THE MIDDLE EAST - A SPACE OF CONFRONTATION FOR THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES

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Abstract: The Middle East is one of the most complex and volatile regions of the world, characterized by protracted conflicts, political instability, and a complicated web of alliances and enemies. In this context, intelligence services have become essential players in managing threats, protecting national security and influencing geopolitical dynamics. These agencies are crucial not only for internal security, but also for responding to external challenges, such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and cyber threats. This study looks at the role of intelligence services in the Middle East, their structures, their goals and the impact they have on the region and the world.

Keywords: information, conflict, security, religion Middle East.

Introduction

Representing the meeting point between Asia, Africa and Europe, the Middle East is of major strategic importance due to its natural resources (especially oil and natural gas), its geopolitical position, and the ethnic and religious conflicts that persist in the region. Placed at the center of historical conflicts, the Middle East is a fertile ground for intelligence activities, being the place where regional and global powers face off for influence and control.

In many cases, intelligence services in the Middle East are responsible for managing relations between different ethnic and religious groups and protecting their identity security in the face of internal and external threats. Thus, intelligence services are not limited to national security, but also include protecting social cohesion and identity balance in the face of radicalization, religious extremism and inter-community conflicts

In this regard, intelligence services may have the following tasks in terms of identity security: monitoring religious and ethnic extremism; protection of ethnic and religious minorities; stabilizing authoritarian regimes by securing political identity; management of identity crises and internal conflicts.

Although intelligence services in the Middle East play an important role in protecting identity security, they face a number of challenges.

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First, internal and geopolitical conflicts aggravate identity tensions, and intelligence services must skillfully navigate between the interests of various regional and domestic actors. The use of intelligence services for political purposes, such as surveillance of the opposition or the elimination of ethnic minorities, can also lead to abuses and human rights violations, which undermines public trust in these agencies.

Second, intelligence services are often exposed to external risks, including interference from international actors seeking to impose their own interests in the region. This can affect internal stability and identity security, especially in the context of proxy wars and regional conflicts.

Middle Eastern intelligence plays a crucial role in ensuring identity security in the region. In an area marked by conflict and division, these agencies are essential for preventing radicalisation, protecting religious and ethnic minorities and maintaining internal stability. However, the challenges of regional diversity, internal and geopolitical conflicts, and the use of these services for political purposes, challenge their effectiveness and ethics. Despite these challenges, intelligence services in the Middle East remain essential for protecting an ever-changing region and maintaining identity balance in the face of internal and external threats.

In the Middle East region, intelligence plays a vital role in preventing terrorist attacks and combating extremist groups, including al-Qaeda, ISIS, Hezbollah, and others. Often, intelligence agencies collaborate with each other to share information about terrorist activities and track down their leaders.

A notable example of intelligence collaboration was the operations in which Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, the leaders of Hamas, and Hezbollah were captured or eliminated. In this operation, intelligence agencies in the Middle East provided essential information for locating and eliminating it. Another example, Iran, through Al-Quds Force, has supported groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza to expand its influence and create a network of allies and partners who can act in its interest. This has led to an intensification of rivalry with Israel and other regional powers.

Intelligence services in the Middle East are also involved in preventing cyberattacks, which pose a growing threat to extremist groups. Protecting critical infrastructures and preventing cyberattacks are essential for maintaining national and regional security.

At the same time, Israel, through Mossad, has had a major impact on the stability of the region through espionage operations and targeted attacks against its enemies, including actions to eliminate the leaders of terrorist organizations and prevent the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by its enemies.

Despite their importance to national and regional security, Middle Eastern intelligence services are often criticized for their abuses of power, excessive surveillance of the population, and the use of repressive techniques. In many cases, intelligence agencies have been implicated in human rights violations, including torture and extrajudicial killings, especially in the context of authoritarian regimes.

Also, the complexity of alliance networks and regional conflicts mean that intelligence services are involved in a constant struggle for influence, which can lead to a lack of influence. These agencies are involved not only in preventing terrorism and protecting internal stability, but also in international conflicts, infiltration and information warfare. In a region marked by political instability and endless conflicts, Middle Eastern intelligence services are essential to protect the region and maintain the balance between regional powers.

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The main threats facing intelligence services in the Middle East

The most important problems within the intelligence community in the Middle East are marked by the presence of an interethnic and religious religious conflict.

The presentation of the main intelligence services in the Middle East aims to examine key agencies and highlight their influence on regional security. The Israeli intelligence community is facing the problems generated, first of all, by the Arab-Israeli conflict, which, in turn, is characterized by a series of features that distinguish it from most of today's conflicts. Among them, I mention:

- the Arab-Israeli conflict dates back to before most known conflicts and continues to this day;

- the number of victims of the two sides is higher than in any conflict;

- the conflict is between one state - Israel and on the other side by more than 20 states supporting an entity that has many of the traits of a state - Palestine;

- both sides claim that they are fully entitled to hold the disputed territory and do not want to make any compromises;

- the conflict takes place between a democratic state that is half a century old and between authoritarian regimes with a new terrorist history;

Also, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unique in terms of several factors:

- the Palestinian side does not recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state;

- there is no reconciliation between the parties;

- both parties claim the same territory;

- Israel cannot fully use the forces at its disposal when the conflict degenerates into violence;

- The Palestinians, who are opponents of the Jewish state, are geographically located within Israeli territory.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is very important for the intelligence community because it functions as a very complex and dynamic matrix, constantly adapting to security requirements. A specificity of this conflict is its concentric capacity, since security requirements are generated in the territorial spheres of the conflict (one inside the other, and Israel is inside the circle). If we look at or analyze this conflict through the prism of this theory, we will notice that within the radius of the largest inner circle are Israel's opponents – the Palestinians, then within the radius of the immediate circle are the states with which Israel neighbors: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and we must take into account the fact that some of them have concluded partnership agreements with Israel. In the third circle we include the states that consider themselves part of the Arab world and are involved in this active conflict, states such as: Iraq, the Persian Gulf states, Yemen, Sudan and North Africa. In the fourth circle are Iran and Pakistan, Muslim powers, which are permanently interested and involved in the conflict.

