INTERVIEW: Lee Fang Exposes Secret Israeli Propaganda Op

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Friend of the show, and intrepid investigative journalist, Lee Fang, has gotten his hands on some truly fascinating documents, documents that had been intended to be secret and that were secret until he and his co-author, Jack Poulson, were able to obtain them and then write about them. They are documents and WhatsApp chats that show – let's put the article on the screen. It's on Lee's Substack, which if you're not following and subscribing to, I really hope you will. It is some of the most important independent journalism, original reporting journalism. And there you see it: *Inside the Pro-Israel Information War.* "Israeli gov-led like calls, WhatsApp chat logs, and other documents provide a window into the massive effort to shape online discourse and silence pro-Palestinian voices." We have Lee tonight to talk about his reporting. Lee, it's great to see you, as always. Thank you for coming on the show tonight.

Lee Fang (LF): Thank you so much for having me.

GG: Yeah. So let me just ask you to start with, for those who haven't read the article and I really encourage everybody to go read this, what, for you, are the key findings? What is it that we learn from these documents you were able to obtain?

LF: Well, this is a very broad look at the organising behind the pro-Israel kind of side here in the US. I reported this over the last few weeks with my colleague Jack Poulson, who's the founder of Tech Inquiry, he is really a fantastic reporter who covers the tech industry and defence industry. And we took a look at one organisation, the J Ventures Global Kibbutz. This is an investment fund, a US Israeli investment fund. They formed a WhatsApp [channel] to support Israel in this war and it is composed of over 300 members, many very prominent tech executives, venture capitalists and other investors. They engaged in a number of activities, some of them very benign and perhaps even laudatory; raising funds for medical supplies, helping with Israeli hospitals and other humanitarian goods for communities affected by this conflict. But this piece kind of looks also at the advocacy and lobbying. It's

through this WhatsApp channel and perhaps many other channels that pro-Israel forces have organised to cancel pro-Palestinian speakers, to shut down events, to support universities in cancelling and revoking the status for pro-Palestinian activist groups from students, including the decision by Columbia to revoke the status for two pro-Palestinian groups. In addition, it looks at how there's a role of Israeli government officials. Of course, any group in the US has the right to speak up on a major public policy, there's no controversy there. What's unusual here is that we have many examples of Israeli government officials, folks from the IDF or from the Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry, sitting in on these WhatsApp meetings, providing guidance, providing talking points, guiding the advocacy, kind of suggesting strategy for social media, suggesting strategy for engaging opponents and really encouraging tech elites and Silicon Valley elites to use their influence with universities, with lawmakers and others to support Congress providing military support to Israel, to kind of shape the conversation, the discourse, the media discourse to support the pro-Israel narrative.

GG: One of the things you say in the article is that part of the goal of this effort is to shape online discourse and also to silence pro-Palestinian voices. What are some of the examples you have of how they try to silence pro-Palestinian voices?

LF: Well, in mid October, and this is just one example, there was an employee of Wix – it's a company, it's a website building company with a big base in Israel – this was an employee in Ireland who tweeted "Free Palestine".

GG: And that was it. No "From the river to the sea". No "Intifada", "Global intifada", just "Free Palestine".

LF: Initially, that was the tweet. I apologise, she posted on LinkedIn. The initial message was just "Free Palestine". Later she elaborated on that, she opposes an exclusive Zionist project that does not give equal rights to Palestinians, that type of message. But initially what was captured and shared with this 300 person WhatsApp group was just the "Free Palestine" message. And members of that group immediately said, we need to take action on this. It's already been referred to a high level executive at Wix, and that high level executive said it's been taken care of. We'll be announcing something later today. And indeed, the next day it was announced that this employee was fired. In addition, there are many examples in this piece. Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian-American in Congress, was slated to appear for a pro-Palestinian lecture at the Arizona State University. This was brought to the attention of the group. Many members collaborated in sending messages to the university campus president to even the mayor's office in Scottsdale, applying pressure in other ways. And indeed, that event was cancelled. Mohamed El-Kurd, a writer from The Nation from East Jerusalem, was slated to appear at the University of Vermont for a lecture. Again, there was an organising effort started by tech executives on this WhatsApp group to apply pressure, and indeed that event was also cancelled. I want to say I don't know if this was the determining factor, but it appeared to have some influence over these university decisions. They were kind of bland or kind of confusing reasons that were publicly given around public safety or

