

JEFFREY BLANKFORT: CHOMSKY IS WRONG ABOUT ISRAEL BEING A STRATEGIC U.S. ASSET (PART 2)

Jeffrey Blankfort has been writing extensively on the Israel-Palestine conflict since working as a photojournalist in the 1970s, photographing the Palestinian refugee camps.

Last July, Blankfort participated in a conference on Israel's nuclear weapons held at the Spy Museum in Washington, D.C., and sponsored by the Institute for Research: Middle East Policy.

Currently, he hosts a program on international affairs called "Takes on the World" for KZYX, the public radio station of Mendocino County, California.

0:53:19 Kathleen Wells: You've written a piece titled "A War for Israel." I want to touch on that piece, because last week* the last combat soldier left Iraq, and so many Americans -- not all, but many Americans -- are asking what was the war in Iraq about? And many will answer it was about oil. Give us your thoughts about that.

0:53:45 Jeffrey Blankfort: Well, it's interesting. There is no record of oil companies wanting a war in Iraq. What the oil companies want is stability. They would like to have been able to purchase oil from Saddam Hussein, who would have liked to have sold it to them.

In fact, the same thing with Iran. Conoco, a major American oil company, had to cancel a contract with Iran under pressure from the Zionist lobby. The oil companies need stability [where they get their resources]. Their profits are guaranteed. They'd have an arrangement with Saddam Hussein like they would have with Saudi Arabia or with Kuwait. So the fact of the matter is that the war in Iraq threatened the stability of the oil companies' [sources]. And it's interesting that President George Bush, Sr., his Secretary of State James Baker,

and his National Security Council -- excuse me, National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft -- all of whom had closer ties to the oil industry itself than did Bush or Cheney -- they opposed the war on Iraq because they thought it would destabilize the region and would bring the Shi'a into power in Iraq, which would then make Iraq closer to Iran.

Now, what's happened after the war is that the major oil contracts have gone, not to American companies, but to China, for example. The largest contract for oil in Iraq went to China, and that was based on a contract that was, ironically, signed with China during the reign of Saddam Hussein.

Now why was this a war for Israel? I actually wrote this in 2004, and there's much more evidence to that effect today. There was a plan put forth by an Israeli political analyst named Oded Yinon in the 80s. The idea was to divide the Arab countries, including Iraq, into their confessional states, making several confessional states based on religion. So instead of having a country called Iraq, you would have a Shi'a Iraq, a Kurdish Iraq, and a Sunni Iraq. That would be designed to weaken Israel's Arab enemies, and Iraq was seen as a major threat to Israel.

Another reason was Israel also wanted to see the U.S. as an occupying force in the Middle East, just like *it is*, so the U.S. could then use Israeli "expertise" in occupying Palestine to occupy Iraq. And many of the same techniques that Israel has used to occupy both Lebanon in the past and to occupy the occupied territories in West Bank and Gaza were used by the United States in Iraq.

Also, if the United States was occupying an Arab country, it would be less prone to criticize Israel for doing the same thing. And we saw there has been far less criticism by the U.S. government since 2003 than before in terms of what it was doing in the occupied territories.

0:58:03 Jeffrey Blankfort: Also, in 1995, you had a group of neocons --

among them Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, and Meyrav Wurmser, who wrote a paper called "A Clean Break." But this was for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, calling on Israel to get rid of the regime of Saddam Hussein and stop peace talks with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu did not adopt that position, but these very same neocons then came into the administration of George W. Bush -- W, Junior -- with the same policies to get rid of Saddam Hussein [as did] the Project for a New American Century.

Now, it's interesting in the First Gulf War, George Bush, Sr., was criticized by the Zionist establishment and its friends in the media for not dethroning Saddam Hussein. And this was when the neocons turned on Bush because they thought Israel's main enemy in Iraq was going to be eliminated and there would be regime change there that would be more favorable to Israel and would reinstate the oil line that used to go from Iraq [to] Haifa. This was probably not going to happen. But in any case, they believed that Israel would benefit from the getting rid of Saddam Hussein.

1:00:07 Kathleen Wells: But why did they believe that? Give me one sentence as to why they believe regime change in Iraq would benefit Israel?

1:00:18 Jeffrey Blankfort: They saw Iraq as the most significant foe and threat to Israel -- the largest Muslim Arab state. Egypt is now out of contention because of the Camp David agreement, and Iraq was considered to be a major threat. The Zionist lobby tells that they didn't really want us to attack Iraq; they wanted to attack Iran, but statements by Israeli officials, including Shimon Perez, called on the U.S. to dethrone Saddam Hussein, because by eliminating Saddam Hussein and hopefully breaking Iraq into a Shi'a, Kurdish, and Sunni states, they would eliminate Israel's major threat in the Arab world.

