



### [Leaked Israeli Documents Unveil an Effort to Evade a Foreign Agent Lobbying Law](#)

Leaked files reviewed by *The Guardian* shed light on how due to Israel's fear of legal trouble over its U.S. advocacy efforts, officials concerned about the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) proposed the creation of an American nonprofit to try to avoid scrutiny. FARA was intentionally enacted by Congress back in the 1930s to help improve transparency regarding foreign influence endeavors in the United States, and thus the actions of the aforementioned officials represent a blatant attempt to skirt the law. Under the terms of FARA, those working on behalf of foreign interests are normally required to register as foreign agents with the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) and disclose their activities, relationships, and financial support in order to ensure maximum transparency on information that could influence American policy, laws, or public opinion. Instead, the evidence analyzed – which included emails and legal memos – showed that legal advisers suggested channeling funds through a third-party American nonprofit to prevent FARA registration and compliance.

The documents examined consisted of discussions about how to bypass FARA using what was referred to as a “PR commando unit” formed in 2017 by Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs to try and improve the government's image abroad. The group's initial aim was to undermine the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement which was created to draw attention to Israel's discriminatory policies towards Palestinians. It has also been tied to efforts to vilify American students legitimately protesting against the Gaza war, with a Likud minister who oversees that project bluntly telling the Knesset earlier this year that the group was set to “go on the offensive” against the aforementioned anti-war demonstrators. The batch of leaked documents and emails was released by a United States-based nonprofit responsible for disseminating several high-profile data hacks in recent years, and Amnesty International's (AI) security lab then analyzed it and concluded that there were no signs of it having been tampered with. In one of the uncovered emails, a legal adviser to Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs outlined the strategy for creating the nonprofit as a means of trying to sidestep the foreign agent lobbying law, stating that “We will have means of supervision and management,” and adding that grants and “informal coordination mechanisms” such as “oral meetings and updates,” would still guarantee control over the U.S. lobbying entity.

Ultimately, what played a significant role in sparking the increased concern regarding FARA was a series of enforcement actions against Trump administration officials for unregistered lobbying in support of foreign interests. Due to this, there was anxiety about the potential for a formal investigation by DOJ, and as a result, Israeli officials retained a law firm to analyze the FARA risks posed by Israeli advocacy efforts aimed at shaping U.S. policy and public opinion. There was also a calculated move to urge secrecy surrounding the Israeli government's use of the U.S. law firm, for fear of potential fallout regarding it. In the leaked documents, individuals outlined the increased public attention to FARA because of the investigation into Trump administration officials accused of operating as foreign agents for the Russian government. Hence, senior Israeli advisers contended that entities would not be interested in donating to groups registered under FARA, and therefore recommended the creation of a new American nonprofit whereby money could be funneled through to avoid detection of illegal behavior.

Experts have highlighted how any deliberate attempts by Israeli government officials to influence American policy or public opinion about foreign affairs would amount to a FARA violation by both agents serving the Israeli government and any knowing participants involved as well.