



## **Rise and Kill First: The Inside Story and Secret Operations of Israel's Assassination Program**

*Ronen Bergman*

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**The first definitive history of the Mossad, Shin Bet, and the IDF's targeted killing programs, from the man hailed by David Remnick as "arguably [Israel's] best investigative reporter"**

The Talmud says: "If someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill him first." This instinct to take every measure, even the most aggressive, to defend the Jewish people is hardwired into Israel's DNA. From the very beginning of its statehood in 1948, protecting the nation from harm has been the responsibility of its intelligence community and armed services, and there is one weapon in their vast arsenal that they have relied upon to thwart the most serious threats: Targeted assassinations have been used countless times, on enemies large and small, sometimes in response to attacks against the Israeli people and sometimes preemptively. In this page-turning, eye-opening book, journalist and military analyst Ronen Bergman offers a riveting inside account of the targeted killing programs—their successes, their failures, and the moral and political price exacted on the men and women who approved and carried out the missions.

Bergman has gained the exceedingly rare cooperation of many current and former members of the Israeli government, including Prime Ministers Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, and Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as high-level figures in the country's military and intelligence services: the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), the Mossad (the world's most feared intelligence agency), Caesarea (a "Mossad within the Mossad" that carries out attacks on the highest-value targets), and the Shin Bet (an internal security service that implemented the largest targeted assassination campaign ever, in order to stop what had once appeared to be unstoppable: suicide terrorism).

Including never-before-reported, behind-the-curtain accounts of key operations, and based on hundreds of on-the-record interviews and thousands of files to which Bergman has gotten exclusive access over his decades of reporting, *Rise and Kill First* brings us deep into the heart of Israel's most secret activities. Bergman traces, from statehood to the present, the gripping events and thorny ethical questions underlying Israel's targeted killing campaign, which has shaped the Israeli nation, the Middle East, and the entire world.

## Rise and Kill First: The Inside Story and Secret Operations of Israel's Assassination Program Details

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# From Reader Review Rise and Kill First: The Inside Story and Secret Operations of Israel's Assassination Program for online ebook

## Murtaza says

This is a really remarkable history of the violence undertaken by the modern Zionist movement, starting all the way back from Mandate Palestine, the wars against the postcolonial Arab states, and ending with the present conflict between Israel and the Iranian-led "Axis of Resistance." The author gets incredible access to the people involved in executing military and clandestine operations on behalf of the Mossad, Shin Bet and AMAN over the past several decades. The story starts even before the creation of Israel, with some remarkable on-the-record interviews with the hitmen and militia fighters - many of them Holocaust survivors - who helped establish the state by targeting British colonial officials and local Arabs in the early 20th century. This is an epic history of the type that few countries get to tell about themselves.

I was genuinely amazed at many of the revelations that Bergman documents, including the fact that the IDF had carried out a wave of deliberate car bombing attacks against Palestinian civilians in Beirut, tried to brainwash captured Palestinians to assassinate Arafat, and even blamed assassinations and bombings in Lebanon on fictional Sunni extremist groups. The means used to carry out these operations were often chilling, including the use of gruesome poisons, package bombings, home invasion murders and other "terroristic" forms of killing. Faced with what they consider existential threats and not thinking too highly of their neighbors, the Israeli officials have been ruthless in their fight to preserve the state over the past several decades. It really is clear that Mossad is willing to do anything, anywhere to potentially anyone if its leaders deem it necessary.

While it cannot be said that all members of the Israeli military-intelligence apparatus had a cavalier attitude towards Arab lives, in general they definitely have a far greater tolerance for carrying out operations that would kill Arab civilians, as opposed to their European or (God forbid) American counterparts. Several high-profile individuals, including Ariel Sharon, Rafael Eitan and Moshe Yaalon come across as absolute war criminals in the book, unconcerned with the deaths of innocents and at times utterly relishing it. Several others, including a number of mid-level objectors, appear to have had moral qualms about things that happened during the conflict. There is a particularly touching section where an AMAN operative tasked with helping kill the famous PLO commando Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir) laments how much he had come to respect the man he was tracking, describing him as a "model family man and authentic leader." It turns out that Moshe Yaalon was personally involved in that killing and pumped several bullets into al-Wazir's already-dead body in front of his screaming wife, something that he gloats to Bergman about in the book.

The history that Bergman recounts also gives a sobering reminder of how common it was for Israelis and Arabs to kill each other in Europe during the 60s and 70s. The fighting has mostly stayed within the Middle East since then, but for a time assassinations (mostly by Mossad) and hijackings (mostly by the Palestinians) were becoming a global phenomenon. The book lists of killing upon killing over decades, charting a back and forth cycle of violence and escalation. Many of these attacks, including high profile Hezbollah bombings that killed dozens of IDF soldiers had been effectively memory holed until now, in some cases deliberately. There are truly gruesome acts committed on all sides, though for the most part the book tends to frame Israeli actions as being in response to Palestinian provocation.

The book also teaches a lot about the organizational structure of Israel's intelligence divisions. The Mossad

has historically been tasked with external operations, something like Iran's Quds Force, whereas Shin Bet handles internal security and AMAN provides intelligence for use by the IDF. I was amazed by the fact Mossad and Shin Bet actually act under the direct command of the Prime Minister and have no parliamentary oversight. The PM himself signs the "red pages" to authorize assassinations and calls the shots of specific operations. Needless to say that this is a system extremely vulnerable to abuse and wanton behavior, with a small unaccountable group of people getting to run their own high-powered global killing machine. Its no wonder that former Mossad head Tamir Pardo recently described the agency as "a crime organization with a license."

There is a lot of information in this book, but, no cliche, it is genuinely written like a thriller. The writing was so good I could not put it down. An intimidating-sounding 700 pages went by in no time. This is a great achievement for a writer and a real testament both to Bergman's narrative skills and the sensational reported information that he managed to obtain. My one complaint is that for all the incredible access he gets to the Israeli side, including the names and voices of people who pulled triggers and made key decisions over the years, the Arabs are mostly covered by secondary sources. The book is not a hagiography of Israeli intelligence by any means and in fact raises serious moral questions about its conduct and ultimate strategic aims. Nonetheless, the war against the Palestinians is basically portrayed as a "War on Terror" without much analysis of the Palestinian history or why, decades after their Nakba (catastrophe), they would have started using terrorism in the first place. Had the book managed to get even a quarter as much access to the Arab side as it did to the Israelis, it would have made a huge difference. The selective use of the word "terrorism" and its exemption for state violence is also a bit dated and fails to reflect debates that have taken place in recent years about how such violence is reported.

That aside, I have to say this is one of the best written and most enlightening history books on the Middle East that I've come across in some time. I really recommend it to anyone, regardless of their stance on the conflict. The level of intergenerational violence documented here is sobering. I sincerely hope that people in positions of influence on all sides will read this book and reflect on the pressing need for this bloodshed to somehow come to an end. I also wish that more peoples had the power necessary to enshrine their history in such a meaningful way.

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### **Vika Ryabova says**

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### **Richard says**

Four stars for a general reader, five for those of us really interested in Israel.

The title is taken from a line in the Talmud, "If someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill him first," and is used as justification for everything from retribution/revenge murders (assassinations,) to preemptive kills, to blowing up Iran's nuclear reactor. It is, I suppose, good advice, especially if you're surrounded by enemies, and facing an existential crisis every day. It has, however, proven to be very difficult to pull off, strategically

problematic, and, on a human level, morally numbing.

