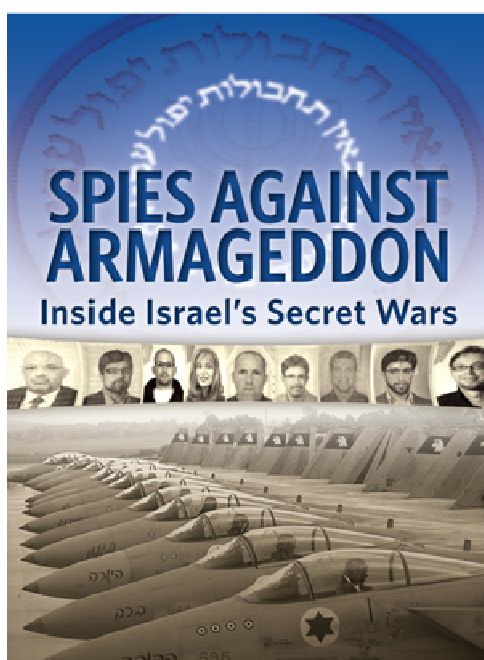


# **BOOK REVIEW**

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DAN RAVIV · YOSSI MELMAN



**Spies against Armageddon:**

**Inside Israel's Secret Wars**

*Dan Raviv & Yossi Melman*

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2012

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Review by

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**B**ooks on espionage have to navigate the fine line between muddled facts and intelligence albeit lucky guesses. A slight miss can tumble down into the dark abyss of conspiracy theories. In *Spies Against Armageddon: Inside Israel's Secret Wars* Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman have not only walked the fine line but have done so with a compelling pace that rarely allows the reader to take a break.

The book begins with startling revelations regarding the espionage war between Israel and Iran. It gives detailed historical account of the chequered relations between the two during the reign of the Shah and in the wake of the Iranian Revolution. However, the revelation that made the book

controversial is the confirmation of a widely held suspicion that Israel was behind the killing of five Iranian nuclear scientists as well as for *Flame* and *Stuxnet* virus attack against the Iranian nuclear infrastructure. According to the authors, “To a foreigner, many of these covert activities might have seemed outrageous. But to the Israelis in the intelligence community, it all made a lot of sense – when the alternatives were either bombing Iran or Iran having the bomb” (p.20).

Then the book takes the readers to the early years of Mossad and depicts the circumstances leading up to setting up of various intelligence agencies to confront security challenges of a newly established state. With the help of personal interviews with a host of active as well as erstwhile spies, the authors create a spellbound tale of the shadowy world of Israeli espionage. The tale is meticulous in detail, fast in its pace and has the added dimension of humour which the authors use to lighten up the severity of the actions.

The authors have given an unflinching account of the various operations undertaken by the Mossad. They not only mention the ruthlessness of various agents in ferreting out information but also the use of female agents as sexual bait. They remark, “Lovers and pillow talkers can provide much valuable information about the diplomats, airports and cities of the Arab world and other countries” (p.81). They graphically detail torture techniques of Mossad as well as the psychological warfare that its agents played with their targets.

An interesting perspective that the authors have tried to highlight is the constant friction among Israel’s various secret agencies, namely, Aman (military intelligence), Shin Bet (internal security) and Mossad (external intelligence). The friction was not confined to budget distribution but also spills over to turf war, which many times overlap. All the above agencies had their own undercover officers as well as their own surveillance methods. Even though some of the Directors of Mossad were previously headed Shin Bet or Aman like Isser Harel and Meir Amit, the complex play of power and influence continued amidst the three agencies.

The book also discusses the nuclear weapon programme, which is one of the oxymoron of the state of Israel. Till date, it remains an ‘open secret’ that the world is aware of Israel’s nuclear capability without the latter having to prove it. Mossad played an important role not only in setting up of the nuclear infrastructure of Israel but also to plant a false trail for various inspections and trials. It procured nuclear matter through secretive channels and even stole various important data from other countries. The authors put this bluntly by stating, “Israel’s perception of its own needs constantly prompted planning for getting things done through secrecy and deception and nowhere was this truer than in the nuclear programme (p.155).

The authors highlight the plight of the spies or sympathizers of Israel who were used during an operation but then were casually cast aside after the completion of a mission. Most of them lived in appalling poverty and a few even had to flee from Israel to make a living. One of the examples of such erstwhile spies is Mordechai Kravitzcki or better known as Kedar who served prison

sentence for 17 years for killing a ‘sayan’—a foreigner who help Israeli agents. After serving his prison term, Kedar argued that he was framed by the director of Mossad Isser Harel both to avoid diplomatic clash with Argentina and to avoid any embarrassment to the intelligence community. Years later, Harel pointed out that serious consideration was given to kill him to cover up the crime (p.63). Another example is that of Blumberg, the main scientist of the nuclear programme of Israel who was abruptly abandoned after the success of the programme. Later on he lamented, “I regret that I sacrificed my life for the security of the state” (p.156).

Throughout the book, the authors have a constant tussle with morality. On one hand, they accept that the security of Israel is dependent upon swift action taken by the spies but on the other hand, they are unable to come to terms with morality of such actions. In various instances, the authors have shifted attention after describing the actions. For example, they confirm that Mossad has been implicated in various human rights abuses not only within Israel but also in other countries where they carry out their covert operations; but the authors immediately shift the attention of the readers from the abuses to the necessity of hiding such cases to avoid diplomatic clashes. In other instances, the authors have tried to lay bare their dilemma regarding collateral damage of ‘targeted prevention’. For example, when Abbas Musawi, Hezbollah’s secretary general was killed in a helicopter-borne operation, his family consisting of his wife and his son were also killed.

A serious drawback of the book is the sense of repetitiveness that a reader will have if he/she has read the earlier book of the same authors, *Every Spy a Prince: The Complete History of Israel’s Intelligence Community*, published in 1990. Even though the book is updated till the beginning of 2012 as well as new materials have been added especially to the Pollard episode, several sections of this book remain same without changes. Even the title of the chapters remains same with just minor changes.

However, this book is an eye opener to the world of Mossad and its covert operations and an addition to the literature on espionage. This book can give the proverbial James Bond run for his money and is recommended for people who want to know about Israel and its defence structures as well as for those who love to read spy stories.

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