

A CUCKOO IN THE EAGLE'S NEST

Capturing Jonathan Pollard How One of the Most Notorious Spies in American History Was Brought to Justice

Ronald J. Olive

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Jonathan Jay Pollard, an intelligence analyst for the Naval Investigative Service (NIS), a branch of Naval Intelligence, is one the most controversial spies against the United States, for he spied in the service of Israel, a purported friend of America. The latest account of the Pollard case is provided by Ronald J. Olive, a former counterintelligence agent with the NIS, who led the investigation.

There are many angles from which to look at this case. As a counterintelligence expert, Olive focuses on the American counterintelligence failure that enabled Pollard to transmit a mountain of intelligence to Israel, and on the investigation that ultimately resulted in his arrest and confession. In Olive's telling, the Pollard affair is fundamentally a story of faulty security procedures, a story Olive hopes will help prevent similar occurrences in the future.

Certainly Olive's book makes for interesting reading, in places reminding of the taut plotting of LeCarré. As to the full import of the Pollard affair, however, *Capturing Jonathan Pollard* is limited in scope, slighting the much broader picture. Most of the significant questions from the case still remain unanswered – at least for the American public. What was Israel's objective in this espionage operation? How deeply involved were top Israeli government officials? What specific damage did Pollard do to American security? Most important, perhaps, *Capturing Jonathan Pollard* book does not broach the possibility that the involvement of Israel might have been a major factor in shaping the Pollard affair.

Despite its restricted scope, Olive's account offers eye-opening insights into the workings, or rather nonworking, of the American intelligence bureaucracy. Moreover, the book provides a reasonable character analysis of Pollard and his

motivation for becoming a spy. Pollard wanted to be an intelligence officer so he could be an important person and appear important to others. Pollard also combined a loyalty to Israel with a proclivity for fabricating stories to make himself seem significant. For example, while an undergraduate at Stanford during the 1970s, he boasted that he was not only a Mossad agent but also a colonel in an elite Israeli army outfit.

After dropping out of a masters program at Tufts University, in 1977 Pollard applied for a position in the CIA, but was rejected. The CIA's reason, the author notes, was Pollard's admission in a polygraph test that he had used illegal drugs extensively. Nonetheless, two years later Pollard was hired by Naval Intelligence as an intelligence research specialist. He worked at the Field Operational Intelligence Office in Suitland, Maryland, a Washington suburb, where his position involved handling top-secret materials. His background investigation had been extremely lax: The Navy did not even learn of the CIA's rejection of Pollard due to his drug use, because the CIA held that Pollard's right of privacy prevented the agency from turning over that information to the Navy.

As Olive points out, Pollard was an obvious security risk who should never have been entrusted with sensitive information. Not only had he used illegal drugs, but he ran up heavy debts and lied compulsively. Moreover, he often acted in oddball ways. In particular, his propensity for telling bizarre stories in college ballooned into wild tales worthy of a Munchausen as he worked in Naval Intelligence. Pollard told a Navy rear admiral that he had been arrested and tortured in Syria, although he had never set foot in that country. Arriving for an important interview late and disheveled, Pollard explained that his girl friend had been kidnapped by the Irish Republican Army and that he had spent the weekend chasing the terrorists around the Washington metropolitan area, ultimately negotiating her release (34).

Despite these serious character flaws, Pollard was able to obtain a succession of positions affording him access to increasingly sensitive intelligence. Ultimately, in October 1984, he was transferred to the Anti-Terrorist Alert Center (ATAC) of the Naval Investigative Service's Threat Analysis Division, where he was responsible for reviewing classified material regarding possible terrorist activities in the Western Hemisphere. In his new position, Pollard was given a courier card that gave him access to all government libraries housing sensitive material, and allowed him to withdraw top-secret material without being searched. Like a kid in a candy shop, Pollard gathered a multitude of documents, most of them concerning the Soviet Union and the Middle East rather than his own area of responsibility. Pollard also grew increasingly negligent about completing his assignments. Astonishingly, none of his superiors or colleagues at Naval Intelligence seemed concerned that he was working after-hours to collect vast amounts of information, but producing little or nothing. As well as recording its subject's treasonous industry on behalf of

the Israelis, *Capturing Jonathan Pollard* demonstrates that the level of vigilance among the naval intelligence personnel, charged with safeguarding some of America's most vital secrets, who worked with Pollard barely approached that of ordinary human curiosity.

Pollard's *modus operandi* was to heap his office cubicle with secret documents, which he would then smuggle out of the building. It was proven by his own signature that the classified documents he removed measured at least 360 cubic feet, over one million pages. Adding the materials he was able to pilfer or photocopy without his signature, the total amount, Olive points out, would be even "more staggering" (213).

One reason Pollard was able to make off with so many documents was because he devoted little effort to secrecy in removing them; there were no disguises, clandestine dead drops, or hollow nickels with microfilm inside. He would simply tote suitcases full of top-secret papers directly to his handler's house. He often made several trips a day to his car carrying envelopes easily recognizable as containing highly classified documents. When Pollard was asked after his arrest why he had not taken more precautions, he responded: "It had become so easy to remove documents, it just didn't make any difference" (182).