Israel is a very small country. In a map comparison - from the US east to west -it's smaller than New Jersey, would sink in Lake Michigan, and is about the same size as Vancouver Island. It was founded by survivors of the Holocaust that effectively killed all the Jews in Europe, and has been surrounded by enemies since its founding. Its enemies believe it should be wiped off the face of the earth, and have been actively working toward that goal since day one, and Israel has used politics and terror to come to life, and survive since before day one.

The subject of this book is targeted assassinations – assassination as policy. Based on over a thousand interviews with policy makers, and assassins, it's a quick (considering its size of 700 pages) and troubling read. The lethal skullduggery that keeps the middle east percolating in stress and blood has not been captured in any fictional account I've seen. The Mossad of Daniel Silva's books is a well oiled machine, in real life it's a (no pun intended) hit or miss operation – sometimes at the top of its game, sometimes mired in interagency politics (the Shin Bet and Israeli Defense Forces figure in.) Assassinations don't often come off as planned, everybody seems to be trying to kill somebody, innocents are targeted by Arabs through the sickening use of suicide bombers, and are “unfortunate” victims of plans gone awry, or bombs built too large on the Jewish side. None of the players are pure, all are self-justified, assassinations tend to cause as many problems as they might solve, and there is no trust – at any level. I was left pondering the popular definition of insanity – doing the same thing over and over while expecting a different result. Peace in the middle-east? Good luck.

Rise Up and Kill is a terrific history lesson, albeit through one blood smeared lens, and is going to be mandatory reading for thriller writers, students of the middle-east, diplomats, and politicians. It's also an important read for anyone interested in Israel's survival.

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### **Budd Margolis says**

This book is one of the very best academic intense history of any national intelligence entity ever comprised. Throughout this book, we are faced with the many moralities of decisions to take life and the results some of which were effective and some counterproductive. You are presented with background and political intrigue and often wonder at how organizations can run amok with hubris and ignorance, vengeance and desperation and then emerge with miracles and victories.

This is not a work of propaganda, it does paint a more solution tolerant view for the region by mapping all the violence. I believe it is in most cases a fair, nearly impartial, interpretation of events in chronological development helps us all to understand the pain of conflict and the enormous loss on both sides.

Peoples who once trusted each, used by politicians to hate each other, still resent and hold grudges which we may never heal from. Maybe with the understanding of events, and acceptance of all the pain from all sides, we can begin to heal and live together. Maybe this book helps us to understand the risks of intolerance and the human cost of hatred. Let us hope so for why else write such a book but to believe we can progress?

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## **David Quinn says**

This must have been an incredibly difficult book to write considering the extreme secrecy surrounding Israel's military and security forces. To his credit, Bergman cites many former sources within the establishment who have both positive and negative opinions to express. While the reporting generally felt balanced it's only from the Israeli perspective.

The early stories of assassinations felt a bit one-dimensional but considering they date back to the late 1940s the author probably didn't have an abundance of source material. As the stories of targeted killings move into the 70s and goes to the current period the narratives are far more robust. Some stories have far more detail than I would have predicted.

Rise and Kill First isn't about victory laps; while some of the accomplishments by the military (AMAN, IDF) and the security services (MOSSAD, Shin Bet) are jaw-dropping the failures are equally astonishing. You don't need to read this book to know that Israel and its enemies have an intractable problem with an elusive, perhaps nonexistent, solution.

You can read Rise and Kill First strictly for the cloak & dagger stories and the action, it delivers in that regard. It also effectively raises the necessary questions regarding the morality and legality of targeting killings.

The many names and acronyms were occasionally confusing to me. A glossary, timeline and organizational chart would have been very helpful.

There's a good degree of overlap with two other books I enjoyed a great deal: Kai Bird's The Good Spy (which is referenced a few times in Rise and Kill First) and Scott Shane's Objective Troy. If you've read and enjoyed any of these books I strongly recommend reading the others.

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## **Gokulakrishnan Saravanan says**

My feelings after reading this book is sense of despondency on the Israel's political establishment. Title of the last chapter succinctly captures the result of Israel's targeted killings: "Impressive tactical success, Disastrous strategic failure".

The author could have easily turned this book into Israel's glorification/bashing. But his even handedness made this book such a great read. Since this book deals with so much military operations, after a certain point of time, it could have easily become repetitive. Luckily, it didn't.

There were many times in the book, I was moved by the attacks against Israel and dismayed by Israel's investigation tactics. Kudos to the author for successfully capturing both the Israel's pain and the high handedness. This book also made me aware of, to what extent, Israel went to ensure that very minimal Palestinian civilian lives were lost in the process of targeted killings.

To sum it up, it's very much worth a read if you are interested in Israel.

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## Michael says

Engaging history of Israel's use of targeted assassinations to combat its enemies from its early struggles for independence through its ongoing conflicts with Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria and Iran. Bergman's account draws heavily on interviews with many of the principal Israeli decision-makers and concludes by asking whether Israeli's impressive tactical successes have resulted in an overall strategic failure. The book raises fundamental questions that are not easily answered and that are relevant to countries beyond Israel. How far can we go in defending ourselves against terrorists before becoming terrorists ourselves? How do our governments balance fundamental principles of morality, democracy, the rule of law, and the sovereignty of other nations against their primary responsibility to protect the lives of their citizens?

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## Vheissu says

*...the intelligence community's very success fostered the illusion among most of the nation's leaders that covert operations could be a strategic and not just a tactical tool--that they could be used in place of real diplomacy to end the geographic, ethnic, religious, and national disputes in which Israel is mired. Because of the phenomenal successes of Israel's covert operations, at this stage in its history the majority of its leaders have elevated and sanctified the tactical method of combatting terror and existential threats at the expense of the true vision, statesmanship, and genuine desire to reach a political solution that is necessary for peace to be attained. (pp. 629-30)*

This sums up Ronen Bergman's stunning book, which combines compelling journalism and sturdy scholarship. The book will appeal to area experts, general readers interested in Middle East politics, and students of spy craft. If you like Tom Clancy (I don't) or John le Carré (I do), you will enjoy this book.

I was drawn to the title not only because I am interested in spy craft generally and assassinations in particular, but also because of a discussion with an old and dear friend who, like me, is a lifelong supporter of the state of Israel. The subject was political assassinations and whether they are ever wise or effective. I thought not, but my friend thought otherwise, using the old "If we could have just killed Hitler..." argument. Our disagreement concerned the murder of national leaders (e.g., Hitler, Stalin, Castro, Saddam Hussein, Kaddafi, Patrice Lumumba, etc.), and not lower-level state and non-state criminals. It is against the latter that Israel had its greatest successes and on which Bergman focuses. In point of fact, Israel studiously avoided assassinations against national leaders (with two or three exceptions; see below), not only because it was difficult but also because Israeli leaders feared such murders might legitimize attempts on their own lives (pp. 144, 367, 375, 392, 404, 542, 606,653). Israeli leaders also came to fear prosecution by the International Criminal Court for targeted killings (p. 551).

There were at least three attempts by Israeli leaders to kill a head of state, a foreign defense minister, and the notorious (and murderous) Yasser Arafat. The first, a plan to kill Saddam Hussein, literally blew up in the faces of senior IDF and Mossad agents, when a dry run accidentally became a live fire against personnel standing in for Iraqi officials (the person portraying Saddam Hussein escaped the accident without a scratch, pp. 359-61)! The second, the assassination of Syrian General Muhammad Suleiman in 2008, was a spectacular success and "the first known instance of Israel targeting a legitimate government official" (p.

