

Israel's War with Iran

Unabridged version

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Israel's War with Iran: The Coming Mid East Conflagration -or- Israel Bombs Iran: The US Suffers the Consequences

Israel's political and military leadership have repeatedly and openly declared their preparation to militarily attack Iran in the immediate future. Their influential supporters in the US have made Israel's war policy the number one priority in their efforts to secure Presidential and Congressional backing. The arguments put forth by the Israeli government and echoed by their followers in the US regarding Iran's nuclear threat are without substance or fact and have aroused opposition and misgivings throughout the world, among European governments, international agencies, among most US military leaders and the public, the world oil industry and even among sectors of the Bush Administration.

An Israeli air and commando attack on Iran will have catastrophic military consequences for US forces and severe loss of human life in Iraq, most likely ignite political and military violence against pro-US Arab-Muslim regimes, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, perhaps leading to their overthrow.

Without a doubt Israeli war preparations are the greatest immediate threat to world peace and political stability.

Israel's War Preparations

Never has an imminent war been so loudly and publicly advertised as Israel's forthcoming military attack against Iran. When the Israeli Military Chief of Staff, Daniel Halutz, was asked how far Israel was ready to go to stop Iran's nuclear energy program, he said "Two thousand kilometers" - the distance of an air assault (Financial Times (FT) Dec 12, 2005). More specifically Israeli military sources reveal that Israel's current and probably next Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered Israel's armed forces to prepare for air strikes on uranium enrichment sites in Iran (Times (London), Dec 11, 2005). According to the London Times the order to prepare for attack went through the Israeli defense ministry to the Chief of Staff. During the first week in December, "...sources inside the special forces command confirmed that 'G' readiness - the highest state - for an operation was announced" (Times, Dec. 11, 2005).

On December 9, Israeli Minister of Defense, Shaul Mofaz, affirmed that in view of Teheran's nuclear plans, Tel Aviv should "not count on diplomatic negotiations but prepare other solutions." (La Jornada, Dec. 10, 2005) In early December, Ahron Zoevi Farkash, the Israeli

military intelligence chief told the Israeli parliament (Knesset) that “if by the end of March, the international community is unable to refer the Iranian issue to the United Nations Security Council, then we can say that the international effort has run its course” (Times, Dec. 11, 2005).

In plain Hebrew, if international diplomatic negotiations fail to comply with Israel’s timetable, Israel will unilaterally, militarily attack Iran. Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the Likud Party and candidate for Prime Minister stated that if Sharon did not act against Iran, “then when I form the new Israeli government (after the March 2006 elections) we’ll do what we did in the past against Saddam’s reactor.” (Times Dec 11, 2005). In June 1981 Israel bombed the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq. Even the pro-Labor newspaper, Haaretz, while disagreeing with the time and place of Netanyahu’s pronouncements, agreed with its substance. Haaretz criticized “(those who) publicly recommend an Israeli military option...” because it “presents Israel as pushing (via powerful pro-Israel organizations in the US) the United States into a major war.” However, Haaretz adds... “Israel must go about making its preparations quietly and securely – not at election rallies.” (Haaretz, Dec 6, 2005) Haaretz’s position, like that of the Labor Party, is that Israel not advocate war against Iran before multi-lateral negotiations are over and the International Atomic Energy Agency makes a decision.

In other words, the Israeli “debate” among the elite is not over whether to go to war but over the place to discuss war plans and the timing to launch war. Implicitly Haaretz recognizes the role played by pro-Israeli organizations in “pushing the US into the Iraq war”, perhaps a word of caution, resulting from increased US opposition to the activities of the Israel First campaigners in Congress (see below).

Israeli public opinion apparently does not share the political elite’s plans for a military strike against Iran’s nuclear program. A survey in the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth, reported by Reuters (Dec. 16, 2005) shows that 58% of the Israelis polled believed the dispute over Iran’s nuclear program should be handled diplomatically while only 36% said its reactors should be destroyed in a military strike.

