

The Termite File:

How an Israeli Arms Dealer Gave Iran a Chemical Arsenal

In the HQ of the Mossad's Caesarea division, the organization's Elite operational unit, there is a small memorial room to commemorate agents ("warriors" in Mossad terminology) who fell in the line of duty. Despite the innumerable perilous actions carried out by Caesarea since it was established, there are only three photographs on the wall. One is of Eli Cohen, the heroic Israeli spy who penetrated the upper echelons of the Syrian government and was caught and executed in 1965. The other two are much newer, and less romantic – their demise was the result of a motorcycle crash in Vienna on May 27, 1993, during one of the least dangerous Caesarea operations ever, the surveillance of Nahum Manbar, the man the Mossad had codenamed "Termite." A businessman and native Israeli, Manbar had betrayed his country and sold chemical weapons to Iran.

At the time he was playing a double game, offering to help Israeli intelligence on two different fronts—illicit arms trades *and* the case of missing Israeli airman Ron Arad.

The two Mossad operatives were tailing an associate of Manbar's, Dr. Majid Abbaspour, a leading figure in the Iranian Ministry of Defense, after a meeting between the two of them. Manbar later described the scene:

"Abbaspour contacted me and said that he could help [on the Arad case]. The subject is extraordinarily sensitive, or so he said, and we will have to find a way of presenting Arad's release, when and if it happens, as something that has no connection whatsoever with Iran. It is impermissible that Iran's name be involved."

Manbar set up a meeting with Abbaspour at the Marriot Hotel in Vienna. "When he came to my suite he was very angry, and he said, 'Nahum, do you know that I've been followed from the airport? I'm certain that these are your guys, because only you and I know that I am here,'" Manbar recounted. "I tell

the doctor that it could not be so, but I know he is right. I went down and saw two guys with earphones ... I went up to the first one, who was sitting to one side with a cup and I stirred his coffee for him. I asked him in Hebrew and English what he was doing there. His face went red and then white. He didn't say a word. I went up to the other one and did the same thing. I asked if that was all the allowance the Mossad gave. Not even enough for a little cream cake. The two got up and left. I went back up. Abbaspour was also pale. He said 'I can't go on like this. I have to get to the Iranian embassy. I need an escort and bodyguards. My journeys are always secret, and now I've been discovered, which means that I am in danger.' I said goodbye and flew back to France."

The two Mossad agents raced off on a motorcycle after Abbaspour, who left the hotel in a great hurry and made for an Iranian embassy safe house. It was pouring with rain, making it particularly difficult for them to keep up with his speeding car. As they emerged from an underpass they overturned and a woman driving a Mazda ran over and killed both of them.

It may not have been a heroic moment, but their mission was part of a crucial one—and apparently, crucially bungled. Manbar's arming of Iran stands as one of Israel's greatest embarrassments, and it could have been prevented.

Nahum Manbar was born on April 18, 1948, at Kibbutz Givat Haim. His family were among the founders of the settlement. Ostensibly the model sabra (literally a "prickly pear," the term for natural-born Israelis), at age 16 he was in the reserve squad of Israel's national basketball team, his determination making up for his lack of height. He then became an outstanding soldier, a combat officer and an instructor at the army's officers college. Manbar fought in both the Six Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973; during the latter he saved the life of Hanoch Saar, who was a defense counsel at his trial and among the last of his friends to remain loyal to him to the end.

After his military service Manbar moved to Tel Aviv and opened a series of businesses. These ventures generally ended with police investigations and indictments. Passing bad checks, fraud, and theft of checks from the

government employment service were just some of the crimes of which he was suspected or convicted. The last straw came in 1984, when he was indicted for fraud, imposture and theft. He fled to Britain and was declared a fugitive from justice in Israel. He began buying and selling agricultural produce in London's Covent Garden market, but soon switched to a much bigger market, trading in arms and military materiel.

He befriended Joy Kiddie, perhaps the most mysterious figure in the whole affair. Kiddie ran a series of charities based in Cambridge, England, helping wounded people and children all over the world, sending toys and food to Rwanda, Angola and Uganda, and aiding needy children in the United Kingdom.

