

German media: U.S. prepares Iran strike

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 30 (UPI) — The Bush administration is preparing its NATO allies for a possible military strike against suspected nuclear sites in Iran in the New Year, according to German media reports, reinforcing similar earlier suggestions in the Turkish media.

The Berlin daily Der Tagesspiegel this week quoted “NATO intelligence sources” who claimed that the NATO allies had been informed that the United States is currently investigating all possibilities of bringing the mullah-led regime into line, including military options. This “all options are open” line has been President George W Bush’s publicly stated policy throughout the past 18 months.

But the respected German weekly Der Spiegel notes “What is new here is that Washington appears to be dispatching high-level officials to prepare its allies for a possible attack rather than merely implying the possibility as it has repeatedly done during the past year.”

The German news agency DDP cited “Western security sources” to claim that CIA Director Porter Goss asked Turkey’s premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan to provide political and logistic support for air strikes against Iranian nuclear and military targets. Goss, who visited Ankara and met Erdogan on Dec. 12, was also reported to have asked for special cooperation from Turkish intelligence to help prepare and monitor the operation.

The DDP report added that Goss had delivered to the Turkish prime minister and his security aides a series of dossiers, one on the latest status of Iran’s nuclear development and another containing intelligence on new links between Iran and al-Qaida.

DDP cited German security sources who added that the Turks had been assured of a warning in advance if and when the military strikes took place, and had also been given “a green light” to mount their own attacks on the bases in Iran of the PKK, (Kurdish Workers party), which Turkey sees as a separatist group responsible for terrorist attacks inside Turkey.

Goss’s visit to the Turkish capital followed the rising international concern over recent statements by the new Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that Israel should be “wiped off the map,” denying the existence of Holocaust, and suggesting that Israel’s Jewish population might be re-located to Europe.

In a December 23 report, the DDP agency quoted an anonymous but “high-ranking German military official” telling their reporter: “I would be very surprised if the Americans, in the mid-term, didn’t take advantage of the opportunity delivered by Tehran. The Americans have to attack Iran before the country can develop nuclear weapons. After that would be too late.”

The DDP report also said that several friendly Arab governments, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman and Pakistan, had also been informed in general terms that the Pentagon was preparing contingency plans, including “the option of air strikes,” in the event of the new Iranian government precipitating a crisis.

Arab diplomatic sources have told United Press International that they have been given no briefings on any policy change beyond President Bush’s “all options are open.”

Bush’s most recent such statement in public came on Aug. 13, during an interview at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, when he told Israeli TV: “As I say, all options are on the table. The use of force is the last option for any president and, you know, we’ve used force in the recent past to secure our country.”

Other NATO sources have told United Press International that “all this may be mood music, a way to step up the diplomatic pressure on Tehran.”

It is possible that leaks from NATO and German security sources are part of a ploy to convince the Iranian government that the Americans and their NATO allies are in dead earnest when they say a nuclear-armed Iran would not be tolerated, and that Iran had better start negotiating seriously.

But the German media speculation about the supposed U.S. plans has been fueled by a number of high-profile visits to Turkey this month, including trips by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, by the CIA’s Porter Goss and by the FBI Director Robert Mueller, who also delivered U.S. intelligence reports on Iranian backing for PKK operations aimed against Turkey. There have also been some significant Turkish visits to Washington, as reported by Der Spiegel.

“Two weeks ago, Yasar Buyukanit, the commander of the Turkish army and probable future chief of staff of the country’s armed forces, flew to Washington. After the visit he made a statement that relations between the Turkish army and the American army were once again on an excellent footing,” Der Spiegel reported Friday.

“Buyukanit’s warm and fuzzy words, contrasted greatly with his past statements that if the United States and the Kurds in northern Iraq proved incapable of containing the PKK in the Kurd-dominated northern part of the country and preventing it from attacking Turkey, Buyukanit would march into northern Iraq himself,” the German weekly added.

The CIA Director’s Dec. 12 call on the Turkish prime minister lasted for over an hour, far longer than customary for a mere courtesy call, and followed an even longer meeting with senior staff of MIT, Turkish intelligence. The Turkish Daily Cumhuriyet reported on December 13: “Goss also asked Ankara to be ready for a possible U.S. air operation against Iran and Syria.”

Der Spiegel noted Friday that the latest high-level visitor to the Turkish premier was NATO Secretary-General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer. This is not unusual, since Turkey is a member of NATO, but the coincidence of these various trips prompted Spiegel to comment “the number of American and NATO security officials heading to Ankara has increased dramatically.”

“In Berlin, the issue is largely being played down,” Der Spiegel reported Friday. “During his inaugural visit with U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in Washington last week, the possibility of a U.S. air strike against Iran ‘had not been an issue,’ for new German Defense

Minister Franz Josef Jung, a Defense Ministry spokesman told Spiegel.”

The original story in the German press which provoked the wider media furore was written for the DDP agency by a veteran reporter on security and intelligence matters, Udo Ulfkotte, who has in the past been criticized in the German media for being “too close to sources at Germany’s foreign intelligence agency, the BND” (Bundesnachrichtendienst).

At the same time, Ulfkotte has himself come under scrutiny by German security services, and his home and offices have been repeatedly searched in the course of inquiries into allegations that he had published official secrets.

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