



# Israeli Intelligence Penetration in Arab States



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january 2026



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## Israeli Intelligence Penetration in Arab States

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### Introduction

Despite the record of intelligence successes achieved by the Zionist movement prior to the establishment of Israel, particularly during the British Mandate, and its subsequent achievements after the 1967 war, the period following Operation al-Aqsa Flood (2023) has marked a qualitative shift. It has revealed an Israeli capacity to conduct intelligence operations targeting prominent leaders of the Axis of Resistance in Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Palestine and Qatar. This is in addition to earlier operations carried out in Tunisia, Malaysia, Damascus, and several European states, among others.

Moreover, Israel has demonstrated an ability to identify and monitor the locations of training sites, storage facilities and laboratories, while actively seeking to exploit social media platforms as tools of psychological warfare. Through these means, it has aimed to incite sectarian strife, inflame subcultural divisions, and inflict psychological erosion, particularly among supporters of the resistance.

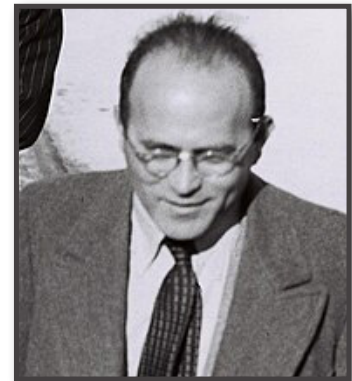
Accordingly, the execution of operations of the scale and severity witnessed in the “pager operations” in Lebanon, together with the penetration reaching senior leadership figures within Hizbullah and the Islamic Resistance, including Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ), points to a profound expansion of Israeli intelligence reach. This is further underscored by the assassination of a significant number of Yemeni government ministers in Sana’a, as well as access to a large number of Iranian scientists and military and political leaders. These developments collectively indicate that the depth of Israeli penetration into the Arab body has reached an advanced and highly alarming stage. Such a development cannot be underestimated; rather, it necessitates a systematic examination of this phenomenon and a careful understanding of the conditions surrounding it and the reasons for its success, with the aim of identifying effective mechanisms to contain and curb it.

It is essential to recognize that achieving “peace” among societal units does not imply an end to “soft wars,” which include espionage. Even allied states, such as the US and Israel, engage in spying<sup>2</sup> to avoid falling victim to what the German General Moltke described as the unexpected actor.<sup>3</sup> As this study will demonstrate, Israel has not ceased spying on Arab states that have normalized relations with it. On the contrary, normalization has made penetration easier. Furthermore, globalization, understood as the extensive technological, economic, and social interdependence among units of the international system, has allowed espionage to operate behind multiple layers of concealment, as will be explained in this study.<sup>4</sup>



## First: The Israeli Intelligence Perspective

Reuven Shiloah laid the foundation for an institution resembling the Israeli external intelligence agency, the Mossad, in the late 1940s, as an offshoot of the Haganah. This institution was later developed into the Mossad, with its leadership entrusted to Isser Harel in 1953. Shiloah had delineated the operational framework of this institution along five dimensions:<sup>5</sup>



Reuven Shiloah

- ▶ 1. Viewing Arabs as the primary threat to Israel, necessitating penetration and dismantling of Arab structures.
- ▶ 2. Establishing cooperation with Western intelligence services, particularly the US.
- ▶ 3. Prioritizing pragmatism over ideology in the security establishment's conduct.
- ▶ 4. Developing intelligence cooperation with neighboring states, notably Iran, Türkiye and Ethiopia.
- ▶ 5. Engaging minority groups in the Arab region that feel marginalized by Arab regimes.<sup>6</sup>

The year 1956 represented a pivotal moment in Mossad's operational history. In February, the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union convened, during which Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev delivered his now-famous secret speech sharply criticizing Joseph Stalin's rule. Although the speech remained classified, Mossad, under David Ben-Gurion's leadership, successfully obtained a copy and subsequently handed it over to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Consequently, this achievement constituted a significant development for Mossad, leading to a qualitative strengthening of its relationship with US intelligence, an objective previously articulated by Shiloah.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this success encouraged the agency to persist in pursuing its broader strategic goals.

## Second: Structure of the Israeli Security Apparatus

Studies on the structure of Israeli intelligence institutions indicate that four branches operate to carry out nearly all Israeli intelligence and espionage activities. These branches are:<sup>8</sup>

- ▶ 1. The Mossad (Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations): The Mossad "operates primarily outside the borders of Israel, gathering "intelligence" on targeted states. The Israeli agents living inside the Arab countries are under the direction of the Institute. The chief of the Institute is directly responsible to the Prime Minister for the over-all direction of all the services.