The military theory of intelligence cooperation argues that secret information about the enemy's capabilities and intentions must be gathered and that the response is prepared based on an assessment of them, this principle in the Middle East, the asymmetry of the actors involved in the coalition against Israel is easily ascertained and why the Arab-Israeli conflict is far from over and how concentric circles are expanding involving even more actors.

The anti-Israel coalition includes all the capacities of those involved, since its inception in the Arab-Israeli conflict, 20 states and the Palestinian entity. When we refer to capabilities, we mention that they mean military, economic, social, diplomatic, internal security, scientific, technological and national resilience resources as a whole. Each actor has its own intentions that it has manifested in this conflict and against the background of these intentions and in response the intelligence services in the Middle East have also developed. The main problem faced by the intelligence services was that most of these states were or are ruled by authoritarian regimes, and their work has been hampered by the impossibility of gaining access to the

intentions of adversaries, which is only possible when states are ruled by democratic regimes.

The centers of power, the intentions of the adversaries and the intensity of the coalition's hostilities against Israel and the degree of involvement of each actor of the coalition have been in a permanent dynamic in recent decades, and this dynamic has contributed to the creation of resilient intelligence services, first of all, but also very active, which punctuate both successes and multiple failures.

Faced with such permanent threats based on various terrorist actions, the activity of the Israeli intelligence services focused on permanently countering the actions of their opponents aimed at destroying the Israeli political entity.

Israel's Intelligence Doctrine

Israel's intelligence doctrine on national security crystallized after the War of Independence. At the time of the signing of the armistice agreements, the newly created state, Israel, had an area of 20,000 square kilometers, and its Jewish population numbered around 750,000 people (of which about 600,000 were already settled in territories before 1940, and 150,000 came during the war), and the minority population was about 120,000.

The newly established state had Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt as neighbors, with which it was in new diplomatic relations, based on armistice agreements. Iraq, which had participated in the war, was not a signatory to these agreements, and at the time of the international recognition of the State of Israel, it was still in a belligerent position with Iraq. In the first quarter century of independence, Israel fought five wars: the War of Independence (1947-1949), the Sinai Campaign (1956), the Six-Day War (1967), the War of Attrition (1970-1971) and the Yom Kippur War (1973), during this 25-year period, the first generation of the Israeli people to emerge in the state of independence formed the basic elements of military intelligence doctrine.

The first basic element of the Israeli intelligence doctrine is deterrence, the practical meaning of which is to create a balance of terror, in which the enemy may know or believe - that an eventual provocation would cost him more than it can lead, more precisely, to a prohibitive response. The principle of active deterrence is a basic one of the military doctrines used by most states that have very aggressive neighbors in their neighborhood or that are declared to be enemies.

The second basic element is the early warning, which has two components: the strategic warning, which requires the infiltration of secret agents at the level of decision-makers to discover the enemy's intentions,

and the tactical and operational warning, which is required at the moment of the outbreak of war and the bellicose plans of the enemies.

The third basic element is "*defeat/subdue*", which represents a broad and high-performance military capability, which guarantees absolute superiority over the enemy, but can also deter in the long run.

The strategic thinking that or the reasoning and functionality of the three basic elements is that even if deterrence may fail or if there is no warning, there is still the real ability to defeat the enemy. Obviously, during the Yom Kippur War, the warning was misinterpreted by those who were in charge of the analysis of secret information at the national level, and a warning that is not interpreted correctly in the intelligence sphere is similar to having no warning at all, and the situation was similar in the case of the attacks of 07.10. 2023, from the Israeli territories carried out by Hamas.

The fourth element of the doctrine is that of moving the war to the enemy's territory as quickly as possible. The reasoning behind this principle is the absence of strategic depth and the understanding that Israel generally does not engage in preemptive wars. Another reasoning behind this element is the attempt to transform the enemy, in the shortest time, from attacker to defender and to minimize the damage caused to one's own territory and its citizens. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to obtain very important, timely secret information about the enemy's capabilities and operative information about the objectives located on enemy territory.

In other words, Israel's military intelligence doctrine is an offensive one, which excludes the option of a preventive war, and the absence of preventive war from its military strategy is consistent with the predictable reaction of the political factor - if Israel attacks first, it will be accused of aggression by the states of the world and international bodies, thus the Israeli governments have emphasized, in their politics, on the way the state is perceived in the West, in general, by the United States, in particular-as a permanent state constrained to be engaged in wars, and when it does get involved, that involvement comes in response to an aggression to which it has been subjected or just to defend itself.

Israeli intelligence services

Israel is known as one of the most secure and innovative nations in the world, and this status is largely due to its world-renowned intelligence services. Israel's intelligence services are essential for national security and for maintaining a strategic advantage in a region marked by conflict and instability.

Established in 1948, Israel has faced significant national security challenges from the beginning, mainly from neighboring states and militant groups. In this context, intelligence services have become a fundamental component of the national defense strategy. The first forms of intelligence

were organized as early as the period of the British Mandate over Palestine, and after 1948, Israeli intelligence quickly evolved to adapt to new threats.

The structure of the intelligence community of the State of Israel - the Military Intelligence Service (IDI)[1], the Institute of Intelligence and Special Operations (Mossad) and the General Security Service (Shabak) - was created in the early 1950s by the Prime Minister of the independent state, David Ben-Gurion.

Organized on the principle of "*information is power*", the intelligence community was created in such a way that there is no single center of power, the Prime Minister being of the opinion that excess of power is a possible source of corruption and abuse. Thus, the leadership of the IDI was subordinated to the Minister of Defense, through the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, the heads of the Mossad and the Shin Bet were to be subordinated to the Prime Minister. Thus, the fields of activity and the limits of the power of the three organizations were also established. The Israel Defense Forces Intelligence Corps was designed as a core service and the largest of them, as it deals with early warning and informational preparation of forces for future wars. From a territorial point of view, the IDI gathers information from within the State of Israel and from abroad. Mossad is in charge of collecting information for the Military Service, as well as the information necessary to carry out its own operations and special operations, meaning any operations carried out in the interest of the State of Israel, which no other body can execute. The Shin Bet deals with internal security, combating subversive activities of any kind and involvement in counterespionage, it operates within the borders of the State of Israel.

