



TOO BIG TO FAIL

FORMER ISRAELI INTEL OFFICIAL CLAIMS JEFFREY EPSTEIN, GHISLAINE MAXWELL WORKED FOR ISRAEL

Since the apparent death by suicide of Jeffrey Epstein in a Manhattan prison, much has come to light about his depraved activities and methods used to sexually abuse underage girls and entrap the rich and powerful for the purposes of blackmail. Epstein's ties to intelligence, described in-depth in a recent *MintPress* investigative series, have continued to receive minimal mainstream media coverage, which has essentially moved on from the Epstein scandal despite the fact that his many co-conspirators remain on the loose.



For those who have examined Epstein's ties to intelligence, there are clear links to both U.S. intelligence and Israeli intelligence, leaving it somewhat open to debate as to which country's intelligence apparatus was closest to Epstein and most involved in his blackmail/sex-trafficking activities. A recent interview given by a former high-ranking official in Israeli military intelligence has claimed that Epstein's sexual blackmail enterprise was an Israel intelligence operation run for the purpose of entrapping powerful individuals and politicians in the United States and abroad.

In an interview with Zev Shalev, former *CBS News* executive producer and award-winning investigative journalist for *Narativ*, the former senior executive for Israel's Directorate of Military Intelligence, Ari Ben-Menashe, claimed not only to have met Jeffrey Epstein and his alleged madam, Ghislaine Maxwell, back in the 1980s, but that both Epstein and Maxwell were *already* working with Israeli intelligence during that time period.

“THEY FOUND A NICHE”

In an interview last week with the independent outlet *Narativ*, Ben-Menashe, who himself was involved in Iran-Contra arms deals, told his interviewer Zev Shalev that he had been introduced to Jeffrey Epstein by Robert Maxwell in the mid-1980s while Maxwell's and Ben-Menashe's involvement with Iran-Contra was ongoing. Ben-Menashe did not specify the year he met Epstein.

Ben-Menashe told Shalev that “he [Maxwell] wanted us to accept him [Epstein] as part of our group I'm not denying that we were at the time a group that it was Nick Davies [Foreign Editor of the Maxwell-Owned *Daily Mirror*], it was Maxwell, it was myself and our team from Israel, we were doing what we were doing.” Past reporting by Seymour Hersh and others revealed that Maxwell, Davies and Ben-Menashe were involved in the transfer and sale of military equipment and weapons from Israel to Iran on behalf of Israeli intelligence during this time period.

He then added that Maxwell had stated during the introduction that “your Israeli bosses have already approved” of Epstein. Shalev later noted that Maxwell “had an extensive network in Israel at the time, which included [the later Prime Minister] Ariel Sharon, according to Ben-Menashe.”

Ben-Menashe went on to say that he had “met him [Epstein] a few times in Maxwell's office, that was it.” He also said he was not aware of Epstein being involved in arms deals for anyone else he knew at the time, but that Maxwell wanted to involve Epstein in the arms transfer in which he, Davies and Ben-Menashe were engaged on Israel's behalf.



Ariel Sharon (right) meets with Robert Maxwell in Jerusalem on Feb. 20, 1990. Photo | AP

However, as *MintPress* reported in Part IV of the investigative series “Inside the Jeffrey Epstein Scandal: Too Big to Fail,” Epstein was involved with several arms dealers during this period of time, some of whom were directly involved in Iran-Contra arms deals between Israel and Iran. For instance, after leaving Bear Stearns in 1981, Epstein began working in the realms of shadow finance as a self-described “financial bounty hunter,” where he would both hunt down and hide money for powerful people. One of these powerful individuals was Adnan Khashoggi, a Saudi arms dealer with close ties to both Israeli and U.S. intelligence and one of the main brokers of Iran-Contra arms deals between Israel and Iran. Epstein would later forge a business relationship with a CIA front company involved in another aspect of Iran-Contra, the airline Southern Air Transport, on behalf of Leslie Wexner’s company, The Limited.

During this period, it is also known that Epstein became well acquainted with the British arms dealer Sir Douglas Leese, who collaborated with Khashoggi on at least one British-Saudi arms deal in the 1980s. Leese would later introduce Epstein to Steven Hoffenberg, calling Epstein a “genius” and describing his lack of morals during that introduction. Thus, there are indications that Epstein was involved with Middle Eastern arms deals, including some related to Iran-Contra, during this period. In addition, Epstein would later claim (and then subsequently deny) having worked for the CIA during this period.