606).

Yasser Arafat is a different matter altogether. For a while, the PLO/Fatah leader was exempted from Israeli assassination plots because of his international "stature" (pp. 278, 369). After the Second Intifada, and once Ariel Sharon became prime minister in 2001, the gloves came off. Israeli officials hatched numerous plots to murder Arafat, but his unexpected death in 2004 either foiled the murder schemes or completed them, depending on one's perspective. A French autopsy reported that authorities could not "rule out the possibility that he died from AIDS" (the Romanians claimed to have film of Arafat engaging in "homosexual relations" with his bodyguards, p. 559; also p. 562). "According to some tests," Berman writes, "there were traces of polonium...on Arafat's clothes and remains" (p. 561). Bergman has his own ideas about what really happened to Arafat, but he writes that "the military censor in Israel forbids me from discussing this subject" (p. 562).

With those three exceptions, virtually all of Israel's "targeted killings" (or "interceptions," p. 538) were against those who actually committed violent crimes against Jews and Israelis or were responsible for these crimes, or were in the process of committing them. For the most part, Israeli officials scrupulously tried to limit collateral damage against innocents (9. 520), but on occasion they turned a blind eye to obvious risks of civilian casualties. In a successful attempt to kill Hamas operative Salah Shehade in 2002, Israeli intelligence downplayed the likelihood of collateral damage, a mistake that resulted in 14 deaths and another 150 wounded (pp. 523-25).

There were several spectacular successes in killing Arab militants and not a few complete debacles. OPERATION SPRING OF YOUTH in 1973, the commando raid in Beirut against those involved in the Munich Olympic massacre, is the most famous and successful of very many Israeli operations. On the other hand, bungled assassinations in Norway (Lillehammer, pp. 179-86), Amman (botched murder of a low-ranking Hamas official, Khaled Mashal, in 1997; pp. 453-66), and the sloppy killing of Hamas weapons trader Mahmoud al-Mabouh in Dubai in 2010; pp. 610-21) accomplished nothing other than blowing the covers of Mossad operatives and damaging Israel's relations with allies and enemies alike.

In at least some cases, ill-considered Israeli operations resulted in unanticipated consequences that made the Jewish state less secure. One of the humiliating concessions made by Israel after the botched attempt on Mashal was the release from Israeli prison of Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin. Once released, Yassin resumed his murderous attacks on Israel from Gaza, only to be assassinated by Mossad in 2004. Yassin, however, was an opponent of collaboration with Iran, and his death helped Iran put Hamas firmly within its grip. Similarly, the assassination of Hezbollah secretary general, Hussein Abbas al-Mussawi in 1991, led to the leadership of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, an Iranian stooge who was more focused on killing Israelis than al-Mussawi and a willing partner with Syria. Even the death of Arafat, who alone was capable of directing the various Palestinian factions, prompted Hamas to found its own "government" in Gaza, independent of the Palestinian Authority but dependent upon Iran. So, by the early 21st century, Israel was surrounded by Iranian surrogates in Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon. None of this was anticipated by the individual Israeli leaders who commissioned the hits.

International law provides that every state has a fundamental right to protect its independence and territorial sovereignty, including Israel. International law also maintains that individuals--not states--commit crimes. Various Israeli prime ministers teetered on the brink of war crimes, except for Ariel Sharon, who was a certifiable, undeniable war criminal. To their credit, individual Israelis and large segments of the Israeli defense and intelligence community criticized and sometimes openly defied orders they deemed to be illegal (pp. 529-40). Still, Israel faces existential threats. As Bergman convincingly argues, the problem isn't "Israel" or "Israelis," but rather the political leaders of the state of Israel who have too frequently abandoned democratic norms and the rule of law, usually for purposes of personal political advantage and not the

strategic interests of the Jewish state.

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### **Steven Z. says**

When the state of Israel achieved nationhood in 1948 it was seen as an ethical and moral experiment because of the role the Holocaust played in its creation, along with its dominant Jewish culture. Residing in a geographical region that had nothing but hatred for the new state it would be difficult to expect Israel to maintain the high standards that were expected of it. The difficulty would morph into a nation that had to protect itself from invasion, and once that was beaten back it had to deal with constant attacks across its borders. As a result Israel would take on the character of other countries and adopt measures that ran counter to expectations. The evolution of Israel into an intelligence and military power to meet the needs of its citizens is explored in detail in Ronen Bergman's new book, **RISE AND KILL FIRST: SECRET HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S TARGET ASSASSINATIONS**. Bergmann is an Israeli journalist who writes for *Yedioth Ahronoth* and has received the highest prize offered for journalism in Israel. Bergman's monograph begins with the end of the Second World War and continues through today. It is based on over 1,000 interviews, thousands of documents, and runs to about 650 pages.

What is clear from the outset is that Israeli leaders were firm believers in the Hammurabi Code of "an eye for an eye." This can be seen from the outset as Israel wanted to ethnically cleanse as many Palestinians as possible (Plan Dalet), from towns in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Bergman traces the creation of a "machine" which came about through the "marriage of guerrilla warfare and the military might of a technological powerhouse." Bergman explores the political leaders, operatives, methodology, and deliberations that resulted in many successes, but a number of important failures also. One of the major themes of the book rests on the moral cost of this policy and how two separate legal systems developed in Israel; one for ordinary citizens, and one for the intelligence community and military establishment. The template became a model for other countries, particularly the United States after 9/11 which mirrored Israeli intelligence gathering and assassination techniques.

Bergman does an excellent job explaining the Israeli rationalization for targeted killing. He explores in depth the history that preceded its implementation, its legal justification, and the resulting bifurcation in Israeli society. Since Israel suffers from a deficit of men and equipment when compared to its enemies, early on they decided to rely on internal security and intelligence gathering services for their survival. The program began under Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion who effectively set up the extrajudicial system to carry out assassinations. By 1949 Ben-Gurion created the Mossad (covert activities beyond the country's borders), along with AMAN (the military intelligence arm that supplies information to the IDF); and Shin Bet (responsible for internal intelligence, counterterrorism, and counterespionage). These three services still remain the core of Israeli intelligence activities to this day.

There are a number of key events and individuals that are responsible for the evolution of Israeli tactics. Israel faced "Fedayeen," Arab terrorists led by an Egyptian, Mustafa Hafez, who crossed into Israel in great numbers after the War of Independence and killed numerous Israelis. By 1956, the Suez War broke out and after the Gaza Strip was conquered Israeli intelligence came across Hafez's list of operatives who had terrorized Israel for years. Ben-Gurion ordered that everyone on the list should be killed and one by one operations were carried out. This section of the book reads like a Daniel Silva novel. From 1956-1967 attacks were drastically reduced as the Arabs realized the price they would pay from Israeli retribution. However, the Egyptians began to employ German scientists to develop long range missiles. Bergman provides a detailed chapter on the episode and one realizes that once a threat is perceived, Israel reacts. In

this case the assassination of German scientists, kidnappings, and recruiting certain scientists to be used against Egypt, i.e., Otto Skorzeny, Hitler's Operational Commander.

