

Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

Iran's arms suppliers

Is a serious crackdown on the gun-runners under way—or are they just fighting among themselves?

At the beginning of July, the Iranian army surprised the Iraqis—and many other countries—with several military offensives. The first surprise came in the last weeks of June, as Iran deployed ground-to-ground missiles to devastate the Iraqi oil center of Kirkuk. At the end of June and the first days of July, there came a large-scale offensive that routed the Iraqis from their position around Mehran, within Iran.

Behind such victories, there is only a little mystery: In recent months, Iran has received the spare parts it needed for its missiles, and deployed a significant quantity of NATO-made TOW anti-tank rockets against the Iraqis. Iran was said to be short of spare parts and military technology, but the Iranian victories showed the contrary.

It seems that the crackdown last April against the arms-dealing network of Israeli Gen. Avraham Bar-Am, who was selling U.S. weapons to Iran, has not scared others in the business.

Where are Iran's weapons now coming from? Rumors are flying. In late May, the Kuwaiti News Agency (KUNA) put out a dispatch announcing that Iran has allowed the United States to reactivate the electronic radar stations built under the Shah to monitor the Soviet Union. Manned by Israeli technicians, they can also provide Iran with a monitoring of Iraq's military moves. The U.S.-Iranian deal, concluded the KUNA dispatch (then carried two weeks later by TASS), provided for the U.S. government to deliver weapons to Iran.

But according to Iranians who know the situation well, the report is dubious. The American radar stations were dismantled between February and August 1979; whatever remained was utterly destroyed by the Revolutionary Guards. The rebuilding of such stations could not have gone unnoticed.

But what about American weapons? Reports from London indicate that South Korea became a major supplier, just as negotiations between Iran, France, and other countries intensified on the issue of Western hostages in Lebanon. These talks have meant deliveries of weapons to Iran and deliveries of American grain to Syria, following the secret visit of U.N. Ambassador Vernon Walters to Damascus in early June.

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir raised the issue while visiting Paris June 25, indicating that Iran was a subject of discussion between Israeli and French officials. "Iran is a very important Middle Eastern nation that the West cannot ignore and abandon to the Soviet Union," Shamir told *Le Monde* on June 26, before describing the rapprochement between Paris and Teheran as a "positive tendency."

Asked about Israel's arms shipments to Iran, Shamir declared without blushing: "We do not interfere in the military conflicts of others." The same week, the *Jordan Times* revealed that Gen. Ariel Sharon's gun-running business partner, Ja'acov Nimrodi, had paid a visit to Teheran in early June.

Unluckily for Shamir, another Israeli connection to Iran was exposed in the first days of July. A former Israeli citizen, turned West German, Henry Kamaniecky, was arrested by the West German BKA. Months of investigation showed that Kamaniecky had set up a profitable link between certain West German businessmen and the Iranian embassy in Bonn to sell Israeli weapons. Involved were fifty thousand 100 mm and 130 mm artillery shells, 5,000 anti-tanks shells, 5,000 U.S.-made M-70 automatic rifles, and TOW missiles, to the amount of \$81 million. Arranged by Abolfatah Katibi of the Iranian embassy in Bonn and Munich businessman Stephan Kaiser, the shipment was to be delivered from Israel to Iran through Yugoslavia. Nothing has been reported of the previous deals, only that a future deal would have included deliveries of tanks.

The Israeli connection was provided by a certain Ron Harel, described by the July 4 *Jerusalem Post* as "involved in several international trading companies, some of them dealing in arms." However, according to the BKA, Harel sent a telex to Kamaniecky on April 1, establishing the connection with "Israel military industry."

Another Bar-Am case? The story has already been forgotten. One also wonders why Israeli arms networks are so much exposed these days. It is no secret that most Israeli arms shipments to Iran since November 1980 have been made with the knowledge, if not approval, of American officials. Is there really a serious effort to crack down on Iran's arms suppliers, or is it rather a battle among the suppliers themselves?

Meanwhile, each Iranian military victory is another step toward destabilization of the region. That's good business only for the Soviets.