Some estimates in 2018 indicate that the Mossad's and Shabak's budget reaches about \$3 billion, with a workforce of 7 thousand employees in Mossad, making the latter the second-largest intelligence agency in the West, after the CIA.



According to Yossi Cohen, a former head of the Mossad, the agency's mandate includes collecting classified intelligence (strategic, political and operational) beyond the state's borders; conducting special operations abroad; thwarting the development and acquisition of non-conventional weapons by hostile states; and preventing terrorist attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets outside Israel. Additionally, it involves developing and maintaining political relations with states that do not have diplomatic ties with Israel, facilitating the immigration of Jews from countries that refuse them departure, and establishing frameworks to protect Jews who remain in those countries.<sup>9</sup>

- ▶2. The Shabak's primary tasks are counterespionage in Israel, the investigation of possible fifth-column activities and the destruction of resistance groups within the occupied territories.
- ▶3. The Military Intelligence Directorate (Aman): Its units are responsible for collecting information specifically related to military aspects and hostile military activities.
- ▶4. Research Department of the Foreign Ministry: It focuses on security-related aspects of diplomatic activities and the collection of information concerning them.

These four institutions rely on two primary forms of intelligence:<sup>10</sup>

#### ▶1. Human Intelligence (HUMINT)

- a. **Mista'arvim:** These operatives are often selected for their ability to integrate seamlessly into Arab societies and for their deep knowledge of local dialects, customs and social norms. Prominent among these are the so-called "Mista'arvim" (Hebrew for "those who resemble Arabs"), first established in 1942<sup>11</sup> "to infiltrate Palestinian communities to gather intelligence and arrest or assassinate targets." The concept of these units, which relied on Arab Jews (Mizrahi), dates back to the British Mandate period and was later developed by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in 1986. The Mista'arvim units successfully planted agents across most Arab states, with large expatriate communities in the Gulf, for instance, providing cover for recruitment efforts.<sup>12</sup> Early units, such as the "Arab Section" of the Palmach, were composed of Jews born in Arab countries who had grown up speaking Arabic as their first language and had lived in Arab communities prior to the establishment of Israel.
- b. **Collaborators:** Some agents were local Arab citizens recruited as collaborators, often driven by financial incentives, promises of benefits such as family reunification or access to services, or personal grievances seeking revenge against their community or government. Many came from disadvantaged backgrounds and were particularly susceptible to recruitment due to economic hardship or psychological and emotional vulnerabilities. Minorities, politically vengeful Arab parties, and narcissistic leaders seeking public visibility provided additional recruitment pools. Furthermore, individuals exposed to blackmail, whether through financial or administrative corruption, sexual misconduct, or compromising relationships, were exploited and coerced into espionage.





c. **Non-Jewish, Non-Arab Foreigners:**<sup>13</sup> The diverse national affiliations of Jews in Israel have created an extensive human network capable of bridging their countries of origin with Israel. By virtue of their deep understanding of their former communities, these individuals often facilitate the recruitment of foreigners through diplomatic channels, commercial enterprises, personal friendships, mixed marriages, and even union or political party affiliations. Many subsequently occupy positions representing their countries in Arab states or as employees of companies operating within the region. Accordingly, a Jewish migrant from a non-Arab country can contribute to recruiting members of their original community for Israeli intelligence. This activity is closely intertwined with broader foreign intelligence collaboration with Israel in Arab states, particularly in domains of mutual strategic interest. A prominent example is India's intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).<sup>14</sup> Beyond technical cooperation in cybersecurity and other technological fields, the presence of over ten million Indians in Arab countries provides Israel with the opportunity to leverage RAW's connections with its diaspora for Israeli-Indian intelligence collaboration in the Arab environment. This dynamic is exemplified by Indian espionage networks that operated on behalf of Israel in Qatar, one of whose cells received the death penalty, as well as by cooperative intelligence efforts targeting Iran and other Gulf states.<sup>15</sup>

## ►2. Advanced Technical Surveillance (SIGINT)

It relies on Israel's exploitation of its advanced technological capabilities, including reconnaissance satellites, surveillance aircraft and artificial intelligence (AI), to intercept communications and monitor military activities across the region. Moreover, the sale of spyware developed by Israel, most notably the Pegasus, to certain Arab governments has enabled indirect Israeli access to sensitive Arab data. Israel leveraged its relations with the United Arab Emirates within the Arab context through a network of partnerships between Emirati and Israeli companies, particularly in the fields of intelligence collection and AI. A prominent example is the Emirati AI firm Presight, which maintains contracts with Israeli defense and intelligence companies and operates joint offices in Israel. The company was originally established as a joint venture between an Emirati firm and an Israeli partner. Furthermore, on 19/2021/4/, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, a leading Israeli defense company, signed an agreement to establish a new joint venture with the technology company Group 42 (G42) to "commercialize artificial intelligence and big data technologies." This agreement included the establishment of a research and development site in Israel to serve global clients. Notably, the agreement followed the public normalization accord signed between Israel and the UAE in 2020.<sup>16</sup>