The book encompasses more than a retelling of numerous targeted killings. Bergman discusses a series of operations whose focal point was not assassination. For example, the high jacking of an Iraq MIG-21 fighter by getting the pilot to defect, or allying with King Hassan II to spy on Arab leaders providing intelligence leading up to the Six Day War. Further, throughout the 1950s and 60s Israel was preoccupied by Egyptian President Gamal Nasser and as a result Israeli intelligence missed the creation in 1964 of the Palestine Liberation Organization under Yasir Arafat and Abu Jihad. After the 1967 War, the PLO launched numerous attacks against Israel. As Israel attempted to assassinate Arafat, his popularity among Palestinians increased, and enlistments in the PLO rose dramatically as the Palestinian leader was seen as the embodiment of Palestinian nationalism.

Perhaps one of Bergman's most interesting chapters, "Meir Dagan and His Expertise" the author describes how Israel dealt with this increasing threat. It is here that we see assassination and killing implemented as standard policy. The Israeli government unleashed Ariel Sharon who commanded Israel's southern frontier. By the end of 1969, Sharon created a new unit under Meir Dagan, and using intelligence gathered by the Shin Bet went into Gaza to murder Palestinian operatives and leaders. After the PLO responded by slaughtering an Israeli family driving along the Gaza road, Shin Bet and IDF Special Forces wiped out terrorism in the Gaza Strip through 1972 by employing methods that went beyond Israeli domestic law. This was effective until the Jordanian Civil War produced a new Palestinian terrorist group, Black September.

Bergman's command of his material is superb, as his analysis down to the last detail. He takes the reader into areas that no previous author has done. Numerous operations are described including their conception and implementation. Among the many that are discussed include the "Spring of Youth" operation that resulted in the death of three top PLO officials and 35 PFLP terrorists in Beirut in October, 1972, which netted documents that would lead to the destruction of the Fatah network in the West Bank, and the killing of all the assailants related to the 1972 Olympic Munich massacre by elements of Black September. However as successful as the operation was it created tremendous hubris on the part of Israeli leaders leading them to believe the Arabs would not attack further. This feeling of superiority resulted in rejection of Anwar Sadat's peace overtures which led to the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War.

The Salameh operation is described in detail and produced a number of surprising pieces of information. For example, Salameh had been recruited by the CIA and was America's back channel to Arafat. Both parties agreed that the PLO would not launch attacks in the United States, and Salameh would be protected. However, Israel viewed Salameh as the man who engineered the Olympic massacre and waited until January, 1979 to kill him with a car bomb in Beirut. Another example was the Israeli raid on Entebbe that resulted in the rescue of most of the Israeli hostages that were imprisoned after an airliner high jacking that was flown to Kenya. Bergman presents the planning of the raid, and once again the outcome was marked by Israeli hubris.

Abu Nidal presented a different problem for Israel after his terror group killed Israel's ambassador to England, Shlomo Argov. This was used as an excuse to invade Lebanon, when Israeli attacks led by Meir Dagan failed to provoke a PLO response, a move that Middle East expert, Robin Wright led to "Israel's Vietnam." Bergman highlights the most important aspects of the war, especially the role played by Sharon. The Israeli general had his own agenda in launching the attack; first, to redraw the map of the region with a Christian Lebanon and the movement of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza to Jordan, second, his obsession with killing Arafat. Both goals were not achieved, but what was achieved was raising Arafat's profile in the Arab world as the Palestinians were forced to leave Lebanon in August, 1982, the emergence of a new terrorist group backed by Iran, Hezbollah, and the beginning of an eighteen year quagmire in Lebanon.

Sharon acted like a monarch, a law unto himself making him a detriment to Israel. Sharon overshadowed Prime Minister Menachem Begin who receded into an emotional depression as the war continued, and was replaced as Prime Minister by Yitzchak Shamir. Israel would continue its policy of targeted killing as the carnage of Munich, Maalot, Nahariya, and many others became Israel's justification for murder and summary executions. Lebanon made the situation even worse as there were no laws to restrain the Shin Bet from torturing prisoners and on many occasions killing them.

There are numerous other highlights in Bergman's detailed narrative. The Intifada that broke out in December, 1987 that caught the Palestinian leadership, Israeli government and intelligence officials totally flatfooted is a case in point as it eventually morphed into the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993. The Intifada saw Israel double down on targeted killings as it sought to control the images being flashed each day in the media. Israel's main target was Abu Jihad, Arafat's number two man and Bergman describes how he was hunted down, and at the same time missing an opportunity to also kill Mahmoud Abbas, the current president of the Palestinian Authority. Bergman makes the important point that Abu Jihad, who was not as intransigent as many others in Gaza had been alive perhaps there might have been some movement towards ending the Intifada and perhaps "Hamas might not have been able to consolidate its position to dominate large parts of the Palestinian public." (323)

As the Intifada continued the Shin Bet became very flexible in its approach to killings; employing disguise to trap suspects, demolished terrorist's homes, and turning Palestinians into spies for Israel. The most important of which was Adnan Yassin, a mid-level activist who dealt with numerous projects in PLO headquarters in Tunis. Once Yassin was turned, he provided valuable information for over four years that helped prevent numerous attacks and contributed to a number of important targeted killings. By 1992, Yassin was discovered and executed.

As Bergman develops his narrative he integrates the history of the region and the most important historical figures into his text. None is more important than Saddam Hussein and his quest to acquire nuclear weapons. Bergman digs deep and points out that the United States and France were currying Saddam's favor because of his ongoing war with Iran in the 1980s. It is surprising to note that the French built a nuclear reactor in Iraq and supplied him with the necessary technology to try and reach his goals. This was due to the ego of Charles de Gaulle who resented Israel's ignoring his advice in 1967 and from that time, France, a traditional ally turned against the Jewish state. The Mossad pursued the same approach it had used against Egyptian scientists and began killing those associated with Iraq's program. Bergman follows Israel's military and intelligence planning that finally led to the Israeli destruction of Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981.

Another important individual that Israeli intelligence had to cope with was Ayatollah Khomeini whose movement overthrew Israel's ally, Reza Pahlavi, the Iranian monarch in 1979. Khomeini was seen as an existential threat to Israel and eventually fomented trouble throughout the region and helped create and support Hezbollah, "the Party of God" during the fighting in Lebanon. This produced another cycle of violence with rockets and raids into northern Israel and Israeli target killings against Hezbollah leaders, particularly Hussein Abbas al-Mussawi who was responsible for many attacks against Israel. He would be replaced by Hassan Nasrallah as Hezbollah's leader in Lebanon. Bergman points out that killing Mussawi may have been a mistake for Israel because he was much more liberal when it came to relations with Israel than Nasrallah who was more of a radical Shi'ite.

This process continued in dealing with Palestinian terrorism throughout the 1990s despite the Oslo Peace Accords. Once again Bergman effectively deals with another cycle of violence. In Gaza, Hamas was a major problem and was responsible for numerous suicide attacks against Israeli civilians. Israel responded once again with an increase in targeted killings. Despite the Oslo Accords, Arafat refused to cooperate with trying

to control Hamas. It would cost Prime Minister Shimon Peres his office and he would be replaced by Benjamin Netanyahu effectively ending the peace process. Bergman points out that Hamas suicide attacks were designed to end the peace process, and with the arrival of Netanyahu as Prime Minister, they achieved their goal.

