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'Saudis, Israelis developing new 'super Stuxnet' against Iran nuclear program'

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A general view of the Bushehr main nuclear reactor (Reuters / Raheb Homavandi)
Israel vs Iran

Saudi Arabia and Israel's Mossad intelligence division are co-conspiring to produce a computer worm "more destructive" than the Stuxnet malware to sabotage Iran's nuclear program, according to a report from the semi-official Iranian Fars news agency.

“Saudi spy chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and director of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency Tamir Bardo sent their representatives to a meeting in Vienna on November 24 to increase the two sides’ cooperation in intelligence and sabotage operations against Iran’s nuclear program,” an anonymous source close to the Saudi secret services told Fars over the weekend.

The source noted that one of the major methods discussed was *“the production of a malware worse than....Stuxnet.”*

Stuxnet, a computer worm discovered in 2010, formed the basis of a cyberattack that sabotaged Iran’s uranium enrichment program. Its complexity prompted researchers to claim that it could only have been developed by a nation state.

It was generally believed to have been developed by the US and Israel, with former NSA contractor and whistleblower Edward Snowden only confirming their covert roles in an interview this July.

The intention behind the development of the new malware would be *“to spy on and destroy the software structure of Iran’s nuclear program.”* The source expressed a desire to remain anonymous on account of the sensitivity of information being shared.

The plan would need a great deal of time and funding, with a rough figure of US \$1 million being given as an estimate. It was apparently welcomed by Saudi Arabia with open arms.

Saudi spy chief Bandar met with Mossad’s Bardo in Jordan’s Aqaba port city, inciting some concern from Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Salman bin Abdulazi, who had advised against Bandar engaging in direct consultations, instead deeming ‘clandestine’ discussions with Israel over strategic Middle Eastern issues more appropriate.

The Fars source mentioned that a recent agreement between Iran and the Group 5+1 (the US, Russia, China, France and Britain plus Germany) unsettled Saudi officials, with Bandar having previously denounced the interim deal as the *“West’s treachery.”* Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lambasted the agreement, which was reached on November 23, as *“a historic mistake.”*

On November 17, The Sunday Times reported that the Israeli Mossad intelligence agency and Saudi officials were working together to develop a contingency plan should Iran’s nuclear program not be adequately curtailed. Both governments reportedly expressed concern that negotiations could result in concessions being made to Iran.

Prince Bandar also participated in a meeting in Tel Aviv with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and French President Francois Hollande to discuss US relations with Iran last week, according to local media.