Israel’s War Deadline All top Israeli officials have pronounced the end of March as the deadline for launching a military assault on Iran. The thinking behind this date is to heighten the pressure on the US to force the sanctions issue in the Security Council. The tactic is to blackmail Washington with the “war or else” threat, into pressuring Europe (namely Great Britain, France, Germany and Russia) into approving sanctions. Israel knows that its acts of war will endanger thousands of American soldiers in Iraq, and it knows that Washington (and Europe) cannot afford a third war at this time. The end of March date also coincides with the IAEA report to the UN on Iran’s nuclear energy program. Israeli policymakers believe that their threats may influence the report, or at least force the kind of ambiguities, which can be exploited by its overseas supporters to promote Security Council sanctions or justify Israeli military action. Fixing a March date also intensifies the political activities of the pro-Israel organizations in the United States. The major pro-Israel lobbies have lined up a majority in the US Congress and Senate to push for the UN Security Council to implement economic sanctions against Iran or, failing that, endorse Israeli “defensive” action. Thousands of pro-Israel national, local and community groups and individuals have been mobilized to promote the Israeli agenda via the mass media and visits to US Congressional representatives. The war agenda also plays on exploiting the tactical disputes among the civilian militarists within the White House, between Cheney, Bolton and Abrams on one side and Rice and Rumsfeld on the other. The Cheney line has always supported an Israeli military attack, while Rice

promotes the tactic of “forced failure” of the European diplomatic route before taking decisive action. Rumsfeld, under tremendous pressure from practically all of the top professional military officials, fears that an Israeli war will further accelerate US military losses. The pro-Israel lobby would like to replace the ultra-militarist Rumsfeld with the ultra-militarist Senator Joseph Lieberman, an unconditional Israel First Zealot.

US-Israeli Disagreements on an Iran War As Israel marches inexorably toward war with Iran, disputes with Washington have surfaced. The conflicts and mutual attacks extend throughout the state institutions, and into the public discourse. Supporters and opponents of Israel’s war policy represent powerful segments of state institutions and civil society. On the side of the Israeli war policy are practically all the major and most influential Jewish organizations, the pro-Israeli lobbies, their political action committees, a sector of the White House, a majority of subsidized Congressional representatives and state, local and party leaders. On the other side are sectors of the Pentagon, State Department, a minority of Congressional members, a majority of public opinion, a minority of American Jews (Union of Reform Judaism) and the majority of active and retired military commanders who have served or are serving in Iraq.

Most of the discussion and debate in the US on Israel’s war agenda has been dominated by the pro-Israeli organizations that transmit the Israeli state positions. The Jewish weekly newspaper, Forward , has reported a number of Israeli attacks on the Bush Administration for not acting more aggressively on behalf of Israel’s policy. According to the Forward , “Jerusalem is increasingly concerned that the Bush Administration is not doing enough to block Teheran from acquiring nuclear weapons...” (Dec. 9, 2005). Further stark differences occurred during the semi-annual strategic dialog between Israeli and US security officials, in which the Israelis opposed a US push for regime change in Syria, fearing a possible, more radical Islamic regime. The Israeli officials also criticized the US for forcing Israel to agree to open the Rafah border crossing and upsetting their stranglehold on the economy in Gaza.

Predictably the biggest Jewish organization in the US, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CPMAJO) immediately echoed the Israeli state line as it has since its founding. Malcolm Hoenlan, President of the CPMAJO lambasted Washington for a “failure of leadership on Iran” and “contracting the issue to Europe” (Forward, Dec. 9, 2005). He went on to attack the Bush Administration for not following Israel’s demands by delaying referring Iran to the UN Security Council for sanction. The leader of the CPMAJO then turned on French, German and British negotiators accusing them of “appeasement and weakness”, and of not having a “game plan for decisive action” – presumably for not following Israel’s ‘sanction or bomb them’ game plan.

