



C H A P T E R

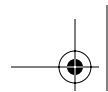
# 1 The Intercept

*Off the coast of the Arabian Peninsula, January 3, 2002...*

In the inky darkness of the predawn hours, the Red Sea had turned choppy. The sun had yet to bathe the sea, known in Arabic as *Al Bahr Al Ahmar*, in its winter light. Fishing boats moored in the waters surrounded by Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the Sudan rocked in the stormy darkness. An old, blue cargo ship, sailing under the flag of the kingdom of Tonga, cruised northward, making its way toward the Suez Canal, while on board most of its 13-man crew slept.

Observing the situation from the sky above, in a Boeing 707 outfitted as a command and control craft, was Lieutenant General Shaul Mofaz, the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) chief of staff. Just the day before, Mofaz, a military careerist and former elite paratrooper, cancelled a scheduled trip to Washington, D.C. Now he was high above the open water staring through the lenses of specially made high-powered field glasses from which he could make out the letters *K-A-R-I-N-E-A* painted on the side of the ship.<sup>1</sup> For three months, Israeli intelligence had been monitoring the freighter as it made its 3,000-mile journey from Lebanon to the Arabian coast. The 4,000-ton *Karine-A*, the Israelis quickly discovered, was a

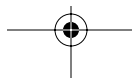




gunrunner, carrying an illicit arms shipment from Iran. Its destination: the Palestinian territories.

The Middle East, a volatile slice of the earth in the best of times, had turned particularly ugly in the fall of 2000. The Palestinian *intifada*, or uprising against the Israelis, exploded in September, igniting shortly after the failure to achieve a final settlement on a Palestinian state at a Camp David meeting attended by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Palestinian Chairman Yassir Arafat, and U.S. President Bill Clinton. The uprising turned lethal following the visit of retired general and Israel's soon-to-be next Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to the open plaza outside of the Al Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem. Accompanied by a cordon of Israeli policemen, Sharon's provocative display of Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount—a site holy to both Jews and Muslims—inflamed the Palestinians, who erupted in demonstrations. The entire conflagration went south quickly as stone-throwing Palestinians resorted to guns, escalating to a wave of human suicide bombers. Israeli reprisals added another violent stamp as they took to hunting down and assassinating suspected Palestinian militants. Now the intifada was raging well into its fifteenth bloody month. Despite diplomatic maneuverings, its end was nowhere in sight. A cycle of violence engulfed the region. It was a powder keg threatening to explode.

The *Karine-A* and its cargo hold full of weapons would do little to quell the unrest. Floating along international waters, it was both a potential match and fuse. Weapons smuggling was not a new twist in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians had moved weapons into the territories in the past. Most often, according to the Israelis, this was done through a system of underground tunnels dug beneath the Israeli-controlled border that separates Egypt and the Palestinian-controlled town of Rafah on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip. But for the most part, efforts to channel large amounts of advanced munitions had failed. The intifada, with its withering spiral of attacks and counterattacks, had already pushed the prospect of peace under the Oslo Accords<sup>2</sup> from its fragile



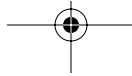


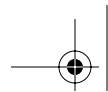
moorings. The possibility of adding a load of sophisticated new weaponry into the mix would do little to restore the peace.

In a secret meeting just weeks earlier, Prime Minister Sharon, a fleshy tank of a man who had fought in just about every Arab-Israeli war since 1948, met with Mofaz and the heads of the Israeli Air Force and Navy to discuss how to make sure the *Karine-A* would not make its final destination. The Israelis could simply sink the ship—unverified accounts had reported that the Israelis had engaged in sinking missions in the past. Or they could capture it. In the spring, eight months earlier, the Israeli Navy had seized a fishing vessel called the *Santorini* only a few dozen miles off of the coast of Haifa en route from Lebanon to Gaza. Its cargo held a load of anti-aircraft missiles, anti-tank missile launchers, artillery rockets, and mortar shells, intended, Israeli officials said, for the Palestinian territories.<sup>3</sup>

