

THIS IS THE TRUE STORY OF AN INCREDIBLE AND COMPLEX OPERATION  
THAT CHANGED THE GEOPOLITICAL BALANCE OF THE WORLD

*A freighter disappears in the Mediterranean Sea. A missing cargo of death that troubled the whole world. Its cargo : enough uranium for twenty nuclear bombs !*

PICASSO<sup>FILM</sup>

presents

# OPERATION PLUMBAT

"THE UNTOLD STORY OF HOW ISRAEL GOT ITS NUKES"

3 x 60 min.

docuseries



## OVERVIEW

### *The true story of an amazing complex operation masterminded by the Israeli secret service*

This is the story of Israel's secret Mossad operation to bring 200 tons of uranium to Israel from Belgium. First Israel built its "peaceful" nuclear power plant under tight security in the Negev Desert (their own strayed plane was shot down to keep the plant a secret), and then the Israelis found that the plant needed fuel for the reactor if it was to produce enough plutonium by-product for making bombs.

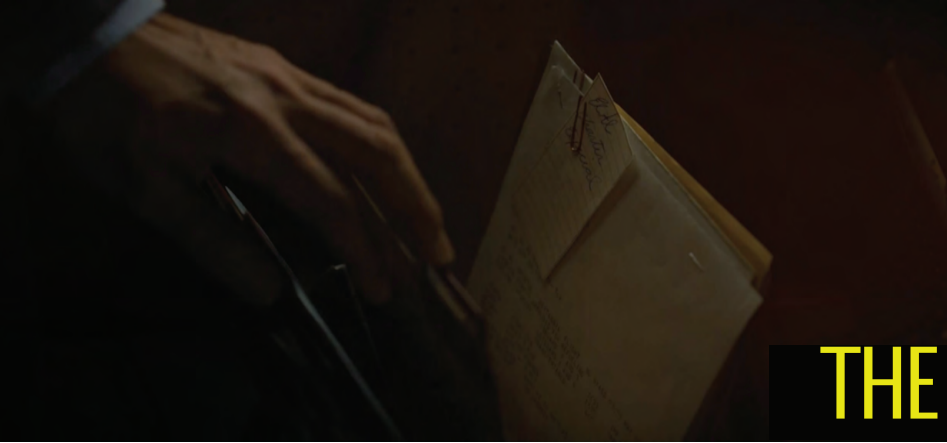
Mossad mocked up a front company, and approached a Belgian uranium manufacturer which was willing to sell the 200 tons at the only condition that the fissionable material remained within the European Common Market and under Euratom surveillance.

The Mossad front agreed but said that the uranium had to be shipped by boat to Morocco to be treated before it could be used by their "Italian" company in Milan. On November 17, 1968, a shabby cargo ship, the Scheersberg A, was loaded with 560 metal drums, meaningless labeled "Plumbat", and sailed out of Antwerp, bound for Genoa, Italy. The ship never reached the port of Genoa. It mysteriously disappeared. Over two weeks later the ship arrived at the Turkish port of Iskenderum, quite empty, and was promptly abandoned by captain and crew.

The cover-up of Israel's nuclear secret remained largely intact until 1976, when the legal counsel to the U.S. Senate's Government Operations Committee, a man named Leventhal, became fascinated by CIA estimates stating Israel had churned-out about three low-grade nukes by 1973. Leventhal, a passionate anti-nuclear proliferation activist, became determined to solve the mystery of how Israel had acquired the fissionable material to make the Bomb.

The truth came out five years later in 1978, when the Italian Enrico Jacchia, former director of the Euratom safeguard, held a press conference in which he declared that he intended to publish his investigations into the 200 tonnes of missing uranium, and that for many reasons, it could be assumed that the uranium had gone straight to Israel.





# THE NARRATIVE STYLE

A spy lies in prison and the only way to save himself is to confess.

The series is based on the figure of Dan Aerbel, a Mossad agent, who tells us, as if in confession, the events of the Plumbat Affair.

Aerbel will reveal everything: his recruitment, Israel's vital need for atomic weapons, the highly secret Dimona nuclear power plant, the relationship between Israel and Western powers, and even aspects that seem impossible at first glance, such as the collaboration between Tel Aviv and former Nazi hierarchs.