After having been introduced to Epstein, Ben-Menashe claimed that neither he nor Davies were impressed with Epstein and considered him “not very competent.” He added that Ghislaine Maxwell had “fallen for” Epstein and that he believed that the romantic relationship between his daughter and Epstein led Robert Maxwell to work to bring the latter into the “family business” — i.e., Maxwell’s dealings with Israeli intelligence. This information is very revealing, given that the narrative, until now at least, has been that Ghislaine Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein did not meet and begin their relationship until after Robert Maxwell’s death in 1991, after which Ghislaine moved to New York.

Ben-Menashe says that well after the introduction, though again he does not specify what year, Ghislaine Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein began a sexual blackmail operation with the purpose of extorting U.S. political and public figures on behalf of Israeli military intelligence. He stated:

“In this case what really happened, my take on it, in the later thing, is that these guys were seen as agents. They weren’t really competent to do very much. And so they found a niche for themselves — blackmailing American and other political figures.”

He then confirmed, when prompted, that they were blackmailing Americans on behalf of Israeli intelligence.

In response to his statement, Zev Shalev replied, “But, you know, for most people it’s hard for them to think of Israel as being ... blackmailing their leaders in the United States, it’s a very ...” at which point, Ben-Menashe interrupted and the following exchange took place:

Ari Ben-Menashe: You’re kidding? [laughs]... It was quite their M.O. Sleeping around is not a crime, it may be embarrassing, but it’s not a crime, but sleeping with underage girls is a crime.

Shalev: It was a crime in 2000 as well, but they let him off that...

Ben-Menashe: And that it is [why] always so he [Epstein] made sure these girls were underage.

In addition, when Shalev asked Ben-Menashe about the relationship between Jeffrey Epstein and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Ben-Menashe stated “After a while, you know, what Mr. Epstein was doing was collecting intelligence on people in the United States. And so if you want to go to the U.S. if you’re a high-profile politician you want to know information about people.” Ben-Menashe subsequently stated that Barak was obtaining compromising information (i.e., blackmail) that Epstein had acquired on powerful people in the United States.

PROMIS, SEX, AND BLACKMAIL

If Robert Maxwell did recruit Epstein and bring him into the “family business” and the world of Israeli intelligence, as Ben-Menashe has claimed, it provides supporting evidence for information provided to *MintPress* by a former U.S. intelligence official, who chose to remain anonymous in light of the sensitivity of the claim.

This source, who has direct knowledge of the unauthorized use of PROMIS to support covert U.S. and Israeli intelligence projects, told *MintPress* that “some of the proceeds from the illicit sales of PROMIS were made available to Jeffrey Epstein for use in compromising targets of political blackmail.” As was noted in a *Mintpress* series on the Epstein scandal, much of Epstein’s funding also came from Ohio billionaire Leslie Wexner, who has documented ties to both organized crime and U.S. and Israeli intelligence.

After the PROMIS software was stolen from its rightful owner and developer, Inslaw Inc., through the collusion of both U.S. and Israeli officials, it was marketed mainly by two men: Earl Brian, a close aide to Ronald Reagan, later U.S. envoy to Iran and close friend of Israeli spymaster Rafi Eitan; and Robert Maxwell. Brian sold the bugged software through his company, Hadron Inc., while Maxwell sold it through an Israeli company he acquired called Degem. Before and following Maxwell’s acquisition of Degem, the company was a known front for Mossad operations and Mossad operatives in Latin America often posed as Degem employees.

With Maxwell — Epstein's alleged recruiter and father of Epstein's alleged madam — having been one of the main salespeople involved in selling PROMIS software on behalf of intelligence, he would have been in a key position to furnish Epstein's nascent sexual blackmail operation with the proceeds from the sale of PROMIS.

This link between Epstein's sexual blackmail operation and the PROMIS software scandal is notable given that the illicit use of PROMIS by U.S. and Israeli intelligence has been for blackmail purposes on U.S. public figures and politicians, as was described in a recent *MintPress* report.

CAN AN EX-SPY BE TRUSTED?