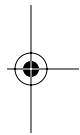
In operational mode, Israel's top military personnel began devising a plan for the *Karine-A* that would account for all contingencies. Whatever they did, however they did it, they would have to get it right. Certainly, the freighter, sailing in international waters in the busy shipping lanes of the Red Sea, would be an intricate target. First, the Israelis had to make certain the *Karine-A* was indeed the boat carrying the rogue arms shipment. Far from Israeli jurisdiction, the scheme would require a precise maneuvering of Israeli air and naval power. Complicating any operation, aircraft would need to be refueled mid-route, and naval patrol boats used to monitoring the 164-mile Israeli coast would be stretched beyond their usual operational limits. At more than 300 miles from Israel, the location posed its own dangers in attempting a commando mission. Then again, the distance also served as an advantage. It was too far at sea for anyone to suspect a surprise raid. An operation of this scale would set a new precedent.

There was, however, another troubling specter for the Israelis. Intelligence had found that the *Karine-A* stood in the middle of a new murky web that they claimed connected the Palestinians, Iran, and the Lebanese-based terrorist organization *Hizbollah*, or Party of God. In seizing the ship, the Israelis could not only disrupt



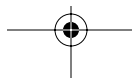


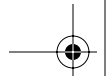
the delivery of arms but also, just as importantly, expose this disturbing relationship. It would be a political triumph for the Israelis as much as a military one. It was an opportunity to deal a crushing blow to Palestinian Chairman Yassir Arafat, who as the ship moved toward its final destination was publicly denouncing violence and declaring his commitment to eliminate terrorism and revive the peace process. Indeed, the captain of the ship, Omar Akawi, later told western reporters in a jailhouse interview that he expected to be ordered to halt the mission after Arafat's public call for a truce.<sup>4</sup> The order never came, and the *Karine-A* stayed the course. As it passed through the Bab al Mandeb Straits on the tip of Yemen, Arafat offered a goodwill gesture to Israeli President Moshe Katzav: an invitation to address the Palestinian Parliament in Ramallah in the West Bank.



Aboard the Boeing jet, keeping track of the operation and monitoring the internal communications among the commandos at sea, Mofaz sat with the top ranks of the IDF: Navy Commander Major General Yedidya Ya'ari, Air Force Commander Major General Dan Halutz, and the head of *Aman*, Israel's military intelligence, Major General Aharon Ze'evi Farkash. Cruising high above the ocean, they posted frequent updates to Prime Minister Sharon (himself a veteran of many Israeli undercover operations and the man who had most likely green-lighted the mission) back in Israel. In a second Boeing jet, representing the rear command, sat Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Moshe Yaalon, the deputy commanders of the Navy and the Air Force, and intelligence agents. F-15A fighter jets provided additional cover.<sup>5</sup>

As dawn broke, the *Karine-A* was positioned between the coasts of Saudi Arabia and the Sudan. The mission, codenamed Operation Noah's Ark, was a go.





At 4:00 A.M., under the cover of Apache helicopters, Israeli Navy Dabur patrol boats raced toward the ship. Appearing in the sky above, Sikorsky CH-53 transport and Black Hawk helicopters released rubber boats, which naval commandos from the elite Flotilla 13 unit scrambled after. At the same time, more commandos stormed their way onto the *Karine-A* from a naval command ship deployed nearby. Within a minute flat, they had climbed up the hull of the ship, entered its control room, and overpowered two crew members before they had a chance to reach for their guns. Unaware of the scuffle on deck, the remaining 11 crewmen were handcuffed as they slept in their bunks. They weren't the only ones caught off-guard. As the *Karine-A* was intercepted by the Israelis, Palestinian officials, including the PLO's ambassador to Cairo, were said to be waiting for the ship where it was expected to dock on the Egyptian Coast.<sup>6</sup> The entire operation took eight minutes. Not a single shot was fired. When it was over, the chief of staff placed a phone call to Tel Aviv. "It's in our hands," he reported to the high-level government officials awaiting news of the mission.<sup>7</sup>

