

Ali Baba and the forty spies

By [Shaun Smillie and Graeme Hosken](#)

25 Feb 2015

South Africa's worst intelligence breach has exposed cover-ups of the theft of military blueprints, attempted secret nuclear deals and the operation of extremist groups in the country...

And more is to come.

As it began leaking thousands of top-secret cables from some of the world's major intelligence agencies last night, international news agency Al-Jazeera revealed that "Johannesburg was the Eldorado of international espionage".

One of the leaked documents reveals how Pretoria's spies hid the fact that Israel had obtained stolen South African weapon plans.

According to the cables, two men were caught trying to sell missile blueprints, software and components stolen from Denel. Police launched a sting operation, posed as Russian buyers, and made arrests near Johannesburg in 2010.

The scale of the leaks appears to be on a par with the Wikileaks scandal and the National Security Agency leaks by Edward Snowden.

Leaked

A selective leak of the secret communiqués - from 2006 to December last year - involves exchanges between South Africa's intelligence operatives and some of their counterparts around the world.

The cables, leaked to Al-Jazeera and the UK's *The Guardian* newspaper, include details of operations against al-Qaeda, Islamic State and other organisations, and the targeting of environmental activists. Spy agencies such as the CIA, Britain's MI6, Israel's Mossad and Russia's FSB are affected by the leaks.

A dossier - Operational Target Analysis - drafted by South Africa's National Intelligence Agency and dated January 2010, is aimed at Iranian agents. Intelligence sources are listed as journalists and businessmen, with some alleged to use Persian carpet shops as fronts.

From cloak-and-dagger to carpet-and-dagger

"Private ... sectors such as the Persian carpet trade are used to accommodate intelligence officers," the dossier says.

The Guardian said the documents show Iran approached South Africa's leadership in search of a way around international sanctions imposed by Western powers.

It cites "a covert source", who claims that on two occasions, then President Thabo Mbeki met senior Iranian officials requesting help with their nuclear programme. Despite the interest, the State Security Agency was wary.

"Cooperation between Iranian entities and the South African defence industry should be carefully considered. Especially in view of the risk of international sanctions against the industry when it becomes known that they are negotiating contracts on non-proliferation and arms-controlled technologies with such a country."



The Mkhopa missile – flying centre stage through a fog of intrigue.
(Image extracted from the [Denel Dynamics website](#))

The cables also detail an MI6 operation to recruit a North Korean spy and its call to South African spooks for assistance. The State Security Agency was asked to provide covert surveillance and to "securely house him" while a British agent made contact. The cables do not disclose if South Africa obliged in any of the requests.

The DA's defence spokesperson, David Maynier, said this was the country's worst security leak in 20 years. Brian Dube, spokesperson for the Inspector General of Intelligence, said: "We have noted the reports. It is too early to comment."

Mbeki's spokesperson, Mukoni Ratshitanga, was unavailable for comment. Former intelligence minister Ronnie Kasrils said he had heard of the cables, but "I have nothing to say". The Presidency's spokesperson Mac Maharaj declined to comment.

Source: *The Times*, via I-Net Bridge

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