

EPILOGUE

Dear Jerry,

1/18/93

I've read about a fifth of Hersh's *The Samson Option*. It is impressive and well-written, predictable for him. It is also dishonest, the reason I write you about it. I do not know whether you've read it and if you have not, whether you'll have the time to read it critically. I did not begin that way but the farther I got into it the more apparent it was to me that he intended a one-sided account of what I presume is true, that Israel has the bomb.

After reading this much of the book I realized that he has been without any explanation of why Israel believed it required the bomb, with a single, passing mention that can be taken that way. This was Ike's failure to respond to Ben-Gurion's request that Israel be included under the US nuclear shield.

Along with the absence of any presentation of Israeli justification of proceeding with the bomb is an absence of any presentation of what, militarily and politically, Israel faced, particularly when it was so much weaker than it now is.

He can be excused, if one stretched, for not ^{having} have a chapter on this, but I do not excuse it and believe that both fairness and honesty required it. Otherwise the book is polished propaganda, not a full and dependable account.

Before Truman was elected, when I was still doing radio news at what became WGMS, I recall clearly that Egypt was importing all the Nazi scientists it could get for military projects. Of these I am clear in my recollection of missiles.

Iraq's hostility to Israel is well-known, even historic. Did not Israel have to regard itself as

a potential target of Iraqi atomic or nuclear bombs?

Until Camp David, as he does not mention, the entire Muslim world was in a state of war with Israel. Those agreements led to Egypt's recognition of the State of Israel. It is the only Muslim country to recognize that state and the only one not to have persisted in a state of war with Israel. The others have as their continuing policy wiping the state of Israel out. Now these are things I not only did not read where they belong in such a book, up front, I also checked the index. Under PLO the index has three mentions only, none with any subject indicated. I just thought to check the index for Arafat. Not there!

Now this is not that large a book that a few pages could not have been added in fairness and in honesty if he had intended either.

So we have a book that is critical of Israel for developing the bomb that does not tell the reader why Israel decided to develop the bomb. Nor what the international attitude toward it is, as reflected at the UN. Nor why the enormous expenditure was invested in developing the bomb at the cost of so many urgent needs that could not be met and at the cost of fantastic indebtedness.

There can be legitimate disagreements over what has to be included in such a book and what might not be. My own view is that on such a subject all that within reason can be interpreted as relevant should be included.

One that I believe he could not have overlooked I realize others may regard differently, but it gets to the environment of Israel's belief it needed the bomb.

After all the wars the Arabs lost, when as the simple price for US recognition of the PLO it asked for only a statement that it recognized the right of the State of Israel to live in peace

within secure borders, the PLO itself rejected this through its executive council but Arafat, under heavy pressure, pretended to. He did not. He could not have been more overtly evasive in refusing to face the issue in his statement — which still would not have been binding to the PLO. His *actual* statement the US administration grabbed and interpreted as recognizing Israel did not. He did not mention the State of Israel. He spoke only of the *people* of Israel. That is deliberately not recognizing the right of the *State* to live in peace, as the world pretended. And he soon blew that by refusing to condemn a PLO terrorist attack in which it got caught.

To most of the readers these facts and so many more like them will be unknown and thus from the approach he has taken and from what I recall from reviews and commentaries they will be made to have anti-Israel feelings and attitudes or they will have these attitudes reinforced.

Israel did not take the Iraqi nuclear plant out until 6/81, long, long after it was clear that Iraq was aiming at the bomb and that in this much of the world had to have helped it, the world that sits in judgment of Israel on its bomb. Of course also the part of the world that pretended ignorance of what Iraq was up to while helping it do it.

It was not long before the world was deeply indebted to the Israelis for ending the bomb threat from Iraq. Which gives every indication of persisting in it at all and very considerable costs. Including at this very minute.

What do you think the situation, especially our situation, would have been if Saddam had that bomb to use in the Gulf War?

