

WILL THE US SHARE INTELLIGENCE WITH ISRAEL'S NEW LEFT WING INTELLIGENCE INITIATIVE?

Ha'aretz reports that Israel's Military Intelligence set up a group several months ago dedicated to collecting intelligence on non-Israeli leftist organizations that criticize Israel.

Military Intelligence is collecting information about left-wing organizations abroad that the army sees as aiming to delegitimize Israel, according to senior Israeli officials and Israel Defense Forces officers.

The sources said MI's research division created a department several months ago that is dedicated to monitoring left-wing groups and will work closely with government ministries.

[snip]

Military Intelligence officials said the initiative reflects an upsurge in worldwide efforts to delegitimize Israel and question its right to exist.

"The enemy changes, as does the nature of the struggle, and we have to boost activity in this sphere," an MI official said. "Work on this topic proceeds on the basis of a clear distinction between legitimate criticism of the State of Israel on the one hand, and efforts to harm it and undermine its right to exist on the other."

The new MI unit will monitor Western groups involved in boycotting Israel, divesting from it or imposing sanctions

on it. The unit will also collect information about groups that attempt to bring war crime or other charges against high-ranking Israeli officials, and examine possible links between such organizations and terror groups.

Now aside from thinking generally that this is a bad idea, I'm particularly concerned about whether or not the US will share intelligence with Israel on such issues.

For example, the initiative says it will look for ties between groups critical of Israel and terrorist groups. How is that different from the investigation of a bunch of peace activists' ties with humanitarian organizations which has suggested the peace activists have ties to Hezbollah? And since we know OLC gave the President and certain Federal Officials the green light to ignore privacy protections on the sharing of grand jury information in the PATRIOT Act, does that mean our government will readily share the information they're collecting in that grand jury with the Israelis?

And to some degree, the Israelis wouldn't even have to rely on intelligence sharing, per se. In his book *The Shadow Factory*, James Bamford spent some time detailing the Israeli ties to key companies in our electronic surveillance, companies like Verint, which intercepts and stores communication, PerSay, which does voice mining, NICE, which does voice content analysis, and Narus, which enables real-time surveillance on telecom lines. Between Verint and Narus, Bamford writes,

Thus, virtually the entire American telecommunications system is bugged by two Israeli-formed companies with possible ties to Israel's eavesdropping agency—with no oversight by Congress.

And we can find such ties closer to home, too. The company that had been paid by Pennsylvania

to track potential threats to critical infrastructure which ended up tracking First Amendment protected speech, the Institute of Terrorism Research and Response, is an Israeli company. Among other groups it tracked (one key focus was anti-fracking groups) were peace organizations—precisely the kind of group that might oppose Israel's actions in Gaza.

The concern that federal and state entities have been paying companies with Israeli ties to collect information on groups that might include the same peace groups targeted by this new initiative in Israel is one thing.

But think of the other logical possibility. Our federal and state governments usually show some embarrassment when they get caught collecting intelligence on peace groups (though that doesn't seem to stop it from happening over and over again). What will stop those same government entities from asking Israel to collect such information?