Kiddie has delicate features and a face that shows her abundant kindness. She declares that she is a devout church-going Christian. But she also has another side, that of a shrewd businesswoman, trading not in charitable donations but at the same time in almost any commodity worth her while. She has maintained a close link with MI6, the British Secret Intelligence service. Kiddie met Manbar through her dealings as a broker on European commodities markets. "I traded in everything then, from sugar to diamonds," she recounts. "Nahum called me one day when I was in Paris. At the time I was trying to find some red mercury, which my connections in the international arms trade had told me was used in improving missile boosters. I knew that a lot of intelligence agencies were looking for the stuff and I realized how valuable it would be. Nahum said that he knew I was in the market for it, and suggested that we cooperate." Red mercury, incidentally, is also used in nuclear weapons and missiles.

Business blossomed between Manbar and Kiddie, and his circle of associates grew. Manbar linked up with Bari Hashemi (alias Farschi), an Iranian Defense Ministry purchasing agent who had homes in Britain and Austria, and headed a Vienna based company. At the time he was involved in some of the deals involved in the Iran-Contra scandal. Manbar later defined his relationship with the Iranians as a "mutual meeting of wills. They found me just when I was looking for them."

Initially, after coming to power, Khomeini maintained a strict policy against developing or acquiring weapons of mass destruction, but Saddam Hussein's horrendous use of poison gas against Iran in the 1980-88 war forced Tehran to take a different line. In 1983, the Revolutionary Guards were instructed to develop offensive chemical weapons. For years later, in order to boost the spirit of the Iranian people and to deter Iraq as the war dragged on, Tehran announced officially that it possessed chemical warfare capability, although it had not yet made use of it. In a speech in the Majlis, the parliament, Prime Minister Hussein Mussawi stated that "If one day Islam permits us, we will have no problem in using this weaponry and going into serial production of it." In point of fact, this declaration was pure propaganda. Despite its efforts, Iran had hardly any actual chemical capability.

Yet Iran's determination did not waver, even as the war drew to a close. Manbar's arms trade with the Iranians expanded steadily. He bought weaponry, some of it from the Polish army, and sold it to Iran, shipping it via Poland, where he set up his HQ in Warsaw and spent most of his time between 1987 and 1992. At first, the weapons were conventional, a small consignment of shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles. Through this deal he became acquainted with the Polish defense minister, Gen. Florian Siwicki. "I would buy, say, T-55 tanks from the Polish army for \$35,000 apiece, install some fire-control system that I had brought from Israel for \$20,000 apiece, and sell them to the Iranians for \$200,000," he explained IN AN INTERVIEW with the author. "The profits were fantastic."

In addition to such offensive weaponry, Manbar sold the Iranians protective gear against atomic, biological and chemical arms, setting up a plant in Poland to manufacture it. He insists he informed Israeli authorities of his activities. "All of the competent [Israeli] authorities who should have known, did know all about everything, and they said nothing. All of the items that I imported from Israel and sold to Iran had the full approval of SIBAT [the Israel Defense Ministry's division for military aid and exports]. At a certain stage, the Iranians ... began asking for some completely different items. I refused to handle the requests, and I reported them to the appropriate authorities. The Iranians

wanted medium-range missiles that could be fitted with chemical warheads. They wanted certain materials. They wanted me to set up a chemical weapons plant in Iran. I transmitted all of their requests that looked suspicious to the appropriate factors in Israel, and I'm speaking about suitcases full of papers. Acting on the instructions of those factors, I asked the Iranians to give me more details about what they wanted, to submit more blueprints and sketches. Everything was conveyed to Israel.”

At least, so he claims. As the record would eventually show, Manbar sold chemicals and even chemical-weapons designs and manufacturing equipment to Iran. The question is, when did Israel discover it, and why did they take so long to stop it? The full story has as many twists as a LeCarre novel.

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Thanks to his arms trade, Manbar became a wealthy man, and many companies and businesspeople wanted some of the action. Or information. Through reserves Brig. Gen Amos Kotzer, his representative in Israel, Manbar offered to supply Israeli intelligence with information on military subjects, as well as on the missing airman Ron Arad. Manbar claimed that via the excellent links he had created with the heads of the Iranian arms industries he would be able to garner information on Arad, and even reach a resolution of the tragedy, and bring the airman home to Israel. The Mossad, like the rest of the Israeli intelligence community was by then in an advanced state of despair. They had failed to come up with any information about Arad and they were being subjected to extreme pressure to solve the problem by the political leadership, who were appearing more and more helpless in the eyes of the public. They were ready to grasp at anyone who seemed able to help. Manbar knew this, and exploited it to the hilt.

