

Israel prepares for war against Iran: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been pressing for an attack on Iran

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A lengthy article, “Will Israel Attack Iran,” published in this week’s *New York Times* magazine confirms that Israel has made advanced preparations for military strikes on Iran. The author—Ronen Bergman, a well-connected political analyst with the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*—concluded: “After speaking to many senior Israeli leaders and chiefs of the military and the intelligence, I have come to believe that Israel will indeed strike Iran in 2012.”

Bergman corroborated previous articles in the Israeli press reporting that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Ehud Barak have been pressing for the country’s security cabinet to authorise an attack on Iran. Vice Prime Minister Moshe Ya’alon told Bergman last week: “It is a matter of months before the Iranians will be able to attain military nuclear capability... We are prepared to defend ourselves in any way and anywhere that we see fit.”

Claims that Iran is on the point of constructing a nuclear weapon are not supported by facts. The latest International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report—a political document designed to justify the latest US and European sanctions against Iran’s oil exports—provided limited evidence of Iranian research related to aspects of building a nuclear bomb. Much of the “evidence” came from US, European and Israeli intelligence sources. Most of the research projects were discontinued after 2003. Iran continues to deny any plans to build nuclear weapons.

Highlighting the bogus character of Israeli claims, veteran journalist Robert Fisk commented in the *Independent*: “The Israeli President [Peres] warns us that Iran is on the cusp of producing a nuclear weapon... Yet we reporters do not mention that Shimon Peres, as Israeli Prime Minister, said exactly the same thing in 1996... And we do not recall that the current Israeli PM, Benjamin Netanyahu, said in 1992 that Iran would have a nuclear bomb by 1999.”

The prominence given to the *New York Times* article suggests that Bergman is the conduit for a message from the Israeli establishment to pressure the Obama administration and more broadly the US ruling elites to take more aggressive action against Iran. The US and European Union have effectively imposed an embargo on Iranian oil exports, as well as the country’s central bank, to operate fully from July.

In a barrage of comments, senior Israeli figures this week called for tougher measures.

Defence Minister Barak demanded “very strong and quick pressure on Iran,” repeating the lie that Iran was producing “nuclear weapons without hindrance.” Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz questioned whether the US/EU embargo was sufficient and called for “a massive blockade” of Iran by sea and air—itsself an act of war under international law. Yesterday, former Israel Defence Force (IDF) chief Gabi Ashkenazi stressed that Israel had to “keep a reliable [military] option on the table with the willingness to use it if necessary.”

In Tuesday’s State of the Union speech, President Barack Obama boasted that his administration had ensured that Iran was “more isolated than ever before” and “faced with crippling sanctions.” He pointedly warned: “Let there be no doubt: America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal.” In other words, the US is prepared to launch war against Iran on the pretext of halting its nuclear programs.

Bergman’s article underlined the close collaboration between the US and Israel, and pointed to the likely timetable for an attack on Iran. Barak told the journalist that “no more than a year remains to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weaponry.” A senior Israeli security source declared: “The Americans tell us there is time, and we tell them that they only have about six to nine months more than we do, and that therefore the sanctions have to be brought to a culmination now, in order to exhaust that track.”

Bergman explained that the Israeli military, particularly since Barak became defence minister, “has prepared in unprecedented ways for a strike against Iran.” The Israeli Air Force “maintains planes with the long-range capacity required to deliver ordnance to targets in Iran, as well as unmanned aircraft capable of carrying bombs to those targets and remaining airborne for up to 48 hours.” The IDF had also prepared plans to deal with any Iranian retaliation.

The article detailed the criminal covert war of assassination and sabotage waged by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad inside Iran since 2004. Under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Mossad was given “virtually unlimited funds and powers” for a “five-front strategy,” involving “political pressure, covert measures, proliferation, sanctions and regime change.” Mossad chief Meir Dagan sent a secret cable to Washington in August 2007 stressing that “the United States, Israel and like-minded countries must push on all five fronts in a simultaneous joint effort.”

The gangster-like operations of Mossad, acting with the complicity or involvement of the US, included financial sabotage, computer viruses, the sale of faulty parts and raw materials, unexplained plane crashes, explosions at Iranian facilities, and the murder of Iranian scientists, most recently of Professor Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan on January 11. The article indicated that Mossad had financed, armed and trained two groups—the Mujahedin Khalq (MEK) and the Sunni extremist outfit Jundallah—to carry out the assassinations.

The barely disguised gloating over these crimes, in Bergman’s article and by Israeli leaders and officials, points to their real purpose—to goad Iran into retaliation that could provide for the further media demonisation of the regime and the pretext for war. This thuggery underlines the fact that the greatest danger of war in the Middle East stems from Israel, which has an estimated arsenal of 300 nuclear weapons and has repeatedly resorted to wars of aggression to maintain its dominance, and its backers in Washington, which has already invaded Afghanistan, then Iraq and is now menacing Iran.

While publicly the Obama administration has focussed on the “crippling sanctions” on Iran, it is also carrying out preparations for military action—a subject openly debated in US newspapers and journals. The Pentagon this month doubled the number of aircraft carrier battle groups near the Persian Gulf and thus its capacity to wage an air and sea war against Iran.

Washington’s allies in Europe are getting ready for war as well. French and British warships accompanied the aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln, into the Gulf last Sunday. British Defence Secretary Philip Hammond declared on Monday: “The UK has a contingent capability to reinforce its presence in the region should at any time it be considered necessary to do so.”

By recklessly escalating the economic embargo and military threats against Iran, the US, Israel and the European powers are heightening the danger of a slide into war that has the potential to engulf the region and to spread internationally.

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