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The Shin Bet Gatekeepers

The story that everyone who cares about peace and justice needs to hear.



The Gatekeepers is a 2012 documentary film by director Dror Moreh that tells the story of the Israeli internal security service, Shin Bet, from the perspective of six of its former directors.



Navy Admiral & Shin Bet Chief Ami Ayalon:
**The tragedy of Israel's public security debate is that we don't
realize that we win every battle, but we lose the war.**

The film combines in-depth interviews, archival footage, and computer animation to recount the role that the group played in Israel's security from the Six-Day War to the present. The film was nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the 85th Academy Awards, won the Golden Trailer Award for Best Foreign Documentary Trailer, won Special Mention at the Biarritz International Festival of Audiovisual Programming in 2013, won the Los Angeles Film Critics Association award for Best Documentary/Non-Fiction Film, shared the Cinema for Peace Award for Most Valuable Documentary of the Year in 2013, was named one of the year's top five documentaries by the National Board of Review, won the award for Best Non-Fiction Film from the National Society of Film Critics Awards, won second place in the Best Non-Fiction Film category at the New York Film Critics Circle Awards, was nominated for the PGA Award for Outstanding Producer of Documentary Theatrical Motion Pictures and for Best Documentary at the Satellite Awards, and was also nominated for Best Documentary Feature Film at the 7th Asia Pacific Screen Awards.

The Gatekeepers consists of interviews with six former Shin Bet Directors:



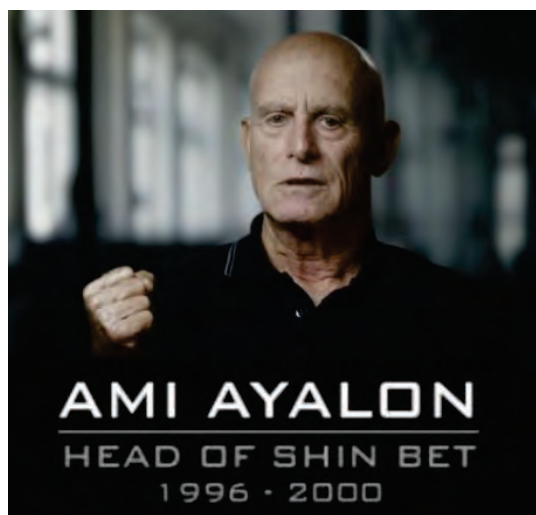
Avraham Shalom served on the team that brought Adolf Eichmann to justice and was forced to resign after ordering the summary execution of two Palestinian terrorists.



Yaakov Peri, a Shin Bet officer since 1966, was in charge of Shin Bet at the time of the First Intifada and following the Oslo Accords.



Carmi Gillon warned that extremists would try to kill Prime Minister Rabin, whose assassination in 1995 led to Gillon's resignation.



Ami Ayalon was a former Navy Admiral who reluctantly took over after the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by a right-wing Israeli Jew, an event which forever changed Ayalon's perception of Israel.



Avi Dichter was an ex-commando who was confronted with the Second (al-Aqsa) Intifada and the collapse of the 2000 Camp David Summit.



Yuval Diskin was a Shin Bet intelligence officer since 1978, and operated in Lebanon during the 1982 war.

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In November 2003, four former heads of Shin Bet (also known as Shabak) – Avraham Shalom, Yaakov Peri, Carmi Gillon and Ami Ayalon – called upon the Government of Israel to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Diskin, along with former Mossad Director Meir Dagan and former IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, have been highly critical of the diplomatic positions of Prime Minister Netanyahu's coalition. Since his retirement from the Shin Bet, he has spoken on a number of occasions on his view of the need for diplomatic progress with the Palestinian Authority and the wider Arab world.

Avraham Shalom grew up in Nazi Austria and experienced first hand what it means to be a Jew in a racist regime. In the film, he says that Israel now treats the Palestinians as the Nazis treated their occupied populations.

Yuval Diskin agreed with left-wing intellectual Yeshayahu Leibowitz (who called Shin Bet “the mechanism of evil”) that Israel’s control of the West Bank would breed an inexorable moral corruption.

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Shin Bet or Shabak – Israel’s Internal Security Apparatus



Shin Bet is the Israel Security Agency (Hebrew for General Security Service), better known by the acronym Shabak. It is Israel’s internal security service (similar to the British MI5 or the American FBI). Its motto is “Defender that shall not be seen” or “The unseen shield”. The special operations unit of Shin Bet is Yamas. It is one of three principal organizations of the Israeli intelligence community, alongside Aman (military intelligence) and the Mossad (foreign intelligence service).

Shabak is believed to have three operational wings:

1. The Arab Affairs Department: responsible primarily for Arab-related counterterrorism activities in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.
2. The Non Arab Affairs Department: responsible for non-Arab security issues and cooperation with foreign security agencies, previously concerned with the Communist Bloc.
3. The Protective Security Department: responsible for protecting high-value individuals and locations in the country such as government officials, embassies, airports, and research facilities.

Although it is a paramilitary security agency (somewhat like the CIA), it is not a part of the Israeli Ministry of Defense (though that’s how it began in 1948), and its Chief answers directly to the Prime Minister of Israel.

Shin Bet’s duties are safeguarding state security, exposing terrorist rings, interrogating terror suspects, providing intelligence for counter-terrorism operations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, counter-espionage, personal protection of senior public officials, securing important infrastructure and government buildings, and safeguarding Israeli airlines and overseas embassies.

The Documentary Story



Since the Six Day War in 1967, the Shin Bet has been at the forefront of Israel's intelligence operations in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza.

The heads of Shin Bet are among the select few involved in all national security decisions. They are the only members of the organization whose identities are known to the general public. They have never been interviewed about their work – until now.