Rafael is well known for producing Israel's missile defense systems, including the Iron Dome and David's Sling, and is a pioneer in laser technology research and networked battlefield systems. At the time, the Israeli financial newspaper *Globes*<sup>17</sup> reported that the cybersecurity firm XM Cyber, cofounded by former Mossad chief Tamir Pardo, entered the Gulf for the first time to market its "cybersecurity technologies to defend the gas,



oil and financial infrastructures in the region.” In this context, OurCrowd, Israel’s most active venture firm, announced that it is to significantly expand its Abu Dhabi operations with a new venture capital office and AI tech hub.<sup>18</sup>

In the aftermath of the September 2024 explosion involving call and radio devices (pagers) in Lebanon, which resulted in hundreds of casualties, and following the earlier, ambiguous explosion at Beirut Port in August 2020 that triggered a massive detonation of ammonium nitrate stores, as well as a subsequent series of targeted assassinations that claimed the lives of senior resistance leaders in Lebanon, several actors and analysts have attributed responsibility for these incidents to Israel, highlighting the exceptionally high level of operational sophistication demonstrated.

Addressing this issue necessitates careful consideration of the following indicators:<sup>19</sup>

#### **a. The Nexus between Economic Strain and Intelligence Penetration**

In security dynamics, it is an established principle that decreased economic power is directly linked to increased vulnerability to intelligence infiltration, particularly through human resources. The economic pressure on some Arab countries, including Lebanon, coupled with the severe hardships endured by large segments of the population in recent years, have significantly enhanced Mossad’s recruitment efforts, even among Shia communities. This dynamic appears to have been a significant factor in enhancing the effectiveness of Israeli intelligence operations.

#### **b. Technological Control**

Apart from economic issues, one of the greatest challenges is technology. In several Arab states, for example, parts of the telecommunications sector are subject to US interests, a reality that is particularly evident in Lebanon, thereby granting them access to all communication data. The internet infrastructure and other tech services are also controlled by rival forces, effectively under US control. In the Arab context, reliance on social media platforms, especially WhatsApp, has been steadily increasing. The vast majority of users, however, pay little attention to issues of security or privacy, thereby enabling Israeli security agencies to infiltrate these data sources and exploit them for intelligence purposes.

#### **c. AI Use**

Israel’s focus on AI in recent years has enabled it to identify a vast network of individuals. For instance, one of the individuals who was assassinated didn’t own a mobile phone. His wife, however, messaged her sister, saying that he would be visiting that night. This information was intercepted, and he was killed on the road while leaving the house.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, it is important to highlight the role of so-called Cloud Computing Services,<sup>21</sup> which involve using hardware and software hosted on remote servers rather than on an individual’s or company’s local device. These servers are managed by companies such as Google, Amazon and Microsoft, among others. Intelligence studies indicate that cloud services have become one of the most significant tools for intelligence



agencies, as they have fundamentally transformed the way data is stored and processed. Cloud computing enables the storage of massive amounts of information, including emails, images, documents, databases, login records and geolocation data, making it an attractive target for cyber intrusions. Moreover, it facilitates operations such as deception, including the establishment of fictitious accounts, storage of encrypted files, or the use of temporary proxy servers to conceal identities, as well as potential distribution of malicious software via legitimate platforms (e.g., Dropbox). Intelligence agencies also seek to exploit vulnerabilities through cloud supply chain attacks, cloud hijacking, and credential theft. Available data indicate that Israel is among the countries most active in leveraging these capabilities.<sup>22</sup>

Unit 8200 constitutes one of the most active arms in this domain. Established in 1952, 8200 is a unit in the Military Intelligence Directorate (Aman), responsible for collecting signals intelligence (SIGINT) including communications between people on electronic signals, radio, and mobile phones. It is the largest unit in the Israeli army, employing 5 thousand to 10 thousand soldiers. It is an agency similar to the US National Security Agency (NSA). Israeli intelligence soldiers are usually recruited from a very young age. The Israeli army actively looks for potential recruits in schools, making the average age among unit members between 19 and 22.



