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## IRAN'S LAST CARD



By [Yaacov Lipszyc](#) | JULY 15, 2025



**Experts predict the Islamic Republic will ramp up the use of the only weapon it has left**



*Photos: AP images*

**Missile sirens in Israel may have gone quiet for the time being, but a new threat has emerged in recent weeks. Tehran's tentacles extend throughout Europe and the US as well, and experts predict the Islamic Republic will ramp up the use of the only weapon it has left.**

**T**he statement issued by Israeli police a few days ago was almost aggressively terse: "The Southern District Fraud Unit arrested an Israeli citizen from Be'er Sheva, 25, yesterday at Ben-Gurion Airport on suspicion of security activity involving contact with an Iranian foreign agent. The arrest was carried out on the advice of the Shin Bet intelligence service."

And yet behind those few lines lies what may well be the most alarming development for Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's government since the temporary ceasefires with its external enemies. The case marks the sixth arrest — in the span of just ten days — of an Israeli citizen suspected of collaborating with the Iranian regime.

This is no longer just a domestic concern — it's a matter of global security. The missile sirens may have gone quiet, but a different kind of alarm is growing louder by the day: the fear of Iranian espionage, not just in Israel but across the Western world.

In recent days, Israeli law enforcement detained two young men between the ages of 18 and 20 from Tiberias, a 33-year-old man from Moshav Hamra in the Jordan Valley, and a couple in their thirties from Raanana. All of them, authorities suspect, had some form of contact with Iranian handlers.

The methods in all the cases were strikingly similar and could be grouped into two broad approaches. The first involves infiltrating left-leaning chat groups on Telegram — a platform notorious for being more difficult to monitor or hack than WhatsApp — where users post content accusing the Israeli government of “genocide.” Once individuals respond to these messages, handlers initiate private conversations and begin assigning them seemingly minor tasks: filming themselves scrawling “Netanyahu is a dictator” inside a cabinet and setting it on fire, for instance. Payment is rendered in cryptocurrency.

The second approach is more brazen: locating individuals in financial distress and willing to do almost anything for cash. That appears to have been the case with the man from Moshav Hamra, who reportedly carried out various small acts in exchange for 2,000 shekels — barely \$600.

Similar arrests have taken place in Germany and Denmark in recent days, while in the UK, Parliament’s Intelligence and Security Committee has issued a warning about the “rising and unpredictable” threat posed by Iran, urging the government to intensify countermeasures.

To better understand this phenomenon — and just how far Tehran’s tentacles might reach — *Mishpacha* spoke with three experts in the field: Saeid Golkar, senior fellow at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change and professor of political science at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga; Dr. Ardavan Khoshnood, a criminologist and professor at Lund University in Sweden, specializing in Iranian foreign policy, terrorism, and the IRGC; and Beni Sabti, Iran analyst at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Jerusalem.

All three are Iranian-born exiles. They know this subject not just academically but intimately. And they are in rare agreement: “Iran is going to escalate its global attacks through espionage.”

## Dumbification

These three experts contend that Iran’s espionage efforts should not be viewed in the same light as traditional cloak-and-dagger operations.

Saeid Golkar, who has written extensively on the Basij militia and IRGC — including his acclaimed book *Captive Society: The Basij Militia and Social Control in Post-Revolutionary Iran* — says that the regime in Tehran presents a façade more fearsome than the reality. “The Iranian intelligence apparatus is complex, resting primarily on three pillars: the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Intelligence Organization. But don’t be fooled. What we’re seeing in Iran is what I call a ‘dumbification’ of the state. In the Islamic Republic, loyalty — real or perceived — is valued far more than competence.”

He cites the recent 12-day war as an example. “They presented themselves as a superpower. Israel humiliated them. I compare Iran to a steroid-filled bodybuilder — impressive from a distance but internally weak. This is a regime that for 46 years has systematically sidelined its experts and promoted ideologically loyal mediocrities. That applies across all levels of governance. So there’s simply no comparing Iran’s espionage capabilities to those of MI-6, Mossad, or the CIA.”

Dr. Khoshnood concurs, but adds that the regime’s spy agencies employ less cloak, more dagger: “Iran is not a global espionage superpower. But it is a global espionage actor. It conducts operations on several fronts — in the US, Canada, Europe, the Middle East. Most of these efforts fail — but what’s striking is that Iran doesn’t care if the world knows it’s behind them. Most countries go to great lengths to maintain plausible deniability. With Iran, you see their fingerprints, their footprints, all over the operation — and they’re fine with that.”

Beni Sabti offers a final piece of the puzzle. “This isn’t classic Soviet-style intelligence work. They’re not collecting information for the long term. Their focus is quick and disruptive. They don’t wait years to strike. They want to hurt you now — and be gone within a few months, at most.”

And that makes the exploits of Iran’s agents much less daring.