It is important to note that, at their establishment, there were three intelligence services, of which only the IDI created research and evaluation capacities from the beginning. The other two were mainly engaged in intelligence gathering, without having research and evaluation capabilities, except for researching information related to their own operations. A mechanism was created to manage the collection of information, the Military Intelligence Service was the only one that carried out both research and assessments, and established and described the threats to the security of the Jewish state, translating them into EEs (Essential Elements of Intelligence) to be then transmitted to Mossad and the Shin Bet, which were their beneficiaries.

The exchange of information between the SMI and Mossad and the Shin Bet has been a very productive cooperation over time. At a later stage, SMI's intelligence collection system appointed its own representative to Mossad's HUMINT unit, thus allowing the two bodies to work in real time and Mossad to share its work. From the 1950s until now, the Mossad has

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[1] Israelian Defence Intelligence.

had the task of preventing hostile activities, specifically global terrorism, namely to prevent the construction of unconventional weapons by Israel's enemies. As a result of this task, Mossad has continuously collected information and increased its research and evaluation capacity in this field, continuing to exchange information with SMI. The research division of the SMI was the national central office to which all requests for information in the country were directed. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Intelligence Corps was not only an investigator and evaluator, but also an independent producer of intelligence in all areas of intelligence, which continued to develop until they reached the proportions necessary to cover a strong country.

Israel is recognized for its advanced intelligence agencies, of which Mossad and Aman are the most prominent:

Mossad is known for its operations outside Israel, focused on espionage and counterterrorism. Mossad plays a key role in protecting national interests and addressing global threats. Notable examples, such as the capture of war criminals or the prevention of nuclear proliferation, highlight its effectiveness[2].

Aman is centered on gathering military intelligence, providing strategic support to the Israeli armed forces and contributing to the planning of military operations. Aman combines intelligence capabilities with advanced technology to assess regional threats[3].

Mossad's full name is the Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations. Mossad operates exclusively outside the borders of the Israeli state, and interactions between Mossad and judicial bodies are minimal. The service does not have a department specialized in interrogations: for such actions Mossad turns to the Shin Bet, which operates on the territory of the Israeli state as an intelligence-gathering agency dealing with counterespionage, subversive acts and counterterrorism. The Shin Bet is an important unit cooperating with IDI-which acts as a research body that deals with the national assessment of armed defense. When a particular situation requires law enforcement, Mossad is assisted by the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) Information Security Department, which reports to the chief of defense and the state prosecutor. The work of the Israeli police is in cooperation with the judiciary.

Right from its inception, Mossad has been in charge of secret contacts with countries that did not have diplomatic relations with Israel. He used his abilities to organize secret meetings with leaders of states with

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[2] Melman, YOSSI, "Inside the Mossad: The Story of Israel's Elite Intelligence Agenc", Cambridge University Press, 2021.
[3] Hacohen, Y., Military Intelligence and National Security in Israel", Harvard University Press Publishing House, 2020.

which Israel had diplomatic relations, but nevertheless, due to certain circumstances, these contacts remain secret.

Mossad's missions are clearly defined: gathering intelligence, analyzing it, conducting security and defense operations, protecting Jews around the world. One of the largest intelligence agencies, Mossad is responsible for gathering intelligence, analyzing and disseminating it, transforming operations into national defense and security support, as well as protecting Jews in the world. The agency reports directly to the Prime Minister of Israel, fulfilling most of Israel's information needs provided through people-to-people contacts and information obtained through the interception of electronic signals or radar communications.

Mossad officially acknowledges that its agents use other methods to gather information and that they are constantly trying to protect their staff[4]. The Mossad has been nominally modeled after the British and American models, respectively MI6 and the CIA, but it is unique in terms of its methods of operation, often being accused of using assassination methods to avoid certain large-scale conflicts, or of permanently carrying out large-scale covert actions.

Against the backdrop of multiple national security threats, from an army of 60,000 soldiers, in 1948, national intelligence agencies such as the Haganah, Lehi and Irgun were taking shape. Of these, the only agency that managed to group and create an intelligence community, the Haganah managed a transformation of its structure in 1949, when Mossad was established.

Its name in Hebrew is the acronym MOSSAD, transliterated - *ha Mossad Merkazi le Modiin Ule -Tafdikim Meyuhadim*, and in the mode of operation it dates back to the date of establishment of the service under the command of Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion[5], in ten different

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[4] The Editors of Encyclopedia Britanica*, „Mossad: Israeli Intelligence Agency", 2018, available at https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mossad, accessed on 14.06.2025..*

[5] David Ben Gurion, David Josef Grün or Gryn, born on October 16 , 1886, in Płońsk, Russian Empire – died December 1973, Ramat Gan, Israel) was an Israeli politician and social democratic statesman , Jewish from Poland, one of the main leaders and ideologists of the Zionist movement, for the self-determination of the Jewish people, and founder of the State of Israel. He was the first prime minister of Israel. He presided over the Israeli government in two periods: May 14, 1948 — January 26, 1954 and November 3, 1955 — June 26, 1963. He was also the first Minister of Defense of Israel and one of the leaders of the Zionist labor movement, of social democratic orientation. Ben-Gurion was at the forefront of the political and military struggle for the creation of the modern Jewish state in Palestine, even at the cost of dividing the country, and was the one who proclaimed the founding of Israel on May 14, 1948. He was the leader of the Zionist movement and chairman of the leadership of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, and then led Israel in its early years. He resolutely defended the authority of the created state and repressed attempts by the right and left to preserve military entities alternative to the single national army (the case of Altalena, Palmahul). This vision led him to decide on the eve of Israel's War of

departments. The minister's statement at the establishment of the agency was: "*For our state, which since its creation has been besieged by its enemies. Information is the first line of defense, we must learn to recognize well everything that happens around us*."

