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May 15th, 2002: THE ISRAELI ART STUDENT MYSTERY

http://www.snappingturtle.net/flit/archives/2002_05_15.html#000655

The Israeli conspiracy theorists continue to look for evidence that Israeli intelligence is somehow connected with Sept. 11. The U.S. has long been concerned about transfer of U.S. weapons technology to third-parties by the Israeli arms industry, particularly to China. They also got a rude awakening when one of their own spies, Jonathan Pollard, turned his coat and gave secrets to the Israelis in the mid-1980s. Rumours of Israeli spying have hovered around the edges of American consciousness more and more in the last five years... in early 1997, Bill Clinton told Monica Lewinsky he believed a "foreign embassy" was bugging his phones, widely seen as an accusation directed at Israel. Carl Cameron of Fox News has singlehandedly created a cottage industry around collecting Israeli spying claims, none of which have stood up to much scrutiny.

Akin to those is the recent "Israeli art student" story. What the Washington Post describes as a "disgruntled" DEA employee leaked a 60-page memo he wrote compiling contacts between federal agents and self-proclaimed art students going door to door, both at their homes and offices, over the last couple years: apparently he believed it worthy of further investigation, but his superiors were not convinced. That memo is now [available online](#), here, so everyone can draw their own conclusions. It's a fairly detailed summary of raw field reports, which added up seem really impressive, but likely aren't. There certainly does seem to be some kind of Israel-based fraud ring selling cheap paintings in the United States, using illegal immigrant labour... the suggestion however that these kids driving around in vans full of knock-offs are serious spies, or even targeting agents, have to be taken with a grain of salt. A revealing paragraph is this one:

94. [Student Nimrod] SIMKIN explained that they are part of a group of Israeli students who are working to earn money so that they may continue their education in Israel. All of the students travel to the United States on tourist visas and pay for their own airfare and living expenses. They remain in the U.S. for a period of four months then return to Israel. SIMKIN did not know how many students participate in this program but stated that in addition to himself and the three females currently with him there are three other students residing in Ft. Lauderdale. These students learn of this opportunity in Israel and they are put in touch with a several outlets where they purchase paintings out of pocket. The students then sell the paintings and they retain any profit for themselves.

Here's another one, in which a real Israeli intelligence officer tries to tip off American authorities while passing through:

125. On December 12, 2000, Shay ASHKENAZI, male, Israeli, DOB: 11-12-74, Israeli Passport number 6847902, arrived at the SEA TAC International Airport via Northwest Airlines flight 33 from Tel Aviv, Israel. He was referred for secondary

inspection by the I&NS Inspectors. As reported by I&NS Intelligence officer Omar N. Nuri, ASHKENAZI stated he was a former Israeli intelligence officer, and was now traveling to "enjoy life". He claimed to have been in the U.S. in April 2000, when he was involved in a car accident in South Carolina. The purpose of this trip was to finalize the case with his attorney and to receive medical treatment. ASHKEHAZI volunteered information that a fraud scheme involving Israeli nationals was taking place in the U.S. He stated that young male and female Israelis are being recruited in Israel to enter the U.S. with B-1/B-2 tourist visas and be employed as door-to-door salesmen of paintings that are shipped to the U.S. from Israel. He claimed that one of the individuals involved in this is "Mikael" (sic) and is present in Texas operating this business.

Here's another:

*127. On March 1, 2001, one male and one female purporting to be Israeli art students visited the home of a Special Agent from the Kansas City District Office. This Special Agent was TDY in Pittsburgh when this incident occurred. The two subjects made contact with the Special Agent's wife. The students were described as clean cut, 22 - 23 years of age, with a slight Middle Eastern appearance. They were carrying a large black portfolio and showed the Special Agent's wife a painting of a church. The Special Agent's wife told the students she was not interested and the students departed. No vehicle was observed. When the Special Agent returned on March 5, 2001, he canvassed his neighborhood and found that the students had contacted some of his neighbors. One neighbor told the agent that the students claimed they were from the University of Jerusalem. **None of the Special Agents neighbors are in the law enforcement field.***

Come on. Does this sound like a spy ring to you? Or is it just likely that, given a year of selling door-to-door in major U.S. cities, possibly hundreds of Israeli student sellers might have just happened to have hit a lot of law-enforcement related addresses? And given the utter lack of any evidence of followup contacts, or attempts by the students to pursue any, what is it exactly people suspect they're doing? Seeing if your average DEA agent could afford nice drapes? Occam's Razor, people...

