

HOW THE WHITE HOUSE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES RUN HIT-JOBS ON CITIZENS

Fri, 21 Apr 2023 14:00:08, swmf088, [post_tag: how-the-white-house-and-federal-agencies-run-hit-jobs-on-citizens, category: news]

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When you report a public agency corruption crime, as Plaintiff did, that is taking place in the US. Government, over 200 companies can be, and are, hired by the White House, Congress-people and agency bosses to attack you in reprisal. These services, contracted by the White House "Plumbers" include the provision of such attacks as: Bribery of contracting officers and agents to damage competitors and only award the bad guys; Internet server manipulation and website spoofing. Manipulation of online payment transaction systems to cut off competitors revenue; Job database manipulation and slander to cut off employment options for competitors or witnesses; Hacking of competitors/witnesses devices; Theft of patent materials; Threats and possible murders of whistle-blowers; Ordering cronies and allies to black-list competitors/witnesses; Bribery of public officials to direct funds and contracts to them and away from competitors/witnesses competing products; Production of media character assassination campaigns; Embezzlement; Placement of sabotage moles, working for them, in competitors/witnesses companies to sabotage their plans and report internal data to competitors; Honey traps; DNS re-routing of all internet connections of competitors/witnesses and hundreds of other Dirty Tricks political reprisal operations.

David D. Kirkpatrick has detailed "The Dirty Secrets of a Smear Campaign" in a recent report. These are the same kinds of attack tactics used against Plaintiff by US. Federal officials.

Rumors destroyed Hazim Nada's company. Then hackers handed him terabytes of files exposing a covert campaign against him—and the culprit wasn't a rival but an entire country. In the summer of 2017, Hazim Nada, a thirty-four-year-old American living in Como, Italy, received an automated text message from his mobile-phone carrier: How was our customer service? Puzzled, he called a friend at the company. Someone impersonating Nada had obtained copies of his call history. A few weeks later, his account manager at Credit Suisse alerted him that an impostor who sounded nothing like Nada—he has a slightly nasal, almost childlike voice—had phoned and asked for banking details. "I started to feel like somebody was trying to scam me," Nada told me.

Nada was the founder of a nine-year-old commodities-trading business, Lord Energy. The "Lord" stood for "liquid or dry," because the company shipped both crude oil and such drygoods as cement and corn. He had carved out a lucrative niche by establishing unconventional routes: Libya to Korea, Gabon to Italy. By the summer of 2017, Lord Energy, which was based in Lugano, a Swiss city across the border from Como, had a satellite office in Singapore, another opening in Houston, and annual revenue approaching two billion dollars.

Nada, whose parents emigrated from Egypt and Syria, is tall and slender, with curly dark hair that's neat at the sides and unruly on top. He'd recently married a Saudi woman he met while she was vacationing with her family in Switzerland. They now had a daughter, and were renovating a historic Liberty-style mansion that sat on a wooded hill overlooking Lake Como. The property's sweeping views and hillside swimming pool were so spectacular that George Clooney—a neighbor—had filmed a Nespresso commercial there, along with Jack Black and various glamorous women; the ad's running gag was the preposterous decadence of the setting. As a hobby, Nada had earned a pilot's license and also taken up skydiving. That March, he had opened a second business, outside Milan: a vertical wind tunnel, which the Italian military and the United States Air Force used to train paratroopers.

Though Nada enjoyed his success, he sometimes worried that his life lacked mission, especially when he compared himself with his father, Youssef, then eighty-six. Youssef had joined the [Muslim Brotherhood](#), the original Islamist movement, as a teen-ager in Alexandria, in 1947, during the group's founding decades. He never engaged in violence, not even in the riots preceding the 1952 coup that deposed Egypt's British-backed monarchy. But, as the coup's leaders consolidated their power, they jailed thousands of Brotherhood members, including Youssef. He spent two years in prison, went into exile, and amassed a fortune in business—in Libya, Austria, the United States, and finally in Switzerland. He founded a bank that, following Islamic tradition, did not charge conventional interest, and he became a major donor to and an international emissary for the Brotherhood. He liked to call himself the movement's foreign minister.

Hazim, in contrast, was planted firmly in the West. Born in Silver Spring, Maryland, he was bored by politics, casual about religion, proud of his American identity, and a fan of nineties hip-hop. He visited Egypt once, then never wanted to return. Hazim's passion was theoretical physics. After graduating from Rutgers, he'd received a master's in physics at Cambridge University and a doctorate in applied math at Imperial College London. Oil trading had started as a side gig: his father's business empire had fallen apart while Hazim was at Rutgers, and he traded commodities to pay for his graduate studies. Now oil had made Hazim richer than physics ever could have. He still missed research, and he daydreamed about going into the electric-vehicle business, partly to atone for shipping so much planet-warming fuel. But, before those suspicious calls started, his most pressing problem was an invasion of wild boars onto his property. He hunted them with a crossbow.

In the fall of 2017, there was another deceptive call. A man pretending to represent Citibank contacted Nada's company and requested banking information about Lord Energy, claiming that he wanted to process a payment. Then, that December, the company unexpectedly appeared in a gossip online publication called Africa Intelligence. The item was ostensibly about a delay in a Lord Energy tanker's departure from Algeria. Nada had kept the tanker anchored for minor repairs, but Africa Intelligence said that Algerian authorities had blocked it. Odder still, the article insinuated that the delay was linked to the implosion of his father's bank, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Youssef Nada and other Brotherhood leaders had long condemned the use of violence—indeed, the militants of Al Qaeda had denounced them as timid. But the Brotherhood did give rhetorical support to the Palestinian group Hamas, describing its fight against Israel as legitimate resistance, and the Egyptian strongman [Hosni Mubarak](#) had cited this as evidence that the Brotherhood was itself a terrorist group. Youssef Nada, the Egyptians argued, was essentially Osama bin Laden in a banker's suit. After 9/11, the U.S. government, too, adopted this view of Youssef Nada. President [George W. Bush](#) publicly accused him of helping Al Qaeda "shift money around the world." Switzerland and the European Union imposed sanctions. Police searched his home. Financial institutions froze his assets. His fortune collapsed.

For more than a decade, Youssef fought to clear his name. He won a libel suit against a journalist at an Italian newspaper who had accused him of financially supporting Hamas. Dick Marty, a former Swiss senator and prosecutor, conducted an investigation of the sanctions against Youssef, and in 2007 he concluded that the blacklisting had been "totally arbitrary" and "Kafkaesque." Five years later, a European court ruled that the Swiss restrictions on Nada had baselessly violated his human rights. On February 26, 2015, the U.S. Treasury Department removed him from its roster of "Global Terrorists," telling him in a terse letter that the "circumstances resulting in your designation . . . no longer apply."

When Hazim Nada started Lord Energy, in 2008, he was forced to prove to each banker he met that his venture bore no connection to his father. Africa Intelligence now portrayed Lord Energy as a new incarnation of the family business. Throughout the "legal marathon" over the terrorism charges, the publication asserted, "the Nada family continued to operate its commercial activities"—including trading Algerian oil.

