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**Strategic Intelligence for  
Strategic Outcomes:  
Operation Rising Lion an  
instructive case study for  
Indian Security Establishment  
to invest in Contemporary  
Intelligence Capabilities**

**DP PANDEY**

**CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES**

**Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw**, better known as Sam “Bahadur”, was the 8th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS). It was under his command that the Indian forces achieved a spectacular victory in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Starting from 1932, when he joined the first batch at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), his distinguished military career spanned over four decades and five wars, including World War II. He was the first of only two Field Marshals in the Indian Army. Sam Manekshaw’s contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. He was a soldier’s soldier and a General’s General. He was outspoken and stood by his convictions. He was immensely popular within the Services and among civilians of all ages. Boyish charm, wit and humour were other notable qualities of independent India’s best known soldier. Apart from hardcore military affairs, the Field Marshal took immense interest in strategic studies and national security issues. Owing to this unique blend of qualities, a grateful nation honoured him with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in 1968 and 1972 respectively.



**Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC**  
**1914-2008**

CLAWS Occasional Papers are dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw

# **Strategic Intelligence for Strategic Outcomes: Operation Rising Lion an instructive case study for Indian Security Establishment to invest in Contemporary Intelligence Capabilities**

**D P Pandey**



Centre for Land Warfare Studies  
New Delhi



**Editorial Team : CLAWS**

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Centre for Land Warfare Studies

RPSO Complex, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt, New Delhi 110010

Phone +91-11-25691308 Fax: +91-11-25692347

Email: [landwarfare@gmail.com](mailto:landwarfare@gmail.com), website: [www.claws.co.in](http://www.claws.co.in)

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# **Strategic Intelligence for Strategic Outcomes: Operation Rising Lion an instructive case study for Indian Security Establishment to invest in Contemporary Intelligence Capabilities**

*“The world is supported by four things: Truth, Knowledge, Wealth, and Spies.” – Chanakya*

## **Introduction**

The recently concluded Israel and Iran conflict offers transformative lessons to the Indian security establishment. While Iran would have had a successful intelligence based military engagements but not much information is available in the open domain. However, when analysing the military operations conducted by Israel during Operation Rising Lion the centrality of long-term, multi layered intelligence, ranging from strategic operational and tactical levels, in shaping the strategic outcomes of military interventions is clearly evidenced. Therefore, this paper will primarily base its arguments for the policy makers of the Indian security establishment by fleshing out the essentials of the operations conducted by Israel that were based totally on the ground work painstakingly laid out by their intelligence agencies at a distant country Iran, 1500 km away across land and air space of two countries, Jordan and Iraq.

When challenges of overstretch in military operations for twenty months against multiple entities in a volatile and hate filled environment, and relative isolation in the world compels a country to yet use force against an existential threat, a major regional power, the strategic complexities are in a realm never experienced or evidenced in recent history. Prolonged war or slow burn of conflict was not an option obviously thus Israel was compelled for a surgical, short and incisive military operation and disengage thereafter rapidly before major pain was inflicted. Such a military venture had to be premised not only on strategic intelligence but also necessitates the support of the intelligence agencies through the operational and tactical realms. It was an impossible mission but Mossad and other intelligence agencies of Israel duly supported by private players succeeded to shock Iran and the world by enabling achievement of all essential strategic objectives within 12 days, shortest ever conflict the recent history of the region.

Obviously, for the information of the Indian security establishment, the groundwork for an impossible task was not laid down when the threat emerged. The investments were made by the intelligence agencies of Israel over decades, both human and technological, within their own country, in Iran, and all over the world, so as to empower the decision makers of the time with options and choices so that the strategic objectives were met without much resistance from the target country. The role of intelligence, in an extremely fluid, volatile and uncertain world, is to cater for as many contingencies as possible, offering the National security establishments options and opportunities, whenever necessitated. Operation Rising Lion happened, not only because of compulsions, but also because the intelligence groundwork enabling intervention at short notice, despite multitudes of challenges in terms of live conflicts were being faced and managed by Israel, was available. It was also due to the opportunities created



by the intelligence agencies of Israel that allowed their decision makers to take the call.

The most telling and compelling effort of the Israeli intelligence was that they not only provided valuable strategic intelligence but also led the military strikes at the operational and tactical levels. Such an engagement across the entire spectrum of a conflict by the intelligence agencies of the country have few examples in history. One may refer to the British action in Falklands or to the intervention by the USA in Afghanistan but these were at a very low and discrete levels. However, in future, as technology enables destructive engagements at long distances with precision, the lead taken by the intelligence agencies is going to be emulated with more finesse and deadly outcomes in the entire spectrum of international relations through wars, conflicts and even during peacetime.

Operation Rising Lion, is one of the most audacious and surgically precise intelligence-led military campaigns in modern history, that targeted Iran's nuclear weapons program, in its complete manifestations i.e. physical infrastructure and knowledge spectrum including the key scientists and data bases. The intelligence agencies allowed Israel to showcase unwavering resolve to counter any existential threat posed by a major regional power on cusp of becoming a nuclear weapon state and its proxies, even in the face of global political ambiguity, fighting a running battle within its territory and multiple international and domestic constraints.

### **Historical Context: Iran's Nuclear Program, Apprehensions of Regional Powers including Israel, concerns of the World and the obtaining Geopolitical Environment**

Iran was once darling of the Western powers and a key ally of the USA.<sup>1</sup> They had a nuclear program ambition that was not

frowned upon. All that changed in 1979, with the Islamic Revolution. Iran pivoted sharply to become a revolutionary theocracy, preaching global resistance to Western and Israeli “oppression.” Nuclear energy, initially supported by the West, was repurposed as a symbol of technological sovereignty and regional hegemony.

Under the two Supreme Leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Khomeini, who held the position from 1979 until his death in 1989 and Ali Khamenei, who has held the position for more than 35 years since Khomeini's death,<sup>2</sup> the nuclear ambition only grew more entrenched. It was framed as both a deterrent and a symbol of divine resistance. Despite Iran's claims that its nuclear pursuits were peaceful, its secrecy, refusal to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and underground enrichment activities fed widespread international scepticism.

Two overtly stated aims of Iran's past and current dispensation, “Supremacy in the Islamic World”<sup>3</sup> and “Death to Israel/USA” made matters worse polarising Iran away from the US led western powers and Israel. Iran also isolated itself from the other regional powers and entities, all of them Islamic nations, through its public enunciations and exploiting the proxies for hegemonistic ambitions to achieve “supremacy amongst the Islamic ummah”. A Shia hegemony in Sunni majority region was clearly a major miscalculation. However, Iran pursued its twin agenda with unparalleled fixation with proxy terror groups of all shades, interfering and intervening in all countries in the region. All kinetic and non-kinetic application of proxy forces towards the hegemonistic ambitions was manageable by the regional powers but the Iranian attempts towards becoming the nuclear power, that would have provided a clear edge and leverage in a fractured and tumultuous environment, was unacceptable. For Israel, it was an existential challenge.

The proxy threats, bombings, assassinations, terror attacks and such other acts by plethora of Iranian proxies such as Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis and likes in the region were manageable through pre-emption<sup>4</sup> or punishment post incident. But a nuclear armed Iran would be a defining threat and a leverage that neither Israel nor the Western powers could provide guarantee from, particularly when it was made out to be a power bestowed for theocratic divinity.<sup>5</sup>

The situation had worsened with an open secret that Israel had possessed nuclear capability since 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Unconfirmed reports suggested that Israel had nearly 90 nuclear bombs. This has fuelled the desire of Iranian theocratic regime ever since for a competitive religious superiority or at least parity with the Nation they most disliked.

