

Apco and Najib: Beneath the PR veil
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Tomorrow, Barisan Nasional parliamentarians will be gearing up to crucify Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim (below) for his comments on Apco. The MPs might think that they are doing the BN government a favour by defending Najib and his high-flying consultancy company.

police interrogate anwar 110310 anwar pc 02In the minds of most BN lawmakers, defending the government is equivalent of defending the country. By the same logic, people who criticise the government are simply traitors to Malaysia.

I would like to invite my friends from the other side to think harder, and look harder. In fact, it does not require a lot of effort to find out the connection between Apco and Israel.

But before I go further, I wish to make myself very clear on this; the discussion has NOTHING to do with the 'Jewish Question'. There is a great difference in being Jewish and being the adherents of ideological Zionism.

Malaysians are often proud to proclaim solidarity with the oppressed Palestinian people. We have also maintained an independent foreign policy and have had a long record of being fully committed to the cause and principles of the non-aligned movement.

In this context, it is hard to understand how our prime minister could hire a public relations firm that is well known for its shady ties with international Zionism? Why should we trust a company with Zionist agenda to handle Malaysian strategic communications?

Not just another Jewish firm

Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim has raised several critical questions in Parliament on the similarities between the slogans '1Malaysia' and '1Israel'. He also challenged the government to justify spending RM23 million of taxpayers' money on Apco.

NONEThere is also the question of why didn't Najib (left) and his government engage local public relations firms to undertake such work?

According to Apco's own statement, its responsibilities cover a wide scope - beyond communications. "Apco's work has included communication support for a broad range of reform initiatives undertaken by the government of Malaysia, especially in the areas of creating jobs, promoting education, and strengthening delivery of services to the people."

Indeed, it is strange that this clarification did not come from Najib or the Prime Minister's Office.

The reason Pakatan Rakyat raised these issues was not for political point-scoring, but because they warrant genuine concern for national security.

Apco Worldwide is based in Washington DC and has 23 offices all over the world including Tel Aviv. It is common knowledge that many of its key personalities and advisers are associated with Zionist Israel, e.g. Shimon Shein (former Israeli Ambassador to Germany), Itamar Rabinovich (former Israeli Ambassador to the US), etc.

Apco and Asero

But Apco cannot deny that its operators in Tel Aviv have close links to the Zionist regime. Its CEO in Israel, Gad Ben-Ari, was a personal adviser of the late PM Yishak Rabin. Apco in Israel undertakes various communications and strategic development work for both corporate and governmental organisations.

Also, the relationship between Israel and Apco is more than merely having an office in Tel Aviv. Apco's activities in the Zionist state go beyond the civilian sectors. Notably one of the members of Apco's International Advisory Council is Doron Bergerbest-Eilon, who was a former security chief for the Israeli government.

NONE Apco's involvement in various intelligence and security-related projects is done through its strategic partner and sister company Asero Worldwide. While Apco's expertise is in the field of communications, Asero specialises in homeland security and risk management consultancy.

Apco and Asero have many overlapping consultants and management members. For example, Doron Bergerbest-Eilon who sits on Apco's International Advisory Council was also founder and president of Asero Worldwide.

Doron Bergerbest-Eilon was formerly a senior ranking security official of the Israeli Security Agency (ISA). He was the head of the protection and security division and held a position equivalent to the rank of major-general. His dedication to Israeli secret service has even earned him a prestigious Director's Recognition Award by the U.S. Secret Service.

Mara Hedgecoth, the daughter of Apco CEO and President Margery Kraus also sits in Asero as Vice President. At the same time, Mara Hedgecoth also serves as Vice President and Director in Apco Worldwide.

Asero's Senior Vice President, Carl Truscott was another tainted figure under Bush Administration. Carl Truscott was the Director of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Bureau.

But he resigned in August 2006 after a report by the Justice Department found he had wasted tens of thousands of dollars on luxuries, wasted millions on whimsical management decisions and violated ethical standards by ordering employees to help his nephew with a high school video project.