I've mentioned nothing about the other Muslim arms proliferation, all of which Israel has to consider is available for use against it — by states that persist in non-recognition and in a state of war. Nothing about the Muslim CBW capabilities, some rather well known. But these dangers

to Israel deserve no mention in such a book? The other efforts against it, like trying to ruin Israel economically?

If the state were not Israel and if the Muslims did not monopolize the world's energy supplies I think there would be an entirely different reaction. Witness India and Pakistan, China and North Korea. And suspects, like South Africa. And the current situation in which for all practical purposes the Muslim world is silent about Iraq and what Saddam has been and is doing. Including in challenging the UN and not living up to the agreement to which he did agree to end the Gulf War. . . . Hersh did not begin with honest intentions and what he evolved is not honest. It is propaganda.

/s/

Harold

The father I get into the book the more interested I become in what it reveals about Hersh and his objectives and the accumulating evidence that rather than a reporting job, at which he is superb, it is a political argument disguised as a reporting job.

Of interest because John McCone was CIA head at the time of the JFK assassination and its investigation is that Hersh begins his Chapter 6 with an account of McCone as a partisan an incomplete leaker, (Pages 71ff) Hoover caught him doing that with consummate irresponsibility over the fabrications of Gilberto Alvarado Ugarte — over which Ambassador Mann was well on his way to starting World War II when wheeled in.

In discussing the ultra Admiral Lewis Straus, AEC head, and portraying him as blindly pro-Israel, he reports that Strauss favored raising money beginning in 1933, to resettle

endangered Jews in Africa. While correctly pointing this impinged on the rights of those living on the land to be bought for this purpose, Hersh does not note how it parallels an early Hitler scheme for ridding Europe of Jews.

Without recognition of how it can influence his argument that Straus was blinded by his Jewishness, Hersh says on 86 that he “privately was in favor of a nuclear-armed Israel” while saying two pages later that he “remained hostile to Zionism all of his life.” Can it be that Straus^A was motivated to want Israel to have the nuclear weapons because Straus^f was so Zionist? ^J

Hersh notes on page 89 that in the CIA there was a fear of the loyalty of Jews so they were excluded from dealing with “Israeli issues within the CIA headquarters” and that for many years no Jews were assigned to Israel. He quotes a high-ranking CIA Jew as saying years later that “every fucking Jew in the CIA was in accounting or legal.”

On 96 Hersh says, quoted in full, that JFK was told at a Hyannis gathering, “everybody knows the reputation of your father concerning Jews and Hitler.” He has a footnote on that page saying that during the period in which he got his education JFK had “few close Jewish friends,” which he says was not atypical for wealthy Irish Catholics, but he has no footnote saying what the “reputation” is that the father got “concerning Jews and Hitler.” ^A

On 97 he quotes reporter and JFK friend Charles Bartlett as quoting JFK saying that Jews had told him that in return for “paying” his “bills” they wanted control over his Middle East policy.” Perhaps true, although nothing about it in his spare notes. But if true is it unusual in any way — other than being attributed to Jews?

Hersh quotes Floyd Culler, an American expert after a trip to Israel’s Dimona nuclear operation as saying “They were terrified that they’d be bombed. I was asked by an Israeli to raise

the question of an American nuclear umbrella.”

If Hersh does not see any connection between the refusal to guarantee Israel against nuclear attack and its decision to achieve its own nuclear protection he is blind. The blindness extending to his index. This is the third such (unindexed) quotation to this point. (There are more, like on 178.) Hersh talks about Admiral Straus as pro-Israel while anti-Zionist and as in favor of a “nuclear-armed Israel” but Hersh never connects the two, the US refusal to provide nuclear protection and Israel’s resulting quest for its own nuclear protection. Or against vastly larger enemy forces. Or CBW.

In seeming to argue against providing this nuclear protection, Hersh quotes Culler as asking, “Would the United States initiate a nuclear war to protect any country in the Middle East, or India, or Pakistan, or Argentina?” He says that Culler said, “we were all in a bind. We have to be careful in assigning blame. It may be a story but there is no right or wrong.”

