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Date: Thu, 18 Feb 2010 12:09:57 +0000

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Troubling questions from Dubai

By Haaretz Editorial

Tags: Mossad, Dubai Assassination



If Israel is behind last month's assassination of senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, it may be assumed that anybody who tried to appropriate some of the glory regrets it now. Dubai's police investigation may present the Israeli government and intelligence community with tough questions, even if the government did not take responsibility for the assassination, which the foreign press attributes to the Mossad. What at first seemed like a "clean" operation turned out to be wracked by negligent mishaps.

First of all, did the goal and outcome justify the risk of carrying out a hit in a moderate Arab country and of exposing the intelligence community's modus operandi? Or did the operational opportunity to get rid of an individual responsible for past terror attacks and current weapons smuggling encourage those who approve and carry out such actions to waive some of the rules of caution?

Second, in a tense period in which Israel is trading threats of war with Iran and its allies in the region, should Israel be goading the enemy instead of maintaining restraint?

Third, is it right, because of this hit, to embarrass the authorities in the United Arab Emirates, who share with Israel the fear of the Iranian threat? Fourth, in preparation for the operation, were the risks of exposure and restrictions on similar future actions taken into account?

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Fifth, is there justification in damaging relations with friendly European countries whose passports were used by Mabhouh's assassins?

Sixth, is it proper to place in harm's way the Israelis whose identities were ostensibly stolen and used by the assassins? The fear of identity theft recalls dark regimes, and such an action seems to do disproportionate damage.

Should all Jews considering coming to live in Israel from the West be concerned that their names might be linked with espionage and terror incidents throughout the world? Stricter security rules at airports and border crossings make things harder on the intelligence services. But does the response require endangering the liberty, and perhaps even the lives, of civilians whose identities were used without their knowledge in a secret operation?

All these questions, particularly the claims of identity theft, need to be closely scrutinized. Lessons must be learned for the future, and the findings must be exposed to the light of day.

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