In the large number of operations that Bergman recounts he is careful to balance successes with failures, i.e., the attempt to kill Khaled Mashal, a Hamas leader in Amman totally backfired and cost Israel dearly. Another would be the attempt to kill Hezbollah operative, Haldoun Haidar that resulted in a deadly ambush for the IDF. These failures along with the ongoing threats from an enemy that used tactics that Israel had never grappled with before led to the reorganization of intelligence agencies under new leadership, a key of which was Ami Ayalon to head the Shin Bet and the introduction of new technology. New surveillance techniques, integration of computer systems, a new approach to network analysis, the use of real-time intelligence, hardware and software designed to integrate different services and operational bodies led to a series of success of which the killing of the Adwallah brothers and capturing the Hamas military archive stands out. The advances made by Shin-Bet was replicated throughout the entire country. Bergman correctly argues if these changes had not been implemented it would have been even more difficult for Israel to deal with the Second Intifada that broke out in 2000.

Bergman discusses the changes in Israeli governments and its impact on “killing strategies.” Netanyahu’s government was plagued by charges of corruption and an increase in suicide bombings, and by May 1999 was replaced by the Labor Party under Ehud Barak, who as a soldier had been a master of special operations. Barak’s military lessons did not carry over to the world of politics and diplomacy. He was able to withdraw the IDF from Lebanon, but failed in his approach to Arafat at Camp David in 2000. This failure in conjunction with Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount helped touch off a second Intifada. The increase in suicide bombings toppled Barak’s government and brought to power Sharon as Prime Minister leading to an all-out offensive against suicide bombers. With no real strategy to confront events Israel turned its usual approach, increased assassinations. When this failed Israel altered this strategy by going after much more low level targets employing advanced drones retrofitted with special targeting technology and missiles. In addition, they began to acknowledge their responsibility for attacks and provided explanations for each. Once the 9/11 attacks took place the Israeli leadership used the new climate in the world to legitimize its assassination policy to break the back of the Intifada.

To his credit the author delves into discord within the intelligence community over certain actions. Reflecting his objectivity Bergman discusses certain planned operations that brought about refusals on the part of certain participants to carry out orders when they believed there would be too much collateral damage. The debates between higher ups in this process are also presented and it was rare that there was unanimity over a given plan. The possible assassination of Sheik Yassin is a case in point because Israel’s legal justification for targeting anyone rests on the principle that a direct link between that person and a future terrorist attack was at hand. Finally, in March, 2004 Yassin was killed, as was his successor Abd al-Aziz-Rantisi one month later. Israel had instituted a new policy that political targets, in addition to operational targets were fair game because of the increase in suicide attacks that also included the use of women for the first time. The suicide attacks finally ended with the death of Arafat and the coming to power of Mahmoud Abbas who finally cracked down on Hamas.

Bergman pays careful attention to the shifting balance of power in the Middle East as it pertains to Israeli targeting policies. Yassin’s assassination was a turning point as he opposed any links with Iran, however once he was dead Hamas’ leadership agreed to work with Iran and the Teheran regime gained a strong foothold in Gaza. At the same time new Syrian President Bashir Assad decided to ally with Iran producing a radical front of Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran. Israel’s response was twofold. First, Sharon appointed

Meir Dagan to totally rework Mossad which Bergman describes in detail, and secondly, have Israel's intelligence services network with those of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco reflecting the Iranian common enemy. The result was a string of targeted killings on the part of Israel.

Israel has faced a number of threats throughout its history and no matter the obstacle it seems to land on its feet. Over the last decade it has dealt with abducted soldiers that led to war in 2006 with Hezbollah, the creation of a Hamas state in Gaza after the split in the Palestinian community, the destruction of the Syrian nuclear reactor at Deir al-Zor in 2007, and the targeted assassination of Hezbollah leaders and Iranian nuclear scientists. But these successes have created further hubris by reasoning that it did not have to engage diplomatically, just rely on its intelligence community and technology. As in the past this hubris could lead to tragedy. As Bergman concludes Israel has produced a "long string of tactical successes, but also strategic failures."

Bergman's presentation of intricate details and analysis of all aspects of Israel's targeted killing policy has produced a special book. His access to the major personalities involved, his documentation of numerous operations and their repercussions, and how his subject matter fits into the regional balance of power is beyond anything previously written and should be considered the standard work on the history of the Israeli intelligence community.

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### **Joseph Stieb says**

Dang. This is a phenomenal book that is eye-opening in so many ways. Going all the way back to early Zionism, this book charts Israeli covert action against its myriad enemies. The programs Bergman describes have been one of Israel's major national security tools. They fit with an Israeli focus on pre-emption, massive retaliation, as well as a national sense that no one will save the Jews except themselves. The extent to which the Holocaust permeates the history of this program is remarkable; the conviction is that if Jews are not strong and ruthless they will be destroyed by their numerous foes.

I don't consider myself strongly pro-Israel, but I would say I'm anti-anti-Israel. The world's obsession with the crimes and misdeeds of Israel is absolutely unreasonable given that Israel is the freest and most democratic, law-abiding state of a very messed up region. They get loads more criticism and condemnation than freaking Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or even many Palestinian groups. This book shows the depth and extent of hatred of Israel throughout its history, and the almost unrelenting waves of indiscriminate terrorist attacks perpetrated by a host of groups from the 1938 pogroms to Hamas and Hezbollah. You will feel the radiating anger of the Israeli people when you read account after account of the butchery of Israelis and consider that these groups would have killed more if they could have.

There were few Israeli actions in this book I would totally condemn. Invading countries like Lebanon to get at terrorists has proven to be a terrible strategy, so Israel has little choice but to strike covertly. Killing operatives or even just members of terrorist groups is not only a just but a necessary way to fight this type of war. And man, they sure are good at it. The stories of spycraft, assassination, and covert action in this book are absolutely gripping, and it's clear that they can kill off members of these groups at all levels. It is also remarkable how much, in most cases, the IDF and Israeli spy agencies were willing to postpone or call off hits and strikes to prevent innocent life from being lost. This is another important contrast from their enemies.

But does this program really work, in a strategic sense? Sometimes, it clearly backfires. In the 1990's the

Mossad killed a Hezbollah leader who was replaced with a raving, extremist lunatic who unleashed a new, even worse terror campaign on Israel. This kind of thing happened several times throughout this book, including the killing of figures who might have been willing to come to the table with Israel. This program also occasionally backfired internationally as Israel gained (and sometimes earned) a reputation for brutality. I buy this argument, but I also understand that many Israeli leaders probably think that the Jews will be hated no matter what they do, so they might as well defend themselves. Overall, Bergman suggests but does not prove that this program has proven a tactical success but a strategic failure. It is more of a way to manage a strategic problem, although it cannot solve that problem; only a political solution can, one that will have to involve the halting of Israeli settlement building.

Nonetheless, there's a strong point to be made that over the course of this book, the Israeli leadership (especially right wingers like the odious Ariel Sharon) lost their moral bearings and indulged in hateful and myopic thinking. Obviously Lebanon was a good example of this, but an even more interesting example was the response of Shamir's gov't to the first intifada. In this case, ramping up the assassination program was a way of ignoring the deep social, political, and economic roots of that uprising. If the uprising was understood as the product of the PLO and other radical groups' conspiracies and provocations, then killing them off would quell the uprising. And kill them off the Israelis did, but the Palestinian problem only got worse. SO not only did many Israeli leaders become brutalized and somewhat inhumane over time, they allowed the obsessive focus on killing terrorists to overshadow the broader political problems festering in the Palestinian Territories. This obviously remains a problem today.

