For Now, the Mossad is Outplaying Tehran

The multiple secret operations carried out by the Israeli special services in recent years against Iran are legitimately indicative of the vulnerabilities inherent in the Iranian strategic infrastructure. And, given the many years of confrontation between Israel and Iran in the area of covert operations, this vulnerability is currently taking on a special significance for Tehran. Tehran recently even had to admit that the Mossad (Israeli intelligence) had penetrated Iranian state system to such an extent that officials had good reason to fear for their lives.

As the former head of Iranian intelligence, Ali Younesi, recently stated, the country’s special services are not doing anything to expose and prosecute foreign agents. Israeli intelligence services regularly steal secret documents from the country’s institutes and military bases - something which is possible only if traitors are present. His words, according to the UAE-based news channel Al Arabiya, are consistent with the statement made by former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that one of the senior Iranian intelligence officials in charge of combating Israeli spies was an agent for Israel himself. According to Ahmadinejad, the success of Israel’s intelligence operations in Iran, including the theft of classified documents that have to do with the nuclear and space industries, is due to nothing more than the infiltration of Mossad agents into the government’s security services.

It is common knowledge that any progress made with developing Iran’s military nuclear program represents an extremely sore point for Israel, for which the Shiite religious state in recent decades has been the main strategic, if
not existential, adversary. The Iranian leadership believes (at least officially) that possessing a “nuclear truncheon” can immediately resolve two issues: first, it could help crush Israel or, at least, in the event of a full-scale war with the threat of mutual destruction, prevent the Jewish state from dealing a nuclear blow; second, it would allow the Islamic republic to preserve its sovereignty, and even stop a possible US intervention by the sole threat of using it (against Israel or the US bases on the Arabian Peninsula).

Therefore, it is not surprising that the main activity done by the Israeli special services in Iran is related to timely receiving information about the Iranian secret nuclear program, nuclear facilities on the territory of Iran, and persons involved in these kinds of activities.

“High-profile exposures” of Israeli intelligence services’ special operations against Iranian nuclear scientists appeared as early as 2007, in particular in February 2007 after the Mossad, “under mysterious circumstances,” assassinated Ardeshr Hosseinpour, one of the leading Iranian scientists who worked at a nuclear facility in Isfahan. Various Western media (in particular, The Daily Telegraph and La Repubblica in February 2009) have repeatedly pointed to Israel’s “secret war” against key figures in the Iranian nuclear program, organizing various acts of sabotage using shell companies that supplied Iran with unusable equipment and raw materials. In 2010, following an operation conducted by Israeli intelligence services, the Stuxnet computer virus disabled more than one thousand centrifuges at Iranian nuclear facilities. In January 2020, with an active role played by the Israeli intelligence services, Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, who headed the most secret elite unit of the Iranian army called the Quds Force, was killed, and on November 27, 2020, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Iran’s leading nuclear physicist, was killed in the suburbs of Tehran.

In May 2018, Israeli leadership announced a secret nuclear dossier on Iran that was received by the Mossad, which, among other things, revealed information about a secret storage facility for undisclosed nuclear materials in Tehran. In September 2018, Benjamin Netanyahu officially presented the international community with information about a second secret nuclear storage facility in Iran.

Israeli journalist Ronen Bergman, author of The Secret War with Iran: The 30-Year Clandestine Struggle Against the World’s Most Dangerous Terrorist Power, recently obtained authorized access to information about that operation, which resulted in the Israeli intelligence services stealing and smuggling documentary materials on one of the secret nuclear storage facilities from Iran to Israel. Judging by the information published by Bergman, a Mossad team discovered a number of these facilities in Iran, and monitored each of them for about a year. Working out the operation (code-named “Ocean-11”) to infiltrate the Iranian facility and remove valuable materials from there started in early 2017. Several dozen people were involved in carrying that out, among whom were deep reconnaissance agents who managed to penetrate not only into the area of the facility of interest, and take a number of photographs, but even get inside it and take a floor plan and data on what is located there - and where. In the early morning on January 31, 2018, a detachment of Israeli agents infiltrated this secret facility in Tehran, and successfully broke into the safes that were needed. As a result, they made off with a secret archive containing 55,000 pages of text materials and diagrams, as well as 182 data storage devices. Despite the fact that the Iranians quickly discovered the intrusion into the secret facility, they could not do anything swiftly. Such was the result of mundane negligence on the part of the employees, inept security for an important sensitive facility, and unprofessional actions taken to intercept the group of saboteurs.

Even back in January 2012, the French newspaper Le Figaro wrote that Israeli intelligence agents were recruiting and training Iranians at clandestine bases located in the Kurdish region of Iraq. A year later, The Washington Post reported that Turkey had disclosed to Iranian intelligence the existence of a network of Israeli spies operating in Iran, and ten of them were presumably Kurds that had met with Mossad representatives in Turkey. According to the Voltaire Network, by allying itself with the Kurds, Israel had gained eyes and ears in Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

At the same time, it has come to light from a number of media publications that Israeli intelligence is not only actively conducting intelligence activities in Iran on the nation’s strategic infrastructure. For example, at the end of 2020 in Tehran Israeli agents not only tracked down, but eliminated one of the most wanted terrorists in the world: Abu Muhammad Al-Masri, number two with the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda (banned in the Russian Federation); this was reported by The New York Times newspaper, citing four sources in the US intelligence services. Al-Masri was driving near his place of residence when two Israeli agents approached him on a motorcycle and killed the terrorist and his daughter Miriam - who was married to Osama bin Laden’s son, Hamza bin Laden - with five shots from a pistol with a silencer. Reportedly, Egyptian Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah (who went by his nom de guerre Abu Muhammad Al-Masri) had been hiding in Iran since 2015, despite hostile relations between the Sunni terrorist group and Shiite Iran. For years, the United States had been looking for Al-Masri, the culprit behind several bloody al-
Qaeda attacks in Africa. He planned the devastating bombings at the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, which killed 224 people and injured hundreds more. Israelis hold him responsible for a terrorist attack on an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa, Kenya in 2002.

*Vladimir Platov, expert on the Middle East, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.*