The 1967 Six-Day War was swift and total. Israeli officials announced that their victory voided previous armistice agreements and international borders with their neighbors. Suddenly, over one million Palestinians came under Israeli military rule in the West Bank and Gaza. Standing at the Western Wall, IDF commander Moshe Dyan vowed never to give up the old city of Jerusalem.



IDF Commander Moshe Dyan Captures the Western Wall

Diskin: As head of the Shin Bet you learn that politicians like binary options. As a commander, I find myself in situations that are different shades of gray. These situations last seconds or minutes. People expect a decision, which means to act. "Don't do it" seems easier but is often harder. There's something unnatural about it. What's unnatural is the power you have to take their lives in an instant.

No Strategy – Just Tactics

Shalom: In the Six-Day War, I was in operations. The Arabs surrendered and suddenly we were without an enemy. Then we started working in the West Bank and Gaza in anti-terrorism, without knowing exactly what that was.

Dichter: We decided to do a census in the refugee camps. We used that information for years. We called up the reserves and gave them quick training in Arabic. They were taught ten words. When they knocked on doors, they were taught to say "we are soldiers, and we came to count you – jinna nehsikun". But they used an accented H instead of an unaccented H and instead said "we came to castrate you".

Shalom: Some Jews began talking about a Palestinian state. I loved the idea. We didn't know what we wanted to achieve – we were given no direction about our objectives from the politicians.

Diskin: I started as a coordinator in the Nablus district – a very pretty place with olive trees. I loved to get out of my car, visit homes, go to cafes. I really loved interaction with the people. I found myself at the center of the Palestinian problem. At first, your security role is all you care about.

Shalom: Gradually there was an increase, to put it cynically, luckily for us terrorism increased. Because now we had work, and we stopped dealing with the Palestinian state. Terrorism became more sophisticated and so did we. Suddenly we had a lot of work in Gaza and the West Bank and overseas too. So we forgot about the Palestinian issue.

Peri: In Nablus, wherever you threw a rock was either a cat or a terrorist. Some nights we arrested hundreds of people. We'd take over a village and gather all the men in the square. We use the "identifier" technique. Terrorists who confessed would be put in a vehicle. The windows had curtains and they wore masks. We'd sit them there and the villagers passed beside the vehicle and they'd tell us "He's a terrorist who trained in Syria", "He's a terrorist who came back from Jordan." Not everyone cooperated, but usually we had a good catch.

Diskin: Back then, most intelligence was based on HUMINT we got in two ways – either from our agents or from interrogation of prisoners.

Gillon: Back then the prison in Jerusalem was the worst that I know. It's a very old building from the time of the Turks. A normal person walks through the door and he's ready to admit to killing Jesus.

Dichter: You need to make the suspect feel tense. You need to make him understand that when we are done he will give up his information, so the sooner the better. The Shin Bet has interrogated tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of people. The Shin Bet is a well-oiled system, effective and systematic. You received a territorial unit,

and learned it village by village, trail by trail – about the village, the clans, the number of people, what institutions it has. You eventually reach a point where you mark who you want to recruit. In the end, you know you want X because of his connections, his ability to infiltrate places that you want to watch over.



Diskin: Recruiting people means taking someone who doesn't usually like you and making him do things he never believed he could.

Peri: To convince someone to betray his surroundings, his friends, sometimes his family is no small thing.

Shalom: In all, we gained control over the war on terror. We kept it on a low flame so the country could do what it wanted. That's important, but it didn't solve the problem of the occupation. Instead of 20 attacks a week, there were 20 a year. All in all, no Israeli Prime Minister took the Palestinians into consideration, whether they lived within the 1967 borders or not. What's the difference between Golda Meir and Begin? Nothing. He didn't visit the Arabs – she didn't either. She called herself a Palestinian. Begin didn't even say that because they were not important to him. In Peres' day, the atmosphere changed, but he did the same things as his predecessors. There was no strategy – just tactics.

Forget About Morality

Gillon: 1982 – The Lebanon war. The IDF entered Lebanon. The Shin Bet recruited operatives. In no time, the Shin Bet controlled Lebanon just like it controlled the West Bank. Avraham Shalom was head of the Shin Bet. After years as the most prominent intelligence agency, the Mossad was replaced by the Shin Bet. I think he was, to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and before him Begin, the most important person in their security circle. I think that what happened to him is he felt he could do whatever he wanted. People weren't in awe of Avraham Shalom, they were afraid of him. He was strong, forceful, smart...



The Younger Avraham Shalom

Diskin: ...very stubborn, uncompromising and a bully. If he didn't like something, heads would roll.

Peri: I was in Jerusalem when the 300 bus incident occurred. The Chief of Central Command called me on the hotline. A bus going south from Tel Aviv was hijacked and headed to Gaza. There was a chase with helicopters. The bus stopped just outside my district. They called that morning to say that they stormed the bus and two terrorists were taken to interrogation. I turned on the news and heard that all the terrorists were killed. I told my wife that something stinks here.

Shalom: I don't remember. I was in Haifa. They said "A bus was hijacked. Come." So I went. The army handled it. During the operation, they killed two and two came out unharmed. I didn't know that then. They beat the daylight out of them, the two of them. So the Shin Bet took them. I asked Ehud, Head of Operations, what state they were in. He said they were almost dead. Maybe the soldiers said so. So I said "Hit them again and finish it." He didn't do that. He did what he described, which I found out a year later. I think he took a rock and smashed their heads in, but they were unconscious. I don't know what state they were in. The photo showed them before they were beaten up. The army pounced on them. The photo was taken before that. It's not how they looked when we got them. Some thought they were dead. They broke their bones – it was a lynching. I didn't see them.



