

British newspaper alleges Israel is planning a military strike on Iran

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An article in the British-based *Sunday Times* last weekend provided details of Israeli military plans for a strike on Iranian uranium enrichment plants that would dramatically inflame tensions throughout the Middle East. According to the report, based on unnamed Israeli intelligence and military sources, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon recently ordered the country's armed forces to be ready for an attack by the end of March.

The article entitled "Israel readies for strike on nuclear Iran" has of course been officially denied by Israeli government spokesmen. However, even while disclaiming specific plans, senior Israeli defence ministry official Amos Gilad told the media: "One cannot say that any option for the future is being ruled out."

The report comes in the context of repeated public threats against Iran by senior Israeli officials, and alarmist allegations that Iran is on the brink of producing nuclear weapons. As the *Sunday Times* noted, Sharon himself recently warned: "Israel—and not only Israel—cannot accept a nuclear Iran. We have the ability to deal with this and we're making all the necessary preparations to be ready for such a situation."

The *Sunday Times* not only gave a timetable but indicated the extent of preparations. "The order to prepare for a possible attack went through the Israeli defence ministry to the chief of staff. Sources inside special forces command confirmed that 'G' readiness—the highest stage—for an operation was announced last week," the article stated.

"A 'massive' Israeli intelligence operation has been underway since Iran was designated the 'top priority for 2005', according to security sources." The newspaper claimed that Israeli intelligence had identified new Iranian nuclear facilities through "cross border operations and signal intelligence" from a base

in northern Iraq.

The *Sunday Times* also pointed to the type of operation being prepared—a combined air and ground assault using special forces units and long-range F-15I fighters that have been especially equipped with large fuel tanks to reach targets in Iran and return without refuelling. The Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981 involved just one undefended target. An attack on Iranian nuclear facilities would be more difficult as there are a number of targets and some of the most significant are underground.

There may well be an element of political manoeuvre in the leaks to the *Sunday Times*. Sharon has recently broken from the Likud Party, created his own Kadima Party and is preparing for elections next March. A tough stance on Iran is one way of countering accusations of betrayal by the ultra-right extremists of Likud over the withdrawal from the Gaza.

The *Sunday Times* article appeared after Benjamin Netanyahu, who is vying for the Likud leadership, earlier in the month hailed the 1981 attack on Iraq's reactor as "a daring and courageous act." "If it is not done by the present government, I intend to lead the next government and to stop this threat. I will take every step required to avoid a situation in which Iran can threaten us with nuclear weapons," he said.

While Netanyahu is seeking to make political mileage out of the issue, there is no opposition within the Israeli political establishment to a military strike against Iran and its nuclear facilities. Israel has long had its own nuclear arsenal, estimated at between 100 to 200 weapons, and is intent on maintaining its monopoly of nuclear terror in the Middle East.

To justify their aggressive threats, Israeli leaders have seized on the demagogic remarks of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in October calling for Israel to

be “wiped off the map”. This week he declared that the Nazi slaughter of six million European Jews was “a myth” used by the European powers to create a Jewish state in the heart of the Islamic world. These appeals to anti-Semitism are reactionary to the core and play directly into the hands not only of the Israeli extreme right, but also US imperialism.

Whatever the exact status of Israeli military plans, any strike against Iran would require the tacit approval of Washington. While maintaining a hypocritical silence on Israel’s nuclear arms, the Bush administration has, without any proof, repeatedly accused Tehran of building nuclear weapons. While pressing for Iran to be referred to the UN Security Council for breaching the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the White House has refused to rule out “the military option” against Iran.

There is no doubt that the US has the closest links with the Israeli military and intelligence agencies, as well as with the Sharon government. The *Sunday Times* report is not the first to allege that the Israeli intelligence service has a substantial presence in the Kurdish north of US-occupied Iraq. In June 2004, Seymour Hersh published an extensive article in the *New Yorker* entitled “Plan B” based on American and Israeli sources revealing the extent of the operations.

“Israeli intelligence and military operatives are now quietly at work in Kurdistan, providing training for Kurdish commando units and, most importantly in Israel’s view, running covert operations inside Kurdish areas of Iran and Syria. Israel feels particularly threatened by Iran, whose position in the region has been strengthened by the [Iraq] war. The Israeli operatives including members of the Mossad, Israel’s clandestine foreign-intelligence service, who work undercover in Kurdistan as businessmen and, in some cases, do not carry Israeli passports.”

According to a former Israeli intelligence officer, some Israeli operatives crossed into Iran, accompanied by Kurdish commandos, to install sensors and other devices targetted at Iranian nuclear facilities. “Look, Israel has always supported the Kurds in a Machiavellian way—as a balance against Saddam. It’s Realpolitik,” he said. “By aligning with the Kurds, Israel gains eyes and ears in Iraq, Iran and Syria.” A senior CIA official confirmed to Hersh that “the Israeli presence was widely known in the American

intelligence community”.

A second article by Hersh in January entitled “The Coming Wars” pointed out that the US military was conducting its own secret operations inside Iran. He wrote: “Much of the focus is on the accumulation of intelligence and targeting information on Iranian nuclear, chemical, and missile sites, both declared and suspected. The goal is to identify and isolate three dozen, and perhaps more, such targets that could be destroyed by precision strikes and short-term commando raids. ‘The civilians in the Pentagon want to go into Iran and destroy as much of the military infrastructure as possible,’ the government consultant with close ties to the Pentagon told me.”

Just how advanced are US and Israeli plans for an attack on Iran is impossible to tell. However, the *Sunday Times* article is one more indication that the public threats of military action are more than just empty posturing. The deepening quagmire confronting the US military in Iraq will not restrain the Bush administration. In fact, to divert public attention from the Iraqi debacle and to further its economic and strategic ambitions in the Middle East, the White House is quite capable of launching another reckless military adventure—either directly, or using Israel as proxy—regardless of the consequences.



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