“You’ll never find an Iranian version of Eli Cohen,” Dr. Saeid Golkar tells me. “No matter how hard you look, there’s no such figure in their history. The people who carry out Iran’s intelligence work are mostly losers. They’re not patriots, not professionals. They’re just people doing it for money — or angry individuals who’ve turned against the places they live in. Some are radical leftists. And the assignments they’re given are usually pretty pitiful.”

Dr. Ardavan Khoshnood says the tools in the Islamic Republic’s undercover arsenal are very limited. “Iran is constantly trying to find individuals inside exile organizations, within Israeli intelligence, the IDF, or even just among regular Israeli citizens. But the only tool they really have is money. That’s it. They can’t train elite spies. So instead, they try to identify people in strategic positions whom they can pay for information.”

## How They Infiltrate

Although Iranian spies may not be the most skilled in the industry, they still need to try to blend into their target societies. And unfortunately, they find fertile environments for their work in Western countries.

“In most cases, Iranian operatives disguise themselves as part of a religious or cultural institution,” the INSS’s Beni Sabti explains. “They open Islamic centers or launch organizations that offer public benefits — free kindergartens, food banks, charity networks, nursing homes. It all looks benevolent at first. That’s how they attract people. Slowly, they begin to introduce anti-Western, anti-Israel rhetoric — or even rhetoric against the host country itself. They do this gradually, and governments tend to overlook it. And this happens everywhere — Europe, Latin America, the United States, Canada.”

Over time, Sabti says, they identify individuals who resonate with that worldview — people who are not just ideologically aligned but willing to act. “They brainwash them slowly, grooming them as future agents. In some cases, they even send them to Iran for further indoctrination. When they come back, they’re not the same. They’ve become terrorists.”

According to Saeid Golkar, recruiting in Europe is not only easier, it's often more fruitful. "There are several reasons. First, there's a large Iranian diaspora across Europe and the US. Within that population, they can find disillusioned people — individuals who haven't adapted, who are unemployed, who feel left behind. Others want to return to Iran but are afraid to do so. By collaborating, they hope to earn an unofficial amnesty that allows them to visit family. And beyond expat Iranians, the Islamic Republic also targets other Shia-aligned refugees — Lebanese, Pakistanis, Afghans — who can be drawn into the same orbit."

Dr. Golkar says that Israel is the Iranians' primary target — but not their only one. "Yes, they're collecting information about Jewish communities and Israeli citizens in the US and Europe. But just as important — perhaps even more so — is the work they're doing against Iranian opposition groups abroad. They try to infiltrate these groups, divide them, destabilize them.

"They know that if the opposition — leftists, monarchists, other factions — ever managed to unify, the regime would be in real trouble. So they gather intel — names, meeting locations, photographs. Then they send those images back to activists with veiled threats, just to let them know: We see you. It's a campaign of intimidation, more than intelligence in the traditional sense."

Aside from using the usual Muslim front operations, Iranian agents also insert themselves into the West in a far more prosaic way — as members of the foreign service.

"All countries use embassies for some level of intelligence gathering," says Dr. Khoshnood. "That's not unusual. But Iran has taken this to another level. Its embassies are no longer just diplomatic outposts. They've become active nodes for covert operations."

A case in point: Asadollah Asadi, an Iranian diplomat stationed in Vienna, who was arrested in Belgium while trafficking explosives for what was allegedly a planned terrorist attack on an opposition rally in France. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison but later released in a prisoner swap with Belgium.

"That case revealed what many of us already knew," Khoshnood says. "Iranian diplomats are not diplomats. They're intelligence officers."

Dr. Golkar says the problem goes down to the very roots. "The Iranian Foreign Ministry has around 4,000 employees," he explains. "And almost all of them are involved in promoting espionage abroad. We shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking it's a civilian institution like in other countries. Many of its ambassadors come directly from the IRGC."

## After the Bomb

The joint Israeli-American operation earlier this year dealt a serious blow to Iran's nuclear program. What remains unclear is how Iran will respond — and how it might restructure its military strategy. In the short term, though, it's clear that Iran is bent on exacting some sort of revenge. For these analysts, the answer is already taking shape: espionage and terrorism, carried out through individual actors rather than missiles or armies.

"With no bombs, no missiles, all they have left is terror and espionage," says Beni Sabti.

Dr. Khoshnood agrees, and says we should expect Iran to ramp up its covert activities. "If the regime has truly been weakened in its nuclear and missile capabilities, then what we're looking at now is a wounded animal. And I believe that we're going to see a far more offensive, far more aggressive posture from Iran — particularly in terms of terrorist attacks and covert operations abroad."

Golkar says that stripped of its fearsome military threats, Iran will engage in operations less characteristic of a state actor. "Once they saw that their missile program had failed, that their military wasn't as strong as they claimed, they pivoted. The Islamic Republic of Iran is evolving. It's less of a sovereign state now and more of a global terrorist organization — something closer to ISIS or Al-Qaeda than to a normal country."

This assessment is chilling because it is entirely plausible. Iran's agents may not resemble the characters in Cold War spy thrillers. They're petty, desperate, unremarkable. But they're everywhere — and that is the point.

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