While other countries in the region were uninterested in the nuclear capability of Israel, fructification of the nuclear ambition by Iran would have surely led to similar acquisition attempts through a parity race in the region. King Salman of Saudi Arabia, in a clear statement, had articulated that if Iran has a nuclear bomb the Saudis will also procure one.<sup>7</sup> The silent escalations among Turkiye, Egypt, UAE, among others was quite well known. This could have resulted in a similar nuclear race as in Asia where there were already four nuclear powers, China, India, North Korea and Pakistan. Avoidance of such a situation and a regional nuclear race also became a strategic objective of the USA and other powers of the West.

Past four decades and plus had failed to tame or change the strategic direction of the Iranian regime that had only hardened its stance with passage of time for nuclear capability. The international community, particularly Western powers including the United States, had pursued diplomatic and economic means to delay and

deter Iran's nuclear progression. However, Iran's opaque and resilient nuclear program—with underground enrichment sites, hardened facilities, and a strong ideological commitment—persisted despite sanctions and diplomatic overtures. Even covert cyberattacks (Stuxnet) failed to make adequate dent to the nuclear program. All international negotiations and pressure tactics failed to alter Iran's strategic direction.

The recent intelligence, flawed, manipulated or correct, reports indicated that Iran had achieved significantly high levels of uranium enrichment to develop more than nine nuclear bombs and was nearing weaponisation. This created a palpable sense of urgency in Israel. Time was running out for Israel that was already overcommitted in Gaza.

The current US administration, led by Trump, having been voted to power on the platform of war avoidance and promise of closing the ongoing ones in the world, was not looking to escalate the situation. Having failed to bring about ceasefire in the Ukraine – Russia and the Israel – Hamas conflicts, there was nothing to show for its constituency in the USA as the midterm elections were nearing. The self-proclaimed success in bringing about ceasefire between India and Pakistan in May 2025 also backfired as the Indian government rejected such claims explicitly and publicly.

Already fatigued with number of flashpoints in the world, the countries of relevance were themselves struggling with management of slowing down of economy, loss of jobs and radicalisation and polarisation on account of migrations. As such the international and world organisations had lost all relevance in the world having failed to control the large number of ongoing conflicts and handle other global challenges. The line was crossed when the 60 days period for talks on nuclear issue passed with Iran not responding favourably to the American overtures.

## Israel's Operational Commitments and Constraints provided an Opportunity for Iran

Israel's was already stretched in Gaza where the primary aim and promise of rescuing the hostages had only been partially achieved. The Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his administration were under extreme pressure due to the intelligence failure of 07 October 2023 wherein the Hamas terrorists had attacked across Israel and killed 1200 people and taken 251 hostages.<sup>8</sup> While many had been returned in an expensive and one-sided prisoner exchange where Hamas benefitted, nearly 50 hostages remained in captivity in the Gaza Strip. Of the remaining hostages, it was believed approximately 30 had already died. While entire Gaza strip had been turned over, virtually razed to the ground, more than 50,000 Palestinians died and nearly 1,30,000 injured and/ or maimed since the conflict started, yet Hamas was remained active, live and still under control, even though their entire leadership had been neutralised.

On the other front, Israel was battling Hezbollah in Lebanon. Though in an intelligence operation, exploding pagers, nearly entire leadership and even middle rung functionaries of Hezbollah were neutralized, they remained active and alive threat. Better armed and trained, Hezbollah was far superior to Hamas. They were also managing the extremely volatile and uncertain front in Syria that seemed stable on exit of Assad and change of hands with new dispensation, HTS (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham), a Sunni Islamist political wing aligned with Al Qaeda earlier, having taken charge. The situation was fragile and evolving.

Israeli leadership was also embroiled in staving off pressure from the international community that had already gone to an extent of holding a trial in the International Court of Justice at behest of South Africa. Opening up of another front with Iran, was

untenable and unrealistic. Iran knew the compulsions of Israel. It was aware of the reluctance of the USA to be further engaged beyond sanctions as it was already involved in other geopolitical turmoil of ongoing multiple conflicts and was engaged into a tariff and trade war with nearly all countries of the world. The volatile and uncertain world environment where countries were focussed on their respective domestic survivals, provided an opportunity to Iran for hastening the nuclear program boldly.

For Israel, fighting on multiple fronts, and with domestic population seeking a pause after being embroiled in the conflict for 20 months, war was not an option. It could also not get into a long-drawn aerial conflict, sitting 1,500 kms away, with Iran, an equally powerful country. Militarily Iran was 14th and Israel was 17th as per the Global Firepower Index.<sup>9</sup> There was need for a short, sharp, incisive, clear operational execution to disable the nuclear capability either permanently or for a period of time.

## **Central Role of Intelligence in Operation Rising Lion**

### **Strategic Aim of Operation Rising Lion**

Operation Rising Lion or Operation Am Kalavi the name was derived from a biblical verse, to symbolise strength of Israel and determination, comparing the nation to a victorious lion.<sup>10</sup> The strategic outcome for Operation Rising Lion was precise. It was to destroy the Iranian nuclear program.

To destroy a nuclear ambition of a country that had been at work for nearly five decades entailed multiple challenges and was nearly impossible to achieve. The Iranians were well aware of the desires and possible attempts to degrade the nuclear program not only by Israel but also by the regional and world powers. They had taken adequate measures to spread the various elements of the nuclear program across the country and taken the most critical ones

underground. The scientists and key members of the nuclear program with the knowledge base were guarded and protected zealously. There were redundancies factored into the plan. The nuclear weapon delivery platforms, the ballistic missiles, were equally well guarded and most of these and the missiles were also located in hardened shelters or underground facilities.

Therefore, the task to achieve the stated outcome was extremely difficult, particularly when the distance involved for conducting air operations or directed ballistic missile attacks had to transit through air spaces of at least two countries, Jordan and Iraq, for the shortest distance covering minimum 1500 kms and much more to the exact sites. The air defence systems of the Iranians were extremely advanced and dense and there was enough response time to available to defend against the Israeli Air Force or their Ballistic missiles. Sabotage of large number of well defended and spread-out facilities was not an option.

Brig Gen (Res.) Amnon Sofrin of Israel in an interview had stated that to demolish the Iranian nuclear program Israel had two main objectives. The first one was to attack the nuclear facilities, and also kill the most important scientists' part of "the weaponisation group", that was responsible to assemble the bomb, when the developing process has been completed and to integrate it on the warhead of a ballistic missile, that will be the platform to carry it to its target.

He had added that the second objective towards disabling the nuclear ambition would be also to demolish the ballistic missiles program because it was the main and only platform available to Iran to carry a nuclear warhead. As the supreme commander of the IRGC and the commander of the IRGC's Air force were responsible to develop and activate the ballistic missiles, their elimination was also an imperative.<sup>11</sup> Another outcome of disabling the ballistic

missile systems was to degrade the response, post military strikes, to attack the Israeli military infrastructure and civilian population. The Iranians had an effective ballistic missile and drone program that had the capability of overwhelming the multi layered air defence system of Israel centred around the Iron Dome and US Patriot systems.

To subdue, delay and make the response of the Iranian hierarchy sluggish, once the operations commenced, it was also imperative to neutralise key commanders. While as the events unfolded key military and intelligence commanders were targeted but the political and religious leaders were left untouched. It was to convey the message that Operation Rising Lion had a restricted aim and that was to destroy the nuclear program without any further expansion or escalation of the conflict.