I don’t know why Hersh included the no right or wrong part of the quote unless he feared a strong reaction from omitting it but it applies to him and he does blame in his writing.

Moreover, was the question of initiating a nuclear war to protect any country?

Is not a “shield” concept that the promise to retaliate will discourage another from initiating a nuclear war?

I am not a third of the way through the book and I wonder more and more what impelled Hersh to do this book rather than one of many other subjects available to him. I continue to wonder about his overt bias and his dishonesty in the book. About him.

For example, his lengthy footnote on 88 reporting that our planes regularly overflew and photographed Nazi extermination camps, his plural but he mentioned only Auschwitz by name. It

has been photographed "30 times." Showing "four large complexes of gas chambers and crematoriums . . . Bodies were ^{be} buried in trenches or burned in large open pits. Some of the photos showed victims being marched to their deaths, while others showed prisoners being processed for slave labor." He does not say that this slave labor was performed at the IG Farben "synthetic oil and rubber complex" only five miles away. He does say that Auschwitz 12,000 were killed daily. An instead of explaining this disclosure, new to me, he seeks to justify its being ignored by saying that photo-interpreters were not available enough and informed enough to make this out. But there was no such need because before then the death camps and crematoria were well reported by eyewitnesses who were ignored by the Allies. With the knowledge that existed these pictures were confirmation of what had been reported and ignored. I think they also refute the claim to explain away not bombing the railroad track to prevent the influx of more to be exterminated: it is obvious that the slave labor was working at the plants engaged in essential Nazi war production. There was this additional reason for bombing at least the means of getting the slave labor there. Hersh also discloses that bombers flew over at least 30 times. So there was plenty of opportunity to at the time reduce Nazi ^{is} supplies and human fuel for the crematoria. It did not even require special flights — there were 30+.

This is the Hersh of My Lai? Or is it a Heine-like ~~(sp?)~~ Jew, a Jew-hating Jew or one with some special ax of a different kind ^{to} grind? Is it only that he is anti-Israel?

Hersh begins his Chapter 9 reporting that when Kennedy could not get Ben-Gurion to say what he wanted him to say he decided "to help get Ben-Gurion . . . out of office." The first step was to invite a political rival, Golda Meir to a long visit at Palm Beach. (Page 117). 526

Hersh says that JFK "made an extraordinary private commitment to Israel's defense, "We

are asking the cooperation of Israel . . . not unfriendly to Israel; but in order to help more effectively I think it is clear that in case of an invasion the United States would come to the support of Israel . . .” 117-8)

As Hersh fails to note, as a “private commitment” this had no meaning after JFK was out of office and need not have while he was President. Moreover, depending on the capabilities of any invading force(s), coming to Israel’s aid after invasion had to be regarded by Israeli’s as perhaps being too late. (Compare with 178, where he says what I say here.)

And, of course, Israel was invaded and it got no military forces from the US to help it and the wars demonstrated that help could always be too late.

It is not easy to believe that the US would go to war against the world’s petroleum monopoly or would have then.

When Egypt, Syria and Iraq combined in the Arab Federation Ben-Gurion proposed that the US and USSR jointly and publicly declare the territorial integrity of *every* Middle Eastern state. JFK would not. When Ben-Gurion then wrote him, “my people have a right to exist . . . and this existence is in danger” JFK again refused to sign a security pact. This told Ben-Gurion’s party to get rid of him, Hersh says.

In discussing LBJ’s closer ties to Jews and stronger feelings and the reason for them — his trip to a crematoria — Hersh says what I do not recall knowing, that Erich Leinsdorf was about to be deported by the US when LBJ prevented that.

Hersh does not evaluate this “extraordinary private commitment” he says JFK gave Ben-Gurion. He does not note that when Israel was invaded the US did not get militarily involved, as JFK promised, and he has no observation about the US refusal to put any guarantees on paper and

how Israel could interpret that and why the US didn't.