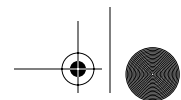
Under a pile of clothing and toys, the Israeli commandos uncovered wooden crates marked "fragile" and packed in waterproof plastic sleeves. They held some 80 submersible containers packed with 50 tons of Iranian and Russian-made weapons and explosives. The Israelis put a price tag on the weapons in the tens of millions. The arsenal was enough to supply a small army, which was fitting as Israeli intelligence had determined the *Karine-A* and its lethal cargo was bound for the Palestinian Authority. The haul included dozens of 122-mm and 107-mm Katyusha rockets with ranges of 20 and 8 kilometers, hundreds of shorter-range 81-mm rockets, numerous mortars with hundreds of bombs, SAGGER and RPG 18 anti-tank missiles, sniper rifles, AK-47 assault rifles, and anti-personnel and anti-tank missiles.<sup>8</sup> Most of the weaponry uncovered from the *Karine-A* was in violation of the agreements signed by the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo accords. The scope, magnitude, and long-range capability of the arms bore little justification, said Mofaz later, for use in self-defense or law enforcement.<sup>9</sup> Most alarming was the 3,000



pounds of C4 explosives found on board. It was enough to manufacture hundreds of suicide bombs, making them a much deadlier and sophisticated batch than the kind of improvised explosives studded with nails, nuts, and bolts for maximum impact—the bomb of choice for Palestinian suicide bombers.

According to the plan, as it was later reconstructed, the *Karine-A* would have sailed to port in Alexandria to transfer the weapons to smaller ships that would then dump the floatable canisters off the Gaza coast, where fishing boats would pick them up and send them to the Palestinian territories. If the plan had been successful, the weapons would have enabled Palestinian militants to escalate the already deadly intifada, perhaps even spiraling it into a regional war. As it was, the intifada by this point had claimed more than a thousand Palestinian and Israeli lives. But with this new cache of weaponry, cities and towns all over Israel would have been made vulnerable and would have been within striking distance from attacks coming from well within Palestinian territory. “If warfare equipment of this kind had reached the hands of terrorists acting against us,” Mofaz exclaimed after the raid, “it may have dramatically altered the security of the citizens of the State of Israel and the soldiers of the IDF, and drastically increased the terror activity against us.”<sup>10</sup>

Immediately, Operation Noah’s Ark was announced as one of risk, brilliance, and imagination. For the Israelis, it was another accomplishment in survival. It was also, more bluntly, a spectacular triumph of military daring—another in a long line of movie-worthy Israeli special-ops victories such as the kidnapping of Nazi Adolph Eichmann from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Israel; the hostage rescue operation at Entebbe, Uganda; or the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirik, north of Baghdad. But it was no less a success, although a deliberately less trumpeted one, of Israeli intelligence. Every operation of any magnitude depends on accurate, timely information. And Operation Noah’s Ark was no exception. Yaacov Erez, editor-in-chief of the Israeli daily *Ma’ariv*, summed up the enormity of the operation in an editorial in which he wrote, “Uncovering the cargo aboard the *Karine-A* was the primary goal of the military



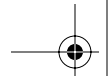
raid, but the significance of the operation, which was carried out flawlessly, was that it demonstrated impressive operational capabilities by the IDF, far from Israeli territory, while using intelligence methods in an awe-inspiring fashion.”<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, in a briefing following the successful raid, Israeli Navy Admiral Ya’ari congratulated the efforts of the Air Force and the Naval commando unit before giving a brief if oblique acknowledgment, saying only that the mission “...began with intelligence....”<sup>12</sup> And he left it at that.

