

# Iran Nuclear Talks: Remembering the Israeli Attack on Iraq's Peaceful Nuclear Reactor Osirak. Will History Repeat Itself?

By [Timothy Alexander Guzman](#)

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On June 7th, 1981, Israel launched a surprise attack in the Southeast of Bagdad, Iraq that destroyed the Osirak nuclear reactor under construction (image left). It was known as *Operation Opera*, an Israeli plan to destroy Iraq's proposed nuclear reactor that was intended for peaceful scientific research. Iraq originally purchased the "Osiris"-class nuclear reactor from France in 1976. Richard Wilson, a Mallinckrodt Research Professor of Physics at Harvard University at the time spoke to *The Atlantic*, an American based magazine and said that Osirak was "*unsuitable for making bombs*". He said:

First, the Osirak reactor that was bombed by Israel in June of 1981 was explicitly designed by the French engineer Yves Girard to be unsuitable for making bombs. That was obvious to me on my 1982 visit. Many physicists and nuclear engineers have agreed. Much evidence suggests that the bombing did not delay the Iraqi nuclear-weapons program but started it

Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin claimed that Iraq's nuclear reactor was ready for operational use and that it can produce nuclear weapons at any given moment. The Israeli government declared Iraq's Nuclear program a threat to its national security. Iraq was also a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that allowed international inspections of its nuclear facilities. Today Iran is also a signatory to the NPT. It is interesting to note that both countries signed on to the NPT which under international law allows them to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and prevents the spread of nuclear weapons and technology. Israel on the other hand is not a member of the NPT and has never admitted nor denied that they have nuclear weapons launched a surprise attack on Iraq's facilities and is now threatening Iran with the same consequences over its nuclear program. It was reported that the Israeli air strikes killed more than 10 Iraqi soldiers and a French citizen. Israel released a statement following their actions and claimed that Iraq wanted to produce atomic bombs to attack Israel because they were Saddam Hussein's main target. The statement read as follows:

On Sunday, 7 June, the Israeli air force launched a raid on the atomic reactor "Ossirac", near Baghdad. Our pilots carried out their mission fully. The reactor was destroyed. All our aircraft returned safely to base.

The Government feels duty-bound to explain to enlightened public opinion why it took this decision.

For a long time we have been watching with growing concern the construction of the

atomic reactor "Ossirac". From sources whose reliability is beyond any doubt, we learn that this reactor, despite its camouflage, is designed to produce atomic bombs. The target for such bombs would be Israel. This was clearly announced by the ruler of Iraq. After the Iranians had inflicted slight damage on the reactor, Saddam Hussein stressed that the Iranians had attacked the target in vain, since it was being constructed against Israel alone. The atomic bombs which that reactor was capable of producing whether from enriched uranium or from plutonium, would be of the Hiroshima size. Thus a mortal danger to the people of Israel progressively arose.

Again, from most reliable sources we learned of two dates when the reactor would be completed and put into operation. One: the beginning of July 1981; Two: the beginning of September 1981. In other words, within a short period of time, the Iraqi reactor would have been operational and "hot". Under such circumstances no government of Israel could contemplate bombing the reactor. Such an attack would have brought about a massive radioactive lethal fallout over the city of Baghdad and tens of thousands of its innocent residents would have been hurt. We would thus have been compelled to passively observe the process of the production of atomic bombs in Iraq, whose ruling tyrant would not hesitate to launch them against Israeli cities, the centers of its population. Therefore, the government of Israel decided to act without further delay to ensure our people's existence. The planning was exact. The operation was timed for Sunday on the assumption that the 100-150 foreign experts employed at the reactor would be absent on the Christian day of rest. This assumption proved to have been correct. No foreign experts were hurt.

Two European governments, in return for oil, have assisted the Iraqi tyrant in the construction of atomic weapons. We again call upon them to desist from this horrifying, inhuman deed. Under no circumstances will we allow an enemy to develop weapons of mass destruction against our people.

We shall defend the citizens of Israel in time, and with all the means at our disposal.