PS: The memo identifies the "spies" ringleader as Michael Calmanovic of Irving, Texas. Phone no from Infobel: 972-252-4504... I suppose you could always phone him and ask him how he's planning to subvert the Drug Enforcement Agency, if you wanted. (Never let it be said I don't try to make journalists' lives easier.) But if it's true he's a no-goodnik and this was all it took to identify Israel's top spy in the United States, that would make this the worst. Spy Ring. Ever...

Update: [Justin Raimondo](#) says this memo is damning evidence that of course the Israelis knew about Sept. 11 in advance!

With the publication of "the 'Israeli Art Student' Papers," however, we are faced with only two possible explanations:

The Israelis knew, but didn't tell us, and [Carl] Cameron's surmise is confirmed, or:
The Israelis knew and did tell us, but the incompetence of the US government got in the way of effective preventive action.

May 15th, 2002: RAIMONDO'S SMOKING GUN

http://www.snappingturtle.net/flit/archives/2002_05_15.html#000654

It's actually kind of interesting to see how far [our favourite antiwar.com writer](#) had to stretch the truth of this [DEA memo](#) to "prove" Israeli culpability in Sept. 11.

Example 1: paragraphs 53-57 describe how the INS interviewed 3 Israeli computer programmers that flew into Dallas. One had a printout with the word "DEA" on it in his luggage. There was NO other connection between them and the rest of this story. Raimondo, however, describes them as "on their way to join their fellow 'art students'... something tells me these are no ordinary art students." Given that the only thing connecting them to the art ring was they were Israelis visiting the U.S at the same time, I suppose he's technically correct.

Example 2: One group of art sellers was apprehended (paras 76-82) when one girl **knocked** on an unmarked DEA office door in a Tampa bank building. To Raimondo, that's "a group [sic] of these "students" were apprehended trying to enter a locked, unmarked office." (The leader of the group had been depositing a lot of cheques recently... can't for the life of me think why a con man would have money like that, can you?)

Example 3: A wife of a DEA agent (para 135-7), had "virtually no dialog" with an individual selling art on her street and "immediately closed the door" on him. Raimondo: "One of the "students" tried to gain entry into [the agent's] home – no doubt, I am told, in order to plant a bugging device."

Example 4: One art seller was noticed while trying to enter a back door to a Richmond, Va DEA office (paras 131-32). Raimondo calls this a "break-in."

Example 5: Four sellers were picked up in Midwest City, OK, and held on visa violations (paras 175-77). Raimondo: they were "spies... nabbed... in the vicinity of Tinker AFB."

Example 6: Two Israeli tourists were picked up taking photos of a runway on a Wisconsin Air National Guard base (paras 178-82). One reacted angrily when asked if he'd ever been involved in the art ring. They asked to phone the Israeli embassy. Raimondo: "no doubt to receive further orders."

Example 7: The clincher for Raimondo, proving the art students' involvement in Sept. 11. Quoting another crackpot, he writes:

"An address for the Sept. 11 hijacking leader, Mohammad Atta, is 3389 Sheridan St. in Hollywood, Fla., only a few blocks and a few hundred feet from the address of some of the Israelis, at 4220 Sheridan."

Actually, that's not quite accurate. 3389 Sheridan Street is the address of a Mailbox Rentals store which was a mail drop for 4 of the other hijackers (Atta was not one of them). One (not some) of the Israeli art sellers apparently had an apartment on the

same street around the same time. And according to Mapquest, the two addresses are about a kilometre apart, not a "few hundred feet."

There's Justin's smoking gun. That's the whole evidence trail, laid out before you, that has him crowing of proof positive that Israel was behind Sept. 11. The man's articulate: I can't believe the guy doesn't see how weak a collective body of evidence it is. But once you're on your "antiwar" horse, I'm sure it's devilishly hard to get off... maybe the only thing left to do is play the busted flush for all its worth. Either that or he's an anti-Semitic idiot. Your call.

PS: Okay, let's peek through into Justin's Bizarro world for a sec and assume for argument's sake that the 24 year-old Israeli "art student," Hanane Sarfati (also referred to in the memo as Hanan Serfaty), whose apartment was a kilometre down the street from where the 4 hijackers were picking up their mail, was actually a spy, keeping tabs on Atta and co (or as Raimondo suggests, giving the hijackers their orders). So why was he:

- a. Driving around his team of 6-8 art students, all in their early 20s, in a red van in Tampa, conveniently for investigators with all his bank deposit records on him?
- b. Having one of his team go knock on the door of a Tampa DEA office?
- c. Having other members of the team selling art all day in office building lobbies in Tampa and Fort Lauderdale?
- d. Being so conspicuous that his team is repeatedly picked up by the authorities and questioned?