Ayalon: We killed a terrorist whose hands were tied, who no longer threatened us. By what right? But in the Shin Bet back then, there was no such concept as an illegal order. Not only did the Shin Bet fail, the Cabinet and the Prime Minister failed, and to some degree they oversee the Shin Bet.

Peri: It's a tough question. Did the Prime Minister [Shamir] know about the premeditated murder, the plan to kill the terrorist caught on the 300 bus? Did the head of Shin Bet have the authority to do that, to make those decisions?

Under what conditions did Shamir give you the authority to kill?

Shalom: There were one or two cases, when I couldn't find him, and it had to be done. We had to deal with the Arabs who were about to launch an attack, or that launched an attack. He said, "If you can't find me, decide on your own."

When did you realize that you had to resign?

Shalom: I offered my resignation to Shamir the next day. He said, "Don't you dare." He was afraid that if I resigned, he'd have to resign too. He went to Shimon Peres. Rabin was Defense Minister. He said, "You gave similar permission to kill, so if you leave us to the wolves, we'll drag you down with us." They kept telling me what to do and how to respond. I didn't do anything without coordinating it. I never imagined that, after a year of coordinating, they'd drop the issue and say "We didn't know." I don't take politicians seriously anymore, because I saw that they couldn't be trusted. They abandon the wounded in the field. That's not for me. Not just me – the whole Shin Bet.

Peri: The Shin Bet operatives said, "We're sent on missions 24/7. Some are of questionable legality; some are barely legal. Some are legal. No one gives us any backing. As soon as the press finds out about an operation, if we don't get any support from the politicians, it's a sign that they abandoned us."

Diskin: The Shin Bet's exposure because of the 300 bus incident, and the sense that "Guys, we're not omnipotent, there's a legal system above us" began to sink in.

Why did you give the order to kill them?

Shalom: I didn't want any more live terrorists in court. It would only increase terrorism. It increased it anyways.

Was it right to kill the terrorists on the 300 bus?

Shalom: Based on the results, no.

Only because of the results?

Shalom: Only because of the results.

So, if there was no reporter, it would be OK?

Shalom: If he hadn't come, no one would have known.

What about the morality of it?

Shalom: With terrorism, there are no morals. Find morals in terrorists first.

And if he surrendered?

Shalom: It's not a moral problem. It's a tactical problem, not strategic. You keep painting it black and white. There are decisions that... there is no morality in a case like that. In the war against terror, forget about morality. When there's a one-ton bomb, forget about morality.

One Man's Terrorist is Another Man's Freedom Fighter

Peri: The First Intifada was the charge that blew up this room with all the explosives, because it occurred spontaneously. A nation rose up and tried to launch a revolution to kick us out.

Dichter: I was in command here in the Southern District. A wave of mass protests erupted, bigger than anything we'd seen. Hundreds and thousands of people took to the street. Only live fire could stop them. The number of people on the Shin Bet's wanted list may have been the largest of any intelligence agency anywhere. Dozens in every region, hundreds, thousands.

Explain how the Shin Bet, which controlled the territory, didn't foresee an insurrection of this magnitude.

Peri: What intelligence agency foresaw the fall of the Berlin Wall? Do complain that the Shin Bet should have foreseen it – formally, in principle, yes it should have. That was the expectation. That's why you operate systems, maintain enormous intelligence factories... correct. But you have to tell the truth. Almost all the intelligence agencies in the world failed to foresee major historical events. You ask yourself, "Where did I go wrong?" Not in the sense that I rule over them, but should I have let this happen, or should I have left out before they said, "Get out"? But those questions are more philosophical than practical. Most of them don't have definitive answers. There were plenty of instances,

since 1967, when in my opinion, and I thought it then too, we should have reached an agreement and got out. But it's not within my mandate to convince the Prime Minister to go to the Palestinians or not. It also depends on who's dealing with the issue. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir never believed that an agreement with the Arabs was possible. Yitzhak Rabin really did believe it

Prime Minister Rabin (archive footage): If we ever want a serious chance at solving the Palestinian-Israeli problem, the time is now and the partner is the PLO, which rid itself of the principles I that despised them for.

Narrator: The signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians marked the first time that the PLO announced that it had officially abandoned terror and violence and recognized Israel's right to exist in peace and security. In return, Israel committed itself to withdrawing its forces from the Gaza and the Jericho region and to transferring all civilian authority in the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian administration.

Dichter: For us, the Oslo Accords erupted in a single day. [Yaakov] Peri was head of the Shin Bet then. He updated me about Oslo. He said, "Avi, listen. We have to act quickly to speak with the PLO's representatives in the field and deal with all the suspects, because we can't keep going after PLO suspects after we sign an agreement in Washington."

It was amazing. The first meeting was in Geneva. Sitting in the lobby was Jibril Rajoub, and I, not me personally but the Shin Bet, put him in prison when he was sixteen. He sat in prison for 18-20 years. You see that you are meeting people whose desire for peace and quiet, whose desire for an agreement is no less ambitious than yours.

Diskin: I felt like I was doing something that... I couldn't be doing this. I chased after these people. How could I sit with terrorists? They killed people. Could I sit down with them? To them, by the way, I was also a terrorist. As a Palestinian, he looks at you and says, "You're a terrorist too." How can that be? Then you realize that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.



Gillon: The number one terrorist enemy of Israel, until the day that Arafat entered Gaza, was Fatah, the PLO. All at once the PLO left the circle of terror. Hamas and Islamic Jihad filled that vacuum.

Diskin: We wondered how the Palestinians will function, how committed they are to fighting terrorism in those areas that they control. We also asked how we could prevent terrorism if we no longer control the territories.

Gillon: The first bus bombing I saw was the 5 bus in 1994. It was the first suicide bombing in Tel Aviv. I'll never forget it. It was the first time I felt I couldn't isolate myself from that site, from the stench of burning bodies. I'll never forget it. Later it passed. I saw many other bus attacks.



