

BOOK REVIEW

Rise and Kill First

The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations

Bergman R. *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations*. New York, NY: Random House; 2018. Hardcover: 784 pages. ISBN-10: 1400069718, ISBN-13: 978-1400069712.

Review by COL (Ret) Warner "Rocky" D. Farr, MD, MPH

This *New York Times* bestseller is the first definitive history of the Mossad, Shin Bet, and the Israeli Defense Force's targeted killing programs. *The New York Times* hailed it as "an exceptional work, a humane book about an incendiary subject," and it won the National Jewish Book Award in History for 2018. Jennifer Szalai at *The New York Times* named it one of the 10 best books of the year. It was also named one of the best books of the year by *The Economist*, *The New York Times Book Review*, the *BBC History Magazine*, *Mother Jones*, and the *Kirkus Reviews*. I fully agree.

It was gripping from the start to the finish and very well written. Some of the episodes, which stretch from the 1948 war for independence to the present day, were operations that I was familiar with, but many were not. I was in Germany when the 1972 Munich Olympic Village massacre happened, and I had worked both before and after with the German units described. So, this book is a good read on killing people, but why review it in a medical journal? Because medical support to casualties—enemy, friendly and civilian accidental—in the small, far-flung, worldwide, high risk–high payoff missions described in this quite long, detailed work require are some of the most difficult and challenging medical support plans in existence.

In the Talmud, it says, "If someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill him first." This indication of intent on how to defend the Jewish state proactively, aggressively, is now engrained into Israeli DNA. "Never Again" was a slogan starting in the 1948 war and continuing on to chalk marks on Israeli nuclear bombs. Proactively protecting the nation of Israel from harm is and has been the responsibility of the intelligence services, and this is one weapon in their arsenal that they have relied on to stop the most serious threats. Targeted assassinations have been used numerous times, on Israeli enemies large and small, in response to attacks and sometimes preemptively. Although some episodes are already well known, such as kidnapping Adolph Eichmann and chasing down the Munich Olympic Village assassins, several only slightly known episodes come

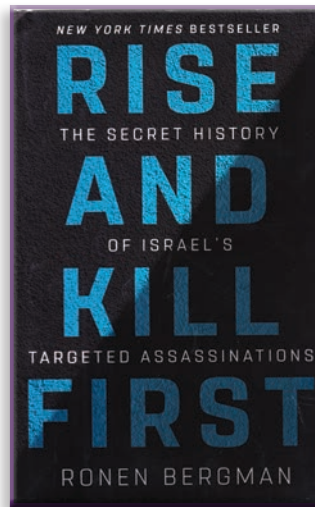
fully into focus, including the assassination of Gerald Bull, Saddam Hussain's large gun developer, killed in Belgium, and the killing of several Iranian nuclear scientists with motorcycle bombs in Tehran. Israeli attack failures are also discussed, as are the fairly common operational issue of civilian casualties. Assassination methods varied from AK-47s to poisoned toothpaste. Female agents seemed to have better timing of detonations used on moving vehicle targets. Assassination targets varied from Palestinians to ex-Nazi scientists developing rockets for Egypt to those working on nuclear bombs and giant guns in Iraq.

This book is full of surprises and opens to light many secrets not openly told before. It 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. Written by journalist and military analyst Ronen Bergman, he received a never-before-seen level of cooperation from

many of the current and former members of the Israeli government, such as prime ministers Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, and Benjamin Netanyahu and senior members of the country's military and intelligence services. These include the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), the Mossad (the intelligence service), Caesarea (a "Mossad within the Mossad" that carries out attacks on the highest of value targets), and the Shin Bet (the internal security service).

Particularly interesting to me were the sections on gathering intelligence and ultimately destroying Syria's nuclear reactor and similar efforts against Iran's nuclear program. In addition, a good read is the botched murder in Dubai where hotel cameras caught sight of the Israeli assassins.

Rise and Kill First brings the heart of Israel's most secret special operations activities into the light. It spans from the beginning of Israeli statehood to present day and looks at not only the entire program but also the ethical questions underlying Israel's targeted killing, a program that has shaped Israeli foreign policy, the nation, the Middle East, and the entire world.





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