

# Helping Protect Itself Against Iran, Israel Helps Protect Many Others

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Not long before tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran reached an unprecedented high point, with the possibility looming of a war that could engulf many other countries besides those two, Israel located a secret Iranian site in Beirut, right near the airport, in the midst of a heavily-populated area (surrounded by thousands of civilians, as a way to discourage Israeli air attacks). The site, according to Prime Minister Netanyahu, holds radioactive material and missiles. The Israelis, after all, have been running circles around the Iranians for years. They assassinated, one after the other, four key Iranian nuclear scientists right in the middle of Tehran. They concocted the fiendishly brilliant Stuxnet worm, the first computer program that caused real-world damage, for it sent

messages to the computers it infected, the computers that were regulating Iran's centrifuges, causing those computers to send messages that made the centrifuges speed up and destroy themselves and even damage other centrifuges. At the same time, other messages were sent back that the computer program was working perfectly.

The Israelis have destroyed, in Syria, hundreds of Iranian missiles, and have kept up the bombing of Iranian bases in Syria, and of Iranian soldiers on Syrian bases, preventing any kind of permanent Iranian outpost to be established. Some time ago Israeli agents carried out a night-time raid in a nondescript commercial district in Tehran, lasting six hours and 29 minutes, bringing away 50,000 pages of documents, and countless discs, which constituted the most important part of Iran's secret nuclear archive, proving to the world that Iran had never abandoned its nuclear project, and had gotten much farther with it than the world previously believed.

In locating the site in Beirut, Israel again did not just itself but the entire Western world a great service. For the missiles whose guidance systems Iran is improving for Hezbollah, and the nuclear material that Iran is storing in Beirut, to be someday used either by its forces or possibly by Hezbollah, are not a threat only to Israel. Iran has designs on Yemen, as its proxy war against Saudi Arabia, that has already lasted several years, demonstrates. Iran would love to project and solidify Shi'a power in Yemen, right on the Arabian Sea, and to be able to threaten Saudi Arabia from the south, made easier by the porous border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Iran has a desire, too, to deal a direct blow to Saudi Arabia itself, as the richest and most powerful Sunni state, whose clerics talk of the Shi'a as if they were Infidels. That could mean supporting the discontented Shi'a in Saudi Arabia, some 15% of the population, almost all of whom are located in the Eastern Province, where the major oilfields are to be found. Iran also wants to take revenge on the United

Arab Emirates, for helping to fight the Shi'a Houthis in Yemen and, Iran now suspects, helping Arab separatists in Khuzestan, in southern Iran. Of course, Iran always proclaims as its chief enemy, more so even than Israel, the Great Satan, America. All of these countries have reason to be grateful to Israel for slowing down, for several years, Iran's nuclear project. Stuxnet alone, a computer worm which destroyed 1,000 centrifuges at the Natanz Enrichment Plant, set back Iran's nuclear project, according to the German scientist Ralph Langer, by as much as two years.

These acts of derring-do did not end there. Israeli agents managed to locate in a dusty part of Tehran the top secret Iranian nuclear archive, to break in, to blowtorch open the many steel doors, to go through the archives and select the huge amounts of material that they then spirited out of Iran to Israel. This archive offered proof to the world that the Iranians had continued to work on their nuclear project after they had supposedly stopped, and that they had gotten much farther along than anyone suspected.

During the last few years, the Iranians have tried to establish their own bases in Syria, and from there hoped both to threaten Israel from closer up than from Iran itself, and to supply Hezbollah with more advanced weapons. But no matter where they put those bases in Syria, and even when the Iranians tried to conceal themselves inside Syrian bases, Israeli planes have always managed to find and to bomb them. And the Israelis have been staggeringly successful at interdicting Iranian weapons shipments meant for Hezbollah.

And now Israel has uncovered, and shown to the world, a secret Iranian facility near the airport in Beirut, which contains fissile material and machines to manufacture precision-guided missiles. At this point, the Iranians may wonder: do we empty the facility of its contents, or will Israel, with its uncanny spying ability, including eye-in-the-sky drones, be able to see everything that comes out of that building and where it is

taken? And if, and when, these machines and that material are taken out of the facility, and are in the open, will it not be easier for Israel to bomb both? Perhaps, by making public its knowledge of this facility, the Israelis are hoping to lure the Iranians into doing just that. It is hard for the Iranians, who have so often been outsmarted by the Israelis, to know what to do. What can Israeli spy drones and spy planes and spy satellites and human spies, find out? Do the Iranians try to smuggle the material and machines out, or do they keep everything as it is, but move even more civilians into close proximity to the building, in the hope that this civilian presence will dissuade Israel from attacking it?

As the Iranians have discovered, to their great displeasure, wherever or whomever or whatever they try to hide from Israel, the Israelis always find them out. The Israelis identified, and then assassinated, four of Iran's top nuclear scientists; they found, and sabotaged, the computers that controlled the centrifuges at Natanz, they found the secret nuclear archives in Tehran and spirited them away, they found and bombed Iranian bases in Syria, and they found, and showed to the world, the once-secret Iranian facility in Beirut. Iran's rulers are surely in a quandary.

All of this limits Iran's aggressive plans. Israel has accomplished these feats in order, of course, to protect itself. But the rest of the West, and some Arab states, too, should recognize that they also benefit from these fantastic acts of human and technological derring-do. Some, at least, from agents in Langley to princes in Riyadh, know enough to be grateful. And so should we.

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