procedural reasons for why these events were cancelled. It didn't really make sense, but we're seeing free speech being snuffed out around this country, around this issue. Many journalists, academics and others have lost their job for expressing a controversial speech or speech that's perceived as pro-Palestinian or anti-Israel.

GG: Yes. And the censorship and the punishment and the cancellation have all almost entirely been in one direction of how pro-Palestinian voices or critics of the Israeli government, those are the ones who have been fired or have been deplatformed or who have otherwise been punished or taken out of schools or banned from accessing student groups or whereas almost no – there's about what, maybe one or two cases pro-Israel activists and advocates who are deemed to have gone too far and had some issues with their job. But the lopsidedness is so, so, so drastic. And this is one of the things that is been agitating me and that I think your reporting shed some light on, which is whenever there is an attempt to censor political speech in the United States and in this case it is being done to protect a foreign country, you need some kind of a crisis that goes along with it. You need some reason why people are endangered and why this speech is so menacing that it has to be stopped. And the narrative that has been created is a kind of victimhood narrative that the American right has spent years in this country heaping scorn on when it was for Black people or Latinos or immigrants or Muslims or trans people, or LGBT: Oh you poor little babies... You don't feel safe on college campuses. Do you need to have a security blanket? And now suddenly, because it's American Jews: Oh, American Jewish students at Harvard and Yale and MIT, these are the most endangered people on the planet. And the irony of it is that you have, in reality almost every major power centre, obviously the US Congress and all kinds of industrial leaders and hedge fund billionaires like Bill Ackman who are completely working as is their right, but they're unified and very powerful working to punish people who are critical of Israel. Who are the kinds of people who are in this group, how powerful are they? Are they influential? Who are these people working to control and shape discourse in the United States and punish people who are critics of Israel or pro-Palestinian?

LF: Well, one example is Bessemer Venture Partners. That's one of the largest venture capital firms in Silicon Valley, a big investment firm behind some of the leading lights in tech, multiple billions of dollars under management, they have several of their partners in this orbit. In fact, the head of the Israel office for Bessemer, led a webinar last month alongside a spokesperson with the IDF and in uniform for tech leaders to engage in social media war, really explaining that the only way for the IDF to have space on the battlefield is to win on the media and social media battlefield. That you should ridicule opponents that, you know, kind of listing out different talking points to engage here. And again, any activist group, any special interest has a right to speak out, to engage on social media. What's interesting is the level of power here. Many powerful tech leaders and also the fact that they're doing this alongside a foreign military. That is unusual. Looking at this broadly, we've had also several social media seminars from the Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry, similarly telling American audience members how to engage when commenting on university campus news articles that

when you go into the comment section, here are different arguments you can make, here's how you should tag the university president to get them involved in the dispute. Clearly kind of bringing in the issues around safety and security. And that's been made explicit in this 300 member WhatsApp group. The issues that you reference around, what's been called wokeness, that historically disadvantaged or oppressed identity groups – whether that's sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or religion – because of those histories that we have to create a safe space, a safe and inclusive space, that any kind of criticism that can be perceived as offensive to these historically disadvantaged groups needs to be shut down and we need to create separate safe spaces for these organisations. Well, that's the kind of rhetoric and kind of value system that's being weaponized in this chat room. They're suggesting in their form letters to elite colleges that you should cite the need to provide Jewish students an inclusive and safe environment. Again, the same rhetoric that was used to shut down debate in 2020 to cancel dozens of speakers on other racial issues. That same rhetoric is being applied and being recommended by these WhatsApp groups, by these kinds of government officials and tech leaders that is being used to cancel events to pressure the cancellation of student groups.

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