Hazim assumed that a competitor had planted the item. But soon other wild allegations began appearing—too many to be chalked up to industry chatter. On January 5, 2018, Sylvain Besson, a journalist who had written a book purporting to tie Youssef Nada to a supposed Islamist conspiracy, published an article, in the Geneva newspaper *Le Temps*, claiming that Lord Energy was a cover for a Muslim Brotherhood cell. "The children of the historical leaders of the organization have recycled themselves in oil and gas," Besson wrote. A new item in Africa Intelligence hinted darkly that Lord Energy employees had "been active in the political-religious sphere." Headlines sprang up on Web sites, such as Medium, that had little editorial oversight: "Lord Energy: The Mysterious Company Linking Al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood"; "Compliance: Muslim Brotherhood Trading Company Lord Energy Linked to Crédit Suisse." A Wikipedia entry for Lord Energy suddenly included descriptions of alleged ties to terrorism.

Six months after the first Africa Intelligence item, World-Check, a database that banks rely on to vet customers, listed both Hazim and Lord Energy under the risk category "Terrorism." Five financial institutions walked away from negotiations with Nada. UBS cancelled his personal checking account—and his mother's, too.

Nine days later, World-Check deleted the listing. "An error was made," a lawyer for the company wrote to Nada, offering a "letter of apology" that he could show to lenders. But the damage had been done. In December, 2018, his longtime bankers at Credit Suisse stopped doing business with Lord Energy.

Dick Marty, the former Swiss prosecutor, accompanied Nada to the office of a UBS regional manager to try to clear up the matter. The manager, whose desk was covered with printouts of the incendiary articles and Web posts, told them that the mere appearance of a terrorism link was too much for the bank, regardless of the truth. A campaign of unproven allegations had ruined Nada's father, Marty thought, and now the same thing was happening to Hazim. But although Marty knew why Mubarak loathed Youssef, he couldn't understand the targeting of Hazim. "He is not the fanatical type," Marty told me.

Lord Energy, unable to finance its shipments, laid off its employees. Nada was so distraught that he couldn't sleep. One night, he took a pill for his insomnia, but its effect was short-lived, and he woke to a panic attack, shivering and shaking. "I was running around, screaming like a madman for about six hours," he told me. When his family took him to a hospital, he said, "the doctor sedated me like an elephant."

Panic attacks kept coming for months. "I had creditors running after me from all across the world—the U.S., South Korea, Gabon, you name it," he said. "It was horrible." That April, Lord Energy ceased operations and sought bankruptcy protection.

Nada complained to the Swiss police that someone was orchestrating a campaign to defame him. After a cursory investigation, an officer met with him to explain why the department was closing the matter. When the officer left the room for a few minutes, Nada found himself alone with the case file. Desperate for answers, he rifled through it. The officer had written notes dismissing him as paranoid, Nada told me. (The local police and prosecutor declined to comment.) But the police had also obtained copies of requests for records about Lord Energy

and a local mosque. Both had been filed by a Geneva-based private intelligence firm, Alp Services.

Alp is the creation of Mario Brero, whom *Le Temps* has called "the pope" of Swiss investigators. Born in 1946, he works out of a third-floor walkup above a bakery on Rue de Montchoisy, a few blocks from Lake Geneva. When I knocked on the door, in December of last year, a tiny dog in a red sweater scampered under a Christmas tree in the foyer. Former employees told me that Brero cultivates a familial atmosphere at his office. But when a junior associate leaves he shrieks of betrayal and threatens legal action.

Brero came into the hall dressed in a three-piece suit; tall and heavyset, he walked with his hands plunged deep into his pants pockets, accentuating his roundness. "Hello—goodbye," he said, immediately ushering me out. He never talked to journalists, he explained, citing client confidentiality. "I am an old man," he added, twirling his neck-length gray hair.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the ruler of the United Arab Emirates, paid a Swiss private intelligence firm millions of dollars to taint perceived enemies. Many countries now outsource intelligence operations to Western companies. Photograph by Michele Tantussi / Getty

French-language news reports and former employees say that Brero represents himself as a graduate of a prestigious engineering institute in Lausanne. Records indicate that he left after a semester. (The school declined to discuss his academic record.) It's unclear how he started his career, but by 1986 he was running a business exporting computers and semiconductor-manufacturing equipment from the United States to Europe. Federal prosecutors in San Francisco indicted him for violating laws against exporting sensitive American technologies to the Eastern Bloc—he'd set up a system of straw buyers in Western Europe. Brero denied the charges but resolved them by signing a consent decree and exiting the business.

Former Alp employees told me that Brero characterizes his brush with American law as the beginning of his private-intelligence career. As he recounts it, he somehow came into contact with [Jules Kroll](#), the American forefather of the modern corporate-intelligence industry, and Kroll persuaded him to start over as an investigator in the secretive banking center of Geneva. (Kroll says that he has no memory of Brero.)

It was an astute decision: the city has become a booming hub of the intelligence business. Geneva banks need to perform due diligence on prospective clients. Its law firms need research for litigation. And the foreign elite who park their assets in Switzerland need private spies for their disputes and divorces. Moreover, the Swiss authorities have cultivated a pointedly hands-off approach to regulation. Although Switzerland is most notorious for banking secrecy, it also asks few questions of private intelligence firms, making Geneva an attractive choice for clients eager to avoid scrutiny.

Brero opened Alp in 1989, and fiercely defended his turf. When a British intelligence firm, Diligence, was launching a Geneva branch in 2007, Brero incorporated a second firm, called Diligence *sarl*, at Alp's address, confusing potential clients. But there was more than enough business to go around. News reports noted that Brero drove a Porsche Cayenne and docked a motorboat on the lake.

Brero's business initially focused on mundane work for banks and law firms, along with a few big-ticket divorces, but in 2012 a French scandal put him in the headlines. The chief of the mining division at the French nuclear-power giant Areva had, without informing his bosses, hired Brero to investigate potential fraud by its chief executive, Anne Lauvergeon, or by others involved in the disastrous \$2.5-billion acquisition of a Canadian mining company. No evidence of corruption emerged, but Lauvergeon got wind of Brero's snooping, and she and her husband brought charges of invasion of privacy against him in a French court. Brero seemed to relish the attention: at the trial, he teased the prosecutors for the amusement of the crowd, and spoke candidly about obtaining tax records from Switzerland showing that Lauvergeon's husband, who is French, had spirited away money there. "Legality isn't the same everywhere," Brero testified. "In France, the only way to get tax information on a citizen is illegal." But, in the Swiss canton of Vaud, "for ten francs it is absolutely possible." (How did Brero come to suspect that Lauvergeon's husband had paid Swiss taxes? In court, lawyers for Lauvergeon's husband contended that Alp had illegally obtained some of his French tax records. Two former Alp employees confirmed this to me, explaining that Brero had received them from a French investigator with inside connections, prompting a look across the border.)