Even the New York Times admitted that Israel was not in "Mortal Danger" in an Opinion article on June 9th, 1981 called *'Israel's Illusion'*:

Even assuming that Iraq was hellbent to divert enriched uranium for the manufacture of nuclear weapons, it would have been working toward a capacity that Israel itself acquired long ago. Contrary to its official assertion, therefore, Israel was not in "mortal danger" of being outgunned. It faced a potential danger of losing its Middle East nuclear monopoly, of being deterred one day from the use of atomic weapons in war. And while that danger may now be delayed, it is also enhanced - by Iraq's humiliation

Is history about to repeat itself? Israel says that Iran's nuclear program is a threat to their existence. Why? They say that former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for Israel to be "wiped off the map." Numerous experts have declared that it was taken out of context. Even Dan Meridor, an Israeli politician who previously served as minister of intelligence and atomic energy and a deputy prime minister admitted in an Al Jazeera interview in 2012 that Ahmadinejad's statement on wiping Israel off the map was misunderstood when he said *"They [Iranian leaders] all come basically ideologically, religiously with the statement that Israel is an unnatural creature, it will not survive,"* Meridor says. *"They didn't say 'we'll wipe it out', you are right, but 'it will not*

*survive, it is a cancerous tumour, it should be removed'. They repeatedly said 'Israel is not legitimate, it should not exist'."*

### **The French-Israeli Nuclear Connection**

The attack on Osirak should be a history lesson on what Israel is capable of. The Times of Israel reported that French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius was warned by a member of the French parliament that Israel would launch an attack on Iran if the present deal was passed. The report titled *'Israel will attack Iran if you sign the deal, French MP told Fabius'*. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wanted the deal to have as he would say in the past regarding Iran's sanctions to "Have Teeth." The report said:

"French member of parliament telephoned French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius in Geneva at the weekend to warn him that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would attack Iran's nuclear facilities if the P5+1 nations did not stiffen their terms on a deal with Iran, Israel's Channel 2 News reported Sunday."

"I know [Netanyahu]," the French MP, Meyer Habib, reportedly told Fabius, and predicted that the Israeli prime minister would resort to the use of force if the deal was approved in its form at the time. "If you don't toughen your positions, Netanyahu will attack Iran," the report quoted Habib as saying. "I know this. I know him. You have to toughen your positions in order to prevent war."

Israel's influence in French politics is obvious. But then again, France and Israel's extensive relationship regarding nuclear weapons dates back to 1949 with the development of the Negev Nuclear Research Center in the Negev Desert, in the southeast of the city of Dimona. In 1949 nuclear physicist Francis Perrin of the French Atomic Energy Commission who was also a friend of Dr. Earnst David Bergmann of the Weizmann Institute located in Israel invited Israeli scientists to a newly built French nuclear research facility at Saclay. Both France and Israel agreed to a joint research effort that would eventually lead to nuclear weapons production at the Negev Nuclear Research Center. Perrin ended up providing Israel with nuclear data. Throughout the 1950's Israel and France developed a business relationship that included Arms deals that benefitted French weapons manufacturers.

### **The Tripartite Pact and the Invasion of Egypt**

France and Israel collaborated in joint military and political operations with the United Kingdom for the control of the Suez Canal-Sinai against Egypt in October 1956 with a secret agreement called the *Protocol of Sevres*. Israel, France and Great Britain had planned a military invasion of Egypt in what was known to become the Suez War because Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser had nationalized the Suez Canal.

The Suez Canal was owned by the France (who built the route in 1869) and Great Britain which connects the Mediterranean and Red seas across Egypt. The Suez Canal is an important shipping route that connects Middle East oil exports to European markets. The Czech-Egyptian arms agreement in 1955 added to Israel's worries that would have increased the strength of the Egyptian military which challenged Israel's power in the region.

When Egypt's President Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran back in 1953, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion had ordered the development of chemical and nuclear weapons

for its national security objectives. Israeli government officials including Shimon Peres and Ernst David Bergmann met with members of the CEA (France's Atomic Energy Commission) and reached an agreement in 1956 that would allow France to sell Israel a "research reactor".

The Suez war began on October 29, 1956. Israel, France and Great Britain launched an attack on Egypt over the Suez Canal. It ended up as a political disaster for France and Great Britain in relations to the Middle East. Israel's military attack was a success for a short time because they ended up occupying the entire Sinai Peninsula. However, France and Great Britain's attempt to advance along the southern border along the Suez Canal was stopped through a cease-fire agreement under Soviet and U.S. pressures. Both nations pulled out of the conflict by the end of December. Israel faced pressures from Soviet Premier Bulganin and President Khrushchev with a threat of a nuclear attack if Israel did not withdraw from the Sinai. The United States Government under the Eisenhower administration supported a UN resolution that called for the withdrawal of all invading forces. By March 1957 Israeli forces completed their withdrawal from the Sinai. Israel was concerned over Soviet threats to launch a nuclear attack on the Jewish state.

