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## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE POLLARD CASE?

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**A Foolish and Reckless Act and an Excessive Punishment / What Separates American and Israeli Jews? / Raising the "Dual Loyalty" Issue and Jewish Insecurity / Israeli Authorities Misunderstand American Courtesy and Political Morality / The Unstatesmanlike Response of American Jewish Leaders**

As the dust begins to settle in the Pollard case and the controversy surrounding it fades from the front pages, it is appropriate to step back and try to assess what we, the Jewish people, can learn from what has been one of the most upsetting, painful and divisive experiences to affect Israel-American Jewish relations, as well as Israel-United States relations, in recent memory.

### **A Foolish and Reckless Act and an Excessive Punishment**

First of all, let us establish that virtually all Israelis who have expressed an opinion on the subject, certainly all those that I know, agree with their American Jewish brethren that the employment of an American Jew as a spy within the federal government was foolish and reckless, to say

the least, and needlessly jeopardized the good relationship developed between Israel and the United States which has reached a high point under the Reagan administration. Catching Pollard, everyone agrees, opened the door to anti-Israel forces within the administration, which had been forced to keep quiet for the past several years, to launch a counter-attack, the degree of whose success is not yet known.

If there is any sympathy in Israel it is for Pollard, the man, who has impressed most Israelis with his sincerity in doing what he did out of love for Israel. That sympathy was increased by his life sentence, far harsher than that meted out to those Americans who have spied for the Soviet Union, transferring American secrets to its major enemy, as distinct from someone who passed on American intelligence regarding

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third parties. In this they are joined by many American Jews and perhaps other Americans as well who, as the first wave of passion subsides, are taking a second look at Pollard's life term and asking why he was so severely punished relative to others. No less a person than Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, one of the leading defenders of civil rights in the United States, has raised this question openly in the columns of the *New York Times* and has drawn a favorable response from other columnists around the country.

### **What Separates American and Israeli Jews?**

The real differences between Israeli and American Jews begin to appear on other levels. On one hand, the situation reminds the sympathetic observer of Churchill's description of the Americans and English as "kindred peoples separated by a common language." In this case we are speaking of two segments of the Jewish people separated by their common love of Israel.

American Jews love Israel as the embodiment of their ideals; in other words, as a fulfillment of their particular synthesis of American and Jewish idealism which has become the American Jewish creed, highly moralistic in its expectations and messianic in its anticipations. That kind of Israel offers nourishment and sustenance to American Jewry. When it falls short, as it does in many little ways, and more blatantly in situations like the Lebanon War or the Pollard case, American Jewry is truly hurt, seeing its ideal as violated and reacting with bitterness.

Israeli Jews, on the other hand, whatever their aspirations for Israel in the future, are presently wrapped up in their concern for Israel's survival in the face of so many enemies. Hence their love for Israel leads them to accept what American Jews see as serious moral breaches. To Israelis those actions often are seen in light of a higher morality of survival, in this case survival by enhancing Israel's ability to prevent war, in itself a moral good. Both communities are partially right in the focus of their love and in their moral assessment. Each sees itself as entirely correct, at least until there is time for second thoughts.

There is yet another level, however, one which reflects how much the two communities still do not really know each other despite so many

decades of interaction and presumed intimacy. Israelis simply do not understand how American Jews feel. No matter how much they understand intellectually, they cannot conceive of the American reality existentially. For them one's people remains first and foremost the primordial ethnic group which commands or should command fundamental allegiance. In that sense they do not understand how American Jews have become Americans while remaining committed Jews.

American Jews, on the other hand, cannot understand how much Israelis are a Middle Eastern people, faithful to the notion that peoples, primordial ethno-religious communities, are the building blocks of the human order, that with few exceptions one is born into peoplehood and can never really leave one's original people except with a great wrenching effort. As long as no such effort is made, loyalty to one's people remains first and foremost for Israelis. Perhaps the two communities will never learn to understand each other experientially in this matter. Indeed we will simply have to learn to live with our misunderstanding, but we must keep trying.

### **Raising the "Dual Loyalty" Issue and Jewish Insecurity**

This brings us to the proximate issue of dual loyalty and American Jewish security. In some respects, American Jews look upon Israel as their creation and their pet, so that when Israel seems to jeopardize their status as Americans, it is as if a faithful dog whom they have fed and cared for (and they have an exaggerated view of how much they have helped Israel, which is to be expected), has just turned around and bitten the hand that feeds it. Israelis can argue, properly, that this is in any case a selfish attitude. That does not make it any less real, but here Israelis have a right to ask American Jews, "if you feel so American (which, as I have said, American Jews really do), how is it that you are so insecure?"

Shlomo Avineri, who posed that question, may not know the half of it. I was in Washington, D.C. the day Pollard was arrested and have since been back to the States twice, at times that happened to coincide with his sentencing and the reaction to it. What has struck me on all three occasions is the degree to which the issue of dual

loyalty has been raised almost exclusively by Jews. In some cases, the American Jewish establishment has done so, apparently trying to prevent the issue from surfacing by raising the charge in order to deny it. Even more frequently, it has been raised so by Jews in the media, most of whom are highly assimilated but still apparently need to demonstrate their "bona fides" as Americans by constantly raising the issue. Thus Ted Koppel, who has become well-known as a good friend of Israel but who, himself, is married to a non-Jew, has repeatedly devoted his Nightline program to the Pollard case, raising the dual loyalty issue every time that I have seen it, to my mind gratuitously.

My business in the States is primarily with non-Jews and it leads me to have close contact with government and public affairs circles and to regularly monitor the media other than the major newspapers and television networks where the Jewish presence is so strong. Maybe they are just being polite, but I have not found any signs that non-Jews are raising the dual loyalty issue independently.