The role of AIPAC, the CPMAJO and other pro-Israeli organizations as transmission belts for Israel’s bellicose war plans was evident in their November 28, 2005 condemnation of the Bush Administration agreement to give Russia a chance to negotiate a plan under which Iran would be allowed to enrich uranium under international supervision to ensure that its enriched uranium would not be used for military purposes. AIPAC’s rejection of negotiations and demands for an immediate confrontation were based on the specious argument that it would “facilitate Iran’s quest for nuclear weapons” – an argument which flies in the face of all known intelligence data (including Israel’s) which says Iran is at least 3 to 10 years away from even approaching nuclear weaponry. AIPAC’s unconditional and uncritical transmission of Israeli demands and criticism is usually clothed in the rhetoric of US interests or security in order to manipulate US policy. AIPAC chastised the Bush regime for endangering US security. By relying on negotiations, AIPAC accused the Bush Administration of “giving Iran

yet another chance to manipulate (sic) the international community” and “pose a severe danger to the United States” (Forward, Dec. 9, 2005).

Leading US spokesmen for Israel opposed President Bush’s instructing his Ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khakhlilzad, to open a dialog with Iran’s Ambassador to Iraq. In addition, Israel’s official ‘restrained’ reaction to Russia’s sale to Teheran of more than a billion dollars worth of defensive anti-aircraft missiles, which might protect Iran from an Israeli air strike, was predictably echoed by the major Jewish organizations in the US. No doubt an important reason for Israel’s setting an early deadline for its military assault on Iran is to act before Iran establishes a new satellite surveillance system and installs its new missile defense system.

Pushing the US into a confrontation with Iran, via economic sanctions and military attack has been a top priority for Israel and its supporters in the US for more than a decade (Jewish Times/ Jewish Telegraph Agency, Dec. 6, 2005). The AIPAC believes the Islamic Republic poses a grave threat to Israel’s supremacy in the Middle East. In line with its policy of forcing a US confrontation with Iran, AIPAC, the Israeli PACs (political action committees) and the CPMAJO have successfully lined up a majority of Congress people to challenge what they describe as the “appeasement” of Iran. According to the Jewish Times (12/6/05), “If it comes down to a political battle, signs are that AIPAC could muster strong support in Congress to press the White House to demand sanctions on Iran.” Representative Illeana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida), who has the dubious distinction of being a collaborator with Cuban exile terrorist groups and unconditional backer of Israel’s war policy, is chairwoman of the highly influential US House of Representative Middle East subcommittee. From that platform she has echoed the CPMAJO line about “European appeasement and arming the terrorist regime in Teheran” (Jewish Times 12/6/05). The Cuban-American Zionist boasted that her Iran sanctions bill has the support of 75% of the members of Congress and that she is lining up additional so-sponsors.

The pro-Israel lobby’s power, which includes AIPAC, the Conference of Presidents, the PACs and hundreds of local formal and informal organizations, is magnified by their influence and hegemony over Congress, the mass media, financial institutions, pension funds and fundamentalist Christian organizations. Within the executive branch their influence in these institutions amplifies their power far beyond their number and direct control and representation in strategic public and private institutions (which itself is formidable). AIPAC’s “Progress and Policy Report for 2005” – published on its website – lists, among its accomplishments, getting Congress to approve 100 pro-Israel legislative initiatives, \$3 billion in direct aid and more than \$10 billion in guaranteed loans, transfer of the most advanced military technology to Israel’s multi-billion dollar arms export corporations, and the lining up by a 410 to 1 vote in the House of Representative committing the US to Israel’s security – as it is defined by Israel.