He gave the Mossad a videotape which he claimed showed Arad, still alive. The tape—and his other leads on the Arad case—proved worthless.

In another matter, however, not less important, Manbar proved able to help, this time thanks to romantic connections. His girlfriend and wife-to-be, Francine, had previously been married to an aviation engineer by the name of Herman Schmidt. Schmidt had had a senior position in a joint Argentinean-Iraqi-Brazilian-Egyptian effort to build a long-range ballistic missile, a source

of grave concern to both the United States and Israel. Francine was not at all happy about her husband's occupation, "because the missile was liable to kill children" but he, as she put it later, told her that "he only wanted to make a few million and to retire." As his trips to Iraq became more frequent, he started to get many threats on life, and the officers of his firm in Salzburg was torched. Eventually, under pressure from American intelligence, the couple was expelled from the principality of Monaco by order of Prince Rainier. In February 1990, Schmidt contracted lung cancer, although he had never suffered from medical problems before. He died in November. Francine believes he was killed by a western governmental agency, "perhaps the Mossad," she reported in an interview.

Francine may have had good reason to believe her husband was murdered. Nonetheless, she opposed the arms industry and was sympathetic to Israel. Manbar brought Francine to Israel where she had a long talk with experts from the Mossad and the technical side of Military Intelligence's research division. She supplied many important details that contributed to Israel's understanding of the project.

Yet even as Manbar helped Mossad, he helped himself with its enemies. In mid-1990, on a visit to Austria, Manbar was introduced by Hashemi to Dr. Majid Abbaspour, who was acting as a special assistant to the Iranian president, Ali Akbar Rafsanjani. Abbaspour has had several titles, and he eventually became a cabinet minister. He was and still is one of the strong men of the Iranian arms procurement system. At that time, he was the head of Iran's chemical weapons program. He headed a Ministry of Defense department known as Unit 105, comprising hundreds of officials, experts, logistical staff, and intelligence personnel, whose job it was to procure the components and the know-how to enable the country to produce chemical weapons. Toward the end of the 1990, Abbaspour and Manbar formulated a contract under which the Israeli was to supply the Iranians with the know-how for the production of substances used in chemical weapons, to set up a production plant, to install the necessary equipment, and to train teams of employees. Manbar was to be paid a total of \$16.23 million for fulfilling his obligations under the contract.

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The process leading to Manbar's prosecution began two years later, after information reached the Mossad that the Iranians were trying to recruit Manbar for their chemical weapons program. A report arrived that did not mention his name, but did specify the name of one of his companies. It could easily have gone unnoticed if it were not for the alertness of "Ruth," a Mossad staffer. She read the information, realized that it was about Manbar, and requested his files from various branches of the intelligence services. She did some cross-checking and realized that something was very wrong. Pursuing Manbar became an obsession, in some cases leading her into battle with her own direct superiors. All the while she wondered, "How can an Israeli do a thing like this?"

On July 16 1992, in the wake of the misgivings raised by Ruth, Shin Bet internal security agents met with Manbar and ordered him to cease all activities with Iran and to hand over all the documents connected to them. He delivered some documents, which were handed to Ruth and another Mossad official named "Ilan," then in charge of the scientific aspects of the chemical weapons department. Ruth and Ilan were not satisfied. In the words of Ilan's later testimony at Manbar's trial: "All of the data referred to things that had been done in the past. Our sense was that these things were ongoing, and that it was possible that they were even at the early stages."

For six more years, Manbar operated with varying amounts of freedom. He still had the stain of his bad checks and fraud in the 1970s and early 1980s, so he launched a vigorous campaign to rehabilitate himself. A multimillionaire, he built two magnificent villas, one in Lugano on the Swiss-Italian border, and the other on the French Riviera, where he entertained many of the Israeli power elite, showering them with the best of everything. He lived like a very wealthy man and made sure that everyone took note. He surrounded himself with advisers and publicists, whose job was to create for him the image of a philanthropist and investor in Israel's economy. Another aim was to erase the memories of his checkered past.