Thanks to the information collected by intelligence, the Israelis knew precisely when the ship was purchased, who purchased it, from whose courtesy its lethal cargo had originated, and its final destination. The only question left for the Israelis was what to do about it.

A year earlier, Israeli intelligence had picked up signs that the Iranian-backed Hizbollah was aiding the armed uprising against the Israeli occupation by bringing weapons and know-how into the Palestinian territories. In October 2000, they learned that Adel Mughrabi (also known as Adel Awadallah), who is the head of the Palestinian Authority’s procurement department, Palestinian Naval Police Commander Juma’a’ Ghali, and his deputy Fathi Ghazem were in touch with Iranian and Hizbollah agents.<sup>13</sup> The following August, Mughrabi purchased the 4,000-ton merchant ship in Lebanon for \$400,000. Arafat’s senior finance officer, Fuad Shubaki, funded the deal. From the time the ship set sail from Lebanon, it was under surveillance.

On the heels of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., the boat was registered with the kingdom of Tonga on September 12 and given the name *Karine-A*. It then sailed for Aden, Yemen, where Akawi took command, along with a crew of four armed Palestinians and an additional group of Egyptians and Jordanians.<sup>14</sup> Although the Egyptian and Jordanian sailors thought they might be part of some smuggling adventure—possibly trafficking in stolen stereo and other electronic equipment—they were evidently unaware of the exact gravity of the freight with which they were sailing. The Israeli press reported that when a crate broke apart

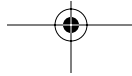


during the loading of the ship and exposed its true cargo, some of the Egyptian and Jordanian seamen requested to leave—only reportedly to be told that from that point on, “There is only one way to get off the ship—with a bullet in the head.”<sup>15</sup>

In early December, the ship arrived at the Iranian island of Kish in the Persian Gulf, where it was met by a ferry said to be carrying Iranian intelligence officials and the weapons. Shortly after the operation, published reports suggested that Israeli intelligence had implicated senior Hizbollah operative Imad Mughniyah in the operation. Long suspected as the mastermind behind the 1983 U.S. Marine barracks bombing in Lebanon that killed 241 Americans, as well as the 1985 hijacking of TWA flight 847, in which a U.S. Navy officer was killed, Mughniyah was on the FBI’s most wanted foreign terrorist list. The Israelis also wanted him, as Mughniyah was considered to be responsible for the 1992 terror attacks against the Israeli embassy in Argentina that killed 29 and the one against the Buenos Aires Jewish community center two years later. More recently, reports surfaced linking Mughniyah to Al Qaeda.<sup>16</sup>

With the weapons on board, the *Karine-A* left in mid-December for Dubai, where it collected a bogus cargo designed to hide the stash of weapons. Then, after an unscheduled week’s pause in Hodeida, Yemen, to repair the engine, it resumed its journey sailing around the Arabian Peninsula heading for the Palestinian territories. On January 3, as U.S. envoy retired General Anthony Zinni was to meet with Arafat and begin a four-day series of talks between the Israelis and Palestinians in an attempt to put together a cease-fire, Israel authorities announced that its commandos had stormed and seized the *Karine-A*. Now traveling under an Israeli flag, the ship sailed north, to the southern Israeli port of Eilat. When it arrived there two days after the raid, hundreds of beachgoers on the rocky shore erupted in applause.<sup>17</sup>

The Israeli government invited journalists and diplomats to Eilat to see for themselves what Prime Minister Sharon called “a ship of terror,” “a ticking time bomb,” and “this Trojan horse by sea” at a press conference shortly after the seizure, where the IDF





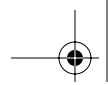


displayed the captured arms organized in rows, each marked and labeled. Amid the display of weaponry, Sharon said the *Karine-A* proved “once again that the Palestinian Authority has been focusing all its efforts on terrorism and preparing the operational infrastructure for the next waves of terror.”<sup>18</sup> Soon after, the IDF put up a streaming video of the arms cache on its own website.

