

HUNDREDS OF COMPANIES SELL ELECTION-RIGGING-AS-A-SERVICE SPY ATTACKS

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Israeli firm dubbed 'Team Jorge' 'meddled in more than 30 elections around the world through hacking, sabotage and disinformation with "black ops" service fronted by ex special forces operative'

- Investigative journalists went undercover posing as potential Team Jorge clients
- Firm's boss boasted of being able to hack Telegram accounts
- Gawker and Gizmodo were well known as manipulation outlets but there are more and they are worse

By [AFP](#)

An [Israeli](#) firm sought to influence more than 30 elections around the world for clients by hacking, sabotage and spreading disinformation, according to an undercover media investigation published Wednesday.

The firm was dubbed 'Team Jorge' by investigating journalists who posed as potential clients in order to gather information on its methods and capabilities.

Its boss, Tal Hanan, is a former Israeli special forces operative who boasted of being able to control supposedly secure Telegram accounts and thousands of fake social media profiles, as well as planting news stories, the reports say.

The investigation was carried out by a consortium of journalists from 30 outlets, including the Guardian in Britain, Le Monde in [France](#), Der Spiegel in [Germany](#) and El Pais in [Spain](#), under the direction of the France-based non-profit Forbidden Stories.

It adds to a growing body of evidence that shadowy private firms across the world are profiting from invasive hacking tools and the power of social media platforms to manipulate public opinion and to sway voters.



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An Israeli firm sought to influence more than 30 elections around the world for clients by hacking, sabotage and spreading disinformation, according to an undercover media investigation published Wednesday. Pictured: A brawl breaks out between officials at Kenya's results centre in Nairobi amid accusations of vote rigging and a delayed announcement in August 2022. The 2022 Kenyan election was directory referenced in the report

'The methods and techniques described by Team Jorge raise new challenges for big tech platforms,' the Guardian says in its [report](#).

'Evidence of a global private market in disinformation aimed at elections will also ring alarm bells for democracies around the world.'

Hanan did not respond to detailed questions, saying only: 'I deny any wrongdoing.'

The 50-year-old told three undercover reporters that his services, often called 'black ops' in the industry, were available to intelligence agencies, political campaigns and private companies.

'We are now involved in one election in Africa... We have a team in Greece and a team in [the] Emirates... [We have completed] 33 presidential-level campaigns, 27 of which were successful,' the Guardian quoted him as saying.

Most of the campaigns - two-thirds - were in Africa, he claimed.

While demonstrating his technology to reporters, he appeared to hack into the Gmail inbox and Telegram account of political operatives in Kenya days before a presidential election there.

Forbidden Stories named the targets as two aides to William Ruto, who ended up winning the August 2022 ballot. The election was marred by chaos, [with a brawl breaking out between officials at the country's election centre amid accusations of vote rigging and a delayed announcement](#).



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While demonstrating his technology to reporters, the firm's boss, Tal Hanan, appeared to hack into the Gmail inbox and Telegram account of political operatives in Kenya days before a presidential election there. Pictured: Chaos after the Kenyan election results were announced

French broadcaster suspends presenter amid ongoing disinformation probe

France's 24-hour BFMTV new channel has suspended Rachid M'Barki, one of its longest serving presenters, over suspected links to an Israeli disinformation firm.

Investigative journalists found the firm sought to influence more than 30 elections around the world for clients by hacking, sabotage and spreading disinformation, their report says.

M'Barki, an anchor at BFMTV since the channel's 2005 launch, was suspended last month after a member of 'Team Jorge' suggested to undercover reporters that the firm was secretly behind a news report on Monaco's yachting industry.

The presenter is now on leave until an investigation into news packages linked to the firm has been completed, the Guardian [reported](#) on Wednesday.

Online public influence campaigns were carried out via a software platform, known as Advanced Impact Media Solutions, that allegedly controlled nearly 40,000 social media profiles across Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, the reports say.

Hanan also claimed that his firm had planted a report on France's biggest television news channel BFM about the impact of sanctions against Russia on the yachting industry in Monaco.

A senior presenter on the channel, Rachid M'Barki, 54, has been suspended and is being investigated.

Other similar companies have been named in media reports or sanctioned by Western governments in recent years over their role in trying to influence elections and public opinion.

Notorious British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica - since shut down - was allegedly used to develop software steering voters towards Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election.

The group collected and exploited the personal data of 87 million Facebook users to which the platform had given it access, leading to major fines and lawsuits.

On Tuesday, the chief of Russian mercenary group Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, admitted creating an infamous troll farm that is also suspected of interfering in Western elections.

Sanctioned by Washington and Brussels, the Saint Petersburg-based 'Internet Research Agency' had for years been linked to Prigozhin, a 61-year-old ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin.



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A man engages in a scuffle with the security officials before the announcement of the results of Kenya's presidential election, at the IEBC National Tallying Centre at the Bomas of Kenya, in Nairobi, Kenya August 15, 2022

Following the latest revelations, Israel might also face increased pressure to rein in its cutting-edge cyberware and technology sector which was spotlighted in another media investigation led by Forbidden Stories in 2021.

It highlighted how the powerful Israeli-made Pegasus spyware had been sold by the cyber intelligence company [NSO Group Technologies to governments and used against at least 50,000 people around the world.](#)

Some of the alleged targets included human rights defenders and religious leaders, as well as politicians such as French President Emmanuel Macron.

Forbidden Stories is a collaborative platform set up in 2017 at the initiative of French documentary maker Laurent Richard, with the support of Reporters Without Borders, and brings together more than 30 different media from around the world.