The motto of service is a verse from the Old Testament, which says: "*When there is no wisdom, the people perish, but victory comes through the number of counselors*."[6] From the beginning of its activity, the Mossad was entrusted with rescue missions, sabotage of enemy operations and was assigned numerous assassinations of opponents. Whether or not these loans are true, it is recognized that its approximately 1,200 employees have the unique ability to adapt to uncertain and hostile circumstances, to achieve large-scale goals with few resources, and to persevere in their mission even when overwhelmed by the situations they face. The missions they successfully carried out often had the common element of defending Jewish identity security. Currently, Mossad states that it carries out actions based on the collection and analysis of foreign intelligence, is still subordinate to the Prime Minister and cooperates closely with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the National Defense/Security Commission.

The first leader of the agency was Isser Beeri, who founded the Shin Bet service or the military intelligence department and the Israeli Police from the Shai military wing. His public statement is recognized, in which he stated: "*The moment an intelligence service begins to function according to the law, at that moment it ceases to be an intelligence service*[7]."

AMMAN represents the Military Intelligence Command, subordinated to the Chief of the General Staff of the Army and the Ministry of Defense. The Shin Bet commander holds the rank of major general. Amman is an effective military service, vested with executing special operations abroad, which may exceed the intelligence competences, respectively to engage in executive actions or the use of unconventional means and methods such as counterterrorism, kidnappings, assassinations, sabotage, diversionary propaganda and other forms of psychological warfare.

The Shin Bet is the General/Internal Security Service, also called SHABAK or Shin Bet Khali, also subordinate to the Prime Minister and collaborates with the Ministry of the Prime Minister's Internal Security

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Independence to dissolve the Jewish paramilitary defense forces Haganah (including Palmah), Irgun (Etzel) and Lehi (Stern Group) and establish the Israeli army (Tzahal), source: Shabtai Teveth, Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: from peace to war, Publisher: Oxford University Press, 1985.

[6] The Bible, Old Testament, Proverbs XI:14: "Where no counsel is, the people fall, but the multitude of counselors there is safety".

[7] Ben Geraghty, Black Ops.: The Rise of Special Forces in the CIA, the SAS and Mossad, Editura Pegasus Books, New York, 2010, p. 416.

(Police, Border Police) and the National Commission for Defense/Security. The Shin Bet is the agency responsible for Israel's internal security, with essential roles in preventing terrorist attacks and maintaining internal order. It is often considered an equivalent of the FBI in the United States, but it also has powers to prevent subversion and manage internal threats, including from the Palestinian population.

The Shin Bet is in charge of protecting Israeli political leaders, intercepting internal communications and executing counterintelligence operations. The agency also has an important role in monitoring the activities of terrorist groups and preventing attacks by them.

Over the past decade, as the Middle East has experienced crisis after crisis, and Israel is considered a strong ally of the United States. Numerous critics have argued that the information Mossad provides to the United States tends to be exaggerated or sometimes falsified to motivate policies that promote Israel's strategic defense objectives, but there have also been cases when these policies have not aligned directly with Israeli objectives.

There will still be debates about the moral character of Mossad's actions, its transparency or opacity, whether its actions are justifiable, but the fact remains that few dispute the agency's remarkable reputation for being the most competent, which has created heroes who would sacrifice their security and lives for the support of Israel's cause, which is nothing more than defending identity security.

Of Mossad's operational sections, the Collection Department, the Operational Planning and Coordination Department, and the Political Action and Liaison Department are the most important. The offices are organized both on a national basis and on a functional basis, in relation to the type of mission entrusted to them.

The most recently established intelligence agencies, but with a history of experience of hundreds of years, that have been remarkably successful are the Mossad and Shin Bet, established in 1949 with the state of Israel. The stated goals of the agencies are based on the principles of the Hebrew Bible. The current head of the two services, Prime Minister Beniyamin Netanyahu has constantly emphasized, in his speeches, that it is necessary for the intelligence services to combine ancient and modern methods of espionage, and this is indeed another principle of operation of the two services. For Mossad, another characteristic is the accusation of often being in the shadow of various assassinations called "*on target*", whose justification was found in the ideology written in the Talmud or the Jewish Bible: "*If someone comes to kill you, get up and kill him first!*".[8] The decision to use this method as a secret state policy seems to have belonged to the first prime minister of the Israeli state, David ben Gurion, who

[8] Talmud-Sanhedrin 72a, Bergman, Rise and kill first.

experienced the extent of the Holocaust phenomenon. Because one of the hypotheses of the thesis is how identity can be a trigger for security, it seems supported by Ronen Bergman's statement: "*the instinct to take all measures, even the most aggressive, to defend the Jewish people (was) inscribed in the Israeli DNA*[9]." In his paper, the author estimates that Israel carried out about 2,700 assassinations.

Israeli agencies use a combination of traditional espionage techniques and cutting-edge technologies to track the activities of potential enemies. Israel is also constantly investing in the development of advanced cyber capabilities, which allow it to intervene in the communication infrastructures of enemies and protect its own systems from external attacks.

A remarkable example of the effectiveness of Israeli agencies was Operation *"Cast Lead"* in 2008, when intelligence gathered by the Shin Bet and AMAN allowed Hamas' infrastructure to be destroyed before the organization could launch significant attacks against Israel[10].

One of the biggest challenges for Israeli intelligence is maintaining a balance between protecting national security and respecting human rights. Operating in the occupied territories, monitoring the Palestinian population and intercepting communications have sparked international criticism due to allegations of fundamental rights violations.

Israel's intelligence services have a significant impact not only on Israel's national security, but also on global security. Over the years, Israeli agencies have collaborated with various countries around the world, providing critical information about terrorist threats and helping to prevent attacks on Western states and allies of Israel.

Israel also plays an important role in the global fight against terrorism, having a vast network of partnerships with other intelligence agencies, including the CIA and MI6, in areas such as countering Islamist extremism and preventing nuclear proliferation.

