

Book review of: Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Angel: The Egyptian spy who saved Israel* (NY: Harper, 2016). 374 pages. In *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2020): 883–885.

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On 6 October 1973, more than 100,000 Egyptian soldiers crossed the Suez Canal and stormed the small Israeli army bases manned by some 500 soldiers. This was hardly a match. The surprise attack took place on the most important day in the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur. Israel, known for its intelligence capabilities, took heavy casualties for its intelligence failure.

For some time, it is known that Israel had a spy in the highest echelons of Egyptian politics; a spy who worked directly for President Sadat, who was Sadat's man for special missions. How come that despite having such a senior agent, Israel was still taken by surprise?

Bar-Joseph focuses his book on the enigmatic figure of Ashraf Marwan, known as "The Angel", who worked for Egypt's arch enemy - Israel. Uri Bar-Joseph aims to answer the following questions:

Who was Ashraf Marwan?

Why did Marwan choose to become an Israeli spy?

Was Marwan an Israeli agent or an Egyptian-Israeli double agent?

Why, despite Marwan's warnings, was Israel surprised on 6 October 1973?

Who had interest to expose Marwan?

Who killed Marwan?

Bar-Joseph answers most of the questions. His research is meticulous, based on primary and secondary sources, including Israeli government documents, unpublished sources and interviews. The writing is engaging and compelling, and the conclusions are well reasoned and convincing. While one cannot be absolutely certain that Bar-Joseph's thinking is accurate, it is certainly plausible. Still, some questions remain open, for instance, why Marwan was silent in the crucial period between early September and October 4, 1973? And if the Egyptians knew that Marwan was an Israeli spy already in December 2002, why did they wait so much time until they killed him in June 2007?

The Prologue (pp. 3-5) sets the scene: the rich, complex and secretive life of Ashraf Marwan had come to an end when he mysteriously "fell" from his balcony. And then, slowly, the story unfolds, from the moment that Marwan was born in 1944 until his mysterious, premature death. The first chapter covers the period between 1944 and 1970. The most important milestone was Marwan's wedding to President Nasser's daughter Mona in July 1966. Thereafter, Marwan started to work in the

President's Office. However, Nasser did not trust his son-in-law. Marwan felt that he was constantly watched and sought an escape route. In 1968, he arrived in London to pursue a master's degree in chemistry. Marwan loved London but Nasser wanted him close to him and ordered him to return to Egypt. Marwan was again, under the close watch of the president who grew to dislike his son-in-law to the extent that he begged Mona to divorce Marwan. Mona refused.

In 1970, Marwan offered his services to Israel. Bar-Joseph suggests several explanations why he did this, but is unable to provide a decisive answer. Clearly, Marwan had difficult relationships with Nasser. He was also greedy and craved a lifestyle that his salary as a public servant could not afford. Marwan was very ambitious, with a tremendous ego, and thought of himself as the cleverest person in the room. Bar-Joseph argues that Marwan was a narcissist with "an infinite craving for honour, power, and influence" (p. 30). He also had a need for stimulus, an adventurer who sought risks. Bar-Joseph thinks that "the act of betrayal itself gave Marwan a sense of adventure that his stormy psyche desperately needed" (p. 32). These explanations are all plausible but, for me, insufficient to explain why a member of Nasser's family was willing to put himself and his family under such a tremendous risk of operating in the Lion's Den under the watchful eye of one of the most feared people in Egypt at that time, Sami Sharaf.

Chapter 2 describes when and how Marwan established contact with the Israeli Mossad. From the first meeting, Marwan provided invaluable information, described as "something that happens only once in a thousand years" (p. 43). Bar-Joseph discusses the Mossad doubts about Marwan's credibility, deliberations about financial incentives and about Marwan's handler. The handler has a special and very important role to play in engineering espionage. In turn, Chapter 3 concerns the role of MI, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) Military Intelligence. The Mossad and MI are partners but also rivals. Their rivalry might have grave consequences when these two organisations do not see eye to eye. This was the case in 1973.

Chapter 4 details the implications of President Nasser's death in 1971 on Marwan. When Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, consolidated his power, Marwan enjoyed a meteoric rise in Egyptian politics as he was made Director General of the President's Office. Israel now had access to the most vital and sensitive secrets of its arch enemy. Soon enough, the quality of information that was provided by Marwan, impressive as it was until then, grew in its importance even further. In chapter 5, Bar-Joseph divulges that Marwan gave Israel the order of battle for the entire Egyptian army (p. 101). Marwan also provided discussions of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, conversations between top generals and their Soviet counterparts, transcripts of meetings between Egyptian officials and officials of other Arab states, and transcripts of the military General Staff meetings (p. 102).

Having access to this invaluable information provided by their angel spy, why was Israel surprised in October 1973? Bar-Joseph dedicates the bulk of his book, chapters 5-11, to this question. He explains Egypt's war abilities and weaknesses, Sadat's aims, the mistakes of the Israeli intelligence, and Marwan's conduct. Bar-Joseph's explanations are detailed, comprehensive and sensible. There is no doubt in his mind that Marwan provided sufficient information and warning about the looming war. Alas, those were underestimated and/or ignored by the Israeli decision-makers. According to Bar-Joseph, Marwan was highly frustrated by the fact that his warning on the eve of the Yom Kippur War had not been immediately heeded by the Israelis (pp. 240, 267).

Marwan continued to work for the Mossad after the Yom Kippur War, but his importance declined for the Israelis when he was dismissed from his role in the President's Office in March 1976 (p. 252). Marwan delivered information to Israel up until the 1990s. In 1981, President Sadat was assassinated and replaced by Hosni Mubarak, a long-time rival of Marwan. Soon after Mubarak was sworn into the presidency, Marwan moved to London (p. 271).

Chapter 12 details Marwan's business affairs, his friends and rivals. Marwan led a very comfortable life as an affluent multimillionaire in London. However, things changed for the worse for him in 2002 when rumours began to spread about Marwan's spying career as an Israeli agent. Bar-Joseph argues that former head of MI, General Eli Zeira, was the one who irresponsibly exposed Marwan's identity (pp. 292-300).

On June 27, 2007, Marwan fell out of his apartment balcony and died. Chapter 13 explains that this was not suicide, and that the people who were behind Marwan's death were Egyptian agents. Former Head of Mossad, Zvi Zamir, said: "We have lost the greatest source in our history... And we lost him because of criminal negligence... and I failed to protect him" (p. 320).

This book tells an intriguing story about a complex man who played a crucial role in the events leading to one of Israel's bloodiest wars. At times, the book reads like a spy thriller. It is fascinating in its insights, captivating as it unfolds the string of events that started when Marwan contacted the Israeli embassy in London and offered his services. It is a book about intelligence, human frailties, conceptions and misconceptions. It is an unusual academic book because of its thriller-style, and it is certainly not a common espionage book because of its academic nature. The mixture of styles makes this book quite special.

Bar-Joseph has served as an intelligence analyst in the Israel Defence Forces. He has deep understanding of the intelligence world in general, and of the Yom Kippur War in particular. This book will be of interest not only to scholars who research the Israeli-Arab conflict and espionage, but also to the general public at large.