



## Israel's secret biological warfare during 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine

### Description

***ISRAEL: Prisoners of war in Ramla 1948 – Benny Morris: “We deciphered the development of the operation and its stages, we found out who authorized, organized and controlled the operation, and how it was carried out in the field” The collection of photographs by his son Rothenberg.***

Two articles have recently been published in [Haaretz](#). As they are both behind a paywall I will share much of the information here and add some further context.

The first is entitled ‘Israel’s secret poisonings in 1948’:

*New article by Benny Morris and Benjamin Kedar indicates that well before the botched assassination attempt 25 years ago on Hamas’ Meshal, Israel attempted mass poisoning during the war in 1948*

On September 25th 1997 – ‘Mossad operatives from the special forces’ unit of Kidon (Hebrew for Bayonet) poisoned Khaled Meshal, the chairman of the political bureau of Hamas, in Amman, Jordan. One of the operatives held a small tube and sprayed Meshal’s ear with the material.’

A female doctor, accompanied by Mishka Ben David, one of Mossad intelligence officers, was chosen for the mission in Jordan. They posed as an Israeli couple on vacation in an Amman hotel. The doctor and Ben David possessed an antidote, which would neutralize the poison if it leaked and injured the operatives by mistake. Israel kept a backup antidote at another location in Amman.

The mission was a failure. Mossad operatives carrying forged Canadian passports were arrested and four others found refuge in the Israeli Embassy in Jordan.

Jordan’s King Hussein threatened to storm the embassy and to execute the operatives. To

placate the king, Israel agreed to release from prison Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, and to save Meshal's life. The doctor and Ben David gave one of the antidotes to a Jordanian intelligence officer, who forwarded it to a Jordanian doctor. Israel saved the life of Meshal.

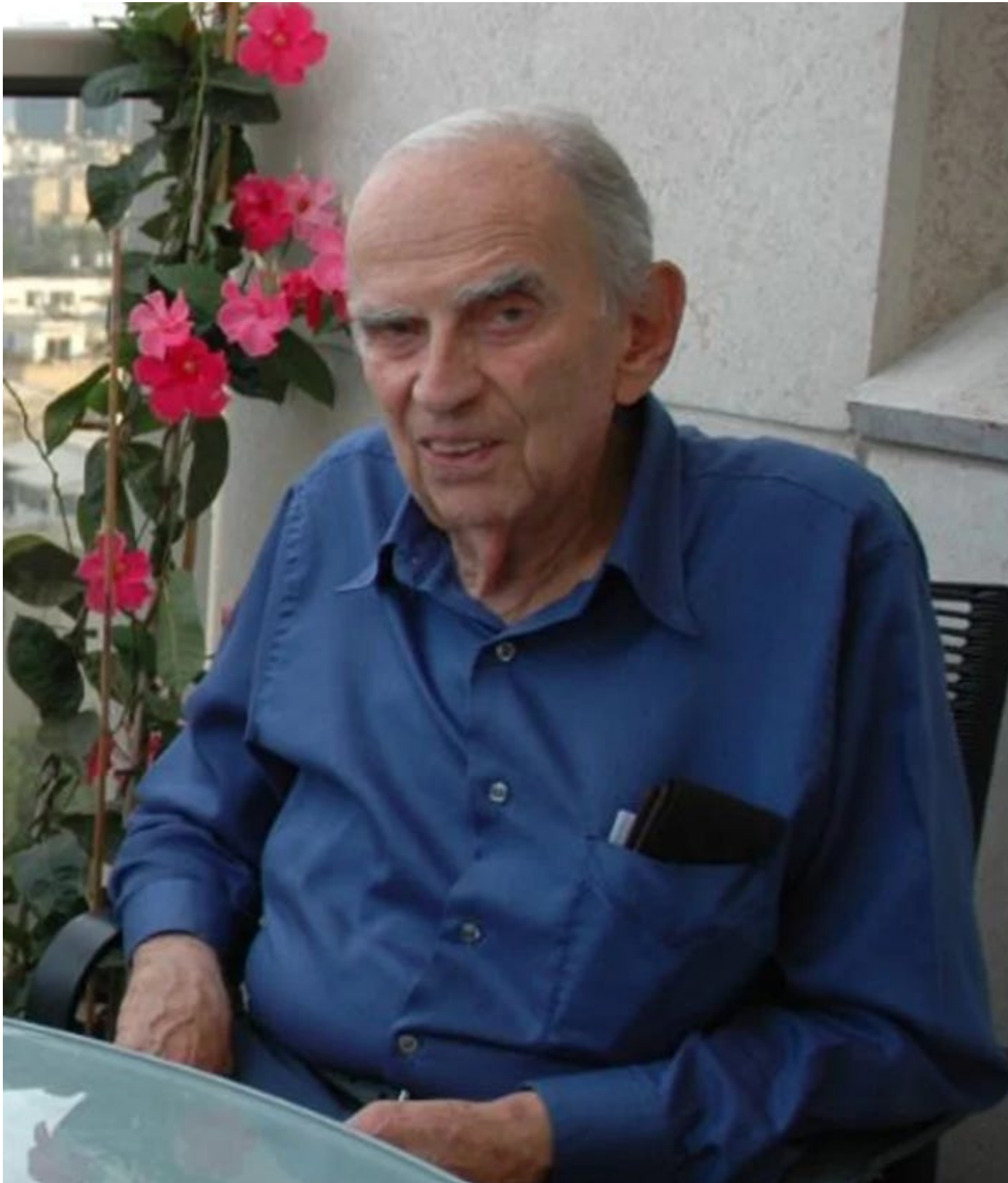
As a result of the botched assassination attempt Israel was forced to admit that it had used poison – a form of biological warfare.

