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Israel's Spies: Who Controls Them?

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JERUSALEM, June 5 — The guilty plea entered Wednesday by a United States Navy analyst to charges of spying for Israel, coupled with the latest domestic intelligence scandal inside Israel, has raised some questions among Israeli officials and political specialists about who is in control of Israel's intelligence services.

News
Analysis

The specialists say it is difficult to decide which is worse: to believe the Israeli Government's explanations that what took place in both the American and Israeli spy scandals was done without the knowledge of the political echelon, or not to believe the explanations and to assume that in both cases the politicians have not been totally candid about their involvement.

"There is no doubt that there is a very basic problem here of control of the intelligence services," said Nahum Barnea, editor of Koteret Rasheet, Israel's leading political weekly.

Israeli officials had little reaction today to the guilty plea entered by the Navy intelligence analyst, Jonathan Jay Pollard, to a charge of selling classified documents to Israel. Mr. Pollard's wife, Anne Henderson Pollard, pleaded guilty to two lesser offenses. Four Israelis, including an Air Force officer, were named as co-conspirators but were not indicted.

Justice Department Criticized

Israeli officials said nothing disclosed in court Wednesday contradicted their statement, made after Mr. Pollard was arrested last November, that the Pollard affair involved an "unauthorized" operation mounted by a small group of intelligence officials.

A senior Israeli official said Israel believed that elements in the United States Justice Department "are trying to blow the whole business out of proportion."

"We cooperated fully with the American investigators in this matter and have nothing more to say," he added.

After an internal "investigation" mounted by Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli officials said last November that the Pollard espionage ring was a "rogue" operation run by Rafi Eitan, without the knowledge or approval of his superiors.

An Adviser on Terrorism

Mr. Eitan, a former chief of operations of the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service, had served as an adviser on terrorism to Prime Minister Menachem Begin and to Mr. Shamir when he was Prime Minister. Mr. Eitan was also appointed in 1981 as the head of the Bureau of Scientific Af-

fairs, a small intelligence unit charged with gathering scientific information.

Israeli and American officials say it is not inconceivable that Mr. Eitan, who had a substantial budget and a reputation for independence, could have engaged in an unauthorized operation.

However, evidence produced in Wednesday's indictment suggests otherwise. The fact that Mr. Eitan was able to use an Israeli Air Force colonel, Aviam Sella, in his espionage operation in the United States suggests that the operation may not have been limited to Mr. Eitan's intelligence operation.

The Israeli Air Force is probably the most tightly controlled bureaucracy in Israel. While it is not inconceivable that Colonel Sella was enlisted by Mr. Eitan without telling his superiors, political specialists here said, it does not seem likely.

Denials by Defense Chiefs

Both Moshe Arens, who was Defense Minister when Mr. Pollard was recruited, and Mr. Rabin denied knowing that a senior air force pilot was being used in an unauthorized espionage operation, which would mean a serious breach in controls.

Moreover, since returning from his period of study in the United States, Colonel Sella was promoted to brigadier general and put in charge of one of the largest air force bases in Israel. The idea that the Israeli Air Force would hand over such responsibility to a man who was involved for more than a year in a purportedly unauthorized espionage operation strains believability, Israeli analysts said.

Also, although the Israeli Government dismissed Mr. Eitan and broke up his agency after the Pollard affair was exposed, it later gave Mr. Eitan the job of chairman of the board of Israel Chemicals, the nation's largest state-owned industrial organization.

How could Israel reward a spy who had, in the Government's own words, violated the basic rules of Israeli intelligence gathering?

Israeli Official Replaced

Officials here ascribe it to the fact that Mr. Eitan had some powerful supporters in the Israeli Cabinet, particularly Ariel Sharon, the Minister of Industry and Commerce, and the fact that Mr. Eitan had been a "loyal and courageous" intelligence officer for many years and no one wanted to "throw him to the dogs."

Mr. Pollard's guilty plea followed closely on the heels of the disclosure in Israel that its former Attorney General, Yitzhak Zamir, had amassed evidence suggesting that Avraham Shalom, the head of Israel's domestic intelligence service, the Shin Beth, might have ordered the killing of two

captured Palestinians bus hijackers in April 1984 and then covered up the murders before two different Government commissions of inquiry. Mr. Zamir, who went against the Israeli Cabinet's wishes in ordering a criminal investigation of Mr. Shalom, was replaced last Sunday by Yosef Harish.

Like the Pollard affair, the Shin Beth case raises questions about the politicians' judgement and control over the intelligence community. Israeli press reports say that while Mr. Shamir gave some kind of approval to the Shin Beth leadership to cover up their alleged involvement in the murder of the bus hijackers, Mr. Arens, the Defense Minister at the time, did not know anything about it. Mr. Shamir has denied any wrongdoing in the case.

Mr. Peres, who replaced Mr. Shamir as Prime Minister in September 1984, apparently found out about the purported cover-up last November, when three Shin Beth officials went to him with the story. Mr. Peres chose not to inform Mr. Zamir, the former Attorney General, but sided instead with Mr. Shalom because he apparently believed the three underlings were trying to mount what was in effect a coup against the Shin Beth chief.

"Shamir is in the mess up to his neck," said Mr. Barnea, the Koteret Rasheet editor. "Peres is only into it up to his knees."

Mr. Peres's ability to restrain the Shin Beth now that the affair has been exposed has come into question. According to political sources, the top 9 or 10 officials in the Shin Beth have notified the Prime Minister that if he goes ahead with an investigation of their organization they will resign, leaving it without leadership and leaving Mr. Peres open to charges of having stripped Israel of its main shield against terrorism.

A Narrow Security Margin

Every democratic government has found it difficult at times to control its intelligence services. But Israel seems to have suffered this problem more than most, particularly recently.

"One reason," said Shlomo Avineri, a political theorist at Hebrew University, "is that because the security margin here is so narrow it sometimes pushes Israel, more than other democratic societies, into hard choices."

Moreover, Mr. Avineri said, Israel has a tradition of individualism and independence of action in military matters. "When it goes right you have national heroes," he said. "When it goes wrong, you have catastrophes."

Israeli political specialists also note that Israel has been plagued by weak governments over the last few years.

"The kind of governments we have had in the past few years do not produce a unity of command," Mr. Avineri said.