



# Shamai Leibowitz

- Naturalized Dual citizen
- Born in Israel
- Taught Hebrew and Israeli law & culture to American Diplomats for US State Department
- Former Israeli lawyer
- Former FBI contract linguist
- American lawyer



## CDSE

Center for Development  
of Security Excellence

# CASE STUDY

## UNAUTHORIZED DISCLOSURE

### WHAT HAPPENED

In April 2009, Shamai Leibowitz (also known as, “Samuel” Shamai Leibowitz), a cleared contractor working as a linguist for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), knowingly and willfully disclosed 200 pages of classified documents and information relating to the intelligence communication activities of the United States to an unauthorized recipient. Furthermore, four documents classified as “Secret” were discovered in a search of Leibowitz’s home. Leibowitz was charged under The Espionage Act, U.S. Code § 798(a) Disclosure of Classified Information.

The classified documents were obtained by Leibowitz between January and August 2009 while working as a Hebrew translator for the FBI. Leibowitz, lamenting his actions, said, "During the course of my work I came across wrongdoings that led me to conclude this is an abuse of power... I should not have done what I did, and I regret it terribly."

In December 17, 2009, Leibowitz pled guilty to leaking five classified documents to an unidentified blogger who later published the documents on the open internet. On May 25, 2010, as part of a plea agreement, Leibowitz agreed to a criminal sentence of 20 months in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release. At his sentencing, Leibowitz described his actions as "a one-time mistake that happened to me when I worked at the FBI and saw things which I considered were violation of the law, and I should not have told a reporter about it."

The plea agreement also mandated Leibowitz be prohibited from discussing any FBI information in accordance with his non-disclosure agreement. In December 17, 2009, Leibowitz pled guilty to leaking five classified documents to an unidentified blogger who later published the documents on the open internet. The documents were obtained by Leibowitz between January and August 2009 while working as a Hebrew translator for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In 2010, Leibowitz agreed to 20 months in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release as part of a plea deal.

### INDICATORS

Security Violation - Leibowitz knowingly and willfully removed classified documents that he maintained at his residence.

Professional Lifecycle and Performance - Leibowitz was once fired from a legal clerkship in Israel and was publicly chastised by an Israeli court for leaking a judge’s private comments.

Access Attributes – Leibowitz worked as a translator for the Federal Bureau of Investigation where he held a clearance and had access to classified information.

## IMPACT

“As a trusted member of the FBI ranks, Leibowitz abused the trust of the FBI and the American public by using his access to classified information for his own purposes,” said Special Agent in Charge Richard A. McFeely.

Government employees who are given access to classified information are prohibited from disclosing the information without permission. Leibowitz’s unauthorized disclosure revealed ongoing classified intelligence operational activities and capabilities, including the standard language for the interception of phone calls, emails, and other messages from the FBI and the National Security Agency. His actions risked the disclosure of sources, methods, and operations.

Any potential leak of US operational activities and capabilities to any foreign intelligence entity, or agent of a foreign power, may degrade or compromise future operational endeavors to protect our nation’s security.

## ADDITIONAL INFO

Consider the following questions:

- What channels exist for lawful reporting of questionable government activities?
- Why is the term “whistleblower” not accurate in this case?
- What potential risk indicators could have been reported to prevent this insider threat?

Resources for further exploration:

- Whistleblower Protection Policies and FAQs  
(<https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/insider/whistleblower-protections.pdf?ver=Rx1hjuwKubBwypU4CL9R5A==>)
- Unauthorized Disclosure Job Aid  
([https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/personnel/CDSE\\_UAD\\_JobAid.pdf?ver=AZDMDCstDDqiJPa2XUNRtw%3d%3d](https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/personnel/CDSE_UAD_JobAid.pdf?ver=AZDMDCstDDqiJPa2XUNRtw%3d%3d))
- Adjudicative Desk Reference  
([https://www.dhra.mil/portals/52/documents/perserec/adr\\_version\\_4.pdf](https://www.dhra.mil/portals/52/documents/perserec/adr_version_4.pdf))

## IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING!

Contact the appropriate POC to report any observed potential risk indicators:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Agency/Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: Supervisor/Security Officer/ITP Senior Official/ITP Manager