Pollard traveled to Europe to meet the leader of his operation, the famous Rafi Eitan, who had headed the capture of Adolf Eichmann. The Israeli spy organization involved was not the Mossad, but the scientific intelligence-gathering unit of the prime minister's office—LAKAM. While primarily motivated by his loyalty to Israel, Pollard also sought payment, and received sufficient emolument to allow for a lavish and—for one in his circumstances—indiscreet life style. "Instead of lying low," Olive writes, Pollard and his wife "were virtually advertising their crimes to the world" (67). Even so, Olive emphasizes that the money Pollard was receiving—\$2500 a month in cash and another \$30,000 a year for ten years deposited in a Swiss bank—"was paltry considering the grave risk he was taking" (89).

Pollard's lack of discretion was at last his undoing. A coworker finally reported his carrying of classified documents to his car, and his successful career as a spy quickly unraveled. Ronald Olive provides a first-hand account of the investigation he headed, which ultimately led to Pollard's apprehension. The investigation took only two weeks to arrest Pollard, but the bureaucratic bumbling continued (although Olive himself showed impressive professional expertise.). For example, even after agents found classified information in Pollard's home, the FBI, which had been called in on the matter, tended to view him as simply careless and absent-minded, and it temporarily dropped the case. It was only due to strokes of pure luck—some of them bringing to mind scenes from an Inspector Clouseau movie—that Pollard was ultimately arrested.

What broke the case was a blunder on the part of Pollard's wife Anne. Learning that her husband was being investigated, Anne sought to remove classified documents from their apartment. She stuffed them into a suitcase, but on noticing FBI surveillance, panicked and hurriedly dropped the suitcase off with a neighbor. Ironically, the FBI surveillance team she had seen was keeping tabs on another spy in the vicinity, not the Pollards. Olive comments that if Pollard's wife had panicked at the sight of the FBI, "She might simply have called a cab herself, climbed in with the suitcase, and made off somewhere with the evidence." Her misinterpretation of the FBI's presence "would prove to be the linchpin in bringing Jonathan Jay Pollard to justice" (135). The neighbor told her father, who happened to be a naval officer, about the suitcase. The latter contacted NIS, which then retrieved the suitcase. The information in the suitcase "would prove to be a crucial piece of evidence in the indictment and conviction, not just of Jonathan Pollard, but also of Anne herself" (161).

Believing that they were on the verge of being arrested, Pollard and his wife sought asylum in the Israeli embassy. Pollard's Israeli handlers had assured him that Israel would provide protection if he were ever in danger, and that he could escape via the Israeli embassy to Israel. Significantly, Pollard's Israeli handlers never provided him with an escape plan. As Olive writes: "Without realizing it Pollard would be left out in the cold" (66).

When Pollard drove onto the grounds of the Israeli embassy, he was denied admission; U.S. agents quickly arrested him outside the embassy premises. Had Pollard had not placed so much trust in the Israeli government, he might have made his escape. Olive notes, "he could have been driving up the East Coast for a flight out of New York, or making his way into Canada" (144). The author observes that it was foolish of Pollard to think that Israel would risk serious diplomatic problems with the United States by openly receiving and sheltering an espionage agent who had betrayed the U.S. on its behalf. Yet, given his overwrought sense of self-importance, Pollard thought the Israeli government regarded him as a great hero.

The bureaucratic bumbling, however, was not quite over. Even after Pollard was arrested, he was almost released on bond (187). Had that occurred, he might have had another opportunity to escape.

Until Pollard sought sanctuary in the Israeli embassy, the investigatory team had been unaware that he was spying for Israel, and even that he was Jewish. Olive writes that not only was Pollard's Jewishness unknown to the investigators, but not even his coworkers knew his ethnicity. Given Pollard's volubility and loyalty to Israel, and his later claims about the hostility to Israel of other NIS officials, it is hard to believe that the talkative Pollard never made his views or ethnicity known. Moreover, his bizarre stories, some of which touched on Israel certainly should have attracted attention to his loyalties.

Once again, the apparent lack of curiosity and analytical ability on the part of the intelligence officers who worked with Pollard is absolutely astounding.

Is it really likely, however, that American intelligence experts are on the level of Inspector Clouseau or the Keystone Cops? To help make a proper evaluation, let us look at a few other episodes that should help to shed some light on this subject.

