

# Israeli attack on Iran: “not a matter of if, but when”

Stefan Steinberg  
20 June 2008

An Israeli military strike is not a matter of if, but when, according to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*. The latest edition of the news weekly carries a four-page article entitled “Plan to Attack” devoted to preparations currently underway in Israel for air strikes against Iran.

The article begins by noting that the Israeli government has rejected economic sanctions as a means of preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. It states that “a broad consensus (in Israel) in favour of a military strike against Tehran’s nuclear facilities — without the Americans, if necessary — is beginning to take shape.”

The main propagandist for a military strike against Iran is the current Israeli Transport Minister and former defence minister Shaul Mofaz, who has been widely quoted as saying that military action against Iran is “unavoidable.” Mofaz first made this remark following recent talks with senior US officials in Washington.

He repeated his comments most recently in an interview with the mass-circulation *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper last Friday. Referring to threats made by the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad against Israel, Mofaz declared menacingly that Iran “would disappear before Israel does.”

Mofaz continued: “If Iran continues with its programme for developing nuclear weapons, we will attack it. The sanctions are ineffective... Attacking Iran, in order to stop its nuclear plans, will be unavoidable.”

With his close links to the military establishment, Mofaz is regarded as a “hardliner” on the issue of Iran. Illustrating the “broad consensus” that exists in Israel for a military strike against Iran, *Der Spiegel* also cites the opinion of Dani Yatom, a retired major general and member of the Israeli parliament for the Labour Party. Yatom declares: “We no longer believe in the effectiveness of sanctions...A military operation is needed if the world wants to stop Iran.”

The article then quotes Israeli historian Benny Morris, who also favours a military solution: “If the issue is whether Israel or Iran should perish, then Iran should perish.”

*Der Spiegel* concludes: “In truth...there is now a consensus within the Israeli government that an air strike against the Iranian nuclear facilities has become unavoidable.”

Agreement over a military strike against Iran is virtually

unanimous in the Israeli cabinet, the article argues. The only outstanding issue is the timing of an attack: “In Israel, it is no longer a matter of whether there will be a military strike, but when.”

According to *Der Spiegel*: “The doves argue that diplomatic efforts by the United Nations should be allowed to continue until Iran is on the verge of completing the bomb. That way, Israel could at least argue convincingly that all non-military options had been exhausted.

“The hawks, on the other hand, believe time is running out. They stress that there is now a ‘favourable window of opportunity’ that will close with the US presidential election in November, and that Israel can only depend on American support for as long as current US President George W. Bush is still in charge in Washington.”

The report then deals with the feasibility of an Israeli air strike, featuring a map of Iran with potential targets for Israeli aircraft. The article notes that the Israeli air force had already carried out a successful bombing raid against Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 and more recently in September 2007 destroyed a target identified by Israeli intelligence as a suspect nuclear site in eastern Syria.

Israel recently signed a deal with Washington involving the purchase of F-22 Stealth bombers, which are ideally suited to the type of targeted bombing raids planned by the Israeli air force command. Israel’s existing fleet of F15 jet fighters could also be used to launch a multi-pronged attack on Iranian uranium enrichment facilities.

The article concludes by citing Middle East expert and former CIA agent Bruce Riedel, who declares that while an American president could anticipate opposition to a US-led strike, “the situation is different from Israel’s perspective...There is some risk that Israel thinks it has limited time to act and it has a green light from American politicians.”

Questioned as to the consequences of such an Israeli strike, Riedel stressed that it would be seen as a US attack, and Iranian retaliation would be directed “at both Israel and the US.” The consequences, says Riedel, would be fatal. “We will see a Middle East in flames.”

Barely a day passes without reports of new diplomatic initiatives in the Middle East—either directly or indirectly

involving the Israeli government. On the same day—Thursday June 19—that the government in Jerusalem announced a cease-fire with the Hamas movement in the Gaza strip, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert also declared his government's readiness to open direct peace talks with Lebanon. Israel has long been conducting regular military operations against Palestinians in the Gaza strip and fought a fierce border war with Hezbollah militias located inside Lebanon in 2006.