It is not possible to make two hundred tons of uranium disappear without leaving a trace, yet the Mossad succeeded in this operation thanks to an intricate and unscrupulous plan, which our spy will slowly reveal to us.

Perfectly legal business agreements and distinguished businessmen will mix with mysterious fixers like the Turkish Burham Yarisal, an ambiguous shipowner who supplied ship and crew to make the uranium disappear from Europe.

And at this last word, a scornful smile spreads across Aerbel's face, who will tell us about the role of the European authorities who were completely fooled by Mossad and for years groped in the dark.



Mossad Headquarters  
Tel Aviv, Israel





# VISUAL STYLE

**1. The re-enactments** will serve to stage sequences that will not be seen in the archives, as well as scenes from the narration that are necessary for the smooth running. Through the set, the costume, the different actors we will recreate an atmosphere of the time of Plumbat.



**2. The Interviews** with experts will recount the facts and with some of them we will analyse the geopolitical and nuclear situation in the 1960s and 1970s. We will also give an in-depth look at Mossad and the importance of Operation Plumbat from the Israeli point of view. The victims, the operational logistics, the intrigues, the compromises, the risks, the investments.



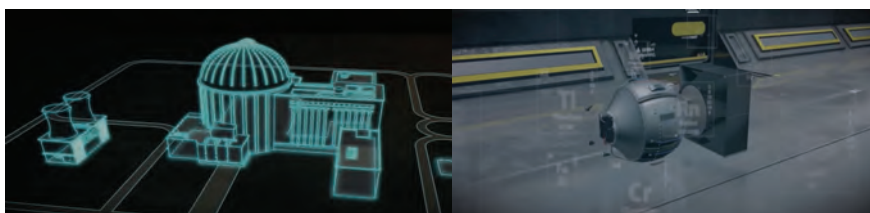
**3. The footage archives** will make it possible to contextualise the time and place of the operation and to show images of the time. The archive will also show the real protagonists of the mission and the locations. The archive will also serve to tell the story of the Mossad secret service.



**4. The montage** will propose transitions made up of modern images of the place where the mission took place in order to anchor the often unbelievable story that the films will tell in reality (stock footage, drones, helicopter shots, night, day, timelapse, B-roll).

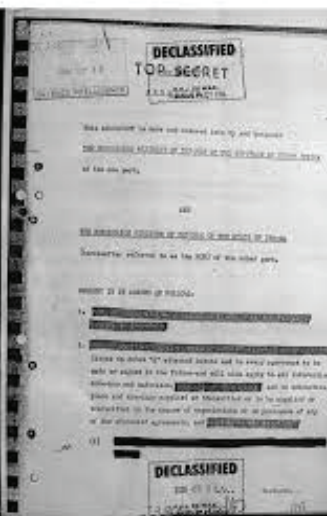


**5. CGI** : With the help of computer graphics, we will reconstruct the locations, walk through the maps of the operation, reconstruct the Dimona plant and illustrate the plans of the secret operation.



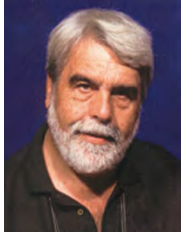
# KEY ACCESS

- **Finding sources** on this subject is certainly not easy; yet through a meticulous and lengthy investigation of archives and port records we can tell you about the voyage of the ship Scheerberg A and its radioactive cargo.
- **Experts will provide** us with details of the conversion of uranium to plutonium and the construction of the Bomb!
- **We will interview and work with Peter and Leni Gillman**, author and researcher respectively of the book "The Plumbat Affair". We will use some of their documents archived during the period of writing the book.



- **Archival materials are the keystone of each episode** to provide both atmosphere and information. Declassified documents, historical archives and those obtained from the National Archives, the Department of the Merchant Navy and various local and international intelligence and law enforcement agencies.
- **We will interview authors and journalists** who have written this story in the past and supported the truth in press conferences; the latter always eclipsed by realpolitik.
- **And finally, we will interview a nuclear technician** who spent ten years of his life in the Dimona nuclear power plant; a man considered to be Israel's worst traitor, who by his escape and confession revealed to the world a secret hidden for too long; his name is Mordecai Vanunu.