The operations of Unit 8200 are concentrated in the following domains:<sup>23</sup>

- a. Penetration and large-scale surveillance in the WB and GS: Unit 8200 deploys and tests its surveillance technologies in the occupied WB and during Israel's operations on GS, effectively using these areas as an Israeli "surveillance laboratory." The unit systematically tests AI and surveillance innovations on Palestinians in the WB and GS to refine and later commercialize them. In this context, it has established a dedicated, isolated environment within Microsoft's Azure platform to store millions of calls from Palestinian citizens in the WB and GS. Reports suggest that tensions arose between Microsoft and Israel following leaks regarding this program.

Furthermore, there is a cloud computing and AI agreement between the Israeli government and two tech companies: Google and Amazon, called Project Nimbus. As part of the deal, Israel requested that the two companies implement a secret "Wink" mechanism, designed to alert the Israeli government whenever the companies were compelled to disclose Israeli data to foreign authorities. This system uses coded financial payments representing the receiving country, allowing Israel to maintain control over its sensitive data without directly violating domestic or international legal obligations.





- b. Achievements in Cyber Intrusions: Avishai Abrahami, CEO of Wix, has reported that in the 1990s he successfully breached the systems of “two hostile states,” decrypting their computer networks and accessing sensitive national data. In 2000, reports indicated that Israeli teenage hackers attempted to infiltrate websites belonging to Hizbullah and Hamas, marking one of the earliest documented cases of cyber warfare. Later, in 2018, a study published by *Haaretz* revealed that 80% of 2,300 individuals who founded 700 Israeli cybersecurity companies were trained in Israeli intelligence agencies.
- c. Upon completing their service, members of the unit acquire advanced technical skills that enable them to join leading technology companies or establish their own ventures. Their expertise renders them highly desirable to major firms, while simultaneously serving as a conduit through which Israeli intelligence can maintain influence within these foreign technology enterprises.
- d. Unit 8200 soldiers are often tasked with intercepting signals and decrypting communications, but as the demand for security and surveillance tech grew worldwide, it became necessary for intelligence agencies to rely on their surveillance sectors. The Unit has been accused of contributing to the Stuxnet computer worm that had infected Iran’s computers and targeted its nuclear servers, setting back their development. Unlike conventional malware, Stuxnet was designed not merely to breach systems or exfiltrate data, but to sabotage physical infrastructure. It specifically targeted industrial control systems “Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition” (SCADA) and propagated through USB sticks (Universal Serial Bus) or internal networks. It is widely believed that the United States and Israel were the principal sources of this worm.

The 8200 Unit’s role is not confined to software attacks alone. It is also heavily involved in establishing AI models to locate and identify its “enemy” targets. The most infamous AI identifier is its “Gospel,” currently used in the war on Gaza. The model, developed by Unit 8200, identifies targets for the Israeli army based on “probabilistic inference,” when an individual shares the same characteristics as an identified enemy in the datasets they’ve been trained on. Hundreds of tech companies and start-ups were launched by 8200 alumni, including the popular instant messaging app Viber, or Wix, the cloud computing web-development service enterprise. Furthermore, Young Israelis hired in this high-tech “secret” branch, Unit 8200, of the Israeli army often work on high-profile projects that require advanced technical skills, such as coding and programming.

### ►3. Multiple Foreign Intelligence Agencies

Moreover, all Western intelligence agencies are active in the Arab countries, particularly in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and the Gulf. Along with Mossad, British, French, and several Arab intelligence services are operating there. Reports mentioned that more than 60 intelligence services have been tasked by the US to gather information on the resistance. The 8200 Unit is also known to have different subunits: Hatzav, Unit 81 and Gedasim. The first is responsible for monitoring Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT), which includes all media ranging from TV to social media, including Arab and Palestinian ones. Unit 81 is even more secretive, as it supplies the military with the latest in-house built technologies. The final unit, the Sigint Operational Regiment or “Gedasim” is the most secretive; its function is to collect real-time intelligence and transmit it to elite military troops. In certain instances, Israel has participated in intelligence sharing and



training with select Arab states, particularly those embedded in US-led regional security frameworks designed to counter Iran. Nevertheless, independently executed covert operations, including the targeted assassination of figures affiliated with adversarial groups such as Hamas and Hizbullah in locations such as Dubai, Qatar and Lebanon, remain a defining characteristic of Israeli operational practice.<sup>24</sup>

#### ►4. Surveillance of Islamic Movements in Arab and Non-Arab States<sup>25</sup>

Given the broad popular base of Islamic movements, most notably the Muslim Brothers (MB) movement, Israeli, Western and, in some cases, Arab intelligence agencies have devoted sustained efforts to monitoring these religious forces. The primary objective has been to detect all forms of Islamic penetration at their earliest stages within public life in Western societies, including education, academic institutions, politics and government, and to eradicate such influence at its roots wherever possible. In this context, Israeli security agencies regularly exchange intelligence with their counterparts regarding MB movement networks in Europe and the US. This cooperation focuses on tracking the development of the MB's educational, social and non-profit infrastructures and working to sever them from their foundational bases. Most critically, these efforts aim to dry up funding sources, which no longer originate solely from the Middle East but also include EU financial assistance that Western intelligence circles increasingly regard as “misused funds.” Accordingly, the restriction of Islamic financial flows has become closely linked to policy decisions criminalizing the MB movement and its various organizational structures in Europe and elsewhere. This approach was exemplified by the decision of US President Donald Trump in November 2025 to designate the MB movement in certain countries as a terrorist organization.