Diskin: It continued with the horrible attack at the Beit Lid junction, and the Stock Exchange and the 18 bus in Jerusalem. The feeling in the Shin Bet whenever there's an attack that we couldn't prevent is a horrible sense of failure, disappointment, especially if the attack is a large one. There's a real sense of disappointment. How did we fail to prevent it? It was the lowest point in the Shin Bet that I remember in my 32-33 years in the organization.

Gillon: As the suicide attacks increased, as long as Hamas played the main role in these attacks, the need to use moderate physical pressure in interrogations increased. Interrogating Hamas and Islamic Jihad is much more difficult. Anyone willing to sacrifice his life, whether it's for the virgins in paradise or not, has nothing to lose. Things get more complicated with a "ticking time bomb". It basically means that you have information or a lead about a possible terrorist attack, whether suicide or other. In any event, people will die, and the way to find out "Yes, no, if so, where?" lies with the person you're interrogating. You use all sorts of techniques that reduce his ability to resist.

Ayalon: The interrogation techniques we were allowed were sleep deprivation, sitting handcuffed in a painful, degrading, exhausting position.

[Riversong: The Shin Bet perfected the torture techniques that were later used by the US forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, CIA secret rendition sites, and Guantanamo Bay.]

What do you get out of covering their heads?

Gillon: It's pitch black, and you lose your sense of where you are. You can hear, but you don't know what's there.

And shaking?

Gillon: Shaking is used to establish presence. It's threatening. It doesn't hurt. What it does is intimidate you. An interrogator picks you up and shakes you. You feel threatened. What happened is that someone named Harizat, from Hamas, was a small man and he was shaken. It was a case of shaken baby syndrome. His brain hit his skull and he died as a result. This resulted in bitter arguments between me as Head of Shin Bet and Attorney-General Michael Ben-Yair, who thought it was immoral and unethical. In response, I said that if we don't use it, if we prevent 90% of suicide attacks now, we'll prevent 70% instead, which means dead Israelis. Prime Minister Rabin had to decide. He once got out of his chair furiously and shouted at Ben-Yair, "You keep telling me what I can't do! Tell me once what I can do!" It was a very contentious issue.

Ayalon: Rabin was a security man in every bone in his body, not someone we have to explain to when we said, "We don't have the tools to provide security." He understood it perfectly. You saw that he was torn up over it, but he made a decision that said, "We will fight terror as if there is no peace process and continue the peace process as if there is no terror."

Gillon: As the attacks increased, the Right, and not just the extremists, took to the streets against the Oslo Accords. It was exactly what Hamas wanted, and they succeeded.

Israeli Settler chant: "With blood and fire, we'll throw Rabin out!" You promised us peace and you gave us walls. You promised us life and you gave us death. You promised us tranquility and you have us terror.

Diskin: Most opposition to the peace process was from the religious camp. There leaders targeted Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The incitement was focused on him.

Our Own Flesh and Blood

Diskin: As a young army recruit in 1974, they took us to stop the first Jewish settlers in the West Bank. We stood there, rows of soldiers gripping each other's arms. The settlers started hitting us in anger. I remember that I really didn't like that.

Peri: The illegal settlements were built despite, or in opposition to, government decisions, but there was no Israeli government that didn't accept them or come to accept them. The fact that most Israeli governments did nothing gave the settlers the sense that they're slowly becoming the masters, that they're gaining the freedom to act because the government looks away. If they do that with an illegal settlement, it can extend into illegal activity.

Gillon: In 1980, a Fatah cell attacked worshippers leaving the synagogue in Hebron. A revenge attack occurred 30 days later. They attacked Palestinian mayors Bassam Shaka'a in Nablus and Karim Halaf in Ramallah. Another bomb blinded someone from the bomb squad in the home of Ibrahim Tawil, mayor of al-Bireh.

Peri: We knew Jews did it. We didn't think it was some rival Palestinian group. You check the Jewish files and find no clues. At some point, you realize that you have a problem, that it's an intelligence failure.

Gillon: We put our entire Operations Unit into action. Operations put in tens of thousands of hours until, six months later, we were in the right direction. We knew who did it. They were a very ideological group, really top quality. Moreover, some of them were even leaders of the communities in which they lived. That gave them access to the Prime Minister [Begin]. They had access to the Knesset. They had access to ministries. They were friends with ministers. They're part of the Israeli establishment, the respectable establishment of the State of Israel.

Peri: We said, "If we don't catch them in the act, we'll never catch them." The decision came when they planned to put bombs in Palestinian buses in a parking lot in Jerusalem.

Gillon: The attack they planned on buses was insane. They intended to kill 250 Arabs all at once. We followed them all night. I commanded the operation in Jerusalem. It was another night I'll never forget. We arrested them at 4:30 AM putting bombs on the busses.

Peri: We got out of our cars and said, "Come join us. If you don't want anything to happen to our bomb squad, dismantle the bombs." We did our first wave of arrests of 17 members, then we investigated and found that, since 1978-79, they were planning an attack on the Temple Mount to blow up the Dome of the Rock.



The Dome of the Rock – One of the Holiest Sites in Islam

Gillon: At first, the idea was based on the belief that, as long as the "abomination" stood over the site of the Jewish Temple, there will be no redemption, and therefore they have to get rid of that Dome. They prepared the bombs. They used a very sensitive type of explosive, Semtex. It was planned by Menachem Livni, who was a demolitions genius. The charges would be placed so that the entire force of the explosion would be directed at the support structure. This would result in the collapse of the Dome. The consequence of blowing up the Dome of the Rock, even today, is that it could lead to total war with all the Islamic states, not just the Arab states, not just Iran – Indonesia too – against the state of Israel. I'm not talking about the risk to the Jewish minority around the world. These people decided to do it out of some mystical belief that this would be the War of Armageddon that would usher in the Messiah and a Jewish Kingdom. After we exposed the Jewish Underground, Prime Minister Shamir called my unit "the diamond in the crown". We received compliments and support from

everywhere. Then the lobbying on their behalf began. They were put on trial. Three of them got life in prison, different sentences. They all got out of prison very quickly. They went home as if nothing happened. They went back to their previous positions, some to even higher positions.