Israeli intelligence is among the most effective and sophisticated in the world, being a central pillar of Israel's national security. Through a combination of advanced espionage, infiltration, and international cooperation techniques, these agencies have been able to protect Israel from multiple external and internal threats. Although Israeli agencies face criticism of their methods, their impact on global and regional security is undeniable, and their intelligence strategies continue to influence developments in the Middle East region and beyond.

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[9] Ronen Bergman, Get Up and Kill First, RAO Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021.
[10] Operation Cast Lead, available at https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/wars-and-operations/operation-cast-lead/, accessed on 14.06.2025.

Arab intelligence services in the vicinity of Israel

The main opponents of the Israeli intelligence services are the Palestinian intelligence agencies. The Palestinian intelligence services were established in the context of the peace process in the 1990s, when the Palestinian National Authority was created with the aim of managing internal problems and promoting security in the Palestinian territories. An important role in this process was also played by international support, especially from the United States, which wanted to stabilize the region.

The Palestinian Intelligence Service (GIS) was created in 1994 with the aim of protecting Palestinian national security. This service has undergone various changes in terms of capabilities, its activity being influenced by internal conflicts between Palestinian factions, in particular Fatah and Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, organizations that in turn have their own intelligence services. The main activity of the Palestinian intelligence service is to prevent militant activities and to collect information about possible attacks by adversaries, especially those coming from those who are regarded as the Israeli occupation regime. These attacks are the main threat to Palestinian national security. Palestinian intelligence is headed by a director who reports directly to the Palestinian prime minister.

The analysis of the information allows the identification of potential threats. The GIS plays a crucial role in assessing the risks associated with the various political and militant factions, as well as Israel's espionage activities.[11]

Egypt, the most militarily powerful state, located in the vicinity of Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian Territories, connects North Africa to the Middle East, and Europe to the Persian Gulf and East Asia, on another axis, through the Suez Canal.

Egypt's special position has led the authorities in Cairo to develop a policy of developing military power, the Egyptian state emphasizes improving the quality and quantity of its military forces. The main rival of the Egyptian state remains Israel, and the armed groups of Sudan and Libya represent secondary threats. Strategic cooperation with the United States ensures the regional military security of the state, and the main threat it faces permanently comes from within and is represented by radical Muslim groups.

From the point of view of national security, the 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel as a result of which Egypt was given back the Sinai peninsula and the eastern borders were established, Egypt does not yet seem stable and still poses a threat to the government in Tel Aviv. The Arab-Israeli war is a

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[11] Jamil Hilal,Where Now Palestine? The Demise of the two-state solution, Zed Book Publishing House, New York, 2023, p. 20.

permanent and exhausting measure of forces between Israel, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon and the Palestinian combat formations, and their stages of development are reference indicators for the state of security in the Middle East.

Since the 1990s, the Egyptian intelligence community has undergone radical transformations, and currently operates with a General Intelligence Service, a Department for State Investigations and Security, and a Military Intelligence Service. The coordination of these three services is carried out by a National Council for Information and Security. Among the main tasks of these intelligence services are: collecting information necessary to ensure state security, preventing risk factors that could affect security and territorial integrity, as well as the political stability of the state, countering terrorist actions inside and outside the country, countering sabotage and attacks against Egyptian institutions, ensuring the security of dignitaries and foreign citizens, actions to combat organized crime, initiation of special actions to collect information from enemy territories.

Syria is the territory in the Middle East, currently at the center of most armed conflicts, since 1976 Syria has deployed part of its armed forces on the territory of Lebanon and managed all its internal confrontations in the neighboring country until 2005, when following a UN resolution it withdrew about 15000 troops from Lebanon. Syria has always needed its neighbor for access to Lebanese ports and, like the other Arab states, has constantly challenged the legitimacy of its other neighbor, Israel. Clearly since 1986, Syria has financially supported and hosted terrorist groups in Iran and Lebanon responsible for maintaining regional terrorism. The army and the secret services, under the leadership of the Ba 'as party, are in a dilemma situation, namely between isolation and accepting peace. The Syrian intelligence services hold key positions in society and have asserted themselves in key situations such as the Arab-Israeli wars12, it has always had tense situations with the Palestine Liberation Organization and has supported the radical organization Hamas and those of the Lebanese Shiites. The Syrian security services have helped Iran in the fight against Iraq and have cordial relations with the Russian Federation. To manage security issues, two organizations operate in Syria that are responsible for intelligence gathering: the Directorate of General Intelligence (inside the state) and the Directorate of Military Intelligence or Bureau II.

The conflict in Syria, which began in 2011, has evolved into a complex civil war, with multiple internal factions and external interventions. In this context, the intelligence services played a key role in shaping the military and political strategy, as well as in coordinating the actions of

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[12] As a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Syria lost the Golan Heights and occupied Lebanon after 1975.

national and international actors. In 2024, Syria's intelligence services maintain their influence in an unstable environment, where war has turned into zonal confrontations and disputes for control of territory continue to be the focal point. The conflict in Syria initially erupted as a protest movement against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, but quickly turned into a complex war, involving various armed groups, including recognized, extremist terrorist groups. International intervention, especially by Russia and the United States, has further complicated the security framework., and currently the regime of Bashar Al-Assad has been replaced by that of the rebels led by the Islamist leader Abu Mohammad al Jolani.

Al-Mukhabarat al-Aam or the Syrian Regime's Intelligence Service was known for its intense use of repression methods, especially during the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Mukhabarat plays a key role in maintaining authoritarian rule in the face of internal protests and external threats, especially from rebels and terrorist organizations.

The Syrian regime's intelligence services, in particular the military intelligence service (Mukhabarat), were essential for maintaining control over the internal situation and countering external threats.

The main Syrian intelligence services are: Mukhabarat – this intelligence service is responsible for monitoring and supervising the activities of Syrian citizens, including opposition groups, and is divided into several branches, each with specific areas of competence. He is popularly known as the "Securitate" and is directly subordinate to the Syrian president. The second Syrian intelligence service is the Army Intelligence Directorate (Amman), and it focuses on external risks and is involved in coordinating intelligence with international partners such as Russia. Syria also has an economic intelligence unit that analyzes the impact of international economic sanctions and monitors the economic activities of enemies.

