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U.S. Aides in Israel Give Assurances About Iran

Israel Hints Involvement in Super-Virus Targeting Iran

An Israeli minister fed speculation that Israel could be responsible for a powerful new virus said to have been used in a recent attack on computers in Iran, and elsewhere in the Middle East. The discovery of the complex data-stealing "Flame" virus was disclosed by a Russian-based digital security firm, Kaspersky Lab. Its experts reported that it had been applied most actively in Iran, but also in Israel, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Moshe Yaalon, Israel's Vice Prime Minister and Strategic Affairs Minister, told Israel Army Radio: "Anyone who sees the Iranian threat as a significant threat – it's reasonable [to assume] that he will take various steps, including these, to harm it." Mr Yaalon, a former military Chief of Staff, added: "Israel was blessed as being a country rich with high-tech. These tools that we take pride in open up all kinds of opportunities for us." He stopped short of directly claiming responsibility, but Israel has long been in the forefront of opposition to Iran's nuclear program, currently the subject of difficult negotiations between Tehran and six world powers.

Although many viruses can already steal large amounts of data, few have been as comprehensive as Flame, or steal in so many different ways. The security industry is still in the early stages of examining what exactly Flame can do, but examples already given include hijacking a computer's microphone to record conversations, taking screen shots during chats through instant messenger, and even stealing data from devices that are attached to an infected computer through a Bluetooth connection.

[PanArmenian.Net]

President Obama and his senior advisers have said little publicly about Iran since the resumption of negotiations over its nuclear program in April, preferring to let the diplomats hash out the issues in the hope that tensions with Tehran can be managed, at least until the election in November. In Israel, however, the United States is saying plenty, with a stream of current and former officials traveling there to threaten additional sanctions on Iran and to reiterate President Obama's readiness to use military action against Iran if diplomacy fails.

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*Michèle A. Flournoy,
former Under Secretary of
Defense*

"When the President said all options are on the table, let me reassure you that those options are real and viable," said Michèle A. Flournoy, a former Under Secretary of Defense, recently speaking at a security conference in Tel Aviv. Referring to the Pentagon's planning for a possible military strike, she said, "Having sat in the Pentagon and spent a lot of my time on this issue, I can assure you of the quality of that work."

David S. Cohen, a Treasury Department under secretary who oversees financial sanctions, told the Israeli newspaper Haaretz that if the next round of nuclear talks break down, "there is no question we will continue to ratchet up the pressure." Israel and the United States, he said, are considering unspecified new measures that would build on the oil sanctions set to take effect at the beginning of next month. Their remarks followed a speech in May by the American ambassador to Israel, Daniel B. Shapiro, who said that the United States not only was willing to use force, but had also made preparations for a military operation.

Flournoy's statements dovetail with a concerted American effort that also includes frequent high-level meetings with Israeli officials, all aimed at giving Israel enough confidence in the diplomatic effort that it will hold off on a unilateral military strike. "There is, and has been, a consistent interest in reassuring the Israelis that we're not going to be played," said Dennis B. Ross, who was one of the President's senior advisers on Iran and is now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "That the goal is to raise pressure, not to relieve it, and that the objective remains prevention, not contain-

(Continued on page 2)

ment.”

Israeli jitters have hardly been eased by the first two bargaining sessions between Iran and the major powers, which in addition to the United States include Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China. The second meeting, in Baghdad in May, ended badly amid signs that the Iranians were unwilling to suspend enrichment of uranium to 20 percent purity - a demand by the major powers that was intended to build confidence for a broader deal.

For some Israelis, the latest signs of an impasse vindicate their worries that Iran will use the negotiations as a way to stall the West, delay the oil sanctions, and buy itself time to stockpile more enriched uranium. In an interview published in the German newspaper Bild, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu complained that the major powers were making “inadequate” demands of Iran at the bargaining table.

Israeli officials also balked when the senior American nuclear negotiator, Wendy R. Sherman, an Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, declared on a visit to Israel after the Baghdad meeting that the United States and Israel were on the same page when it came to dealing with Iran. “We believe that the Iranian goal is to drag this out as long as possible,” said an Israeli official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the delicacy of the matter. “We’re happy to hear what they have to say,” this official said of the visiting Americans. “We’re happy to try to be reassured.”

Ms. Flournoy, who now advises the Obama campaign, devoted most of her remarks in Tel Aviv to making the case that Israel should not launch a premature or unilateral strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities. Such an attack, she said, would set back the Iranian nuclear program, at most, one to three years. And it could splinter the coalition the United States has assembled to impose crippling sanctions on Tehran.

“Here’s the rub,” Ms. Flournoy said at Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Security Studies. “If Israel or any other country were to launch a unilateral strike against Iran’s nuclear program prematurely, before all other options to stop Iran have been tried and failed, it would undermine the legitimacy of the action.”

In a recent interview, Ms. Flournoy said she was encouraged because several Israelis approached her at the conference to express opposition to an Israeli strike and skepticism of the government’s assertions that the window was fast closing for a military attack that would incapacitate Iran’s nuclear abilities.

But she added that the diversity of opinion among ordinary Israelis did not ease her fears of military action since, she said, Mr. Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak “are getting clearer and clearer in their intentions.” [NY Times]

El Al Israel Airlines Gets \$40 Million Loan from Boeing to Buy Aircraft

Israel’s flagship carrier, El Al Israel Airlines Ltd., has been granted a \$40 million loan from Boeing Company’s (BA) financing division to help fund the purchase of new airplanes.

El Al said it would use the loan to help buy either one Boeing 787 Dreamliner or to lease two 787s in 2015 or 2016. El Al has already purchased four other new planes that will enter its fleet between 2013 and 2015. El Al representatives said it needs the new planes to reduce the overall age of its fleet and to replace some of its wide body jets with narrower ones. [Dow Jones]

Israeli Microscope Uses Rainbow Of Light To Image The Flow Of Blood Cells

A new device developed by a team of researchers in Israel can reveal much of the same information as a traditional blood test in real-time, simply by shining a light through the skin. The optical instrument, no bigger than a breadbox, is able to provide high-resolution images of blood coursing through veins without the need for harsh and short-lived fluorescent dyes. “We have invented a new optical microscope that can see individual blood cells as they flow inside our body,” said Lior Golan, a graduate student in the biomedical engineering department at the Israel Institute of Technology, or Technion.

By eliminating a long wait-time for blood test results, the new microscope might help spotlight warning signs, like high white blood cell count, before a patient develops severe medical problems. The portability of the device could also enable doctors in rural areas without easy access to medical labs to screen large populations for common blood disorders, Golan said.

Using the new microscope, the researchers imaged the blood flowing through a vessel in the lower lip of a volunteer. They successfully measured the average diameter of the red and white blood cells and also calculated the percent volume of the different cell types, a key measurement for many medical diagnoses.

To scan blood cells in motion, a probe is pressed against the skin of a patient and a rainbow-like line of light is directed across a blood vessel near the surface of the skin. As blood cells cross the line they scatter light, which is collected and analyzed. The color of the scattered light carries spatial information and computer programs interpret the signal to create images of the blood cells.

The researchers are also working on a second generation system with higher penetration depth. Said Golan, “We hope to have a thumb-size prototype within the next year.” [e! Science News]