# OUR EXPERTS



**Peter Hounan - UK** \_An Award-Winning Investigative Journalist.

Peter Hounan is a former chief investigative reporter at The Sunday Times, columnist at the Daily Mirror and presenter of Channel 4's Despatches and the BBC's investigative journalism stalwart, Panorama.

### Why have him as a guest?

Peter He is most famous for his role in the case of Mordechai Vanunu, Israeli nuclear technician who revealed Israel's secret nuclear bomb programme. He has stood up against the behemoths of power, exposing international smuggling rings and unearthing government corruption tied back to weapons of mass destruction.



**Mordechai Vanunu - Israel** \_Mordechai Vanunu is a former nuclear technician and whistleblower from Israel.

In 1986, he revealed the extent of Israel's nuclear weapons programme to the world. Vanunu has paid an immense personal price for his courageous peace activism. Mordechai Vanunu was abducted by the Israeli secret service Mossad in Italy and taken to Israel, accused of espionage and treason.

### Why have him as a guest?

For his courage and self-sacrifice in revealing the extent of Israel's nuclear weapons programme.



**Avner Cohen - USA** \_Writer, Israeli historian

Known for his work on Israel's nuclear history and strategic policy. He is currently a professor at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies and director of the education program and Senior Fellow at the James Martin Center for Non proliferation Studies.

### Why have him as a guest?

We will understand the development of the Israeli atomic plan, the key figures who decided this strategy, including the infighting between scientists and politicians. Finally, we will try to understand why after so many decades Israel still denies the existence of its own nuclear weapons.



**Gideon Remez - Israel** \_Formerly head of foreign news at Voice of Israel Radio

He served in the Israel Army Paratroops from 1964 to '66; on reserve duty, he saw combat on the Golan Heights in the 1967 Six-Day War and later in the Jordan Valley, and was a front-line reporter from the Suez Canal theater of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

### Why have him as a guest?

We will explore the theoretical and practical aspects of building a nuclear power plant, converting uranium to plutonium and making a nuclear device.



**Michael I. Karpin (1945) - Tel Aviv - Israel** \_ Israeli TV journalist and author.

Known for his investigative reportages that have often aroused scandal in Israel; such as the documentary and later book: "A Bomb in the Basement in 2001.

### Why have him as a guest?

Thanks to Karpin, we will discover the Dimona nuclear power plant, Israel's most secret site. We will explore the birth of this nuclear power plant, the concerns of the West and the development of military nuclear power, and above all we will talk



**Ronen Bergman (1972) - Tel Aviv - Israele** \_Journalist for Israel's leading daily newspaper.

He works on political-military and intelligence analysis. Bergman has written for The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Foreign Affairs, and Newsweek in the United States, and for The Times, The Guardian, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, and Süddeutsche Zeitung in Europe.

### Why have him as a guest?

We will delve into topics related to Mossad, recruitment techniques, the creation of spy networks, and the disaster that befell Mossad with Aerbel's revelations while in custody in Norway.

# WRITERS & WITNESSES

## Peter e Leni Gillman , London - United Kingdom

British husband and wife; writers and journalists. Peter Gillman was a Sunday Times staff writer for many years, specializing in the Middle East. After going in freelance in 1983, he has written for most British newspapers, and has written numerous books with Leni. Peter and Leni are co-authors (with Paul Eddy and Elaine Davenport) of the best-seller 'The Plumbat Affair' (1978). The book is renowned for being the first to tell the full story of Mossad's hi-jack of uranium to fuel Israel's nuclear weapons programme.

### Why have them as a guest?

To get another point of view; we want to know how the authors discovered this scandal and why they decided to divulge it and whether their lives changed after this work. Finally, we could look at the scrolls and notes with which the book was written.

## Cosattini Giovanna e Luigi Andrea Bologna - Italy

Descendants of an important Italian Jewish family and grandchildren of Enrico Jacchia.

Thanks to them, we will try to reconstruct the figure of the writer, journalist and politician who, as head of the Euratom Commissioners, was the only one to fight in European forums to unravel the mystery of the Plumbat Affair.

### Why have them as a guests?

Professor Jacchia passed away in 2011. Thanks to his grandchildren, we will be able to learn about some aspects of the life of this man who tried in every way possible to combat nuclear proliferation in Europe. We will also be able to acquire unpublished documents and notes that belonged to Jacchia.