#### Third: The Use of Psychology in Espionage

Psychological espionage refers to the employment of purported paranormal or extrasensory abilities (Extrasensory Perception—ESP), such as remote viewing (RV), telepathy, and clairvoyance, for the purposes of intelligence collection and national security. This highly contested approach is rooted in parapsychology, a field that gained notable traction during the Cold War. The most prominent US initiative in this domain was the US Army's Stargate Project (1978–1995).<sup>26</sup> The project was officially terminated after evaluative assessments concluded that such methods failed to yield operationally reliable intelligence, despite references to certain isolated instances of apparent success. These methods include:<sup>27</sup>

- 1. **Remote Viewing:** The principal technique allegedly employed in this field, defined as the purported ability to acquire information about a geographically distant or concealed target without recourse to the known sensory faculties. Practitioners



typically enter a trance-like or meditative state, after which they produce drawings or articulate their “perceptions” verbally.

- **2. Telepathy:** It’s the direct transference of thought from sender to receiver without sensory channel of communication.
- **3. Clairvoyance:** The alleged capacity to obtain information about events or locations situated at remote distances, thus a form of extra sensory perception.

In 2003, documents related to this field were declassified, including US government research materials released through the CIA’s Stargate Project, which had close institutional ties with Israeli intelligence services.

#### **Fourth: Field Indicators of Israeli Intelligence Penetration in Arab States**

The so-called “Lavon Affair” of 1954 can be considered the earliest concrete indication of the implementation of recommendations made by the Mossad’s first director, Shiloah, as previously discussed.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, the case of Eli Cohen, the Israeli spy in Syria executed in 1965, serves as a striking example of the profound infiltration of ruling elites within the Arab world.<sup>29</sup>

The author systematically reviewed publicly available Arab and Israeli reports concerning the exposure of Israeli espionage cells in Arab countries. The evidence indicates that Israeli networks have infiltrated all Arab states through a variety of channels. Between 2000 and early 2025, 275 Israeli espionage cells were publicly reported across the region, averaging more than 11 cells per year. Taking into account the likelihood of additional, undiscovered cells, these figures clearly illustrate the considerable extent of Israel’s intelligence penetration into the Arab world.

**Table 1: Estimates of Israeli Espionage Cells Discovered in Arab Countries, 2000–2025<sup>30</sup>**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Minimum (acknowledged (by Arab state or Israel</b>	<b>Maximum (acknowledged (by either party</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>	50	150
<b>Egypt</b>	5	20
<b>Algeria</b>	1	10
<b>Tunisia</b>	1	5
<b>Syria</b>	10	30
<b>Jordan</b>	1	10
<b>Iraq/ Morocco/ Yemen/ Gulf States</b>	10	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>275</b>



Available data and reports point to a strategic shift in Israel's intelligence penetration of the Arab world.<sup>31</sup> This shift is manifested in Israel's infiltration via Gulf normalization states, through which it extends into the broader Arab body by means of the two previously identified dimensions: the human and the technological. Notably, Yossi Cohen, who served as Mossad chief from 2016 to 2021, highlighted his involvement in restructuring the Emirati security apparatus<sup>32</sup> to institutionalize and facilitate cooperation between the two parties.

Mossad operations in the Gulf have taken two distinct forms: overt and cooperative. The first has become particularly prominent following the normalization agreements known as the Abraham Accords with the UAE and Bahrain. An illustrative example of this overt cooperation is the statement made by Bahrain's former Deputy Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, at the Munich Security Conference in February 2022. He confirmed the existence of intelligence collaboration between Bahrain and Israel, noting that "the Israeli intelligence was operating in the Gulf state." The second form predates the Abraham Accords. As revealed by Wikileaks documents, the King of Bahrain "had admitted having intelligence contacts with Israel and instructed that Israel should no longer be called the 'Zionist entity' in official statements."<sup>33</sup>