Minister of Defense Shimon Peres secured an agreement from France to assist Israel in developing a nuclear deterrent which led to the development of the Negev Nuclear Research Center at Dimona. On March 20, 1957 Israel and France began to construct a "small swimming-pool research reactor" but the real plan was the construction of Dimona's Nuclear Reactor which began around 1957 and 1958 and then completed in 1962.

Why did France help Israel develop nuclear technology? They both had strategic interests in two regions of the world. France was fighting a colonial war in Algeria in Northern Africa and Israel had ambitions to control the Middle East militarily, politically and economically. In terms of historical and religious beliefs Israel wanted to also establish Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. France also wanted nuclear weapons as a deterrent against any "Blowback" from their colonial possessions in North Africa and the Middle East.

Israel and France collaborated on a number of programs including the early design on the Mirage fighter jets intended to deliver nuclear bombs. French experts secretly built the Israeli reactor underground at Dimona with Hundreds of French engineers and technicians with many stationed at Beersheba, the largest town in the Negev. A French firm called SON also helped build plutonium separation plants in both France and Israel. The ground was broken for the reactor in early 1958 known as the EL-102. Israel concealed its secret activities at Dimona by camouflaging it as a manganese and textile plants. By the end of 1958 the US had taken pictures of the project from U-2 spy plane and identified the site as a reactor complex. The French engineers and technicians were difficult to hide from international observers. In 1960, under the leadership of Charles de Gaulle France decided to suspend the project. After several months of negotiations France and Israel reached an agreement that allowed the reactor to proceed if Israel promised not to make nuclear weapons and make the project known to the international community.

On December 2nd, 1960, the U.S. State Department issued a statement that Israel had a secret nuclear installation and became public knowledge with its appearance in the *New York Times*. Then on December 21st, David Ben-Gurion announced to the world that Israel was building a 24-megawatt reactor "for peaceful purposes." The French government's collaboration with Israel to produce weapons of mass destruction was a disservice to world peace.

France also has a powerful Zionist organization in France that has as much influence as AIPAC (the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee) in the United States called CRIF (Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France), a group that unites Jewish organizations. The Times of Israel reported that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said back in May that *"I have known Meyer Habib for many years and he is a good friend to me and to Israel,"* the report continued *"He fights a lot for Israel, for public opinion, and cares intensely about the Land of Israel and Jerusalem, and he has helped me over the years deepen Israeli-French relations"* Netanyahu said in Hebrew.

France stepping in on behalf of Israel is no surprise looking back on their historical relationship. Iran's nuclear talks were going to fail. I am pessimistic about the new round of talks scheduled for November 20th. Can history repeat itself with an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities by Israeli Defense Forces in the future?

The parallels between Iraq and Iran concerning Israel's determination to start a war with its neighbors are eerily similar. Israel wants to dominate the Middle East in every aspect, but Iran is in the way. Israel's Western partners will back Israel one way or another. US President Barack Obama agreed to continue sanctions on Iran. It seems like the Western powers and Israel are really not interested in a peaceful solution with Iran, no matter what the new leadership of Hassan Rouhani does to ease tensions with the West and its neighbors including the Gulf States.

The same goes for Israel's so-called peace talks with the Palestinians. Every time the peace talks resume, Israel continues to build new "Jewish only settlements" in Palestinian territories. In other words, there are no peace talks. The same unfortunate truth with Iran's nuclear program, there will be no peaceful solution to Iran's nuclear program unless Russia, China and the rest of the world prevent an Israeli strike on Iran's facilities. It would be a disaster for the Middle East and the rest of the world. Many would die in this long predicted war scenario. The Middle East would explode in anger against Israeli aggression.

It is true that the world is a different place today in comparison to 1981. The world is in a more fragile state today with several countries suffering from foreign interventions such as Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Mali and many others. The world's volatile economy would lead to a global depression allowing oil prices to double even triple as a result. Let's hope history does not repeat itself. If it does, then history will tell us that World War III was the most catastrophic moment in our time.

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Articles by: [Timothy Alexander Guzman](#)

## About the author:

Timothy Alexander Guzman is an independent researcher and writer with a focus on political, economic, media and historical spheres. He has been published in Global Research, The Progressive Mind, European Union Examiner, News Beacon Ireland, WhatReallyHappened.com, EIN News and a number of other alternative news sites. He is a graduate of Hunter College in New York City.

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