

U.S.-Israel spy relations are 'love-hate,' author says

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Of all the obstacles to chronicling the history of Israeli intelligence, journalist Yossi Melman found the issue of fairness the most difficult.

"The problem with writing a book on intelligence is that usually you can't tell the successes," said the co-author of *Every Spy a Prince: The Complete History of Israel's Intelligence Community*.

"It's easier to talk about the failures because failures are more known than successes. The real success in intelligence is something that is not told."

Melman — in San Francisco last week as part of a whirlwind publicity tour for *Every Spy's* paperback edition — is pleased with reaction to his work. "Everyone finds in the book whatever he wants," he said. "If you are an Israel-basher, you have enough information to support that. If you are pro-Israeli, you have sufficient material to be proud. I think it speaks for itself, that the book is balanced."

Of course, said the diminutive journalist, events of the last 10 years have been a nearly unbroken series of public mishaps for Israel's intelligence community. "The '80s were a decade of failures."

To prove his point, he recited a litany of intelligence fiascos and faulty assessments: the Lebanon war, the Iran-Iraq war, the Iran-Contra scandal, and the Jonathan Pollard case.

But *Every Spy* takes pains to point out that recent mishaps have unduly stigmatized the in-

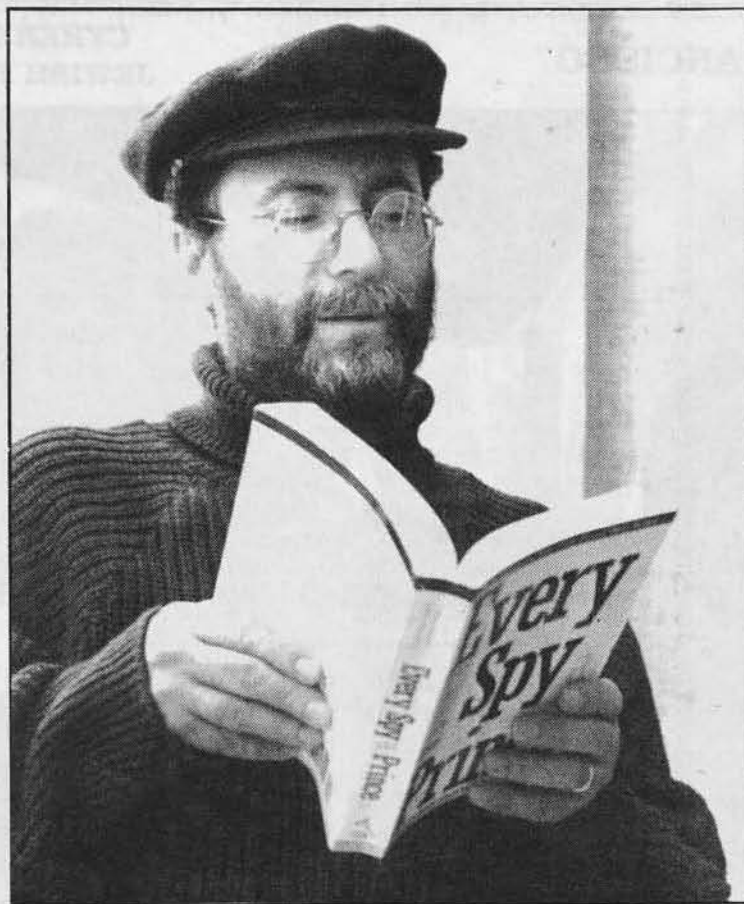


Photo by Tamar Kaufman

In S.F., Yossi Melman, co-author of *Every Spy a Prince*, looks at his best-selling book on Israel's intelligence community.

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"It has become fashionable in Israel," the book reads, "in a sharp departure from the once automatic praise for the intelligence agencies, to blame them for unexpected or unwelcome turns of events. Once honored as princes, Israel's spies are uncomfortably — and usually unfairly

— cast as selfish and confused has-beens."

Outside of a three-year stint with the Israel Defense Force and continuing reserve duty, Melman has not worked directly with the military, but that did not unduly hamper his efforts to chronicle the intelligence community.

"The advantage is you can talk

to many people; you can interview them," he said last week. "The disadvantage is that you are suspected by all sides. The intelligence people do not really trust you because you are not one of them. But if you are a working journalist and you've established your credentials and people believe they can trust you and share with you their little secrets, then I think you can write a book."

Under law, Melman's chapters were submitted to Israeli censorship; those written by co-author Dan Raviv, a CBS correspondent, were not.

"The censor censored some parts," Melman said. "It would be wrong for a journalist to praise or to give compliments to any censorship system; it's against our natural instincts. But I would say that Israeli censorship is fair. It's not political censorship; it's strictly military censorship. I argue with them, and in some cases I've changed their minds."

The case of Pollard, an American who has served six years of a life sentence for spying for Israel, has been in the public eye since the gulf war. "I think he should be released," Melman said. "He has suffered, he has paid for his sin. I'm not saying he didn't deserve to be punished — he spied against his own country. But now in the background of the war, a new light has been shed. The Israeli government should admit its responsibility and should appeal on his behalf to the U.S. government."

The "Israelis made a serious mistake by employing an Ameri-

can Jew," he added, "because when he was caught, the loyalties of all Jews in this country came into question."

However, Melman said, Pollard's betrayal will have no long-term ramifications. "Intelligence communities don't work on sentiment. They work on interests. There was nothing unusual about the Pollard affair. Countries do spy on each other. Those who express astonishment in [governments] are just hypocritical or they don't know the true nature of intelligence relations.

"It's a love-hate relation between friendly intelligence apparatuses. You collaborate, you exchange information, you are good buddies, but at the same time" — Melman reached under the table — "you pull the legs of your friends."

Though Israel's intelligence community is currently under fire, Melman said, it remains crucial to the country's survival. "Israel lives in a very hostile environment. That's why Israel needs to maintain its intelligence and its military apparatus. It's not something Israel wants to be proud of. The Israeli dream is to get rid of military arrangements."

In a sense, "Israel is a deviation of the Jewish genius," he continued. "Jews have always been identified with brains, with art, with literature, with music, and for the first time a new breed of Jew has emerged — a soldier, a brilliant intelligence officer — and it's a deviation.

"I think Israel would like to see more chess masters being produced than good generals."