A member of the Jewish Underground: The main question is how history will judge us in the annals of the Jewish people. I am sure that the Dome of the Rock will not remain on the Temple Mount and the Temple Mount will return to us, just as I am sure that those same murderers, whose legs I took part in removing, deserved their fate.

Gillon: The entire underground was released by the Knesset. The Clemency Law for the Jewish Underground was signed by Yitzhak Shamir as Prime Minister of Israel. It wasn't just a few members of the Opposition. At first it was, "Oh no! They broke the law. They killed people. They wanted to blow up the country, etc." Later they said, "They are our own flesh and blood." Then, the delegitimization process was transferred to the Shin Bet.

Peri: The story of the Jewish Underground is an episode that really shook up the Shin Bet intelligence-wise. It established the intelligence mechanism that, since then, keeps an eye on those Jewish suspects worth watching, in our opinion, in the West Bank. You watch it closely. You work hard and up comes Yigal Amir, who was never on any list of suspects. He gets up one morning and shoots the Prime Minister.

Gillon: I started to feel that we were faced with an increase in the potential for the assassination of the Prime Minister.

Right Wing Israeli Chants: Rabin's a traitor! Rabin's a traitor! We're fighting against a government that is leading us into a chasm.

Gillon: The Right's activity in Israel was no secret. You don't need the Head of the Shin Bet to explain what Bibi Netanyahu or Arik Sharon said to the demonstrators in Jerusalem. You don't need the Head of the Shin Bet to explain to the Israeli public and especially the Prime Minister the significance of Rabin's coffin at a mock funeral.



Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's Actual Funeral

Chants: With blood and fire, we'll throw Rabin out!

Gillon: Things started heating up more and more. There was an attempted attack at the Wingate Institute. After that, I went over to him and said, "Listen, Yitzhak, it doesn't work like that. They'll hurt you in the end. I'm asking you to start wearing a bullet-proof vest and to drive in the armored car. We'll increase your security detail." He slammed me down. "I was a soldier before the State. I won't wear a bullet-proof vest."

Did you speak to the Rabbis and settlers' leaders?

Gillon: Yes, I met with the rabbis. I met with the leaders of the settlers. We spoke about incitement and insurrection.

The Rabbis: The government has no right to force people to do anything that runs counter to Torah and Jewish Law.



Prime Minister Rabin at rally (archive footage): All of you here, by your presence at this gathering, prove that the people really do want peace and oppose violence.

Gillon: I went to Paris on Thursday, maybe Wednesday, on an assignment that was forced on me by Rabin. I got a call from my bureau chief, who told me that Rabin was wounded. I was in shock, of course, but I was surrounded by people, so I had to function. On a personal level, until I sat on the plane in the dark at night, on the flight to Tel Aviv, I think it was the first time that I started to feel in my heart what I knew in my head. Thank God for those four hours because it gave me a chance to absorb the loss of a man who really was extraordinary.

Ayalon: In retrospect, I can say that it changed my whole world. I suddenly saw a different Israel. I wasn't aware of the intensity of the chasms and hatred, of the rifts that exist between us. How do we see our future? What do we have in common? Why did we come here? What do we want to become? All that was self-evident, and it all fell apart.



Peri: Rabin's assassination shattered all hope. It showed very clearly that some punk of an assassin, with a pistol that could barely shoot, could eliminate hope, an entire peace process. He could change everything.



Gillon: First of all, I decided, after consulting with my wife, that I would take ministerial responsibility and submit my resignation. I did that immediately. It was a very difficult period. [Yigal Amir] changed history. He succeeded big time. Today... it's only getting worse. I believe we'll see another political assassination surrounding the withdrawal from the West Bank. It will come from every direction, mainly from the rabbis, because the

rabbis have no reason to learn any lesson. As far as the extremist rabbis are concerned, the system proved itself.

Victory is to See You Suffer

Ayalon: Rabin's assassination brought me to the Shin Bet. A year earlier, I turned Rabin down when he asked me to be head of Shin Bet. After Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, I realized I had no choice. It was obvious the Shin Bet faced a serious crisis and everyone in the Shin Bet knew it.

Diskin: Everything the Shin Bet's operations collapsed. Security surrounding the Prime Minister collapsed. The intelligence that should have prevented the assassination collapsed. The Shin Bet's strong suit, preventing Palestinian and Islamic terror, could no longer provide the goods. The organization was down for the count. The Shin Bet needed new tools and they had to be developed. We also realized that we were relying on force, rather than on our brains. We began to implement an organizational shift, from field operations to people sitting in offices in front of their computer monitors.

Ayalon: We prevented more attacks each year. We achieved greater security every year. How did it happen? It had a lot to do with changes we made in Shin Bet. But the truth must be told, the more significant achievement was cooperation between us and the Palestinians. I met with all the top Palestinian security officials – all of them, once a month, to coordinate intelligence. They always told me, "We're not your agents. We don't put Hamas members in prison for your sake. We only do it because our people believe that, at the end of the day, we'll have a state beside Israel. When we no longer believe that, forget about us."

Peri: Just as there was a strong desire, a firm decision and real intent by Peres and Rabin to reach an agreement, after Rabin was gone, the desire or Israel's intent to reach a real agreement dwindled, to put it mildly.