Iran is not an Arab country, and for years Israel's foreign policy had been based on making alliances with non-Arab regimes in the region such as Turkey, Iran, and the Kurds. And so they had a long, very close relationship with Iran under the Shah. Despite the statements made by Khomeini and Iranian leaders, we saw that during Iran-Contra, that the Iranians and the Israelis were dealing arms. And Turkey now, of course, has made close ties to Iran, and this has put the U.S. in a bind, because Turkey has been a real strategic asset to the United States since World War II. And the Israel lobby is pushing for the United States to break that relationship with Turkey, because Turkey is not bending to Washington's wishes or Israel's wishes when it comes to Iran or to the Palestinians.

1:02:19 Kathleen Wells: And you're saying that Israel -- the Jewish lobby -- is pushing for the United States to break with Turkey? Is that what you just stated?

1:02:29 Jeffrey Blankfort: Well, the Israel lobby has gone so far as to get 87 senators to sign a letter to President Obama calling for the Turkish charity that sponsored the Gaza flotilla (the last one) to be put on the terrorist list by the United States, which would be a major attack on Turkish sovereignty, because this particular charity, IHH, is the most important Turkish charity [and close to Turkey's ruling party].

Turkey has told Israel that unless Israel apologizes for the murder of eight Turks and one Turkish-American on board the *Mavi Marmara*, Turkish-Israel relations will not be restored. And Israel refuses to apologize, so the Zionist establishment and its friends in the media are pushing for the U.S. to break with Turkey. But Turkey is an essential part of U.S. imperial policy and U.S. regional policies since World War II, whereas Israel has been, as I say, more of a liability. Right now Israel, by provoking Turkey and by pushing its agents in the United States, the Zionist establishment, to break with Turkey, is causing a

major problem for the United States. Now the United States has been telling Turkey that it has to toe the Israel line; otherwise, it's going to have a problem with the United States. But Turkey doesn't need the United States as much as the United States needs Turkey.

1:04:20 Kathleen Wells: And you said that 87 senators have signed a letter?

1:04:25 Jeffrey Blankfort: They did send a letter, about a month ago, to President Obama, calling for the IHH, the Turkish charity, to be put on the terrorist list. And they're very upset that it hasn't happened to date.

1:04:39 Kathleen Wells: And this letter was drafted by whom again?

1:04:42 Jeffrey Blankfort: It was probably drafted by AIPAC. Before President Obama had his first meeting with Netanyahu [in 2009], he received a letter on May 9, signed -- he received actually two letters : one from three-quarters of the Senate and the other from three-quarters of the Congress, in which they called on him, when he met with Netanyahu, not to put any pressure on Netanyahu. And the pdf, the file sent to [members of] Congress [for their signatures], was called "AIPAC letter." Not a single U.S. newspaper published this story other than in a blog on the *Washington Post*, when Al Cayman wrote, he said, "Curiously, when we opened the attachment, we noticed it was named AIPAC letter, Hoyer Canter, May 2009 pdf."

1:05:47 Kathleen Wells: And so it was signed by Hoyer -- Senator Hoyer, Congressman Hoyer -- and Congressman Canter.

1:05:55 Jeffrey Blankfort: Right.

1:05:55 Kathleen Wells: So this is ... You have Congresspersons across the aisle, Republicans and Democrats coming together on one issue, and the issue

being Israel.

1:06:07 Jeffrey Blankfort: This has historically been the case. And not only that, in that congressional recess a year ago, Congressman Hoyer, who is the House Majority Leader -- he's not just an ordinary congressman -- he led a group of thirty Democrats, just after Cantor had led a group of twenty-five Republicans to go to Israel, where they met with Netanyahu, gave press conferences shown on Israeli television, and Steny Hoyer gave his press conference -- by himself -- in which he took the position of Israel against the U.S. President when it came to [Jewish] settlement in Jerusalem.

Now, were a congressman doing this for any other country besides Israel, it might be called treason. But not only was this not reported here in the United States, it was also ignored by those who say that they support the Palestinian struggle here in the United States. This was online. I actually played Steny Hoyer's comments for my radio audience so they could see what I was talking about.

1:07:23 Kathleen Wells: You're saying it's not reported. So talk to me about the media when you say things are not being reported.

1:07:34 Jeffrey Blankfort: The media has been a target of the Zionist establishment since its inception -- since Israel's inception -- because the media is what manufactures the consent of the public to U.S. policies.