He began visiting Israel again and buying Israeli basketball teams, eventually claiming investments of seven million dollars in them. He also began contributing to charitable organizations, hospitals, and various politicians. He became a sought-after guest at parties thrown by members of Israel's high

society. A smiling Manbar can be seen in photographs with the likes of then-foreign minister Shimon Peres, cabinet ministers, Labor party leaders Dalia Itzik and Uzi Baram, future prime minister Ehud Olmert, as well as Yitzhak Rabin's wife Leah and others, during the years 1989 to 1996]. At the same time he began trying to steamroll the Israeli Ministry of Justice and President Ezer Weizman [who had pardoning powers, into wiping his record clean of past convictions. "He used the heaviest possible guns, so that he would not only be forgiven, but also have his record cleared," the Mossad Director Shabtai Shavit would recount later. In 1991, finally, a plea bargain was reached in which he paid a small fine and received a suspended sentence. There was no erasing of convictions, but he got off lightly nonetheless.

It would take six more years before he was brought to justice for his gravest crimes—treason, and arming the enemy. All along the way, the intelligence services debated what do to about him, and made astonishingly meek decisions. Ruth and Ilan led the charge against him, taking their suspicions to Mossad Director Shavit at the time of his plea-bargain, in 1991. Six years later, in classified testimony at Manbar's trial for treason— disclosed here for the first time - Shavit recalled: "The people who are considered experts on the subject by the Mossad came and told me about the sale [to Iran] of constituent materials and technology for the production of mustard gas from thionyl-chloride and also told me of the accused's connection with the supply of know-how for the production of tabun, or nerve gas. Of all of the substances in the chemical weaponry arsenal, these are the two that are lethal on a mass scale, to entire populations. If we were talking only about a constituent substance, it would be open to discussion, perhaps, what the purpose of the sale was and what the purpose of the substance was. But when it is a matter of the sale of technology, of production lines for factories, the debate about the end use of the substances becomes altogether redundant...

"This case seems exceedingly grave to me, perhaps the gravest in my entire experience of crimes committed by Israelis against the security of the state... I decided that we must expose the truth about this man's involvement in the supply of the know how, the materials, and the technology to Iran ... From the first moment, and because of the fact that he was an Israeli, I deemed it

necessary to bring the matter to the attention of the prime minister and defense minister, the late Yitzhak Rabin.”

Shavit passed what had become known as the “Termite File” to the Kidon (bayonet) unit of the Mossad’s Caesarea special operations division. Kidon handled the most complex and covert tasks, including assassinations. The two operatives who lost their lives in the pursuit of Abbaspour were members of this unit, and their deaths were one of the tragic twists of the Termite file.

After 1992, and especially after the two were killed, the Mossad pursued Manbar much more actively. The secret services of France, Italy, Holland, the United States, Germany and Britain were also after him. MI6 tried to exploit the network set up by Manbar in order to penetrate the Iranian arms industry. A young agent named Richard Tomlinson was given the mission. In time, Tomlinson was fired and decided to take revenge on his former employers by publishing a sensationalist book purporting to reveal the failures and illegal actions perpetrated by MI6.

Tomlinson was jailed for six months for trying to get his book, *The Big Breach*, published. After his release he broke his parole terms, fled from Britain, and began distributing parts of his book by mail and via the Internet from a hiding place in Switzerland. A chapter was devoted to his involvement in the Manbar affair. In an interview granted as part of the research for this book he maintained that, “We never intended to interfere with Manbar’s work. On the contrary. The whole thing was a classical British intelligence operation: to allow authentic private businessmen, not straw companies, to enter into relationships with hostile countries like Iraq, Iran and Libya and later to penetrate their networks in order to gather information on the target country.”

Tomlinson dismisses concern about the damage Manbar caused, arguing that not all WMD are equally dangerous: “Equipment and material for the production of chemical weapons don’t count to MI6. It’s easy to defend against chemical warfare agents and they don’t have a decisive effect on the battlefield. The conception is that it is permissible to supply something in this area in order to collect important information on many other subjects.”