The conflict between the Israeli elite and the Bush Administration has to be located in a broader context. Despite pro-Israeli attacks on US policy for its ‘weakness’ on Iran, Washington has moved as aggressively as circumstances permit. Facing European opposition to an immediate confrontation (as AIPAC and Israeli politicians demand) Washington supports European negotiations but imposes extremely limiting conditions, namely a rejection of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which allows uranium enrichment for peaceful purposes. The European “compromise” of forcing Iran to turn over the enrichment process to a foreign country (Russia), is not only a violation of its sovereignty, but is a policy

that no other country using nuclear energy practices. Given this transparently unacceptable “mandate”, it is clear that Washington’s ‘support for negotiations’ is a propaganda device to provoke an Iranian rejection, and a means of securing Europe’s support for a Security Council referral for international sanctions. Washington has absolutely no precedent to object to Russia’s sale of defensive ground to air missiles to Iran, since it is standard in the arms export business. As for as the Ambassadorial meetings in Iraq, the US has had great success in securing Iranian co-operation on stabilizing its Iraqi Shiite client regime. Iran has recognized the regime, has signed trade agreements, supported the dubious elections and provided the US with intelligence against the Sunni resistance. Given their common interests in the region, it was logical for Washington to seek to bend Iran into further co-operation via diplomatic discussions. In other words, as the US seeks to withdraw its troops from a losing war in Iraq (largely supported by AIPAC and its organizational partners), pro-Israel organizations are pushing hard to put the US into a new war with Iran. It is no surprise that the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) invited the most bellicose of US Middle East warmongers, UN Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, to be its keynote speaker at its annual awards dinner (ZOA Press Release, Dec. 11, 2005). The ZOA has loyally followed all the zigzags of Israeli policy since the foundation of the State.

Despite the near unanimous support and widespread influence of the major Jewish organizations, 20% of American Jews do not support Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians. Even more significantly, 61% of Jews almost never talk about Israel or defend Israel in conversation with Goyim (non-Jews) (Jerusalem Post, Dec 1, 2005). Only 29% of Jews are active promoters of Israel. In other words, it is important to note that the Israel First crowd represents less than a third of the Jewish community and hence their claim to speak for ‘all’ US Jews is false and a misrepresentation. In fact, there is more opposition to Israel among Jews than there is in the US Congress. Having said that, however, most Jewish critics of Israel are not influential in the big Jewish organizations and the Israel lobby, excluded from the mass media and mostly intimidated from speaking out, especially on Israel’s war preparations against Iran. The minority Jewish critics cannot match the five to eight million dollars spent in buying Congressional votes each year by the pro-Israel lobbies.

The Myth of the Iranian Nuclear Threat The Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff, Daniel Halutz, has categorically denied that Iran represents an immediate nuclear threat to Israel, let along the United States. According to Haaretz (12/14/05), Halutz stated that it would take Iran time to be able to produce a nuclear bomb - which he estimated might happen between 2008 and 2015.

Israel’s Labor Party officials do not believe that Iran represents an immediate nuclear threat and that the Sharon government and the Likud war propaganda is an electoral ploy. According to Haaretz, “Labor Party officials...accused Preme Minister Ariel Sharon, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and other defense officials of using the Iran issue in their election campaigns in an effort to divert public debate from social issues” (Dec. 14, 2005). In a message directed at the Israeli Right but equally applicable to AIPAC and the ‘Presidents of the Major Jewish Organizations in the US, Labor member of the Knesset, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer rejected electoral warmongering: “I hope the upcoming elections won’t motivate the prime minister and defense minister to stray from government policy and place Israel on the frontlines of confrontation with Iran. The nuclear issue is an international issue and there is no reason for Israel to play a major role in it” (Haaretz, Dec. 14, 2005). Unfortunately the Israel lobby is making it a US issue and putting Washington on the frontlines...

Iran’s Nuclear Threat Fabrication Israeli intelligence has determined that Iran has neither the

enriched uranium nor the capability to produce an atomic weapon now or in the immediate future, in contrast to the hysterical claims publicized by the US pro-Israel lobbies. Mohammed El Baradei, head of the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which has inspected Iran for several years, has pointed out that the IAEA has found no proof that Iran is trying to construct nuclear weapons. He criticized Israeli and US war plans indirectly by warning that a “military solution would be completely un-productive” (Financial Times, Dec. 10/11, 2005).