In summary, the destruction or degrading the nuclear program, including deep underground sites, degrading of the ballistic missile systems, killing of the key military and intelligence commanders and also the scientists involved in the weaponisation program all spread over the vast Iranian territory and well-guarded and defended was an impossible mission. To allow the operation to progress uninterrupted and smoothly, the extensive and excellent air defence systems had to be breached, disabled and destroyed, if possible. These were also critical part of the Iranian Armed Forces and were well protected.

Israel had to achieve all these within few days without escalating the short and sharp military action into a long drawn slow bleed and burn conflict or a full-blown war. Operation Rising Lion had to be executed with shock and awe, as a 'first-strike decisive blitz' avoiding escalation, collateral damage, and war, ensuring capitulation of Iranians and disengagement within days before the pain was inflicted on its population. Such a feat from a



significant distance, without boots on ground, against a professional Armed Force that was prepared for such an eventuality was impossible.

### **Centrality of Strategic Intelligence in Play during Operation Rising Lion**

To achieve the stated objectives of Operation Rising Lion set by the leadership, even in part, the primary prerequisite was intelligence. The number and significance of targets and the fluidity involved along with stipulations of short and swift military operation avoiding war or even a long-drawn conflict, mandated an intelligence problem for the entire operational spectrum, strategic to tactical. The success or failure of the military operation was to hinge on Strategic intelligence that informs high-level planning, status of the nuclear program in terms of enrichment levels and quantity, the locations of the enriched uranium and the nuclear sites with targeting specifics. There were other data and details vital in the realm of operational intelligence to execute current operational plan, and tactical intelligence for immediate actions.<sup>12</sup> Due to the nature of the operations to be undertaken, all levels fused into one rather than being interlinked for success of the military strikes. Yet the strategic intelligence, the advance status of the nuclear program wherein Iran had the requisite highly enriched Uranium for making nine or more nuclear bombs, shaped Israel's pre-emptive strike and provided Jus ad Bellum for the military operation.

### **Mossad at the Helm**

With diplomatic efforts exhausted and military deterrence no longer sufficient, Israel turned to its most trusted and effective institution, Mossad. Known globally for its audacity, precision, and reach, Mossad was tasked with laying the groundwork for a mission that would demand unparalleled levels of stealth,

coordination, and overwhelming technological knowledge and superiority to subdue the enemy and execute the strikes without putting boots on ground.

Mossad, (Hebrew: “Central Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations”), is one of the three major intelligence organisations of Israel, along with Aman (military intelligence) and Shin Bet (internal security). The Mossad is concerned with foreign intelligence gathering, intelligence analysis, and covert operations. In Operation Rising Lion, Mossad was the lead agency.

For over decades, Israel’s external intelligence agency, Mossad, has been one of the world’s most feared and admired covert organizations. Known for eliminating threats before they reach Israeli soil, Mossad, since inception, had conducted high-risk missions globally—from the capture of Nazi war criminals to disrupting Hezbollah’s logistical networks. They were like ghosts and referred to as the best in the world. But Operation Rising Lion marked a new zenith. It wasn’t a single raid or targeted assassination—it was a full-spectrum, intelligence-led military campaign carried out across a hardened sovereign state’s territory, without detection or resistance.

**Building of Spy Network and Creation of Target Folders.** Such intelligence operations demand time, energy, funds, and commitment over a significant period of time to plant or turn agents and moles. What made the operation viable was Mossad’s decades-long infiltration of Iran’s defence and nuclear ecosystem built on meticulous planning, human intelligence (HUMINT) cultivation, and technological integration. Israeli intelligence had been tracking Iranian nuclear scientists, military leadership, and logistical infrastructure through a blend of satellite imagery, digital footprint analysis, cyber surveillance, and deep undercover operations. By embedding human assets across military and

scientific echelons and marrying that HUMINT with SIGINT, ELINT, and cyber capabilities, Israel created a real-time, actionable map of Iran's nuclear and missile programs.

The success of the operation hinged on the accuracy of this intelligence. Identifying and confirming the whereabouts of top-tier Iranian officials and scientists in a secretive, tightly controlled regime was a feat unto itself. Many of the individuals targeted were considered untouchable, moving under heavy protection and rarely appearing in public.

Mossad not only tracked permanent bases such as offices or residences of key figures but understood behavioural routines – when specific scientists were home, when commanders changed locations, and what security protocols were in place. This pattern-of-life intelligence was crucial for minimizing collateral damage and maximizing operational efficiency.

The entire operation was built around the local intelligence assets, deep-cover agents and the advanced digital technology manned and supported by even civilian experts that played a critical role in the planning and execution.<sup>13</sup>

It is believed that Mossad had infiltrated deep within IRGC, AEOI (Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran), Ministry of Defence and had recruited disillusioned scientists, junior officers amongst others who were on the payroll for decades. The intelligence agencies had exploited the technological superiority for SIGINT, ELINT and Cyber Surveillance. Using Satellite and cast footprints the data bank of radar facilities, SAM sites, Command and Control nodes was exhaustively prepared. The electronic footprints were collated through intercepts on military networks, low-grade military wireless and Iranian communications and by calibrated cyber breaches for access to internal databases by staging fake orders and spoofed IDs. Detailed intelligence and signatures were

farmed by Unit 8200, the technological intelligence division of Israel.<sup>14</sup>

What set Operation Rising Lion apart from previous Israeli strikes, and any military operation in the world ever, was the unprecedented integration of human intelligence with real-time digital surveillance. By employing advanced biometrics, facial recognition, and pattern-of-life analysis, Israeli operatives could monitor and predict the movements of key figures with surgical precision. This blend allowed not only for accurate targeting but also for minimising collateral damage—an essential consideration given the broader regional and world sensitivities, and controlling escalation.

In particular, identifying and eliminating nuclear scientists in secure locations required not just knowledge of geography but intimate awareness of Iranian security practices. The precision of these hits suggests Israel had deep-rooted human assets embedded within the Iranian security apparatus, a theory that continues to reverberate within intelligence circles globally.

The fear and suspicion were palpable of being tracked through mobile phones and killed, and yet Iranians could not protect Ali Shademani, the newly appointed commander of the Iranian Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters (The Principal body coordinating and planning joint military operations within the Iranian Armed Forces. It operates directly under the General Staff). He was killed on 17 June 2025, just days after his predecessor, Gholam Ali Rashid, was similarly killed in the Israeli strike on 13 June 2025. It was well known that Israel used mobile tracking to assassinate individuals in Iran. Killing of Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas political commander in Tehran on 24 Jul 2024 was widely quoted as an example in Iran.<sup>15</sup>

The elimination of Shademani after a gap of merely few days, even after top leaders and commanders were killed on 13 June,

demonstrated the intelligence reach of Mossad, despite the efforts of the Islamic Republic.

## **Intelligence Agencies Driven Execution of the Operation Rising Lion**

**Decapitation Strike Strategy.** Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, June 2025, surely was unlucky for Iranians in many ways. The Israeli ballistic missiles, loitering munitions, kamikaze drones smashed into the air defence systems, ballistic launchers and storage facilities and also killed large number of key commanders, who died without the knowledge of the commencement of Operation Rising Lion. And then the Israeli Air Force arrived and operated with impunity sweeping across the huge Iranian territory bombing the important nuclear sites, critical for the nuclear program and many other military targets. The Iranian air force and the air defence were unable to respond even symbolically. These strikes across a distance of 1500 kms from Israeli airspace, shocked both Iran and the global community with the sheer audacity, scale and first strike success achieved.

