

Israeli army brass advocate timely war on Iran

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An Israeli security assessment has recommended devising contingency plans to attack Iran even if it means courting a conflict with the US.

The leaked paper drawn up by Israeli military chiefs maintains that Tel Aviv has a 'limited' window of opportunity to act against Iran before the country obtains a nuclear weapon, claiming that in 2009, Israel might have to face a nuclear Iran 'alone'.

Senior Israeli officials had earlier expressed concern that an Obama administration might lead up to the restoration of Washington-Tehran relations.

President-elect Barack Obama has vowed to begin direct and unconditional talks with top Iranian officials on the country's long-disputed nuclear program.

Israel alleges that Iran, a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has plans 'to build a nuclear weapon'. Under the allegation, Israeli officials have long argued that the use of military force is a legitimate option in retarding the country's nuclear progress.

Iran denies the Israeli claim, insisting that the country's nuclear activities are solely directed at the civilian applications of the technology.

The Israeli army assessment claims 'Iran's threat to Israel's survival' is at the top of the list of challenges facing Tel Aviv and recommends close cooperation with the US to prevent a Washington-Tehran rapprochement.

According to the assessment, Israel must therefore draw up a plan for military action against Iran, in case other countries show reluctance to counter the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

The paper is to be presented to the cabinet next month as part of the National Security Council's annual situation assessment, Haaretz reported.

This comes as outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert arrived in Washington on Sunday for talks with US President George W. Bush.

During his three-day stay, Olmert is expected to attempt to make President Bush pledge to counter the Iranian nuclear program.

Earlier in November, an unnamed senior European Union diplomat said that the bloc is concerned that 'a possible Israeli strike against Iran is not completely off the radar'.

The official suggested that the perfect time for Israel to strike Iranian nuclear installations 'is

between now and January 20' — when US President-elect Barack Obama takes office.

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