The Palestinian Authority denied any involvement in the episode at first (as did the Iranians), accusing Israel of manufacturing the whole thing. Later they said the shipment was headed for Lebanon. Indeed, some U.S. officials expressed their own doubts about the Israeli claims in initial reports, raising the possibility that the arms were actually intended for Hizbollah in Lebanon. For their part, the Israelis claimed irrefutable evidence that the arms shipment was organized by Palestinian Authority officials with the aid of Iran and Hizbollah and was earmarked for the Palestinian territories.<sup>19</sup> Washington, however, was not totally in the dark, as American intelligence was also said to have been following the ship and even to have shared strategic information with the Israelis. The Israelis, however, denied it.<sup>20</sup>

Although no direct line of evidence surfaced linking Arafat to the *Karine-A*—at least not publicly—such a large purchase would not likely go unnoticed by Arafat given his ironclad hold on the Palestinian Authority’s coffers. And, too, the men implicated in the scheme were not marginal to the Palestinian Authority—they were quite close to the chairman’s inner circle. Omar Akawi, the ship’s captain, did little to quell the connection. In interviews he gave with Israeli TV and western journalists following the seizure, he identified himself as an officer of the Palestinian Authority and a 26-year member of Arafat’s own Fatah group. Akawi referred to Arafat as his “commander and chief,” calling him by his *nom de guerre*: Abu Amar. Describing himself as a soldier who must obey orders, he said the operation was organized and supervised by senior Palestinian Authority official Adel Mughrabi, and he affirmed that the munitions were indeed headed for Gaza and for the Palestinian Authority. As for the weapons’ provenance, he told an Israeli journalist in a television broadcast, “I received [the





cache] near Iran, so where could it have come from? You're smart and can understand on your own."<sup>21</sup>



The event was greeted somewhat ambivalently by a conflict-weary world that viewed it with what was becoming the increasingly jaundiced prism with which they looked at the growing tensions in the area. However, back in Israel, there was much backslapping and congratulations. The operation was a perfectly executed combination of military might and intelligence prowess. The naval commandos under air force cover had stormed the ship, arrested its crew, and secured the dangerous cargo. Of course, the entire mission was predicated on information, and that information came from intelligence. After all, as one former high-level intelligence officer explained, "You can't just go in and take over a ship in international waters." Intelligence had to piece together that an illicit arms smuggling operation was in progress. It had to determine that the *Karine-A* was that ship and not simply a merchant vessel transporting T-shirts to Egypt. It was a complicated affair, logging 3,000 miles and crossing a considerable number of countries—most of which are hostile to Israel.

In Israel, there were a select few who knew exactly what was needed to support such an operation. Sitting deep within the furtive Israeli intelligence complex exists an agency until recently little known outside of the intelligence community. It's an ultrasecretive unit without a name—just a number: 8200. Pronounced *shmone matayim* in Hebrew, it is known as the ears of Israeli intelligence. As the former intelligence officer continued, "Important information came from this unit. A military operation is the last step based on intelligence." The Israelis could not afford any kind of mistake. They needed to be sure it was the right ship,



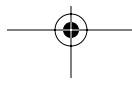
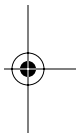


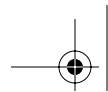
where it was going, and when. In concert with several organizations, unit 8200 played a significant part in teasing out the kind of information needed to put together the intelligence puzzle. Thanks to 8200's high-tech ability to listen, intercept, and mine thousands of pieces of information, it was able to help build the kind of portrait needed.