He is absolutely certain that Manbar acted on behalf of Israeli intelligence in his arms deals with Iran: “We had no doubt about it. I wasn’t a liaison officer,

but I know that Manbar's name kept cropping up in talks our people had with their Mossad counterparts. Officially, the Mossad never admitted that Manbar was acting on its behalf, but it was clear that the Israelis knew about everything that he did. We received the reports of the DST [the French intelligence service] on their surveillance of Manbar's house on the Riviera. There were dozens of calls to the Israeli Embassy and the Mossad HQ in Tel Aviv. These calls could be interpreted in only one way." He also claims that Mossad stonewalled them on any hard information about the weaponry, saying that they "kept on trying to disrupt our work and didn't hand over all the documents that it had."

Tomlinson's assertions are astounding. If in fact the Mossad not only knew about Manbar's work, but gave him permission to continue, then why was he eventually tried for treason? Tomlinson has no explanation.

"Just as it happens often in intelligence services, this time too the Israeli services decided, for reasons unknown to me, to get rid of Manbar, break off the connection and make him a scapegoat. The Mossad kept all the documents that could have proved his innocence to itself, and anyone who tries to get them out will be punished."

MI6's profound conviction that Manbar was working for the Mossad was shared by the CIA. By the early 1990s that agency had marked Abbaspour as a subject and had placed him under surveillance. In the course of their inquiries, Manbar's name cropped up, so the Americans began an intensive investigation into him as well. On July 16, 1994, the State Department issued a statement placing Manbar had been placed on its blacklist, noting that Manbar and two of his companies, Mana International Investments and Europol Holding Ltd., had sold chemical weapons components to a state which appears on the list of countries that support terrorism, in contravention of an American embargo. Manbar and the companies were to be boycotted by the American government, and none of their and their subsidiaries' products were to be allowed into the United States. "Manbar's dealings...helped the Iranians to leap several stages forward in their efforts to develop chemical weapons. If it were not for Manbar's involvement we believe that it would have taken them several years

more,” commented a State Department official in charge of the prevention of proliferation of non-conventional weapons.

On the covert level, the Manbar affair cast a shadow over the relationship between the CIA and the Mossad, and even over the entire American-Israeli partnership. Senior officials in the U.S. Administration were convinced that Israel was conducting a massive operation behind Uncle Sam’s back, yet it made no sense. The Israelis were investing huge efforts in trying to persuade the Americans to take strong measures against Iran and its endeavors to obtain non-conventional arms. So why was Jerusalem supplying Tehran with precisely what it needed to produce such weaponry? As Brig. Gen Amos Gilad, deputy military secretary to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, explained later at Manbar’s trial, “The Americans were altogether bewildered by us. They believed that we were activating him in order to wipe ourselves out. It all appeared irrational to them When you come to an American and demand vigorous action against the Iranian strategic threat, your own hands seem to be dirty when you yourself are turning a blind eye on or covering up for someone who is an Israeli citizen and is helping to build the gravest threat against you. We were perceived in a bewildering light.”

In late 1993, Mossad Director Shavit met with Rabin to discuss prosecuting Manbar. As he later testified, “We were certain beyond any doubt that we had all of the intelligence evidence that the accused was indeed doing what we suspected that he was doing ... This discussion was not a typical discussion with the prime minister and defense minister. The purpose of this discussion was to take a decision as to how to proceed. We presented intelligence information which was in the nature of intelligence proof about the charges. We brought a legal opinion that said that there was not yet enough evidence for an indictment. Eventually, the prime minister decided that the next time the accused came to Israel he would be summoned to the police and warned by a senior official of the Israel Police, to cease his activities with the Iranians ... Another decision taken by the prime minister and defense minister at that meeting was that we would bring the Americans up to date and disclose all of the details to them so that they would not, God forbid, suspect us of running an operation the ultimate result of which would be Iran’s possession of chemical

weapons capability.” If they couldn’t convict him, they decided to settle for a stern lecture—hardly the typical Israeli response.

In October 1993, Manbar was summoned to Israel and told to report to Brig. Gen. Avi Cohen, commander of the national unit for investigation of serious crimes. Cohen informed Manbar that he was known to be selling chemical warfare materials to Iran despite previous warnings to desist, and that if he did not cease, he would face prosecution. There was no arrest. Manbar’s shipments, were not sabotaged. A year and a half after the first warning in July 1992, there was only another talking-to.

