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Espionage, Treason, and the Congressional Fifth Column

By Justin Raimondo

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The spectacle of virtually the entire Senate GOP caucus mobilizing in support of a foreign power in order to drag us into war with Iran has certainly been instructive. Not since the Federalist party plotted with the British during the War of 1812 has an American fifth column been so open about their treason.

But isn't the "t"-word a bit hyperbolic? After all, don't all Americans, even the worst warmongers among us, have the right to free speech? Those members of Congress were merely expressing their opinion – right?

Not so fast:

"Soon after the U.S. and other major powers entered negotiations last year to curtail Iran's nuclear program, senior White House officials learned Israel was spying on the closed-door talks.

"The spying operation was part of a broader campaign by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to penetrate the negotiations and then help build a case against the emerging terms of the deal, current and former U.S. officials said. In addition to eavesdropping, Israel acquired information from confidential U.S. briefings, informants and diplomatic contacts in Europe, the officials said.

"The espionage didn't upset the White House as much as Israel's sharing of inside information with U.S. lawmakers and others to drain support from a high-stakes deal intended to limit Iran's nuclear program, current and former officials said."

To be clear: the Israelis penetrated our communications, and used other means – including "informants" presumably inside the U.S. government – to uncover details about the emerging deal with Iran, and then passed this information on, perhaps indirectly, to their congressional fifth column, including presidential aspirants Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Rand Paul, all of whom then signed on to Sen. Tom Cotton's "open letter" to Tehran.

If this isn't treason, then the word has no meaning.

Speaker of the House John Boehner, who plotted with Israeli ambassador Ron Dermer behind the President's back to invite Netanyahu to address Congress, said he was "shocked" and "baffled" by the news. Not by the news they spied on us – it's well known that the Jewish state is among the most aggressive foreign adversaries our counterintelligence agencies have to fend off – but "by the fact that there were reports in this press article that information was being passed on from the Israelis to members of Congress. I'm not aware of that at all." What's baffling, however, is Boehner's behavior during this Israeli incursion onto American territory: why did he suddenly decide to go full wingnut and canoodle with the Israelis to bring Bibi to American shores? And how is it the Speaker has so little knowledge of what's going on right under his nose on Capitol Hill?

"The White House discovered the operation," reports Adam Entous of the *Wall Street Journal*, "when U.S. intelligence agencies spying on Israel intercepted communications among Israeli officials that carried details the U.S. believed could have come only from access to the confidential talks, officials briefed on the matter said." Those telling details then somehow found their way into conversations between the Israelis (and their American agents) and "U.S. lawmakers and others," accord to the *Journal*.

It's one thing to spy, said a top U.S. official, but "it's another thing to steal U.S. secrets and play them back to U.S. legislators to undermine U.S. diplomacy."

Given the extensive surveillance capabilities of our government, one assumes they have concrete evidence of such "play back." And surely the Israelis knew this, and yet didn't hesitate to engage in such brazen behavior. One can only conclude they *wanted* to get caught.

This is the Israeli style: flagrant flouting of diplomatic conventions and norms in order to display their prowess – and their utter contempt for their adversaries, in this case the Obama administration. And not only the Obama administration: for surely the Israelis knew their congressional enablers would be left hanging, at a loss to explain how such information came into their possession. One can almost hear them laughing in Tel Aviv: "Those stupid Americans, how they grovel before us – even as we kick them in the teeth!"

Relentless Israeli espionage in order to manipulate U.S. policy toward Iran is hardly new. The case of Larry Franklin, formerly a high ranking Pentagon Iran analyst, who handed over top

secret information to two employees of AIPAC – who then transmitted it to their Israeli handlers – underscores the lengths Tel Aviv will go to in order to push us into war with Tehran.

The two AIPAC officials – longtime AIPAC lobbyist Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman, a foreign policy analyst for the powerful pro-Israel group – were interested in procuring internal U.S. government documents detailing Washington's evolving stance toward Tehran. At the time there was a vigorous internal debate about whether to launch a preemptive strike against Iran, and the Israelis wanted the inside dope.

