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THE SATELLITE THAT ALMOST WAS – ABIR (KNIGHT), THE FIRST INDIGENOUS SATELLITE  
OF ISRAEL

**Abstract**

On September 19, 1988, Israel became the eight nation in the world to join the exclusive space club – by launching OFEK-1 (Horizon) into space on top of a SHAVIT (Comet) launch vehicle, also of Israeli autonomous design. Since 1988, Israel have successfully launched 5 optical remote sensing satellites, One SAR satellites, 3 communication satellites and one research satellite. The development and production of all the satellite is made by IAI – Israel Aerospace Industries.

Little known even in Israel, is the history of the first satellite, the ABIR (Knight) by RAFAEL advanced defense systems – but the birthplace of Israeli satellites was at Rafael's laboratories, in the early 1980's.

The article will portray the heritage and origins of Israel's first satellite, and will deal with the rivalries between the most prominent defense contractors in Israel – IAI and Rafael, which led to favoring IAI's proposal over Rafael's.

The author was granted access to the archives of Rafael and Israel Ministry of Defense that was previously an uncharted territory for scholars; together with interviews with veterans of the Israeli space program, the article will shed light on the obscured and hidden history of the first steps Israel made into space. The article is the first in a series of articles on the history of Israel's space programs – other will discuss the history of the launch vehicles, the operational use of space assets and other aspects of Israel's space technology, motivations and scopes.