More praise for this book: it is actually exciting to listen to. You want the terrorist to die, and sometimes you have to check yourself to make sure you are remaining critical. And yet, Bergman is a scrupulously fair guide to this story. He documents legal problems with the assassination program, especially how at times (esp under Sharon in the early 1980's) it exceeded civilian controls. He raises excellent moral and strategic questions all while acknowledging the unique position of Israel, its special history, and the fact that it must be tough in order to survive.

So I'd recommend this book for anyone interested in counter-terrorism or Middle Eastern history, especially given that the Israelis thought about and operated in CT long before the US. It was a longish listen, but utterly engrossing. I learned a ton, and it made me think about the US war on terror in new ways. This is vivid, historically rich, exemplary journalism. Read it.

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### Ronin2 says

It is an unpleasant topic and a more unpleasant reality for Israel. The author is even handed in his dislike for assassination but recognizing Israel's necessity for doing them. Most valuable for me was it gave me a better understanding of the real and evolving threats Israel has faced and faces today. I now understand better the threat Iran poses to Israel and the world. I understand better how the threat to Israel has evolved from conventional war by attacking neighboring nations to asymmetrical warfare by militias and proxy armies such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Highly recommend the book.

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## Samuel says

The Badass Israeli Assassin....this is an archetype that has glued itself to the public imagination. More cunning, more professional, more stylish than their bumbling goody two shoes gentile counterparts, there are many grains of truth in this image. Since its creation, the state of Israel has developed a highly sophisticated paramilitary capability to annihilate the enemies of the Jewish people from Buenos Aires to Damascus and those who decide out of ideology, greed or callous disregard to give aid to those enemies.

As a rule magicians never tell their secrets and prefer to die with them rather than loosen their lips. The same can be said for the Guardians of Israel who like any good spies, prefer misdirection, strategic exaggeration and the occasional modest downplaying to keep what really happened under wraps. Case in point the sometimes exuberant journalist Gordon Thomas whose *Gideon's Spies* has been shown to have quite a bit of exaggeration over the years.

This time however, the magicians have decided to tell more of the truth in a book that is set to be the seminal 2018 release, beating out Steve Coll's *Directorate S* for the most hotly anticipated non fiction history book of this year.

"Rise up and kill first". These are the words that the men who run Israel's paramilitary operations live and die by. Taken from the Babylonian edition of the Talmud, it's a reference to how Israel does not want to see another would be Hitler getting to that blood soaked finish line.

To achieve this end, whether it be a bomb sent by express delivery through an Iranian nuclear power plant or that trademark hail of .22LR lead fired from Italian made automatics, Mossad and Sayaret Matkal were finding, fixing and finishing people before Mitch Rapp and Scott Harvath made it cool.

This book is written by Ronen Bergman, the journalist in Israel who knows all the main players and has illuminated the pitch black dark spaces. At 900 pages it is the complete history of covert ops, intelligence gathering and assassination by those who defend Israel.

Starting from the humble days of the British Mandate era where Zionist militants were knocking off British Tommies and Ruperts, we then go on an odyssey through the war against the Post Colonial Arab nations, the wave of PLO terrorism, the dark days of the Lebanese Civil War, both Infatadas and concluding in 2016 with the death of one of the greatest Middle Eastern spies in history, saying that there's a lot of detail in this book is like saying bullets go through flesh and blood.

A thousand anecdotes, a thousand battles on the never ending covert war that is the espionage game. Chronicling the greatest hits by letter bomb, car bomb, air force bomb, bullets and in one case, the worst dental hygiene product in the world.

Exploring the biggest defeats and setbacks which include the ones that they would have preferred to keep under wraps, this book is the warts and all portrait of the most idolized and demonized group of soldiers and spies in the world that in the age where facts are now irrelevant but feelings are in fashion is truly a welcome relief. This is proof that proper journalism is not dead.

The cast of characters is phenomenal and so are the little stories woven into the narrative. We have Mossad's founding fathers and how they got their first office (a group of Nazi loving German Protestants were in Tel Aviv and were removed from the vicinity permanently), their assets like Otto Skorzeny who proved to be an

even better intelligence officer and manipulator than commando when Mossad hired him for a job, the seminal events like the formation of the Kidon team that has brought the fear of Allah to millions of terrorists from Paris to Beirut, and that is just the tip of the iceberg. The material in this book would provide any spy series with enough information to go on for decades.

As I said above however, this is a true warts and all account. Some people you may admire do not come off well in this book. And some of the biggest mistakes stuff ups and some of the more mad "proposals" that were considered are recounted in detail that will leave you quite shaken even. But this serves in humanizing the people in the story. They're not Gods, but very human, trying to do the best they can in spite of what their job throws at them.

At the heart of this story however, is an analysis about the paramilitary side of the espionage game (aka the side of the business which the most beloved spy novels are drawn from). It shows you the planning, the hard work and sheer effort it takes to kill a man that you only see a third of in a thriller novel.

The men who developed the paramilitary capability as you'll learn in the book, are proud of their creation and rightfully so. But they understood that it can only bring short term tactical victories, but not the long term solution that they realize their country would need. And it's this tactical victory and strategic defeat dichotomy that you'll learn cuts to the heart of the utility of paramilitary operations in covert affairs.

To conclude. This is the book about the real Gabriel Allons and peels back the curtain to show you the time, effort and suffering they've had to do to create that "badass Israeli" legend. For thriller fans, "Rise Up and Kill First" can leave you unsatisfied with many spy novels. For writers, this book is an amazing resource if you want to write about Mossad, Shin Bet and Amman. And for those who want to learn something new and are tired about the same old portrayals, this is the book for you.

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### **Laura says**

One of the surprises in this book was the number of times Israel's intelligence community (the Mossad, Shin Bet, et al) completely botched a job. Going into the book I had unconsciously imagined that Israeli spies and commandos were complete masters of the field, and my pre-conceived image was only brought into my conscious mind as the book began tearing it to shreds. I don't know if it was more fun reading about the failures or the successes; either way I was fascinated.

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### **Samuel says**

#### **A CLOSER LOOK:**

Among general pop culture, there are some perceptions and stereotypes of spies by nationality. The British are either suave and smooth talking, or morose, depressed arse covering bureaucrats, but ones who take gathering useful intelligence seriously. The Americans are either the Christians In Action who can't help but make a bad situation worse, or are blundering and violently jingoistic and incompetent with their militarized approach to the gentleman's game. The Russians are the gleefully card carrying villains who take the no – kill live overkill approach to destroying enemies of the Motherland, while at the same time crafting delicate, sometimes too clever by half gambits. And then, we come to the Israelis.

The general perception of the Israeli intelligence and military community, is that of the kill artist. Considering the surprisingly large number of former arts students or amateur artists among the list of most honored and revered Mossad Officers, it should come as no surprise that whether it comes to gathering intelligence, or preparing and executing a black operation where many bodies will hit the floor, Mossad, Shin Bet, Aman and the Israeli Defence Forces approach the spying game like how an artist approaches their work, crafting masterpieces that stand for years to the renown and admiration of the audience.