U.S. counterintelligence caught Franklin – a dyed-in-the-wool neocon, who had committed treason for purely ideological motives – red-handed, and confronted him. Faced with a long jail sentence, he agreed to be wired, and the FBI caught Rosen and Weissman on tape, openly celebrating their success in securing vital U.S. secrets on Israel's behalf. Franklin was sentenced to 12 years in prison, but was given time off for cooperating with investigators: Rosen and Weissman fought the charges, and were lionized by the neocon media as "martyrs" to "free speech" (!). The only reason they didn't wind up in the slammer was because they threatened to reveal in court the very secrets they had handed over to Israel: in the face of this blackmail, the government declined to pursue the case – although the charges were never dropped. Rosen slunk off to work for some neocon outfit, and the whole thing was forgotten. Perhaps it's time to recall it.

Speaking of AIPAC and the FBI: federal agents have raided AIPAC's Washington headquarters on no less than two occasions, looking for evidence of the same sort of collusion with Israeli spy agencies that our congressional solons have apparently engaged in. On December 1, 2004, FBI agents seized the hard drives of Rosen and Weissman at AIPAC's offices, and, as Richard Sale of UPI reported at the time:

"The FBI also served subpoenas on AIPAC Executive Director Howard Kohr, Managing Director Richard Fishman, Communications Director Renee Rothstein, and Research Director Raphael Danziger.

*"All are suspected of having acted as 'cut outs' or intermediaries who passed highly sensitive U.S. data **from high-level Pentagon and administration officials** to Israel, said one former federal law enforcement official."*

Franklin was nabbed when the FBI videotaped him in conversation with Naor Gilon, chief of political affairs at Israel's embassy in Washington, D.C. The feds were observing Gilon as part of a larger investigation into an extensive Israeli spying operation inside the U.S. government. As Sale reported:

"In 2001, the FBI discovered new, 'massive' Israeli spying operations in the East Coast, including New York and New Jersey, said one former senior U.S. government official. The FBI began intensive surveillance on certain Israeli diplomats and other suspects and was videotaping Naor Gilon, chief of political affairs at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, who was having lunch at a Washington hotel with two lobbyists from the American Israel Public Affairs

Committee lobby group. Federal law enforcement officials said they were floored when Franklin came up to their table and sat down."

U.S. counterintelligence agencies were hot on the trail of a much larger Israeli spying operation, of which the Franklin-Rosen-Weissman team was just the tip of the iceberg. Those "high-level Pentagon and administration officials" who were passing U.S. secrets to Israel were never caught, or at least they were never prosecuted. They are presumably still at large – and perhaps still embedded in the high councils of state.

Whenever Israel's aggressive spying in the U.S. is uncovered the usual excuse is that countries spy on each other all the time, and this practice is "routine" even among allies. Yet this is nonsense, and especially so in the case of Israel's covert activities in this country. The very real consequences of Israeli espionage on our soil are being felt today, in the present debate over the not-yet-signed U.S. deal with Iran.

This story goes back to the earlier part of this decade. The U.S. had cracked the Iranian inter-agency code, which gave Washington a vital window into the internal workings of the Tehran regime. Suddenly, however, all went dark. What had happened? The fact that we cracked their code had somehow been leaked to Tehran and the Iranians immediately changed their communications protocols: U.S. intelligence was blinded as to what was going on inside Iran.

So who was the leaker? Ahmed Chalabi, a neocon favorite with considerable support inside the Bush administration – who, it turned out, had been an Iranian agent all along – was the prime suspect. When Franklin was questioned about this he stopped cooperating with the FBI and secured a prominent lawyer, Plato Chacheris. This led to the raids on AIPAC.

When the Obama administration came into office the case against the AIPAC defendants was summarily dropped, much to the chagrin of U.S. counterintelligence agencies. These days I'm willing to bet administration officials are quite sorry they let those Israeli big fish – and their American minnows – off the hook.

So Boehner is "baffled," is he? Perhaps an interview with a couple of U.S. law enforcement officers – preferably conducted under hot lights, with him in a straight-backed chair – would succeed in un-baffling him. I seem to recall a number of people, among them prominent reporters such as Glenn Greenwald, who have been prosecuted or threatened with prosecution for passing classified intelligence along – or receiving it – without authorization. I wonder how many of those Senators who signed the Cotton letter were privy to classified information given to them courtesy of Israeli "briefers," and who then paraded around Washington braying about what a "bad deal" the administration was preparing to sign.

Do these esteemed solons think they're above the law? Clearly they do. One longs for the day when they realize they aren't – on the wrong side of a set of prison bars.