Ayalon: There was no good faith. There was no good faith from the Palestinian side and not from the Israeli side. We wanted security and we got more terrorism. They wanted a state and got more settlements. When we started the Oslo process in 1993-94, 100,000 settlers lived in the West Bank and Gaza, not including the new Jerusalem suburbs. At the end of the process, 6-7 years later, in the summer of 2000 when the process collapsed, there were over 220,000 settlers. Ehud Barak is very proud to have built more settlements than Bibi Netanyahu or any other Prime Minister before him. So the question isn't whether there's a partner. Arafat doesn't have a partner. Barak doesn't have a partner. The question is what both sides do to have a partner. It was obvious we were heading toward another Intifada, another round of violence by a group, a society, a nation that felt it had nothing to lose.

In 2002 I went to London. The Intifada was raging. It was hell and we went to London – a group of Israelis and a group of Palestinians, in order to see if we could do anything. At some point, I was making myself a cup of coffee and I was approached by a Palestinian acquaintance named Iyad Saraj, a Doctor of Psychiatry. He said, "Ami, we finally defeated you." I said to him, "Are you mad? What do you mean you defeated us? Hundreds of you are getting killed. At this rate, thousands of you will get killed. You're about to lose whatever tiny bit of a state you have and you'll lose your dream of statehood. What kind of victory is that?"

He said to me, "Ami, I don't understand you. You still don't understand us. For us, victory is seeing you suffer. That's all we want. The more we suffer, the more you suffer. Finally, after 50 years, we've reached a balance of power, your F-16 versus our suicide bomber." Iyad Saraj's statement gave me a very clear insight. I suddenly understood the suicide bomber phenomenon. I suddenly understood our reaction very differently. How many operations did we launch because we hurt, because when they blow up busses it really hurts us and we want revenge? How often have we done that?

Collateral Damage

Gillon: Yahya Ayyash was the most senior terrorist that ever operated against Israel, certainly the most senior member of Hamas. He was an engineer. He knew how to make bombs out of improvised explosives. These were the bomb belts that blew up in busses. Secondly, he knew how to convince someone to commit suicide. Finally, he had survival skills that beggared description. For years, every IDF soldier carried his picture. He was undoubtedly our number one most wanted man.

Dichter: Yahya Ayyash moved from Samaria to Gaza. It took some time to get that intelligence. Then we started basic surveillance to see who was around him, where he might go.

Gillon: Of course, everyone has his weak points. Yahya Ayyash's weak points were his wife and son. After a long time living alone in Gaza, he asked them to join him. We knew the whole story and I decided to let them into Gaza. I thought, once they were in Gaza, he'll want to see them. Maybe the mouse would come out of his hole. Then we found that he really misses his father. He never used a cell phone – people made calls for him. After weeks of persuasion, he agreed to speak with his father for a few minutes.

Dichter: At this point, we started laying the groundwork for our cell phone to infiltrate his surroundings. Then we started doing all the backup work, making sure that an innocent cell phone had explosives in it. The Shin Bet are technical experts at making small appliances with lots of power, not so much broadcast power as explosive power.

Gillon: Since it was difficult for us to make direct contact with Ayyash, we used the services of a middleman who gave him the cellphone.

Dichter: One Friday, everything was in place. We set off the explosive charge in the phone and nothing worked. Everything we built over eight months fell apart in front of us. Everything worked perfectly, then we click to get the coffee and it doesn't come out. Nothing happened. Within days, the phone was back in its natural environment. We saw that no one suspected anything, that things went on as normal. We all got together again. On Friday morning, his father called him. The wire tapper recognized Ayyash's voice and told us. someone hit a button and the cell phone exploded when it was right next to Yahya Ayyash's ear. He was killed on the spot and no one around him was hurt. More importantly, no one on the ground floor heard the explosion. The operation was coordinated with the Air Force. It went very nicely. It was very clean... elegant. I like operations like that. They're nice and tidy.



The Funeral of Yahya Ayyash

Dichter: To some people, the assassination of Yahya Ayyash, at a time that seemed relatively free of attacks, some said it was a mistake. Sometimes it feels quiet and you say, "Oh we disturbed the calm." Two months later, it seemed like the whole country was exploding. We know for a fact, after Ayyash's assassination, a group crossed the fence and left Gaza to organize attacks from the West Bank. Of course I see the connection. But if we make the equation, if we assassinate them they'll commit suicide attacks, if we don't assassinate them they won't – the second part of the equation is false. After we pulled out of Gaza, we couldn't enter the Palestinian areas unexpectedly, with a small force, and exit safely. How do you surprise a terrorist from the air from a distance? He has no idea where the missile came from. But, to fire a missile from a distance, you need very precise intel, and not for one split second but for the entire operation.

Ayalon: What is targeted assassination? Where do we break the chain? Okay, we'll injure, if necessary we'll even kill whomever comes to kill us. What happens to the people surrounding him? What happens to the people who make the explosives, who transport him, who make the plans, who gather the intel and who just preach the idea? They don't kill. They preach an ideology that, in the end, creates jihad and leads to the death of Israelis.



