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The Pollard Affair: Israel's master spy

✓ By Wolf Blitzer

WASHINGTON - From the first revelation that US Navy intelligence analyst Jonathan Jay Pollard was spying for Israel, one question has puzzled almost everyone knowledgeable about Israeli-American relations: Considering how close the two countries are and how much is already shared, what could Pollard have provided that would be worth the risk?

After investigating the Pollard case for more than a year, and interviewing dozens of US and Israeli officials, I have learned some of what Pollard provided to Israel. My information suggests that far from the small-time bungler portrayed in some news accounts, Pollard was a master spy, who provided very important information to the Israelis.

Leon H. Charney, a New York lawyer who briefly represented Pollard and is close to senior Israeli officials, says: "His help was clearly invaluable to the security of the State of Israel."

The intelligence provided by Pollard to Israel included specific material dealing with the following general areas:

- Reconnaissance of PLO headquarters in Tunisia, including a description of all buildings there, according to one American with firsthand knowledge of the Pollard case and confirmed by an Israeli who is familiar with what Pollard provided. This and other related data obtained by Pollard - especially the specific capabilities of the Libyan air defense system and the movement of US, Soviet and French ships in the Mediterranean - enabled the Israeli air force to evade detection and to bomb the headquarters on Oct. 1, 1985. Pollard's information "made our life much easier" in the Tunis raid, one Israeli official said.

- Iraqi and Syrian chemical-warfare production capabilities, including detailed satellite pictures and maps showing factories and storage facilities, according to Israeli officials who were told by colleagues what Pollard had provided. An American official subsequently confirmed that Pollard had provided information about Iraqi chemical warfare.

America's refusal to provide this chemical-warfare material directly to Israel had angered Pollard, according to one knowledgeable source. Israeli officials said the first documents Pollard gave Israel, which greatly impressed his handlers, included the layout of eight Iraqi chemical-warfare factories.

- Regular US intelligence assessments of operations planned by a PLO unit, according to an American account that was confirmed in Israel.

- Soviet arms shipments to Syria and other Arab states, including the specifics on the SS-21 ground-to-ground and the SA-5 anti-aircraft missiles, according to knowledgeable American and Israeli sources. Whenever the United States discovered that a Soviet ship was passing through the Bosphorus into the Mediterranean, Pollard passed that information to Israel, the sources said.

- The US intelligence community's assessment of a particular Soviet-made fighter.

- Pakistan's program to build an atomic bomb, including large satellite photographs of its nuclear facility outside Islamabad, according to an American source with detailed knowledge of the Pollard case.

Despite the official Israeli claim that Pollard was part of a rogue operation, Israeli officials speak of him in terms that suggest he may prove to be one of the most important spies in Israel's history.

In general, Pollard gave Israel the pick of US intelligence about Arab and Islamic conventional and unconventional military activity, from Morocco to Pakistan and every country in between. This included both "friendly" and "unfriendly" Arab countries.

Pollard, 32, as arrested outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington on Nov. 21, 1985, after attempting to obtain political asylum. He pleaded guilty to espionage charges and his wife, Anne Henderson-Pollard, 26, pleaded guilty to lesser charges involving unauthorized possession of classified documents. Both of them are scheduled to be sentenced Wednesday.

Why did Israel recruit and use Pollard? Some US officials argue that the operation was unnecessary since Israel gets virtually everything it wants from American intelligence agencies. But Israeli officials, living on a thin margin of security, apparently were not convinced of this logic. They feared that the United States was not supplying everything. And what the United States was not supplying could be essential for Israel, especially in the area of sophisticated reconnaissance photography and electronic intercepts, where Israel's capabilities are limited.

Pollard had all the proper credentials, as far as Israel was concerned. He was intelligent. And he was a dedicated Zionist. Indeed, Pollard told me in the only interviews he has granted since his arrest that he was obsessed by the need to help Israel "personally."

Pollard held "Top Secret" security clearances. According to the presentencing memo submitted last month by US Attorney Joseph E. diGenova, Pollard had access to "Sensitive Compartmented Information," principally data about technical systems for collecting intelligence "as well as the intelligence product collected by the systems." A relatively small percentage of individuals who have "Top Secret" clearances are also approved for SCI access, the court document said.

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Throughout the Washington area, secure libraries contain this kind of extremely sensitive intelligence information that is accessible only through computer terminals requiring codewords, diGenova's memo explained. He said Pollard could "readily access these libraries, repositories and computer terminals to obtain data in order to perform specific duties."

The court documents suggest lax security and sloppy procedures in the military intelligence facilities where Pollard worked. Like other intelligence analysts, he was supposed to operate on the honor system, meaning that he would limit his access to that information for which he had an official "need to know," according to diGenova's memo. But since he had the appropriate access codes, he could easily obtain information unrelated to his duties.

In addition, according to diGenova, Pollard had a "courier card," permitting him to leave these libraries without having his belongings checked by security personnel. In short, he had all the credentials to become an extremely valuable spy.

In fact, diGenova says Pollard provided Israel with more than 1,000 classified documents, some of which were several thousand pages in length. Stacked up, the tens of thousands of pieces of paper could have filled a small hall. Most of the documents, according to the presentencing memo, "were detailed analytical studies containing technical calculations, graphs and satellite photographs." Other information included "highly classified message traffic and intelligence summaries" as well as data on "specific weapon systems." He apparently was able to take copies of this material - including satellite photos

- with him out the door.

An Israeli intelligence official told me that some of the information was "so breathtaking" that it justified the risk Israel was taking in running an agent in

Washington. Pollard's handlers - including Air Force Brig. Gen. Aviem Sella, veteran intelligence agent Rafael Eitan and former science counselor at the Israeli Consulate in New York Yosef Yagur - told him that he was "a one-man intelligence agency" for Israel, one source said.

What Pollard did was to make virtually the entire US intelligence-gathering apparatus available to Israel, completing the picture in those areas where Israel's knowledge was limited. His Israeli contacts, knowing where Israel was in need of specific information, "tasked" Pollard on a weekly basis to obtain it, according to the American prosecutors.

Israel has maintained that the Pollard operation was "unauthorized," part of a "rogue" unit that ran amok. Israel apologized to the United States and cooperated in the probe by making available for questioning to a delegation of US officials some of the Israeli operatives involved in the ring.

Some American intelligence sources remain very skeptical about Israel's denials. They argue that the unit that recruited Pollard, known as "Lekem," was created years ago to collect scientific intelligence. They also assert that Israeli intelligence experts had to know that only an inside American agent could supply the massive quantity and quality of satellite photography that they were getting.

Israel lacks that capability and Israeli experts knew that the United States was not supplying such information to Israel officially. Pollard himself said that the "extremely detailed" requests suggested a "highly coordinated" espionage effort by Israel.

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