## Mishka Ben-David

For 12 years, he took part in secret operations in Europe and the Middle East as an agent for Israel's intelligence agency, the Mossad. He played a key role in a high-profile assassination fiasco in the 1990s. He was required to manipulate and deceive. He experienced the acute loneliness of an undercover operative in situations where only he knew his true identity.

### Why have him as a guest?

We will delve into topics related to Mossad, recruitment techniques and the creation of spy networks.

## Halvor Elvik (1947) Oslo - Norway

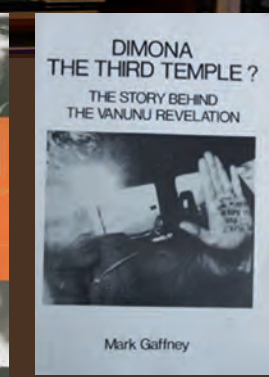
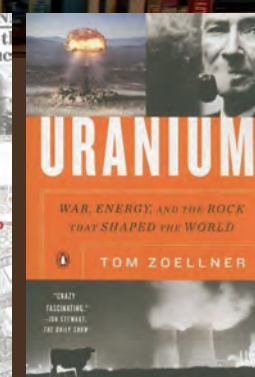
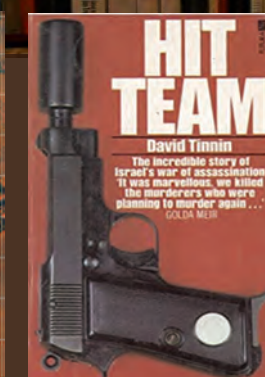
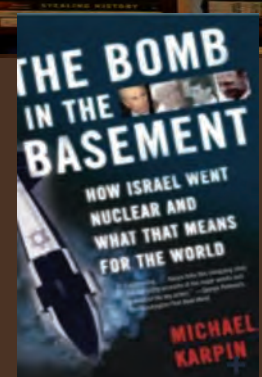
A retired journalist and former editor of Dagbladet, Norway's largest daily newspaper, for which he was also a political reporter, foreign reporter and US correspondent.

Elvik is also a non-fiction writer and has taken an interest in the Lillehammer affair.

### Why have him as a guest?

Thanks to Elvik's lucid reconstruction of the facts, we will be able to understand DanAerbel's ( the Mossad Spy ) state of mind and the motivations that led him to confess.

# OUR READINGS



# EPISODE 1 : THE NUCLEAR POWER

A small fledgling country, surrounded by enemies, concludes that its best chance of survival lies in acquiring a weapon that will instil terror in its adversaries and respect in its allies. In short, Israel decides that it needs nuclear weapons — and our series reveals how it acquired them. It is a story of subterfuge, cunning, deceit, and drama on the high seas; and one of some surprising secret political alliances which brought profound consequences for the geopolitics of the Middle East and beyond.

The first episode portrays the birth of Israel's nuclear programme. Ben Gurion, Israel's founding father, declared it needed the capacity "to kill masses or cure masses" – a reference to the twin purposes of science. He rarely referred to nuclear weapons specifically, placating those Israelis who believed that their country should never acquire them, and creating uncertainty which has left Israel's adversaries guessing to this day.

The man who pushed Ben Gurion to make the project a reality was Shimon Peres, future prime minister, who also forged the crucial collaborations which Israel sought. One was with France; another, improbably, was with Germany, conducted in the utmost secrecy until 1964, when Germany's cover was blown and it pulled out. Britain too played a covert part, using a Norwegian front company to ship heavy water required by Israel's secret nuclear reactor at a remote location on the road to Sodom in the Negev Desert – Dimona.



We will analyse these curious shifting alliances in the context of Europe's recent history, with motivations ranging from Realpolitik to Germany's desire to atone for Nazism and the Holocaust. We will also give voice to experts who will explain how Israel designed and constructed its first rudimentary nuclear devices at Dimona. By May 1967, the time of the Six-Day War, the project had progressed far enough to enable Israel to load two crude nuclear bombs on to army trucks that could be detonated on the Egyptian border if Israel's defences were overwhelmed.

