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## "Thunderous Surprise" for U.S. Intelligence

Israel's assault on an Iraqi nuclear facility left U.S. officials wondering about America's intelligence capability in the critical Middle East.

Even with its extensive intelligence assets in the region, the Pentagon said that news of the June 7 raid arrived as a "thunderous surprise." The first word came from the Israelis themselves, in an announcement to the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv 4 hours and 10 minutes after the jets struck Baghdad.

U.S. officials refuse to call the incident an intelligence failure. They note that Israel historically has maintained rigid military security and went to great lengths to protect the secrecy of the 1,200-mile mission.

Still, analysts admit that Israel's ability to keep the attack under wraps was remarkable, given the possibilities for U.S. detection.

The Israeli jets evidently were never spotted by the four AWACS radar planes that the U.S. flies over Saudi Arabia. One Pentagon official said the

sophisticated radar did not pick up "one single, solitary blip."

How did this happen? Experts say that Israel's warplanes, in streaking low over the Saudi Arabian and Iraqi deserts, flew beneath the AWACS's normal radar beams. Also, the AWACS radar was aimed east over the Persian Gulf—hundreds of miles from the attackers' flight path. Some experts suspect that Israel may even have had knowledge of the AWACS schedule and flight paths—and planned its attack accordingly.

America's supersensitive satellites were no help, either. Analysts explain that the spy-in-the-sky devices, though able to observe tiny stationary targets, remain virtually blind to such moving objects as a jet in flight. The satellites' intelligence-gathering activities, said one defense expert, are good at measuring damage after an attack but not in warning of one.

Israel also apparently frustrated any U.S. effort to decipher its military radio

traffic—a task sometimes carried out by U.S. ships in the Mediterranean. Israeli pilots reportedly spoke Arabic to confuse eavesdroppers. In addition, guidance systems on Israel's American-made jets are so advanced that the raid could have been directed with little direct voice communication.

Moscow insisted that the Pentagon was not as ignorant as it claimed. Said the Soviet news agency Tass: "Israel's arrogant aggression was not taken without Washington's sanction."

Some intelligence experts agreed that close U.S. ties with Israel were a factor—but not in the manner that the Kremlin suggested. These analysts note that Washington relies heavily on Israel's intelligence service, Mossad, for secret data on the Mideast—an arrangement with obvious limitations in keeping track of Israel itself.

"You don't spy on your friends very easily," said former CIA Director Stansfield Turner. "You trust them to keep you informed. This time they evidently did not." □