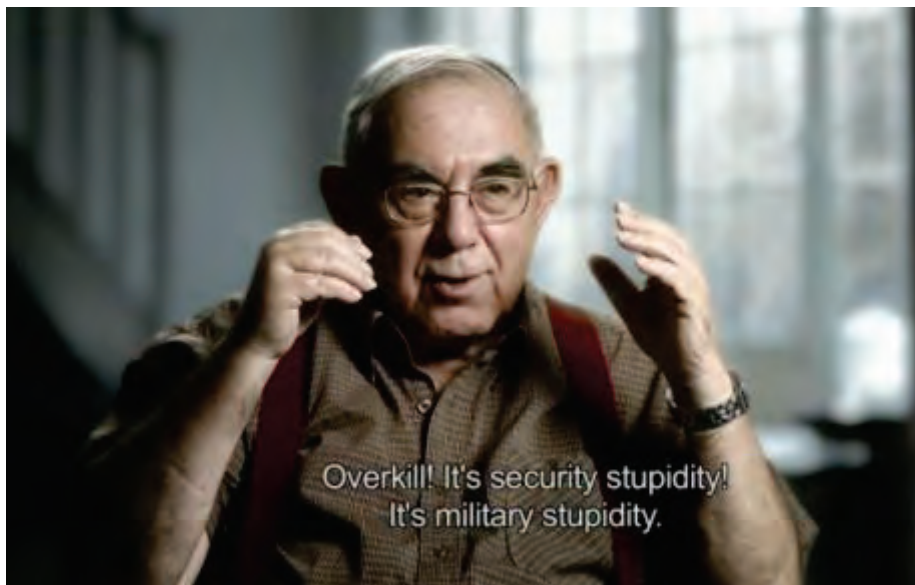
Salah Shehade

Dichter: Salah Shehadeh was what we called the “hairspring” that set Hamas’ entire terror operation in Gaza into motion. The hunt for him was very difficult with lots of intelligence tools invested in it. At some stage, it was clear that he was home, that his daughter wasn’t, and that only his wife was with him. We agreed by phone, the Chief of Staff, me, the Defense Minister and the Prime Minister [Sharon]. The Air Force dropped a one-ton bomb on the house. Unfortunately, because of inaccurate intelligence, innocents were killed. No one knows the final number, 9-14.

When you drop a one-ton bomb on a densely-populated area, like in the Shehadeh incident, obviously bystanders will be hurt...

Dichter: No, it’s not obvious. No, you gather intelligence. Where do people live? How many? Who? What are the chances? Where do you shoot from? The implications of this incident, in terms of collateral damage, led to criticism of how we could drop a bomb on a home in the middle of Gaza. An American asked me about it. I said, “We know about your methods in Afghanistan. You bombed a wedding and 70 people were killed and no one knows if the target was killed.”

Shalom: Overkill! It’s security stupidity! It’s military stupidity! I don’t know what to call it, but it makes no sense that to kill the most important man in Gaza you have to drop a one-ton bomb on a house surrounded by homes with families and children. That can’t be moral. It’s ineffective militarily, and it’s certainly not humane. Is it just? Not that either.



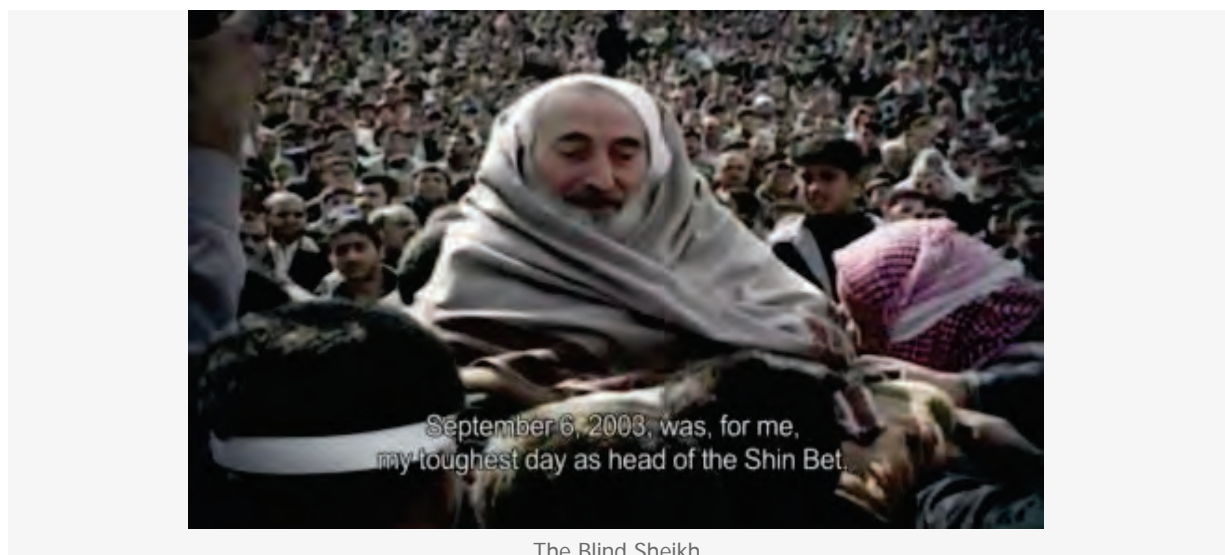
Ayalon: There’s a concept, “the banality of evil”. When you start doing it en masse, 200, 300 people die because of the idea of “targeted assassinations”. Suddenly, the processes become a kind of conveyor belt. You ask yourself less and less where to stop.

Dichter: September 6, 2003 was, for me, my toughest day as head of the Shin Bet. On that day, the state of Israel had a chance to get rid of the biggest terrorist group in a single blow. We had very reliable and precise intel that the Hamas leadership was going to hold a meeting like they never had before and probably never will. I think there were ten or twelve people there, but the crème de la crème, the merde de la merde. Really, everyone was there. Suddenly I was told the Army is opposed: “A one-ton bomb would cause collateral damage.” There was a bitter argument. Finally, after several hours, the

Prime Minister was convinced to cancel the attack. I called the Prime Minister [Sharon] to convince him that it's unreasonable. The compromise was a quarter-ton. It was based on probabilities. The house had two stories. If they were on the second floor, it would kill them. If they were on the first floor, it wouldn't kill anyone.