At the same time, Brero acknowledged violating Swiss law. He said that he'd paid phone-company employees for bills listing customer calls, sometimes using another private intelligence agent as an intermediary. "I know that the work done by these sources is illegal," Brero testified. He refused to name his sources in court, but Swiss prosecutors subsequently arrested the agent and three phone-company employees in connection with the sale of call histories, and *Le Monde* suggested that Brero had betrayed his accomplices to protect himself. The trial also exposed other unseemly assignments that Brero had discussed with Areva—such as spying on Greenpeace—and some embarrassing e-mails. Brero had written to a client, "Despite my large size, I have the flexibility of a cat combined with that of a Bolshoi ballerina." (Brero did not respond to detailed questions from me, including some about the Areva case.)

The scandal transformed his business. Although the French court imposed only a token penalty on Brero, he was convicted of inducing a phone-company employee to disclose customer data and of disseminating information acquired by illegal means. Former employees told me that the verdict drove away reputation-conscious law firms, banks, and corporations, along with international corporate-investigations giants, such as Kroll, that had previously subcontracted to Brero. At the same time, the Areva affair brought Alp less squeamish customers: oligarchs from the former Soviet Union, politicians and businessmen from small African states, sheikhs and tycoons from the Middle East. "They came from the East and the South," a former Alp employee told me. "And they were very demanding."

Brero recast his sales pitch, talking up his ability to spread negative information instead of merely collecting it. He now described his specialty as "offensive viral communication campaigns."

After Nada met with the Swiss police officer, he fired off an e-mail to the general mailbox listed on Alp's Web site, complaining of "fraud and prank calling to obtain private information regarding our company" and proposing to resolve the matter "amicably." He received no response, and he was too busy settling the claims of Lord Energy's creditors to follow up immediately. But the name Alp Services never escaped his mind. In early 2021, Nada e-mailed the company again, threatening "personal and professional repercussions on your agents and firm" if Alp did not correct the false allegations it appeared to have spread. By that April, his wife was about to give birth to their second child, and the stress of Lord Energy's collapse was straining his marriage.

That is when he received an encrypted message from an unfamiliar French number. The sender, who refused to give a name, claimed to speak for a group of vigilante hackers who had penetrated the online accounts of Alp Services. As proof, the sender presented Nada with a copy of the threatening e-mail that he'd sent to the Alp in-box. His head was spinning: Was this a ruse by Alp itself? Then the contact showed Nada internal Alp e-mails directing operatives to write the online articles calling him an extremist. Nada could scarcely control his rage. "If I did not have a family, I think I would have gotten a gun and driven all the way to Geneva," he told me.

The hackers sent him messages in an idiosyncratic English sprinkled with French and Italian cognates, and the style varied over time. Nada assumed that he was dealing with a group of Europeans. "The guys," as Nada thought of them, sometimes sounded righteous, as if they were activists out to expose Brero's wrongdoing, but their main motive was clear. "They asked me to pay them," Nada told me. Had the hackers targeted Alp as part of some unrelated dispute and then discovered something that they thought they could sell? Or had they targeted a Geneva private detective on the hunch that he must hold valuable secrets?

Either way, they offered to sell Nada their Alp files—terabytes of stolen material, including e-mails, proposals and reports, photographs, invoices, and recorded phone calls—for thirty million dollars in crypto. He told the hackers that he was neither willing nor able to pay them for their information, but the messages kept coming. After about two weeks, the hackers made a different request: they wanted Nada to act as a messenger, relaying their sales pitch to a wealthier potential buyer. Thieves were pressing Nada to fence their stolen treasure. Yet the chance for revenge was hard to resist.

Nada, concerned that he might be accused of having abetted the hacking, reported it to the Swiss authorities within two days of the first contact. A Swiss intelligence agent, Antonio Covre, went to the hospital where Nada's wife was giving birth and took photographs of the encrypted messages. Nada showed me e-mails that he'd sent to the local police about the hack. Nobody followed up. (A lawyer for Alp asserted, without seeing the stolen files, that some were "obviously forged." But the lawyer declined to specify which files he doubted, and I was able to corroborate hundreds of private details contained in the leak.)

To draw Nada in, the hackers let him browse through the stolen cache, restricting him only from downloading any of it. "The guys" made no effort to curate the leak by highlighting some files or hiding others, as many hackers do. Nada, unsure what to do, pored over it all with a mixture of fury and fascination. He stopped sleeping again as he scrolled endlessly through the trove. "I was really swimming in darkness, seeing all these bad plans and this evil machine," he told me. "When I was in the car alone, I would start screaming in anger." He rolled his eyes at the way Alp pitched prospective customers. "We are mercenaries but we have our ethics," Brero sometimes wrote. "We only work with clients with whom we share the same values."

If so, Brero shared the values of a remarkable array of characters. The files revealed that he had done intelligence operations for many foreign governments, or for individuals close to them. The list included Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Congo, Nigeria, Gabon, Monaco, Angola, Uzbekistan, and Saudi Arabia. He appeared to have done work on behalf of the Hollywood filmmaker Bryan Singer, the director of "Bohemian Rhapsody," who has been accused several times of sexual assault. (A lawyer for Singer, who has denied the assault allegations, said that Singer was not available for comment.) Other revelations: Brero had done investigations for the French fashion tycoon Bernard Arnault, for the Israeli mining baron [Beny Steinmetz](#), and for a roster of billionaires from Eastern Europe, including Bulat Utemuratov, of Kazakhstan, and Oleg Deripaska, Dmitry Rybolovlev, and Vladimir Smirnov, of Russia. (A spokesperson for Arnault declined to comment, and the other clients could not be reached.)

Nada sometimes felt like a Peeping Tom. Photographs stored in backups of Brero's phone appeared to offer glimpses of his private life: giving flowers to his daughter, doting on a grandchild. Brero, though, clearly had few qualms about invading other people's privacy. In the stolen files, Nada told me, he saw backups of various iPhones and BlackBerry devices, suggesting that Brero had hired hackers himself. There was a surprising amount of confidential banking information, and someone using a Proton Mail address had corresponded with Alp about obtaining details of client accounts at UBS. (Former Alp employees told me that a contact at UBS had sometimes leaked such information to Brero, who courted the source with gifts and meals.)

Nada also saw evidence of honey traps: images of a woman posing in fancy rooms wearing lingerie, and internal correspondence about sending a sex worker to compromise a Swiss tax official. A former Alp employee who wasn't aware of the hacked material told me that Brero, while working for the Swiss art dealer [Yves Bouvier](#), paid a sex worker to entrap a Swiss tax official. (A spokesperson said that Bouvier had no knowledge of such a scheme.) Two former Alp employees each described at least one other occasion when Brero had used the tactic.

