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Introduction: Intelligence that Kills

One evening, in the autumn of 1972, a young Palestinian man took a last sip of his drink, left the neighbourhood bar, and walked towards his apartment. His name was Wael Zwaiter and he freelanced as a translator at the Libyan embassy in Rome. He also translated classics and had just finished the Italian translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*.[1] That October night, Mossad, the Israeli foreign intelligence service, decided it would be Zwaiter's last: as he entered the stairway that led up to his apartment, two men with handguns appeared and shot eleven bullets into his body – eleven bullets for the eleven Israeli athletes killed in the Munich Olympics massacre, which had happened just a month earlier.[2]

According to Mossad, Wael Zwaiter not only was a poet and translator, but also actively supported Palestinian terrorism in Europe, including the Munich attack. How did Mossad select Zwaiter as a target, how did they know about his alleged terrorism involvement, and what help did they receive to organise this killing operation? As this book reveals for the first time, it was with the help of European intelligence agencies.

The murder of Wael Zwaiter was the first of ten assassination missions in Europe and the Middle East undertaken by Mossad after the 1972 Munich Olympics attack. This assassination campaign is known today as Operation Wrath of God (Hebrew: מבצע זעם האל *Mivtza Za'am Ha'el*) and is one of Mossad's most spectacular targeted killing operations.[3] The operation consisted of ten missions to kill Palestinians who were directly or loosely associated with Palestinian terrorism. The purpose of this covert action was to avenge past terrorist victims, to disrupt current terrorist plans, and to deter anyone from perpetrating future terrorist actions.

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This volume examines the role of European intelligence agencies in Operation Wrath of God and in countering Palestinian terrorist attacks. Its central argument is that European intelligence played a vital role in the organisation and execution of Operation Wrath of God. The book demonstrates this by analysing the intelligence that was shared within a multilateral intelligence liaison.[4] It is shown that intelligence agencies kept each other updated about Palestinian terrorism and thus maintained direct links with one other. This led to a shared mindset among intelligence officers across national boundaries. Officers generally assumed that Palestinians were potential terrorist suspects who needed to be stopped. In doing so, European intelligence agencies helped to prevent Palestinian terrorists from organising attacks, but they also helped Mossad in assassinating terrorist suspects. Altogether, the book thus reveals a covert European struggle against the Palestinians. This active role of European intelligence agencies has until today not been known and will be revealed here for the first time.

This research is innovative because of its perspective of linking a country that carries out a covert action and the one that hosts it. The volume reveals European complicity in a controversial Israeli covert action, explains the methods that Mossad used to organise the operation, and recounts the story as a back-and-forth between Palestinian terrorist actions and intelligence agencies' reactions. It is unique because an intelligence service's sources, methods, and foreign connections are among the most carefully guarded secrets in the world. This book analyses all three based on large-scale documentary evidence.

Israel was able to (ab)use European intelligence through a secret liaison called the Club de Berne. This multilateral liaison was founded in 1969 by eight intelligence agencies from Western European countries and was linked to ten additional European and extra-European partners (including Mossad, Shin Bet, and the FBI).[5] In October 1971, Israel suggested that a separate encrypted communications channel be opened to share warnings and intelligence about Palestinian terrorist activities in Europe. This channel sent cables under the code

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word 'Kilowatt'. From there developed a fruitful cooperation mechanism.

Kilowatt was used daily by the agencies to track Palestinian organisations and share intelligence about terrorist operational methods, planned attacks, weapon acquisitions, and innovations in terrorist techniques. All agencies provided timely replies to requests, especially when it was believed that a terrorist suspect was in their country. The information on suspects (mostly in Europe) included, for instance, which hotel a Palestinian terrorist suspect had stayed at, what phone numbers they called, flight routes if applicable, address, passport, and anything else of relevance that could be found.

In terms of the historical importance of the Club de Berne, this secret group hosted the first multilateral counterterrorism warning channel.[6] Cooperation continued over decades and has developed into a cross-country near-institutionalised intelligence apparatus.[7] Today, the Club de Berne is the most important informal counterterrorism intelligence channel in Europe and among its partners.[8]

By the time the Israeli government decided to approve Operation Wrath of God, the Club de Berne exchanges had already developed into a widely used counterterrorism intelligence-sharing tool. With the existence of such a mechanism, it was logical for Israel to use it to operationalise Operation Wrath of God. Thus, without prior knowledge or approval, European intelligence agencies had become a central component of the operation. Their intelligence was useful in three main ways.

