

How badly did spy hurt America?

One of the worst cases of espionage in American history." That is how the U.S. federal prosecutor described the activities of Jonathan Pollard, a U.S. Navy intelligence analyst and "anti-terrorism expert" who was sentenced to life in prison last week for spying for Israel.

Because the case was tried under the highest secrecy, it's impossible to estimate the extent of Pollard's treachery. The judge, after hearing evidence from U.S. Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger, agreed with the prosecution that Pollard had caused damage to the U.S. that was "beyond calculation."

And while Washington's official words were muted, in private senior U.S. officials were seething with anger at Israel. What did Pollard give his Israeli handlers that not only outraged Israel's closest ally, the U.S., but that also provoked Washington into finally prosecuting an Israeli spy?

As I related in my Thursday column, all previous cases of Israeli spying have been hushed up. American officials caught passing secret data to Israel have never before been prosecuted. Why now? Here are some tantalizing clues and my own supposition:

(1) Pollard passed thousands of secret documents to Israel about Arab and Soviet military capabilities. Israel knows a lot about these subjects already. The damage was not here. Where it occurred, I surmise, was Pollard's selling Israel many of the sources of U.S. intelligence from the Mideast and other areas, including the Soviet Union. Such information would be a treasure of incalculable worth to Israel. With it, Israel could force America's agents across the Mideast to also work for Israel — or face death from their own countrymen if revealed.



Eric MARGOLIS

A Syrian general spying for America, for example, would now fall under Israeli control. The CIA's wide network of Mideastern agents may have been compromised. This includes generals, politicians and not a few Arab heads of state.

(2) The U.S. government stated: "Pollard compromised a breadth and volume of classified information as great as any reported espionage case and adversely affected U.S. interests vis-a-vis numerous countries, including, potentially, the Soviet Union."

The suggestion has been made that Israel may have bartered some of the secret U.S. data stolen by Pollard to the Soviet Union, or to other nations. Secret intelligence data is worth more than gold. Pollard's data was widely circulated in the Israeli government. Soviet KGB agents in the Israeli government may have gotten their hands on some of this data.

(3) Pollard was to some degree involved in the Iran-Contra arms scandal. He was asked by his Israeli handlers to research U.S. files on arms sales to Iran, with particular attention to anti-aircraft missiles.

It is possible, as I have already suggested, that Pollard was linked to that other likely Israeli agent, Manucher

Ghorbanifar, the moving force in duping the U.S. into the Iranian arms fiasco. Was there a link between Pollard and Michael Ledeen, the shadowy National Security Council "consultant" who helped set up the Iranian deal?

(4) Pollard's chief handler was the senior Israeli intelligence officer, Rafael Eitan. There are persistent though unconfirmed reports that Eitan was, at the same time, in charge of a super-secret Mossad operation aimed at making it appear that Syria and Libya were guilty of widespread terrorism. This campaign, if true, culminated in the attempted bombing last fall of an El Al airliner in London. Syria was blamed — and indeed seemed clearly guilty. But France's president and West Germany privately said that the affair was staged by Israel.

Is there a link between the U.S. Navy anti-terrorist expert, Pollard, his handler Eitan and this curious disinformation scheme? It's interesting that so many so-called anti-terrorism experts also seem to be so deeply involved in Irangate and the Pollard affair. Note also that Israeli disinformation — perhaps channeled through Pollard — led to American plans to bomb Libya.

The full story of Pollard's treason will probably never come out. That it did at all, and that Pollard was tried, is grim testimony to Washington's anger.

Following the Walker and Pelton Mideast men, the Yurchenko fiasco and Irangate, the Pollard affair marks the culmination of an era of unprecedented disaster for U.S. intelligence. If truly one of the worst cases of treason in U.S. history, then the American public should demand that the details of this debacle be exposed and those responsible for it punished.