The pivotal role in the success of initial strikes and even thereafter was not that of the Israeli Defence Forces but their intelligence agencies who had provided the crucial intelligence folders and participated as well in the kinetic operations from outside and inside the territory of Iran. This contribution was exemplary, out of the syllabus and any teachings worldwide and of the scale that had no comparable reference in the military history.



Picture courtesy India Today - Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan, the three important nuclear sites of Iran, were struck repeatedly in the 12 Days Operation Lion Rise by Israel.

**Three-pronged Mission Approach of the Intelligence Based Military Operation.** The entire surprise, shock and success hinged on a three-pronged mission approach. Eliminate top military and intelligence commanders and attack the command-and-control network through kinetic and non-kinetic means for decision paralysis and disable the air defence systems. Thereafter follow the strikes to neutralise essential elements of the nuclear program such as the uranium enrichment sites and assassinate key scientists with knowledge and experience of the nuclear program and its weaponisation. The last one was to neutralise the long-range ballistic missile capabilities that could strike Israeli population, the centre of gravity, 1500 kms away. In the entire spectrum of the three-pronged mission approach, provide the intelligence support for direct targeting and the support the Special Forces elements to infiltrate, sustain, survive and operate from within the Iranian territory.

One of the operation's most decisive elements was the simultaneous targeting of Iran's top military and nuclear

commanders. According to the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), the Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Armed Forces, the head of the IRGC, the Aerospace Commander, and senior nuclear scientists were all killed in the initial wave – many in their sleep. The decapitation strategy effectively paralyzed the Iranian chain of command before it could retaliate. The strikes also disabled the Air Defence systems including the radars, the anti-air missile launchers and the command-and-control systems allowing the Israeli Air Force complete air superiority.

**Unique and Distinctive Three-Layered Role of the Israeli Intelligence in Execution of Operation Rising Lion.** The first and foremost layer, that formed the bedrock of the entire operation, was decades of collation of accurate intelligence by the operatives of Israel using human assets, agents and more importantly technology. Without these data and even live digital signatures to locate, identify, track and confirm the targets, especially the humans whose movements were unpredictable, no kinetic or non-kinetic action was conceivable. Killing the scientists and military leadership by firing missiles, drones' systems or loitering munitions, with minimum collaterals was achievable with excellent and pinpoint intelligence. Jamming or disabling, through kinetic or cyber, of various passive and active military systems was doable only because reliable and comprehensive digital and physical intelligence library was compiled assiduously.

The second layer of the intelligence operation was active logistical support inside the enemy country for complementing the military operations. While such actions have been conducted earlier by other countries but the scale of the logistical support was staggering. The support comprised of insertion of weapons, drones, loitering munitions, missiles and also the Special Forces operatives well in advance to support the operations as they unfolded.

Without deep strategic intelligence network developed over decades at various levels of the Iranian regime, the logistics and secrecy involved in the entire project was unimaginable. Mossad, it is reported, was able to place the Special Forces teams and weapons across the territory of Iran and in close proximity of Tehran and critical Air Defence systems in an elaborate manner. Technologically modified vehicles were smuggled into Iran from where attacks were launched. The missiles, drones and special forces were smuggled into Iran via Turkey, Kurdistan and probably Oman with false manifests and decoy convoys.<sup>16</sup> The technologically modified vehicles with concealed 'kamikaze drones' and FPV-ready trucks were smuggled through or altered in garages locally.

The ultimate dare of the intelligence support operation by Mossad was placing of ballistic missile systems within Iran and launching them on commencement of the operation. Mossad operatives even build a covert drone base near Tehran from which loitering munitions (kamikaze drones) were launched, destroying high-value missile silos and radar installations.<sup>17</sup> Most of the ballistic missile launchers were destroyed before they could even participate in the Iranian retaliation.

The credit goes to the Mossad and its affiliates, that conducting a large-scale logistics support operation within Iran, an authoritarian regime based on theocracy, where suspicion and distrust is absolute and overt and covert surveillance of the common people, the disgruntled and disaffected is carried out with diligence and ruthlessness.

The third layer, was active participation by the intelligence operatives in the Operation Rising Lion in support of the military strikes as they hit the targets designated across Iran. A daring shift from classical framework of provisioning intelligence, Mossad



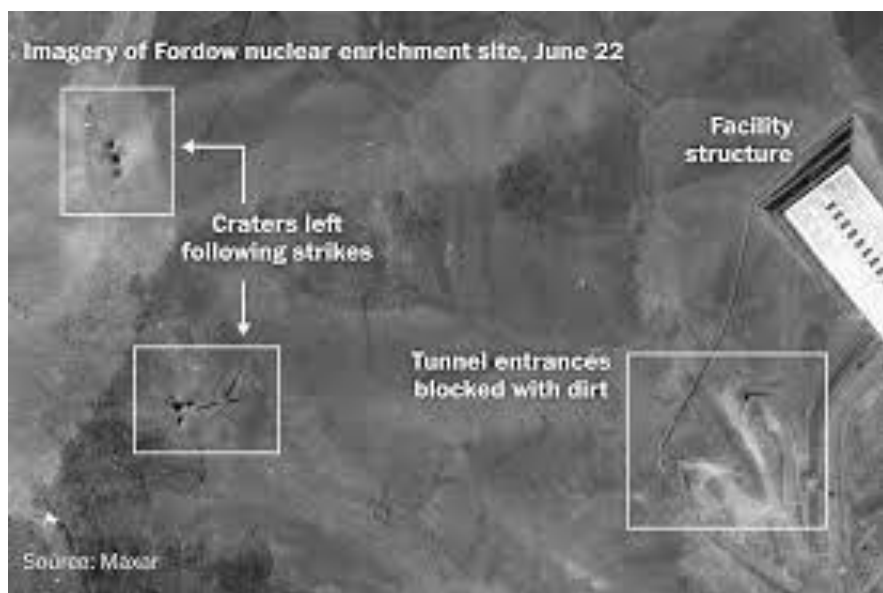
stepped up to participate in direct operations complementing the military strikes. They launched kamikaze drones and conducted cyber-attacks to disable or destroy the critical components of the air defence systems so as to enable the Israeli Air force to operate for critical periods of time in the Iranian air space without any resistance. This was the most critical part of the direct contribution by the intelligence operatives. Killing the entire hierarchy of the military and intelligence commanders to lend the Iranian response delayed, sluggish and confused was a noteworthy achievement.

## **Strategic Objectives Achieved**

**Damage to Nuclear Program.** While the truth of the extent and scale of damage to the nuclear program of Iran will take time to emerge, if at all, it can be safely assumed that there will be a degree of delay and pushback in timelines after analysis of the footage of the strikes on the nuclear sites that has been recorded as evidence. There are claims of 400 kgs of weapon grade highly enriched uranium having been taken out to a safe place allowing Iranians to have adequate material to weaponise more than nine bombs. However, with killing of the key scientists, and significant damage to important nuclear sites including the data bank of knowledge, even though some may have been retrieved or untouched, the degree of assurance to weaponise would have been reduced. This delay provides some additional time for diplomacy or other engagements to change the strategic direction of Iran.

