

Leak inquiry launched over 'NYT' Story on American-Israeli Cyberwar Targeting Iran

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The [Obama administration's war on leaks](#) has now [ensnared General James Cartwright](#), a four-star general and a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a high-level body of military leaders. Cartwright is the target of an investigation over "a politically sensitive leak of classified information about a covert U.S. cyber attack on Iran's nuclear program," as [NBC News' Michael Isikoff reported last night](#). The cyber attack was developed in coordination with Israel.

[National security blogger Marcy Wheeler](#) raises an intriguing, albeit speculative, [question in Salon today](#): is [Cartwright being investigated](#) for what he revealed about U.S. officials' anger at Israel over a cyberwar program gone awry?

Wheeler is perhaps the smartest writer on national security and civil liberties issues out there, so her theory is worth listening to—even if it's just a theory at this point. So here it is:



General James Cartwright is in the crosshairs of the Obama administration's latest leak investigation. (Photo: D. Myles Cullen/U.S. Army/Wikimedia Commons)

[The New York Times ran an important front-page article](#) last year by David Sanger on the Israeli-U.S. cyberwar on the Iranian nuclear program. [Sanger reported](#) that "President Obama secretly ordered increasingly sophisticated attacks on the computer systems that run Iran's main nuclear enrichment facilities, significantly expanding America's first sustained use of cyberweapons."

But Sanger (and two other Times reporters) [had already reported in 2011](#) that the U.S. and Israel had developed the Stuxnet virus—the name of the cyber weapon—to cripple Iran's program. So why is the Obama administration investigating the 2012 story and Cartwright's role in it, and not the 2011 story (as far as we know)?

Wheeler thinks it's because of an explosive passage in the 2012 article pertaining to a 2010 meeting with the president after it was discovered that the Stuxnet "worm, which was never supposed to leave the Natanz machines, had broken free, like a zoo animal that found the keys to the cage." Key players involved in the creation of Stuxnet and its use—including Cartwright—had to break this news to Obama. [Here's the passage:](#)

“We think there was a modification done by the Israelis,” one of the briefers told the president, “and we don’t know if we were part of that activity.”

Mr. Obama, according to officials in the room, asked a series of questions, fearful that the code could do damage outside the plant. The answers came back in hedged terms. Mr. Biden fumed. “It’s got to be the Israelis,” he said. “They went too far.”

Cartwright was in that meeting. Here’s [Wheeler’s speculation](#) on why he’s now the target of the leak investigation:

Was it the diplomatically dangerous accusation from Biden —“It’s got to be the Israelis”— that DOJ now suspects Cartwright of sharing with Sanger, in addition to technical details that likely come from Sanger’s broad range of sources? (Sanger notes, as have others, that it remains unconfirmed who bears responsibility for the code that led StuxNet to escape.)

Whether or not this accusation against Israel is the big secret that might get Cartwright in trouble, it’s worth noting that just weeks before this StuxNet leak investigation started, the House tried to legally mandate investigations into leaks that “degrad[e] Israel’s ability to defend itself.”

“I recently traveled to the Middle East, where we met with senior Israeli officials,” said Congressman Tom Price (R-GA), who introduced the measure. “Their number one concern was that for the first time in our long relationship, United States was releasing classified operational information and capabilities, willfully putting at risk the lives of Israeli people.”

Have we gotten to the point where America’s most fiercely guarded secrets — the kind that could put a retired General in legal jeopardy — concern not America, but Israel?

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