When Nada first learned of the hack, "the guys" played coy about who had hired Alp to attack him. They made Nada guess. He named competitors in the oil trade. Wrong, they said. The true client was Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, the ruler of the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Mohammed, often referred to by the initials M.B.Z., was arguably the richest person in the world, thanks to his control of vast sovereign wealth funds. He commanded the Arab world's most effective military, and paid large sums to lobbyists, think tanks, and former government officials to maximize his influence in the West. And, since the [Arab Spring](#) uprisings of 2011, M.B.Z. had led a campaign across the Middle East to restore and fortify authoritarian order in the region. "M.B.Z.'s picture flashed before my eyes," Nada told me. "An oil trader just wants you out of a territory. But this was someone with the resources of a *state*." The threat felt existential. (I sent numerous questions to U.A.E. representatives in Washington and Abu Dhabi who declined to respond.)

The U.A.E. had hired Brero as part of a long-running feud with its neighbor Qatar. As many American officials saw it, the mutual hostility exemplified what Freud called the narcissism of small differences: both states were Western-backed, petroleum-rich monarchies; both had checkered human-rights records; both were close partners with the Pentagon. But the ruling families of Qatar and the U.A.E. embraced different, if equally cynical, strategies for bolstering their power. Qatar performed a balancing act: it hosted a major American airbase but also cultivated a tactical alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, both to gain grassroots influence in the Arab region and to counterbalance its larger Persian Gulf neighbors. Qatar welcomed exiled Muslim Brothers in Doha and handed them microphones on the government-owned Al Jazeera network (as long as they never discussed Qatari politics). During the Arab Spring, Qatar had used its money and its media to amplify demands for democracy (although never at home), in an ill-fated bet that its Brotherhood allies would assume power around the region.

M.B.Z., meanwhile, staked a claim to regional leadership on the notion that the U.A.E. was a modernizing force in a dangerously backward region. He regarded the Brotherhood—founded on the premise that an Islamic revival and Islamic governance could restore the Arab world's greatness—as an embodiment of that backwardness. That is why the prospect of Arab democracy frightened him, he told Western visitors. He warned that Islamists would win free elections in any Muslim-majority country. "The Middle East is not California," M.B.Z. liked to say. According to a cable obtained by WikiLeaks, he told American diplomats that fifty to eighty per cent of his own military forces would answer the call of "some holy man in Makkah."

The tensions between the U.A.E. and Qatar ratcheted up in early 2017. Each side splurged on lawyers, lobbyists, and public-relations consultants as they battled for influence in the capitals of the West, and private investigators raced to cash in, too. The industry newsletter Intelligence Online [reported](#) that "Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are fast overtaking Russian oligarchs as the main clients of international private investigation firms." Diligence, the company that Brero had tried to outmaneuver in Geneva, secured contracts with Qatar. Brero was evidently recommended to the Emiratis by Roland Jacquard, a Lebanese-born French journalist and an occasional adviser to the French government who professed to be an expert on the secret extremism of European Muslims. The hacked files include what appear to be Jacquard's handwritten notes preparing a campaign against Qatar and French Islamists, and financial records show that Alp paid him a ten-per-cent commission on its Emirati contracts. (Jacquard did not respond to requests for comment.)

In a May 12, 2017, letter to the U.A.E., Brero wrote that "several Head of States" and other "high-net-worth individuals" had made use of Alp's "capacity to enhance or degrade reputations on the Internet." The Emiratis did not need to be sold on the value of online warfare. That month, hackers believed to be working for the U.A.E. took over the Web site of Qatar's state news service and published bogus remarks—falsely attributed to Qatar's emir—describing "tensions" with President [Donald Trump](#), urging conciliation with Iran, praising Hamas, and attesting to warm relations with Israel. The implausible comments appeared calculated to alienate both Washington and the Arab street. News channels controlled by the U.A.E. and its ally Saudi Arabia had wall-to-wall coverage of the purported scandal ready to air, and they kept analyzing its significance even after Qatar denied that the emir had made any such statements.

The U.A.E. soon escalated the fight further, rallying several countries in the region to cut off trade and diplomatic ties with Qatar. The coalition demanded that Qatar neutralize Al Jazeera and reject the Muslim Brotherhood. The Qatar side responded with its own dirty tricks: hackers cracked the e-mail accounts of the Emirati Ambassador to Washington and of Elliot Broidy, a top Republican fund-raiser close to the U.A.E., then leaked embarrassing contents.

In August, 2017, Brero arrived at the Fairmont Hotel in Abu Dhabi, as a guest of its rulers. He had prepared fourteen pages of talking points to persuade the Emiratis to pay him to take on Qatar and its Brotherhood allies. "We would aim to discredit our targets by discreetly and massively diffusing the embarrassing and compromising information: in the eyes of the media/public/officials, they would appear as perverts, corrupts or extremists," Brero wrote in his notes. "The power of 'dark PR' should not be underestimated: many experts argue that [Hillary Clinton](#) lost the Presidential elections due to 'fake news' relayed on social media and non-traditional media." Brero's promise: "We would use similar tools against your opponents."

His nominal client was an Emirati enterprise called Ariaf Studies and Research. But Alp's files made it clear that the bills went to M.B.Z. Brero addressed his host as Matar, and photographs that an Alp operative took of him at meetings in Abu Dhabi match one of Matar Humaid al-Neyadi, an Emirati official. Brero later met with Matar at the Baur au Lac Hotel, in Zurich, along with Matar's superior—referred to in the files as "His Excellency" or "Ali." Someone at Alp took photographs of the superior at that meeting, and they match those of Ali Saeed al-Neyadi, a ministerial-level aide to Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed—the Emirati national-security adviser and M.B.Z.'s brother. Brero sent a formal letter thanking "Your Excellency" for "the great honour to provide our services to your country." In texts, he sent "warm greetings" to "His Highness"—M.B.Z.

Brero had planned to tell the Emiratis that, given the profound secrecy of the Muslim Brotherhood, investigating them would be unusually costly. "We need to be frank about this case: to obtain useful, ideally game-changing intelligence, especially evidence-based, our actions remain highly complex, risky and resource-intensive," he wrote, in a WhatsApp message after the Abu Dhabi meeting. Yet this "first collaboration" was "a noble cause," he went on, and "could also allow you to judge our work and effectiveness." Brero's pitch succeeded. In an internal accounting, he recorded that the U.A.E. had agreed to an initial four-to-six-month budget of a million and a half euros "to obtain 'concrete evidence'" about Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe.

"I met your daddy on a special island where cameras followed us everywhere and producers tried to instigate fights between us by withholding food and only feeding us alcohol, and when everyone else got voted off we had to choose between getting married or public humiliation."

His talking points never mentioned Hazim Nada. Brero initially proposed targeting people who had already been described as Brotherhood sympathizers. For example, he offered to take down Tariq Ramadan, the Swiss philosopher and the grandson of the movement's founder, by exposing his "wild" sexual life, his many young mistresses and lax religious practice. Someone else beat him to it, though. Six months after the Abu Dhabi meeting, French police charged Ramadan with sexual assault, and he has since acknowledged having "submissive-dominant" sex with multiple women, though he has insisted that it was consensual. (In reports to the Emiratis, Brero took credit for anything he could, but not for the takedown of Ramadan.)