Even that crude weaponry – nicknamed Spider, from their protruding appendages – would not have been possible without the crucial nuclear propellant: uranium. There were supplies aplenty in the US, but the US until then had limited its cooperation to assisting Israel with the early stages of constructing Dimona, supposedly to be used for peaceful purposes alone. Then, in 1965, several hundred kilos of uranium went missing from a nuclear materials company in Pittsburgh. The CIA later concluded that the company, headed by an ardent Israel supporter, had shipped the uranium to Dimona (although controversy over this finding persists to this day.)

Either way, a few hundred kilos of uranium was far from enough to supply Israel's needs. Then Israel identified a new source, at an improbable location near the tourist village of Olen, some 25 miles from Antwerp in Belgium. There, beside a canal a few miles away, were the smoke-belching chimneys and gigantic black slag heap of a metal refinery owned by the Belgian company Metallurgie Hoboken-Overpelt — the only place in Belgium licensed to store radioactive materials. Israel had found its uranium, leaving two enticing questions. How did Israel identify this source? And how would it transport the uranium to Dimona, enabling it to become a true nuclear power?





# EPISODE 2 : THE HIJACK

This episode reveals how Mossad, Israel's secret service agency, brought Israel's uranium home. The operation had to be conducted in the utmost secrecy and using Israel's resources alone, as no Western country would have risked breaking international treaties or compromising their relations with oil-producing countries, many of them Israel's sworn enemies. The episode us takes from the world of covert international alliances into one that is even murkier, involving fake documents, shell companies, undercover shipments and a range of characters who include a former Luftwaffe fighter pilot still suffering from injuries sustained when he was shot down over Denmark during WW2.

The uranium in question consisted of 200 tons of "yellowcake", so named for its colour, which would be converted into enriched uranium once it reached Dimona. The order for the yellowcake arrived at the Brussels HQ of the Olen company in March 1968. The cost was 190m Belgian francs (around £1.5m or \$4m at the time) and it was placed by a german trading company named Asmara whose owner was the former Luftwaffe pilot Herbert Schulzen. And Schulzen had been assiduously wooed by Mossad agents who had placed numerous innocuous contracts his way before asking him to set up the uranium deal.

Much more remained to be done to transport the uranium to Israel, not least in evading the scrutiny of Europe's supposed uranium watchdogs. That was dealt with by pretending that the uranium would be shipped to the Italian port of Genoa and therefore would not leave the bounds of the European Union. A new and even more elusive character now enters the story: a mysterious shipping broker named Burham Yarisal, born in Turkey and based in the Ethiopian city of Diredawa.



It was Yarisal, secretly commissioned and financed by Mossad, who bought a 2,500-ton German cargo boat named the Scheersberg at the bargain price of 1.5million Deutschmarks (around £160,000 or \$400,000). And it was Yarisal who found a ship's captain willing to take part in the most dramatic subterfuge of all. On 17 November the renamed Scheersberg A set sail from Antwerp loaded with 560 drums of yellowcake. All were stamped with the single word PLUMBAT – derived from the word "plumbum", the Latin for lead. Some ten days later the Scheersberg A made a night-time rendezvous with an Israeli freighter, shadowed by two fiercely armed Israeli gunboats, in waters somewhere between Cyprus and Turkey. The 560 drums were winched aboard the Israeli freighter, arriving at Dimona just one week later.

It was to take another five years before European investigators began to piece together the story of the uranium heist – facilitated, quite remarkably, by a Mossad agent named Dan Aerbel. In 1973, Aerbel was part of a Mossad hit-squad which travelled to the Norwegian town of Lillehammer in the mistaken belief it had found and identified Ali Hassan Salameh, the Palestinian militant who masterminded the kidnap and subsequent massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Mossad in fact assassinated a blameless Moroccan-born waiter and several of its agents were arrested. Among them was Aerbel, who blurted out that he had been the owner of the Scheersberg A – a vital clue that led to the unravelling of the Plumbat Affair, as it became known.

We will talk of Enrico Jacchia, an executive of the European body Euratom, who will tell of his search for the truth about the Plumbat operation. He did so in face of the silence of the nuclear watchdogs such as the International Atomic Energy and Euratom itself, embarrassed at how easily they had been deceived by Mossad. Even today there has been no official accounting for their failure.



