the Islamists via Israel.

This should come as no surprise. Patel famously argued that Britain's aid budget should be cut unless it works in the national interest, and opposes aid to the Palestinians. Her department provides most of Britain's \$85 million a year aid to the Palestinian Authority and Gaza, as well as grants to human rights organisations that criticise Israel, including Amnesty International.

It emerged that her visits were arranged by Stuart Polak, who for 25 years was president of the Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI) and was rewarded with a baronetcy and the Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for political service by former Prime Minister David Cameron. Lord Polak heads the consultancy firm TWC Associates, whose clients include Israeli arms corporations. He attended several meetings in Israel alongside Patel.

Patel's unauthorised meetings were generally portrayed in the media as the behaviour of an arrogant politician who has scant regard for the norms of ministerial conduct. She had failed to inform either Number 10 or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) before or after her visits, which were not attended by civil servants. Nor were they minuted, so no one knows what she discussed with Netanyahu and other politicians.

However, it is now clear that the Israeli politicians and diplomats she met informed the FCO of their discussions almost immediately after they took place. Patel's meeting with Netanyahu was described as "successful," while Lapid and Erdan tweeted photos of their meetings with Patel. This means there is every reason to question whether the government was secretly informed beforehand, and that Patel had in fact acted with May's authorisation.

In any event, Patel's supposed disregard for diplomatic protocols was evidently not a problem for the FCO or Number 10, nor presumably was the content of her discussions. Rather the government suppressed information about Patel's meetings for at least two months, until the BBC brought it to public attention.

According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, Patel maintains that she discussed her proposals to use some of the aid budget for the IDF field hospitals with May in September, prior to the UN General Assembly. May did not dispute the validity of the plan, but said it would need to be agreed with the FCO, which later rejected it.

Speaking in the House of Commons last week, Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt defended Patel's "perfectly legitimate" right to raise the matter, adding that it was within the context of providing medical help for Syrian refugees who could not get assistance in their own country. He said the idea had been rejected because ministers did not think it would be "appropriate." May's spokesman was then forced to clarify that "The UK does not provide any financial support to the Israeli army."

It later emerged that Patel had two further undisclosed meetings with Israel's public security minister Gilad Erdan in parliament on September 7 and foreign ministry official Yuval Rotem in New York on September 18. Again, these were held without government officials being present. Although the Department for International Development had declined the proposed meeting with Erdan, Patel's constituency office later arranged it. It was the revelation of these meetings that finally forced May to demand Patel's resignation.

Erdan heads Israel's taskforce that monitors Palestinian and Israeli human rights organisations in Israel, the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) movement and other groups abroad that Tel Aviv accuses of seeking to delegitimise Israel.

This is not the first time that Israel has sought to influence ministers. Last January, *Al Jazeera* filmed Israeli officer Shai Masot, attached to the embassy in London, proposing to "take down"—by manufacturing a

scandal—Alan Duncan, a Foreign Office minister, and Crispin Blunt, the Conservative chair of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, because they were "strongly pro-Arab rather than pro-Israel".

Blunt had ordered an inquiry into British policy in the Middle East that would also examine "how UK policy is influenced by other states and interests." His successor, Tom Tugendhat, closed down the investigation.

According to the *Jewish Chronicle* and Labour Party deputy leader Tom Watson, Patel had spoke about these two further meetings to May, who asked Patel not to include them in her list, as it would embarrass the FCO.

May fired Patel because her exposure also revealed Britain's craven support for Israel and Islamist terrorists. The British prime minister's attitude to Israel's efforts to directly influence British political life at the highest level of government could not stand in sharper contrast to her pose of outrage over unsubstantiated accusations of Russia's attempts to subvert Britain's elections and plant fake stories in the media.

Just five days after quietly shunting Patel from cabinet, May delivered a speech at Mansion House accusing Russia of seeking to "weaponise information" so as to "sow discord in the West and undermine our institutions."

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