Yet without comment and without any notes this is part of Hersh's argument for Israel not developing the bomb for its own protection.

Is it not obvious that if JFK did not dare put his promise in writing there was little chance of his daring to implement it? Hersh has no observation on whether or not this could or should have made those Israelis determined to develop their bomb willing or unwilling to give the promise or of any real meaning in the promise for Israel.

Chapter 10 is the title chapter, "The Samson Option." He writes it to give the impression this is how Israelis who wanted the bomb actually thought and spoke of that extremity but this is not true: "In its place, argued the nuclear advocates, would be the Samson option. Samson, according to the Bible . . . cried out, 'Let my soul dies with the Philistines'." (page 137) He concludes this paragraph with a similar suggestion, "For Israel's nuclear advocates, the Samson Option became another way of saying, 'Never again'." Here he has a footnote to a Podheretz Commentary essay in which Podheretz offers the opinion that if there was a war in which Israel was hopelessly lost it would do as Samson did, not do a Masada of mass suicide. The closest thing to a source in his notes as "For a discussion of the Samson and Masada psychologies see "A Psycho-History of Zionism . . ." The number of books in his text and sources is considerable, so I wonder how he had the time for a book with this title, or whether he was attracted to it by its title.

While I indicated he at no point gives an explanation of why those Israelis who opted for the nuclear weapon did so and at no point makes an effort to state what the nuclear interest/ situation was in the Muslim world, from time to time a bit creeps in. For example at the beginning

of this chapter he quotes a Dayan article published 4/63 or well before Israel had made any real progress on having a nuclear bomb, as "urging^d the Israeli arms industry to keep pace with President Gamel Abdel Nassar's effort to build nuclear weapons," (page 129). He has not yet given his reader any real understanding of Nassar as a person or leader or of his policies. But without that, is it not enough that Nassar sought the bomb for Israel to feel that as a deterrent it also needed the bomb? No discussion of this by Hersh. No mention.

On 138 Hersh says that "A major complication in the debate (over whether to develop the bomb by Israel), seemingly, was the Arab and Israeli press which routinely published exaggerated accounts of each side's weapons of mass destruction. In Israel there were alarmist accounts of Chinese support for an Egyptian nuclear bomb. . ." Hersh has no single quotation or citation of any such stories in the Israeli press. But do not the subsequent wars reflect that the Arabs were very well supplied with advanced weaponry, especially planes and tanks? Was not the USSR stocking them all? And he wrote this after he knew that the Scuds had exploded over Israel in the Gulf War and after it was well known that China and other powers like North Korea were stocking Syria with missiles of longer range than the Scuds. And Saudi Arabia obtained from the US planes that could enable it to bomb *Greece*, that much of a load range.

It is not only Nassar^o about whom Hersh gives his reader not a word to this point, through chapter 10. He has nothing on any of them, the Saddams, whose name is not mentioned in the book once, or Asad, also not mentioned (Correction, there is a single mention of Saddam Hussein on page 317, his Epilogue, where he says that on the second day of the war Saddam launched 8 Scuds at Israel). Of King Hussein, on page 289, he says it was Ariel Sharon's hope to overthrow him and make Jordan a Palestinian state. No mention is made Gadafi^m under any spelling of which

I know. Libya is not mentioned at all, not its tyrant or its CBW arms and plants. None of this and more if I searched, I'm sure, in a book supposedly examining the Israeli development and possession of nuclear weapons, and with the title yet of "The Samson Option" so clearly scribbled from what appears to be a work of amateur shrinkery published in 1975 by the prestigious house of Mason J. Charter, in New York!

His chapter 11, "Playing the Game," is on Angleton. It has remarkably few sources and none for some direct quotations. Some of it is new to me and I'd like to know the source! Including of direct quotations. What made wonder is that much as he knows about Angleton he has no source for his statement that it was Angleton who received the CIA intelligence on Israel. He was head of counterintelligence, not intelligence, and normally intelligence would be routed to that component.

In Chapter 12, "The Ambassador," he has brief mention of the Israeli attack on our spy ship the *Liberty*. He quotes a cable from our ambassador saying, "Urge strongly that we too avoid publicity. (As Israel had sought to do.) [*Liberty*'s] proximity to the scene could feed Arab suspicions of U.S.-Israel collusion . . . (his omission) Israelis obviously shocked by error and tender sincere apologies," (Pages 166-8)

On page 167 he begins this short section saying that the *Liberty*, a naval intelligence ship, "had been monitoring Middle East communications traffic in international waters off the coast of Israel and had been identified as an American ship before the attack . . ." In the text Hersh has no explanation of the attack but in a footnote — on Clark Clifford! — it quotes him as not crediting Israel's claim of error. (Neither do I!) But having said that the ship flew an American flag and had been identified as American and then that the "error" explanation is not credible when he says

nothing else it is a deliberate attack on Israel. He quotes the Ambassador as saying that Arabs could suspect collusion with Israel but says nothing at all about the ship monitoring Israeli communications when Israel was in a declared war in which it could be wiped out. (It was on the third day of that war.) The Israeli pilots had to assume their communications were being monitored and that it was a US ship or an Arab ship flying a US flag. The ship had no business being there on such a mission without arranging for the Israelis to know why it was there and persuading it that it was not spying on Israel's communications. Avoiding the incitation against Israel he published would have required but one sentence and the book had plenty of room for that.

I see no ⁹ ₁ pint in continuing with long details or comments and I'll make fewer. But I cannot omit his justifying on 178 the US not to keep a President's promise: the US "failed to respond to Nassar's closing the straight of Tiran and blockade of Elat. Israeli foreign ministry documents show that Dwight Eisenhower had promised in writing after the Suez debacle of 1956 that the United States would use force, if necessary, to keep the straight open. Israel called on Johnson to keep that commitment after Nassar's blockade and felt betrayed upon learning that the State Department considered Eisenhower's commitment to have expired when Eisenhower left office in early 1961. Only a treaty ratified by the U.S. Senate was binding on subsequent administrations . . ." Yet as noted earlier, Hersh had the exact opposite position re: a JFK promise.

This was, he says, a month before the Six-Day War — as he says — and he does not say that it did or could trigger that war, or whether what Egypt did was an act of war.

Without comment or explanation, he reports that the US "embargoed all arms deliveries to

Israel for 135 days . . . while the Soviets continued to supply their allies, the Arabs.

This has no bearing on any Israeli effort to develop The Bomb? Or belief it had to?

He even lies, and it is a lie, in the very beginning of Chapter 15, to cover the perfidy of Albion. He refers to "the Jewish struggle after World War II against the British mandatory power in Palestine. The British authorities had angered David Ben-Gurion and his followers by insisting that the adhere to the strict limitations on Jewish immigration to Palestine that were set in 1939, after three years of Arab revolts." In fact the British refused to permit the number of Jews within those "strict limitations" to enter Palestine. He melds time, treating before and after World War II as one period and in this makes no mention of the fact that those denied permission to emigrate from Europe within the quota were incinerated by Hitler and as of that era has what came after the war, "the outgunned members of the Hagannah, the Jewish underground, began the inevitable guerrilla war against British troops." (195) This is more reprehensible because in the period he omits, of the war, as with World war I, Palestine Jews fought valiantly with the British while most of the Arabs of the area were behind Hitler.

This is not sloppy writing, Hersh is not a sloppy writer. It is a deliberate deception and misrepresentation. Moreover, as he may say later, "the underground" did not consist only of the Hagannah.