First, through the Club de Berne, Israel received help from European agencies in identifying the Palestinians responsible for or involved in the planning or execution of the Munich massacre. This was important for Mossad because every killing operation had to be justified to Prime Minister Golda Meir and a Palestinian's involvement in Munich was a clear reason to put someone on the kill list.

Second, Mossad received valuable intelligence on the whereabouts and movement of Palestinian suspects, some of whom had been on Mossad's kill list. European partners helped

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Mossad locate terrorist suspects, initially without knowing that they were going to be killed. Israel thus received help in the planning and organisation of their killing operations. In other words, the European intelligence agencies helped with the groundwork to trace the alleged terrorists on Israel's death list. The Israelis only enquired about some of the targets, as it would have raised suspicions if Palestinians were killed shortly after Israel informally asked about them.

Third, and most importantly, after every assassination in Europe, the respective intelligence agencies would report to the Club de Berne about the case, share detailed police reports, and regularly provide updates about the ongoing criminal investigations. This provided Mossad with very clear indications as to whether the European authorities had any suspicions that Israel might have been behind the murder.

Two examples are worth mentioning in this respect, which illustrate how this type of intelligence was useful for Israel. First, after the above-mentioned assassination of Wael Zwaiter in Rome on 16 October 1972, the Italian intelligence agency SISDE sent – in good faith – every detail about the killers that they could find. For instance, a witness at the murder scene had been able to write down the licence plate of the car that the killers had used to escape. Italy investigated this car further, found out that it was a rental car, and shared with its Club de Berne partners the alleged name of the driver. This was, of course, the cover name of the Mossad officer who had rented the car for this operation. Mossad thus knew that it needed to be more careful next time when organising the escape of its hit men.

Similarly, as a second example, after the assassination of Mohamed Boudia on 28 June 1973 in Paris, the French intelligence agency, DST, shared the results of its investigation. It informed its partners that the French police believed that the car explosion was an accident during the transport of weapons. In reality it was, of course, Mossad who had placed the explosives in Boudia's car and detonated them remotely.

This kind of intelligence was very helpful for Mossad because they could gauge whether their cover had been blown or where they might have to be more careful with the next killing. The

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European agencies thus sent very useful information on how to continuously improve Mossad's killing operations in Europe. In short, the murderers were kept updated about the investigations of their own murders.

A central question related to the European role is: how much did European intelligence know about Operation Wrath of God? If they did, at what point did they understand that they were being used for this operation? According to secondary literature and contemporary newspaper articles, some suspicions circulated that Mossad might have been behind the frequent murders of Palestinians. Arab circles already pointed to Mossad as early as the second kill (Mahmoud al-Hamshari), in early December 1972. After the fourth assassination (Basil al-Kubaisi) in April 1973, mainstream newspapers like *Le Monde* strongly suggested that Israeli intelligence was behind it. Nevertheless, Italy and France continued to share intelligence with the Kilowatt group, which included Mossad. These intelligence reports were about Palestinian terrorist activities more generally but also specifically about investigations concerning these murder cases. This means that countries on whose soil the assassinations happened shared intelligence with Mossad despite the rising suspicions that Mossad was the killer.

In July 1973 there was the so-called Lillehammer affair. In Lillehammer, a small Norwegian town, Mossad organised the execution of someone who it thought was a top terrorist. However, the Israeli intelligence agency in fact murdered a completely innocent man, a Moroccan waiter and father-to-be. In an amateurishly executed escape and cover-up attempt, some Mossad officers were caught by the Norwegian police. The subsequent trial exposed Operation Wrath of God and clearly linked Mossad to the assassination operations in France, Italy, Greece, and Cyprus that had occurred over the previous months.