By far the most famous masterpiece the guardians and gatekeepers of the Jewish State have crafted is the world's most sophisticated paramilitary capability run by an intelligence service. Sure, the CIA has the Special Activities Division, the SIS has The Increment, the French, their Service Action and the Russians have an army of thugs and mechanics along with their rough and tumble Spetsnaz teams, but none of them possess the political freedom, experience, precision and sheer, jaw dropping creativity that units like the Kidon Team do. It's this paramilitary capability, this masterpiece, which has been running almost non stop since the creation of Israel that has been used to annihilate her enemies and their sympathizers from Canada to the Sudan. And as a result, Israel has come under constant, unceasing criticism by otherwise friendly governments and activists who haven't walked in the shoes of those whose job is to ensure that never again will the Jews live with a boot being stomped into their face like through much of world history.

But who are the guardians and gatekeepers really? Like any world class spies, they prefer the muggles of the general public know only what they want them to know. This end is achieved by a hurricane of lies, omissions and selective exaggeration, given a helping hand by generations of thriller writers and filmmakers around the world. The SIS benefitted from 50 years of free advertising by EON's James Bond, and organizations like Mossad and Shin Bet have been hit by similar mystique. However, such a portrayal only has grains of truth, but not the truth. And these cloak and dagger magicians have historically been more content with going to the grave with their secrets.

However, in the book I'm going to review today, those magicians have decided to tell a little bit more of the truth about themselves, their profession and the duty they've performed with unreliable skill, against biblical odds over more than half a century. As they, themselves would say, in a world where antisemites are once again on the march, whether Islamist, far leftist or far rightists, sometimes, when they are coming to kill you, you need to rise up, and kill them all first.

Rise And Kill First. It is the title of a new book written by Ronen Bergman, a noted Israeli investigative journalist. The head security correspondent of the most widely circulated daily paper in Israel, Bergman reports on the activities of the Israeli Intelligence and Defence apparatus along with any major geopolitical developments that concern the Jewish State. With a list of insider sources as long as the Golan Heights, Bergman's work has become renowned and infamous for gaining a far more accurate picture of what the Ramsads and the Gatekeepers get up to, compared to exuberant sensationalists like Gordan Thomas and chartlans like Ross and Ostrovsky. Bergman's writing is a balance between the pace and juicy details of a spy thriller novel, and the sober, coolly dispassionate assessment of a seasoned geopolitical analysis. While his work is exciting, on a deeper level, it assesses some very relevant global security issues to a far more insightful degree than his peers.

And Rise And Kill First is no exception. It's a book, that is the unofficial history of the Israeli Military And Intelligence communities, and what could be considered Berman's magnum opus. It charts the development of Israel's paramilitary capability from the wild, uncertain days of the Post WW2 British Mandate Era, right up to 2016 on the eve of one of the more contentious elections in Israel's history. Black ops, intelligence gathering, counter – terrorism and geopolitical powerplays, Bergman lays it all on the table and throws them into a non fiction, intergenerational epic saga, unlike any other. This intergenerational saga is about the story of

a country, told from the perspective of the men who have defended it all these years. It is about how they first formed their paramilitary apparatus, the first jobs they conducted and how they changed and evolved with each new threat they faced. And along the way, Bergman transcends his original brief and explores a very important theme that is almost never covered in your average spy novel. But that can wait for later. Now to the review. What happens when you're tasked with making sure an entire race and religion is never going to be wiped out again, in a world full of nations out for your blood and people who just don't care?

We begin *Rise and Kill* first with the resignation of a spy. But this is no ordinary spy who is leaving the world of gathering intelligence and putting the enemies of his nation in the ground. It's Meir "King of Shadows" Dagan. Israeli Defence Force Major General who pulled off many black ops in his time long before he became a spymaster, 10th Ramsad of the Mossad and one of only three men in that post who truly embodied the title of Memuneh, the one in charge. The prologue opens on January 8th 2011, where Bergman and a select few journalists were taken to the Mossad office north of Tel Aviv for a press conference. There, what was supposed to be a low key statement and victory lap, turned into a mike drop moment for the outgoing spymaster. Dagan vented his frustration and disgust with his last Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu whom he had come to blows with over two major policy disagreements, the first being whether to destroy the Iranian Nuclear program on a roll of the dice using a conventional military air strike and the second being Netanyahu's growing reluctance to authorize assassinations that Mossad was planning for terrorists and Iranian nuclear scientists.

It's this incident, a microcosm of the institutional disagreements Israeli intelligence and military services have had with their civilian masters over the years, which is one of the pillars of this book and the entry into a true, inter – generational saga of the ages.

In terms of content, *Rise Up and Kill First* is a grand, detailed journey through history that leaves almost no stone uncovered. Most people are familiar with the hallowed names, of Sayaret Matkal, Shin Bet, the Kidon Teams and Aman. But few know how they came to be established in the first place and the individuals who set them up. *Rise and Kill First*, brings the story of their Genesis to a mostly unfamiliar Western audience for the first time in decades. The Kidon Teams for instance, the stars of the *Munich* movie are usually seen as these slick, dashing gunmen who outwit Western Police and terrorists with gleeful abandon. Bergman however tells us the story of how it, and the other paramilitary units controlled by the Jewish state were formed. We also get appearances by the Grenade Rangers of Ariel Sharon, the IDF Flotilla 13 unit and the Cherry Gaza Strip Squads among others which have never achieved the recognition or accurate portrayals in media that they deserve. Bergman outlines the initial political and social factors that led to the future state of Israel investing heavily in paramilitary teams to become a foreign policy tool and defend the state, which included repeated historical persecution and the fact that non Jewish nations while saying "never again", would almost readily let butchery go down on their watch.

A key part of what makes *Rise and Kill* first so fresh and interesting, in the world of cookie cutter books about the Mossad is that it expands on legendary operations and broader historical events with never before revealed details, weaving them all into a canvas that paints a far clearer picture than before. Highlights include the Operation Spring of Youth Incident, the clockwork raid into the heart of Beirut with Ehud Barak cross dressing and blazing away with an Uzi, the 1971 Wrath of God Project where the Kidon unit stepped out for its blood splattered coming of age party and the 1980s shennanigans in Beirut where the biggest game of whack a terrorist ended up levelling most of the city in three years. But what Bergman does is show the hidden things that the participants of the ops left out. Whether it be the fact that the Mossad getaway driver let one of the Flotilla 13 commandos bleed to death on the night of Spring of Youth, Yasser Arafat being in the rifle scopes of seven IDF snipers as he walked out of Lebanon, or even what went down when Mossad found the CIA Beirut station deep in bed with a Palestinian terrorist, *Rise and Kill* first will keep surprising you to the very end and make you reevaluate some of the things you thought you knew.

Then, there's the deep exploration of the work that the Israeli intelligence and military community does. There are many non fiction books which try to portray the true nature of espionage. Not many of these are successful as they're much less compelling than the kiss kiss bang bang thriller fiction. But *Rise and Kill First* succeeds where its counterparts fail, by attacking the topic from a different angle. It examines the extensive work, and occasional suffering that goes into making the grand, dramatic operations that your average spy thriller is inspired by. The planning, the preparation, the long hours where one must wait for a window of opportunity. And then, sometimes the need to abort when the opportunity evaporates in order to avoid damage. It's very easy to pick up a gun and shoot a person in the face.

But one bullet is not effective on its own. The author shows how the tit for tat killing portrayed in a Scott Harvath novel ultimately doesn't cut it in real life, as Mossad and Shin Bet initially found out during hunts in glittering Europe and the claustrophobic Gaza Strip. Rather, as both agencies and the IDF learned, you need to set up systems and procedures to utilize the ingredients of an assassination to perfection. Whether it be integrated ops rooms for the departments to work in sync, trailblazing in mobile surveillance and miniturized explosives, creating the first weaponized UAVs, and before that, using drones to improve the accuracy of Apache Helicopter gunships, *Rise and Kill First* shows that the true strength of the Israeli Paramilitary apparatus is not badass gunmen who can put a bullet between your eyes at a thousand yards, but rather ingenuity, an obsessive compulsive eye for detail and the ability to use information in such a way to apply the firepower to the place where it can cause the most devastation to the target.

