

From The Times

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## Wiretap scandal of leading Democrat 'who lobbied for Israeli spies'



(Kirk McCoy/Reuters)

Democratic Congresswoman Jane Harman was allegedly told that she would be appointed to an intelligence post if she used her influence in favour of pro-Israel lobbyists

Tim Reid in Washington

A prominent Democratic Congresswoman was embroiled last night in a growing scandal involving government wiretaps and her relationship with two alleged Israeli spies.

Jane Harman, a California Democrat with long involvement in US intelligence matters, was allegedly recorded by a Bush administration wiretap promising an Israeli agent that she would intervene on behalf of two pro-Israel lobbyists charged in the US with spying.

In return for pledging to use her influence to get the charges against the two men reduced, Ms Harman, a pro-Israeli hawk, was allegedly told by the unidentified agent that he would put pressure on senior Democrats to get her appointed to a top Congressional intelligence post.

Allegations that Ms Harman had inappropriately used her influence to aid the two employees of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the powerful Israeli lobby group, surfaced in 2006. What is new is the claim that she had been caught on a National Security Agency (NSA) wiretap discussing a "quid pro quo" deal on the case.

The alleged wiretap, reported by the political journal *Congressional Quarterly*, occurred because the NSA had been targeting telephone calls made by the Israeli agent during an investigation of AIPAC. In 2006 it was reported that Ms Harman was the subject of an FBI investigation over her involvement with the hawkish Israeli lobby group.

*Congressional Quarterly* also claimed that in 2006 Alberto Gonzales, President Bush's Attorney General, got the investigation against Ms Harman dropped because he wanted her help to defend the Administration's warrantless wiretapping programme, which was about to be exposed by *The New York Times*.

Indeed, Ms Harman managed to persuade the newspaper not to publish the story. It later did print it, and the congresswoman lambasted the editors for doing so, giving the Bush administration some badly needed political cover for the secret eavesdropping programme. The FBI dropped its investigation of her because of "lack of evidence".

The Israeli lobbyists, Steven J Rosen and Keith Weissman, were charged in 2005 with conspiring to obtain classified US intelligence and passing it to the Israeli government and Israeli journalists. They are due to go on trial this summer and their case has become a cause celebre among Israeli hawks in the US.

In a statement, Ms Harman denied ever contacting the US Justice Department about the AIPAC lobbyists. She added: "The...story simply recycles three-year-old discredited reporting of largely unsourced material. If there is

anything about this story that should arouse concern, it is that the Bush Administration may have been engaged in electronic surveillance of members of Congressional Intelligence committees.”

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