



AIPAC leader boasts of special 'access' to top Trump natsec officials in leaked audio

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During an off-the-record panel, AIPAC's CEO detailed his organization's grooming of Trump's top national security officials, and how his group's "access" ensures they continue to follow Israel's agenda.

The Grayzone has obtained audio of an off-the-record session from the 2025 Congressional Summit of AIPAC, the main US lobbying arm of the state of Israel. Recorded by an attendee of the panel discussion, the audio features AIPAC's new CEO, Elliott Brandt, describing how his organization has cultivated influence with three top national security officials in the Trump administration - Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Director Mike Waltz, and CIA Director John Ratcliffe - and how it believes it can gain "access" to their internal discussions.

Joining Brandt on the panel was Dana Stroul, formerly the highest ranking civilian overseeing Middle East issues in the Biden administration's Department of Defense. Stroul made it clear that defending Israel's strategic imperatives from within the US government was a top priority, arguing that Washington should deepen its "mutually beneficial" special relationship with its "strong partner" in Tel Aviv.

Stroul dismissed the bloodbath in Gaza as the result of supposed Hamas tactics which supposedly aim to maximize the amount of children killed by Israel. At the same time, she and her fellow Israel lobbyists fretted about the impact of the post-October 7 war on public support for the self-proclaimed Jewish state. She was particularly troubled by Sen. Bernie Sanders' attempts to force votes on military aid packages to Israel which, in her view, should never be debated in the open. Another unidentified AIPAC panelist worried that pro-Palestinian academics could eventually influence AI knowledge systems, leading to a dangerous shift in national security policy unless they were decisively suppressed.

The Congressional Summit was permeated with anxiety, as AIPAC leaders told rank-and-file members to hide their badges when they left the Marriott Hotel for fear they would be confronted by anti-genocide protesters. Other than a handful of sessions, such as a keynote address by Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, the conference was strictly off-the-record.

With the cameras off, AIPAC leadership provided unusually candid details of their activities. In one revealing admission, Brandt explained how he and his lobbying organization groomed the future CIA director and other top Trump officials as pro-Israel assets.



New AIPAC CEO Eliot Brandt speaks at the Congressional Summit in Washington, February 23, 2025

AIPAC's "lifelines" on the Trump national security team

Elliot Brandt was promoted to Executive Director of AIPAC in 2024, making him one of the most powerful lobbyists in Washington. Though he is largely unknown to the American public, Brandt has spent around three decades building relationships on Capitol Hill. This was the key, he suggested, to cultivating the future leaders of America's national security state as loyal servants of Israel.

Referring to Trump's Secretary of State Marco Rubio, his National Security Director Mike Waltz, and Elise Stefanik, whose nomination to serve as the US ambassador to the United Nations was suddenly withdrawn to preserve the GOP's majority in the House of Representatives, Brandt explained to AIPAC members, "Those three people have something in common: they all served in Congress."

After relying heavily on pro-Israel donors to fuel their campaigns for office, "they all have relationships with key AIPAC leaders from their communities," said the AIPAC CEO. "So the lines of communication are good should there be something questionable or curious, and we need access on the conversation."

Brandt's comments corroborate Representative Thomas Massie's [claim](#) that each member of Congress is expected to answer to an "AIPAC person."

The AIPAC director's reference to his organization's "access" to presumably internal national security discussions contains ominous echoes of past espionage scandals in which AIPAC employees were accused of forking classified information over to Israeli intelligence. In 2004, for example, the FBI [arrested a Pentagon researcher](#) named Larry Franklin, who had provided classified documents related to Iran to two AIPAC staffers, Keith Weissman and Steve Rosen, who then delivered the information to Israeli intelligence. That December, the FBI [raided AIPAC's offices](#) and seized a computer belonging to Brandt's predecessor, Howard Kohr. (In the end, Franklin received a slap on the wrist from the government while Weissman and Rosen were fired by AIPAC.)

In his remarks to the AIPAC Congressional Summit, Brandt also pointed to CIA Director John Ratcliffe as an important point of contact. "You know that one of the first candidates I ever met with as an AIPAC professional in my job when he was a candidate for Congress was a guy named John Ratcliffe," he recalled. "He was challenging a long time member of Congress in Dallas. I said, this guy looks like he could win the race, and, we go talk to him. He had a good understanding of issues, and a couple of weeks ago, he took the oath as the CIA director, for crying out loud. This is a guy that we had a chance to speak to, so there are, there are a lot - I wouldn't call them lifelines, but there are lifelines in there."



Top Pentagon veteran comes out as Israel lobbyist

Dana Stroul works as [director of research](#) at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a neoconservative think tank that was originally founded as the research arm of AIPAC. Stroul previously served as deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East in the Biden administration's Pentagon, presiding over policy toward Iran, Syria and virtually every other issue of importance to Israel.

In a closed session at the Marriott hotel, seated before an audience of AIPAC members, Stroul sounded more like a veteran Israel lobbyist than a US national security expert, arguing at length that any and all US military aid packages to Israel provided a net benefit to American empire, while dismissing well-documented Israeli atrocities in the besieged Gaza Strip as the result of "clever" Hamas human shield tactics.