Technological intelligence units in the IDF were established in order to greatly enhance the kind of instant intelligence needed to provide early warning of the impending actions of its enemies. Such units are also an important tool to provide the raw data necessary to form policy, strategy, and, ultimately, the basis of a military operation. Ringed by its Arab neighbors, and for most of

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its history in a state of war with them, Israel needed not only real-time intelligence but the means with which to collect and interpret it just as instantaneously. From its rudimentary beginnings during the early years of the state, 8200 was made up of an enormously gifted brain trust of mathematicians and engineers. It is they who are said to have created and analyzed much of the super-secret technology of Israeli intelligence sleuthing. Manipulating huge amounts of information, it plumbs through an endless skein of intercepts from phones, faxes, and all other types of electronic communications to extract the vital signs and form the abstract links that connect the dots. The unit is also the producer of the kind of sophisticated systems that capture and decrypt these enemy transmissions, unraveling their signals, turning them into comprehensible messages, and ultimately exposing their hidden meanings. The unit sits squarely at the center of Israel's defense and security.





It has been described as perhaps more important to Israeli espionage in recent years than its better-known counterparts like the Mossad. The men and women who toil inside of unit 8200 are in large part responsible for the long and penetrating reach of Israeli intelligence. "Reuven," a former 17-year veteran of the unit, related, "Every step in the process, one way or another 8200 is involved. 8200 is responsible for every significant event in the life of this country, whether it's war or the odd event of peace. A considerable amount of all information is first received by 8200."

Until recently, when the unit was mentioned in public, if it was mentioned at all, it was referred to innocuously as the Central Collection Unit. Little is known about 8200 outside of the clandestine intelligence community. Its members work in tight groups, and their contributions are known only among themselves. Perhaps the best-known example of such eavesdropping took place more than three decades ago during the Six Day War in 1967, when intelligence intercepted and recorded a radiophone conversation between Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser and King Hussein of Jordan on June 6, the second day of the war.<sup>22</sup>

*Nasser:* Does Britain have aircraft carriers?

*Hussein:* (Unclear)

*Nasser:* Very well. So King Hussein will publish and we shall publish an announcement.

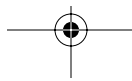
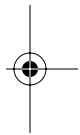
*Hussein:* Thank you.

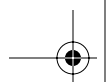
*Nasser:* Yes, Yes.

*Nasser:* Hello, good morning my brother, be strong.

*Hussein:* Mr. President, if you have any request or idea...at any time.

*Nasser:* We are fighting with all our forces. The fighting goes on all fronts. All the night, and if there was anything at the beginning, never mind, we shall overcome and Allah





will be with us. Will his Highness publish an announcement concerning British and American participation?

*Hussein:* (Answer not clear)

*Nasser:* I swear to Allah that we shall publish an announcement, and you will publish and we shall see to it that the Syrians will publish an announcement that American and British aircraft are participating against us from aircraft carriers. We shall announce it and emphasize it.

*Hussein:* OK.

*Nasser:* Your Highness, do you agree?

*Hussein:* (Answer not clear)

*Nasser:* Thousands of thanks, be strong, we are with you with all our heart. Our aircraft are over Israel all [day] long today, our aircraft are pounding the Israeli airbases since this morning.

*Hussein:* Thousand thanks, good bye.

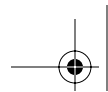
Two agents listening at a base near Tel Aviv, using unsophisticated, old World War II equipment, caught the exchange. Recognizing its political cache, Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan insisted that the conversation be made public, broadcasting it in Israel, Great Britain, and the United Nations Assembly. It was a rare exposure of Israeli intelligence capabilities, and it was done despite the vehement protestations of military intelligence. The discussion came to be known as “The Big Lie.” The fabrication of an American-British conspiracy humiliated both Nasser and Hussein, hurting for a time their relations with the western powers. Its consequences, however, had a much greater impact. Despite the fact that the Israelis had pummeled most of the Egyptian Air Force, Nasser neglected to mention this important detail to King Hussein. With his back against the wall, the Jordanian monarch, in a face-saving move, joined forces with Nasser and entered the war. He lost half his kingdom, the West Bank, to the Israelis, radically altering the shape of the geopolitical map of