When dealing in the world of deception and intrigue that defines intelligence operations, it is often difficult to determine whether any individual linked to an intelligence agency is telling the truth. Indeed, in the United States, there are examples of elected intelligence officials committing perjury and lying to Congress on several occasions with no consequences, and of intelligence officials feeding politically motivated and untrue information to agency assets in the media.

So, are Ari Ben-Menashe's claims regarding Epstein and the Maxwells trustworthy? In addition to the aforementioned, corroborating information for his claims, a review of Ben-Menashe's post-intelligence career suggests this is the case.



Ari Ben-Menashe arrives at Harare International Airport, in Zimbabwe, Feb. 22, 2002. Photo | AP

Prior to his arrest in November 1989, Ben-Menashe was a high-ranking officer in a special unit of Israeli military intelligence. He would later claim that his arrest for attempting to sell American-made weapons to Iran was politically motivated, as he had threatened to expose what the U.S. government had done with the stolen PROMIS software if the U.S. did not cease providing Saddam Hussein's Iraq with chemical weapons. Ben-Menashe was later acquitted when a U.S. court determined that his involvement in the attempted sale of military equipment to Iran was done on behalf of the Israeli state.

After his arrest, Ben-Menashe was visited in prison by Robert Parry, the former *Newsweek* contributor and *Associated Press* reporter who would later found and run *Consortium News* until his recent passing last year. Parry remembered that, during that interview, “Ben-Menashe offered me startling new information about the Iran-Contra scandal, which I thought that I knew quite well.”

Israel’s government immediately began to attack Ben-Menashe’s credibility following his interview with Parry, and claimed that Ben-Menashe had never worked for Israeli intelligence. When Parry soon found evidence that Ben-Menashe had indeed served in Israeli military intelligence, Israel’s government was then forced to admit that he had worked for military intelligence, but only as a “low-level translator.” Yet, the documentation Parry had uncovered described Ben-Menashe as having served in “key positions” and performed “complex and sensitive assignments.”

A year later, Ben-Menashe would be interviewed by another journalist, Seymour Hersh. It would be Ben-Menashe who first revealed to Hersh secrets about Israel’s nuclear program and the fact that British media mogul Robert Maxwell was an Israeli spy, revelations that Hersh would not only independently corroborate but include in his book *The Samson Option: Israel’s Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy*. Hersh was then sued by Robert Maxwell and the Maxwell-owned Mirror Group for libel. The case was later settled in Hersh’s favor, as the claims Hersh had made were true and not libelous. As a result, the Mirror Group paid Hersh for damages, covered his legal costs, and issued him a formal apology.

After Ben-Menashe's interviews by Hersh and Parry, Israel's government was apparently concerned enough about what Ben-Menashe would tell congressional investigators that it attempted to kidnap him and bring him back to Israel to face state charges, much like Israeli intelligence had done to Israel's nuclear-weapons whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu. The plan was foiled largely thanks to Parry.

Parry, who broke many key stories related to the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s and beyond, was tipped off by a U.S. intelligence source about a joint U.S.-Israel plan to have Ben-Menashe first be denied entry to the United States on his planned trip to give congressional testimony. Per the plan, Ben-Menashe would be denied entry to the U.S. in Los Angeles and then be deported to Israel, where he would have stood trial for "exposing state secrets." Parry called Ben-Menashe and convinced him to delay his flight until he secured a guarantee for safe passage from the U.S. government.

Ben-Menashe subsequently gave a sworn statement to the House Judiciary Committee that mostly focused on U.S.-Israel collusion regarding the theft and creation of a "backdoor" into the PROMIS software. Ben-Menashe offered to name names and provide corroborating evidence for several of his claims if he was offered immunity by the committee, which, for whatever reason, declined that request.

Prior to the conclusion of the Hersh “libel” trial, which would later uphold Ben-Menashe’s claims regarding Robert Maxwell’s Mossad activities as true, there was a concerted effort in the U.S. press to downplay Ben-Menashe’s credibility. For instance, *Newsweek* — in an article on Ben-Menashe entitled “One Man, Many Tales” — claimed that “inconsistencies may undermine Ben-Menashe’s testimony in the British courtroom proceedings,” citing inconsistencies from sources in Israel’s government and Israeli intelligence as well as Ben-Menashe’s ex-wife and Israeli journalist Shmuel (or Samuel) Segev, a former IDF colonel. It goes without saying that such sources had much to gain from any effort to discredit Ben-Menashe’s claims.

