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<http://www.politico.eu/article/american-traitor-israeli-hero-jonathan-pollard-natanyahu-obama/>

American traitor, Israeli hero

The Pollard case shows that the interests of Israel and America are often sharply at odds.

By Andrew J. Bacevich

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The U.S. government's announcement that Jonathan Pollard will soon gain his release from prison is cause for celebration in Israel, and understandably so. There, Pollard is considered a patriot and hero. By engaging in espionage on Israel's behalf, he placed himself at great risk. Once caught, he endured considerable punishment — 30 years in a federal penitentiary. Pollard has more than earned the gala welcome that will no doubt be his, if and when he arrives at Ben Gurion Airport.

Americans have equal reason to classify Pollard as a despicable traitor, who in spending all those years behind bars got precisely what he deserved. Pollard betrayed the country of his birth and is no more worthy of sympathy than convicted spies like Aldrich Ames or Robert Hanssen or John Anthony Walker. Whether Pollard acted out of love for Israel or from greed — both motives were seemingly in play — hardly matters. And although his legions of defenders contend that he caused no actual harm to the United States, senior U.S. defense and intelligence officials, past and present, vehemently disagree.

This difference of opinion regarding the about-to-be-sprung Pollard presents Americans with a teachable moment. Sadly, we can count on American politicians of both parties to close their eyes to what that moment has to offer. Here is an opportunity sure to go to waste.

Israelis have no problem grasping why their take on Pollard and ours should differ. They fully understand that on many occasions U.S. and Israeli security interests are at odds. And when that occurs they do not doubt what comes first. It's Americans, insisting that "no daylight" exists between the United States and Israel, who perpetuate a false understanding of this relationship — a pretense that may benefit Israel, but certainly does not benefit the United States.

That the government of Israel paid an employee of the United States government to provide it with exceedingly sensitive intelligence is but one example of Israeli actions that should puncture that pretense. Israeli officials make no bones about the fact that they will do *anything* necessary to ensure the security of the Jewish state. The Pollard case reminds us that they mean what they say, even to the point of compromising the security of their principal (and perhaps only) ally.

Their hero is simultaneously our traitor because the prerequisites of Israeli safety and well-being differ from the prerequisites of American safety and well-being. Those differences, on matters ranging from nuclear weapons to settlement expansion to the creation of a Palestinian state, are anything but trivial or cosmetic. They are, in fact, fundamental, comparable to Washington's differences with Moscow over Ukraine or with Beijing over the South China Sea.

State security

On all matters touching on security, Israel plays hardball. It does not view itself as beholden to the United States or bound by American concerns, a reality that Israeli governments regularly affirm in word and deed. That seriousness ought to command respect. It should also elicit an equally serious American response. That response should take the form of a candid acknowledgment that where U.S. and Israeli security interests diverge, the United States need not be bound by Israeli concerns.

In negotiating a nuclear accord with Iran, of course, the Obama administration has done just that, which is what makes the deal such a startling departure from standard American practice. Obama has refused to defer to the demands of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and he just might get away with it.

Opponents of that deal have responded with a torrent of criticism. What's so striking about their objections is that they consist largely of talking points that Netanyahu himself might have drafted. Obama's American critics fail even to make any effort to distinguish between the U.S. interests and Israeli interests involved, preferring to sustain the fiction that those interests align. Indeed, the critics seem less interested in evaluating the pros and cons of the agreement than in affirming their own "passionate attachment" to Israel. That phrase, coined by George Washington, warns of the dangers that result from indulging in misplaced affection for another country.

In what has become one of the most bizarre rituals of American politics, those aspiring to high office seek to establish the legitimacy of their candidacy by proclaiming to the heavens their depthless regard for Israel. Any U.S. politician out on the stump publically professing undying love for Canada or Mexico, America's nearest neighbors, would be considered a whack job. A candidate declaring his or her love for Israel evokes bipartisan applause.

To their credit, Israelis profess no comparable passionate attachment to the U.S. Their fealty is to the state of Israel and rightly so. They reserve their admiration and gratitude for the likes of Jonathan Pollard, the American traitor.

In doing so, they make an important point, which Americans would do well to contemplate. Israelis understand that we and they are two different nations and two different peoples. The Pollard case and the Israeli response to news of Pollard's impending release testify to the enduring nature of that separation.