The idea of targeting Nada appears to have originated in conversations with Sylvain Besson, the Swiss journalist for *Le Temps* who had previously written about Hazim's father, Youssef. "It is an endless déjà vu," Hazim told me. Besson had spun a whole book, "The Conquest of the West: The Secret Project of the Islamists," out of an unsigned fourteen-page document, from 1982, that had been delivered to Youssef and then discovered years later, during the 2001 raid on his home. Most scholars now consider Besson's book an Islamophobic conspiracy theory, but it continues to influence the right. ([Anders Breivik](#), the Norwegian mass murderer, cited the book extensively.)

Brero included Besson in an early list of potential sources for the U.A.E. project and scheduled several meals with him while pitching the Emiratis. Besson's name is attached to an early draft memo about Nada and to a chart showing Nada and Lord Energy at the center of a sprawling network of supposed Islamists. (Besson acknowledged having spoken to Brero, but said that he could not remember the details of those conversations, and would not disclose his sources. He noted that, while he was reporting his book, Swiss investigators had told him that the fourteen-page document was "highly significant." But he now considered Youssef Nada to be "essentially peaceful." Besson added, "Maybe I would do it differently now.")

In Brero's first official report to the Emiratis, dated October 6, 2017, he wrote, "Why Hazim Nada?" His answer, which ran for forty-eight pages, was predicated on the presumption that the son was an extension of his father: "Youssef Nada is now an 86-year-old millionaire and it is natural that he hands over the family business to the next generation." After making this leap, Brero constructed a case against Hazim Nada mainly through an analysis of surreptitiously obtained copies of Nada's call history for June, July, and August of 2017. Nada often called his sister, for example; she lived in Qatar, and her husband was a mechanical engineer who happened to be the son of a prominent Muslim preacher revered by the Brotherhood. Nada called childhood friends, some of whom were the offspring of his father's old Brotherhood friends. His father's business partner, also a Brotherhood supporter, had a son, Youssef Himmat, who had worked for Hazim and also led a European network of Muslim youth groups. Nada frequently called an Italian Lord Energy employee and friend whose family had converted to Islam; the friend had even posted messages on social media opposing a 2013 Emirati-backed coup in Egypt that had removed a Muslim Brother as President. And so on—page after page of secondhand associations. In reality, Nada told me, the only person on his call history who might actually have been an Islamist was an Algerian parliamentarian and the operator of a language school in Milan. Nada's wife was studying Italian there.

Brero pushed his conceit with confidence, though. "Lord Energy SA appears as a highly important—and deeply discreet—entity within the Global Muslim Brotherhood secret terror system," he wrote to the Emiratis. Nada could hardly believe that the Emiratis were paranoid enough to buy it. "You just put some names of people they hate on a chart and their eyes will start flipping!" he told me.

His experience felt increasingly surreal: he was witnessing his own downfall through the eyes of the man who had caused it. The leaked files revealed that the editor of Africa Intelligence, Philippe Vasset, regularly sought information from Alp operatives, whom he knew on a first-name basis. (Vasset, who declined to discuss his sources, may have learned about the Youssef Nada connection indirectly—possibly from an oil-industry intermediary tipped off by Alp, whose operatives wrote Vasset after he had published to commend his reporting.) And Nada saw that, a week after the first Africa Intelligence item, Brero had drafted a sixteen-page dossier, labelled "Sylvain," that further elaborated Lord Energy's supposed ties to the Brotherhood. When Sylvain Besson published the *Le Temps* article, Brero presented it to the Emiratis as evidence of his own early success in exposing Nada.

Brero appears to have figured out quickly that Lord Energy's critical weakness was its dependence on a steady flow of loans—borrowing to fill a supertanker with oil in Libya, say, then

paying off the debt when the ship unloaded in Indonesia. Brero's work with Swiss banks had made clear that their compliance departments worried acutely about reputational risk. In February, 2018, he asked for more money to expand his operation against Nada, and proposed "to alert compliance databases and watchdogs, which are used by banks and multinationals, for example about Lord Energy's real activities and links to terrorism." His "objective," he explained, was to block the company's "bank accounts and business." Nada was beginning to feel that the main reason Brero had destroyed Lord Energy was to demonstrate his effectiveness.

Alp quickly put the Emiratis' money to work. An Alp employee named Raihane Hassaine e-mailed drafts of damning Wikipedia entries. On an invoice dated May 31, 2018, the company paid Nina May, a freelance writer in London, six hundred and twenty-five pounds for five online articles, published under pseudonyms and based on notes supplied by Alp, that attacked Lord Energy for links to terrorism and extremism. (Hassaine did not respond to requests for comment. May told me that she had worked for Alp in the past but had signed a nondisclosure agreement.) May and a fictitious French writer concocted by Alp—the freelance journalist 'Tanya Klein,' whom we created and who is becoming an expert on the European MB—also published articles about the youth-group network headed by Youssef Himmat, the Lord Energy employee. The articles described the network as a terrorist-recruiting branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. In reality, the network, the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations, was funded by the E.U. It campaigned against antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of hate speech.

Himmat, who grew up in Switzerland, told me that he considered himself to be a classical liberal. Not only did Alp's online campaign cost him his lucrative job at Lord Energy; it prompted banks to cancel his checking accounts and credit cards, and the rumors still make it difficult for him to find employment, borrow money, or even open an online checking account. "What did we do to deserve this?" he remembered asking himself when Nada relayed his discoveries. "We were caught in the crossfire." (He is no longer president of the Muslim-youth network and now makes a much diminished living trading commodities on his own.)

Alp operatives bragged to the Emiratis that they had successfully thwarted Nada's efforts to correct the disparaging Lord Energy entry on Wikipedia. "We requested the assistance of friendly moderators who countered the repeated attacks," Brero wrote in an "urgent update" to the Emiratis in June, 2018. "The objective remains to paralyze the company." To pressure others to shun Lord Energy, Alp added dubious allegations about the company to the Wikipedia entries for Credit Suisse and for an Algerian oil monopoly. And an operative using the pseudonym Laurent Martin lobbied World-Check about Lord Energy's alleged "terrorism."

Nada could not believe how easy it had been to persuade lenders to shun him. "Just a few blogs and some guy with a fake name and Proton Mail account," he told me.

Lord Energy "used to be seen as a serious commodity-trading firm with a legitimate business," Brero wrote to the Emiratis in an update in July, 2018. "Due to our actions, Lord Energy is today publicly exposed as a controversial Muslim Brotherhood company with ties to terrorism financing." He boasted that Google now auto-completed a search for "Lord Energy" with the words "Muslim," "Muslim Brotherhood," or "terrorism." In a 2019 "impact assessment" whose cover bore the image of an arrow hitting a bull's-eye, Brero reiterated his goal: "Pushing the MB-trading company Lord Energy towards bankruptcy."

