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&
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Special to The Star

The Shinbet murder scandal: Help from New York Times

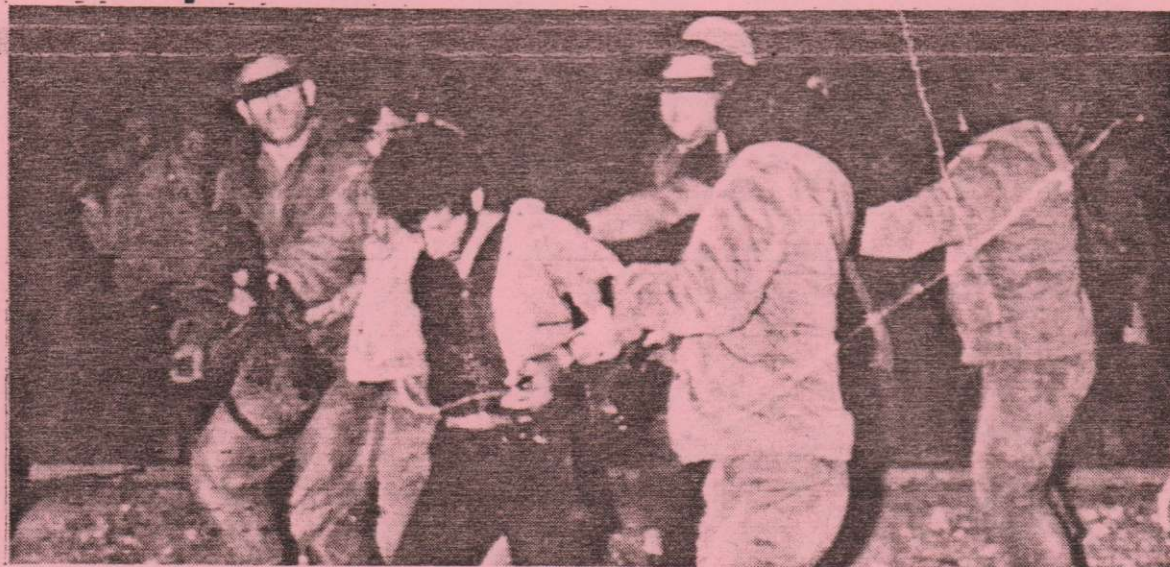
WASHINGTON — Censorship at the New York Times? Most Americans have difficulty even connecting the term "censorship" with American journalism. Most Americans believe political censorship happens only in other places.

It is true, of course, that political censorship in the United States is far more amorphous, informal, cultural and selective than the state-managed news of totalitarian countries or the state-media co-ordination of many Mid-East count countries. Moreover, the multiplicity and competitiveness of news sources in the US does provide many safeguards, and some alternatives.

And yet, when it comes to matters involving Israel, a unique kind of comradery seems omnipresent between many major American publications and the Israelis. Some of this is of course transmitted through the American Jewish community. It is well-known, for instance, that magazines like *The New Republic*, *US News & World Report*, *Commentary* and *Atlantic Monthly* are owned by ardent Zionists who very cleverly promote a kind of Israeli Labour party tinge to developments in the Middle East.

Then, of course, there are publications such as *Near East Report* and the weekly newsletter published by two former Jewish lobby operatives, Ken Wollack and Richard Streauss, which are more directly affiliated with the "Jewish lobby". And then there are some Israeli "Journalists" — best known in this category would be Wolf Blitzer of *The Jerusalem Post* who some years back was editor of the Jewish lobby's weekly — who are trotted out whenever an "official" Jewish lobby person wouldn't be quite right.

But it is the New York Times which remains the premier US



One of the Palestinians caught in the bus incident being led away by Israeli members of the Shinbet

after his resignation and pardon, that he acted with knowledge and authority of then Prime Minister Yitzchak Shamir. This followed by unprecedented press censorship in Israel including the closing of one newspaper for a week, repeated lies before official investigating bodies, and government-sanctioned intimidation of those wanting to tell the truth. In short, a massive, Watergate-type cover-up by the most senior officials in the Israeli government, and one aided by the New York Times.

How so?

Deeply troubled by the Times' coverage in the days immediately following the murders, four of us felt impelled to write a letter to the editor on 14 May 1984.

We were a rather unusual and well-connected four — a former minister at the Egyptian Embassy in Washington, the former Wash-

ington Post editor, a former Shinbet operative, and a former Shinbet operative. We believe they may be liable for complicity in murder and should be made to stand trial in an open judicial proceeding ... We call upon the government of the United States which has so far surprisingly refused to comment on this matter to join in the call for such an urgent and thorough investigation."

After a phone call to the Times bureau chief this letter was hand-delivered to the Times' office in Washington. A week later, after repeated phone calls, we were told "Sorry, somehow the letter has been lost." Another copy was immediately sent over and a copy telexed to the editor of the editorial page in New York. Following a variety of further delays and excuses the Times refused to publish the letter, or even to discuss the matter with any of us.

Instead, on 30 May, the Times published an editorial titled "Equal

Justice' — this, the same newspaper which publishes a regular flow, practically a daily barrage, of letters and comments by various Jewish spokesmen defending Israeli actions and policies!