Atta was controlled/being surveilled by this crew? Come on...

October 7th, 2002: THE ART STUDENT STORY RESURFACES

http://www.snappingturtle.net/flit/archives/2002_10_07.html#000447

Two estimable blog owners, [Charles Johnston](#) and the [Shark](#) himself, have been gulled by a German Die Zeit piece Sharkansky has had translated [here](#). It's basically a retelling of the leaked DEA memo about an Israeli fraud ring involving fake "art students" that was working in the U.S. in early 2001. The full memo's [here](#). This was previously used by Justin Raimondo of antiwar.com and others to prove their wild-assed theories about Israeli involvement in the Sept. 11 attacks. The Shark is now citing it as evidence that the Mossad at least knew, and hence U.S. intelligence probably did as well, about Mohammed Atta and friends. This is somewhat more sane, but given the quality of the evidence, hardly compelling. Here's a few of the obvious problems with the Die Zeit piece:

Die ZEIT obtained the 61-page final report, according to which, 120 Israelis, organized into cells of four to six persons, formed a tightly organized and efficient espionage network.

The memo never concludes that the art student ring was definitely an espionage network. That's Die Zeit talking. The memo lists 125 names in an appendix at the back... not all are "art students." The memo says they were actually organized in groups of 8-10, not 4-6.

The Israelis were arrested, interrogated and subsequently deported.

Many Israelis without proper documents were deported following Sept. 11. There is no public evidence how many, if any of those students previously identified as part of the "art ring" were among them, even if they were still in the country at that time. Few, if any, were arrested or deported for their activities prior to Sept. 11, and certainly none for "espionage."

Both [Sept. 11 conspirators Atta and Al-Shehi] lived in Hamburg before they settled in Hollywood, Florida in order to plan the attacks.

Atta and Al-Shehi lived in Hollywood, Florida for a little over one month in all, arriving in early May, 2001 and leaving on June 13. That's not "settling," and the planning of the attacks was obviously well underway by that point.

A Mossad team was also operating in the same town. The leader, Hanan Serfati, had rented several dwellings. "One of Serfati's apartments was located on the corner of 71st St. and 21st Ave. in Hollywood, right near the apartment of Atta and al-Shehi.", French intelligence reported later.

There is no 71st St. and 21st Avenue intersection in Hollywood, to start with. As you can read below, the DEA picked up a group of Israelis for questioning on March 1, 2001, including Hanane Sarfati, 24 (also referred to as Hanan Serfaty in the DEA memo; the French report has yet another spelling), Eli Cohen, 23, and Oshirt Zaguri, 23. Cohen and Zaguri gave their addresses as apartments 207 and 4205 respectively in the building at 701 S. 21st Street. Apparently French intelligence has trouble

understanding American address nomenclature. Anyway, two and a half months later, on May 13, Atta and Al-Shehi moved into their own rented apartment at 1818 Jackson Street, a half mile south west of the place Cohen and Zaguri had been staying at. (They apparently picked the place after a couple nights at the Bimini Motel Apartments, several kilometres east). There is no evidence the two pairs of Mediterranean tourists were ever renting their respective apartments at the same time: obviously spying on Atta when Atta was actually IN TOWN would have been too easy for these highly trained Mossad SpyKids (23? Come on...), so they decided to do their spying months before he even ARRIVED.

The chief Israeli agent was staying right near the post office where the terrorists had a mailbox.

This was the piece of info that got Justin Raimondo convinced the Israelis were behind Sept. 11. For the record, four of the terrorists who arrived **in June** used the Mailbox Rentals store at 3389 Sheridan, in Hollywood, as their address while in the U.S. Mr. Sarfati (or whatever) was living in an apartment at 4220 Sheridan, about half a mile west, when the DEA picked him up **in March**.

