

# More than Just a Spy: Jonathan Pollard and the “Special Relationship”

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Under the guidance of Dr. McDougall and Dr. Peiss, and with the support of CURF

## Who *is* Jonathan Pollard?

**Jonathan Pollard** is an American Jew who worked for Naval Intelligence. In November 1985, he was arrested for espionage, which he conducted on Israel’s behalf. Although he was spying for a friendly country, with which the United States shares a “special relationship,” he was sentenced to life imprisonment in March 1987. In 2015, Pollard was released on parole (after years of activism on his behalf, by American Jewish leaders, American officials, and Israeli officials), and in December 2020, he immigrated with his wife to Israel as a free man. His case is still controversial, as many of the details remain classified and therefore unknown to the public. Although the United States and Israel maintained a close relationship throughout the years that Pollard was in American custody, the affair was an awkward stain on their relations.



1985



Jonathan Pollard’s Naval Intelligence ID Card, 1985.

## Research Questions & Starting Point (Spring 2021)

### Initial Research Questions:

- Why did the Pollard affair become so famous?
- What lasting effects, if any, did the affair have on the ties between the two countries?
- What effects, if any, did the affair have on American Jewry?
- What role did American Jewry have in Pollard’s release, if any?
- What does the Pollard affair explain or show about the overall “special relationship” that may not otherwise be so clear?

## Research & Findings (Summer 2021)

### How I did my research:

- I started with background and secondary source research about the Pollard affair itself, the history of U.S.-Israel ties, American Jewry, Israeli security strategy, the connection between intelligence and diplomacy, and more.
- I next moved to the exciting stuff: primary sources. I read a few books and journal articles, and even a play, but most of the material came from newspaper articles – nearly 200 of them. They ranged from 1985 to March 2021 and came from American newspapers, Jewish magazines, and Israeli newspapers.

### Major Findings & Tentative Chapter Outline:

- One major running theme throughout most of those primary sources was references to the moral- and value-based ties between the two countries. I had underestimated the actual importance of that aspect of the rationale behind the relationship, previously dismissing it as rhetoric to mask plain strategic interests. However, it seems to really play a large role in determining foreign policy toward Israel and buttressing the stability and public opinion of the relationship.
- A second recurrent theme I gleaned from the news articles on the case is the diverging priority that Americans and Israelis place on certain values. While Americans tend to place more emphasis on justice, rule of law, and trustworthiness, the Israelis seem to care more about security, self-reliance, and nationhood. Both countries value all these principles, but the question is which they value *more*. I believe that these differences contributed to some of the lasting friction in the Pollard case.
- My three chapters will each use a reason why I believe the Pollard case became such a controversial international affair as a springboard to discuss different aspects of the “special relationship.”
  - **Chapter 1:** Because of the shock of *Israel* spying on the U.S. The two countries are so close, but why? I will explore the moral- and value-based underpinnings of the relationship along with the flourishing strategic cooperation. I will also discuss Pollard’s motivations and view of the connection between the countries, and American Jewry’s connection to Israel. The strong foundation of the relationship prevented the affair from having any real lasting effects on the bilateral ties.
  - **Chapter 2:** Because Israel botched the handling of the case. This has to do with domestic politics in both countries and underscores tensions between the State and Justice Departments. The Israeli reaction also, naturally, showcases Israeli “personality” and values.
  - **Chapter 3:** Suspected anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism. I will discuss opinions on whether anti-Semitism was involved in the sentencing/imprisonment, the power of the so-called “Israel Lobby,” and American Jewry’s thoughts on Pollard, then and now.



Pollard bumping elbows with then-Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu as a free man as he landed in Israel, December 2020.

## Next Steps & Writing (Fall 2021)

- As next semester begins, I will create a detailed outline and begin writing the thesis, replete with an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion.
- I will continue to confer with my advisor, Dr. McDougall, my HIST400 instructor, Dr. Peiss, and my Honors Thesis peers as I go through the writing process.
- Thank you CURF for the support!



The U.S.-Israel “special relationship” has lasted decades and has weathered more than one crisis. Israel has received the most cumulative foreign aid from the United States.