# EPISODE 3 : SECRECY AND DECEPTION

Our third episode will weave the story of Dimona with that of a remarkable whistleblower who revealed the truth about Israel's nuclear weapons programme. He later stood trial in Israel for treason and, having been spared the death penalty, spent 18 years in prison, more than 11 of them in solitary confinement.

The Dimona story continues the themes of secrecy and deception that run through our first two episodes. Its construction began in 1958 with assistance from France under the same protocol – the Treaty of Sevres – that covered the joint invasion, with the British, of Egypt and the Suez Canal in 1956. In order to evade inspection from the International Atomic Energy Agency, reactor components were shipped from France under the pretence that they were part of a desalination plant intended for Latin America.

Soon after construction began, a US U-2 spy plane spotted the site. Israel claimed it was building a textile plant, later changing its story and describing it as a metallurgy research installation. By 1960 the US was in no doubt, as CIA director Allen Dulles informed President Eisenhower, that Israel was constructing a reactor that would enable it to make nuclear weapons. Israel admitted US inspectors but they were repeatedly thwarted during their visits and by 1966 Israel had the means to unleash a nuclear device. Israel continued to protect its asset to the point when one of its own Mirage fighters strayed over Dimona during the Six-Day War, it was shot down.

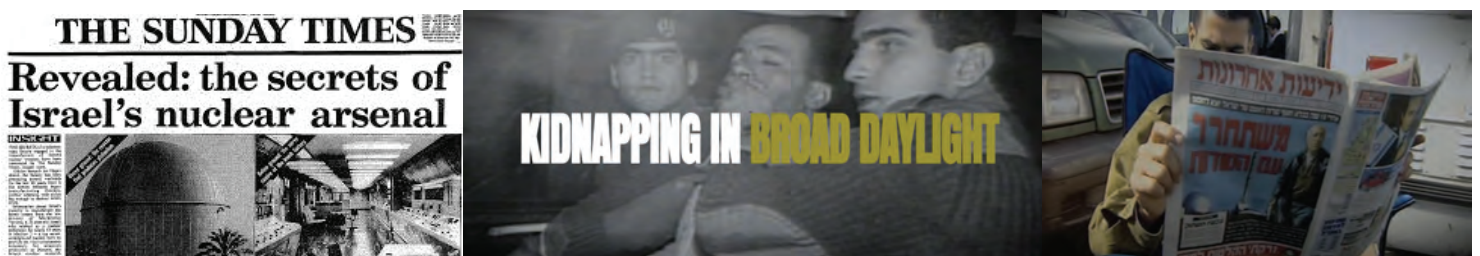


The secrecy shrouding Dimona was finally lifted in 1986. The man who did so was Mordechai Vanunu, a Moroccan-born Israeli who started work as a technician at the facility in 1977. A former Israeli army conscript, he became disenchanted with Israeli government policies, ranging from its weapons programme to its treatment of Israeli Arabs. In 1986 he emigrated to Australia and it was from there he offered to sell the story of Dimona to the London Sunday Times.

A reporter escorted Vanunu to London where he was questioned intensively by the Sunday Times, who published its story on 5 October. Illustrated with Vanunu's photographs, it said that Israel had enough uranium to have produced more than 100 nuclear warheads.

The story caused a sensation – but by then Vanunu was back in Israeli hands. In an operation reminiscent of Plumbat itself, he had been befriended by a Mossad agent who persuaded him to fly with her in Rome. There he was overpowered and injected with a paralyzing drug. He was shipped out to sea and transferred to an Israeli supply boat which delivered him to Israel two days after the Sunday Times report appeared.

Vanunu was released from prison in 2004. But Israel kept him on a tight rein, preventing him from travelling abroad, even after he married a Norwegian professor of theology in 2015. Israel was determined to exact full retribution for Vanunu's betrayal. Yet ironies abounded. Vanunu had confirmed what the world had long suspected, namely that Israel was the world's sixth nuclear weapons power. His bigger offence was that Israel could no longer maintain the policy of ambiguity – does it have nuclear weapons or not? – originally formulated by David Ben Gurion.





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"THE UNTOLD STORY OF HOW ISRAEL GOT ITS NUKES"

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