Dichter: The bomb was dropped – it was a direct hit. The second story was destroyed and the entire “Dream Team” fled the house on their own two feet. Some people insist they saw crippled Sheikh Yassin running. If there's a moment you realize, not that we missed, but that we were mistaken, because of what happened with Salah Shehadeh, we paid the price with the “Dream Team”. It took a long time to get to some of the people there, like Sheikh Yassin and others. God knows how much damage they caused until we managed to take out the ones we did. Some of them were never taken out and are still active today.



The Blind Sheikh

[Riversong: Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, a nearly-blind quadriplegic who was much loved for establishing hospitals, education systems, libraries and other services, was killed in an Israeli attack on March 22, 2004, while he was being wheeled out of an early morning prayer session in Gaza City. An Israeli AH-64 Apache helicopter gunship fired Hellfire missiles at Yassin, killing him and his two bodyguards

and nine bystanders, as well as injuring another 12 people, including two of Yassin's sons.]

Dichter: I've often said, "Terror is a barrel with a bottom." You can reach the bottom. You don't need to reach the last terrorist. You reach a critical mass and that is enough of a deterrent.

Ayalon: I can prove to you that Hamas did not become more moderate after Sheikh Yassin was eliminated. I can prove to you that when we killed Abbas Musawi [Lebanese Shia cleric and co-founder and Secretary General of Hezbollah, who was killed by the IDF in 1992] and [Hassan] Nasrallah took over instead, the security situation in Israel didn't really improve. That's why, when we deal, not with the one who's coming to kill us immediately, but with the person preaching, we are headed toward a place which is forbidden by international law, and basic justice poses huge question marks as to its ethics. But I'm talking to you as the head of Shin Bet – it's ineffective.

The Old Man at the End of the Corridor

Ayalon: I was born near the Sea of Galilee. I grew up in a children's house, like all children who lived on kibbutzim back then. I had a wonderful childhood. I knew that there's a house in Jerusalem, and on the second floor there's a long corridor. At the end of the corridor, there is a door and behind the door is a wise man who makes decisions. He thinks. My parents called him the "Old Man" – Ben Gurion [first Prime Minister of Israel].

Years later, after the [1973] Yom Kippur War, I went to Jerusalem and I went to that same building. I was on the second floor and found no door at the end of the corridor, and behind the missing door no one was thinking for me.

Peri: You see that void, that lack of initiative, that unwillingness to let things take their course, without you stepping in and saying, "This is as far as it goes in this direction or that."

Dichter: You can't make peace using military means. Peace must be built on a system of trust, after or without using military means. In the end, you must build it on a system of trust. As someone who knows the Palestinians well, I claim that there should be no problem building a system of trust with them, a genuine one.

Gillon: For Israel, it's too much of a luxury not to speak without enemies. As long as they decide not to speak to us, I have no choice. But when we decide not to speak, I think we're making a mistake.

Do you support speaking to anyone?

Shalom: Anyone we can, even if they answer rudely, I'm for continuing. There is no alternative to talking... Hamas, Jihad, even Ahmadinejad, I'm always for it. It's a trait of a professional intelligence to talk to everyone. Things get clarified. I see you don't eat glass. He sees I don't drink petrol. That's how it is.

I want to read something that Professor Leibowitz, a critic of the occupation, wrote a year after the Six-Day War, in 1968. "A state ruling over a hostile population of one

million foreigners will necessarily become a Shin Bet state, with all that this implies for education, freedom of speech and thought, and democracy. The corruption found in every colonial regime will affix itself to the State of Israel. The administration will have to suppress an Arab uprising on one hand and acquire quislings, or Arab traitors, on the other." What do you think about this prediction, given where Israel is today?

Diskin: I agree with every word he wrote. Every word he said is etched in stone. I think it's an accurate depiction of the reality that emerged from 1968 until today. I wouldn't say that it became a Shin Bet state, but no doubt our current situation with the Palestinians undoubtedly created a reality that is very similar to what Leibowitz wrote.

Peri: You knock on doors in the middle of the night and wake a sleeping family all cuddled up in bed. The mother's tears or the last goodbyes of the suspect you take from his family's embrace... It's not easy. You see the family suffering, those difficult moments between parents and children, between children and parents. These moments end up etched deep inside you, and when you retire you become a bit of a leftist.

Gillon: We are making the lives of millions unbearable, into prolonged human suffering. We leave the decision about what's appropriate to a soldier who's spent a few months in the Army. A year earlier, he finished high school, at best. He's standing there facing a father who's holding his baby girl, deciding does he search him or not, does he let him pass or not. It kills me.

Shalom: The future is bleak. It's dark, the future. Where does it lead? To a change in the people's character? Because, if you put most of our young people in the Army, they'll see a paradox. They'll see that it strives to be a people's army, like the Nahal unit involved in building up the country. On the other hand, it's a brutal occupation force, similar to the Germans in World War II. Similar, not identical. And I'm not talking about their behavior toward the Jews. That was exceptional, with its own particular circumstances. I mean how they acted to the Poles, the Belgians, the Dutch, to all of them... the Czechs. It's a very negative trait that we acquired, to be ... I'm afraid to say it so I won't. We've become cruel, to ourselves as well, but mainly to the occupied population, using the excuse of the war against terror.

Ayalon: Clausewitz, who was wise even though he wasn't Jewish, or at least we haven't discovered his Jewish roots, said almost 200 years ago... I'm translating, but the essence of what he said is, "Victory is simply the creation of a better political reality." That's victory. Victory doesn't dictate that we have to conquer Gaza or Ramallah or Nablus or Hebron. I think my son, who served for three years in the paratroopers, participated in the conquest of Nablus at least two or three times. Did it bring us victory? I don't think so. Did it create a better political reality? The tragedy of Israel's public security debate is that we don't realize that we face a frustrating situation in which we win every battle, but we lose the war.

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