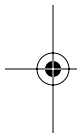
the Middle East. The consequences of this episode reverberate to this day, remaining a source of heated conflict, putting millions of Palestinians under Israeli occupation.<sup>23</sup>

It is a general rule of thumb that intelligence organizations are loathe to make public much of the information they collect in order that they not expose the sources and methods with which they obtained it. This reluctance to make information public was one major reason why the United States failed to produce a smoking gun during the great Iraqi weapons of mass destruction debate at the United Nations in the early part of 2003. (Of course, the vexing question of whether such weapons existed at all would emerge later and haunt the Bush Administration following the invasion of Iraq.) Indeed, the famous exchange between Nasser and Hussein had great short-term effects, but it also upped the ante for Israeli intelligence. Immediately the Arabs took greater measures to secure their communications, eroding a significant portion of Israeli SIGINT (signals intelligence) capabilities against their neighbors at the time. On the other hand, the Arabs were no longer so sure when, where, or how they were being monitored. Indeed, as a result of this breach, six years later, as the Egyptians and Syrians prepared their surprise attack in what would become the Yom Kippur War of 1973, they were notably cautious regarding Israel's SIGINT capabilities. They avoided communicating between themselves on telephones, cables, and radiophones.<sup>24</sup>

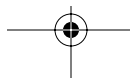
It would be almost another 20 years before the Israelis would exchange such deep intelligence activity for political gain, at least publicly. They did so on October 16, 1985, after members of the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF), an offshoot of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), had hijacked the Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro* in the Mediterranean en route to the Israeli port of Ashdod. When the hijackers were discovered by a crewmember, their plans went awry. Most notably, they shot an invalid passenger, 69-year-old Leon Klinghoffer, and dumped his body and wheelchair overboard. They then tried to sail to Syria but were refused permission to enter. Ulti-

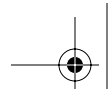


mately, the ship pulled into Port Said in Egypt, where the hijackers surrendered to Egyptian and PLO officials. However, almost from the moment the ship was taken, Israeli intelligence had electronically intercepted and monitored Egyptian communications and recorded ship-to-shore conversations between the hijackers and PLF guerilla leader Mohammed Abbas, also known as Abu al Abbas and reportedly on the executive committee of the PLO. Shortly after the incident, no less than Ehud Barak, then head of *Aman*, released a portion of the recorded transcript. The PLO, which had tried to distance itself from the hijackers by calling attention to its diplomatic efforts in resolving the matter, was now publicly implicated in the affair.<sup>25</sup>



In the cat and mouse game of intelligence, special electronic and technological units like 8200 spend their existence exhaustively inventing new and ingenious ways to intercept enemy transmissions and decipher and analyze signal communications however they were transmitted and from wherever they originated. From its earliest days, the insular world of electronic intelligence was kept in almost complete secrecy. Due to the clandestine nature of intelligence, the unit could not make large acquisitions, and instead it came to rely on developing its own technologies and solutions, customized and suited to the unique challenges of fighting terrorism and a war that at times seems endless. The result has been a kind of innovation engine that has driven the development of some of the most advanced commercial technologies in a number of areas that would later find applications in the civilian world, such as the areas of wireless telecommunications, encryption, search engines, firewalls, data





security, data and voice compression, streaming technology, DSP chips, and virtual networks, to name a few.

From the beginning, faced with a host of unique geopolitical challenges, Israel's founding fathers knew it would have to depend on knowledge, cunning, and imagination to sustain the nation. This feverish environment gave birth to military and intelligence units like 8200, which would wage an unending war. The byproduct of unceasing security and defense had also become an engine for ingenuity

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that would permeate outside of the tiny country. These individuals, indelibly trained in the notion that innovation serves as a fundamental pillar of national security, would go on to help establish an entire high-tech industry as civilians. The impact of this industry would stretch beyond the narrow geographical borders of Israel.