In the beginning, the Zionist establishment was on the outside looking in. But over the years, it has [built] a media stable in the major newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, whose columns are reproduced all over the United States. So it's not just important that a Charles Krauthammer, for example, writes in the *Washington Post*. If it was only the *Washington Post*, it wouldn't be so important, but Krauthammer's

columns appear all over the United States. You had William Safire in the *New York Times*, whose columns appeared everywhere. He was a close friend of Ariel Sharon. He was replaced by David Brooks, another neocon -- Jewish neocon -- whose columns appear everywhere around the country. You have Tom Friedman, the *liberal* support of Israel, whose columns [in the *Times*] appear all over the country. You have Jonathan Jacoby of the *Boston Globe*. You have Richard Cowan in the *Washington Post*.

You don't have anybody anymore who is a critic of Israel writing in a mainstream newspaper. You used to have Anthony Lewis, who is Jewish, who'd write editorials or op-ed pieces for the *New York Times* critical of Israel. He was replaced by Tom Friedman who never does.

1:09:36 Jeffrey Blankfort: In 1979, the *Washington Post* was writing a number of articles critical of Israel. So the Jewish community leadership there complained and demanded that a representative of the Washington Jewish community be allowed to sit in the *Washington Post* newsroom for a week to watch how it worked. And the *Washington Post* editor agreed to let that happen. Over the years, the *Washington Post* went from being a responsible newspaper to being, editorially, a mouthpiece for the Israeli position and for the Israel lobby.

There have been exceptions. Just recently, when I was back in Washington, at the time Netanyahu was also there [and] met with President Obama -- this time President Obama rolled out the red carpet; and Dana Milbank, who is their Washington columnist, wrote a column which he headed "Alliance or Dysfunctional Relationship?" And he wrote how when Netanyahu visited President Obama, White House officials, "instead of flying the U.S. flag, might have flown the white flag of surrender."

1:11:02 Jeffrey Blankfort: He said [that] Tuesday, Obama, "routed and

humiliated by his Israeli counterpart, invited Netanyahu back to the White House for what might be called the Oil of Olay Summit. It was all about saving face." And then he writes about "Obama came to office with an admirable hope of reviving Middle East peace efforts by appealing to the Arab world and positioning himself as more of an honest broker. But he has now learned the painful lesson that domestic politics won't allow such a stand." That's pretty heavy.

1:11:35 Kathleen Wells: Yeah, everything you're saying is pretty heavy, and I think that, [given] everything you are disclosing, you know, the charge of being a self-hating Jew is going to be leveled against you.

1:11:47 Jeffrey Blankfort: I've already surpassed that. I've been called an anti-Semite. This is like the last refuge of scoundrels, as far as I'm concerned. [chuckle] Patriotism is the first one. The charge of anti-Semitism in this case is the last.

But I've been following this problem for years, and when I started speaking out about the role of the Zionist lobby, I was marginalized. Now, fortunately, there are people speaking out about it. When John Mearsheimer and Steven Walt wrote the book "[The] Israel Lobby and American [U.S.] Foreign Policy," it was a major breakthrough. Of course, they've been called imperialist hawks. They've been called anti-Semites. These are two distinguished university professors. There's nothing, when you read their book, that is anti-Semitic, but it's a way of trying to smear them, and the smears come not ... They come not only from the right-wing, but they come also from the "left-wing," Jews who claim to be anti-Zionist. They call Mearsheimer and Walt imperialist hawks. And there's nothing to back that up.

My position is I'm a human being first and my responsibility is to humanity before it is to my Jewish history -- my Jewish background. That's the way I was

brought up. And so, yeah, as far as I'm concerned, those criticisms only reflect the lack of arguments to challenge what I say. They have no arguments so they have to smear me.

1:13:34 Kathleen Wells: So President Obama will be resuming peace talks with President Netanyahu, Palestinian Authority President Abbas, King Abdullah of Jordan, and President Mubarak of Egypt on September 2. Give us your thoughts about these peace talks that are going to be taking place soon.

1:13:56 Jeffrey Blankfort: This reminds me of the comic strip "Peanuts," in which every September, Lucy used to put out the football for Linus to kick. And every time he would go to kick, she'd pull the football away. This game has grown old. There is simply no way, at this point in time, for a kind of solution -- a two-state solution, or even a one-state at this point -- without severe economic pressure brought to bear on Israel.