In the present situation, it is very difficult to specify the state or functionality of the Lebanese intelligence services, as well as of the Syrian ones, in the current anarchy, but before the seizure of the territory by the forces of the Hezbollah group, **the Military Intelligence Bureau (former Bureau II) and the General Security Directorate, a service intended for internal and external counterespionage,** functioned in Lebanon.

There are three Jordanian secret services: the Military Intelligence Service, in charge of information and covert actions, and two civilian services, with responsibilities in the field of counterespionage and internal security, the Directorate of General Security and the General Intelligence Service.

The Palestinian intelligence services have a different way of working and their members come from the military groups that control the Palestinian territories and obtain their information from the Arab intelligence services, most often the Syrian ones. The official intelligence

service is under the command of the Palestinian prime minister and was established in 1968. This service is called Jihaz al Rasd and today it has three very precise missions, which can be found in the three departments: the intelligence department (intended for the collection of information from Israel), the documentation department in the countries that constitute its theater of operations, counterespionage and, of course, the covert actions department. The service became public with the organization of the "Black September" mission, which continues to this day and carries out special missions against the State of Israel.

Terrorist groups have constantly adapted to intelligence needs and have their own intelligence services in the Middle East.

A prime example is Hamas[13], which is an Islamic extremist organization, which became very active at the beginning of the Intifada[14], on

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[13] Hamas in Arabic translates to courage or bravery and is the acronym for "Islamic Resistance Movement" (Hakarat al Muqawamah al Islamiyya) and was linked to Sheikh Ahmed Yssin in Israel in 1978.

[14] The great Palestinian intellectual Edward Said noted that *the intifada* was the only Arabic term that entered the international political vocabulary of the twentieth century. The idea of unarmed uprising contained in the notion of *the Intifada* itself had been applied several times throughout the twentieth century, first in Iraq in 1952, then in Egypt and other Arab countries, before it was taken up and used repeatedly by Palestinian groups. The principle of an *Intifada* (from the verb meaning "to shake") is simple and apparently honorable: the population, especially young people, revolts, but lethal weapons are not used against the forces of order or occupiers, but stones, possibly Molotov cocktails. The occupier represses, but he can kill at any time, because of tension, accident, or because the situation degenerates, and then the blame falls on the police. If we accept a periodization, we could say that the third Intifada is now beginning in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The first was the one mentioned, triggered in 1987 and which lasted until 1993, until the Oslo accords that brought peace between Israel and Arafat's PLO. Then, in 1994, Yasser Arafat received the Nobel Peace Prize, along with Israeli leaders Yitzhak Rabin and Simon Peres. At that time, Arafat was already the president of the Palestinian National Authority. The second *Intifada* was sparked in 2000, against a background of exacerbation of tensions between the two sides. The spark was the visit of the hardline right-wing Israeli prime minister and former general Ariel Sharon to the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, located just above the Temple Wall, the "wall of complaints". In the face of violent protests, the police responded just as violently, then everything expanded and for five years the whole of Israel and the Palestinian territories entered a cycle of violence, including suicide bombings, which caused a total of 3,000 deaths on the Palestinian side and at least a thousand among Israelis, not counting a few dozen foreigners. including tourists. This second Intifada ended in 2005, with the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the construction of the barrier wall along the West Bank, to separate the two entities and communities. The techniques and principle applied in the *Intifada* were, however, and remained, at the same time, highly criticized. It is also called "unarmed aggressive resistance", but it is primarily an instrumentalization of civilians. The real militants stay hidden, direct, but do not participate, while the young recruits, or some who do it spontaneously, go to attack armed soldiers or policemen knowing what they are risking. Finally, Edward Said's remark remains: the *intifada* is the only Arabic term that has entered the contemporary political vocabulary, and so far the Middle East has gone through a number of five intifadas,

the territory of the Gaza Strip, but also in the West Bank. Hamas has carried out numerous violent subversive acts against the State of Israel and its citizens, being outlawed in 1989, but the terrorist organization has never stopped its activity and has constantly regrouped and reinvented itself, gaining the trust of the Palestinians and has permanently entered into partnerships with other terrorist groups that support the Palestinian cause. Together with Fatah and Hezbollah in Iran, they represent the groups that have permanently opposed the Middle East peace process, through their actions and by promoting the anti-Jewish doctrine that has its origin in the Islamic fundamentalist doctrine of the original group, the Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt.

The continuation of the Arab-Israeli war, the large number of Palestinian and Syrian refugees, the socio-economic deprivation of the population in the refugee camps, and the relatively low status of nationalist elements to this day have caused Hamas to spread its influence not only among refugees but also abroad. The dissemination of the idea that the liberation of all Palestinians is a priority in Gaza, together with social factors, have fueled the influence of fundamentalist Islam on a global scale, and under this creed, but also under this pretext, terrorist groups have acquired not only new valences of power but also other forms. Thus, the popularity of the Palestinian and Islamist phenomenon has gained followers and supporters in the West and Europe.

Hamas has argued through the voice of its leaders that it is not only a parallel force, but also an alternative to the almost exclusive control that the Palestine Liberation Organization and its factions represented over the Palestinians in the Territories. Since the early 1990s, Hamas has established itself as an Islamic terrorist group with a political ideology based on adversity for the State of Israel, but also against the Palestine Liberation Organization. Hamas made its policy known through mosques from which it constantly gathered followers and managed to establish a military apparatus called the Mujahideen, which quickly became a guiding force in the Islamist struggle. In December 1991, the Hamas mujahideen assassinated an important Israeli citizen, and this execution radically changed the modus operandi of Hamas, but also of the Israeli intelligence services, because Hamas was the first organization to publicly affirm that jihad is the only means by which the Palestinian problem can be solved and that called on every Muslim in the world to fight. The Mujahideen intensified their actions, especially during the Intifadas, and today they operate as a regular army and are referred to as Al-Mahajadoun Al

availabble at https://yplus.ps/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Said-Edward-The-Question-of-Palestine.pdf, accessed on 15.06.2025.

