

## OPINION

# ISRAEL'S NEW NGO BILL WILL REVEAL HIDDEN AGENDAS

BY EMMANUEL NAVON ON 1/10/16 AT 6:56 PM



Israeli Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked speaks during a ceremony at the Justice Ministry in Jerusalem May 17. Shaked's proposed bill obliges Israeli NGO's to reveal if they get the majority of their funding from foreign organizations. GALI TIBBON/POOL/REUTERS

U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby has publicly rejected the comparison between the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and a recently proposed Israeli bill on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) funded by foreign governments. Kirby, however, did not explain why he rejects such a comparison. He certainly knows why: There is no explanation. In fact, FARA is stricter than the proposed Israeli bill.

FARA requires **agents who lobby** on behalf of foreign governments to register with the Department of Justice, and to report their activities and finances. The purpose of FARA is to prevent the deception of U.S. lawmakers by lobbyists who actually act on behalf of foreign governments in order to influence U.S. policy making and legislation. Lobbyists who do not comply with FARA can be severely punished. In March 2012, for example, Kashmir-born U.S.

lobbyist Syed Ghulam Nabi Fai was sentenced to **two years of imprisonment** by a U.S. court for not reporting a \$3.5 million donation from the Pakistani government.

The proposed Israeli bill would require Israeli NGOs that receive more than half of their funding from “foreign political entities” (i.e., the European Commission and European governments) to make that information public whenever they lobby elected Israeli officials and whenever they publish their reports.

The proposed bill does not restrict the activities of NGOs, neither does it limit the amount of money they can receive from foreign governments. Rather, the bill enables lawmakers to know whether they are being lobbied by an organization acting on behalf of foreign governments. NGOs whose funding is mostly governmental can hardly claim to be “non-governmental” and to not promote the agenda of the governments that fund them.

In recent years, the extent of European meddling in Israeli politics via supposedly “non-governmental” organizations has reached unprecedented levels. Both the European Commission and European governments donate dozens of millions of euros every year to Israeli NGOs that influence Israel's decision-making and that affect Israel's international standing. Some of these NGOs are active in the **BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanctions)** campaign; some support the so-called Palestinian right of return (which is incompatible with the two-state solution); some petition Israel's High Court of Justice to amend laws passed by the Knesset (Israel's parliament).

For example, the High Court of Justice was petitioned twice (in **2006** and in **2012**) to amend Israel's citizenship law so as to enable “family reunifications” between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians from the West Bank.

Yet the purpose of the petitioners (among them NGOs funded by European governments) was to open a backdoor channel for the granting of Israeli citizenship to Palestinians (via fictitious marriages). In 2009, European-funded Israeli NGOs actively testified to the **Goldstone Commission**, whose final report accused Israel of **intentionally committing war crimes** during its military operation in Gaza (an accusation later retracted by Judge Richard Goldstone himself).

If European governments want to influence Israel's policies, they should do so via the accepted diplomatic channels. If they choose to hide their game, that game should be exposed. Under the proposed Israeli transparency bill, government-funded NGOs will continue to operate freely and to receive unlimited amounts of foreign donations. But those NGOs will now have to reveal up-front to Israeli elected officials the identity and agenda of their backers.

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