Recruited from Mossad

Asero Worldwide advises Israeli military/civilian agencies on strategic and tactical security challenges and provides assistance to both governments and corporations to prepare, mitigate and recover from threats of terrorism and other hazards, as well as to protect lives and critical assets and ensure continuity of operations.

Asero's staff are filled with recruits from the Israel Security Agency (also known as Shabak or Shin Bet) and the infamous Mossad. As we all know, these agencies' standard operation procedures in counter-terrorism include torturing suspects, assassinations, etc.

In 2006, Apco and Asero introduced Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to Israel, and helped to develop Israel's airport security system - the Suspect Detection Systems. The TSA was designed by John Magaw, another Apco leading consultant who used to serve as

director of the U.S. Secret Service.

Links to Singapore

It is no secret that Singapore and Israel covertly engage in extensive cooperation in the fields of defense and intelligence. The cooperation between the two countries can be traced back to the 1960s.

singapore defence poster 170505 Within the high-ranking Asero directors and managerial officers, the only non-American or non-Israeli appears to be a Singaporean.

Asero and Apco provide consultancy service on homeland security to the Singapore Government. Asero, in particular, assists Singapore with technical and intelligence services in aviation and aerospace security. Their services and expertise have facilitated the rapid transfer of Israeli military and security technologies to Singapore.

The two companies are also involved in promoting Israeli participation in long-term research and cooperation in strategic fields that have security or military implications. One such institution is the Singapore-Israel Industrial R&D Foundation (SIIRD) established in 1997.

In recent years, Asero has actively participated in many counter-terrorism activities. In the quest for academic exchange, Asero joined the Centre of Behavioral Science (CBS). The objective of CBS is to serve as a "platform for the transfer and exchange of leading-edge knowledge and ideas which contribute to the transformation of the life of individuals, organisations and society at large".

Access to sensitive material

Against this background, there are ample of reasons for patriotic Malaysians to question the wisdom of engaging Apco. There is no doubt that Apco does not share the vision and objective of our nation-building. It is not surprising that '1Malaysia' has not been resonating well in our local context.

In fact historically, '1Malaysia' sounds too similar to the various one-nation movements around the world. Unfortunately, the one-nation slogan has become inevitably associated with conservative tendencies.

As we know, 'One Israel' was the slogan of a failed attempt to forge unity in a fragmented political landscape. Then there was also 'One Britain', which had been the theme of notorious UK Conservative politicians and far-right, anti-immigration groups.

john howard malaysia visit 301106 talking In Australia, ex-Prime Minister John Howard (left) formulated a 'One Australia' policy in 1980s. In essence, 'One Australia' was a reaction against multiculturalism and it insisted that Australia must retain the domination of the Anglo-Saxons.

Howards's 'One Australia' theme was later picked up by racist politicians such as Pauline Hanson who founded the One Nation Party. This party's sole platform was based on fiery anti-migrants and anti-foreigners rhetoric and policies.

Surrendering sovereignty

A year after launching, the concept of '1Malaysia' is still too ambiguous to the majority of

Malaysians. Although the slogan has generated lots of hype, there is no substance in it.

In fact, Malaysians of all ethnicity are equally lost in this mantra-like rhetoric. The 'feel-good' effect cannot sufficiently cover the disappointment or disillusionment over inaction in addressing real issues affecting the nation, such as corruption, falling productivity, poverty, national unity etc.

Our concern is more than just wasting tax payers' money on all those glitzy advertisements, billboards, songs, concerts, essay-writing competitions etc. We must address the core issue; how secure can the country be when we voluntarily expose all governmental functionaries to a private firm with a strong foreign interest?

In its work, Apco has been given access to many highly sensitive government materials which I believe even most Malaysians are denied access to. It would be absolutely naïve for us to believe that Apco will handle our state secrets 'professionally', especially when we run into conflict with global powers.

I hope legislators and leaders of BN would pay some attention to this serious issue. If you are truly patriotic, stand up now. Please do not surrender the fate of Malaysia into the hands of foreign powers.

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