

The Consummate Intelligence Man

Shabtai Shavit

Shabtai Shavit was the director-general of the Mossad from 1989–96.

Dave Kimche was born and raised in England, but received his higher education, including a PhD in Middle Eastern studies, in Israel. The exceptional combination of his English background, academic qualifications, and innate abilities made for a multilingual man who was at home in Western culture but at the end of the day was also very Israeli.

At the age of eighteen, out of Zionist convictions, Dave immigrated to the Land of Israel. His identification with the country and its people was immediate, absolute, and uncompromising. At first, he rapidly relinquished all the trappings of his past life. Later, he successfully merged them into his new life and that enabled him to become a most effective tool in the service of the Jewish state and its people. By nature, Dave was an affable man who made friends easily. He was also extremely brave. The consummate “British gentleman,” his fluency in the “language” of understatement coupled with his ever-present display of cautious optimism made him uniquely equipped to handle any intelligence job with true virtuosity.

Dave was one of the originators and developers of the concept of cooperation with other intelligence services around the world—both with friendly and not-so-friendly ones. The responsibility of the Mossad for ties with countries with which Israeli did not enjoy diplomatic relations was, in the 1950s and up to the 1970s, crucial to the enhancement of Israel’s international status. During the period in which Dave was charged with that task, he was a regular presence in the corridors of power of many heads of state. Dave brought Israel’s message to countries that did not want an open relationship with the Jewish state. He established intelligence connections with those countries and created complex direct and indirect networks.

Dave was a highly intelligent man with a profound understanding of the world in general, and the Middle East and Africa in particular. He especially liked working with various national and ethnic minorities in those regions. In his family and office photo albums, there are countless pictures of Dave dressed in the traditional folk garb of the peoples with whom he had established close ties. In these activities, the solidarity of the Israeli people (who have known suffering and had already achieved independence) with oppressed minorities in their struggle for self-determination or independence was evident.

Dave took special interest in psychological warfare, particularly because it takes place on an intellectual battlefield, where the primary weapon is the human brain. The essence of that endeavor is to come up with ideas and to wield influence so as to stimulate change of Archimedean proportions. Being a descendent of the Radak [the Hebrew acronym for Rabbi David Kimchi (1160–1235)], a medieval biblical commentator and philosopher who was widely known for his intellectual prowess, it was no wonder that Dave was captivated by the casuistry of psychological warfare. Staying the course and maneuvering toward the defined objective was a particular challenge.

People say that Dave was behind the idea of defining the initial Pakistani nuclear efforts as an attempt to create an “Islamic bomb.” The rationale behind this definition was that in this way it would be easier to recruit the non-Muslim world against the Pakistani effort.

When Dave served as the vice-director of the Mossad, I was still at the bottom third of the ladder. People talked about Dave with awe and respect and looked to him as a role model. I had great admiration for him and I sought his advice before every important decision.

Dave was an intellectual spy, one of the best that this country and its intelligence service has ever produced. He is without a doubt a member of the small group of those few who did so much and deserves the thanks of the Israeli nation, if it only knew to whom it was indebted.

Dave is finally freed from his tribulations. May his wife and children know no more sorrow, and may they find comfort in the fact that his friends will always remember him.

Translated from the Hebrew by Kristina Grinshpoon