

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 9CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
11 June 1986

INTERNATIONAL

Israeli damage control

Government tackles furor over Pollard spy affair, alleged secret service cover-up

By Mary Curtius
Special to The Christian Science Monitor

Jerusalem

Israel's government and the United States State Department are quietly coordinating efforts to limit damage caused by the Jonathan Jay Pollard spy case, according to both Israeli and Western sources.

The coordination has included prior consultation on statements issued this week by both Israel's Cabinet and the State Department, aimed at quelling reports that Israel has offered less than full cooperation in investigating the Pollard case, the sources say.

"I think the main concern here now is damage control," says one Western source, speaking on condition he not be named.

The Israelis were taken aback by American news media reports last week — based on leaks from the Justice Department — alleging that there might be more "Pollards" operating on behalf of Israel in the US.

It is a charge the government here has taken pains to deny, most recently in a Cabinet statement Sunday that was coordinated with the US Embassy in Tel Aviv and with Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy in Washington.

"During the examination of the Pollard affair, there was sincere cooperation on the part of the Israeli government," the statement said. "The government of Israel is committed to the continuation of this cooperation, which is based on the relations of trust that prevail between the two countries."

The statement was made after Federal Bureau of Investigation di-

rector William Webster criticized what he termed Israel's "selective cooperation" in the Pollard case. The State Department, particularly Secretary of State George Shultz, is inclined to believe Prime Minister Shi-

mon Peres's assurances that the Pollard affair was an isolated, unauthorized breach of the agreement between Israel and the US not to spy on each other.

After Pollard's arrest last November by the FBI on suspicion of passing secrets to Israel, the Israeli government said he had been hired by what was described as a "rogue" spy unit operating from inside the Israeli Defense Ministry. Israel apologized to the US, disbanded the unit, and fired its director, Rafi Eitan. The Israelis also allowed US officials to question, in Israel, several Israelis connected to the Pollard case.

Both Israel and the State Department seemed to think that the matter was behind them — until the Justice Department's ongoing investigation revealed that Pollard had been working with an Israeli Air Force officer. The officer, Brig. Gen. Aviam Sella, an Israeli Embassy science consul, an embassy secretary, and another Israeli, were all named in the court documents made public last week when Pollard and his wife pleaded guilty to charges related to spying.

The connection with General Sella made it harder for US investigators to believe that Israel's political leaders knew nothing of Pollard, Western sources here say.

Senior Israeli officials continue to insist Mr. Eitan "ran" Pollard without informing his superiors and

that Sella, too, was involved in the case without informing his superiors. But US investigators say that, though Eitan was dismissed from his post, he was later given a senior position at a top Israeli firm.

Security services under scrutiny

The Pollard controversy, and another case involving the head of Israel's super-secret Shin Beth counter-terrorism force, have deeply embarrassed this nation's security services and raised disturbing questions about their operations.

"The real scandal is not in the United States, but here," says one senior Israeli official. "These are more examples of how secrecy and compartmentalization can damage us enormously."

In both cases, the political echelons have distanced themselves from particularly grave acts committed by the security services. In the Pollard case, hiring an American to pass secrets to Israel put at risk the single most important relationship Israel has with another nation.

In the Shin Beth case, at issue is how two Palestinian bus hijackers died after they were captured and handed over, handcuffed, to the Shin Beth two years ago. Israeli Attorney General Yitzhak Zamir, who was replaced last week, insisted he had reason to believe the men had been murdered and that Shin Beth head Avraham Shalom may have been involved in a cover-up.

Neither the Pollard nor the Shin Beth case are popular issues here. Israel, a nation that has been at war with most of its neighbors for almost 40 years, allows great leniency to its security services. Prime Minister Peres, who has resisted an investigation of Mr. Shalom, has said repeatedly that the Shin Beth is engaged in a deadly, secret war and must be protected. Peres and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir seem inclined to protect the Shin Beth rather than address con-

cerns about possible structural flaws in the security apparatus.

As one Israeli observer pointed out, "In a country like Israel, where the work of the Shin Beth is so important, you can't even afford to have questions about their intent or capabilities."

Israeli political analysts and some government officials insist that the Pollard and Shin Beth cases suggest that Israel may be, as one put it, "in more danger from the Shin Beth than from terrorists."

Israeli reporters who have followed the Shin Beth case and generally supported Mr. Zamir's insistence on an investigation say they believe that at most, only a secret investigation will be conducted "and we will only get, at the end, a one-sentence conclusion that there was nothing to the charges," says one.

Few here believe that the damage caused by the Pollard affair or the Shin Beth case will move the nation's political leaders to reorganize or clean out the state's security apparatus.