

Israeli Experts Mum on Iran Attack to Support Bibi's Bluff

By [Gareth Porter](#)

Global Research, April 03, 2012

[IPS](#) 3 April 2012

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

A striking feature of the Israeli political landscape in recent months has been the absence of a serious debate on the issue of the threat of war with Iran led by national security figures.

It is well known that many prominent former military and intelligence officials believe an attack on Iran would be disastrous for Israel. After an initial blast at the idea of striking Iran by two former high-ranking officials last year, however, very little has been heard from such national security figures.

The reason for this silence on the part of the national security sector, just as the Israeli threat of war was escalating sharply, appears to be a widespread view among Israeli national security analysts that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's threat to attack is a highly successful bluff.

Some critics of Netanyahu's threat to go war against Iran have expressed concern about the failure of national security figures to speak out publicly against the policy. Former Jerusalem Post columnist Larry Derfner, who now blogs for the independent web-based magazine 972, wrote last month that there are "crowds" of former military and intelligence officials who privately oppose an attack on Iran and could slow the "march to war" by speaking to the news media.

But he complained that "Israelis aren't hearing their voices...."

Yossi Alpher, a former Mossad analyst and later head of the Jaffee Center for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, has noted the same problem. "Plenty of people are calling for public debate on the issue of striking Iran," he told IPS in an interview. "But it isn't happening."

Former Mossad director Meir Dagan launched the first attack on Netanyahu's policy by a former national security official last June, asserting that an attack on Iran would provoke a regional war and would ensure that Iran would acquire nuclear weapons.

Maj. Gen. Shlomo Gazit, who was chief of military intelligence in the 1970s, also disassociated himself with the policy, declaring, "An Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear reactor will lead to the liquidation of Israel."

Like Dagan, Gazit warned that it would cause Iran to immediately decide to become a nuclear power and he added that it would increase international pressures for the abandonment of "the territories".

Those shots across Netanyahu's bow have not been followed, however, by similar criticisms by other former military and intelligence figures.

In fact, Gazit himself appeared to backtrack from his earlier harsh verdict on the option of attacking Iran in a recent television interview.

On Russia Today Mar. 12, Gazit did not voice any of his previous objections to the threatened Israeli strike against Iran. Instead he emphasised the readiness of Israel to carry out a strike, even without U.S. approval if necessary, played down the cost to Israel of an Iranian response, and said an Israeli strike would result in delaying the Iranian nuclear programme by "two or three years at least".

Gazit reaffirmed to IPS, however, that he has not changed his mind about the dangers to Israel attending a strike against Iran he had raised last June.

The publicly discussed reason for the absence of dissent from the national security sector is lack of information. Nathan Sharony, who heads the Council of Peace, with over 1,000 former high-ranking security officials with dovish views, told Derfner the reason ex-national security officials were not speaking up was that they lack the "solid information" necessary to do so.

Gazit gave IPS the same explanation for the failure of former officials to oppose a strike against Iran publicly.

But the main reasons for opposing war with Iran do not require access to inside information. The more compelling explanation for the silence of former military and intelligence officers is that they, like journalists and other policy analysts, think that Netanyahu is probably bluffing and that they perceive the bluff as working.

Retired Brig. Gen. Uzi Rubin, the former head of Israel's missile defence programme, recalls being on a television programme a few months ago with Ari Shavit, senior correspondent at Haaretz, on which Shavit declared, "Netanyahu is playing poker for all of us. We shouldn't call out his cards."

Shavit was suggesting that the success of the prime minister in the high stakes poker game requires that influential Israelis not question his claims about Israel's willingness and capability to attack Iran's nuclear sites.

That struck a Rubin as a significant factor in the politics surrounding Netanyahu's policy. "People who think we shouldn't attack Iran believe Netanyahu is playing poker," said Rubin in an interview with IPS. "So they think they shouldn't speak up."

"Netanyahu speaks like he's very convinced Iran has to be stopped by force," said the former missile defence chief. "Does he mean it?" Rubin said he doesn't know the answer.

Alpher agrees. He told IPS the reason high-profile expressions of dissent by Dagan and a few others have not provoked more lively debate on Iran policy among national security figures is that "they don't want to spoil Bibi's successful bluster."

Netanyahu's bluffing on Iran has "kept the international community on edge", Alpher suggested, and thus achieved the latest round of sanctions and heavier pressure on Iran.

Both the poker game metaphor and the view that he has been successful at it have been central elements in media coverage of Netanyahu's policy in recent weeks.

While the prime minister was in Washington last month, Aluf Benn, the editor-in-chief of Haaretz, wrote that Netanyahu had "managed to convince the world that Israel is on the verge of a preemptive war" and that he is "playing poker and hiding his most important card - the IDF's true capabilities to destroy Iran's nuclear installations."

Just last week, Benn's colleague, Ari Shavit, referred to the threat to attack Iran's nuclear facilities before the end of 2012 that he and a handful of other journalists had heard from senior officials. Shavit acknowledged, however, that "we cannot exclude the possibility that senior Israeli officials briefing us are bluffing", noting that the officials had a "vested interest" in exploiting such a threat.

One factor that may have fed the reluctance of some former military and intelligence officials to go public with criticism of the option of war against Iran is that Netanyahu has a reputation for being far less aggressive on Iran in practice than his rhetoric would indicate.

Benn told IPS there is a perception of Netanyahu as a "hesitant politician who would not dare to attack without American permission".

A former national security official, who did not wish to be identified, told IPS some people who have worked with Netanyahu have said he is less decisive than former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on Iran, although he personally disagrees with that assessment.

The widespread impression among the Israeli national security elite and press corps that Netanyahu's threat of war against Iran is a bluff does not guarantee that Netanyahu will not attack Iran. But it does help explain why there has not been a much bigger outcry against a war option that is widely regarded as irrational for Israel.

Gareth Porter is an investigative historian and journalist specialising in U.S. national security policy. The paperback edition of his latest book, "Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam", was published in 2006.

The original source of this article is [IPS](#)

Copyright © [Gareth Porter](#), [IPS](#), 2012

[**Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page**](#)

[**Become a Member of Global Research**](#)

Articles by: [Gareth Porter](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca