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## Mossad: Might or myth?

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The assassination of Mahmoud Mabhouh, a Hamas commander, in Dubai is a watershed moment in the long history of the Mossad.

Israeli officials who ordered the assassination did something that Zionists have always done - underestimate their Arab opponents.

In his first impressions of Arabs, David Ben-Gurion, the first Israeli prime minister, compared them to children.

Ahad Ha'Am, an essayist considered to be the father of cultural Zionism, described the merciless beatings that Arabs were subjected to for no reason by Zionist settlers - the pioneers of the movement - in the late 19th century.

Other Zionists have compared the Arabs of Palestine to animals. All this prejudice would in the 1960s and 1970s benefit the rise of sophisticated Lebanese and Palestinian resistance movements which would plan operations keeping in mind that the Israelis would likely underestimate their chances of success.

Hezbollah, established in the early 1980s, used that understanding when it established a resistance movement that would beat Israel at its own game - on the battlefield and in the war of intelligence.

More recently, Israeli officials assumed that the UAE's rulers would not pose a challenge to their activities in the emirates, especially after the welcoming of Israeli tennis player Andy Ram to the Dubai Championships with great fanfare in February 2009. But little did they know that an effective and stubborn man serves as Dubai's chief of police.

### **Technology gap**

Israel has traditionally used its technological superiority and prowess over Arabs to operate freely in the Middle East.

Relatedly, the military gap between Israel and the Arabs remains quite insurmountable by order of the US and its allies.

But the technology of surveillance and intelligence is now available to most governments, and even ordinary citizens can assume the classic roles once reserved for characters in spy novels.

The assassination team in Dubai did not expect that their pictures would be plastered all around the world, and that their names (in their real passports) would be circulated on Interpol's ("Red Notice") wanted list.

The assassins did not think that the Dubai security officers would be capable of operating security cameras, retrieving the data therein and piece together how 26 of their agents were able to carry out the hit on al-Mabhouh.

The Zionist state has operated on the assumption that its enemies do not progress and are incapable of learning from past mistakes. This explains why Golda Meir, the late Israeli prime minister, ignored the late Jordanian King Hussein when he flew to Israel to warn of an impending Egyptian-Syrian attack in 1973. She brushed it off as highly unlikely and out of character for the Arabs.

Israeli strategists did not think that the Arabs could muster the courage, let alone the military acumen, to launch a pre-emptive attack - for the first time since the Zionist invasion of Palestine.

### **Inferior and dispensable**

Israel has traditionally used a two-pronged strategy when dealing with the Arabs: The first is to treat them like inferior, dispensable human beings.

Israel first began using mass violence against Arabs, not for any military designs but for purposes of terrorising a whole population late in the 19th century.

Menachem Begin, the late prime minister, admitted as much in his book, *The Revolt*.

The Deir Yassin massacre, which was led by Begin in 1948, was targeting not only the 750 Arab residents of the village living just beyond the UN-demarcated Israeli border, but was also designed to terrorise the Palestinian and Arab at large.

Begin would later say: "The massacre was not only justified, but there would not have been a state of Israel without the victory at Deir Yassin."

Such killings of Arab civilians in large numbers and for no discernible military reason - the casualties do not even fall under what is now savagely dubbed "collateral damage" - has become part and parcel of Zionist politico-military strategy.

Secondly, the Zionist state has also terrorised the Arabs by exaggerating the reach and knowledge of its intelligence arm, the Mossad. It sought to convince the Arabs that Israel knows what they are doing and, in time, the name Mossad became synonymous with swift punishment, daring, and cruelty.

But cruelty toward Arabs was never a concern for Western public opinion, for Arab regimes also dealt harshly with their own citizens. Nevertheless, the undeserved image of the Mossad remained.

### **Botched operations**

Israeli intelligence failures began very early on. In 1954, the Egyptian regime uncovered a network of Egyptian Jewish spies who were engaged in terror attacks on British and US targets in Egypt in what later came to be known as the Lavon Affair.

When the Egyptian government tried the spies in court, Israeli media claimed that Cairo had no case, was perpetrating lies and conspiracies against Tel Aviv, and fostering "anti-Semitism". This knee-jerk reaction has become an almost automatic response whenever Israeli policies are scrutinised.

