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## From AIPAC to Check Point

### Is Check Point's problem over Sourcefire caused by a hostile Washington bureaucracy?

Ran Dagoni, Washington 9 Mar 06 18:55

The [American Israel Public Affairs Committee](#) (AIPAC) held its Policy Conference in Washington this week. There were long speeches and discussions about the problems of the day (nuclear proliferation, Iran, and the rise of Hamas), as well as about the "strong alliance" between Israel and the US.

As in the past, this strength was seen in the impressive presence of senior administration official and Congresspersons, including Vice President Richard Cheney, who praised Israel's contribution to US security interests, and promised reciprocation in the form of constant support.

However, mingling in the crowded hallways of the Washington convention center that hosted the event gave one the impression that the threat of a mushroom cloud in Middle Eastern skies in the coming years bothered the thousands of participants far less than the clear and present danger to AIPAC: the pending trial of two senior officials, Steven J. Rosen, who was responsible for foreign affairs and was a strong figure in the lobby, and Keith Weissman, a former Middle East analyst.

Rosen and Weissman are suspected of "receiving classified information" without being authorized to do so, and passing it onto Israeli and other diplomats, as well as other crimes. They are not actually being charged with espionage, but these are still crimes could put them into federal prison for many years.

In an act of self-preservation, AIPAC fired the two men last year, shortly after they were exposed as supporting actors in a bureaucratic drama about the leak of information in the Bush administration, known as the "Pentagon mole affair". The mole was Defense Department Iran analyst Lawrence Franklin, who leaked to Rosen and Weissman juicy details from a presidential document about Iran and the threat that Iranian agents might kill Israelis in northern Iraq.

AIPAC feared that Rosen and Weissman would refuse to fall on their swords for the sake of the lobby, even though AIPAC offered them generous six-figure sums to finance their defense. The road the two men are expected to take is the one paved by Franklin. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison, but his sentence was slashed in exchange for cooperating with the prosecution.

If Rosen and Weissman decide to buy their freedom with confidential information about goings-on at AIPAC - and Washington sources believe that they will do so - AIPAC as we know it is liable to disappear, and this could have a decisive effect on US-Israeli relations.

However, beyond AIPAC's real distress, the affair reveals another worrying problem in US-Israeli relations. What exactly led to the capture of Rosen and Weissman? Is AIPAC under surveillance? Not necessarily. Former and current intelligence officials told "The New York Times" says, "The two men may have stumbled into an American intelligence operation involving electronic monitoring of Israeli interests in the US". The working assumption in Washington is that all embassies in the capital are exposed to surveillance, but it is not clear



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whether the surveillance of “Israeli interests” was limited to the embassy.

Some say that the entire affair is another sign that beneath the tight US-Israeli ties bubbles a constant US fear about Israeli espionage. Former AIPAC director of legislative affairs Douglas Bloomfield says this fear existed even before the Jonathan Pollard affair, but Pollard’s arrest in 1985 almost certainly drove US defense establishment figures to view Israel not only as an ally, but also as an adversary.

Flare-ups between Israel and the US over Washington’s allegations that Israel sold weapons and technology, some including US inputs, to China merely fanned the coals of hostility of these officials.

You don’t have to be excessively paranoid to see a link between the way Israel is perceived in some corners in Washington and the bureaucratic obstacles placed in the way of the acquisition of [Sourcefire](#) by [Check Point Software Technologies Ltd.](#) (Nasdaq: [CHKP](#)) last week. One of the Maryland-based IT security company’s products, Snort, is part of the intrusion prevention and detection technology systems used by the US Department of Defense and other entities in the US.

Ostensibly, the obstacles are anchored in national interest security considerations: a (rare) 45-day investigation into the security aspects of the transfer of control of sensitive technology to foreign hands. But when one examines the obstacle in light of well-publicized accusations spread by anonymous government sources against a few Israeli technology companies a few years ago, fear arises that Check Point ought to prepare not only to allay the regulator’s legitimate concerns, but also to deal with in-built hostility on the part of certain administration officials towards Israel, especially towards a particular sector of Israeli technology companies.

In May 2000, reports began appearing in the US media linking [Amdocs Ltd.](#) (NYSE: [DOX](#)) to the wiretapping of government communications. “Insight”, a magazine of the right-wing “Washington Times” group, cited “scores” of sources, including intelligence sources, who claimed that the FBI was convinced that Amdocs, a contractor for upgrading the White House’s telephony system, had listened to conversations in the president’s residence.

The reports was echoed widely, until “The New York Times” quoted two FBI sources as saying that Amdocs was clear of all suspicion. Nonetheless, the conclusion about Amdocs’s innocence only came after a year-long investigation. There were enough FBI officials to whom the allegations against the Israeli technology company seems likely enough to warrant such a lengthy investigation.

In December 2001, two months after the September 11 terrorist attacks, reports reemerged, again citing “federal sources”, about the involvement of Israeli technology companies in US espionage activities. In a series of shows, “Fox News” correspondent Carl Cameron claimed that, in the late 1990s, the FBI and other agencies had investigated Amdocs “more than once”. In 1999, the US National Security Agency (NSA) warned that electronic records telephone calls in the US had reached Israeli hands, according to Cameron.

In another report, Cameron said [Comverse Technology Inc.](#) (Nasdaq: [CMVT](#)) subsidiary Comverse Infosys, a provider of surveillance equipment to US law enforcement agencies, was itself conducting secret wiretapping through a back door in the equipment it installed.

This was not a marginal report or a loony medium. Fox is the leading television news channel, with twice as many viewers as CNN. Nor is Cameron small fry. He is now “Fox News” chief White House correspondent. Nor is “Fox News” hostile towards Israel; on the contrary, it is considered the most

pro-Israel television news channel in the US. This may explain why it erased Cameron's reports from its website a few days after they were broadcast. The reports can now only be found in electronic archives.

The reports disquieted Israeli diplomats at the time. They believed that there was a hard core of officials at the Defense Department, FBI, and other agencies, who bore bitter resentment of what they saw as Israeli intelligence operations in the US, rightly or wrongly. This assessment has not changed, and the same figures are probably involved.

As for Israel's Embassy in Washington, embassy spokesman David Segal said on Friday, "We have no comment on the matter."

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