The 1925 Geneva Protocol forbids the use of biological weapons. Fifty years later another international agreement was signed: The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, commonly referred to as the Biological Weapons Convention.

However, while 183 states have ratified the treaty, Israel, together with Egypt, Somalia, Eritrea and Comoros, have refused to join it.

It is widely assumed and reported that the various poisoning materials used by the Mossad for the already published cases, and few more which have remained secret, were manufactured at the Israel Institute for Biological Research in Nes Ziona, 20 kilometers south of Tel Aviv.

The institute, which jointly belongs to the Prime Minister's Office and the Defense Ministry, was founded in 1952, replacing the army's Scientific Corps. Its first director was Alexander Keynan.



*Alexander Keynan*

This unit is now implicated in the use of biological warfare during the Nakba 1948 – the British assisted Zionist ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Two historians – Benny Morris, professor emeritus at Ben-Gurion University in Be'er Sheva, and professor emeritus Benjamin Ze'ev Kedar of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem – have written “Cast thy bread: Israeli biological warfare during the 1948 war” (published by Middle Eastern Studies).

According to Haaretz the article was researched and published against the wishes of the Israeli security establishment which has consistently blocked historical documents that attest to war crimes against Palestinians – including prisoner executions, torture, ethnic cleansing, destruction of villages and apartheid. The article is based on original documents stored in the Israel State Archive and other related archives.

The following is from the abstract of the article by Morris and Kedar:

This article describes Israel's bacteriological warfare campaign during the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948 [Nakba]. Over the decades following that war rumours circulated that Israel had used bacteria, alongside conventional weaponry, in its battle against Palestine's Arabs and the surrounding Arab states. The declassification of files in the Israeli military archives, our discovery of a crucial letter in private hands, and the publication of a handful of memoirs relating to 1948 have enabled us to bridge the divide between rumour and fact; to explain the campaign's origins; to reconstruct its stages, beginning in April 1948; to identify who was involved – including Israel's prime minister, David Ben-Gurion and the Israeli army's de facto chief of general staff, Yigael Yadin, as well as leading Israeli scientists – and who actively opposed it.

The codename for the operation was “Cast Thy Bread” (taken from a verse in the Book of Ecclesiastes 11:1). According to the research – scientists from the Scientific Corps in collaboration with military units were “involved in a systematic campaign to poison water wells” with typhoid bacteria to effectively ethnically cleanse the Palestinian population and to frighten them into abandoning their land.

The order to use the typhoid contamination was given or approved by the founder of the ‘Jewish state’ – David Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion consulted with eminent scientists including Prof. David Erenst Bergman who is considered the originator of the Israeli nuclear program. Also consulted was Prof. Ephraim Katzir and Prof. Alex Keynan already mentioned.

The following is taken from the second Haaretz article:

On April 1, 1948, David Ben-Gurion wrote in his journal about “the development of science and speeding up its application in warfare.” A month and a half later, he wrote about “biological materials” that were purchased for \$2,000.

Ben-Gurion was committed to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine to build the ‘Jewish state’.

On July 12, 1937, Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary explaining the benefits of the compulsory population

transfer (which was proposed by the British Peel Commission):

“The compulsory transfer of the [Palestinian] Arabs from the valleys of the proposed Jewish state could give us something which we never had, even when we stood on our own during the days of the first and second Temples. . . We are given an opportunity which we never dared to dream of in our wildest imaginings. This is MORE than a state, government and sovereignty—this is national consolidation in a free homeland.” ([Righteous Victims](#), p. 142)

“With compulsory transfer we [would] have a vast area [for settlement]. I support compulsory transfer. I don’t see anything immoral in it.” ([Righteous Victims](#), p. 144)

Military top brass privy to the operation included Generals Yohanan Ratner and Yigal Yadin and Lt.Col. Moshe Dayan. It was Dayan’s task to deliver the typhoid test tubes to his subordinates with the instructions to distribute it throughout water wells near Jericho and in villages throughout the Jerusalem countryside. It is worth pointing out that the Jordanian army was also deployed in these areas.

