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SPYING AMONG FRIENDS

By Gilbert A. Lewthwaite

"Most of the world's 400 or more intelligence and security services are targeted to one degree or another on U.S. military, diplomatic and intelligence personnel, facilities, and technology. . . . One should remember, as some intelligence practitioners put it, there may be friendly countries, but there are only other intelligence services."

— Intelligence and Policy, by Roy Godson, 1985.

"We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow."

— Lord Palmerston, 1848.

Israel, in recent days, has given fresh focus to what an American intelligence expert wrote just this year and a British statesman declared last century.

Israel today, much to its own embarrassment and confusion, stands accused of pursuing its own interests by paying an American spy to divulge the secrets of its staunchest supporter and richest patron.

If two such closely bound and beholden friends cannot trust each other, who can?

It is not the first time an ally has been caught spying on the United States, or that the United States has been accused of spying on an ally.

In 1954, the Dutch Embassy in Washington admitted receiving secrets from Joseph Sydney Petersen Jr., a research analyst at the top-secret National Security Agency. The Dutch said they thought the information transfer was authorized. Petersen pleaded guilty to unlawfully taking secret information and was sentenced to seven years.

In 1956, the United States reportedly monitored British code messages to keep abreast of developments during the United Kingdom's Suez Canal invasion. Communication interception, even among allies, has become almost routine.

In recent years, U.S. diplomats have been expelled from South Africa (1979) and Spain (this year) for allegedly spying.

The current Israeli case is particularly disturbing because of the closeness of the relationship. The question it provokes is: How common is the practice of ally spying on ally?

Intelligence experts agree that it certainly goes on when circumstances convince a government that the information it needs, albeit from an ally, can be acquired only by espionage. But they doubt that allies, particularly those formally aligned, as in NATO, routinely finance spying operations against each other.

P "As the length of alliance and strength of alliance varies, you have greater and greater probability of having human agents [spies] being run against countries," says Jeffrey T. Richelson, an American University expert on intelligence who suggests, by way of illustration, that the United States would be less likely to spy on the British than to spy on the traditionally more independent French.

But he adds: "Even with the strongest and closest of allies you always have a certain amount of intelligence going on."

The Soviet Union, for example, is widely held to regard even its closest Warsaw Pact allies as intelligence targets. The United States, however, has generally preferred a system of close intelligence liaison, although this has been frequently compromised by leaks and security breakdowns in allied security services, notably the British.

Does the United States spy on its allies these days?

A Richard Helms, a former CIA director, says: "In the world of espionage, usually allies don't spy on each other. On the other hand, there may come an occasion when something is going on in an allied country that it is in the national interest to find out about."

"And maybe the only way to find out would be doing a little bit of spying. But it would be done on a case-by-case basis."

A William Colby, another former CIA director, says: "You can't answer that question. It's too hard to answer. Who are your allies? You have to look at the particular situation."

"You would be out of your mind if you spied on Canada. If you want to find

something out about Canada, go up and ask them. Other countries are more secretive about things."

Mr. Colby and other intelligence experts say the basic equation behind any decision to indulge in espionage against an ally is likely to be: Is the information to be obtained worth the potential of the acute embarrassment of discovery?

"Obviously, each nation is going to have to make its own decision about its own security. But when you do a secret operation in another country, you obviously have to weigh the value of the information you hope to get against the risk of being caught," says Mr. Colby.

"That means in many countries the impact would be so serious you wouldn't do it. But you also have a problem here of control of the intelligence services."

When the French secret service decided to sink the Greenpeace yacht in New Zealand earlier this year to scuttle a planned anti-nuclear protest at France's nuclear test ground in the Pacific, the blame was eventually laid on the defense minister and the chief of intelligence. Both lost their jobs in the diplomatic furor that engulfed the scandal.

It was not exactly spying, but it was a hostile intelligence action taken on friendly territory, and it shows the lengths to which intelligence services are prepared to go in pursuit of their own perceived interests.

Other documented examples of hostile intelligence activities among allies would be the South Korean and Filipino governments' activities against dissident groups residing in the United States — undertaken with official blessing of the foreign governments but despite U.S. protest.