This was the point when France and Italy officially realised the extent of Mossad's killing operation and that the lion's share happened on their territory. This infringed European countries' sovereignty and brought the Middle East conflict right to their doorsteps. It was also a form of intelligence abuse because Club de Berne intelligence exchanges were meant to

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collectively enhance knowledge about Palestinian terrorists in Europe, not to help kill them. European governments heavily criticised Israel for this covert action, which led to a Euro-Israeli diplomatic crisis.

However, amidst official condemnations and crises, the strong counterterrorism ties between the countries' intelligence communities remained entirely intact. Club de Berne and its counterterrorism intelligence channels continued uninterrupted on a daily basis. In essence, nothing changed in any way on the operational level, neither when rumours about Mossad involvement first appeared nor when European intelligence agencies unmistakably understood that their intelligence had supported Israel's killing operation.

One can thus describe the practice in the Club de Berne as a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy. Even at the height of the Lillehammer scandal, it was 'business as usual' in the intelligence world. Agencies continued to share warnings about Middle Eastern terrorists, reports based on past terrorist attacks, alerts about suspects, and explanations of terrorist groups' operational methods.

The preservation of close Euro-Israeli intelligence ties can be explained through the important benefits that Club de Berne cooperation yielded for all parties involved. European agencies entered this liaison in 1971 with a genuine concern about terrorism. Israeli intelligence also needed European help to counter the threat. The Club de Berne and Kilowatt pre-dated the Munich Olympics attack and the Israeli decision to avenge its victims.

In Israel's view, killing terrorists before they were able to perpetrate an attack was one of many ways to counter the threat. It is thus logical or understandable that Mossad used the already existing framework to obtain information for its operations. From an Israeli perspective, Club de Berne cooperation served as a force multiplier and was essential to successfully combat the terrorist threat. From the European perspective, similarly, cooperation with Israel was essential to thwart terrorist plots in Europe.

The mutual interests of all parties, even the ones who might not have agreed that their intelligence could be used for an

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assassination campaign, explain why Club de Berne cooperation also continued after the Lillehammer affair. It not only continued over the following decades, but also grew in scope and importance. It is today the most important informal counterterrorism intelligence liaison between Europe and its partners; only the cooperation code word changed from 'Kilowatt' to 'Phoenix' in the 1990s.

MOSSAD'S COVERT ACCOMPLICES

When Operation Wrath of God was launched, Mossad was directly connected to seventeen European intelligence agencies through the Club de Berne, a secret coalition of intelligence agencies. They shared information about Palestinians on a colossal scale. Because intelligence cooperation was so beneficial for all the parties, the Europeans let Mossad operate and tolerated the use of its shared intelligence to kill Palestinians. Hence, this volume's overall argument is that the extensive advantages European agencies gained through Club de Berne intelligence-sharing led them to turn a blind eye towards, or tacitly support, Israeli covert actions on their respective territories. In other words, European agencies, and, indirectly, the governments they served, implicitly condoned Israel's covert actions on their territories.

One can push this argument further and speculate that some European agencies even benefited from or agreed with Israel's practice of killing Palestinian terrorist suspects. Or, more provocatively, one can ask whether the Israelis did the 'dirty work' for the Europeans. This remains an open question, but it is clear that Euro-Israeli liaison in the Club de Berne was such an asset for European intelligence that they were willing to ignore any risks, possible downsides, or repercussions of this cooperation. European intelligence that was used for Operation Wrath of God thus highlights an extreme case of intelligence-sharing and shows how far counterterrorism intelligence cooperation could go.

This book consistently shows how Club de Berne intelligence was used for two purposes. First, it helped Mossad organise its

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killing mission. Second, it collectively enhanced European capacities to counter Palestinian terrorism. The book thus employs a dual focus. First, each chapter analyses a Mossad assassination and the role of European intelligence in conducting it. Second, each chapter recounts Black September attacks and explains how the Club de Berne tried to counter them. Some of the terrorist plots are revealed for the first time. Particularly interesting are the cases where agencies thwarted attacks through cooperation, uncovered new terrorist methods, and collectively increased their knowledge about Palestinian groups.