The following is from Haaretz :

Dayan – now calling himself, in code, “Moshe Neptune” – cabled Yadin: “Cast Thy Bread will be activated by Nahshon [meaning Operation Nahshon forces, which included the Harel Brigade] on Monday or Tuesday. I will come down mid-week with all the material.”

Yadin instructed senior IDF commanders: “There is an immediate need to appoint in your HQ a special officer for Cast Thy Bread matters. The matter is of utmost importance and must be kept in great secrecy by you.”

In another cable, Yadin writes: “Place in the wells material of the Cast Thy Bread type.” And in another cable: “Is there authorization to use B [the Hebrew letter Bet] in the areas that will be evacuated by us [i.e., Israel]?”

Moshe Dayan addressing the Technion (Israel Institute of Technology), Haifa in 1969:

“Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you because geography books no longer exist, not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either. Nahlal arose in the place of Mahlul; Kibbutz Gvat in the place of Jibta; Kibbutz Sarid in the place of Huneifis; and Kefar Yehushu’a in the place of Tal al-Shuman. There is not one single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population.”

It is worth mentioning that Ilan Pappé the historian and author of [‘The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine’](#) has referred to this operation even prior to the recent revelations and was pilloried by the Zionist lobby for his claims:

Local left-leaning commanders at the southern front refused to participate in the biological warfare.

The article by Morris and Kedar also sheds light on a few more cases in which Israeli soldiers were sent with the poison to Acre and the Galilee village of Ilabun. According to British Arab and Red Cross documents, dozens of local residents of Acre were poisoned and became severely ill. An unknown number of them died.

“The operation initially focused on the area between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and later expanded to Acre in the north and Gaza in the south. The evidence indicates that it later included – either in planning or in effect – other communities such as Jericho, Be’er Sheva, Ilaboun, Bidu, Beit Suriq, Beit Mahsir and Har-Tuv (after the Jews were evacuated). The possibility of adding targets outside of Israel such as Cairo and Beirut was also proposed, but nothing came of it. The idea behind that was to hinder the Arab armies’ advance. [Egypt and Jordan].”

In May 1948 two Hagana soldiers posed as Arabs and entered Gaza with the intention of poisoning the water sources. They were arrested and sentenced to death by an Egyptian military court.

Morris found dramatic evidence about the operation in the archives of Kibbutz Na’an, in testimony provided in 1988 by a kibbutz member, the archaeologist Shemarya Guttman, who was a Palmah commander and senior IDF intelligence officer. Guttman told of how General Yohanan Ratner, the senior commander whom Ben-Gurion tagged to head the operation, informed him about sending “two people to the Egyptian border to do this job [concerning] wells.” The two were David Mizrahi and Ezra Horin (Afgin), who set out for the mission in Gaza on May 22, 1948, but were caught and tried in an Egyptian military court for poisoning wells with bacteria, and later executed.

Guttman recounts that he vehemently opposed the operation on moral grounds and also warned that poisoning the water could harm Jews as well. “Look, we may also conquer this area tomorrow and drink from this water, and all our army will also be sick with typhus or dysentery,” he told Ratner. When he asked to be issued the order in writing, his request was refused. “[Ratner] said to me, ‘I will never give such a thing [in writing].’” Guttman goes on to report that he asked “what sort of material were they talking about – ‘liquid or powder ... and he then decided it would be powder.’” He also notes that “the two were caught red-handed.”

Another testimony located by Morris and Kedar was hidden in an interview given by former ambassador Asher Ben-Natan to historian Nir Mann in 2008. Ben-Natan described another phase of the operation: an attempt to poison wells in Cairo. In the summer of 1948, Ben-Natan was in Paris as part of his position in operational intelligence. Intelligence officer Binyamin Gibli met him there and gave him “a capsule to be used for poisoning wells in Cairo.” But the plan was scrapped and, said Ben-Natan, “I was left with the poison capsule, and in the end, I destroyed it in the sewer.” Morris and Kedar also found evidence of this in the IDF archives, in a document from September 1948, in which Yadin writes: “Please call soon ... in regard to activation of Cast Thy Bread abroad.”

The documents show that Ben-Gurion was at the top of the pyramid. Below him was Yadin,

who oversaw the military side of the operation. The operation was commanded by Yohanan Ratner. Initially, the top man in the field for the group was Dayan, who went on to become the IDF chief of staff and defense minister. The documents indicate that Dayan served as the smuggler who conveyed the bacteria from the Science Corps to different points throughout the country.

David Shaltiel, commander of the Etzioni Brigade in Jerusalem, was also involved in the operation. Intelligence officer Ezra Helmer (later Omer, head of the Haganah General Staff Intelligence Department) also joined at a later stage. The identity of another person who was involved in the operation remains uncertain. In cables, he is referred to as "Mizrahi."





*The ethnic cleansing of Palestinian (Tantura) women to Jordan in 1948.*

by Vanessa Beeley

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