But of course, the Egyptians turned out to be right; the operation was such a debacle that it led to the eventual resignation of Pinhas Lavon, the then Israeli defence minister.

The second case was that of the Israeli spy, Elie Cohen who was smuggled into Syria, where he posed as a Syrian citizen with considerable financial resources and with Arab nationalist convictions.

The case was turned into a cheap paperback novel and into two movies, at least. But the ability for a Mossad operative to successfully infiltrate the highest echelons of the Syrian regime is wildly exaggerated.

Cohen was never the high-ranking person that Israeli propaganda made him out of to be. To be sure, he did operate his house like a brothel, and invited prostitutes to entertain various Syrians, but he was not really privy to state secrets of any relevance.

The story of his relations with then president Amin Hafiz was invented by Israel and echoed by his enemies within Syria. The affair concocted by the Israelis was even mired in historical inaccuracies. The Israelis had widely disseminated the notion that Cohen had met Hafiz when he

served in Syria's embassy in Argentina. But Cohen's presence in Argentina did not match the years that Hafiz spent there.

Stansfield M Turner, the head of the CIA from 1977 to 1981, perhaps said it best when he described the Mossad as a mediocre intelligence agency which excelled in public relations.

## **Munich**

And Mossad's real achievements have been in the realm of public relations.

According to Mossad propagandist literature, one of their greatest achievements has been the pursuit and elimination of the "red prince".

The Mossad supposedly scored its biggest hits when it killed the Palestinian Black September perpetrators of the attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

But in fact, the Mossad had no clue what Black September was all about. They assumed the group was being led by Abu Hasan Salamah - the red prince, while his role in the faction turned out to be rather minor.

Not only did the Mossad spend years in pursuing Abu Hasan but they also managed to kill an innocent Moroccan waiter in Norway in 1973, mistaking him for the Palestinian.

The Mossad agents behind that bungled assassination were captured by Norwegian police but subsequently released. Israeli agents later assassinated Wael Zuaytir, a Palestinian scholar who had nothing to do with the Black September group.

In 1979, Mossad agents assassinated Abu Hasan in what was described as a surgical kill; a massive car bomb exploded as his motorcade passed through downtown Beirut, leaving scores of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians dead and wounded.

In what would be a further intelligence failure for the Mossad, Black September's real mastermind emerged years later as Abu Dawoud, the nom du guerre of Mohammed Oudeh, a PLO commander who returned to Palestine in 1996 under the Oslo peace agreements.

In 1999, he published his memoirs and revealed that he had been the brains behind the Munich operation. He is believed to be living in Syria.

## **Kidnapping Nasrallah**

Through film and literature, the media has romanticised the undercover world of intrigue, espionage and targeted killings and in doing so has elevated the Mossad to a station it does not deserve.

Mossad blunders are not as widely known as its invented successes, and Western governments have been more than keen to protect the image of the "formidable" Israeli spy agency.

But Israeli intelligence failures during the war on Lebanon in 2006 crippled the Mossad's image in the eyes of the Arabs

During the summer of 2006, as Israeli jets pounded Beirut, the Mossad claimed they had captured Iranian soldiers in South Lebanon. That, and the kidnapping of a poor Lebanese farmer because his name is Hassan Nasrallah, later turned out to be in error.

Arab media were left scratching their heads; could the Mossad have been so inept as to fail to distinguish that there are many Arabs who have the name Hassan Nasrallah and in doing so capture a farmer who had nothing to do with Hezbollah?

As it turned out, the Mossad had a very inaccurate picture of Hezbollah capabilities and abilities; it failed to kill one Hezbollah regional or national leader despite blustering threats.

In summation, the assassination in Dubai will only serve to convince the Arabs that Israel is not as formidable as they were led to believe. Ironically, Arab governments also helped in exaggerating the powers of the Mossad because they wanted their citizens to remain passive and inactive. But the Arabs now know better.

They now know that some of the Arab intelligence services that are characteristically ridiculed are in fact more effective and capable than the highly touted Mossad.

The conflict with Israel is a very long one: it spanned over a century, and it will probably be settled before the end of this century, but not to Israel's satisfaction.