In reading his account of the 1973 war in his "Nuclear Blackmail" chapter pages 225ff I was surprised to note that he avoided giving any meaningful account of the remarkable military performance of the surprised and unmobilized Israeli forces. I then remembered that he handled the 1967 war the same way. To me this is surprising for a number of reasons, including that it could be an argument that Israel did not need The Bomb. It would have taken only a few

sentences to give his readers an idea of the remarkable military performance of the greatly outnumbered and under-equipped Israeli forces so that other than his argument for their not having the bomb the reader could learn more about the actualities of that area and that dispute. He does make passing reference one point to Israel crossing the Suez canal but he at no point indicates the number of prisoners they took, the planes, tanks, and even armies they destroyed or the casualties. Without the epilogue he added, in paperback format this book is only 315 pages so space was not a consideration. It seems as though in all respects save for making the bomb he intends to deprecate Israel and just about all things Israeli.

His account of the Nixon/Kissinger reaction to the nuclear blackmail by Israel Hersh alleges is new to me and is interesting. He says Israel said it would use the bomb, would have to, if its conventional arms lost in the earliest moments of the 1973 war were not replaced.

Not until the very end does Hersh offer any explanation of or reasons for Israel's making the enormous and very dangerous (for it) investment in having its own Bomb. On page 318, next to the last in his Epilogue, he refers to the Gulf War guarantees meaning "little; no Jews had been killed by poison gas since Treblinka and Auschwitz and Israel, after all, had built its bomb so it would never have to depend on the goodwill of others when the lives of Jews were being threatened."

The very last sentence in this epilogue bears this: "The Samson Option is no longer the only nuclear option available to Israel."

In short, only after completing a ~~very~~ anti-Israel book which he was certain to get considerable international attention does he make a gesture at putting the entire book in context. He does not give his reader or reviewers any reason to believe that it was not all 100% madness

and irresponsibility until after his mind-poison has had its effect.

Earlier I noted the inadequacy, an understatement, of his notes and citations of sources and to a large degree their total absence where they appear to be most necessary. This morning, my reading including his last two chapters, his Epilogue and the Afterword to the Vintage edition, I began to believe and I do believe that his book is really an operation of essentially United States intelligence, with some involvement in Israeli intelligence or opposition politics or both.

This would account for the absence of the urgently needed, in most cases, notes on the unnamed and unidentified sources for most of the content of this book.

In this morning's reading, in which I did not bother to check the inadequate notes, and in looking at them now see that for those chapters they take up less than a page, I came to believe that even if he had a massive research staff it does not seem possible for him to have located and read all the sources he does cite, many in text, not notes. And his brief (page 329) acknowledgments do not refer to any such research help.

Perhaps relevant, perhaps not, his last two chapters are on the Pollard case in the US and Vanunu's leaking of Israeli nuclear information in London, this is a very brief chapter. Much of the Pollard material has no direct connection, but I think I'd have included it, too. Among the more remarkable omissions in his handling of that is any reference to the unusual severity of the sentence. This also is consistent with his serving US interests in his book.

With Hersh here is a precedent. Colby selected him of all reporters to use in getting and rid of Angleton and his disclosures he believed necessary for the health of the CIA, for the disclosure of its "family jewels," as I recall the phrase. While this may not have happened, I believe it is the history of this book and it does explain the unquestioned omissions of many,

possibly most sources and the absence of citing direct quotations of controversial nature to any source.

If this book did not have this origin, it would have been impossible without intelligence agency help the signs of which permeate this book.

Books

in "unsound" exposés. "We don't do that kind of thing here," Gottlieb said as he showed Hersh to the elevator.

Random House came to the rescue, signing Hersh to write a book about the Israeli nuclear-weapons program. *The Samson Option* was another flop, and Hersh's revelations provoked howls. The most aggrieved came from British press baron Robert Maxwell and from Nicholas Davies, foreign editor of Maxwell's London *Daily Mirror*—both of whom Hersh accused of being Israeli intelligence assets. YOU LIAR!

spinning fantastic, unverifiable stories. When a writer for *The New Republic* pressed Hersh for an accounting, Hersh—who now says Ben-Menashe "lies like people breathe"—snapped, "You know what, kid? Come around next Tuesday and tie my shoelace."

