

Pro-Israeli American Billionaires Helped by the White House “Make War on Iran”, Law Suit Reveals

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There is a group of American billionaires who are apparently doing their best to make sure that negotiations with Iran go nowhere in the mistaken belief that they are doing what is best for Israel. And they would also appear to be assisted in their efforts by the White House, which is at the same time claiming that it wants the talks to be successful. The odd relationship is currently playing out in a [Manhattan courtroom](#) where the Justice Department is seeking to squash a lawsuit that it fears might expose the extent to which the government has hypocritically played fast and loose with classified information while simultaneously sending journalists and whistleblowers to jail over allegations that they have done the same.

The power and wealth of the anti-Iran groups as well as their unrivaled access to the United States government means that a policy of détente with Iran, which would be a no brainer based on both American and Iranian interests, only proceeds by fits and starts with the US Congress and much of the media lined up solidly to stop the effort. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and its affiliated educational foundation, which have focused on the “Iranian threat” over the past three years, have a [combined budget](#) of more than \$90 million while AIPAC’s spin-off the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) has \$8.7 million.

The American Enterprise Institute’s (AEI) efforts are more diversified but uniformly hawkish when it comes to the Middle East. It has a [budget](#) of \$45 million. [Identified](#) multi-million dollar donor/supporters of AIPAC, AEI, and WINEP include Sheldon Adelson of Las Vegas Sands, Paul Singer of Elliot Management hedge fund and Bernard Marcus of Home Depot.

Other right wing think tanks including Heritage and Hudson in Washington also support unrelenting pressure directed against Iran. Even the more centrist Brookings Institute is [hard core](#) when it comes to Middle Eastern politics by virtue of its Saban Institute funded by Israeli-American billionaire Haim Saban. And then there are the mainstream Jewish organizations to include the Anti Defamation League, the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations and the American Jewish Congress, all of which have vast resources and unparalleled access to the White House, Congress and the media.

All the pro-Israel anti-Iran groups engage in pressure tactics on Capitol Hill and have been effective in dominating the political debate. Of thirty-six [outside witnesses](#) brought in to testify at seven Senate hearings on Iran since 2012 only one might be characterized as sensitive to Iranian concerns. The enormous lobbying effort enables the anti-Iran groups to define the actual policies, move their drafts of legislation through congress, and eventually see their bills pass with overwhelming majorities in both the House and Senate. It is

democracy in action if one accepts that popular rule ought to be guided by money and pressure groups rather than by national interests.

Less well known is [United Against Nuclear Iran](#), which has a budget just shy of \$2 million. UANI is involved in the New York lawsuit. The group, which has somehow obtained a 501[c]3 “educational” tax status that *inter alia* allows it to conceal its donors, has offices in Rockefeller Center in New York City. It is active on Capitol Hill providing “expert testimony” on Iran for congressional committees, to include “help” in drafting legislation. At a July Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Iran [all three](#) outside witnesses were from UANI. It is also active in the media but is perhaps best known for its “name and shame” initiatives in which it exposes companies that it claims are doing business with Tehran in violation of US sanctions.

UANI is [being sued](#) by a Greek billionaire Victor Restis whom it had outed in 2013. Restis, claiming the exposure was fraudulent and carried out to damage his business, has filed suit demanding that UANI and billionaire Thomas Kaplan turn over documents and details of relationships regarding UANI donors who it is claimed are linked to the case. Kaplan, a New York City resident, made his initial fortune on energy exploration and development. More recently he has been involved in commodities trading in precious metals. His wife Daphne is Israeli and his [involvement](#) in various Jewish philanthropies both in the US and in Israel have invited comparison with controversial deceased commodities trader Marc Rich, who reportedly [worked closely](#) with the Israeli government on a number of projects.

The Justice department would like to see the UANI lawsuit go away as it is aware that what is being described as “law enforcement” documents would include both privileged and classified Treasury Department work product relating to individuals and companies that it has investigated for sanctions busting. Passing either intelligence related or law enforcement documents to a private organization is illegal but the Justice Department’s only apparent concern is that the activity might be exposed. There is no indication that it would go after UANI for having acquired the information and it perhaps should be presumed that the source of the leak is the Treasury Department itself.

Who or what provided the documents to a private advocacy group that is also a tax exempt foundation supported by prominent businessmen with interests in the Middle East is consequently not completely clear but Restis is assuming that the truth will out if he can get hold of the evidence. The lawsuit claims that UANI intimidates its targets by defaming their business practices as well as by demanding both [examination](#) of their books and an audit carried out by one of its own accountants followed by review from an “independent counsel.”

Kaplan is named in the suit as he appears to be the gray eminence behind UANI. He once [boasted](#) “we’ve (UANI) done more to bring Iran to heel than any other private sector initiative.” Kaplan also employs as a director or officer in six of his companies the Executive Director of UANI Mark Wallace and [reportedly arranged](#) the awarding of the Executive Director position at Harvard’s Belfer Center to its President Gary Samore.

Kaplan is a business competitor to Restis, whose lawyers are apparently seeking to demonstrate two things: first, that the US government has been feeding sometimes only partially vetted information to UANI to help in its “name and shame” program and second, that UANI is itself supported by partisan business interests like Kaplan as well as by foreign sources, which apparently is meant to imply Israel. Or even the Israeli intelligence service

Mossad. Meir Dagan, former head of Mossad, is on the UANI advisory board, which also includes ex-Senator Joseph Lieberman and former Senior Diplomat Dennis Ross, both of whom have frequently been accused of favoring Israeli interests and both of whom might well have easy access to US government generated information.

And then there is the Muhadedin-e-Khalq, the Iranian terrorist group that has assassinated at least six Americans and is now [assisting](#) the Israeli government in killing Iranian scientists, a *prima facie* definition of what constitutes terrorism. The group was on the State Department terrorist list from 1997 until 2012, when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton de-listed it in response to demands coming from friends of Israel in Congress as well as from a large group of ex government officials, many of whom were paid large honoraria by the group to serve as advocates. The paid American skills [included](#) former CIA Directors James Woolsey and Porter Goss, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, former Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Louis Freeh and former United Nations Ambassador John Bolton. The promoters of MEK in congress and elsewhere claimed to be primarily motivated by MEK's being an enemy of the current regime in Tehran, though its virulent anti-Americanism and terrorist history make it a somewhat unlikely poster child for the "Iranian resistance."

Supporters of MEK [also ignore the fact](#) that the group is run like a cult, routinely executes internal dissidents, and has virtually no political support within Iran. But such are the ways of the corrupt Washington punditocracy, lionizing an organization that it should be shunning. MEK's political arm is located in Paris and it has long been assumed that it is funded by the Israeli government and by at least some of the same gaggle of billionaires, possibly including their Israeli counterparts, who support the anti-Iranian agenda in the United States.

Iranian negotiators have accepted that their country should have only limited uranium enrichment capabilities coupled with a rigorous inspection regime but the talks in Geneva drag on and on as the United States continues to hesitate, raising new objections regularly in spite of claims that it operates in good faith and seeks a settlement. That an agreement is within reach is undoubtedly true and it would even be good for Israel as it would remove the regional nuclear option while making much less likely another pointless and devastating war. But the men who write the checks do not see it that way and, unfortunately, they are the ones who all too often both pay the piper and call the tune.

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