By then, the U.A.E. was paying Brero two hundred thousand euros a month to locate and attack targets across Europe, with additional fees for one-off side projects. Matar was delighted with Alp's results. "Excellent job," he said in a phone call that Brero secretly recorded. "Everyone appreciates what you have done."

Brero pushed for more. In January, 2020, he wrote to the Emiratis, "We are ready to start the new five year Action Plan, by the end of which we will have covered about 20 European countries." The two had grown so close that in encrypted text messages Matar addressed Brero as "My dear papa." (The hacked files also indicate that Brero set up a Proton Mail address for Matar and then logged in to monitor his client.)

Nada was surprised to see mainstream journalists and scholars on Brero's payroll. While working on behalf of the U.A.E., Brero recorded more than five thousand euros in payments to Ian Hamel, a Geneva correspondent for the French magazine *Le Point*, and another five thousand euros to the French journalist Louis de Ragueneil, who wrote for the right-wing magazine *Valeurs Actuelles*. Both men attacked Alp targets in their reports or commentary. (Both men deny receiving payments.)

One of Brero's first moves after signing the U.A.E. as a client was to seek out Lorenzo Vidino, the director of the Program on Extremism at the George Washington University and a consultant for several European governments. Vidino, a dual citizen of Italy and the U.S., argues that even the most moderate Islamist organizations in the West can tilt Muslims toward separatism and violence. Nada, like many Muslims, thought that he simply dressed up bigotry in academic language. Georgetown University's Bridge Initiative, which studies Islamophobia, has described Vidino as someone who "promotes conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood" and "is connected to numerous anti-Muslim think tanks." In 2020, the Austrian Interior Ministry cited a report by Vidino as a basis for carrying out raids on dozens of citizens or organizations suspected of having links to the Muslim Brotherhood. No one targeted in the raids has been arrested, much less convicted of any wrongdoing. An Austrian appellate court ruled the raids unlawful.

Farid Hafez, an Austrian scholar of Islamophobia who was picked up in the raids and is now a professor at Williams College and a fellow at Georgetown University, said that Vidino portrays nearly all of the most prominent Muslim civil-society organizations as adjuncts of the Brotherhood. "Vidino is like a fox," Hafez said. "He says, 'They have some kind of a relationship to people who are related to the Muslim Brotherhood,' so you cannot sue him for libel, because he does not actually say you are a member of the Muslim Brotherhood!"

Alp records show that, on January 12, 2018, Brero treated Vidino to a thousand-dollar dinner at the Beau Rivage Hotel in Geneva. In prepared talking points, Brero indicated that he planned to lie about working for the U.A.E., instead telling Vidino that Alp had been hired by a "London-based law firm" to examine the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, with a focus on "possibly interesting points, like Lord Energy."

Brero's notes for the dinner suggest that he aimed to make Vidino a proposal: "Would he be available to work as a consultant, perhaps a short unnamed memo on the MB in Europe? (confidential of course)." Two weeks after the dinner, Vidino signed an initial contract paying him three thousand euros for "interesting leads/rumours" about the Muslim Brotherhood, along with a "list of alleged members of the first tier organisations in European countries."

Vidino acknowledged to me that he'd worked for Alp, adding that he often undertook research for private firms. "It's the same research I do no matter what, so it does not really matter who the final client is," he said. "I am a one-trick pony. I have been researching the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe for almost twenty-five years." Given this experience, I said, he must have realized that only the U.A.E. had the means and the motive to pay a private investigator to dig up dirt on Brotherhood-style Islamists across Europe. "They were the most realistic client," he said, though "it wasn't clear cut whether it was the Emiratis, the Saudis, the Israelis, or some private entity in the States."

Vidino delivered to Alp a series of gossipy reports about the Brotherhood's reach, and they undergirded Brero's work for the Emiratis. Vidino even appears to have promised Alp information that he'd obtain while consulting for European security services about Islamist threats. German authorities had invited him to Berlin "to work exactly on our topic," he told an Alp operative in a WhatsApp message in February, 2020, adding, "Obviously I think that my memo would be 'juicier' after that visit." The next month, Vidino wrote that "many of the names on the list come indeed straight from various meetings with German intel." (Vidino told me that he did not remember meeting the Germans around that time but considered such official interactions "field work.")

After ruining Lord Energy, Brero persuaded the Emiratis to pay him to go after many more people on Vidino's roster of suspected Islamists. By November, 2019, Brero had proposed to the Emiratis more than fifty potential European targets. At one point, he asked Vidino for "interesting elements/rumours" on the other side of the Atlantic. "It may be an opportunity to show that we could be useful in this jurisdiction too," Brero suggested. According to the partial records in the hacked files, by April, 2020, Brero had paid Vidino more than thirteen thousand euros. And an internal Alp accounting indicates that, between August 21, 2017, and June 30, 2020, the U.A.E. paid Brero at least 5.7 million euros.

Nada told me that, as he combed through the dossiers on various targets, he began to feel oddly "privileged." Whereas other Alp victims remained in the dark, he had seen the machinations behind his downfall. He recalled, "I was thinking of what I had lived through and multiplying it by all these other people, imagining what every single one of *them* had gone through. I began to feel a kind of responsibility."

The biggest Alp campaign that Vidino inspired was against Islamic Relief Worldwide, a major international charity. It was founded, in 1984, by an Egyptian-born medical student in Birmingham to raise money for a famine in East Africa; another early organizer, Essam el-Haddad, later returned to Egypt and played a prominent role in the Muslim Brotherhood. (Haddad served as the foreign-affairs adviser to Egypt's Islamist President Mohammed Morsi and has been imprisoned since the 2013 military takeover.) But Islamic Relief's purpose was purely humanitarian. Although Israeli officials have claimed that the group's work in Gaza has aided Hamas, Islamic Relief is contesting those charges in an Israeli court, and nobody has ever credibly identified any institutional ties between the charity and an Islamist movement. In fact, Islamic Relief typically works in partnership with the U.N., U.S.A.I.D., and European governments.

The U.A.E. has been more skeptical. In 2014, a year after the coup in Egypt, the Emiratis placed Islamic Relief on a list of dozens of outlawed "terrorist" organizations, along with the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Muslim American Society, and many other Western civic associations whose founders included Muslim Brothers. (Many nonprofit Muslim groups in the West trace their origins to Brotherhood émigrés, who were often educated professionals with experience in organizing.) The U.A.E.'s condemnation of Islamic Relief was halfhearted, though: representatives of the group were still welcomed at international conferences held in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

In 2019, Brero pitched a campaign against Islamic Relief by asking the Emiratis, "A major MB charity that has so far managed to remain under the radars in the EU? Hidden links with terrorism?" The Emiratis signed on, and Alp operatives began weaving webs of associations linking Islamic Relief officials to the Muslim Brotherhood or to violent extremists. One seventy-four-page "case study," dated April, 2020, suggested that a member of its board of trustees, Heshmat Khalifa, was "a terrorist at the top of Islamic Relief." Alp's case rested mainly on the claim that, in the nineteen-nineties, Khalifa had worked with an Egyptian humanitarian organization in Bosnia while Islamist extremists were flocking to the war there.