A French researcher, drawing on a 15-page intelligence report, noted that Egyptian intelligence had warned Israel of a military operation being prepared by the Palestinian resistance prior to Operation al-Aqsa Flood.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, reports indicate that US Central Command (CENTCOM) leadership has used Al-Udeid US base in Qatar to facilitate security and military coordination between Israel and normalization states.<sup>35</sup>

Documents released by the CIA reveal multiple forms of Israeli infiltration into Arab communities, political parties and civil, military and security elites. Such penetration occurs through relations with Arab minorities, familial connections to political or military leaders, Israel's own initiatives, or collaboration with various international intelligence agencies.<sup>36</sup> Over the past decade, the Mossad has systematically enhanced its cooperation with select regional and international intelligence services, driven by shared interests against common adversaries. Reports highlight a particularly close partnership between the Mossad and India's RAW, within the broader framework of extensive India-Israel cooperation,<sup>37</sup> which facilitated the aforementioned Indian engagement in the Gulf. The roots of this collaboration date back to coordination during the 1999 Kargil War between India and Pakistan.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, security coordination between Israel and certain Gulf states has expanded; even prior to formal normalization, Mossad and other Israeli officials maintained frequent behind-the-scenes contacts with key Gulf capitals.<sup>39</sup>





## **Fifth: Mossad Objectives in the Gulf States**

The conditions of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states render Israeli intelligence operations comparatively more accessible. The presence of over 26 million foreign workers from dozens of national backgrounds<sup>40</sup> substantially facilitates intelligence recruitment. For instance, in 2022, the Indian population in the Gulf is estimated at approximately 10 million, with around 3 million in the UAE, 2.5 million in Saudi Arabia, and 4.5 million distributed across other GCC countries.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the existence of thousands of foreign companies either registered in or maintaining regional headquarters within the Gulf creates an environment conducive to intelligence penetration.<sup>42</sup> This dynamic is further amplified by the presence of foreign military bases, which may employ Israelis with dual nationality. As of 2023, the number of Israelis holding dual US or European citizenship alongside Israeli nationality was estimated at roughly 544 thousand.<sup>43</sup>

Israeli intelligence efforts in the Gulf States are primarily focused on the following:<sup>44</sup>

### **►1. Tracking and Monitoring the Conflict with Iran**

Iran represents Israel's primary security concern, and Mossad leads efforts to monitor Tehran's activities. The Gulf, due to its proximity to Iran and frequently tense relations with it, serves as a key arena for observing Iranian movements. It is self-evident that the Mossad, in cooperation with certain security agencies in Gulf normalization states, seeks to gather the maximum possible information on Iran, operating both independently and beyond formal bilateral frameworks. Mossad aims to monitor any political, military or economic cooperation between Gulf states and Iran. It is also expected to track Iranian support for the Houthi movement in Yemen, as well as the activities of Iran's armed forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Gulf waters. Western intelligence reports indicate Israeli concern regarding Gulf military projects with Iranian or Chinese involvement, including Oman's spaceport "Etlaq," which Israeli reconnaissance satellites reportedly monitor over fears it could serve Iranian military purposes. Enhancing technical surveillance and recruiting local sources within Gulf states to track Iranian activities is thus among Mossad's highest priorities.

### **►2. Monitoring Gulf Armament Programs and Military Technologies**

While the Gulf states do not pose a direct military threat to Israel, Tel Aviv nonetheless maintains close surveillance over any military developments in the region that could potentially affect its qualitative military superiority. This concern was clearly reflected in the Qatari submarine project. Recent disclosures indicate that Mossad conducted espionage operations targeting the project through Indian agents, who supplied classified information regarding Qatari plans to procure Italian submarines.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Israel has consistently opposed the sale of F-15 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia, contending that such transfers would erode Israeli air superiority. In this regard, Israel exerted sustained pressure on Washington to restrict certain capabilities, including operational range and strike capacity. The same pattern resurfaced when Israel resisted Gulf states' acquisition of F-35 stealth fighters, even after the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020. Against this backdrop, Mossad is likely to closely monitor Saudi Arabia's ballistic missile





and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) development programs, while also engaging in surveillance of the ministries of defense of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, as well as their military-industrial establishments. The overarching objective is to pre-empt any shift that could destabilize the regional military balance. Moreover, civilian nuclear energy projects, which may serve as a foundation for future nuclear capabilities, are subject to heightened scrutiny through espionage, satellite imagery, internal documentation, and communications among experts involved in these programs.