Here once again, is the story of how that "tightly organized and efficient Mossad team" was fingered and picked up by the brilliant police work of the DEA, according to the DEA's own report. Note the particularly clever spylike behaviour bolded below. It can be hard to fathom the complex workings of these superspies, who were in this country cleverly disguised as stupid petty criminals. I know it would be easy to conclude from the paragraphs below that these were really a bunch of kids working a simple con game, who then turned scared and witless after they were picked up by the cops, but you have to realize that's all part of their cunning, secret-squirrel plan, the details of which only a supergenius of Justin Raimondo's calibre could derive from the raw field report details below. If it helps, try humming the "Mission Impossible" theme in your head while you read it:

"76. On March 1, 2001, at approximately 3:00 p.m., SA Kevin McLaughlin of the Tampa DO [DEA office] **responded to a knock at one of the fifth floor office doors.** (It should be noted that the Tampa DO occupies the fourth and fifth floors of a First Union bank Office building. The reception area is on the fourth floor, with the fifth floor doors being locked, and possessing no signs of identification.) At the door was a young female who immediately identified herself as an Israeli art student who had beautiful art to sell. She was carrying a crudely made portfolio of canvas, matted, but unframed pictures... When asked her name, she identified herself as Bella POLLCSON, and pointed out one of the paintings was signed by that name. **She then changed her story and said that the paintings were not for sale,** but that she was there to promote an art show in Sarasota, FL, and asked for the agents' business cards so that information regarding the show could be mailed to them. **She was not able to say when, or where the show would take place.** After this discrepancy, the agents began to question her more closely, and her responses were evasive at best. When asked whom she was with, **she stated that she was dropped at this office building by her Team Leader, who knew everything and could answer more questions.** The Team Leader was described as a male driving a red van, dropping off this female, with another four females and a male.

"77. Tampa DO agents then began searching the area around the Tampa DO office and found the individuals described by the young female. Two of the girls were on a street corner near another busy office complex area and **as agents were speaking with them,** the red van pulled up. All were escorted to the Tampa DO for questioning.

"78. Agents from the Tampa DO then interviewed each of the subjects. Through identification that was produced, it was revealed that the female who approached the Tampa DO and identified herself as Bella POLLICSON, was now identified as Inbal VAKSHI. The other subjects were: Sussie OSHRA, Keren KUZNITZ, Keren MATATIA, Livnat SELLA, Eli COHEN, Oshirt ZAGURI, Rachel KENDEL, and Hanan SERFATY. SERFATY, the driver of the red van, was identified as the Team Leader. All of the subjects gave ambiguous answers to the agents, but keeping to the story that they were Israeli art students.

79, VAKSHI produced an Israeli identification card, an Israeli passport, a student identification card, and a Florida driver's license for Sarah Minna SASSOON. VAKSHI stated that she had received the license from a friend of hers who was no longer living in Florida.

"80. S/A David Keikin interviewed subject Hanan SERFATY. SERFATY stated that he served in the Israeli military between the ages of 18-21. He further indicated that he arrived in the U.S. approximately one year ago at the age of 23. When questioned as to what he did between the ages of 21 and 24, he refused to answer. The interviewing agent indicated that SERFATY's command of the English language was excellent, even the utilization of slang words. SERFATY indicated that he resides in Hollywood, FL, with a phone number of (954) 478-1006. He further related that he purchases the paintings from an Anglo male, TOM for \$8.00-\$15.00/piece. In turn, each piece of artwork is subsequently sold for \$50-80. TOM allegedly resides in Hollywood/Ft. Lauderdale area, and reportedly has a storage unit in south Florida where he keeps the artwork to be picked up.

"81. It should be noted that in SERFATY's possession were **deposit and withdrawal slips** for Washington Mutual Bank account #038300002297689, dating, from December 19, 2000 through February 21, 2001. The fifty-one (51) slips were for transactions at various banks in Dade and Broward County, FL, banks, specifically in Coral Gables, Miami, Hollywood, Aventura, and Tamarac. The deposits for the timeframe totaled \$93,252.00, with withdrawals totaling \$86,000. Also in SERFATY's possession were four (4) deposit slips for First Union Bank account #1010017986436, from February 26, 2001 through March 1, 2001, totaling \$14,250."

The DEA memo goes on to state that checking with local police showed that this group had been canvassing parts of the Tampa-Fort Lauderdale area with their phony art for at least a week previously. As I said back in May, the DEA efficiently identified the ringleader of all these silly groups of Israeli kids (Serfaty's team was one of many, it's true) as Michael Calmanovic, a resident of Irving, TX, current phone number 972-252-4504. So if Congress or anyone else really thought this was ever worth their time (Charles? Shark?), it wouldn't be hard.