

# Operation Yachin

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**Operation Yachin** was an operation led by Israel's Mossad in coordination with the Moroccan state to discreetly emigrate Moroccan Jews to Israel between November 1961 and spring 1964. Prior to Operation Yachin, emigration had taken place illicitly, facilitated by the Mossad and Jewish Agency, but discouraged by the Moroccan government.<sup>[1]</sup> The Misgeret division of the Mossad utilized much of the infrastructure from the illicit emigration operations of the 1950's to now legally import Moroccan Jews with the permission of Hassan II into Israel. From the time of Moroccan independence in 1956 to 1961 some 29,400 Jews had been illicitly emigrated out of Morocco to Israel, but this did not quite meet the influx demand of Israeli authorities.<sup>[2]</sup> Alex Gatmon of the Mossad and who was assisted by the Jewish Agency, negotiated with representatives of Hassan II's government to work out an emigration policy that would allow Moroccan Jews to make Aliyah with approval and support from the Moroccan monarchy.<sup>[1]</sup> This would allow Israel to continue to sustain its substantial population growth that was considered necessary to maintain its survival.<sup>[2]</sup> In the arrangement between Israeli intelligence and Hassan II, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), an American organization, paid King Hassan II of Morocco a per capita fee for every Moroccan Jew who migrated to Israel. About 90,000 to 97,000 Moroccan Jews left for Israel by plane and ship from Casablanca and Tangier via France and Italy.<sup>[1]</sup>

The impetus to get Jews to emigrate out of Morocco was driven on one hand by the desire to preserve and expand the state of Israel by the Israeli government and on the other, the fears of repression by Hassan II in the era of Moroccan nationalism and wider Arab opposition to the formation of the state of Israel.<sup>[1]</sup> Israeli government official Moshe Yuval perhaps reflects Israeli sentiment regarding Jews in Morocco leading up to Operation Yachin. He states "Although nowadays, annihilation is not anticipated for the Jews in Morocco, God forbid, this country remains Muslim and basically anti-Semitic."<sup>[1]</sup> Yuval displays an ideology that immediately rules out Jews and Muslims being able to coexist in any manner and presents emigration as the only choice for many Moroccan Jews.<sup>[1]</sup> This was compounded by the Misgeret's political branch in association with the Mossad which spread news stories about the danger in store for Moroccan Jews in a post-independent Morocco.<sup>[1]</sup> This threat was not entirely unsubstantiated though, as Historian Michael Laskier also notes instances of discrimination and propaganda in newspapers from Moroccan nationalist groups conflating Jews with Zionism and calling for their expulsion.<sup>[1]</sup> Additionally, he notes a slew of unwarranted arrests of Jewish Moroccans during the visit of Gamal Abdel Nasser to Casablanca.<sup>[3]</sup> While Yuval somewhat acknowledges there was no existential threat to Jews in Morocco, it is still important to state Hassan II's position on Jewry in Morocco could mostly be characterized as pragmatic and generally favorable. Despite having no real ideological stance on Morocco's Jewish population, Hassan II tended to support and lookout for Moroccan Jews as a whole. The government of Hassan's father, Mohammad V, and subsequently Hassan II included many Jewish members in high positions.<sup>[3]</sup> In addition, a strong contingent of Moroccan Jews belonging to various leftist organizations called for disavowing Zionism and for reunification with their Moroccan roots post French Colonialism.<sup>[3]</sup> Furthermore, Historians note Hassan II would visit a Casablanca synagogue every Yom Kippur and convey a message of good

will to attendees.<sup>[3]</sup> Despite Hassan II's desire to keep at least a somewhat sizable Jewish population in Morocco, since the founding of Israel, Moroccan Jewry now constitutes the largest national demographic of all Islamic countries in Israel.

The actual operation part of Operation Yachin consisted of identifying primarily Jewish families who had at least one primary breadwinner who could work and provide for their families in Israel.<sup>[1]</sup> Individual departures for Jews from Morocco in this case were less favorable as the Israeli government did not want to be seen as splitting up families. From that point members of the Misgeret would transport persons partaking in Aliyah to Casablanca to get passports created collectively or as a family. Once families or persons were registered and photographed they and their belongings would be transported by ship to Italy, France or sometimes Spain en route to Israel.<sup>[1]</sup> The same boats and infrastructure from the times of illicit emigration was often used during operation Yachin to transport Jewish families to Europe allowing for a fast flow of emigrants out of Morocco.<sup>[1]</sup>

