

# The 'Big Lie' behind the Israeli hit on Baghdad's nuclear facility

by Robert Dreyfuss, Middle East Editor

In carrying out an unprovoked air raid against the Iraqi nuclear research facilities on June 7, the Israeli government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin claimed to have acted for the urgent self-defense of Israel.

That rationale is a complete lie. Moreover, the attack on Iraq represents a severe strategic miscalculation by Begin and his international allies. In fact, the Iraqi reactor presented not the slightest threat to Israeli security, despite Begin's extravagant declaration that he has "saved Israel from a holocaust." In addition, Begin's attack on Iraq, in contravention of international law, will not aid Begin's much-proclaimed intention to exclude the Soviet Union from the Middle East, but will facilitate the growth of Moscow's influence in the Arab world.

From Begin's own standpoint, the air raid was calculated as a jingoistic vote-getting move in the battle against challenger Shimon Peres of the Labour Party in the June 30 national elections. Peres blasted Begin's cynical opportunism the day after the raid, saying, "We must tell the people what we feel, that the action was an election stunt. The reactor in Iraq did not yet pose a risk that required action at such an early stage."

Peres' statement was little noticed in the hoopla after the attack; it exposes Begin's defenders overseas—including many gullible U.S. congressmen—as mere electioneers for Begin, *not* defenders of the Israeli state.

As viewed by Begin's supporters, the real purpose behind the Israeli attack was to further destabilize the Middle East in alliance with the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini, disrupt oil supplies to the West, and, more broadly, set back the prospects for developing nuclear energy-based industrialization anywhere in the Third World.

But the decision to unleash the Israeli air force created a deeper and further-reaching crisis in the Middle East and around the world than its authors may have intended. In the aftermath of the June 7 attack, a fundamental alteration has occurred in the way the Arabs, the Europeans, the Soviets, and the Reagan administration will view international relations. The consequences are highly unpredictable.

Perhaps most significant is the fact that Begin has violated the basic principle governing world affairs: the

inviolable sovereignty of the nation-state. To accomplish that, Begin relied on two outright falsehoods:

*First*, Begin lied that the Iraqi reactor was designed to "create atomic bombs" and that the "existence of Israel was at stake." In reality, the Iraqi reactor was a small research facility designed primarily to train Iraqi scientists and prepare the expansion of the Iraqi industrial nuclear program. It was not intended to produce bombs, and the nuclear fuel was under tight French controls and inspection.

Iraq is also a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and international teams of inspectors had recently visited Baghdad to guarantee against military uses of the reactor. Israel has refused to sign the treaty and possesses several nuclear bombs, according to the CIA.

## Menachem Begin's alliance with the Iranian regime

Iraq's Osirak nuclear research reactor which Israeli F-16s bombed June 7 was the centerpiece of a bold economic development plan for the entire Arab world.

Last year, Baghdad presented a plan to the Arab League for a multimillion-dollar development program intended to make the Arab world an economic superpower by the year 2000. Only through such a plan, argued Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, could the Arab nations hope to ensure their sovereignty, and reach a just settlement of the Middle East crisis.

Iraq intends to utilize nuclear energy to desalinate seawater. "The transformation of this region will have important climatic and agricultural repercussions and will serve as a model for analogous experiences in other parts of the Arab world, which have the largest deserts in the world," the Iraqi news agency reported last year.

In addition, Miles Copeland, an ex-CIA official with Middle East connections, has said that American authorities were fully briefed by French intelligence at every stage during the construction of the Iraqi facility, and thus had full knowledge of its actual capabilities.

*Second*, the Iraqi attack exposes as a lie Begin's claim that Israel acts as a force to prevent the involvement of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Israel's intention was to feed a radicalization of the Arab world. Begin is known to believe that by assisting Arab extremists like Libya's Colonel Qaddafi, he is building Israel's role as America's only friend in the region.

In recent months, Begin has established a secret alliance with the Soviet KGB intelligence service, by mutually agreeing with KGB-controlled Syria to divide war-torn Lebanon between its two neighbors. That accord was desired not only by the KGB but also by Secretary of State Alexander Haig, whose Cold War talk masked his commitment to a Yalta-style division of the Middle East into U.S. and U.S.S.R. spheres of influence. Both the Israeli government and the U.S.S.R. join with British banks and oil companies in seeking the destabilization of Saudi Arabia, and they are counting on Prince Abdullah, commander of the Saudi National Guard, to serve their mutual interests. Abdullah, who is widely known to have London connections, has recently been praised in the Soviet press.

Nuclear-powered desalination for mass irrigation projects is the foundation of a plan which Iraq and the government of French President Giscard d'Estaing created for renewing the ancient valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, known as the Fertile Crescent. Since 1974 Iraq has engaged in a land reclamation project which was projected to yield sufficient food by 1990 to feed the entire Arabian peninsula. President Hussein has stressed that Iraq's agricultural potential is "permanent oil," since it will yield economic benefits after its oil reserves are depleted.

The Iraqi nuclear program was a vehicle for training a generation of Arab scientists who could spread nuclear technology throughout the Arab world. In 1975, Iraq signed a nuclear cooperation accord with France to build a center for nuclear research. This center, which was about to become operational this year, housed the Osirak reactor.

The Iraqi research center's principal function was to train 600 engineers and technicians a year. Just before the defeat of President Giscard in the May French elections, Iraq and France were involved in negotiating for the construction of a much bigger reactor of 600 megawatts.

## Responses to the Israeli blitzkrieg

**Government of Iraq:** "It has been known to us from the beginning that many parties, local and international, were and still are behind the eagerness of the backward and suspect Iranian regime to stir up the dispute with, conduct aggression against, and begin the war against Iraq.