Manbar claims he did cease all connections with Iran at the end of 1993. Yet in 1995, by his own testimony, he came to Shimon Peres, who was the foreign minister, and gave him Abbaspour’s calling card. “I told Peres that this was the man who could do anything for us in Iran. He is a pragmatist with a very moderate attitude... Peres took the card and told me that the matter was being dealt with.” Two weeks later, he contributed \$200,000 to Peres’s campaign fund.

On November, 3 1995, I met Nahum Manbar for a long conversation, in which he completely denied the charges leveled against him by American intelligence. In the same meeting, which – without our knowledge – was photographed and monitored by the Shin Bet, Manbar said that Israel had missed an historical opportunity by not allowing him to continue the dialogue with Abbaspour. The next day, prime minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, and the Manbar case was put on hold.

Finally, in April 1996, a meeting was held in prime minister Shimon Peres’s office to debate the case against Manbar. The Shin Bet representative said Israel should not submit to the American pressure to indict him, in order to prove that Israel has no part in the business that he was doing with Iran. Others disagreed and argued that it was time to arrest him. Nothing happened.

At the beginning of the following year, Devorah Chen, Deputy Attorney General for Security Related Affairs, reached the conclusion that she could get Manbar convicted for harming the security of the state and aiding the enemy in its war against Israel, offenses carrying the death penalty. Meanwhile, Mossad

officials finally persuaded Manbar's right-hand man, Kristof [his full name cannot be revealed], who had been a party to the deals with the Iranians, to come to Israel from Poland and testify. On March 27 1997, Manbar arrived in Israel to watch his basketball team, Hapoel Jerusalem, compete for the State Cup. On the runway when his plane landed were officers of the police's serious crimes unit and the Shin Bet. He was arrested, and a court ordered him held without bail. A blanket gag-order prevented the media from reporting the details of the case.

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When Manbar went on trial on 15 May, 1997, the story launched several political scandals that shook the nation, including Manbar's large donations to Labour Party leaders and unconfirmed reports that then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had tried to influence the court against Manbar. Also unconfirmed were rumors that the president of the court, Judge Amnon Straschnov, had an inappropriate relationship with a female member of the defense team. It was a secure trial held behind closed doors, and much of the testimony was classified.

The defense case was largely based on the claim that Manbar did not act alone. The Israeli arms industry, Manbar's lawyers asserted, including Israeli businessmen who functioned with the ostensible permission of the security authorities, had sold and were still selling vast quantities of materiel to Iran. The judges partially accepted the defense arguments on this point and leveled sharp criticism at the state's conduct: "Even if there have been only a few instances and they were of an altogether dissimilar nature, and even if these facts did not clear the accused of the responsibility for the disgraceful crimes that he has committed, they nevertheless constitute a weighty consideration for not punishing him to the fullest extent of the law, as would have been appropriate had these circumstances not existed."

Witnesses testified that Manbar was fully aware at the time of the gravity of his actions, and tried to blur his tracks. Kristof, his assistant and right-hand man in Poland, recounted how Manbar had secretly given the Iranians diskettes containing information for the construction of the thionyl-chloride plant. "He used to yell at the Iranians at meetings for sending us things directly to the

office,” Kristof told the court. “All of the correspondence was addressed to the company’s ‘cover’ name.”

In his decision, Judge Amnon Straschnov poured 86 pages worth of fire and brimstone onto Manbar: “I regret to say that my impression of his testimony and his personality was utterly and absolutely negative. His testimony was replete with contradictions, peculiarities and self-rebuttals, not to say outright lies. It was evasive, tortuous and devoid of ... even the most basic credibility. The accused has impressed me as a liar, a manipulator, a profiteer, who only rarely can be caught telling the truth.”

The panel of judges determined that from 1990 to 1994, Manbar provided the Iranians with 150 tons of thionyl-chloride in very high concentrations, most of which was acquired by Joy Kiddie, the patron saint of needy children, from China. The court also found that he sold Iran the equipment needed to produce more thionyl-chloride, shipped from Europe to Iran on a fleet of 24 trucks. Manbar was convicted of supplying know-how and equipment for the building of factories for the manufacture of four different types of nerve gas, including VX, the most lethal chemical warfare agent that there is.