More recently, Iran, in a clear move to clarify the issue of the future use of enriched uranium, “opened the door for US help in building a nuclear power plant” (USA Today, Dec. 11, 2005). Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, speaking at a press conference, stated “America can take part in the international bidding for the construction of Iran’s nuclear power plant if they observe the basic standards and quality” (USA Today, Dec. 11, 2005). Iran also plans to build several other nuclear power plants with foreign help. The Iranian call for foreign assistance is hardly the strategy of a country trying to conduct a covert atomic bomb program, especially one directed at involving one of its principal accusers.

The Iranians are at an elementary stage in the processing of uranium, not even reaching the point of uranium enrichment, which in turn will take still a number of years, and overcoming many complex technical problems before it can build a bomb. There is no factual basis for arguing that Iran represents a nuclear threat to Israel or to the US forces in the Middle East.

Israel’s war preparations and AIPAC’s efforts to push the US in the same direction based on falsified data is reminiscent of the fabricated evidence which was channeled to the White House through the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans led by Abram Shumsky and directed by Douglas Feith and Paul Wolfowitz, both long-time supporters of the Likud Party. Israel’s war preparations are not over any present or future Iranian nuclear threat. The issue is over future enrichment of uranium, which is legal under the Non-Proliferation Treaty as is its use in producing electrical power. Iran currently is only in a uranium conversion phase, which is prior to enrichment. Scores of countries with nuclear reactors by necessity use enriched uranium. The Iranian decision to advance to processing enriched uranium is its sovereign right as it is for all countries, which possess nuclear reactors in Europe, Asia and North America.

Israel and AIPAC’s resort to the vague formulation of Iran’s potential nuclear capacity is so open-ended that it could apply to scores of countries with a minimum scientific infrastructure.

The European Quartet has raised a bogus issue by evading the issue of whether or not Iran has atomic weapons or is manufacturing them and focused on attacking Iran’s capacity to produce nuclear energy – namely the production of enriched uranium. The Quartet has conflated enriched uranium with a nuclear threat and nuclear potential with the danger of an imminent nuclear attack on Western countries, troops and Israel. The Europeans, especially Great Britain, have two options in mind: To impose an Iranian acceptance of limits on its sovereignty, more specifically on its energy policy and capacity to control the deadly air pollution of its major cities with cleaner sources of energy; or to force Iran to reject the arbitrary addendum to the Non-Proliferation Agreement and then to propagandize the rejection as an indication of Iran’s evil intention to create atomic bombs and target pro-Western countries. The Western media would echo the US and European governments position that Iran was responsible for the breakdown of negotiations. The Europeans would

then convince their public that since “reason” failed, the only recourse is to follow the US to take the issue to the Security Council and approve international sanctions against Iran.

The US then would attempt to pressure Russia and China to vote in favor of sanctions or to abstain. There is reason to doubt that either or both countries would agree given the importance of the multi-billion dollar oil, arms, nuclear and trade deals between Iran and these two countries. Having tried and failed in the Security Council, the US and Israel are likely to move toward a military attack. An air attack on suspected Iranian nuclear facilities will entail the bombing of heavily populated as well as remote regions leading to large-scale loss of life.

The principal result will be a massive escalation of war throughout the Middle East. Iran, a country of 70 million, with several times the military forces that Iraq possessed and with highly motivated and committed military and paramilitary forces can be expected to cross into Iraq. Iraqi Shiites sympathetic to or allied with Iran would most likely break their ties with Washington and go into combat. US military bases, troops and clients would be under tremendous attack. US military casualties would multiply. All troop withdrawal plans would be disrupted. The ‘Iraqization’ strategy would disintegrate, as the US ‘loyal’ Shia armed forces would turn against their American officers. Beyond Iraq, there would likely be major military-civilian uprisings in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Pakistan. The conflagration would spread beyond the Middle East, as the Israel-US attack on an Islamic country would ignite mass protests throughout Asia. Most likely new terrorist incidents would occur in Western Europe, North America, and Australia and against US multinationals. A bitter prolonged war would ensue; pitting 70 million unified Iranian nationals, millions of Muslims in Asia and Africa against an isolated US accompanied by its European allies facing mass popular protests at home.

