Natanz Explosion Sent Message from Israel to Iran: If You Build It, We Will Come

by Hugh Fitzgerald

When a simple email just wouldn't do, Israeli saboteurs decided two months ago to send a message to the Supreme Leader and his cronies in Tehran. Not for the first time, Israel decided that an act of spectacular derring-do would put the Iranians on notice: you are being watched, everywhere; we know everything you do; you may go thus far, but no farther. The stirring story is [here](#).

An explosion two months ago at Natanz, a key Iranian uranium enrichment facility, was meant to send a message of determination to stop the Islamic Republic's nuclear program, The Jerusalem Post has learned. The purpose of the attack was to send an unambiguous deterrent message that progress toward a nuclear weapon beyond certain redlines would not be

Israel is a world leader in cyberwarfare, as its unprecedented creation and use of the computer worm Stuxnet in 2010 demonstrated. The Israelis then infected Iranian computers with the worm, which in turn ordered about 1,000 centrifuges to speed up so fast that they destroyed themselves. This set back the Iranian nuclear program, at that point, by at least a year.

Israel is also a master at inserting its agents into Iran. Such agents managed to kill, in separate incidents, four of Iran's top nuclear scientists, by riding up on motorcycles to their cars, stopped in Tehran traffic, shooting them, and then riding away. None of these agents were ever caught.

In another act of derring-do, Israeli agents targeted a certain nondescript building in the middle of Tehran. They waited until just after the last guards had left for the night. And then they sprang into action, as the [New York Times](#) reported:

> *The Mossad agents moving in on a warehouse in a drab commercial district of Tehran knew exactly how much time they had to disable the alarms, break through two doors, cut through dozens of giant safes and get out of the city with a half-ton of secret materials: six hours and 29 minutes….*
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> *The agents arrived that night, Jan. 31, with torches that burned at least 3,600 degrees, hot enough, as they knew from intelligence collected during the planning of the operation, to cut through the 32 Iranian-made safes. But they left many untouched, going first for the ones containing the black binders, which contained the most critical designs. When time*

*was up, they fled for the border, hauling some 50,000 pages
and 163 compact discs of memos, videos and plans.*

It was an astounding feat, leaving the Iranians panicked. How
did these agents get into the country? How did Mossad locate
that building, and keep it under surveillance for a year
before striking? How did its agents know which safes to open,
in what order? And how did they manage to slip out of Iran
unobserved with a half-ton of documents and compact discs? Did
heads roll in Tehran as a result?

But let's go back to the sabotage at Natanz:

*To date, Iran has made multiple announcements, but has not
accused Israel at an official level and Jerusalem has never
officially taken responsibility, although multiple ministers
have dropped hints.*

*At the time, a previously unknown group called the Homeland
Cheetahs, claimed that it was a group of Iranian dissidents
and had undertaken the attack.*

*However, that group has not been heard from since. Experts
speculated that the group was a cover for the true attacker
or at most a mixed operation of Iranian dissidents with a
powerful foreign backer like Israel, the United States or
Saudi Arabia….*

The "Homeland Cheetahs" do not appear to exist, but were
apparently fabricated in order to initially throw up a
smokescreen, leading Iranian officials on a wild goose chase,
possibly giving those Mossad agents involved sufficient time
to escape.

Israel wanted the Iranians to understand that that their
progress on their nuclear project would unceasingly continue
to be undermined. Cyberwarfare capable of destroying
centrifuges, assassinations of nuclear scientists, thefts of a

half-ton of top-secret documents and compact discs about the nuclear project, and now this latest feat — the destruction at the centrifuge plant in Natanz, which could only have been caused by agents on the ground, who may have placed explosive charges inside the building. That latest act was not meant only to destroy the plant, but to send Tehran an unmistakable message: if you keep pursuing nuclear weapons, we will keep attacking whatever and wherever you build, in the ways — agents or cyberwarfare — we deem most effective. We are masters of cyberwarfare as you know to your own secret sorrow. And we have agents everywhere inside your country. We know everything you are trying to do. Go ahead and rebuild your Natanz plant inside a mountain. It won't help; we will find a way (you know we always find a way). Besides, the Americans are going to provide us with those bunker busters we've been eyeing, that our airplanes or drones or agents — you may never know which — will send down shafts to blow up whatever you've built underground.

Though Tehran initially played down the Natanz and other explosions, within days satellite footage revealed that the impact was far more serious than the regime was claiming.

By July 9, Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) president David Albright had told the Post that around three-quarters of the advanced centrifuge assembly facility had been destroyed, setting back advanced centrifuge development by between one to two years.

The Post has confirmed that official levels of the Israeli government agree with this assessment and believe that the attack has dealt a major setback to Iran's development of advanced centrifuges.

In other reports, Israelis have said that Iran's nuclear project has been set back, as a result of the advanced centrifuge plant's destruction, of at least two years. But

there is reason to think it has been set back even longer.

> *Shortly after the explosion, Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi hinted to [sic] Israeli involvement. Furthermore, last month Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen responded to the Post's questions about the attack saying, "we know what is happening everywhere" in the Islamic Republic and "whoever wants to threaten Israel's existence will have no immunity anywhere… I say to Iran, 'don't put Israel's determination to the test.'"…*

> **Albright estimated that the facility would take at least a year to rebuild, but likely longer since it took six years, from 2012-2018, to build it and become operational the first time.**

If it took six years to build the Natanz plant, even allowing for a steep learning curve, surely "a year to rebuild" is a gross underestimate. Two years, as Israelis have mentioned, or even three, seem much more plausible estimates as to how long it will take to build a new plant. And if the plant is going to be rebuilt inside a mountain, as the Iranians claim, that will be a much more complex and lengthy undertaking than was the building of Natanz on flat ground.

The message to Iran from Israel is clear: if you build it, we will come. We will come with airplanes, or drones. We will come with Mossad agents, ready to lay their explosives at any facility they choose, ready to assassinate those nuclear scientists who are deemed critical to the program, ready to travel into, and around, and swiftly out of, Iran, with impunity. If you build it, we will come in another way, too — not physically but through the ether, sending messages to your computers that will cause massive self-destruction to your nuclear project. Spare yourselves the grief; stop your nuclear project. Or be prepared for more — much much more — of the devastation you have already experienced.

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