That connection turned out to be too tenuous to sell to mainstream news outlets. But Alp operatives hit pay dirt by combing through Arabic-language posts from Khalifa's personal Facebook account. After a deadly 2014 clash between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, Khalifa had posted antisemitic statements. Among them: "For the first time in modern history, prayer in the Al Aqsa Mosque is banned, and it has been closed by the grandchildren of apes and pigs with the blessing of a pimp in Egypt." (A Quranic verse says that God turned a group of Jews

into monkeys or swine as punishment for violating the Sabbath; Egyptian critics of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi refer to him as a pimp.) In another post, Khalifa called Sisi “the pimp son of the Jews.” Alp operatives also dug up similarly offensive social-media posts in Arabic by another trustee and an Islamic Relief executive.

In a report to the Emiratis, Brero wrote that he had leaked the quotes “piece by piece” to journalists—most prominently, Andrew Norfolk, of the London *Times*, an investigative reporter with a history of inflammatory writing about extremism among British Muslims. But Brero explained to the Emiratis that Vidino had served as a cutout: “We channeled our findings to the academic expert Lorenzo Vidino and to the *Times* to be sure to remain completely confidential.” (Norfolk told me that Vidino did not disclose that he had received the information from Alp.) Islamic Relief immediately removed all three officials, and said of Khalifa, “We are appalled by the hateful comments he made and unreservedly condemn all forms of discrimination, including anti-Semitism.”

Alp operatives promoted the scandal to contacts in the news media across Europe and the United States. The U.S. State Department issued a statement, British and Swedish authorities opened inquiries, and the German government stopped working with the organization. Banks threatened to stop transferring Islamic Relief funds to crisis zones around the world.

Islamic Relief officials told me that though they deplored the antisemitic statements, they couldn’t fathom why anyone was digging through six-year-old social-media posts. For about eight weeks, the attacks seemed to be coming from everywhere—the storm felt too diffuse to pin on any single antagonist. The crisis consumed its leadership. Islamic Relief added hundreds of thousands of dollars to its overhead to pay for outside audits, suppress false information in Internet-search results, and restore its good relations with governments—including paying for an independent commission, headed by a former attorney general of England, which verified that the organization was free of institutional antisemitism.

In the end, only the German government cut off the charity. Waseem Ahmad, Islamic Relief Worldwide’s chief executive, told me that the main harm done was to the millions of people who rely on the organization for food, shelter, or medical care. “It just hurt and delayed our humanitarian work,” he said. Why had the U.A.E. undermined Islamic Relief? “That is a multimillion-dollar question,” Ahmad said. “It’s a very unjust world—let’s put it that way.”

In other cases, Alp’s campaign for the U.A.E. may have gone beyond spin. The hacked files included more than a dozen photographs of the suburban-Paris apartment of Sihem Souid, a French Tunisian public-relations consultant for Qatar. She had also worked for the French border police and for a socialist minister of justice. She lived in the apartment with her husband and business partner, Olivier Felten, and their two children. Alp had labelled the pictures “reco,” for “reconnaissance.” In one image, a superimposed red circle marked the “access door” to the apartment; in two others, a red box highlighted a second-floor balcony. Another image was captioned “Picture taken inside her mailbox by our agent.”

Souid told me that she’d never heard of Alp or Brero. But by the end of 2017 she had begun to feel that someone was following her: a car appeared repeatedly outside her apartment. And in 2018 a burglar stole some of her jewelry but also her old cell phone, her computer, and some notebooks. A year later, there was a second break-in, by a burglar who took only a laptop and a mobile phone. Souid said, “It is shocking that a foreign country might apply such thuggish methods outside their own borders.”

One night in Como in May, 2021, Nada told me, he looked up from his laptop and saw a trespasser outside his window. His house sits more than half a mile from the road, behind a tall gate, so nobody had strayed there by accident. Nada grabbed his crossbow and the trespasser disappeared into the trees. Had an Alp operative cased his house?

Brero’s campaign sometimes involved secret retaliation. In a 2018 report, a U.N. panel of human-rights experts concluded that the U.A.E. may have committed war crimes in its military intervention in Yemen. The Emiratis commissioned Brero to investigate the panel’s members, especially its chairman, Kamel Jendoubi, a widely admired French Tunisian human-rights advocate. Jendoubi spent seventeen years in exile in France for opposing Tunisia’s former dictatorship, then in 2011 helped oversee Tunisia’s first free elections. “Today, in both Google French and Google English, the reputation of Kamel Jendoubi is excellent,” Brero noted in a November, 2018, pitch to the Emiratis. “On both first pages, there is not a single critical article.” Within six months, Brero promised, Jendoubi’s image could be “reshaped” with “negative elements.” The cost: a hundred and fifty thousand euros.

Rumors spread through Arab news outlets and European Web publications that Jendoubi was a tool of Qatar, a failed businessman, and tied to extremists. A French-language article posted on Medium suggested that he might be “an opportunist disguised as a human-rights hero.” An article in English asked, “Is UN-expert Kamel Jendoubi too close to Qatar?” Alp created or altered Wikipedia entries about Jendoubi, in various languages, by citing claims from unreliable, reactionary, or pro-government news outlets in Egypt and Tunisia.

Jendoubi told me that he’d been perplexed by the flurry of slander that followed the war-crimes report. “Wikipedia is a monster!” he told me. He had managed to clean up the French entry, but the English-language page still stymied him. He said, “You speak English—can you help?”

Nada first contacted me in May, 2021, shortly after he reported the hack to Swiss authorities. He felt torn by conflicting desires—he wanted revenge and compensation, and also to expose Brero and the Emiratis. He was outraged that one of Washington’s closest Arab allies could spy on and defame Muslim citizens and civic associations in Western democracies. Nada texted me, “What are we, second-class citizens that can be abused like this by some lunatic Muppet in the Gulf?” None of the reports to the Emiratis in the hacked Alp files documented financial transfers or other support being provided to any extremist group or Muslim Brotherhood organization.

Nada initially spoke to me on the condition of confidentiality, without telling the hackers. He didn’t yet know if or how he would gain possession of the files, but he wanted to reach out to other targets, who might join him in a legal action. He had reluctantly told the hackers that he would carry a message from them to the richest and most obvious potential buyer for the files: the rulers of Qatar.