### ►3. Disrupting the Financing of Factions Hostile to Israel

Israel views with pronounced suspicion the relationships maintained by certain Gulf states, particularly at the societal level, with Palestinian factions and Islamic groups that Israel designates as hostile. In this regard, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman figure prominently. As a result, Mossad is likely to regard sovereign ministries in these states as potential intelligence targets, alongside the financial and media networks within the Gulf that are associated with these factions. Accordingly, Mossad is expected to seek the placement of assets within banks, financial institutions, and money transfer companies in order to monitor financial transactions and intercept communications between faction leaders and their supporters. Iran has previously been accused of attempting to exploit Bahrain and Kuwait as transit points for smuggling weapons to affiliated cells. Consequently, Mossad has a strong interest in tracking and disrupting such activities, either through coordination with local security agencies or via covert operations conducted independently. In addition, Mossad is likely to extend its intelligence-gathering efforts to charitable organizations and social institutions in these countries, systematically monitoring their financial flows and networks of supporters, including segments of the business elite.

### ►4. Shaping Normalization Decisions and Intelligence Deception

At the political level, Mossad seeks to anticipate Gulf decision-makers' orientations toward Israel while monitoring alliance structures and foreign policy trajectories. It simultaneously aims to shape these choices in ways that advance Israeli strategic interests. Within this context, the prospect of Saudi–Israeli normalization constitutes the central focus of intelligence attention for both the Israeli political leadership and Mossad. Accordingly, the agency is likely to assess the views of royal circles and the Saudi security establishment in order to provide Israeli decision-makers with regular, credible evaluations of persuasion strategies and points of resistance within the Saudi system.

In parallel, Mossad seeks to deepen security cooperation with the UAE and Bahrain to consolidate this emerging regional alignment. These efforts have gained urgency following the Saudi–Iranian rapprochement mediated by China. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the Mossad operates discreetly to uncover Iranian plans targeting the Gulf and relay such information to Gulf partners to disrupt or slow the détente. This may include the dissemination of false or misleading intelligence on Iran, China, or Islamist movements. The strategic objective is to keep Gulf states closer to Israel than to its adversaries through a calibrated mix of intelligence sharing and security warnings that blend accuracy with deception.



## ►5. Protection of Israeli Missions and Interests

As with all states maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel, Mossad bears responsibility for safeguarding Israeli facilities, political figures and citizens in the Gulf. Any security threat directed at Israelis, whether diplomats, businesspeople, or other nationals, falls squarely within Mossad's mandate, whether in coordination with host governments or independently. Accordingly, the agency systematically gathers intelligence on extremist Islamist cells as well as individuals or groups hostile to Israel that may be planning attacks. In addition, Mossad is expected to monitor Arab and Muslim communities in the UAE and Bahrain in order to address any potential security concerns.

Concurrently, the agency works to secure Israeli companies and technological systems operating in the Gulf against hacking, thereby protecting Israeli investments and ensuring the smooth functioning of their activities. Information obtained in the course of these protective measures is subsequently leveraged to advance the broader strategic objectives outlined above.



## Sixth: Future Methods of Penetration and Recruitment in the Gulf

It is highly likely that the Mossad will employ a combination of conventional and innovative penetration mechanisms, carefully tailored to the specific structural and social characteristics of the Gulf states. In this context, the most prominent anticipated methods of penetration and recruitment can be outlined as follows:<sup>46</sup>

### ►1. Foreign Labor

The Gulf states host large expatriate communities that constitute a substantial proportion of the workforce, including millions of migrants from South Asia, alongside Arabs, Europeans, and others. This demographic configuration provides the Mossad with an effective human cover through which infiltration can be facilitated. As previously noted, the Mossad has exploited Indian espionage networks operating in Iran and the Gulf to recruit dozens of Indian nationals employed in sensitive projects, thereby supporting both Indian and Israeli intelligence activities.

Looking ahead, the Mossad is likely to continue recruiting migrant workers in countries such as the UAE, Qatar, Oman and, in particular, Saudi Arabia. Given the relatively low wages earned by many of these workers, financial inducements are expected to be used to encourage direct espionage or to facilitate the installation of surveillance or intrusion software on electronic devices within their workplaces. Moreover, some Arab residents in the Gulf may also be targeted. In this regard, it was previously reported that the Mossad recruited, for example, Jordanian citizens who traveled to Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah in 2018 in order to carry out espionage-related activities.<sup>47</sup>



## ►2. Commercial Activity and Advanced Technologies

All Gulf states have steadily moved to simplify the requirements for establishing international companies as a means of attracting foreign investment. As a result, commercial enterprises have emerged as a critical entry point for penetration.

In this context, it is anticipated that the Mossad will promote the deployment of consulting firms across a range of specializations, staffed by Israelis or Mossad operatives, to operate in the Gulf. Although these firms would ostensibly provide legitimate services, they would simultaneously serve as platforms for intelligence collection. In recent years, for example, the Emirati cybersecurity company DarkMatter employed Israeli experts who are graduates of Unit 8200.<sup>48</sup> The presence of such Israeli personnel within Gulf communications and information systems grants Israel a promising opportunity for deep access, and potentially for the covert installation of surveillance mechanisms within critical infrastructure.

