

Is It Time For an “October Surprise”?

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Region: [USA](#)

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The term “October Surprise” is one that always triggers speculation in political circles.

It refers to some covert initiative that a candidate takes in the month before the election to try to win an election.

Even as President Obama seems to lead in the polls, and the lead is slipping, the political race faces a number of unknowns including whether and how Israel may intervene more actively to force its political agenda on our political agenda.

According to Consortium News, this has happened before in an earlier US election.

“A pressing foreign policy question of the U.S. presidential race is whether Israel might exploit this politically delicate time to bomb Iran’s nuclear sites and force President Obama to join the attack or face defeat at the polls, a predicament with similarities to one President Carter faced in 1980, writes Robert Parry.

According to Parry, who worked for the Associated Press at the time:

“There is doubt in some quarters that Israel’s Likud government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would time an attack on Iran in the weeks before a U.S. election with the goal of dooming the incumbent Democratic president, Barack Obama, or forcing his hand to commit American military might in support of Israel.

But there was a precedent 32 years ago when another Likud government had grown alienated from the Democratic president and found itself in a position where it could help drive him from office by covertly assisting his Republican rivals in another crisis involving Iran.”

Some supporters of Obama think this scenario might even prove helpful to the President, however much he may personally detest Israel’s Bibi Netanyahu.

Should the US appear to be threatened or at risk, he might win support because he is, after all, the Commander in Chief. Some tough appearing moves involving US military forces might be to his advantage. The truth is he has been unsuccessful in “fixing” the economy, that is, if a President even has that power.

The naval armada now steaming towards The Strait of Hormuz and Iran may be a maneuver to be seen in this framework.

London’s Telegraph reports: “Battleships, aircraft carriers, minesweepers and submarines from 25 nations are converging on the strategically important Strait of Hormuz in an unprecedented show of force as Israel and Iran move towards the brink of war.

Western leaders are convinced that Iran will retaliate to any attack by attempting to mine or blockade the shipping lane through which passes around 18 million barrels of oil every day, approximately 35 per cent of the world's petroleum traded by sea...

In preparation for any pre-emptive or retaliatory action by Iran, warships from more than 25 countries, including the United States, Britain, France, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, will today begin an annual 12-day exercise."

On the other hand, these naval maneuvers may be designed to provoke attack so that the US/UK can justify "retaliatory" actions.

Iran is said to be preparing its own major maneuvers to show its ability to defend itself and its nuclear program.

Meanwhile, the Telegraph also reports, "the main naval exercise comes as President Barack Obama is scheduled to meet Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, today to discuss the Iranian crisis.

Many within the Obama administration believe that Israel will launch a pre-emptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities before the US presidential elections, an act which would signal the failure of one of Washington's key foreign policy objectives.

Both Downing Street and Washington hope that the show of force will demonstrate to Iran that Nato and the West will not allow President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian leader, to develop a nuclear armory or close Hormuz."

The problem with exercises on this scale is that they are prone to errors, collisions or predictable incidents that could trigger an actual war. The people engineering this may be hoping for just such a confrontation knowing that Western military power is superior.

A massive British presence couldn't have happened without US backing, even as Israel and the US go through the motions of a noisy political spat.

At the same time, the rift between Israel and Washington could be calculated to keep all sides guessing.

Writes Stephen Lendman on OpEd News: "Much has been made about an Obama/Netanyahu rift. At times, it's hard separating rhetoric from reality. Nonetheless, neither leader, it appears, particularly likes the other. Disagreement between them is palpable. It's over Iranian red lines and deadlines.

Former IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz said he doesn't believe in "red line policies."

Lendman faults Netanyahu, writing, "He's arrogant, offensive, duplicitous, thuggish, and dangerous. He's an embarrassment to legitimate governance. It's hard imagining why any Israelis put up with him. If ever a bum deserved to be thrown out it's Netanyahu.

One Israeli analyst said he "must set red lines on his malice toward Obama." Israelis and

many others are fed up with his bluster. He's gone out of his way to alienate support from his closest ally. An unnamed Israeli official said he caused "profound" damage in relations with Washington."

But what if all of this is for show, a way Israel can appease its hard-line right wing, pacify Republicans and allow Obama to appear reasonable with his core supporters before both countries map out a joint strategy?

They do share a world view however much they may seem to disagree on tactics and timing. Even as Obama and Netanyahu hiss at each other, Israel's Ambassador to the US is doing "damage control" by kissing up to everyone on the hill and having a Rosh Hashonah dinner with Joe Biden. The two countries are still aligned even if their leaders don't seem to be!

Israel is too dependent on US military support to risk turning a long-term ally/cash cow into an enemy.

Obama cannot afford to alienate voters for whom Israel is a key issue.

In a sense, both need each other. Obama may need a conflict to win over independents. He has already has his "liberal" base, people who are terrified of Republicans and right-wing extremism. Now he is really after so-called independents and even Republicans who support hard-line military policies like the showy liquidation of bin Laden and the ongoing drone wars. Obama may talk left but he walks right.

Both sides talk out of all sides of their mouths with their domestic political calculations far more important than any dangers to world peace. They see Iran as a symbolic issue, not necessarily a real threat. Even Israel calls it an "existential threat," whatever that is.

Fear of Iran keeps Netanyahu in power. An "Iranian menace" is useful to Obama too. Don't underestimate the games politicians play.

If you want truth, look elsewhere.

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