This is seen in beautifully recounted detail where Shin Bet under the brilliant Avi Dichter and Yuval Diskin's successful effort at smashing the Hamas organization through successfully using a combination of advanced tracking techniques and tradecraft to pick off the cogs that cultivated the suicide bombers attacking Israel. It's not about killing the head of the wolfpack which makes a difference and will save lives. It's about shooting as many members of the wolfpack as possible so it can't threaten you as much.

Another thing that makes *Rise and Kill First* stand out is the attention paid to the cockups and more unsavory moments of Israeli Intelligence. The morality of the spying business switches between light and dark gray, with it usually being the latter in the Israeli context due to the constant threat of the asymmetric threat targeting it. Such incidents like the Bus 300 affair where Avner Shalom, the Shin Bet director had two amateurish terrorists beaten to death and then proceeded to frame a senior IDF General for responsibility of the deed are covered in full, *Rise and Kill first*, will give a rather jarring reality check to readers who have been blissfully unaware that the men and women who are part of the IDF, Mossad, Shin Bet and Aman are still human and can fall prey to the occasional mistakes, emotions and malicious pettiness that anyone else can. Probably one of the reason why the powers that be have grinded their teeth at this book and Bergman is because by showing a far more rounded picture of them, he damages the mystique and legend that has generated fear among the enemies that they're going after. But for us readers, such coverage of errors, is enriching as it humanizes the people working in the shadows. They're not perfect, but they're working at their best day in and day out to protect their country from harm.

Thematically, the book focuses on some of the most interesting and relevant themes you don't normally see in a non fiction book about spying. The first, and in my view, the most important, is the nature of real life paramilitary operations in the espionage business. No nonfiction book on spies and geopolitics has ever gone into this area, and what Bergman has done here is groundbreaking. Most spy thrillers focus on paramilitary work, assassins, soldiers and shooters killing evil men and women, and *Rise and Kill First*, by focusing on the real life nature of paramilitary work, would make any exuberant Post 9/11 spy thriller fan very, very sober and a lot more appreciative of just how complicated it really is.

The author examines the utility and morality of paramilitary tactics in real life, and how far can a democracy really go with them. He explores the real prices that a country and those of its citizens who dive down this

dark covert ops rabbit hole have to pay in engaging in such stressfull, nerve destroying work. Bergman finds that as a tool, paramilitary operations in espionage can have a positive result for those executing them when geared towards a specific, focused goal and acting as one of many means to an end, rather than the only means and the only end. Most civilians would shudder at the perceived immorality of paramilitary ops, but one would concur that done in a precise fashion, and taking care to minimize collateral damage, it is far cleaner than dropping a bomb on a apartment block from an F16 jet fighter. Finally, Bergman shows the consequences of what happens when paramilitary operations get infected with hubris and politics, leading to some very disastrous results.

The second theme which is less pronounced is the cautionary tale about having intelligence services distinctly geared towards operations. What results, is cripling overspecialization, with inferior analysis of future threats and opportunities. Mossad, for instance is an operations focused agency, which means it's geared to current threats and usually unable to pre – empt current ones as its analysis of data isn't as good as, say the UK SIS. That flaw led to Israel nearly reaching the point of death during the Yom Kippur War, being blindsided by Hamas and the Hezbollah puppet controlled by Iran and other issues that it's been forced to clean up in a permanent fashion. It's the inversion of its western counterparts who have good analysis, but lack the operational capability to react to them.

Thirdly, and the one very casual observers of the Israeli Palestinian conflict will find most interesting. The desperate, desparing search for a long term solution. Most of the individuals who run the Israeli military and intelligence apparatus are far from being the jingoistic demons that Palestinian activists worldwide paint them as. As Bergman shows, they're much more reflective and almost unanimously in favor of a two state solution. They're not peaceniks but realists who, while rightfully proud of their work and the legacies they've made in fighting foreign and domestic threats to Israel, know that the state of affairs they're in is unacceptable, and may be unsustainable in the long run against an adversary that is equally as tenacious as them.

There's so much more I could talk about on Rise and Kill First. But I will have to stop here to not break the wordcount limiter for goodreads reviews. Ronen Bergman has written a triumph of modern journalism, and done his profession proud, in the age of hysterical pundits and a limp wristed fourth estate that is no longer deserving of the title of "gatekeeper". Rise and Kill First is an epic, non fiction saga spanning generations and the history of a nation like no other.

Told from the perspective of a unique community of individuals with special sets of skills, that has seen many members come and go over more than 70 years, the book, examines the most significant security issues ongoing today, in a clear, beautifully nuanced and fair style. Handling its violate subject matter with consummate skill, Rise and Kill first masterfully explores timeless, relevant themes like civilian – military/intelligence clashes, the nature of modern terrorism and most impressively of all, a deep investigation into how far a free society can take paramilitary operations in the world of espionage.

The world is at its most dangerous now since the end of the Cold War. The wolves and vultures are blowing down the door and circling in for the kill. But there's one country which has learned a lesson of survival at times like these. To Rise And Kill First.

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### **Marcella Wigg says**

My favorite book of the year so far!

I've been looking for a comprehensive history of Israel's targeted assassinations since the clumsy video-recorded assassination of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai made headlines worldwide in 2010, and finally, I have found it: a truly comprehensive, journalistic, and enlightening look at the history of Israel's targeted killing program from the days preceding the 1948 foundation of the state to nearly the present day. *Rise and Kill First* was everything I wanted to read and more! Not only do I feel far more knowledgeable about the history of Israel and the Middle East as a region in the last eighty years than I did before reading this book, but the dozens of assassinations and assassination attempts make for spellbinding reading. Despite the worldwide perception of Israeli intelligence as incredibly adept, its history of success with targeted killing has been more mixed than one might perceive from the outside. Many times, potentially disastrous assassination orders were subverted or sabotaged by concerned or skeptical commanders or military personnel. Even when assassinations did proceed, Bergman shows how killing a single individual yields unpredictable results often. Killing a perceived threat in Hezbollah or Hamas sometimes slowed the frequency at which attacks on Israelis occurred, but sometimes it created power vacuums filled by even more staunchly anti-Israel, more charismatic leaders.

Bergman clearly extensively consulted with sources within the Israeli intelligence and military establishment, and the depth and breadth of his knowledge, even about matters that are not (at least on a global scale) common knowledge, is very impressive, and he hints at times that he may be prevented from disclosing even more information due to military censor. Although he is Israeli himself, he doesn't gloss over some of the ugly episodes in the history of the targeted killing program, such as Lillehammer, a near-attempt on Yasser Arafat that ended up being mercifully aborted (and would have been a total disgrace internationally), and even vengeful extrajudicial killing carried out by relatively high-ranking military personnel. He also touches upon the historic successes of the red-page program.

Thanks to the endlessly interesting subject matter and narrative-driven writing, this is more interesting than a spy novel, and I found it can't-put-it-down fascinating in many parts. I can't recommend it highly enough, especially if you are interested in military or espionage history.

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