There are no pre-conditions for this peace talk. As a matter of fact, I read today that the only pre-condition that the Palestinians had was that Hillary Clinton would say -- would not say -- that there were no pre-conditions, and she went and said there were no pre-conditions. So the Palestinians are miffed because Abbas, who is not legally anything -- his term of office expired more than a year ago. There has not been an election. [Their representation is a fiction.]

He does not even have the support of a substantial part, or even what's left of the Palestinian Authority. A number of important Palestinians in the West Bank did not appear, simply did not show up to take a vote on him going to come and meet with President Obama. That he's coming to meet with Obama [is] because he's been pressured to do that, but Abbas has to be remembered as being one of the people who drafted the Oslo Agreement back in '93, which actually betrayed the Palestinians and turned over part of the land of Palestine to Israel, which is, in fact, against international law, but that's been ignored.

1:15:56 Kathleen Wells: So you're saying President Abbas doesn't have the authority to negotiate peace.

1:16:04 Jeffrey Blankfort: He really doesn't. I mean, he doesn't have the support of the Palestinians. If there would be some incredible deal in which Israel would agree to withdraw to the 1967 borders, he would have some credibility, but he has none. When the Goldstone Report came out criticizing Israel for its brutal behavior, brutal attack on Palestinians in Gaza, Abbas wanted to suppress the report.

1:16:36 Jeffrey Blankfort: I'm saying that the Palestinians don't expect anything in these talks. This is all like a political charade, and it has been in every case.

1:16:48 Kathleen Wells: I was just going to ask you that. And then you mentioned the fact that there are no pre-conditions. In fact, Assistant Secretary Shapiro said last July at the Brookings [Institution] that for the fiscal year 2010 the Obama administration has requested \$2.775 billion in security assistance funding specifically for Israel. And this is the largest request in history -- in U.S. history -- and Congress has ... Go ahead.

1:17:23 Jeffrey Blankfort: Yeah. This is part of a ten-year package that was first negotiated by George W. Bush at the end of his term, but it was signed with President Obama's approval. That amount of money is also not the total amount of money.

For example, President Obama, to gain the favor of the Jewish community, which is now turning on him or certain elements of it are, approved \$205 million for something called the Iron Dome -- a defensive shield for Israel to protect itself against rockets from Hezbollah the next time Israel launches a war

on Lebanon, which is considerably more than the United States has offered to Pakistan to help the Pakistanis in what is the largest global disaster in modern times.

The United States has come up with less than \$200 million for Pakistan at this particular point in time. And, in fact, [it] had the Pakistani Army divert waters that would have covered a military base there and which drowned a Pakistani town.

The United States' commitment to Israel is, unfortunately, virtually unbreakable at this point in time, unless there is a mass movement from the American people to change it. It doesn't appear that it's happening, because nobody is really calling for it, even on the side of those who support the Palestinians. Or say they do.

1:19:16 Kathleen Wells: So let me ask you. Since our support -- or Obama's support rather -- the administration's support of Israel is so generous and effective, why is President Obama so unpopular in Israel?

1:19:31 Jeffrey Blankfort: Well, first of all, it begins with his speech in Cairo. Well, maybe that continues. The Israeli public, the Ashkenazi -- the European Jewish public -- is very racist. They're racist against the Ethiopian Jews that emigrated there from Ethiopia. They're racist against dark-skinned Jews, who are really the Arab Jews who emigrated from Arab countries. One of the reasons that the right wing Likud came into power in 1977 was because the European Ashkenazi Jews who ran the Labor Party looked down on the Jews from the Arab lands, dark-skinned Jews who were indistinguishable physically from Palestinian Arabs, whereas the European Jews were white. I guess they lost their color after leaving ancient Palestine 2000 years ago.

In any case, the racism is a great part of it, the same kind of racism that we see here against Obama on the part of a significant segment of the American public

that has nothing to do with his policies. The idea that his name, of course, is Barack Hussein Obama and then he was born to a Muslim father only added to this. We see today that 20 percent of Americans think that Obama is a Muslim.

1:21:02 Kathleen Wells: And he is not, I want to ...

1:21:04 Jeffrey Blankfort: And he's not.

1:21:05 Kathleen Wells: Yes.

1:21:07 Jeffrey Blankfort: But the point is that the Israelis are used to having a President who bends over and kisses the behind of whoever is the Israeli Prime Minister. And that was the case with Bill Clinton. It was the case with George W. Bush. And they expected the same with Obama. The first George Bush, however, was the last President to really stand up to Israel, and he paid for it at election time when he lost to Clinton. He probably ...

1:21:39 Kathleen Wells: Oh, I thought Kennedy was the last President to stand up to ...