**Military End State of the Intelligence Operation.** The shock and awe and disbelief when the missiles, bombs, kamikaze drones and loitering munitions started smashing into the designated targets in early hours of 13 June 2025 in a coordinated manner all across Iran with cyber-attacks was absolute. The disabling and degrading of the command-and-control systems at the operational and tactical levels and neutralisation of key and the highest

commanders of military and intelligence left Iran bereft of the strategic guidance and orders, all in the space of few hours, was the sum total of achieving a perfect military end state. The domination in the military space continued for the entire period of 12 days conflict. The Air Defence remained inoperable for the entire duration, allowing even the American B2 spirit strategic bombers, seven in total, to fly all the way from their operating base in Missouri, to discharge 12 GBU 57 MOP (Massive Ordnance Penetrator) on Natanz and Fordow nuclear sites in 25 minutes on 22 June 2025 as part of Operation Midnight Hammer, and fly back uncontested to their base completing an uneventful 37 hours journey.<sup>18</sup>



Courtesy: The Washington Post - Imagery of the Fordow nuclear enrichment site on June 22, 2025 after being hit by GBU 57, the Bunker Busters.

**Avoidance of War through Moral and Political Calculations and Escalation Control.** Despite its aggressive execution, Operation Rising Lion carefully avoided religious and political

leadership targets and steered clear of civilian infrastructure. This deliberate restraint was not due to a lack of information—intelligence on such individuals existed—but a strategic choice aimed at preserving escalation control. The conflict was contained within the military domain disallowing any opportunity or excuse to escalate by Iran. It left Iran without justification for a full-scale retaliatory war, providing Israel with diplomatic space for potential ceasefire negotiations.

This operational restraint underscored another key aspect of strategic intelligence, the ability to shape not only tactics but also post-operation diplomacy. By avoiding mass casualties and public infrastructure, Israel maintained the high moral ground, a crucial asset in international relations.

Therefore, war was avoided and so was the long-drawn conflict. The ceasefire was accepted on 24 June 2025, within 12 days of operation allowing Israel to resume the operations in Gaza with renewed focus.

**Dent in Image of Iran Externally and Internally.** The dent to the image of Iran has been complete due to the out-and-out surprise and the elaborate intelligence operations conducted from within the Iranian territory. The purge that has since been followed will further fuel suspicion, disaffection and fear in the society. The replacements of critical commanders at the topmost levels also will find the adjustment and control difficult. An overhaul of the entire military and intelligence ecosystem will set the Iranian military back by few years.

More importantly, the silence of the regional countries was deafening throughout the conflict. Only polite noises by few but no proactive or preventive support came forth. The side lining of the proxies was also clearly evident. Houthis were bought out, Hamas destroyed, and Hezbollah severely decapitated and there was no

Assad in Syria to extend military or diplomatic support. Iran was clearly isolated and exposed.

Internally, the chinks through the comprehensive intelligence operations were evident. While the Supreme Leader had to be in a safe place, the absence of the military and political commanders spoke volumes of the challenges the Islamic Republic was faced with. The threat, only to scare monger, of regime change found ears and that ensured clamping down of the country.

### **Iran's Strategic Miscalculation, Intelligence Failure and Yet a Robust Response**

Iran, is an authoritative and extremely controlled and repressive regime where trust amongst top leaders, religious, political and military, is virtually non-existent. The Iranians live by suspicion and are extremely careful and protective about the location of the military assets, top leadership movements and particularly all aspects of their nuclear program including the scientists. Yet to harvest first rate and pinpointed intelligence speaks volumes of Israeli intelligence.

Most telling was the Iran's counter intelligence failure. With the 60 days warning period for nuclear talks by the USA nearing, the Iranians should have appreciated the war plans of the Israeli Armed Forces and discerned indications of the massive intelligence operations unfolding within Iran and military plans shifting in Israel. While the geo political environment and commitment of Israel in multiple operations in the region indicated that no major military operation could have been taken, but ruling out such an action from a committed enemy, that had been significantly and similarly hurt on 7 October 2023 due to massive intelligence failure, for a reaction was flawed. The warning bells should have gone up, when inputs started emerging in the environment of the near nuclear weaponisation capability of Iran. If this input was planted

or flawed, the possibility of build up for a justification to conduct a military strike as in the case of Iraq, where the canard of Weapon of Mass Destruction was similarly used to invade and carryout regime change, should have alerted the Iranians. And if the information was true, then Iran should have been overly cautious. Israel, USA and the other regional powers could not afford to have a nuclear Iran due to its overt and stated strategic objective of 'Supremacy in the Islamic World' and 'Destruction/death of Israel/USA'.

The intelligence breaches within the country were already evident and therefore there was a need for extra vigilance. Despite mounting indicators—such as high-profile assassinations of leaders and scientists both within Iran and abroad—Iran failed to grasp the magnitude of the threat. In terms of counter intelligence, the signs of breach in the system should have been apparent to Iranians, wherein in last two years many of their leaders, both intelligence and military, and that of their proxies were killed in Iran and abroad. In the most daring assassination on the Iranian soil itself, Ismail Haniyeh, the topmost political leader of Hamas was killed in a guest house in Tehran. Haniyeh was killed while sleeping in a military-run guesthouse after attending the inauguration ceremony for Iranian president Masoud Pezeshkian himself. It was a daring plan wherein a bomb was concealed two months prior in the guest house where Haniyeh was known to stay in Tehran. It was detonated remotely once he was inside his room.<sup>19</sup> In similar attacks other key figures of Iranian military and their proxies were eliminated elsewhere. These killings, including that of Haniyeh, should have triggered red alerts across the Iranian security apparatus, but it didn't.

Operation Rising Lion exposed the hollowness of Iran's counter-intelligence capabilities. Even after the Spiderweb operation by Ukraine wherein nearly 35 % of strategic capability of

Russia to launch nuclear strike was disabled through an attack from within Russia, the lessons were not learnt. Just 12 days earlier, on 01 June 2025, Ukraine had struck by launching FPV (First Person View) drones from technologically modified vehicles. These vehicles contained large number of remotely operated FPVs hidden below the roof tops that were sliding. They were smuggled into Russia and located innocuously near the locations where strategic assets were placed deep inside the Russian territory. Tehran did not enhance its internal monitoring mechanisms. The complacency proved costly.

Credit must go towards the Iranians for bouncing back even after the early decapitating strikes and launch a measured and calibrated response. Their capability to secure the top leadership, while Donald Trump made statements that they knew where Khamenei was and there were rumours of him having fled to Russia, absorb the effects of the strike and respond effectively with precision attacks by ballistic missiles breaching the multi-layered, Israeli Air Defence systems that were highly celebrated as the best in the world. The Iranian intelligence was able to neutralise a number of agents as well. Most importantly, the Iranians were reportedly able to move nearly 400 kgs of the highly enriched Uranium to safe place thus retrieving the nuclear program to an extent<sup>20</sup>. Even after much reported bombings and missile attacks through the 12 days operation that peaked on 22 June 2025 when 12 GBU 57 bombs and two dozen Tomahawk missiles as part of Operation Midnight Hammer by USA smashed into Natanz and Fordow nuclear sites, the destruction to the nuclear facilities was contained to an extent. The long-term appreciation of weapon capabilities existing with Israel and even the USA had ensured that the Iranians took the critical elements of the nuclear program deep underground to 300 ft and below. The GBUs, the famed bunker busters of the world available only with the US, had the maximum

demonstrated penetration capability of 200 ft, also could not make much effect.

The strikes at Beer Sheba, the Haifa Port, Mossad Headquarters, and other important military and civilian establishments of Israel reflected resilience as a Nation and also the intelligence and technological prowess of Iran. As the efficacy of the Israeli air defence reduced, the Iranians were able to hit back with greater accuracy and frequency. It would be safe to assume that the peacetime diligence in gathering technical intelligence had enabled the Iranians to push back the Israelis who were supported by the USA and other western countries. The development of modern systems including weapons, that were employed to strike back at Israel, in an environment of severe sanctions for decades also reflected the intellectual and scientific prowess of Iran.