Manbar was positive he would be acquitted, just as he had once seemed to think he could get into the good graces of Mossad by offering a forged video tape in which a man not at all resembling Ron Arad says, in a heavy Persian accent, “I am Ron Arad, I am Ron Arad.” Manbar had ordered a private jet to fly him to France on the day the trial ended. But the only trip that he took was to Ramle prison, to serve out his 16 year sentence.

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The materials and the factories that Manbar supplied have undoubtedly served as a key component of Iran’s chemical weapons capability. A senior Mossad official said in his testimony in the trial: “Because of the accused’s actions, an extremely hostile state which openly advocates the destruction of Israel, is today equipped with chemical weapons of mass destruction and with the practical ability to use them against the population of Israel.”

According to a series of reports submitted by the CIA to the House Permanent select Committee on Intelligence during the latter half of the 1990s, Iran had

by then stockpiled thousands of tons of chemical agents, including mustard gas, phosgene and cyanide. Its production capacity was estimated at a thousand tons a year, with the main plants situated at Damghan, 300 kilometers from Tehran. It was to Damghan that Manbar's lethal and lucrative materials were shipped. Moreover, despite the protestations of the Israeli defense establishment that it never traded with post-revolutionary Iran, in fact Manbar was never prosecuted for selling Iran conventional weaponry, though he repeatedly admitted doing so.

Even in prison Manbar has continued winning people's confidence. He has quarreled with almost all of his former friends and acquaintances, including his wife Francine. During furloughs, he carried on a hot romance with his lawyer for a time. Manbar gives lessons to inmates in several subjects, including chemistry, in the prison library. He had also tried to keep his business going, trading with African states via the telephone in various products. Somehow, He was given permission to acquire unlimited phone cards, and has held long conversations with the defense minister of Uganda. On occasion, he has needed to explain the background noises made by the prisons public address loudspeakers, and he was once heard to say to the minister: "It's alright for you sitting comfortably in your air-conditioned office in Kampala, with all your aides and secretaries. But I have to work hard for you, waking up in a different country every morning and suffering the nerve-wracking noise of the loudspeakers in airports."

In June 2007, after serving 10 years in prison, Manbar asked to have the remaining third of his sentence commuted for good conduct. There was no disagreement that his behavior in jail had in fact been good, but the Mossad and the Shin Bet submitted secret reports to the parole board, expressing sharp opposition to his release.

The Mossad was so anxious for Manbar to remain behind bars that it hired as an adviser former prosecutor Devorah Chen, who had left government service and gone into private practise as a defense attorney, representing particularly

well-heeled clients. Mossad director Gen. Meir Dagan sent Y, the head of the organization's agent control division, to represent him and the agency at the hearings. In his affidavit and in testimony, he was referred to as "Daniel." In the Mossad, behind his back, he is referred to as "the model" because of his good looks ("Good enough to appear in Marlboro ads," says one coworker) and his fashionable taste in clothes, from Europe's top designer brands. In the classified affidavit that he submitted to the court, he wrote that he was a trained and highly experienced senior intelligence and operations agent of the Mossad. "At the time, as part of my duties, I took part personally in the investigation, both intelligence and criminal, of the prisoner, and I served as a prosecution witness in his trial." The Mossad and the ShinBet were worried that Manbar's knowledge "along with the great knowledge that he has in the area of setting up a secret proliferation system" as "Daniel" testified, and the connections, monies, and operational networks that he had left in Europe, would enable him, like the bounce-back doll he had shown himself to be, to recover and begin again, with only one goal in mind: to make as much money as possible. Since he had never confessed his crimes or expressed regret, there was a grave suspicion that he would soon be back at his old tricks. Manbar's application was denied.

Many column inches of newspaper headlines have been devoted to Iran's nuclear weapons program. Yet hidden in plain sight is the fact that Iran possesses huge quantities of chemical WMDs.

Only time will tell if Iran will dare to make use of these weapons either in the battlefield, or – and herein lies the great fear of the United States and Israel – through its "long arm": Hizballah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as it had done previously with many weapons it had developed. In the past, Hamas had already tried to produce chemical and biological weapons, without help from the outside, but failed. The Iranians could solve the problem for them.