Sanctions on Iran will not work, because oil is a scarce and essential commodity. China, India and other fast-growing Asian countries will balk at a boycott. Turkey and other Muslim countries will not cooperate. Numerous Western oil companies will work through intermediaries. The sanction policy is predestined to failure; its only result will be to raise the price of oil even higher. An Israeli or US military attack will cause severe political instability and increase the risk to oil producers, shippers and buyers, raising the price of oil to astronomical heights, likely over \$100 a barrel, destabilizing the world economy and provoking a major world recession or worse.

Conclusion The only possible beneficiary of a US or Israeli military attack on Iran or economic sanctions will be Israel: it will seem to eliminate a military adversary in the Middle East, and consolidate its military supremacy in the Middle East. Even this outcome is problematic because it fails to take account of the fact that Iran’s challenge to Israel is political, not its non-existent nuclear potential. The first target of the millions of Muslims protesting Israeli aggression will be the Arab regimes closest to Israel. An Israeli attack would be a pyrrhic victory, if a predictable political conflagration unseats the rulers of Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia. The consequences would be even worse if the US attacks: major oil wells burning, US troops in Iraq surrounded, long-term relations with Arab regimes undermined, increased oil prices and troop casualties inflaming domestic public opinion. An attack on Iran will not be a cleanly executed ‘surgical’ strike – it will be a deep jagged wound leading to gangrene.

No doubt AIPAC will celebrate “another success” for Israel in their yearly self-congratulatory report of missions accomplished. The Presidents of the Major Jewish Organizations in

America will thank their obedient and loyal congressional followers for approving the destruction of an 'anti-Semitic and anti-American nuclear threat to all of humanity' or some similar rubbish.

The big losers of a US-Israeli military attack are the US soldiers in Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries who will be killed and maimed, the US public which will pay in blood and bloated deficits, the oil companies which will see their oil supplies disrupted, their new multi-billion dollar joint oil exploitation contracts undermined, the Palestinians who will suffer the consequences of greater repression and massive displacement, the Lebanese people who will be forcibly entangled in a new border war, and the Europeans who will face terrorist retaliations.

Except for the Israeli lobby in the US and its grass root Jewish American supporters and allies among the Presidents of the Major Jewish organizations there are no other organized lobbies pressuring for or against this war. The ritualistic denunciations of "Big Oil" whenever there is a Middle East conflict involving the US is in this instance a totally bogus issue, lacking any substance. All the evidence is to the contrary - big oil is opposed to any conflicts, which will upset their first major entry into Middle Eastern oil fields since they were nationalized in the 1970's.

The only identifiable organized political force, which has successfully made deep inroads in the US Congress and in sectors of the Executive Branch, are the pro-Israel lobbies and PAC's. The major proponents of a confrontationist policy in the Executive Branch are led by pro-Israel neo-conservative National Security Council member (and Presidentially pardoned felon) Elliott Abrams, in charge of Middle East policy, and Vice President Cheney. The principle opposition is found in the major military services, among commanders, who clearly see the disastrous strategic consequences for the US military forces and sectors of the State Department and CIA, who are certainly aware of the disastrous consequences for the US of supporting Israel's quest for uncontested regional supremacy.

The problem is there is no political leadership to oppose the pro-Israel war lobby within congress or even in civil society. There are few if any influential organized lobbies challenging the pro-war Israel lobby either from the perspective of working for coexistence in the Middle East or even in defending US national interests when they diverge from Israel. Although numerous former diplomats, generals, intelligence officials, Reformed Jews, retired National Security advisers and State Department professionals have publicly denounced the Iran war agenda and even criticized the Israel First lobbies, their newspaper ads and media interviews have not been backed by any national political organization that can compete for influence in the White House and Congress. As we draw closer to a major confrontation with Iran and Israeli officials set short term deadlines for igniting a Middle East conflagration, it seems that we are doomed to learn from future catastrophic losses that Americans must organize to defeat political lobbies based on overseas allegiances.

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