This demonstrates the centrality of intelligence-sharing to European security. The book highlights the hands-on experiences of intelligence practitioners in the 1970s and shows how intelligence officers managed to establish successful and effective counterterrorism cooperation early in the decade. By the same token, through the intelligence reports the book presents new insights into terrorist practices at the time and terrorism innovation. These include terrorist methods, how Black September and other Palestinian groups were working, and the role of women in terrorist plots.

The book further illustrates the international relations of the secret state – a secret security order that was enabled because intelligence agencies were able to have direct connections with one another. Since intelligence agencies could keep their actions secret, their policies did not have to be justified publicly. This meant that intelligence services did not need to respect the same normative considerations as official foreign policy lines. In this way, Club de Berne cooperation created a covert space where Europeans (even neutral states) could facilitate an Israeli assassination operation. It also created space for state relations to be pursued independently of official foreign policy constraints. This was the case, for instance, between the UK's MI5 and Mossad, both Club de Berne members. These agencies cooperated closely in security matters, even though in the early 1970s the UK had a very critical foreign policy towards Israel. Relatedly, direct communication channels among intelligence officials enabled an additional layer of state diplomacy, one that could follow different rules to official state relations.

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Through the analysis of intelligence-sharing about Black September terrorism, new aspects of this secret security order become apparent.

The story of Europe's covert struggle against Palestinian terrorism is recounted chronologically 'kill by kill' and 'attack by attack' in three main parts. Part I focuses on the preparation of Operation Wrath of God and how the Europeans were instrumental to it. Part II analyses how Operation Wrath of God was carried out, details how European intelligence contributed to it, and examines how agencies tried to prevent Black September attacks via intelligence cooperation. Part III analyses the continuation of cooperation after Operation Wrath of God was exposed by the Lillehammer affair.

The above-mentioned dual-focus structure allows the story of Operation Wrath of God to be told as back-and-forth actions and reactions between Mossad assassinations, Black September attacks, and the role of European intelligence agencies in relation to both.

Some themes run across the volume, including questions relating to the effectiveness of covert actions, Mossad's logic and rationale for selecting the Palestinians who were killed, terrorism innovation techniques, European leniency towards terrorist offenders, and the day-to-day workings of intelligence practitioners and how they moulded a parallel secret security order.

SECRET RECORDS

This volume uses archival records from the above-mentioned secret intelligence-sharing group called the Club de Berne. The goal of the Club de Berne was to ensure an effective exchange of information and knowledge about terrorism and espionage. When the above-mentioned Kilowatt alerting system was introduced, the intelligence agencies had a direct link to one another and could send information straight from one operative to another. All eight Western European Club de Berne founding members and ten partner agencies participated in the Kilowatt encrypted telex system. In alphabetical order, the countries that were part of the Kilowatt system were Australia, Austria,

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Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The agencies shared warnings, threat assessments, updates about ongoing police investigations, intelligence about suspects, and detailed insights into the inner workings of terrorist groups. In short, Kilowatt members and their partners shared intelligence if it was deemed timely, relevant, and helpful for another agency to counter the common terrorist threat.[9]

The author was the first historian to obtain completely unredacted access to all cables that were sent under the Club de Berne alerting system from October 1971 onwards.[10] This amounts to more than forty thousand cables that were sent from eighteen different intelligence agencies.[11] The source material for this volume includes the daily correspondence among Kilowatt members before, during, and after Operation Wrath of God (1972–1979).[12] The core of the operation lasted from September 1972 until July 1973 and these dates form the main timeframe of the book.

The policy in this book is to identify a person's name only if they were mentioned in the press, were convicted, have since passed away, were well-known at the time, or are mentioned in publicly available records. Otherwise, their names have been changed or only anonymised initials are given. All intelligence reports, warnings, and assessments are compared with what we currently know about the Operation Wrath of God assassinations and Palestinian terrorism through journalistic accounts and secondary literature. This provides important context to the book's storyline. Furthermore, use of the term 'terrorism' or 'terrorist' is not a moral or political judgement but refers to the strategy employed by the Palestinian armed groups at this time.

Despite its importance, or precisely because of it, to this day the Club de Berne remains an extremely secretive liaison and very little is known about its operations. It is very rare for researchers to obtain access to the documentary evidence of a multilateral intelligence liaison, especially where one can see exactly what was shared by which agency.

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