

# Israel sees dwindling chance of US strike on Iran, despite nuclear ‘smoking gun’

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Global Research, March 29, 2008

[The Raw Story](#) 25 March 2008

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✘ During his whirlwind tour of US-friendly nations in the Middle East, Vice President Dick Cheney claimed Iran was “heavily involved” in developing a nuclear bomb — an allegation that is at odds with what’s known about the regime.

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Although his trip also focused on the war in Iraq, sky-high oil prices and the ongoing quest for peace between Israel and Palestine, Iran was never far from the vice president’s mind. Although the US and Israel believe they have found a “smoking gun” in Iran’s enrichment of uranium, the chances of a unilateral US strike are seen as “remote,” according to [JTA news service](#).

With U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney in Israel this week talking about Iran, the big question was whether President Bush would be willing to use military force in the waning days of his presidency to stop Iran’s nuclear weapons program. The answer from most Israeli intelligence analysts: not likely. ... Israel also figures that the chances of the Bush administration ordering a pre-emptive military strike against Iran are virtually zero. The only such scenario the Israelis envision is if the Democratic presidential candidates appear to be far ahead of their Republican rival and Bush senses a “now or never” strike option. Even in these circumstances, the Israelis say, an American strike is highly unlikely. Still, the Israelis are hoping that the hard-line Cheney will push the envelope — a role he reportedly played vis-a-vis the U.S. invasion of Iraq. One official said Cheney is seen as “a significant player” who could influence “serious issues that cannot wait.”

Cheney [told ABC News’s Martha Raddatz](#) that Iran was “obviously ... heavily involved in trying to develop nuclear weapons enrichment.” The Los Angeles *Times* notes that Iran has denied trying to develop a nuclear weapon and the uranium enrichment that has been demonstrated is in line with energy production, not weapons development.

Iran is currently enriching uranium at its plant in Natanz in central Iran. Weapons-grade uranium is enriched or concentrated at 80% or 90%. According to the latest [International Atomic Energy Agency report](#), Iran currently enriches uranium at concentrations of less than 3.8%, which is the amount necessary for creating fuel for a reactor. Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful energy production, but the U.S. and other Western countries have cast suspicion. Nevertheless, Cheney’s comments contradict both U.S. [intelligence agencies’ assessments](#) of Iran’s nuclear program and the findings of the IAEA. Both say, and Iranians

admit, that Iran is trying to master the enrichment of uranium. But no one has yet come up with proof that Iran is now actively trying to produce weapons-grade nuclear material.

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