More recently this New York Times approach to Israeli wrongdoing has been repeated in the way the newspaper totally whitewashed the documented brutal torture of an Arab American earlier

of the newspapers' very special Israeli fixation. During the first few days of the story the Times treated it very gingerly. Then came a major page 1 story suggesting that many nations do the same thing so why single out Israel. Only when other news media persisted in playing the Pollard story as the main spy case that it was all along, did the Times begin to do the same.

Investigative journalist Stephen Green in his forthcoming book about US-Israeli relations documents a number of further instances of exceptionally biased coverage of major developments by the Times.

And when it comes to the New York Times editorial page those highly critical of Israel are literally banished. Even a Op Ed sought from Philip Klutznick, probably the leading senior American Jewish personality in America today as honorary President of both the World Jewish Congress and B'nai B'rith International and former Secretary of Commerce during the Carter administration, was rejected when it was deemed too critical of Israeli policies.

The "Shinbet Scandal" was resurrected in Israel because lower-level Israeli officials refused to allow the government's cover-up to succeed. But in the US both the American Jewish community, through its utter silence, and what is sometimes dubbed "Israel's newspaper in the US." The New York Times, did what they could to further the cover-up and are now doing what they can to minimize its repercussions.

On the whole American journalism is vibrant and competitive. But when it comes to matters relating to Israel's image a combination of social pressures and political intimidation have created a kind of taboo against telling the truth or allowing the full range of opinions to be expressed, even when what is involved is consider scandalous in Israel itself.

Moreover, the rest of the Am-

newspaper, the "newspaper of record" in American society. And it is precisely this publication which consistently attempts to minimize news and opinion harmful to Israel's image.

In our own personal experience, for example the New York Times has helped cover-up what is now being termed the "Shinbet Scandal" in Israel when two Palestinian teenagers handcuffed and in custody after a bus hijacking were literally beaten to death with rifles and fists on orders of the chief of Israeli intelligence who now says,

in Washington, the former Washington Associate of the World Jewish Congress (myself) who initiated the letter, and a former US Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East.

Our letter detailed what had actually happened — much of which had been omitted or buried by the Times — and concluded that "it now appears the facts may warrant criminal charges against the responsible officials in Israel ... If Israeli officials ordered or acquiesced in the summary execution of the Palestinians taken into

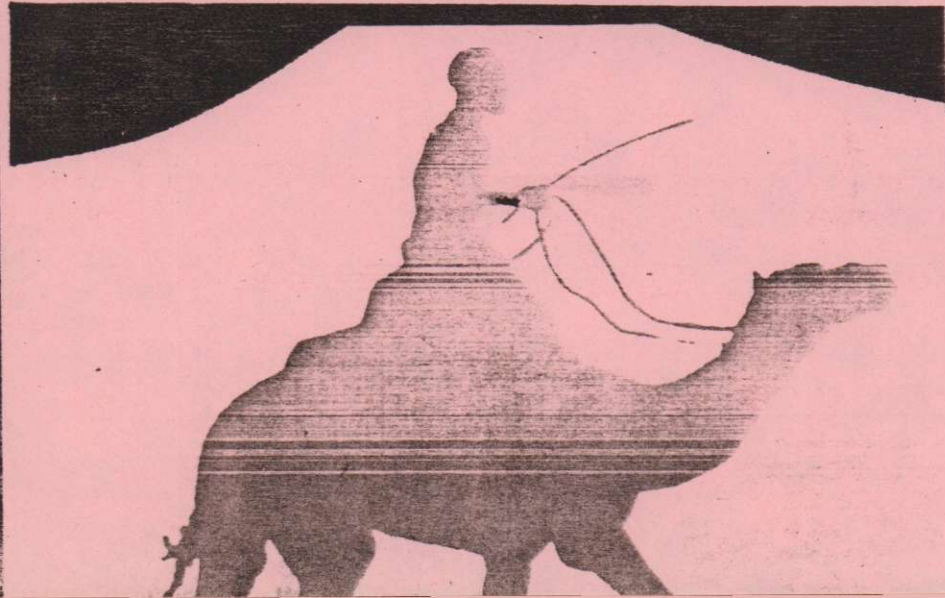
custody, or if they had published an editorial titled "Equal Justice in Israel" commenting on a deceptive Army investigation set up by Defence Minister Moshe Arens and praising Israel's handling of this affair! Shocked and outraged the four of us met for lunch the same day and wrote a second letter, this time specifically in reference to the Times' outrageous and offensive editorial. Israel's handling of this matter "has many signs of a cover-up" we wrote. "A proper judicial investigation, with full powers of subpoena and immunity, is the only way to proceed ... Only when the perpet-

rated the documented brutal torture of an Arab American earlier this year. While The Washington Post managed to squeeze it in onto page 1 even on the day that America's attack on Libya pushed most things to back pages the Times gave very little attention to the story actually devoting more space to rather absurd rebuttals by Israeli Embassy spokesman Yossi Gal than to the sickening details of the incident itself.


The way the Times has handled the Pollard spy case, in comparison to other American newspapers, is but another recent example

Moreover, the rest of the America media has to work overtime to make up for the ways of the most respected of all American dailies, the New York Times.

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