After tapping contacts in the petroleum markets and in the Arab news media, Nada reached a series of senior Qatari officials. He was invited to Doha, put up in a luxury hotel, and told to wait. More than a week later, a car shuttled him to a meeting with Qatari intelligence agents, where he shared a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of the hackers: “Over 1.5 millions of files . . . over 1 Terabyte of emails. . . . Complete backups of the executives’ phones. . . . Millions of files and information of inestimable value.”

Nada received no response. Other Qataris met him at hotels in London. Some, noting that the isolation campaign against Qatar had recently ended, insisted that the feud with the U.A.E. was behind them; others claimed to possess far better intelligence already. A member of the Qatari royal family expressed interest, then backed away. When someone claiming to be a Qatari emissary tried to renew contact, early this year, Nada was too exasperated to engage.

He grew increasingly resentful of the hackers, too. They went silent for weeks at a time, or hinted that they were negotiating with other potential customers. A few [leaked Alp documents surfaced](#) in the European media, possibly provided by the hackers. “They are trying to use me, absolutely,” Nada told me. “What is their agenda? I don’t know.”

Last summer, another friend from the oil business gave him the number of a former Emirati security official, Abdul Rehman al-Blouki, who was said to be close to M.B.Z. Hoping for a financial settlement in exchange for staying quiet, Nada spoke with Blouki on the phone. Do not threaten the U.A.E., Blouki warned. (Blouki told me he didn’t remember the call, but said that the U.A.E. “is always a fair country, whose rulers only give and don’t take.”)

I sensed that Nada’s drive for vengeance might be fading. He told me that he is still worth about twenty million dollars. Lord Energy’s collapse had freed him to start the electric-car venture he had dreamed of. In November, his new company, Aehra, unveiled its first model, a sleek S.U.V., and *MotorTrend* [praised](#) its “Milanese flair.” Meanwhile, he accepted a research position in plasma physics, beginning next year, at Imperial College London. He and his wife are preparing to divorce, and he is now involved with a woman from Ukraine; he has travelled with her several times to her home town, near the front line of the war. “I am moving on with my life,” Nada told me.

Nevertheless, his improbable glimpse inside Alp’s campaign haunted him. How many other private citizens had been targeted by such firms—and never even known it? Occasionally, the press learned of another instance in which non-Western governments or billionaires had deployed private intelligence agents: last fall, the New York *Times* [reported](#) that both Iran and China had used undercover agents to hire American private intelligence firms to plot against dissidents in New York and New Jersey. A country’s decision to outsource intelligence operations to a Western company may seem perplexing, but the strategy offers various advantages. A country that is courting Western approval, such as Kazakhstan, might want to avoid getting caught at conventional spying. Others, such as the Persian Gulf monarchies, lack effective in-house intelligence agencies. [Western firms](#), meanwhile, often have connections to local media outlets which make them ideal proxies for conducting “dark P.R.” Pierre Gastineau, the editor of Intelligence Online, noted that few private investigators have faced a penalty for working for a foreign plutocrat or government. “There is no cop in the yard,” he told me.

Ronald Deibert, a political scientist at the University of Toronto and the director of its Citizen Lab research center, has argued that the growing use of private intelligence agencies by authoritarian rulers and their cronies is ushering in “a golden age of subversion.” Last year, in [an article](#) for the *Journal of Democracy*, he wrote that, “even a few decades ago, most authoritarian regimes” lacked the capacity to “mount the types of foreign-influence, espionage, and subversion operations that have become common today.” But digital spying does not require people to be on the ground in a foreign country, and the growing number of private firms—often staffed by former Western intelligence agents—makes it easy for governments or oligarchs to order an espionage or misinformation operation à la carte. “Anyone with enough cash can hire a ‘private Mossad,’ ” he wrote. “Subversion is now big business. As it spreads, so too do the authoritarian practices and the culture of impunity that go with it.”

Nada suspected that he had not yet escaped Brero’s sights. The most recent of the hacked files date from early 2021, and that fall a Reuters reporter forwarded Nada a pseudonymous e-mail, from Brero’s firm, that repeated claims about his secret ties to extremism. This time, Alp was attacking the Italian military for training at Nada’s indoor-skydiving business. (After I visited Brero’s offices, I received a similar e-mail.)

Nada told me, “This stuff should not be allowed to happen—that some dictator or his consultants decide for their own reasons to target citizens of a democracy and ruin their lives, without any kind of process whatsoever.” Many of Brero’s targets “have never done anything wrong, other than potentially holding views that the Emiratis saw as a threat. It was clear that I had no political views at all!” Of course, there is also the money Nada lost—more than a hundred million dollars by early 2019, he said, not to mention the millions he might have earned during the boom years for the oil trade in 2020 and 2021.

The lyrics of a Smashing Pumpkins song ran through his head: “The world is a vampire sent to drain / Secret destroyers hold you up to the flames / And what do I get for my pain?”

By last spring, the hackers had cut off Nada's access to the Alp files. He told me this past winter that he had persuaded "the guys" to stop holding out for a big payday from Qatar. Instead, he proposed that public exposure of some of the stolen information might help them attract other customers. The hackers e-mailed the Emirati-related Alp files to a Swiss prosecutor in Geneva, Yves Bertossa, and to Dick Marty, the former prosecutor—who forwarded them to Nada. (Bertossa declined to comment; Marty confirmed that he had relayed the unsolicited e-mail to Nada.)

Nada has now sent the files to two lawyers, one in Geneva and the other in London. Both declined to comment. It is a violation of Swiss law to gather political or business intelligence for a foreign state, and someone convicted of the crime can be sentenced to three years in prison. British law allows sweeping claims of damages for defamation. Nada told me that he is talking to lawyers in the U.S. about enlisting other Brero targets in a class-action suit to be filed there. "They've messed with the wrong guy this time," he told me.

Nada can expect a vigorous counterattack. Among the hacked files was a recording of a phone call with Matar about how to handle an e-mail from Nada threatening legal action. Ignore it, Matar told Brero. The U.A.E. was ready for war. "We're fully, fully a hundred per cent behind you," Matar said. "Whatever it takes." The White House "Plumbers" Dirty Tricks Team in America has ten times as many resources as those that were deployed against Nada. The financiers of the American White House: John Doerr, Vinod Khosla, Larry Page, Eric Schmidt, Steve Westly, Elon Musk, et al, are said to be "clinically insane billionaires" who will amplify any White House attacks, with their funds, to increase the damage to the target. The Ronan Farrow Book: "CATCH AND KILL" does an excellent job of detailing the attack efforts deployed by major White House financier Harvey Weinstein. All of the same attack service providers decrbed herein were used against Plaintiff, in reprisal, in order to protect a trillion dollar+ corrupt energy scam crime.

DOES1 through 20, as additional Defendants in this case, are thought, by investigators, to include persons friendly with the Judge, infinancial investments with the Judge and the leadership of organizations for which the Judge is a spokesperson. If those persons are also under active investigations by SEC, FTC, OGE, OSC, FEC, DOJ, FBI, and other organizations that Plaintiffs reports to, then the potential conflicts of interest are compounded.