According to Parry, this media campaign, which employed American journalists with close ties to Israel’s government and intelligence agencies, was very successful “in marginalizing Ben-Menashe by 1993, at least in the eyes of the Washington Establishment.” After a years-long media campaign to discredit Ben-Menashe, “the Israelis seemed to view him as a declining threat, best left alone. He was able to pick up the pieces of his life, creating a second act as an international political consultant and businessman arranging sales of grain.” The effort to marginalize Ben-Menashe has continued well into recent years, with mainstream news outlets still referring to him as a “self-described ex-Israeli spy” — despite the well-documented fact that Ben-Menashe worked for Israeli intelligence — as a means of downplaying his claims regarding his time in Israel’s intelligence service.

After the conclusion of the Hersh libel trial, Ben-Menashe became an international political consultant who “surrounded his far-flung business activities in secrecy and got involved with some controversial international figures, such as Zimbabwe’s leader Robert Mugabe,” and

“conducted his international consulting business ... in a wide variety of global hotspots, including conflict zones,” according to Parry. In addition to Mugabe, Ben-Menashe has also recently come under fire for his consulting work on behalf of Sudan’s military junta and Venezuelan opposition politician Henri Falcón.

Ben-Menashe has also maintained ties to several different intelligence services and eventually became a controversial whistleblower whose information led to the arrest of the former head of Canada’s Security Intelligence Review Committee, Arthur Porter.

As far as his character is concerned, Parry noted that Ben-Menashe could often be “his own worst enemy” and that, even though Parry considered his information regarding Iran-Contra and PROMIS reliable and noted that much of it was later corroborated, he “often compound[ed] his media problem by treating journalists in a high-handed manner, either due to his suspicions of them or his arrogance.”

Bill Hamilton, the original developer of the PROMIS software and head of Inslaw Inc., also found Ben-Menashe’s claims regarding the illicit use of PROMIS by U.S. and Israeli intelligence agencies to be credible, though he expressed doubts about Ben-Menashe’s character.

Hamilton told *MintPress* the following about Ben-Menashe:

“*Ari Ben Menashe was the first source to tell us reliable information about the role of Rafi Eitan and Israeli intelligence vis-a-vis PROMIS but, in the end, of course, he was a clandestine services-type guy whose official duties include the ability and willingness to lie, cheat, and steal.*”

A THREAT REVIVED

While Ben-Menashe may have been viewed as a “declining threat” after the early 1990s, his plans to meet with Robert Parry of *Consortium News* years later in 2012 to discuss Iran-Contra and other covert dealings of the 1980s appeared to change that. Right before he planned to travel from Canada to the United States to meet with Parry and “finally prove” the truthfulness of his past claims, a fire-bomb was thrown into his Montreal home, destroying it.



**Ari Ben-Menashe surveys the damage to his home after it was mysteriously firebombed. Photos
| Robert Parry**

Though Canadian media referred to the incendiary device as a “molotov cocktail,” *Consortium News* reported that “the arson squad’s initial assessment is said to be that the flammable agent was beyond the sort of accelerant used by common criminals,” leading to speculation that the accelerant was military-grade.

Had it not been for the bomb, the origins of which Canadian police failed to determine, Ben-Menashe would have traveled to the U.S. alongside a “senior Israeli intelligence figure” to be interviewed by Parry. The other intelligence-linked individual, according to Parry, “concluded that the attack was meant as a message from Israeli authorities to stay silent about the historical events that he was expected to discuss.”

Though neither Ben-Menashe nor Parry directly blamed Israel’s government for the destruction of Ben-Menashe’s home, Parry noted that the bombing did succeed in “intimidating Ben-Menashe, shutting down possible new disclosures of Israeli misconduct from the other intelligence veteran, and destroying records that would have helped Ben-Menashe prove whatever statements he might make.”

While Ben-Menashe’s post-intelligence associations with controversial governments and individuals have given plenty of fodder to the still thriving media campaign to discredit his claims about covert U.S.-Israel operations in the 1980s, there remain troubling indications that the Israeli government sees his information on decades-old events as a threat.