

Israeli leaders press for attack on Iran

Peter Symonds
7 November 2011

Over the past week, evidence has been mounting of an intense debate in Israeli ruling circles over the launching of air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities in the not too distant future. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Ehud Barak have reportedly been campaigning inside the cabinet and seeking to overcome resistance within sections of the country's military and intelligence establishment to a war with Iran.

The internal debate was first made public by prominent journalist Nahum Barnea in *Yediot Aharonot* on October 28 and was confirmed by the liberal *Ha'aretz* newspaper last week. While pointing to the dangers of "an eternal war with Tehran," *Ha'aretz* columnist Ari Shavit described the government's decision as "the decision of our generation," warning: "If Israel acts too late on Iran, the implications could be critical for our survival."

Israel's right-wing foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman dismissed the media reports as having no connection to reality, but neither he nor any other cabinet member has ruled out an attack on Iran. Speaking to the BBC yesterday, Defence Minister Barak said he did not "underestimate the nature of the Iranian threat; it is a major threat to the stability of the whole region." He said Israel believed that harsh sanctions could halt Iran's nuclear programs, then added that "no options should be removed from the table."

Israeli President Shimon Peres also warned yesterday that an attack on Iran was becoming increasingly likely. "The possibility of a military attack against Iran is now closer to being applied than the application of a diplomatic option... I don't think that any decision has been already made, but there is an impression that Iran is getting closer to nuclear weapons," he told the *Israel Hayom* newspaper.

The debate in Israel takes place as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) prepares to release a report this week on Iran's nuclear programs. Aspects of the report have been leaked to the press by unnamed Western diplomats, seeking to prepare the ground for what are likely to be sensationalised commentaries that

Iran is building nuclear weapons. One source told the *Financial Times* yesterday, however, that the report contained "no smoking gun" but only "a gradual and telling accumulation of evidence."

Iran has repeatedly denied any plans to build an atomic bomb. In a press conference on Saturday, Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi accused the IAEA of succumbing to Western pressure, saying: "Iran has already responded to the alleged studies in 117 pages. We've said time and again that these are forgeries similar to faked notes." He drew attention to the forged documents that were used by the US to claim that Iraq was importing uranium from Niger and to justify the 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

It is certainly possible that faked documents are being used to provide a pretext for war against Iran. Much of the IAEA's "evidence" against Iran comes from American, European and Israeli intelligence agencies. Moreover, it is widely recognised that Israel's intelligence agency Mossad is actively seeking to sabotage Iran's nuclear programs through the use of computer viruses and the assassination of key Iranian nuclear scientists.

The release of previous IAEA reports has been preceded by new nuclear "revelations" about Iran and strident criticisms from Washington. In Israel, thinly veiled threats of a military attack on Iran have been used to intensify the pressure on the US and other powers to take stronger diplomatic measures and impose tougher sanctions.

This time, however, the content of the leaks is far more menacing. Two Israeli cabinet members—Benny Begin and Dan Meridor—are apparently opposed to air strikes on Iran but nevertheless bitterly attacked the media and the defence establishment for leaking details of the discussion. Begin described the public debate as "utterly irresponsible" for impeding "the government's ability to make decisions," suggesting that an attack on Iran was seriously being considered, rather than being used a diplomatic ploy.

Last Wednesday, the Israeli military test-fired a long-range ballistic missile that has the potential to strike Iran.

Less widely reported was an exercise involving Israeli war planes using an airbase on the Italian island of Sardinia, which is specially fitted for training by NATO. Israeli planes used the drills to practice for long-range operations that would be needed to reach Iran. Over the weekend, US Assistant Secretary of State for Political/Military Affairs Andrew Shapiro announced the largest ever joint exercise with Israel. It will involve testing Israel's capacity to block a ballistic missile attack of the type that Iran might launch in response to air raids on its nuclear facilities.

Several articles in the US media have pointed to concerns in Washington that Israel might unilaterally attack Iran. An American official told CNN over the weekend that in the past the White House had thought it would receive advanced warning of any Israeli military action against Iran, but "now that doesn't seem so ironclad." In reality, Israel is completely dependent economically, politically and strategically on the US and would not take action without Washington's tacit approval at least. Far from being at odds with the US, Israeli plans for attacking Iran are in line with military preparations by the US and Britain that were leaked in British newspapers last week (See "US/Britain prepare for war against Iran".)

At last weekend's G20 summit, the US and France both warned of tough action against Iran and underlined their support for Israel. US President Barack Obama highlighted the "continuing threat posed by Iran's nuclear program" and his agreement with French President Nicholas Sarkozy to maintain "unprecedented pressure" on Iran. For his part, Sarkozy declared: "Iran's behaviour and this obsessional desire to acquire nuclear military [capability] is in violation of all international rules... If Israel's existence were threatened, France would not stand idly by."

Israeli preparations for a war with Iran are not motivated primarily by the "nuclear threat." It is an open secret that Israel has had its own nuclear weapons for decades and the means to deliver them anywhere in the region. Unlike Iran, Israel has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation treaty or to allow IAEA inspections of its nuclear facilities.

While the press constantly refers to the Iranian "threat," Israel, unlike Iran, has a long record of unprovoked attacks on countries within the region. These included the 1981 air strike on Iraq's nuclear reactor and a similar attack in 2007 on a Syrian site where the US claimed Syria was building a nuclear reactor. This latter raid was

widely viewed as a practice run for air strikes against Iran.

The Israeli political establishment remains intent on maintaining its military advantage over any regional rival, but the current push for air strikes against Iran is driven by the political and economic crisis within the region and Israel itself. The Israeli elite has been deeply concerned by the revolutionary upheavals of the working class in the Middle East and North Africa that have removed or threaten to remove regimes on which the Israeli state has depended for decades. In particular, the uprising in Egypt that led to the replacement of President Hosni Mubarak by an unstable regime resting on the Egyptian military has undermined Israel's position within the region.

Above all, the Israeli ruling class fears the movement of Israeli workers and youth that resulted in the country's largest ever protests in September, directed against the government and its policies that have produced a profound social divide between rich and poor. Those protests, which renewed last month, threaten to link up with workers and youth internationally over social inequality and poverty, particularly within the Middle East.

A war by the Netanyahu government against Iran would, at least initially, bury the class issues under an outpouring of chauvinism and racism, and poison relations between workers and young people throughout the Middle East. It must be opposed by the working class in Israel and throughout the region and internationally on the basis of a fight for the United Socialist States of the Middle East.



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