Falastinioun or Palestinian Holy Fighters, responsible for terrorist attacks against Israeli targets.

Hamas' structure in Gaza and the West Bank is based on a mix of regional and functional power control. Thus, the group has established three sectors: the first, called Daiwah, literally isermonizing, deals with recruitment, distribution of funds and the establishment of meetings between members of the organization, the second sector deals with the planning and execution of terrorist attacks and the last sector is the one intended for gathering intelligence and monitoring those who are suspected of collaborating with the authorities, The sector is called JehazAmm. This sector is also responsible for interrogating and assassinating those who turn out to be against Hamas' policies.

The permanent intelligence sector has changed its form, and the current one is the identification with the Izz al-Din al Qassam action detachment.

Hamas was the first to have its own press office and received permanent funds from the unofficial organizations of Saudi Arabia and Iran, in the form of donations made to the accounts of the charitable organizations that Hamas has in the West.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is Israel's main neighbor and the kingdom plays a crucial role in maintaining regional stability, and its intelligence services have had the role of managing foreign relations with neighbors as well as with external powers. Jordan is surrounded by conflicts, including the civil war in Syria, instability in Iraq and the challenges posed by terrorist groups in the region. This complicated environment has necessitated deepening international cooperation, especially with the United States and other allied Arab states.

The General Directorate of Intelligence (GID) is the main intelligence agency of the kingdom, with the role of protecting national security and monitoring internal and external activities that may threaten the stability of the monarchy state. The GID deals with: collecting, analyzing and evaluating information on external and internal threats, monitoring opposition groups and terrorist organizations. The GID works closely with international intelligence agencies, particularly those in the United States, in sharing information about international terrorism and regional threats. This collaboration is essential for the international intelligence community.

In **Saudi Arabia**, under the coordination of the Prime Minister and the command of the Saudi royal house, the intelligence service recognized as Al Mukhabarat Al A'amah operates and is the main intelligence agency in Saudi Arabia, focused on internal security and terrorism prevention.

The Agency operates in an unstable regional context, working with international partners to counter threats to the Saudi regime and the security

of the Gulf. In light of recent political and economic changes, its role is becoming increasingly essential.

Iranian intelligence is essential to ensuring national security and protecting the theocratic regime. Since the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, these agencies have evolved and adapted to the geopolitical context.

Iran operates through the Ministry of Intelligence (Vezarat-e Etellaat). This important service deals with the holding and analysis of internal and external information. It is the main body responsible for counterintelligence and the prevention of subversive activities. The Ministry is active in monitoring the political opposition and ethnic minorities, playing a significant role in the repression of dissidents.

Another military intelligence service, part of the Ministry of Intelligence, is the intelligence unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). This is not only a militant force, but also indeed the most important actor in the field of intelligence. The IRGC conducts its own espionage operations and has special units that deal with foreign intelligence, with the aim of protecting the interests of the Iranian state in the Middle East and other regions[15].

MOIS is the military intelligence unit part of the IRGC, which deals with both internal and external intelligence, being responsible for countering threats to the Islamic regime and national security. Using asymmetric tactics, the IRGC is involved in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, demonstrating its ability to operate across borders[16].

Al-Quds Force or the Special Division of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), Al-Quds Force is responsible for espionage and influence operations in foreign affairs, especially within other countries in the Middle East. Al-Quds Force is involved in supporting Islamist militant groups and strengthening Iran's influence in the region.

Iranian intelligence services use extremist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas and various Iraqi militias to expand their influence in the region. These groups are often logistically and financially supported, and their work is coordinated by Iranian agencies whose interest is to hide information about the nuclear program in the context of the rivalry with Saudi Arabia, the US and Israel. Iran has invested a lot of resources in its intelligence agencies to support military and political actions in neighboring regions such as Syria and Yemen, and the main criticism of these services focuses on abuses of power, human rights violations and lack of transparency.

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[15] Thomas Nissen, „Iran's Intelligence and Security Apparatus: A profile", Oxford University Press Publishing House, London, 2020.
[16] R. Takeyh, *The Guarded Empire: Iran's Revolutionary Guards and the Quest for Power*, Yale University Press Publishing House, London, 2021, p. 146.

Lately, Iran has been made clear in the context of the war in the Middle East, through its military intervention and the involvement of the Hezbollah organization.

Hezbollah was founded following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the Lebanese civil war that lasted until 1990, amid an environment favorable to the development of extremist groups animated by the feeling of having been wronged by the war and which constantly accused themselves of being affiliated with major global security actors. In 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon, its motivation was to eliminate Fatah, which allowed another group to emerge or regroup under a different name what was left of the group's extremist members, under the name Hezbollah. Against this background, militant activity and frequent interventions by external forces, including Syrian and Israeli, led to increased support for extremist movements that promised to protect local communities, especially Shiite ones. Iranian support in the formation and organization of Hezbollah was essential, with Iranian agents helping to train fighters and create a well-defined structure.[17]

Hezbollah is today a terrorist organization of Shiite fundamentalist Islamist origin, which includes military, political and social branches and operates in the Middle East and Iran.