Other countries, notably France, Germany together with Turkey, have also been active in pushing to re-establish improved international relations with the Syrian regime, which has long been branded by both Israel and the United States as a “pariah” nation and an original candidate for inclusion in Washington's “axis of evil.” French President Nicholas Sarkozy recently visited Damascus, leading a large French delegation, and has invited Syrian President Bashar Assad to Paris to join in French National holiday celebrations. Sarkozy has also invited the Israeli Prime Minister and hopes that the two sworn enemies can be persuaded to shake hands and reconcile in Paris.

Any close examination of the rival “peace initiatives” reveals that different strategies are being followed by the Israeli and European governments. Israel is using the propaganda campaign conducted by Washington demonising the regime in Tehran to prepare its own military strike against Iran. At the same time, Jerusalem is seeking to politically neutralise a number of traditional allies of the Iranian government—the Hamas movement in Gaza, the Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Syrian government led by Assad—in order to minimise the risk of retaliation from these forces following a military strike against Iran.

European governments, such as France and Germany, are certainly well aware of the threat of a military strike on Iran by either the US or Israel, which would endanger their own considerable economic and political stakes in the Middle East. Urgent warnings of the consequences of an Israeli strike on Iran were already raised by Ruprecht Polenz (Christian Democratic Union), chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the German parliament, in November 2007, and just two weeks ago by the former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer.

But while they are vigorously conducting their own diplomacy in the Middle East, European governments are not prepared to publicly challenge the belligerent propaganda campaign being undertaken by both Israel and America against Iran.

This was the significance of the recent tour of European countries undertaken by the US president. In one country after another, George Bush was able to repeat his threats against Iran, unchallenged by a single European leader.

The article in *Der Spiegel* makes this same point and notes that the standpoint of the Israeli hawks who are demanding rapid military action against Iran has been strengthened by the recent Bush tour.

“President Bush, however, has recently been sending out signals that are suspiciously reminiscent of the run-up to the Iraq war. Then, as today, he insisted that ‘all options are on the table.’ And then, as today, he sought to appease the Europeans by saying that all diplomatic channels would be exhausted first. But during his recent visit to Slovenia, Bush said: ‘There's a lot of urgencies when it comes to dealing with Iran, and the Israeli political folks ... if you go to Israel and listen carefully, you'll hear that urgency in their voice.’”

The parallel drawn by *Der Spiegel* with the run up to the Iraq war is entirely appropriate. Prior to the launching of the military invasion in 2003, spineless European leaders faithfully supported the sanctions campaign against the regime of Saddam Hussein, which cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. They then either remained silent (France and Germany) or complicit (Great Britain) as the Bush government trotted out a string of lies to justify its devastating assault on Iraq.

In a similar fashion, the current silence on the part of European governments (and much of the European media) on the danger of a US-backed Israeli military strike on Iran is deafening. After the events of the Iraq war, no politically conscious person can claim that the consequences of a similar unilateral “pre-emptive strike” against Iran remain unclear. Another catastrophic war crime is being prepared in the Middle East under the noses of the European ruling elites, and not a single government on the continent is prepared to challenge the administrations in Jerusalem and Washington.

On the contrary, they are already sending signals that they will side with the Israeli regime in the event of war with Iran. The same German politician who warned so dramatically of the consequences of Israeli action against Iran last November makes clear in the latest *Der Spiegel* report that Germany would unquestioningly side with Israel in the event of open hostilities.

Ruprecht Polenz sums up the European role in encouraging tougher sanctions against Iran as a possible deterrent to military action—a strategy which at the same time binds European nations closer to Israel.

“By issuing this warning, we are taking even more responsibility for (guaranteeing that) our favoured approach will yield results,” Polenz says. In other words, if Iran continues to pursue its nuclear program, the West will have to close ranks with Jerusalem. “Under no circumstances can the impression be created that Israel would be left alone with the possibility of an Iranian atom bomb.”



To contact the WWSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**