

# Spy's Death Bares Joe's 'Soft Spot'

*Where do the loyalties of Sen. Joe Lieberman lie, with Israel or the United States?*

EXCLUSIVE TO THE SPOTLIGHT

BY MARTIN MANN

Is Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) the Democratic campaign's vice presidential nominee, an agent of influence or a covert collaborator of the Mossad, Israel's secret service?

That question haunts both the federal national-security officialdom and Congress these days in the wake of the startling discovery that Lieberman was a close confidant to a top Mossad spymaster in Washington.

The secret agent in the affair, Eliahu Ben-Elissar, was a prominent figure in the capital's social circles while he served as Israel's ambassador to the United States in the mid-to-late 1990s.

When he died of a sudden heart attack in Paris at the age of 68 earlier this month, the independent Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* revealed that Ben-Elissar was a high-ranking Mossad official, who specialized in espionage, subversion, assassination and the recruitment of undercover informants.

Born in Poland, a refugee from wartime Europe, Ben-Elissar joined the Mossad while a student in Paris, and soon became a key operative of the hardcore



**JOHN DEUTCH**  
... Dual loyalist.



**EHUD BARAK**  
... Eulogized top spy.

terrorist faction run by Menachem Begin, who began his political career as a hit man and ended it as Israel's prime minister.

As Begin ascended through Israel's bureaucratic elite, Ben-Elissar rose with him. He became a division chief, the head of liaison between the prime minister's office and Mossad headquarters. Eventually, under senior diplomatic cover, he became a regional director of clandestine Mossad operations, first in the Middle East and subsequently in the United States.

At Ben-Elissar's funeral on Aug. 18, the deceased spymaster was eulogized by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak as a "leader in the forefront of the fight for Israel's security . . . who deserves the nation's thanks for the difficult and dangerous tasks he undertook without hesitation or personal vanity, fully aware that some of his most significant achievements must remain a secret."

That one of Ben-Elissar's "secret achievements" included getting close to Lieberman now appears "a disturbing probability," U.S. law-enforcement sources say privately.

"Soon after Ben-Elissar showed up in

Washington as the Israeli ambassador [in early 1996], Lieberman took him under his wing," said a former FBI agent who now works as a congressional investigator. "The two were close, attending receptions and speaking engagements together."

Ben-Elissar made no bones about the debt he owed to the Connecticut senator.

"Much of what I have accomplished here for my country [Israel], would have been impossible without the friendship and support of Joe Lieberman," the Mossad spymaster remarked publicly.

Some U.S. leaders hailed the alliance between the influential Democratic lawmaker and the envoy from an alien espionage service, citing occasions when Lieberman's positions led to significant shifts in U.S. national security policies.

In mid-1997, for instance, Ben-Elissar made it plain that Israel wanted the United States to develop a "robust" anti-missile defense system without revealing the tens of billions of taxpayer money it will cost—and most likely waste.

When the congressional leadership of the Democrats opposed this, Lieberman became a one-man lobby until the Israeli position won out, though not without some modifications, recounted Rabbi Rafael G. Grossman, honorary president of the Rabbinical Council of America.

But congressional staffers and missile-defense experts have a less innocuous version of these events, a SPOTLIGHT inquiry has discovered.

"Scholars who presented carefully researched critiques of the unworkable and wasteful space defense boondoggle urged on us by Israel found that not just their anti-missile findings, but their jobs came under vicious attack," says Dr. Vanessa Hughessen, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, Mass.

The director of Central Intelligence John Deutch, a controversial figure



**JOE LIEBERMAN**  
... How close to Israel is he?

known as an Israeli loyalist and, like Lieberman, a close collaborator of Mossad spymaster Ben-Elissar, led a drive to get Prof. Ted Postol, a respected rocket scientist and a leading critic of the pro-missile lobby, fired from his tenured position at MIT, these sources related.

But when the intrigue against Postol sparked angry protests among American academics and calls for a congressional investigation, Lieberman rushed to defend Deutch and Ben-Elissar, warning his colleagues that a legislative investigation of the pro-missile lobby would be considered an "unfriendly act."

"This episode explains how the power wielded by hard-line Zionist politicians such as Lieberman is used to subvert and deform U.S. strategy to produce key policy decisions tailored to serve alien interests, rather than America's own needs," concluded another MIT national-security scholar, who, like most defense intellectuals holding sensitive security clearances, asked for anonymity before volunteering any candid comments.

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