The *Times* was unfazed. In 1991, Rosenthal's successor, Max Frankel, brought Hersh back on a six-month contract to investigate "the October Surprise"—the rumor that senior officials of the Reagan campaign had de-railed Jimmy Carter's re-election by getting Iran to delay the release of

over the phone. "Sy was caught being his old extortionist self," says a former assistant managing editor. (Hersh denies that he tried to "extort" information from sources.)

Hersh was debating what to do next when he got a call from Emmy-winning producer Mark Obenhaus, who had worked with him on two PBS *Frontline* documentaries in the 1980s. The 30th anniversary of J.F.K.'s assassination was coming up, Obenhaus said. Would Sy like to do an investigation for ABC's *Day One*?

While Hersh publicly disparaged conspiracy theorists—"If somebody doesn't write a book for a million dollars, then there was no conspiracy," he told *Rolling Stone* in 1975—the ABC project promised a substantial fee. The offer was tempting, since Hersh describes himself as "chronically broke." And Hersh had a friend who could school him in the intricacies of the Kennedy



SY ANXIETY: Hersh at work in *The New York Times*'s Washington bureau, 1975. In the 1970s, he had a tumultuous reign at the *Times*, where he made headlines and enemies, and generated piles of hate mail (right).

"You know what, kid?" Hersh said to a reporter investigating his work. "Come around next Tuesday and tie my shoelace."

Best and Good: URGENT Feb-16-75
 you stinking ANIMAL, you TRAITOR, you RABBIT, you SCAB, you PLEASANT TRAITOR, you Vicious REVELATIONS OF CIA (REASONABLE) HONOR VIVIPIS IS EXTORTION AND TRIAL AND GIVEN THE SAME PUNISHMENT AS THE ROSENBERGS (RECEIVED), MAYBE EVEN WISE. HITLER & NEFAARIOUS GOOD LIKE YOU STRAIGHT LIVING DON'T YOU GO & TIE YOUR SHOELACE IF YOU HELP THEM TO KILL DISHONORABLE

screamed the front page of *The Sun*.

Hersh gloried in the attention ("Larger than the headline on the D-day invasion," he bragged), even after Maxwell and Davies slapped libel writs on Hersh and his British publisher, who promptly sued back. But Maxwell wasn't in a position to counter Hersh. Two weeks after suing, he was found floating in the Atlantic, the apparent victim of a heart attack. Maxwell's heirs quietly settled with Hersh by paying him £100,000.

In writing the book, Hersh had relied on Ari Ben-Menashe, a shadowy Israeli exile and arms dealer who specialized in

U.S. hostages until after the election. He never uncovered the "surprise," but Hersh did report that a heavy-equipment manufacturer had provided "missile launchers for the Iraqi military." The company denied the charge and filed a libel suit. In a correction, the *Times* conceded that Hersh's claim was based on "an accusation by an unidentified informant who was himself relying on an anonymous source." The end came when, after six increasingly fractious months, Hersh was heard threatening a source

case: Michael Ewing, a researcher for the House Select Committee on Assassinations, whose 1979 report concluded that Kennedy was "probably" the victim of a conspiracy.

Hersh and Ewing had met in the early 1970s, when Ewing was an aide to Iowa senator Harold Hughes, an important Hersh source. Ewing, who would marry Hughes's daughter, Phyllis, had also been helpful, providing Hersh with a 60-page memo detailing the C.I.A.'s relationship with organized crime.

Apart from a mutual knack for ferreting out secrets, they seemed an odd match. Where Hersh was loudmouthed and brash, Ewing was low-key and cautious—"a paper person," he called himself, because of his compulsion to squirrel away confidential documents. He

TOP BY ANNIE LEBOVITZ