

Striking Back... After Munich

**The Secret Assassination Campaign to Track
Down the Perpetrators of the Munich Massacre**

Last month, *Zman* covered in detail the harrowing Munich Massacre. This month, we follow up with an article on the Israeli government's reaction: a long term, wide-ranging, bloody search-and-hunt campaign targeting those connected to the horrific terrorist attack. Encompassing some of the most audacious plans and employing some of the most ingenious spy tactics, Mossad agents staked out suspected terrorist leaders across Europe and the Middle East. Often they got their man, but sometimes they failed miserably, not only calling into question the agency's competence but fanning the fierce controversy over the morality of the so-called "Wrath of G-d" and similar operations.



Moshe Miller

September 5, 1972
Around 11:30 PM

At tense Golda Meir sat in a comfortable chair, surrounded by cabinet members, eyes glued to the television screen despite her fatigue. She felt as if the weight of the excruciating anticipation of the entire nation—Jews all over the world, even—was pressing upon her. She knew that the West German operation to rescue the Israeli Olympic athletes held hostage by Arab terrorists was underway, and she could only hope that they would achieve the best possible outcome (see *Zman* 52—*Pesach* 5774).

Suddenly, the television announcer interrupted his report. “This just in from Reuters,” he said in an authoritative tone. “All nine Israeli hostages have been rescued and are safe. Munich police successfully ambushed the Arab terrorists at the Fürstenfeldbruck airport.”

Mrs. Meir broke into a big grin, looking joyfully at the advisors surrounding her. The Germans had done it! Everyone toasted the amazing success of the rescue operation.

September 6, 2:55 AM

The secure phone in Prime Minister Meir’s private residence rang, and she groggily reached out her hand to answer it. On the line was Zvi Zamir, Israel’s Mossad chief. His tone was grave.

“I have bad news, Golda. We just returned from the airport. All nine were killed... not one was saved.”

“But, but the news... surely it’s not...” she gasped in shock.

“I was there,” Zamir stated clearly. “I saw what happened with my own eyes. No one’s left.”

Her hands shaking, Golda Meir replaced the phone on its hook. The look of shock on her face was soon replaced with fury.

Meir recoiled internally from the hornet’s sting of indignation, dejection and profound



Zvi Zamir, Israel's Mossad chief
at the time of the Munich Massacre.

disappointment. From her youth, she had worked unwaveringly toward the establishment of an independent Jewish homeland in Palestine. She was one of the 24 signatories on Israel’s declaration of independence. According to Zionist ideology, Israel was “supposed to” single-handedly solve the problem of Jewish vulnerability, to be the one country that would spare no means to protect Jews all over the world. Israel had failed, and she was its leader.

In a devastatingly symbolic move, on soil drenched with the Jewish blood of the Holocaust, terrorists who denied Israel’s very right to exist had shed innocent Israeli blood with stunning audacity. For Golda Meir, it was an insult never to be forgotten.

September 8, 1972

It was only the third day after the terrible events at Munich had reached their disastrous conclusion. While debate had raged among political leaders about the precise tactics necessary to respond to the cold-blooded murder of the Jewish athletes, one thing was clear, at least according to the Israeli media: the populace was demanding a response.

That Friday, dozens of fighter jets took off from air bases inside Israel, heading toward the borders with Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. In the largest military operation since the 1967 war, the air force simultaneously attacked at least 10 PLO guerilla bases across the borders, including one just a

stone’s throw from Damascus. Two hundred terrorists were killed, along with at least 11 bystanders. Syrian military planes sent to respond to Israel’s violation of its airspace were downed.

Eight days later, on September 16, a huge number of Israeli tanks rolled into southern Lebanon. Over 1,300 infantrymen participated in the raid. One hundred fifty tons of bombs were dropped over the course of two days. One hundred thirty homes suspected of housing PLO terrorists were destroyed. The IDF reported 45 killed and 16 captured.

On September 12, Golda Meir had stood up in the Knesset and made her intentions, and that of the Israeli government, quite explicit:

From the blood-drenched history of the Jewish nation, we learn that violence which begins with the murder of Jews ends with the spread of violence and danger to all people, in all nations... We have no choice but to strike at terrorist organizations wherever we can reach them. That is our obligation to ourselves and to peace. We shall fulfill that obligation undauntedly.

The speech was given in the midst of Israel’s large-scale military reprisal against terrorist bases, which had temporarily knocked the Arab resistance movement off its feet. Not that a retaliation had been unexpected. The Syrian military had already begun readying its defenses for a possible strike on Damascus as soon as the news emerged from Munich. Nevertheless, the final scope and accuracy of the Israeli strikes was both mystifying and terrifying to Israel’s enemies. The destruction of so many terrorist bases threw the Arab world into shock and confusion. The terrorists themselves were dumbfounded at how many supposedly secret training camps and hideouts had been located by Israeli intelligence and annihilated by its armed forces in a matter of weeks.

The terrorists killed and the bases destroyed had nothing to do with Black



Members of Israeli sports organizations form a Guard of Honor in front of command cars bearing the bodies of victims of the Munich Massacre during memorial services at Lod Airport.



Israeli tanks in the early 1970s.



A stadium in southern Lebanon that had been used as a PLO arms depot. Shown after an Israeli bombing.

September, per se. That amorphous terror group, which unabashedly took “credit” for the massacre, would prove much harder to pin down. In fact, both masterminds of the Munich Massacre, Abu Iyad and Abu Daoud, admitted later at different times that Black September was simply the name Fatah used