Hezbollah's military wing, referred to as the "Resistance Forces" (al-Muqawama) is responsible for the fronts on which the organization is fighting and has developed significant military capability using advanced technology and asymmetric warfare strategies. Hezbollah plays an active role in Lebanese politics, having representatives in the Lebanese Parliament and in the government, thus Hezbollah has promoted its political and economic agenda, anticipating the interests of the Shiite community and the social comfort of Lebanese citizens. Hezbollah, like other Islamist organizations, provides social services, such as education and healthcare, within its communities, which helps maintain popular support. Social interest activities have helped the organization to strengthen its support base and legitimacy among the population. The main link between Hezbollah and Iran is that the organization's ideology is based on Islamist and nationalist principles, inspired by the doctrine of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.18Over the decades, Hezbollah has evolved from a party focused on resistance against Israel to a regional player with influence in the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, as well as into a strategic alliance with Iran. Since 2011, the civil war in Syria has created a context in which Hezbollah has decided to intervene. The stability of Bashar al Assad's regime was essential for the

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[17] August Richard Norton, *Hezbollah-A short history,* Princeton University Press Publishing House, 2007, p. 81.
[18] Samuel Heller, The Strategy of Hezbollah, Survival Magazine, volume 49, no. 2, 2007.

continuation of Iranian or Shiite influence in the area, and Hezbollah considered that the protection of this regime was crucial for its existence, but it also saw the opportunity to use advanced combat techniques in this war, which it would implement in the current Arab-Israeli war. Currently, following Hezbollah's involvement in the war in Syria, the group of Lebanese origin has partnerships with multiple radical Islamist groups.

Hezbollah has developed a series of asymmetric warfare tactics, aimed at countering Israeli technical and air superiority, such as: the use of long-range missiles, urban warfare strategies, capabilities to disperse or deploy combat forces, and uses modern means of combat such as intelligence-gathering drones and Ghass-1 and M-600 missiles[19].

The current conflict between Israel and Hezbollah can be found in the recent history of 2006, when Hezbollah captured Israeli soldiers in revenge for the frequent bombings carried out by the Israeli army in northern Lebanon, a situation that showed the Israeli state that Hezbollah has an impressive military capacity, that it can respond forcefully to attacks and that its position in Lebanon is a very important one. At the same time, this conflict led to the reconfiguration of Israel's military strategy.

In 2024, tensions between Hezbollah and Israel have increased significantly, largely due to regional developments, but also amid the involvement of various international powers, including the United States, Russia and Iran. These countries have stratified interests in the area, and the Israeli state has demonstrated since the beginning of the conflict that it wants the destruction of the terrorist organization[20].

Hezbollah's intelligence services are central to its holistic operating strategy, helping to coordinate military activities, develop politics, and build popular support. Currently, Hezbollah's intelligence services are organized into several divisions, each of which has a specific role within the organization's operations: the Military Intelligence Division (Al-Mukhabarat al-'Askariyya), which is in charge of collecting information about enemy forces, their strategies and movements on the ground, the Counterintelligence Division, which has the role of preventing the infiltration of opponents into the ranks of Hezbollah, monitoring and suppressing the activities of Hezbollah's opposition groups. The Political Intelligence Unit analyzes the impact of international and regional political decisions on Hezbollah, providing strategic advice to the organization's leadership.

Intelligence collaboration or cooperation with Iran, in particular with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, has continuously improved the

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[19] Eyal Zisser, „Hezbollha's Terrorist Capabilities: an assessment", Institute for National Security Studies Publishing House, 2018.
[20] Shmuel Bar, „The Strategic Enviroment of Hezbollah in 2024", Midlle Eastern Studies Journal, 2024.

capabilities of Hezbollah's intelligence services, this collaboration also allows for the exchange of tactical and technological data, as well as the training of personnel.

Conclusions

The Middle East is one of the world's most complex regions, marked by a tumultuous history, endless conflicts, and ongoing geopolitical tensions. The intelligence services in this region play an essential role in shaping domestic and foreign policy, decisively influencing government decisions and military operations. Intelligence services in the Middle East have evolved in response to the security challenges posed by internal and external conflicts. Over the years, these agencies have been influenced by the following factors:

- Colonialism – many of these services were shaped by colonial influences, having roots in the security structures created by the European colonial powers.

- The Cold War – the confrontations between ideological blocs contributed to the consolidation of some intelligence agencies in the Middle Eastern states, which acted as allies or opponents of the superpowers.

- internal and external conflicts - conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli War, conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Libya have led to an expansion of the role of intelligence services in monitoring threats and planning interventions.

The most spectacular element of the security paradigm shift was the fact that the world after September 11, 2001 returned to an era of religious and cultural wars-a world in which Islam was trying to gain the hegemony it had lost, and radical Islam was paving the way for it. After September 11, 2001, the international intelligence community turned its attention to Israel, the only Western country in the Middle East with the greatest experience in terrorism.

These features affected the role played by the secret intelligence services, continue to influence today and will continue in the future.

Despite political and ideological rivalries, in recent decades, Middle Eastern intelligence services have been forced to cooperate to deal with common threats. For example, in the face of the danger posed by ISIS and other extremist groups, many countries in the region have recognized the need to share information and coordinate actions to combat terrorism. Intelligence services in countries such as Israel, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey and the Persian Gulf countries have collaborated in informal or formal networks to support counterterrorism operations and expose the plans of extremist groups.

Intelligence services from various Arab states also worked together to combat Hezbollah and other Lebanese groups that threatened the stability of the region. Collaboration between intelligence agencies is essential not

only in the fight against terrorism, but also in the prevention of proxy wars and sectarian conflicts.

One of the most important functions of intelligence services in the Middle East is to prevent radicalization and recruit new members into extremist groups. These agencies carefully monitor online activity and suspicious behaviour among the population, especially among vulnerable youth, who may be attracted to extremist ideologies. The intelligence services also carry out infiltration operations and prevent terrorist attacks.

In Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, intelligence agencies have been able to prevent multiple terrorist attacks by gathering key information about extremist groups' plans and implementing preventive security measures. In addition, they play a crucial role in combating the recruitment of members from religious or ethnic minorities, which risk becoming a habit. Cyber threats, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the massive migration of populations due to protracted conflicts also pose new challenges for intelligence services. In this context, agencies need to be highly adaptable and work closely with international actors to safeguard regional security.

Intelligence services in the Middle East play a key role in maintaining regional stability. From combating terrorism and religious extremism, to preventing sectarian conflicts and protecting critical infrastructure, these agencies are actively involved in strengthening security and preventing the escalation of violence. However, the internal and external challenges faced by these agencies, as well as the geopolitical complexity of the region, require a high degree of cooperation, adaptability and efficiency in order for the stability of the region to be maintained in the face of an uncertain future.

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