Moreover, private companies have been documented as serving as recruitment fronts, such as the Dahra Global Technologies and Consulting Services, in Qatar, which was later revealed to be a cover for espionage activity and to have employed Indian officers who were subsequently charged with espionage and arrested. Therefore, the Mossad is likely to promote commercial partnerships and joint investments between Israelis and Gulf actors in order to entrench a legitimate foothold. It may also continue to develop software exported to Gulf states in fields such as cybersecurity and smart city systems.

## ►3. Infiltration of National Intelligence and Security Agencies

It is imperative not to dismiss the possibility that the Mossad may seek to recruit individuals within national intelligence and security institutions or, alternatively, to construct specialized networks of relationships that grant access to sensitive internal information. Such efforts may be advanced by targeting Gulf intelligence officers during periods spent abroad for education or official assignments, where opportunities arise to cultivate sustained personal and professional relationships. Moreover, in states such as the UAE and Bahrain, recent developments have enabled senior security officials and officers to engage openly with their Israeli counterparts. While this does not necessarily entail direct recruitment, it may nonetheless establish conditions conducive to covert, individualized recruitment where overt approaches are impracticable. Failing that, the Mossad may pursue indirect methods, including the interception of communications and documents, as well as the placement of targeted individuals under close personal surveillance.

## ►4. Diplomatic and Tourism Cover

Israeli intelligence agencies frequently deploy officers under diplomatic cover within embassies and official missions. As a result, embassy personnel in Gulf states are likely to include Mossad operatives who gather intelligence within the formal constraints afforded to diplomats, while simultaneously cultivating networks among foreign nationals residing in the host country. Moreover, with some Gulf states progressively expanding the issuance of tourist visas to Israeli citizens, the number of Israelis entering these countries for tourism or commercial purposes is expected to rise.



This development further enables intelligence operatives to operate under ostensibly civilian identities, such as business professionals or technical experts. For instance, a Mossad operative with dual European citizenship can readily enter the country as a specialist employed by a multinational corporation, engage with officials or local nationals, and do so without arousing suspicion. In this context, seamless assimilation into the local environment serves as a critical instrument for effective intelligence collection and operational assessment.

### ►5. Remote Technical Surveillance and SIGINT

Israel is expected to continue leveraging its technological superiority to monitor communications and electronic emissions across the Gulf remotely. Mossad, along with other Israeli intelligence agencies, is likely to operate advanced networks of satellites and reconnaissance aircraft capable of intercepting communications signals. Tel Aviv is also expected to intensify the deployment of spy satellites focused on the Gulf to monitor military bases, ports, and emerging infrastructure sites, such as the Port of Duqm in Oman.

### Conclusion

Academic studies consistently highlight the significant expansion of Israeli intelligence penetration across the Arab world. This expansion has been facilitated by normalization processes, the alignment of Arab–Western interests with those of Israel, and the increasing role of technology in enabling covert infiltration into Arab structures. The phenomenon is further compounded by the prevailing prioritization of regime security over the security of the state or society. The Gulf states, in particular, have emerged as a critical arena in this regard, due to several factors, including their shared concerns regarding Iran and the continuous influx of foreign labor into the Gulf labor market.

Quantitative data on the presence of Israeli espionage cells in both Arab countries proximate to and distant from Palestine suggest that Israel seeks to politically fragment the Arab world, while simultaneously treating it as a single adversarial entity from an intelligence perspective. In this regard, intelligence operations serve as a key instrument for weakening this collective unity. Moreover, the evidence indicates that Israeli intelligence systematically exploits intra-Arab disputes to penetrate Arab institutional structures, gather information on individuals, political orientations, and opposition forces, and subsequently leverage these insights to advance its strategic objectives. This pattern is exemplified, for instance, by Moroccan cooperation with Israel targeting specific political actors, including with respect to Algeria.<sup>49</sup>

The mega trend clearly indicates that Israeli intelligence is steadily penetrating Arab structures, with normalization serving as its primary gateway. This underscores the necessity of intensifying scholarly research to expose the risks of intelligence infiltration, even within the normalization states themselves. It is imperative for liberation-oriented political forces to make curbing this penetration a central objective, provided that their efforts are grounded in rigorous scientific studies to establish the foundations for strategic planning to counteract such infiltration.





## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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  - <sup>3</sup> Helmuth von Moltke was the chief of staff of the Prussian Army at the end of the 19th century, who said that the commander must always be prepared for the unexpected.
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