

GANG WARFARE TO PROTECT ISRAEL'S SECRETS

Easily the most overlooked line in David Sanger's story on StuxNet is this one:

Mr. Obama concluded that when it came to stopping Iran, the United States had no other choice.

If Olympic Games failed, he told aides, there would be no time for sanctions and diplomacy with Iran to work. Israel could carry out a conventional military attack, prompting a conflict that could spread throughout the region.

It's a sentiment he repeats in this worthwhile interview:

FP: There haven't been thoughtful discussions about the consequences or the ethics or the international legal ramifications of this approach. Let's imagine for a moment that you're [Iranian President] Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and you are confronted with this. Isn't your first reaction, "How is them blowing up Natanz with a code any different from them blowing up Natanz with a bomb? And doesn't that justify military retaliation?"

DS: Blowing it up with computer code, rather than bombs, is different in one big respect: It very hard for the Iranians in real time to know who the attacker was, and thus to make a public case for retaliating. It takes a long time to figure out where a cyber attack comes from.

That was a big reason for the U.S. and Israel to attack Natanz in this way. But it wasn't the only reason, at least from

the American perspective. One of the main driving forces for Olympic Games was to so wrap the Israelis into a project that could cripple Natanz in a subtle way that Israel would see less of a motivation to go about a traditional bombing, one that could plunge the Middle East into a another war. [my emphasis]

A key purpose of StuxNet, according to Sanger, was not just to set back the Iranian nuke program. Rather, it was to set back the nuke program in such a way as to set back Israel's push for war against Iran.

With that in mind, consider the way the article blamed the Israelis for letting StuxNet escape.

An error in the code, they said, had led it to spread to an engineer's computer when it was hooked up to the centrifuges. When the engineer left Natanz and connected the computer to the Internet, the American- and Israeli-made bug failed to recognize that its environment had changed. It began replicating itself all around the world. Suddenly, the code was exposed, though its intent would not be clear, at least to ordinary computer users.

"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."

After having explained that the whole point of StuxNet was to stop the Israelis from bombing

Iran, the article then goes on to say that what alerted the Iranians to StuxNet's presence in their systems—and effectively gave a very dangerous weapon to hackers around the world—was an Israeli modification to the code.

The Israelis went too far.

Those details are, IMO, some of the most interesting new details, not included the last time David Sanger confirmed the US and Israel were behind StuxNet on the front page of the NYT.

How very telling, then, that of all the highly revealing articles that have come out during this Administration—of all of the highly revealing articles that have come out in general, including Sanger's earlier one revealing some of the very same details—Congress is going apeshit over this one.

First, there's John McCain, pitching this as an election stunt.

McCain first called attention to the issue with a fiery speech on the Senate floor Tuesday evening, pointing to a new book by New York Times journalist David Sanger that reveals U.S.-Israeli cybercampaigns used against Iran.

McCain charged members of the administration with leaking classified information and called for an investigation by a special counsel. He also called for people to be prosecuted if guilt is found. His Democratic counterpart on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., agreed to hold a hearing to investigate.

"It is difficult to escape the conclusion that these recent leaks of highly classified information, all of which have the effect of making the President look strong and decisive on national security in the middle of his re-election campaign, have a deeper

political motivation," McCain said.

Then there's John Kerry attacking the NYT.

"I personally think there is a serious question whether or not that served our interest and whether the public had to know," Kerry, the Foreign Relations Committee chairman, told reporters. "To me it was such a nitty-gritty fundamental national security issue. And I don't see how the public interest is well served by it. I do see how other interests outside the United States are well served by it."

The worst is the Gang of Four—Dianne Feinstein, Saxby Chamblis, Dutch Ruppersberger, and Mike Rogers—rolling out new legislation to crack down on leaks.

The four members of the intelligence committees also called the leaks "damaging and intolerable." They plan to modify and strengthen legislation regarding leaks. "We believe that significant changes are needed, in legislation, in the culture of the agencies that deal with classified information, in punishing leaks, and in the level of leadership across the government to make clear that these types of disclosures will not stand," the lawmakers said in the statement.

Oh, and DiFi sent Obama a classified letter. Ut oh.

And all this comes just a few weeks after the House passed an Amendment mandating an investigation into three stories which were pretty obviously designed to make it harder for Israel to attack Iran.

Our do-nothing Congress has found one issue on which there is broad bipartisan agreement: that

leaks are one thing, but leaks that thwart
Israel's efforts to foment war against Iran must
be criminalized.