The accession of Hassan II on 26 February 1961 enabled negotiations to begin on a secret agreement between Mossad's "HaMisgeret" division and the Moroccan authorities (principally Prince Moulay Ali and labour minister Abdelkader Benjelloun), together with the American organisation HIAS. After the Pisces tragedy, in which a ship of Jewish emigrants from Morocco sank, killing 46, the Moroccan government became eager to switch its policy outlawing Jewish emigration.<sup>[1]</sup> This had to do in large part with Hassan II's desire to appear in a favorable manner to the West and his prerogative to preserve many of the economic benefits the Jewish population provided to Morocco.<sup>[1][2]</sup> The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in the United States served as a cover for the Misgeret and Jewish Agency to help process emigrants out of Morocco.<sup>[1]</sup> An economic arrangement was agreed between Israel and Morocco, with the agreement of Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and King Hassan II of Morocco, whereby \$500,000 would be paid as a downpayment, plus \$100 per emigrant for the first 50,000 Moroccan Jews, and then, \$250 per emigrant thereafter.<sup>[4][5][6]</sup> Several times during the operation, emigration had to be paused due to the economic effects of a large withdrawal of Jewish capital from banks and real estate.<sup>[1]</sup> The operation also received important help from Francoist Spain.<sup>[7]</sup> However, some Jews settled in France, Canada and the United States instead of in Israel.<sup>[8]</sup>

The operation was fronted by the US-based HIAS, which financed approximately 50 million US dollars of costs.<sup>[9]</sup> In 1964 the operation was ceased due to a growing unpopularity as David 'Amar, the secretary-general of the CCIM stated: "rumors about ineffective absorption policies [in Israel] reached Morocco and made it difficult to continue the operation."<sup>[1]</sup> Nonetheless, by 1967 the population of Moroccan Jews had dwindled to 53,000 from 162,420 at the beginning of 1961.<sup>[3]</sup> The affects of Operation Yachin were also felt in Israel on behalf of the Jewish Agency. Moshe Kol a top Jewish Agency official was quoted as saying "Israel will turn into a land of the Levant" in regards to the increased Sephardic Jewish population from Morocco settling in Israel.<sup>[2]</sup> Additionally, Chaim Sheba, a Ministry of Health emissary to Morocco as well as various reporters from Israeli Newspaper Haaretz, expressed concerns about the "Levantization" of Israel by Moroccan Jewry.<sup>[2]</sup> While operation Yachin was successful in diluting much of Morocco's Jewish population, the idea became increasingly unpopular among Moroccan Jews and Israeli Jews as time went on.<sup>[3]</sup> The economic situation of the Jewish population in Morocco was generally good, while rumors of recession and poor treatment of Sephardic Jews in Israel disheartened many would be emigrants to Israel.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Etymology

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The operation's name *Yachin* was of Biblical origin, being the name of one of the two central pillars that supported the Holy Temple built in Jerusalem by King Solomon, and because Israel regarded immigration as a major pillar that supported the existence of the Jewish state.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Background

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Upon Moroccan independence from French colonial rule in 1956, full rights and status were conferred to the Jewish population under the subsequent reign of Mohammed V. Nonetheless, immigration to Israel continued. In 1959, under pressure from the Arab League and facing the specter of the Jewish population's continued decline, emigration to Israel was prohibited, narrowing Jews' options for leaving the country. Despite retention efforts, Moroccan immigration to Israel rose to approximately 95,000 Jews for the period spanning 1952–1960.<sup>[11]</sup>

The formal prohibition on emigration remained in place only through February 1961. While the formal prohibition was ended, Mohammed V maintained a clear public preference that the Jewish community remain within Morocco and barred foreign action to facilitate or encourage emigration.<sup>[12]</sup> Beginning in 1960, Israeli authorities engaged Moroccan officials in discussions intended to negotiate the facilitation of Jewish immigration to Israel with official (or, at least semi-official) blessing.<sup>[13]</sup> Even with the removal of the prohibition on such movement, these talks continued. Eventually, this evolved into Operation Yachin.

On 10 January 1961 a small boat called *Egoz* carrying 44 Jewish emigrants sank on the northern coast of Morocco.<sup>[14]</sup> This created a crisis both for the Moroccan authorities and for the foreign aid groups responsible for assisting the refugees.

## Migration

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During Operation Yachin, 17.9% of the Jewish population of Tangier, 77.2% for Marrakesh, and 54.5% from Casablanca were migrated to Israel.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Impact

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In Kathy Wazana's 2013 film *They Were Promised the Sea*, Simon Levy, founder of the Moroccan Jewish Museum, noted that the trucks and planes that took the Jews away were Moroccan, which added to the trauma.<sup>[16]</sup> Susan Gilson Miller described the departure of the majority of Jews from Morocco as "monumental national tragedy."<sup>[16][17]</sup>

## Notable people

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Shas politician Ya'akov Margi, born in 1960, was brought to Israel during Operation Yachin in 1962.