In the Israeli case, the intelligence outfit allegedly responsible for retaining the U.S. spy was apparently operating without the knowledge of Prime Minister Shimon Peres and other Cabinet members. The potential of political embarrassment appears, therefore, to have been left out of the scales when the espionage decision was made.

According to one NATO ambassador based in Washington, intelligence services frequently operate in such an autonomous fashion that political leaders are not always privy to their activities.

In the United States, however, such loose-cannon activity is less likely. The intelligence services here are required by law to inform the congressional intelligence oversight committees of any particularly significant actions or developments. This puts clear political restraints — frequently resented — on them.

There is, of course, a fundamental difference between intelligence-gathering and spying. Every embassy, of an ally or an adversary, is in the business of snooping, of finding out as much as it legally can of what is happening in its host country. That is why embassies have political, economic and military experts to glean whatever information is available, to analyze trends, to dissect and

predict policies, to study personalities, to read every available tea leaf.

"What would our [intelligence] station chief do in Britain?" asks Richard H. Shultz, who teaches an intelligence course at Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. "Obviously he is going to be collecting a lot of open-source information. He is going to be working with his British counterparts against adversaries. Would he be recruiting British officials [to spy]? The answer is: I really doubt it."

Mr. Shultz says, "Generally, what your intelligence [operator] will do is attempt to identify people who can provide information that is helpful in terms of the external dynamics of a system. Do they really recruit them and pay them off in the ways the Israelis [allegedly] did? I don't think so. Generally, it's a little different. It's what is called in the trade 'having a close contact.' You don't have this guy in tow. You are not paying him. It's pretty deep in the background."

This is all diplomatically de rigueur. It stops short of illegal espionage.

But when you find, finance and control an agent who is channeling secret documents to you, you are spying.

That is what the Justice Department alleges Israeli intelligence officials did in the case of Jonathan Jay Pollard, a Navy counter-terrorism expert.

The information Mr. Pollard allegedly sold to the Israelis — largely details of Arab military strengths, as perceived by the United States — has prompted some American Jews to suggest that it was the sort of intelligence the United States should have been willing to share with Israel anyway.

The problem here is that, in peacetime, the United States maintains close military contacts with some Arab nations, notably Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt. Indeed, so close is the current U.S. relationship with Egypt that three U.S. officers attached to the U.S. Embassy in Cairo accompanied the Egyptian commandos on their mission to Malta to try to rescue the passengers in the hijacked EgyptAir plane last month.

That sort of cooperation would be impossible if Egypt thought the United States was routinely passing along military information to the Israelis. Here U.S. national interests clearly take precedence over Israeli intelligence requirements — at least in peacetime.

The Israeli government has instigated its own inquiry into the Pollard affair, and it has promised to forward the results to the Reagan administration, and to return any documents illegally obtained. Despite its original "dismay" over the espionage case, the Reagan administration is still ready to take Israel at its word as a close and trusted ally.

Roy Godson, a Georgetown University expert, says, "The point is that in the history of international relations, allies have spied on each other. It would be remarkable if that didn't exist to some extent in the closing years of the 20th century."

Mr. Lewthwaite is a reporter in The Sun's Washington bureau.

Israel's apology

Israel's statement after two Americans were charged with spying for Israel, issued Sunday by Prime Minister Shimon Peres:

The Government of Israel is determined to spare no effort in investigating this case thoroughly and completely and in uncovering all the facts to the last detail no matter where the trail may lead. The full inquiry is still incomplete and therefore the Government of Israel is not yet in possession of all the facts; but the inquiry is progressing vigorously.

The Government of Israel assures the Government of the United States that in the wake of the inquiry, if the allegations are confirmed, those responsible will be brought to account, the unit involved in this activity will be completely and permanently dismantled, and necessary organizational steps will be taken to ensure that such activities are not repeated.

Our relations with the United States are based on solid foundations of deep friendship, close affinity and mutual trust. Spying on the United States stands in total contradiction to our policy. Such activity to the extent that it did take place was wrong and the Government of Israel apologizes. For the time being, we have nothing further to say on this.

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