1:21:44 Jeffrey Blankfort: No, Kennedy took three positions that were red lines for Israel. One, Kennedy supported the Palestinian “right of return” -- Resolution 194 -- which called for Palestinians as individuals to determine whether they would take compensation or return to their homes in Palestine. Kennedy realized that all Palestinians couldn't return, but he believed a significant number should be allowed to return, and he supported that. Israel was adamantly against that.

President Kennedy was adamantly opposed to Israel's nuclear weapons, both publicly and privately, as he was with the Palestinian “right of return,” and he was very upset with the way the Israelis lied to him about what they were doing

in Dimona -- that they were building [a] nuclear reactor for peaceful purposes, a propaganda lie that was propagated by the American Zionist Council here in the United States, which they bragged about.

The third position of Kennedy was that his Justice Department, under his brother Bobby, was making a serious effort to get the American Zionist Council, which was a predecessor to AIPAC, to be registered as a foreign agent. And they refused to do so. They kept stalling and stalling until Kennedy was assassinated, and then under Johnson, all these particular campaigns were allowed to die. And Johnson became the first really pro-Israel President we've had. Most of that is not known about Kennedy. Professor Chomsky never writes about it. He doesn't consider it to be important. It would interfere with his position that the United States supports Israel because it's an asset. That's not the way Kennedy saw it.

1:23:44 Jeffrey Blankfort: Now Bush, Sr., in 1991, decided that he wanted to force Israel to come to the peace table. It should be noted that when Bush was Vice President, when Israel bombed the Iraq nuclear reactor, Bush wanted Israel to be sanctioned. He was outvoted by President Reagan and Secretary of State Alexander Haig. When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, Bush also wanted Israel to be sanctioned. Again he was outvoted by Reagan and Haig. This is documented by Moshe Arens, Israel's Foreign Minister at the time, in his book "Broken Covenant: The US Israel Relationship and the Bush Presidency."*

In 1991, when Israel came to Bush and wanted ten billion dollars in loan guarantees from the U.S. government at a time when our economy was hurting, Bush saw this as Israel's way of not engaging in peace talks, and he told Israel ... He asked the Israeli Prime Minister Shamir to postpone his request for four months. Shamir decided he would not do it and he would go over his head to Congress. When Bush Sr. found out and realized that Congress would override his veto of the \$10-billion loan guarantees, he went to the American people [on

TV] on September 12, 1991, and [held] a press conference/statement, in which he said, "There are a thousand lobbyists up here on Capitol Hill against little old me." And he told the American public the amount of money that each Israeli citizen -- man, woman, and child -- was getting in aid from the United States.

At this time there were a thousand -- at least a thousand -- Jewish lobbyists on Capitol Hill talking to members of Congress about passing the loan guarantee legislation. And so the very next day the polls showed that the American public was behind Bush by 85 percent. This really scared the lobby and members of Congress. And so they retreated. But the head of AIPAC at the time, a man named Thomas Dine, made a statement that September 12, 1991, would be a day that would live in infamy. And from that moment on, even Republicans such as William Safire in the *New York Times* began attacking Bush over the economy. They wouldn't attack over this issue but over the economy.

And in February of '92, when Bush again would not approve the loan guarantees, they went after him big time. This is all very well documented. The Congressional Record is filled with speeches attacking the President and supporting Israel. The only person who spoke against the loan guarantees was the late Senator Robert Byrd, but you did not read what he had to say in the American press because the American press by 1992 was parroting essentially the Israeli line.

1:27:17 Jeffrey Blankfort: The failure to get the loan guarantees, at that time, embarrassed Shamir, and he was defeated by Rabin for Prime Minister, and with the November elections rolling around, Bush then agreed to give loan guarantees to Israel while deducting the amount of money that was being spent on the settlements. Bush was adamantly against the Jewish settlements; he wanted to freeze on the settlements. He did not want any Russian Jews going to the settlements.

1:27:49 Kathleen Wells: Hasn't Obama been trying to impose a settlement freeze on Netanyahu?

1:27:54 Jeffrey Blankfort: He did in the beginning, but, unfortunately, he found out that Congress was not behind him. And unlike at the time when the first George Bush did it, there was nobody writing editorials or op-ed pieces in the American press that was supporting it. So in a sense he found himself out on a limb spending political capital that he could not afford to spend.

When you have the U.S. Congress supporting the position of a foreign government and that being ignored by those who criticize our government, it's quite an astonishing situation.

*(The book title is *Broken Covenant: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis Between the U.S. and Israel.*)

This extensive interview is being presented in three parts. Part 3 is published.