## See also

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- Operation Magic Carpet (Yemen)
- Operation Ezra and Nehemiah
- Moroccan Jews in Israel
- Jewish exodus from the Muslim world

## References

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2. Bialer, Uri (2020). "Let My People Go" (<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvz7k2z0.12.>). *Israeli Foreign Policy: A People Shall not Dwell Alone*: 136–86 – via JSTOR.
3. Heckman, Alma Rachel (2021). "SPLINTERS: DISILLUSION AND JEWISH POLITICAL LIFE IN THE NEW MOROCCO" (<https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8305940.10.>). *The Sultan's Communists: Moroccan Jews and the Politics of Belonging*. 1st ed. (Stanford University Press): 143–75 – via JSTOR.

4. Frederic ABECASSIS (<http://www.ens-lyon.eu/annuaire/m-abecassis-frederic-22968.kjsp?RH=ENS-LYON-FR-ETUD-DEP>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160203114253/http://www.ens-lyon.eu/annuaire/m-abecassis-frederic-22968.kjsp?RH=ENS-LYON-FR-ETUD-DEP>) February 3, 2016, at the Wayback Machine, QUESTIONS ABOUT JEWISH MIGRATIONS FROM MOROCCO "OPERATION MURAL" (SUMMER 1961): RETURN FROM DIASPORA OR FORMATION OF A NEW DIASPORA? ([http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/77/86/64/PDF/NEW\\_DIASPORAS.\\_THE\\_JERUSALEM\\_WORKSHOP.\\_JUNE\\_2012.pdf](http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/77/86/64/PDF/NEW_DIASPORAS._THE_JERUSALEM_WORKSHOP._JUNE_2012.pdf)) "Since 1960, indirect talks had been initiated between the Israeli authorities and the heir to the throne, and even with the leftist leader, Mehdi Ben Barka (Bin-Nun, 2008). According to Yigal Bin Nun (2009), the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs was progressively convinced to consider financial compensation to the departure of the Jews, as it had been done in Iraq and Romania. In early May 1961, Isser Harel, the Director of the Mossad, decided to entrust to Alex Gatmon, chief of the Misgeret in Morocco, the mission to contact Jewish intermediaries to start negotiations with the Moroccan authorities. By the end of July, with the collaboration of Sam Benazeraf and Dr Isaac Cohen Olivar, he was negotiating with Abdelkader Benjelloun (Minister of Labour) and Moulay Ali Alaoui (the King's cousin and brother-in-law) and came to a compromise agreement. An economic clause was planned: half a million dollars would be paid as a down payment for the emigration of 50,000 Moroccan Jews to Europe, and then, 100\$ per capita (250\$ after the 50,000th). A humanitarian association, The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) would be the façade for the Israeli emissaries. The Moroccan authorities demanded that the Jews leave Morocco as entire families and not as single and selected migrants, as was the case since 1953. Furthermore, Alex Gatmon refused to dissolve his network "Misgeret" in Morocco, and clandestine emigration kept on until the end of the negotiations. Raphaël Spanien, the HIAS representative in Morocco, negotiated with colonel Oufkir collective passports issue by the Ministry of Interior. By the end of November 1961, Operation Yachin had begun. From then till 1964, 97,005 Jews left Morocco with the tacit agreement of the Moroccan authorities."
5. *In Ishmael's House: A History of Jews in Muslim Lands*, Martin Gilbert (<https://books.google.com/books?id=4Kis0gWNQ5QC&pg=PA279>), p279
6. Semi, Emanuela Trevisan (October 24, 2018), "Double Trauma and Manifold Narratives: Jews' and Muslims' Representations of the Departure of Moroccan Jews in the 1950s and 1960s" (<https://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781315796796-3>), *Sites of Jewish Memory*, Routledge, pp. 45–63, doi:10.4324/9781315796796-3 (<https://doi.org/10.4324%2F9781315796796-3>), ISBN 9781315796796, S2CID 239909967 (<https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:239909967>), retrieved August 24, 2021
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8. Simon, Reeva S.; Laskier, Michael M.; Reguer, Sara (2002). *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in modern times*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 502. ISBN 0-231-10796-X.
9. Szulc 1991, p. 210: "Under the 1961 arrangement between HIAS and the Jewish Agency, over 100,000 Moroccan Jews, including entire villages in the Atlas Mountains, were directly helped by the Americans in emigrating to Israel; thousands more were later indirectly assisted by HIAS in leaving the country. The cost to HIAS, which relied on contributions from American Jewry, was close to \$50 million."
10. *Every Spy a Prince: The Complete History of Israel's Intelligence Community*, by Daniel Raviv, Yossi Melman, p.111.
11. "IMMIGRANTS, BY PERIOD OF IMMIGRATION, COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND LAST COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE" ([http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton60/st04\\_04.pdf](http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton60/st04_04.pdf)) (PDF). *Government of Israel*. 2009.
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## Further reading

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