"They have been behind the continuation of this war for several months because of their political and military support and backing for Iran, including information, technical consultations, and direct and indirect military intelligence, in order to achieve their evil objectives against Iraq. The main party was the Zionist entity, which understands completely that a literate, developed, and capable Iraq is a decisive factor in determining the results of the Arab conflict against it, today and tomorrow.

"The Zionist entity understands that one of the most decisive factors in determining the future of the conflict the Arab nation is waging against it, is the continued presence of the technical and scientific gap between it and the Arab nation. Therefore, it is trying by all means to keep this gap within limits which will not enable the Arab nation to achieve victory over it in the conflict.

"Based on this strategic objective, the Zionist enemy participated on more than one occasion, directly and indirectly, with Iran against Iraq. This included supplying Iran with military equipment and spare parts. Zionist enemy planes also raided Iraq in the first days of the war, thus exploiting the war circumstances against Iran, in collusion with the suspect regime in Iran. The raids were aimed in particular at the Iraqi nuclear installations.

"The men who have been able, through their loyalty to their people and nation, their faith in their cause, and their minds and efforts, to bring Iraq's nuclear potential up to the standard which created this amount of rancor and blatant aggression by the Zionist and Persian enemies, make us confident that they are also capable of continuing this trend no matter what our enemies try, and no matter what these enemies can achieve in their attempts to do direct or indirect harm."

**France's reaction:** The Quai d'Orsay stated, "Any

attack on the territory of a foreign state is a violation of law and is therefore condemnable. The initiative of the Israeli government is a grave act which the French government deems to be unacceptable. In addition, this bombing increases the tension which affects the whole region.... M. Chaussepied, a French technician, found his death during this bombing."

**French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson:** Cheysson called the bombing a "grave" and "unacceptable" act. Agence France Presse news agency reported that the French government will not antagonize Israel, however, and continues to consider Israeli a "friend."

**French Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy** called the raid on Iraq, "an unacceptable and very grave act that complicates a very explosive situation." Despite this official expression of regret, French President François Mitterrand does not intend to cancel an upcoming trip to Israel, while Mauroy is sending out signals that France will not help Iraq rebuild the reactor. According to the *Washington Post*; "Mauroy said the French would study any Iraqi request to rebuild the nuclear center, but that a decision would be made in light of the French Socialist government's determination to gradually take France out of the 'international arms sales business and to avoid nuclear proliferation.'"

**King Hussein of Jordan:** "Those who do not support Iraq would in effect be supporting Israel. Supporting Iran means supporting the Zionist enemy."

**Prime Minister Mudar Badran of Jordan:** Badran accused Iran of assisting Israel in the attack. The Israeli jets, charged Badran, flew "with Iran's knowledge, coordination, and cooperation."

**Information Minister Mohammed Abdo Yamani of Saudi Arabia:** The attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor, charged Yamani, was the "peak of international terrorism practiced by Israel."

**Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali of Egypt:** Israel's raid on Iraq was "irresponsible and unjustified" and "could lead to a dangerous escalation of tension in the area."

**TASS, the official Soviet press agency:** "Israel's arrogant aggression against the sovereign Arab state of Iraq was made not without Washington's sanction. Moreover, it is obvious that this latest act of international piracy has been backed by the present American administration. American television commentators later hinted that contrary to the official version put out by the State Department, Washington was informed of Israel's preparation for this gangster action. The leadership of the American administration knew of the plan for a sudden attack by the Israeli air force on Iraq. ABC television's diplomatic correspondent points out that the question of the setting up of a nuclear center in Iraq has long been riling the United States. Washington has more than once

notified France and Italy of its opposition to this construction and has called for its cessation. American intelligence services drew the conclusion that Israel was planning the destruction of the complex and that a blow would be struck against it.

"The facts show that Tel Aviv did not stop at anything in carrying out this action. Israeli pilots intruded into the airspace of Jordan and twice that of Saudi Arabia. CBS correspondent draws attention to the fact that the American AWACs, which had been bought by Saudi Arabia for its anti-aircraft defense, could not pick up the Israeli planes. The explanation is that the crews of the AWACs are exclusively American.

"All the statements made by the Department of State condemning the Israeli raid are obviously designed to delude the world's public opinion regarding the true stand of the U.S. administration, as well as to soften the anti-American reaction of the Arab League. Washington's hypocritical stand is conclusive evidence that the current U.S. administration supports and encourages the pirates of international terrorism, and piracy which Israel has made state policy."

**U.S. Government Statement No. 2, cleared by President Reagan and Secretary of State Haig:** "The United States Government condemns the reported Israeli air strike on the Iraq nuclear facility, the unprecedented character of which cannot but seriously add to the already tense situation in the area.

"Available evidence suggests U.S.-provided equipment was employed in possible violation of the applicable agreement under which it was sold to Israel, and a report to this effect is being prepared for submission to the United States Congress in accordance with the relevant United States statute."

**U.S. Senator Howard Baker (R-Tenn.):** "It has extraordinary implications. It was totally unexpected. It will certainly make Ambassador Habib's mission more difficult. It's a serious matter and a cause for great concern."

**U.S. Senator Alphonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.):** In a press statement issued June 9, Senator D'Amato called the Israeli bombing of an Iraqi atomic reactor "courageous. . . . If this is what Israel felt she had to do to safeguard her national security, we are in no position to second guess her. . . . Israel is in a position of extreme vulnerability . . . there is no margin for error. . . . A preemptive strike can be a very effective weapon to prevent wider conflict. We might even term this a rather effective method of antinuclear proliferation."

**Representative Richard Ottinger (D-N.Y.):** An aide to the Representative told an interviewer that the bombing may have been Israel's message to the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia that Israel will not let Soviet-Arab relations "get away with nuclear proliferation."