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## U.S. Embassy Met With Group Trying to Influence Israeli Elections

Posted By [Alana Goodman](#) On February 9, 2015 @ 2:30 pm In [Issues](#) | [No Comments](#)

Top officials at the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv met in late January with one of the main progressive groups working to tip the upcoming Israeli elections against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and helped facilitate the organization's visit to the United States this week to learn political organizing techniques.

The State Department helped the nonprofit group Givat Haviva secure last-minute visas for a delegation of Arab-Israeli mayors, which is in the United States this week meeting with civic leaders and attending discussions on voter outreach and community organizing. The delegation arrived on Feb. 4 and is in Washington, D.C., through Wednesday.

Givat Haviva is part of a coalition of U.S.-funded progressive groups working to influence the Israeli elections, the *Washington Free Beacon* reported last week. The organization, which has chapters in both the United States and Israel, is leading an effort to increase voter turnout among Arab Israelis, who traditionally oppose right-leaning parties such as Netanyahu's Likud.

Top American diplomats met with Givat Haviva and the Arab-Israeli mayors at the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv on Jan. 29, where they discussed the plans for this week's visit. U.S. officials at the meeting included the deputy mission chief, the CIA station chief, and the cultural attaché, according to an attendee.

The Givat Haviva Institute's co-executive director Mohammad Darawshe, the main organizer of the delegation, told the *Free Beacon* that the meeting was just a "farewell greeting from the embassy staff after they helped with getting the visas."

The State Department said it would provide a summary of the meeting to the *Free Beacon* last Wednesday, but as of Monday afternoon had not provided one.

Givat Haviva was also scheduled to meet with the State Department's Bureau of Near East Affairs in Washington, D.C., on Monday, but the meeting was abruptly canceled following inquiries from the *Free Beacon*.

Moti Kahana, an Israeli American businessman who funded the delegation visit, told the *Free Beacon* on Monday morning that he was not sure why the meeting was canceled.

The State Department, which has provided funding for Givat Haviva in the past, said last week that it would not be meeting with the mayoral delegation.

"The State Department, including [the Middle East Partnership Initiative], had no involvement in organizing or funding the trip, and will not be meeting with the delegation," said a State Department official.

The agency did not respond to request for comment when asked specifically about the scheduled meeting on Monday. The delegation organizer Darawshe had previously said they had no meetings scheduled with U.S. officials.

The State Department declined to comment on whether it helped expedite the mayoral delegation's visas. However, internal Givat Haviva correspondence shared with the *Free Beacon* indicates that the delegation received special attention from U.S. officials.

On Jan. 22, Darawshe wrote to other trip organizers and asked for the names and information about the mayors planning to attend the trip.

"[State Department Program Specialist] Manal Haddad from the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv is ready to help get the visas for mayors," wrote Darawshe.

The delegation received its visas one week later. The State Department told the *Free Beacon* that the

approval process for travel visas from Israel typically takes around 12 weeks to complete.

American involvement in the Israeli elections recently came under scrutiny after *Ha'aretz* reported that President Obama's reelection team and the U.S. nonprofit group OneVoice were helping the V15 campaign to oust Netanyahu. OneVoice, which received State Department funding last year, described its work as a nonpartisan get-out-the-vote effort.

On Thursday, the *Free Beacon* [published](#) a confidential strategy proposal drafted by U.S.-based group Ameinu, which outlined a "massive" \$3 million get-out-the-vote initiative funded by American donors. The campaign would target Israeli communities that traditionally oppose right-leaning parties such as Likud.

According to the memo, Obama's reelection team was involved in the effort. Givat Haviva was "chosen to carry out the Arab community GOTV [Get-Out-the-Vote] initiative."

Givat Haviva has had a close relationship with the State Department for many years, according to Darawshe.

"Givat Haviva has been an awardee of the State Department grant for more than 20 years already," he said.

While the *Free Beacon* was unable to independently verify 20 years of grants, Givat Haviva did receive State Department funding in 2011, 2012 and 2013, according to public records. U.S. ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro gave a keynote address at the group's conference last May.

"The United States has a long history of partnership with Givat Haviva, through our Embassy in Tel Aviv, the USAID Conflict Management and Mitigation program, and the Middle East Partnership Initiative," said Shapiro.

In addition to the meetings with the State Department, Givat Haviva's mayoral delegation also attended discussion sessions on political organizing at George Mason University on Monday morning. On Monday evening, Jeremiah Baronberg will host a reception for the delegation at McKenna, Long & Aldridge LLP.

Special guests at the reception will include Howard Dean, Thomas Pickering, and former Washington mayor Anthony Williams.

According to the confidential strategy memo published last week, Givat Haviva's get-out-the-vote effort in Israel would include bi-weekly polling, messaging, an advertising effort, grassroots outreach, and an operation to bring targeted voters to the polls on Election Day.

The memo stressed the urgency of securing funding in a timely manner and indicated that the plan would be put into place immediately.

"As of the writing of this document on December 17, there are only 91 days until the election," said the document. "We need to raise the necessary funds immediately to allow the operations to get established in order to maximize the remaining time until voting day."

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