On June 8, 1967, during the Six Day War, Israeli fighter planes and torpedo boats attacked the U.S.S. *Liberty*, which was on a reconnaissance mission in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea. Thirty-four American sailors and Marines were killed and at least 173 wounded. The White House prevented fighter planes from attempting to protect the American naval vessel, and the event was officially whitewashed as an accidental attack. The men at the scene clearly recognized the attack as deliberate. Apologists for Israel have labeled those individuals "anti-Semitic."¹

Richard Perle, David Wurmser, and Douglas Feith, in their 1996 report "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the [Israeli] Realm," advised Israel to attack its enemies, especially Iraq. These same men would later advise the administration of George W. Bush to pursue virtually the same policy they had recommended to Israel. They did this by promoting lies about Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's possessions of "weapons of mass destruction" and ties to Al Qaida. The few individuals who have dared to point out these and other key policy makers' links to Israel and to draw the logical conclusion that their desire to aid Israel was a significant factor in the 2003 United States invasion and occupation of Iraq have been instantly branded with the lethal stigma of "anti-Semitism." Consequently, the obvious connection between Israel's interests and American action against its Iraqi adversary is usually left unmentioned.

Finally, there is considerable evidence to show that Israeli intelligence operatives lived close to the chief terrorist Mohammed Atta in Hollywood, Florida. Moreover, on September 11, other Israeli intelligence operatives were seen taking pictures of the collapsing Trade Towers from the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, dancing and celebrating during the horrific event. To say the least, this should have aroused grave suspicions. Those Israeli agents were allowed to return to their country after questioning, however. The reaction of America's major media? Virtually nil. Fox News did a story on some of this, but quickly, as a result of pressure, removed all vestiges of it from its website. And nothing more was said about the subject: "Nothing to see here folks, just move along."²

How do these three cases relate to the seeming incuriosity and incompetence of U.S. intelligence officials in the Pollard case? In short, they show that anything (excepting the actions of Israel and its agents, of course) tending to put Israel in a negative light can involve serious, punitive consequences. Officials and journalists concerned with their reputations and careers have learned to

be hesitant about acts or opinions that can be portrayed as anti-Israel or anti-Semitic, including claiming that Israel spies on America. Thus allegations of espionage on behalf of Israel by several of the most influential neocons, including Perle and Feith, have been quietly allowed to expire by U.S. investigators. Indeed, had Pollard not sought asylum in the Israeli embassy, Americans might have received a far murkier idea of the specifics of his espionage. Despite the damning evidence against him, a noisy movement has continued to lobby for pardoning Pollard, imputing anti-Semitism to opponents of a pardon. The campaign nearly achieved success in 1998, but outrage among American intelligence officials caused President Bill Clinton to reconsider his plan to release Pollard so that he could make triumphant aliyah to Israel. The fact that an intelligence operative as indiscreet as Pollard could remain undetected long enough to inflict major damage on the United States implies that many more agents for Israel have been at work in America's security apparatus, hidden by routine caution and discretion. Instead of taking suitcases full of documents, they simply take a few pages. Instead of seeming flamboyant oddballs, they act like normal human beings. Thus Pollard may have been merely the tip of the iceberg.

If Pollard was indeed simply a small player in a much vaster problem—even a sacrificial victim being punished to obscure the real problem—public concern should center not on meting out punishment to Pollard but on discovering what information was released to Israel. Evidently Israel sought more than just intelligence about its Middle East adversaries, as indicated by Pollard's acquisition of secret documents about the Soviet Union. Did Israel, as has been alleged, seek information on the United States that could be used to harm American security? In the interests of full disclosure, the United States government should release both Pollard and the information he provided Israel, with only crucial names redacted. Then Americans could assess Israel's real stance toward the United States: Is Israel a loyal friend or does it simply see the United States as a valuable instrument to be manipulated and exploited, even to America's detriment?

American Jewish leaders have lambasted the notion of dual loyalty as applied to American Jews. Certainly the charge doesn't apply to Pollard. In a classified memorandum to the judge in the Pollard case, Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger wrote that Pollard's "loyalty to Israel transcends his loyalty to the United States" (216). Pollard's wife Anne (since divorced), who had abetted his espionage activities, spoke for the couple when she said in a CBS interview: "I feel my husband and I did what we were expected to do, what our moral obligation was as Jews, what our moral obligation was as human beings, and I have no regrets about that" (212).

As Olive's book clearly brings out, Pollard was undoubtedly an individual with many flaws. Nonetheless, when one observes the craven antics of leading American politicians and media figures when confronting subversion and

espionage, one can only wish: “Would that Americans could be as loyal to the interests of their country as Jonathan Jay Pollard was to his.”

When the full picture is glimpsed clearly by Americans, the fault is not with Israel, Pollard, or pro-Zionist American Jews. Israel is simply doing what all countries – all countries that seek to survive, that is – must do: acting in its own interests. Countries it can exploit, it exploits to its best advantage. Pollard and other Jews who identify with Israel are simply acting out of ethnic loyalty. If other leading Americans continue not merely to tolerate, but to abet, such activity, the depredations of Israel and its loyalists here will only continue to worsen, to the great detriment of the United States.

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ENDNOTES

1. USS Liberty Memorial, <http://www.ussliberty.org/index.html>.
2. Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, “Ketcham’s Story: Coming In from the Cold,” *CounterPunch*, March 7, 2007, <http://www.counterpunch.org/cockburn03072007.html>; Justin Raimondo, “Terror Enigma: 9/11 and the Israeli Connection.”

