

Earthquake unmasked team of Israeli spies in New Zealand

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

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Espionage? Ofer Mizrahi was 'part of a Mossad spy team'

A Mossad spy team from Israel may have been uncovered by the Christchurch earthquake that hit New Zealand.

A newspaper has said that an Israeli, named as Ofer Mizrahi, was found with at least five passports when his body was recovered after masonry fell on his van.

Three other Israelis were in the vehicle but escaped serious injury and rapidly left the country within 12 hours, the paper claims.

The Southland Times said the group were suspected of trying to hack into the country's police computer system.

It said the country's Security Intelligence Service ordered checks into the police national computer system following the earthquake because of fears Israeli agents had loaded software into the system that would allow backdoor access to highly sensitive intelligence files.

One intelligence officer told the paper that the service was suspicious of activities of several groups of Israelis during and immediately after the disaster, which claimed 181 lives.

Acting police chief information officer Murray Mitchell said he was confident that the data and network systems were not compromised during February's quake.

The newspaper said it had asked Prime Minister John Key repeatedly to confirm details of an SIS investigation into whether the Israeli secret service had infiltrated the police national computer.

Mr Key responded that he was satisfied there had been no misuse of the police computer - but he refused to say whether an investigation had been carried out by the security service because it was not in the national interest.



Devastation: Rescue workers search for victims buried under the rubble of the Christchurch earthquake. One of the bodies found was an Israeli man with five passports



Collapse: Extensive damage to the Christchurch Catholic Cathedral. More than 180 people died in the 6.3-magnitude quake - including Ofer Mizrahi, who is thought to be a Mossad spy

But he did confirm that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rang him four times on the day of the earthquake.

Seven years ago, Mossad agents were caught and convicted of identity theft for illegally obtaining New Zealand passports.

While Mr Key declined to comment on the claims that the men in the van were spies, the Israeli Ambassador in New Zealand, Mr Shemi Tzur, dismissed them as 'science fiction' yesterday.

He said the three friends of Mr Mizrahi, 23, had left New Zealand hurriedly because they were shocked and crying and wanted to go home.



Intelligence: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rang John Key four times on the day of the earthquake

‘These were youngsters holidaying in your beautiful country,’ Mr Tzur told local media.

‘We encourage our young people to visit New Zealand.’

Mr Tzur said he was aware that Mr Mizrahi was carrying more than one passport when identification checks were being made of the earthquake victims.

‘I was handed a parcel of his effects and it did contain more than one passport.’

But he said that dual citizenship was common in Israel because of difficulties over the use of Israeli passports in some countries.

‘I’ve not been told anything about Mr Mizrahi being found with five or six passports and to suggest that he and his friends were anything other than young tourists makes me upset.’

Mr Tzur said that two urban search and rescue teams from Israel had arrived in Christchurch soon after the disaster but were refused permission to enter the earthquake red zone to help the search because they were unaccredited.

‘They had been sent by the parents of two other Israeli backpackers who died in the quake,’ he said.

Mossad has a long history of skilfully targeted killings and sophisticated plots since it was created in 1951.

Its spies abducted Nazi Adolf Eichmann, who had fled to Argentina after the Second World War and smuggled him back to Israel, where he was tried and executed.

New Zealand passports are highly prized by some overseas intelligence agencies.

The country’s neutral stance or lack of involvement in many international conflicts provide a perfect cover for covert espionage activities.

A New Zealand passport is also seen as a possible route to obtaining a British passport, because of family ties between the two countries.