Frankly, I am increasingly amazed at the level of American Jewish insecurity. As one who was born and raised in a religiously observant, Zionist, Hebrew-oriented home in the midwestern and western United States, it was not until I became an adult that it even occurred to me that this could be a real issue. Perhaps this was my naivete or perhaps it reflected a high degree of integration in American life. Whatever, especially since 1973, I have watched with ever-growing amazement how American Jews keep looking for the anti-semitic response to fall upon them as a result of some Israel-related activity. So far it has not, but they keep escalating the stakes. American Jewry would do well to examine its deeper self in this respect. Avineri has quite a point here.

On the other hand, even Jacob Neusner has a point in his excessive, unnecessary, and tasteless article. In an immediate sense, the United States may indeed be more physically secure for Jews than embattled Israel and, although he is dead wrong in seeing Israeli culture as limited and parochial, in certain ways, there is a greater flowering of a wider range of Jewish ideas in free, pluralistic and affluent America than in an Israel under siege, but why make the comparison? What

is it that drives some people to suggest that the other guy is not what he cracks up to be in order to justify who they are? America can be praised for what it is without denigrating Israel and it is unseemly for an American Jew, no matter how committed to the United States, to do so. Denigration is different from criticism. It is certainly legitimate to criticize Israeli actions and one can do so without in the least bit denigrating the Jewish state, but that is not what Neusner does. Neusner's brilliance as usual enables him to go immediately for the jugular, but even where he may have a point, it is not to his credit to make it.

#### **Israeli Authorities Misunderstand American Courtesy and Political Morality**

The Israeli authorities also have a lot to learn. Personally, I doubt if the decision to employ Pollard will be traced back to senior ministers. If experience is any guide, in no government do ministers themselves deploy field agents. The usual rule is that those on the political level give their spymasters tasks and then say to them "do what you have to and don't let us know about it." Were that not the case, there would never be a moment when any political figure was safe. Spying is by definition a dirty business, a little more, a little less, and the political leadership have to insulate themselves from it.

Their foolishness is in misassessing the American response. Israelis still do not understand American culture and morality, even after observing Watergate and more recently, Irangate. This is not the place to go into an explanation of why Americans are like they are, but Americans apply strict moral standards in the political realm of a kind probably never applied in any other country (Canada may come close, influenced as it by the United States). Moreover the structure of the American political system with its separation of powers makes it well nigh impossible to quash issues such as the Pollard case. Congress would invariably get into the act. Even within the executive branch, presidents do not rule the roost in these matters. If nothing else, Justice Department investigators take a professional pride in being fearless in their work and showing no favor. In this case they were probably egged on by anti-Israel elements, but even without that, in all likelihood they would have acted as they did.

The "normal" processes in international relations would lead the Israelis to expect that Pollard uncovered was an embarrassment, but since two friendly states were involved, the issue would be resolved at the political level. That is to say, there would be whatever appropriate apologies and reparations made and then the political leadership of the offended country would quiet the matter for the sake of continued good relations. Apparently they did not understand that that cannot be done in the United States. Certainly not in our time. The media would go about their business of "exposing" without restraint. Every aspect of America's moralistic political streak would come to the fore and, since this moralistic streak coincides with American Jewish political moralism it would be reinforced by the most articulate elements in American society.

Israelis in authority apparently continued to misjudge American courtesy as well. One can have little doubt that Prime Minister Shamir came back from his February visit to the United States encouraged that the matter was ended. Prior to his trip the American Jewish leadership had brought heavy pressure to bear on him not to go on the grounds that the timing was very bad. Pollard was due to be sentenced during the time Shamir was to be in the country and in general the climate was not good. Shamir persisted for his own reasons and the American government obliged by postponing the sentencing and by not raising the issue with him. Since this would not have been the Israeli way - Israelis wear everything on their sleeves as we all know - Shamir and his colleagues were lulled into thinking that they could go back to business as usual. Hence the unfortunate timing of Rafi Eitan's appointment and Aviem Sela's promotion. The Israeli leadership must learn to better understand the United States if it is to properly assess American reactions on other issues that may even be more vital to Israel's future.

#### **The Unstatesmanlike Response of American Jewish Leaders**

On the other hand, American Jews have to climb down from their moralistic hobby horse, which was reflected in their expectation that

Eitan and Sela should be cast out of the temple forever. They have to understand that Israelis, however wrong and foolish they believe employing Pollard was, will inevitably take into consideration the long and excellent service records of both men. They will never be brought to believe that one mistake, which after all caused no fatalities or wars, demands such an overrighteous reaction. I found this, indeed, to be one of the greatest sticking points in communication between the two communities. Neither can understand the other's views on the subject of punishment of the Israeli principals.

Finally - and this is probably too much to expect - American Jewry should take this opportunity to reexamine the way it responds to such issues as an organized community. One of the leading elder statesmen of American Jewry reflected to me on my last trip how unseemly it was for the American Jewish leadership to fall over their feet to run to Israel to publicly lecture the Israeli leadership on how to behave in the aftermath of the case. Dignity has its place in international relations and it is important one. Those American Jewish organizations engaged in external relations (what American Jews call "community relations") will in almost every case sacrifice dignity for publicity since they live off of the latter; hence the unseemly scramble for column inches in the *New York Times*. But this, too, is registered by friends and foes alike, who undoubtedly have come to certain conclusions about how the Jewish people does its business and, in turn, how to do business with the Jewish people.

All told, the Pollard case was far from being our finest hour. Let us at least try to learn from our mistakes.

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