



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on February 17, 2023

How Hacking and Disinformation Are Destroying Free Elections

“Hijacking, sabotage, and automated disinformation on social media.” These are the weapons purportedly used by a group of Israeli contractors to attack more than 30 elections around the world.

In an exclusive exposé published by *The Guardian*, this organization is identified and its influence revealed.

The Guardian reports:

The unit is run by Tal Hanan, a 50-year-old former Israeli special forces operative who now works privately using the pseudonym “Jorge”, and appears to have been working under the radar in elections in various countries for more than two decades.

He is being unmasked by an international consortium of journalists. Hanan and his unit, which uses the codename “Team Jorge”, have been exposed by undercover footage and documents leaked to the *Guardian*.

Hanan did not respond to detailed questions about Team Jorge’s activities and methods but said: “I deny any wrongdoing.”



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It’s unlikely that anyone who’s been paying attention to elections here and abroad would deny the interference with the electoral process being carried out by Team Jorge. In fact, such meddling in elections is something that has become nearly *de rigueur*, both for foreign and American governments and freelancers.

The *Guardian* report is fascinating and illuminating as it shines a light on techniques and tools typically kept in the dark. The story paints a picture that is shocking in its sophistication, even by today’s desensitized standards for free elections:

Hanan told the undercover reporters that his services, which others describe as “black ops”, were available to intelligence agencies, political campaigns and private companies that wanted to secretly manipulate public opinion. He said they had been used across Africa, South and Central America, the US and Europe.



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One of Team Jorge's key services is a sophisticated software package, Advanced Impact Media Solutions, or Aims. It controls a vast army of thousands of fake social media profiles on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Telegram, Gmail, Instagram and YouTube. Some avatars even have Amazon accounts with credit cards, bitcoin wallets and Airbnb accounts.

This story and the detailed insights into the world of election tampering and manipulation of the masses through media makes it clear that beyond just the traditional armies that could conquer a country, we must be prepared to defend ourselves against invisible soldiers armed not with machine guns firing deadly bullets, but with laptops controlling social media accounts and other sources of information and influence.

The insidious effect this has on the electoral process is perhaps more devastating than many perceive. Not only is the outcome of elections placed into reasonable doubt, but the entire process becomes one regarded by many as unreliable and thus unnecessary. Perhaps creating such a perception is the goal of groups such as Team Jorge and their government and civilian employers.

Reading the tactics used by Team Jorge is disturbing, not only for the effect on public elections, but for their effect on personal lives, as well. Consider these details revealed in the *Guardian* report:

In more than six hours of secretly recorded meetings, Hanan and his team spoke of how they could gather intelligence on rivals, including by using hacking techniques to access Gmail and Telegram accounts. They boasted of planting material in legitimate news outlets, which are then amplified by the Aims bot-management software.

Much of their strategy appeared to revolve around disrupting or sabotaging rival campaigns: the team even claimed to have sent a sex toy delivered via Amazon to the home of a politician, with the aim of giving his wife the false impression he was having an affair.

Three journalists — from Radio France, Haaretz and TheMarker — approached Team Jorge pretending to be consultants working on behalf of a politically unstable African country that wanted help delaying an election.

The encounters with Hanan and his colleagues took place via video calls and an in-person meeting in Team Jorge's base, an unmarked office in an industrial park in Modi'in, 20 miles outside Tel Aviv.

Hanan described his team as "graduates of government agencies", with expertise in finance, social media and campaigns, as well as "psychological warfare", operating from six offices around the world. Four of Hanan's colleagues attended the meetings, including his brother, Zohar Hanan, who was described as the chief executive of the group.

In his initial pitch to the potential clients, Hanan claimed: "We are now involved in one election in Africa ... We have a team in Greece and a team in [the] Emirates ... You follow the leads. [We have completed] 33 presidential-level campaigns, 27 of which were successful." Later, he said he was involved in two "major projects" in the US but claimed not to engage directly in US politics.

And consider this chilling revelation next time you're networking with "like-minded" people online:



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Team Jorge's bot-management software appears to have grown significantly by 2022, according to what Hanan told the undercover reporters. He said it controlled a multinational army of more than 30,000 avatars, complete with digital backstories that stretch back years.

Demonstrating the Aims interface, Hanan scrolled through dozens of avatars, and showed how fake profiles could be created in an instant, using tabs to choose nationality and gender and then matching profile pictures to names.

"This is Spanish, Russian, you see Asians, Muslims. Let's make a candidate together," he told the undercover reporters, before settling on one image of a white woman. "Sophia Wilde, I like the name. British. Already she has email, date birth, everything."

As I stated earlier, all of this intrigue and influence and interference can be viewed from many angles, none of which is encouraging or comforting.

The angle that is likely most destructive of the process of a government chosen by consent of the governed is that the activities exposed by the *Guardian* article are not meant to lead to greater protections of the electoral process, but to foment mass mistrust of that process and the ultimate abandonment of the republican form of government in the United States and globally.

Finally, this is nothing new.

Sometime in the fourth century B.C., the Greek philosopher Aristotle (his name means "complete perfection" in Ancient Greek) wrote a book aimed at inquiring into what it was that could keep the community — the *polis* — peaceful and functioning well and to the benefit of the citizens of the community. Aristotle's guidebook to good governance is known as *Politics*.

Book 5 of *Politics* reveals the establishment's efforts anciently to undermine free elections.

Aristotle reveals that agitators will aim "to get gain and honor by creating conflict and partisan fighting to prevent themselves and their friends from experiencing any dishonor or loss."

Then, after igniting these fires of faction, those organizing the disturbances continue following their feelings because "they resent others unjustly getting a larger share" than they do. If the uproar and the conflagrations don't deliver the power they are seeking, then the instigators will resort to "election intrigue."

How many "Team Jorges" are operating clandestinely but convincingly throughout the world to manipulate the masses and ruin republicanism?

Perhaps with this advanced warning we may, as the historian Livy counseled, use history to avoid falling prey to those people and programs that are "rotten through and through."



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