**A picture of a building in Beer Sheba after being hit by Ballistic Missile from Iran. Courtesy The Times of Israel**

## IRAN FOOLS ISRAEL: AFTER QUIET NIGHT, SUDDEN ATTACK ON MOSSAD HQ



Mossad location hit by Iran on 17 June 2025. Courtesy Hindustan Times

### Global Precedents of Intelligence Led Operations

Intelligence-led surgical strikes have historical precedence. The CIA's use of drones and laser designators in Afghanistan and Iraq has been quite well documented and celebrated. The operations by CIA alongside the US Seals, Marines and Special Forces behind the enemy lines have been discussed very often. Operation Neptune Spear in 2011 when the U.S. Navy SEAL conducted a daring raid from the Afghanistan territory deep into the Pakistani airspace to kill Osama bin Laden was near perfect conducted strike.

In the regional context, a four day long, 7 to 10 May 2025, military Operation Sindoor<sup>21</sup> was conducted by India against Pakistan as a retaliation to killings of tourists on 22 April 2025 in Pahalgam, on the basis of religion by Pakistani terror groups. The initial strikes, precise, calibrated were carried out on nine terror launchpads, global Headquarters and training camps by missiles, drones, loitering munitions and bombs. Later on, the important military infrastructures of Pakistan were also destroyed when they



tried to escalate. The strikes based on excellent intelligence resulted in Pakistan folding up within four days.

Israel had also previously conducted a strike on Syria's nuclear reactor in 2007 is another example of intelligence led operation. However, none match the scale, intensity, integration, and audacity of Operation Rising Lion.

## **India: Operation Rising Lion as a Reference to Define Intelligence Challenges and Opportunities**

**Chaotic Geopolitical Location.** Like Israel and Iran, the geographical location of India, post-Independence, has lend itself to a perpetual chaos due to the unnatural boundaries creating artificial countries that never existed eight decades prior. The region around will always remain in anarchy because of the insecurity of each country from internal fractures and outside interference. Israel and Iran have similar challenges. With communities, ethnicities, and religious affinities transcending the borders, most of which remains unfenced and loosely guarded, the intelligence opportunities galore. Like in Iran, due to the economic disparity and religious and other types of polarisations, ideological, ethnicity etc, the possibility of identifying disaffected ready to compromise national security is extremely high. In India. the challenges to the counter intelligence agencies stem from the democratic rights and a weak and inefficient law and order and judicial system where the individual rights are more important than the responsibility towards the country and community. The numbers of NGOs, persons of significant importance and power, within government, media, political parties and otherwise are available for ideological or monetary buyouts. The large-scale migration into India, within India and to outside countries also creates opportunities for the inimical forces to identify, invest and exploit the vulnerabilities of the migrants.

However, these very reasons are also an opportunity for Indian intelligence agencies, except for operations in China, where language and a very strict and authoritarian regime exploits an efficient integrated system of technology and human surveillance to monitor the population. The combined challenges of both Israel and Iran, dissimilar as they maybe, are combined in the Indian context but so are the opportunities.

**Intelligence in Sashakt Bharat@ 2047.** If India wants to emerge as Viksit Bharat@2047 then an equal attention is mandated to the security realm. No nation or people can progress without the equitable investment in security else the national interests will remain hostage to security challenges. As such the rise of a Nation, howsoever benign in purpose or end state it maybe, will have friction.

The basic foundation for security is intelligence. It may range from economic to military, the entire spectrum of National power rides on intelligence. Unfortunately, in India, because of politically motivated and other inappropriate actions, intelligence does not find a respectable place. However, with availability of technology and requirements of the business world to stay ahead, intelligence is now treated as a profession of specialisation.

Intelligence, strategic to tactical, has always served as the cornerstone of national security strategy and high-stakes military operations. For nations facing existential threats or otherwise, intelligence is not just an enabler but the defining factor in planning, launching, and sustaining precision military actions. This essence of investing time, energy, funds, resources and plans for intelligence gathering, looking for opportunities, at times creating opportunities has to be, therefore, understood by the Indian establishment consisting of disparate groups responsible for the national security. It is imperative to educate the politicians across

the spectrum, believers and not so fond of intelligence operations, both on centrality of intelligence to protect peace and ensure progress; the bureaucrats who are diffident and apprehensive and suspicious of all facets of intelligence to take the same as a very serious venture that is expensive and expansive, necessitates technology investments and human resources. They need to also trust the intelligence reports and the recommendations offered by the intelligence agencies.

It is equally important that the intelligence community of India recognise the essence of intelligence in pre-emption and equal participation in conduct of operations, strategic to tactical. Their diffidence to remain focussed on cloak and dagger way of doing business, providing information on the principle of 'having done the job and not our responsibility thereafter' and relying only on human assets and agents must change. They must incorporate technology exploiting range of expertise available within India harnessing the civilian enterprise, academia and private players, because the governments have limitations. In Operation Rising Lion, a significant contribution of the civil partners and private firms to produce technological solutions and also to be part of the operation has to be recognised wherein their capacities, capabilities and commitment to the country was effectively harnessed.

As the geopolitical surroundings and the internal fault lines of both countries, Israel and Iran, are quite akin to India, it is important that the, role of intelligence before and during and after Operation Rising Lion be studied by the Indian security establishment and systems and processes be put in place so that when the time comes for seeking strategic outcomes appropriate strategic intelligence environment is available with multiple options.

For India, it is important that a situation of engaging in a long war or conflict is avoided so as to ensure that the country remains steadfast on the path of achieving the long-term mission objective of Viksit Bharat 2047. This will be only feasible if intelligence agencies create a strategic intelligence ground work for exploitation by all elements of National power, as relevant.

### **Legacy Benchmarks by Mossad of Intelligence Operations for Indian Security Establishments**

Operation Rising Lion as the archetype of 21st-century intelligence-led warfare had established the centrality of precise intelligence for coordinated execution, escalation control and ethical framing. The future wars will be silent, surgical, and morally framed surprising the best prepared Nation. Mossad, was surprised by Hamas on 7 October 2023. However, it redeemed itself thereafter through relentless intelligence-based operations identifying and killing nearly all the important perpetrators.

Going beyond the 7th October shock, Mossad has now redefined modern intelligence capabilities by seamlessly blending cyber warfare, deep human intelligence, technological innovation, and strategic patience. It has set a new benchmark in how intelligence can act not just as a support mechanism but as the operational vanguard that is worth emulation. It was possible only because a thriving and vibrant intelligence environment existed.

In the age of hybrid warfare and multi-domain operations, strategic intelligence has transcended its traditional role of informing national leaders. It has become an essential tool for pre-emptive defence, precision targeting, and escalation control. Operation Rising Lion, Israel's bold and unprecedented military strikes on Iran in June 2025, highlight the transformative power of intelligence when used not just to anticipate threats—but to surgically eliminate them.

