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Published 20:54 13.01.12 | Latest update 20:54 13.01.12

'Israeli Mossad agents posed as CIA spies to recruit terrorists to fight against Iran'

Foreign Policy magazine cites CIA memos from 2007-2008 that the Mossad recruited members of Jundallah terror group to fight against Tehran; U.S. was reportedly furious with Israel and moved to limit joint intelligence programs.

By Barak Ravid

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Israeli Mossad agents posed as CIA officers in order to recruit members of a Pakistani terror group to carry out assassinations and attacks against the regime in Iran, Foreign Policy revealed on Friday, quoting U.S. intelligence memos.

Foreign Policy's Mark Perry reported that the Mossad operation was carried out in 2007-2008, behind the back of the U.S. government, and infuriated then U.S. President George W. Bush.

Perry quotes a number of American intelligence officials and claims that the Mossad agents used American dollars and U.S. passports to pose as CIA spies to try to recruit members of Jundallah, a Pakistan-based Sunni extremist organization that has carried out a series of attacks in Iran and assassinations of government officials.

According to the report, Israel's recruitment attempts took place mostly in London, right under the nose of U.S. intelligence officials.

"It's amazing what the Israelis thought they could get away with," Foreign Policy quoted an intelligence officer as saying. "Their recruitment activities were nearly in the open. They apparently didn't give a damn what we thought."

According to a currently serving U.S. intelligence officer, Perry reports, when Bush was briefed on the information he "went absolutely ballistic."

"The report sparked White House concerns that Israel's program was putting Americans at risk," the intelligence officer told Perry. "There's no question that the U.S. has cooperated with Israel in intelligence-gathering operations against the Iranians, but this was different. No matter what anyone thinks, we're not in the business of assassinating Iranian officials or killing Iranian civilians."

The intelligence officer said that the Bush administration continued to deal with the affair until the end of his term. He noted that Israel's operation jeopardized the U.S. administration's fragile relationship with Pakistan, which was under immense pressure from Iran to crack down on Jundallah.

According to the intelligence officer, a senior administration official vowed to "take the gloves off" with Israel, but ultimately the U.S. did nothing.

"In the end it was just easier to do nothing than to, you know, rock the boat," the intelligence officer said.

Apparently, the Mossad operation caused a fiery debate among Bush's national security team and it was only resolved when U.S. President Barack Obama drastically scaled back joint U.S.-Israel intelligence programs targeting Iran, Perry quotes several serving and retired officers as saying.

The U.S. State Department has vehemently denied any ties to Jundallah and many U.S. intelligence officials remained angry with Israel over the 2007-2008 operation.

"Israel is supposed to be working with us, not against us," Foreign Policy quoted an intelligence officer as saying. "If they want to shed blood, it would help a lot if it was their blood and not ours. You know, they're supposed to be a strategic asset. Well, guess what? There are a lot of people now, important people, who just don't think that's true."

The CIA, the White House, and the Mossad failed to respond to the Foreign Policy report by the time it went to press.

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