According to an attendee of the AIPAC Congressional Summit, Stroul began her remarks by recalling the frantic hours after she received word of the October 7, 2023 attacks. Personally summoned to work by then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Stroul described how she rushed her child to the Pentagon's in-house daycare center so she could get to the work of surging munitions to the Israeli military. She said she worked continuously for the next 48 hours, helping the Pentagon transfer weapons from its own stockpiles to Israeli bases. (The AIPAC attendee was unable to capture audio of these comments by Stroul).

Even as she worked to ensure that Israel had all it needed to transform Gaza into a moonscape, Stroul privately acknowledged that the Israeli military might be committing war crimes, according to a series of [emails leaked to Reuters](#). On October 13, 2023, Stroul fired off an email to top White House, State Department, and Pentagon officials about a phone call she had just held with the International Red Cross Committee's (ICRC) Middle East director, Fabrizio Carboni. "ICRC is not ready to say this in public, but is raising private alarm that Israel is close to committing war crimes," Stroul wrote. "Their main line is that it is impossible for one million civilians to move this fast."

Since recognizing the likelihood of Israeli atrocities, Stroul has apparently kept her conscience clear by blaming Hamas for the over 50,000 civilians Israel has killed in Gaza. "I think if you're in Iran, or you are the Houthis or any of these other proxy terrorist groups, and frankly, probably the Russians and the Chinese," she told AIPAC members at the 2025 congressional summit, "you're looking at the ways in which the international community so quickly moved on from October 7 and what happened to Israel and why Israel is at war, and you're probably taking away that a great tactic in wars to put as many civilians on the front lines as possible so that they can just get killed. And so, the Hamas tactic had strategic effects, because Israel finds itself isolated on the international stage. And it's a tactic by Hamas to both terrorize on the global stage, and number two, [for] propaganda and disinformation."

Stroul went on to suggest that the Israeli military was superior in ways to the US military. "This is a mutually beneficial relationship. This is not just about what the United States gives Israel," the former Pentagon official declared. "This is a partner that has flipped the script on what can be accomplished with military force in a way the United States military never conceived of doing against Iran and Iran's proxies across the Middle East. We get as much intelligence from Israel, as we give to Israel. They are using our F-35 more than we are using it..."

In her view, Israel also served as an important proxy of the US by applying violence and taking casualties against its supposed enemies: "One thing that you hear that I think is common on the far right and the far left is that they don't want young men, American men and women, service members going to war in the Middle East, or anywhere. So the way to not have young Americans on the line anywhere is to actually invest in strong partners who can defend themselves. That's Israel."

One month after Stroul delivered her comments to AIPAC, President Donald Trump restarted the US military assault on Yemen's Ansarullah movement in order to protect Israeli shipping from its blockade of the Red Sea. The war has by now cost US taxpayers at least one billion dollars, but has failed to achieve freedom of navigation.

Like the other AIPAC panelists, Stroul was consumed with anxiety about Israel's image among the American public. She singled out Sen. Bernie Sanders' efforts to suspend military aid to Israel as a particular source of concern, though not necessarily because she believed they would be successful.

"What do I worry about? I think everyone who's a supporter of this relationship needs to be wary of the manner in which sometimes it's not going to be about - Israel is going to be about congressional versus legislative tussling, but Israel is going to be caught in the crosshairs. And I'm worried about that with these executive holds," Stroul proclaimed.

I'm worried about it with things like the [Bernie] Sanders joint resolutions of disapproval, even if he doesn't force a vote this time, we're not getting through four years without him forcing a vote. And it is not good for Israel and for this relationship to make members constantly have to vote on it, even if they pass. That's not the point. The point is to not have to debate every time."

Fear of a pro-Palestine AI system

Asked about his greatest concern, an AIPAC panelist whom The Grayzone has not been able to identify pointed to academia and social media. According to the clearly seasoned Israel lobbyist, Israel was losing "the war of ideas" to a collection of professors and influencers with outsized influence among the future generation of America's intelligentsia.

"Imagine five years from now, a staff, a congressional staffer, types into AI Claude, GPT, at that one. GPT, 14, whatever says, 'Is supporting Israel bad for American national security?' The answer that they get back is going to be informed by the information that's on the internet today, which is why punching back in the information sphere becomes so important," the Israel lobbyist urged.

"When you disengage, you leave an open playing field for precisely that sort of information that's going to inform national security decisions five years from now. And by the way, Congress is not immune, because if a member of Congress, if his or her elector, is increasingly being read that type of information, it will skew how they pressure him or her to vote, or even to throw him or her out of office and pick somebody else. Right?... I mean, it starts in academia, but it doesn't end there, right?"

AIPAC did not respond to The Grayzone's request for comment about statements made during the off-the-record panel.



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The editor-in-chief of The Grayzone, Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of several books, including best-selling [Republican Gomorrah](#), [Goliath](#), [The Fifty One Day War](#), and [The Management of Savagery](#). He has produced print articles for an array of publications, many video reports, and several documentaries, including [Killing Gaza](#). Blumenthal founded The Grayzone in 2015 to shine a journalistic light on America's state of perpetual war and its dangerous domestic repercussions.

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