## Operation Lion Rise Affirms Centrality of Intelligence in High Stake Contest

Any conflict, contestation, competition or confrontation, between States or with non-states, spanning the entire spectrum from peace to full-fledged war, in the domains of diplomacy, economy, informational, military, technology or even cultural or religious, will see intelligence playing an important role. While the importance of intelligence has been articulated since ages, but the time dimension due to the emerging technologies have significantly reduced the response timings; proactive, pre-emptive or reactive. During the times of Sun Tzu who said, "Know the enemy and know yourself in a hundred battles you will never be in peril" and Chanakya who articulated the role of spies/ intelligence agencies by advising that "A king should be constantly vigilant and should gather all possible information about his kingdom and neighbouring kingdoms through his spies," there was adequate time for gathering intelligence and preparing to respond. The essence of the sage advice of two brilliant strategic masters becomes more critical when the reaction to take action is reduced to seconds. The fear of absence of time to take a decision during recent India Pakistan imbroglio, Operation Sindoor, was expressed by the Rana Sanaullah, Special Assistant to Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who highlighted how dangerously close South Asia came to the brink of nuclear war. During India's precision military campaign when they had only 30 to 45 seconds to understand if the Brahmos launched by India was carrying nuclear weapon or not.<sup>22</sup>

Intelligence operations become extremely sensitive, in terms of quality and time both, when reputation and survival of a Nation is at stake. It becomes furthermore complex when one or both the countries involved are nuclear armed. And error of incorrect signalling may have a response that maybe catastrophic for the target country and for the world. The technology provides

adequate platforms and systems to monitor such situations but the speed of the new weapon systems gives seconds to respond to a developing situation. The investments in technology, that too indigenous systems, is essential.

The role of spooks or spies to gather intelligence has become more important but technology offers solutions that are equally critical in the intelligence game. As the entire command and command control systems ride on communication networks of ethernet the information warfare has two critical components. The first is gather intelligence and the second is to protect own information. The additional task of deception or maintain the secrecy of an activity or decision for as late as possible also rides on intelligence.

Intelligence apparatus to be placed in a country or the target organisation has a long gestation period. The assets to be placed, created and conditioned is time consuming. The possibility of failure to perform or going rogue or even being discovered is extremely high. Similarly, the placement of technological tools within the target organisation in form of hardware or a bug is also a process that takes time and perseverance. Therefore, most important is the strategic directions by the decision maker about the intelligence problem after which an intelligence agency can put the assets in place, human or tech or both.

Israelis knew that there will be a time that they will have to intervene to stop, stall or delay the nuclear program. Therefore, the investments in the assets and tech were in place over decades and would have continued to be replaid as the stems would have modernised and evolved.

The strategic decision to intervene could come after only after confirmation on the status of the nuclear program and as to how far it would have progressed. It would be also imperative to note the

response of the world powers, particularly US and the regional powers, to the strike. For all this information the levels of intelligence intrusion would have been extremely high value.

Actions at strategic levels are feasible only with Deep Human and Signals Intelligence (HUMINT + SIGINT). Mossad, had assets penetrated into Iran's inner military and nuclear elite, while exploiting the technological edge to breach the cyber network and the signal communication systems. This enabled targeted strikes on multiple generals and scientists, "decapitating" Iran's strategic command.

The collation of technical data library for the strikes at nuclear sites, air defence architecture, ballistic missile systems and the leaderships including the important scientists would have been a painstaking process of not only gathering intelligence but to keep on evolving and updating the data bank over decades preparing for the eventuality that may or may not occur. The investments in the satellites, listening devices, EW equipment etc for this purpose is extremely expensive and when redundancies are added these costs escalate.

The logistics to support the military or even a political/diplomatic strike within a country is extremely dangerous, difficult and fraught with international embarrassment, if discovered. The criticality of such operations mandate placing of redundancies as well. These are lessons that emerged clear in execution process of Operation Rising Lion. The covert preparation and provisioning of logistics support was the focus for months. Israel pre-positioned drone bases and sabotage devices inside Iran, smuggled via seemingly innocuous means, and activated during the strike.

A very critical component of the intelligence in a fast-paced technology driven environment is to provide multiple options to

the leadership and if possible, wargame to understand the response of the target organisation as well. Building up of a profile of the target leadership and understanding their responses to a situation is an integral part of intelligence gathering that is missed out by the best. As the overriding factor was to close the operation soonest and disallow any escalation because a prolonged conflict was in favour of Iran, in terms of recuperation and allowing it a justification to use force against the people of Israel, the role of intelligence was that was critical. Israelis had invested heavily on this facet.

In technology driven world, investments have to be made much in advance on suitable systems so as to plant these well in advance in the target countries and also protect are systems from such a challenge. A harmonised integration of the humans with the technology for intelligence operations is non-negotiable in the contemporary and future world where conflict will remain a way of life.

**Multi-Domain Hybrid Integration.** The importance of integrating human agents, cyber-attacks, electronic warfare, drone swarms, covert sabotage behind enemy lines, and conventional airstrikes, all synchronised, can never be underscored. Such an integration is feasible with real operational experience. The Israelis have executed similar operations over a period of time, at smaller scale in Syria and other geographies, thus scaling up to a significantly higher levels during Operation Rising Lion.

**Deception and Psychological Warfare.** There is enough space for deception and psy operations even in the transparent operating environment. Israel conducted a layered deception campaign—leaking false diplomatic efforts, phony meetings, and timing distractions—to mislead Iran’s leadership and erode confidence in their situational awareness. Even though the world and Iran knew



Israel will act, the scale and precision of the integrated methods and timing surprised all.

The world at large must have watched the unfolding of multiple feuds in the geo political arena, some military and others in trades and terror, in the past half a decade. The lessons of the Operation Rising Lion, is the most instructive on the role of intelligence agencies in the contemporary world for long term planning and investments so as to be able to respond to emerging situation that may have an effect in an intricately interlinked world.

**Strategic Takeaways.** The most important strategic takeaway for the world should be that Intelligence is primary for National Power and situational awareness central to military operations. Contests can be one sided if the adversary is blinded, confused, and paralysed. In this the primacy is of the non-kinetic means and not bombs and missiles. Integration and synergy of systems and organisations are more decisive than mere numbers. Fusion of intelligence, SOF, cyber, EW, and airpower was more decisive than the entire Israeli military force. Prepositioning of assets, embedding of operatives and systems in territory ahead of conflict timing was transformative and changed the conflict in favour of Israel before even the operations had commenced. The psychological domination through cognitive paralysis allows success in a short conflict and gives a definite edge. It can be more crippling than battlefield losses.

## **Implications for India - Role of Intelligence Agencies in Operations**

India, post-independence, has inherited an extremely complex, volatile and violently fractured neighbourhood. With the similarity of the populations across each of the borders, most of which is always active, the sensitivity burns the frayed societal fabric conflicting the internal politics with the diplomatic engagements.

The Tamil issue with Sri Lanka, the Bangladeshi migrants in the border districts, the inhuman treatment of Hindus and other minority communities in Bangladesh, frontier concepts along the fractious Myanmar, the unresolved borders with China and the Tibetan issue, with highly sensitive two nation theory that consumes the identity crisis of Pakistan has ensured that Bharat will never be able to resolve the unique set of challenges. A revisionist China that wants a unipolar Asia and the revisionist religious ideology in the neighbourhood, both threaten the second largest country in Asia, the most populous country in the world and the second largest economy in the world, with no permanent peace. The two powerful militaries and nuclear nations, having joined hands against India; their designs remain to helm in the progress of the country and contain and limit influence in the world and surely in the region. While a constant irritation, Pakistan begs constant attention, the primary enemy remains hidden behind the iron curtain of zero information wall engaging India to benefit through trade yet isolating diplomatically.

The challenges of the intelligence agencies of India are multi fold combining the geo political complexities of Israel and internal fault lines of Iran. The compounding factor is that India is not an authoritarian regime of Iran and does not have the advantages of the western support in terms of technology, funds and the diplomatic backing in the world forum. Behind the curve in technology, constrained by the bureaucratic walls and lack of trust in matters intelligence by the strategic community, intelligence agencies are yet to prove their worth in India.

