

# Voices: Concerns about Israeli government lobbying churches

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On Sept. 27, the [Israeli government filed a FARA request](#) with the United States government.

A FARA request—Foreign Agents Registration Request—is simply a request to lobby the citizens of the United States on behalf of a foreign government.

This particular FARA request was filed so the Israeli government could have the right specifically to lobby evangelical Christians regarding their opinions about the state of Israel and their opinions about Palestinians.

## My concerns

### Foreign influence

The first reason I find this troubling is any foreign government requesting permission to influence specifically Christians, specifically churches, and then the United States government granting that is troubling.

It doesn't matter if it is Israel, who is an ally of the United States. It is really troubling that a foreign government would want to be involved in lobbying evangelicals at all, and that our own government would allow it. It sets a really bad precedent.

### Involuntary

Second, if you read the filing, I'm worried about it, because it's involuntary.

They use geofencing. Geofencing is a technology where, if you drive onto a church campus, one of those listed in the filing, and your phone is then

picked up, you will be served up targeted messages.

One could call those messages propaganda designed to get you to have a different opinion regarding the nation of Israel and/or the Palestinians.

I mentioned this because you don't get to opt in.

So, the pastors of these churches don't get to decide if they want to be part of this program. The leadership of these churches, the membership of these churches, don't get to decide. They're just targeted, because the government has given permission to a foreign actor to target the phones of these particular groups.

## **Dangerous precedent**

The next reason I'm really worried is it sets a really dangerous precedent.

If we allow a foreign government to request and get permission to lobby our churches, what might happen next?

Now, I don't want to act like churches have been political neutral zones, but I really do think this is a step that is a little dangerous, where we allow a foreign entity to begin to lobby and to do so openly.

I really worry about it opening Pandora's box here, specifically with political influence on churches, specifically when pastors and church leaders don't have the opportunity to reject that.

## **What to do**

If you're worried about this and you're wondering what you can do, you can read through the filing and see if your church is listed. There are a lot of churches listed in Texas. There also are some in California, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada.

If you see your church listed, you might want to make your church leadership aware they're being targeted. They might want to think about how is best to handle that in whatever way is appropriate in your particular church setting.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The full list of targeted churches begins on [p. 34 of the FARA filing](#). An interactive map of targeted churches is [available here](#). Numerous Texas Baptist churches are included.*

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