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Dassault is back 40 years after French embargo

By Ora Coren

Four decades after the French imposed an embargo on selling arms to Israel, the maker of the Mirage jet fighter, Dassault Corp., is back. Laurent Dassault, who heads the Dassault group, was among the business delegation that accompanied France's President Nicolas Sarkozy during this week's visit to Israel.

The French corporation manufactured the Mirage fighter jet upon which the Israeli airforce was based in the 1960s. France's embargo on shipment of armaments to Israel in 1967 dealt a harsh blow to Israel's deterrent capabilities.

The corporation has already begun operating in Israel on a small scale, through the Cukierman & Co. investment house, and its chairman Edouard Cukierman, who accompanied Dassault during his visit in Israel, confirmed that the corporation had made a strategic decision to renew activities in Israel.

Laurent Dassault, 52, noted that he sees himself as continuing in the footsteps of his father, Marcel, who armed Israel with its first planes with the birth of the state. The



Posing with the plane: Laurent Dassault, on right and Edouard Cukierman, left.

success of the Israeli airforce during the Six Day War was also Dassault's success, since it helped the company sell their fighter planes all over the world.

The Dassault family is close to Cukierman's father, who is considered one of the leaders

of the French Jewish community. This is how Laurent Dassault came to invest in Israel through the Catalyst Fund, which Cukierman founded. When Catalyst considers an investment, Dassault generally considers co-investing, along with investment in the

fund. Dassault's potential investment in Israel is estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars. The firm is currently considering involvement in Shai Agassi and Idan Ofer's electric car initiative, through technology that the company manufactures. Cukierman noted that among other things, the company produces electric batteries for cars, a possible basis for cooperation in the electric car project, which is expected to be produced by the French automobile manufacturer Renault.

The Dassault family also conducts business with Israel Aerospace Industries Ltd., and the companies recently launched a plane fueled by solar energy in Switzerland. Dassault, maker of the exclusive Falcon executive plane, is also involved in the software market and is considering investment in the field in Israel. It is also interested in acquiring a winery in Israel, but its efforts have yet bear fruit.