Operation Rising Lion brings forward many lessons for politico military bureaucratic leadership of India towards strengthening intelligence community for being effective in the realms transcending strategic to tactical. There is a need to invest on intelligence capability, either going alone or through

partnerships/alliances, for strategic intelligence as forewarned is forearmed. The same has to be done through investments in human assets at the strategic level, not only in target countries but also in all important countries in the world. There are enough countries in the world who are concerned with the nuclear armed Pakistan using terrorism as a state policy and China as an emerging power with intentions of dominating and not cooperation.

India must pivot from a reactive to a proactive, pre-emptive intelligence doctrine, especially concerning cross-border terrorism, to carry out strikes. A difficult proposition given the challenges of providing proof to justify the strikes, but capacity must be developed so as to be able to strike whenever opportunity emerges.

Investments in technology, preferably indigenous, covering the entire spectrum of warfighting systems of the security establishment and communication systems of the command and control set ups of the country, for denial of information is an imperative. On the other side, it is essential that investments be done to develop intelligence folders on the tactical and operational level targets in the countries with possibility of military conflict. The technological support for strategic intelligence for early warning of intentions be developed in the neighbourhood and beyond.

The synergy for identifying the intelligence problems, and verification of priority of targets, political, economic, diplomatic, military and nuclear, should be a norm with the relevant ministries, within the three services, the other security establishments with the intelligence agencies.

The trust, on intelligence agencies also needs to be built up within the community through success stories over past seven decades. Today, the failures of intelligence dominate from Pahalgam to Pulwama to Kargil to 1962. But the stories of

successful exfiltration of Dalai Lama, 1971 war training of Mukti Vahini, investments in Sri Lanka, averting many terrors strikes, conducting missions in enemy countries etc maybe used for folklores. Today there is not much trust exists.

Investment in technology is an imperative, more so, when human assets are difficult to plant in the case of the Northern adversary. Language experts, alliances with the countries with common interests and concerns, are way forward.

Towards developing capabilities within the target countries, given the fault lines and also expansive territories with limited population or repressed communities, there are opportunities to be invested. The criticality is the development of these assets in the peacetime without causing an international furore is a challenge but doable with risks.

One of the exceptional technologies driven intelligence was the telephonic conversation of Gen Parvez Musharraf, from China with his staff in Pakistan discussing the Kargil complicity, that was released by Indian intelligence agencies to fix the responsibility on Pakistan Army for the intrusion and not Mujahidin, as claimed.<sup>23</sup> These are instances that need adequate coverage to indicate the capabilities, the advantages and thus further investments on the intelligence capacities.

The essence of modern warfare through intelligence driven operation is integration of Cyber, HUMINT and SIGINT. Therefore, IB, RAW, NTRO, and Defence Cyber Agency must function more jointly, not in silos. India's cyber capabilities must be used in tandem with physical ops—such as disabling enemy radars or communication before strikes.

India needs to invest energy, funds and human resources in the intelligence agencies as the technology driven world will allow for

limited time and error for decision making in all realms of National Power. If India is to be considered a power of some reckoning, the role of intelligence will be central.

### **Conclusion: Strategic Intelligence as a Force Multiplier**

Operation Rising Lion is more than a case study in military brilliance—it is a strategic paradigm shift. It proves that with superior intelligence, even the most fortified and secretive adversaries can be neutralized with minimal direct confrontation. Israel's ability to achieve its objectives with precision, limited collateral damage, and minimal political fallout speaks to the maturity of its intelligence ecosystem.

Launched under extreme geopolitical stress and regional uncertainty, this operation wasn't merely a military manoeuvre. It was the culmination of years of surveillance, technological innovation, cyber mastery, and human infiltration. It showcased Mossad's ability to shape the battlefield before the first missile was fired. The surgical removal of key military and scientific figures in Iran was only possible due to the multi-dimensional intelligence architecture underpinning the mission. Operational Lion Rise provides for a blueprint for Modern Warfare driven by intelligence with old style sabotage only with modern systems of drones, cyber, HUMINT, SIGINT, and stealth warfare. It signals a shift from standalone kinetic strikes to fully built, multi-domain intelligence-led campaigns. In summary, Operation Rising Lion demonstrates that modern strategic surprises rely on deep intelligence, seamless cross-domain integration, pre-positioned assets, and psychological disruption—emerging models likely to redefine deterrence and hybrid warfare in the years ahead.

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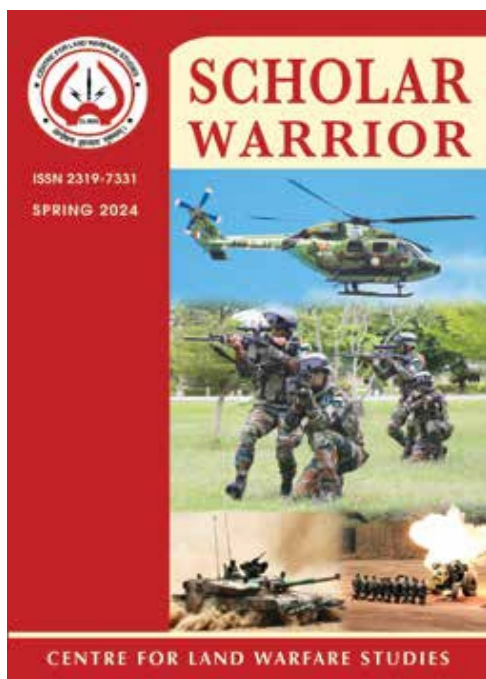


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The importance of intelligence as a core element of national power is widely recognised, especially among the world's most influential nations. This was prominently demonstrated during the recent 12-day military confrontation between Israel and Iran. For India, where the role of intelligence agencies is still approached with caution and hesitation, Israel's Operation Lion's Rise offers valuable lessons.

In today's unpredictable and volatile global landscape, where alliances and partnerships are increasingly shaped by short-term interests and immediate crises rather than enduring visions or moral commitments, building robust strategic intelligence capabilities is essential. Whether pre-empting threats or responding to them effectively, decision-makers need a range of viable options, options that only a well-resourced and proactive intelligence apparatus can provide across both tactical and strategic domains, which often intersect.

Moreover, with emerging and niche technologies transforming the information landscape, intelligence agencies must evolve beyond their traditional role of information gathering. They must be empowered to lead operations—both in strategic planning and on the battlefield. For India to secure a place at the global high table, its intelligence services must be modernised, empowered, and integrated into national decision-making. Only then can they create the strategic space necessary for India to assert its role as a global power.

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**Lt Gen DP Pandey, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM** was the Corps Commander of the prestigious Chinar Corps of Indian Army responsible for operations along the Line of Control opposite Pakistan Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and also for the counter terrorist operations in Kashmir during the post abrogation of Article 370 period. He has the experience of also being part of Operation Vijay Kargil, Operation Meghdoot and Operation Parakaram amongst others. His assignments include being a Military Observer in the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia as a Captain, instructor in National Defence Academy, Director in Infantry Directorate for a brief period

and then Director of Military Intelligence Foreign Division, the Brigadier General Operations of a Command and then of a Corps along the Western Front, he was also was the Head of the Additional Directorate of Strategic Communication and the first Director General of the Territorial Army. The Officer retired as the Commandant of the Army War College. A book, '**Soldiering with Passion**' has been written on him by Col Ajay Raina. The author also has number of publications accredited to him.

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The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an independent Think Tank dealing with contemporary issues of national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional & sub-conventional conflicts and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy oriented in approach.

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Contact us: [landwarfare@gmail.com](mailto:landwarfare@gmail.com)



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