



# ISRAEL MATTERS!

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## Netflix series, “The Spy” - The Story of Eli Cohen

### The Streets and Avenues of Israel

In Hebrew, R'chov means street and Shdera means avenue, C'vesh means road; so there is R'chov this and Shdera that, and C'vesh so and so.

I have observed that many of the streets and avenues and roads in Israel are often named for Biblical figures such as King David Street, King Saul Street, Joshua Ben Nun Street and Judah Hamacabi Street.

Then of course many of the streets bear the names of modern personalities from the history of Zionism and the modern State of Israel; Ben Gurion Avenue, Menachem Begin Road, and Jabotinsky Street.

It seems that every town and city has a Hertzl Street or Weitzman Street. These heavy hitters do better than street names. There is a whole city named Hertzliya just north of Tel Aviv, and of course there is the Weitzman Institute in Rehovoth.

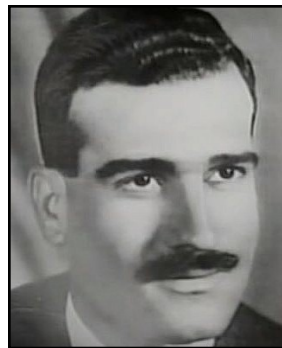
Many towns and cities have an ‘Eli Cohen’ street. A hero of Israel, Eli Cohen was a spy for the Mossad during the 1960s.

From an ordinary bank clerk who felt a strong patriotic duty to the State of Israel, he penetrated the Syrian Defense establishment and provided crucial information that led to Israel’s victory in the 1967 Six Day War.

In 1965, he was caught by Syrian counterintelligence and executed.

Now, Netflix is airing a series on Eli Cohen, with Sacha Baron Cohen in the starring role. The following article will shed some light on this heroic Israeli spy.

- Dr. Martin Laskin, Co-Chair, Israel Affairs Committee



Sophie Ben-Dor, the daughter of Israeli spy Eli Cohen (photo), said “it hurt” to watch the new Netflix series about her father’s life and execution in Syria, noting some historical inaccuracies in the adaptation but praising Sacha Baron Cohen’s performance. Ben-Dor laments ‘the distance from the truth’ about her legendary agent

father, but understands and respects the show.

“The Spy,” which was recently released, tells the story of Cohen, who spied for Israel in Syria during the 1960s, providing valuable intelligence that was said to have greatly assisted the Israeli military in the 1967 Six Day War.

Cohen was caught and eventually executed by Syrian authorities in 1965. Israel has for decades worked to retrieve his remains.

“It hurt. It was hard to see the distance from the truth” in some parts of the series, Sophie Ben-Dor said in an interview with Israel’s Channel 12 news.

Asked to pinpoint what she found not to be reflective of her family’s experience, Ben-Dor cited “the ethnic gap,” noting her mother was never a maid as was portrayed in the series.

“This was unnecessary,” she said.

Still Ben-Dor, who was four years old when her father was killed, said she was pleasantly surprised by actor Cohen’s portrayal.

(Continued)

"I was more worried," Ben-Dor said of hearing that Cohen, who is known for playing comedic figures such as Borat, would star in the series.

"He reminded me of my father sometimes," she added.

Ben-Dor was pessimistic that Israel would soon be able to retrieve her father's body from Syria. "I think as long as Bashar Assad is in power I don't see the word 'progress,'" she said, referring to Syria's dictator.

Despite her criticism of the series, Ben-Dor said she understood why the show's creators took artistic license with her father's story. "It's unfamiliar to me, this form of expression in a global television series. It doesn't fit our story but I understand the situation. I understand and respect [it]," she said in a separate earlier interview with the network.

Cohen was born and raised in Egypt and was expelled to Israel in 1956.

In 1960, he was recruited to join the Mossad for a special mission in which he was to pretend to be a Syrian businessman returning to the country after having lived in Argentina. The goal was to gather intelligence from high-ranking Syrian politicians and military officials.

Ahead of the mission, Cohen had to learn to speak Arabic in a Syrian accent rather than his native Egyptian. He took on the name Kamel Amin Thaabet and went to live in Argentina for some time to build a name for himself in the Syrian expat community. While there, he gained the trust of Amin al-Hafez, who would later become Syria's president.

In February 1962, Cohen moved to Damascus. He was quickly able to infiltrate the highest levels of Syrian society. He would entertain high-ranking politicians and military officials at extravagant parties where there would be many women and lots of booze. The drunk guests would often end up blabbing about their work to Cohen, who was sober but would pretend to be intoxicated. He made friends with many of the guests and ended up receiving classified military briefings and visiting Syrian military sites.

Cohen would then send intelligence back to Israel using a hidden radio transmitter.

Cohen wasn't allowed tell anyone of the plans and told his wife that he was working abroad for Israel's Defense Ministry. He returned home to his family only a few times during his mission. On his last visit, in 1964, he told intelligence officers he wanted to come in from the cold be-

cause he was concerned a new Syrian intelligence commander did not like him. But the intelligence officers convinced him to go back one last time.

The following year, Syria found out about Cohen by tracing his intelligence transmissions to Israel.

He was convicted in a trial without a defense and sentenced to death. Israel desperately tried to have his sentence commuted, and despite requests from world leaders and Pope Paul VI for clemency, Cohen was hanged publicly in May of that year.

His remains have yet to be returned, despite pleas from his family. Reports earlier this year said a Russian delegation had removed his remains from Syria in an attempt to bring them to Israel. Last year, Israel was able to retrieve Cohen's wristwatch from Syria and return it to his family. [TimesofIsrael.com]

## Magen David Adom, Saving Lives in Israel

Magen David Adom is Israel's national EMS organization providing emergency ambulance and blood services. A non-governmental agency, MDA's mission is to provide emergency care and blood services to all the citizens of Israel and foreign tourists. In addition to being Israel's national EMS organization, MDA oversees Israel's national blood services. In that role MDA not only supplies the blood used by Israeli hospitals, it supplies all the blood used by the IDF, providing a critical resource to ensure wounded Israeli soldiers survive.

Magen David Adom's role in times of war is crucial. In addition to 2,200 full-time professionals, MDA has more than 23,000 volunteer EMTs, paramedics, and first responders, men and women dedicated to saving lives.

"Support for Israel has always been important to our family," said Helene Meltzer, a fellow TBS member. In Manny Meltzer's memory, the Meltzer Family has sponsored a lifesaving MDA Medicycle. This vehicle which can maneuver through heavy traffic and other obstructions is in Israel right now and saving lives.

The Meltzer Family asks that if you can, please make a gift to Magen David Adom. For more information please visit the MDA website, [afmda.org](http://afmda.org), or call Laurie Meltzer Bandremer at 212-757-1627 ext 2210.

