

Obama has been Warned that Israel May Bomb Iran

Memorandum to the President from former Intelligence Officials

By [Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity](#)
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FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: War With Iran

We write to alert you to the likelihood that Israel will attack Iran as early as this month. This would likely lead to a wider war.

Israel's leaders would calculate that once the battle is joined, it will be politically untenable for you to give anything less than unstinting support to Israel, no matter how the war started, and that U.S. troops and weaponry would flow freely. Wider war could eventually result in destruction of the state of Israel.

This can be stopped, but only if you move quickly to pre-empt an Israeli attack by publicly condemning such a move before it happens.

We believe that comments by senior American officials, you included, reflect misplaced trust in Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu.

Actually, the phrasing itself can be revealing, as when CIA Director Panetta implied cavalierly that Washington leaves it up to the Israelis to decide whether and when to attack Iran, and how much "room" to give to the diplomatic effort.

On June 27, Panetta casually told ABC's Jake Tapper, "I think they are willing to give us the room to be able to try to change Iran diplomatically ... as opposed to changing them militarily."

Similarly, the tone you struck referring to Netanyahu and yourself in your July 7 interview with Israeli TV was distinctly out of tune with decades of unfortunate history with Israeli leaders.

"Neither of us try to surprise each other," you said, "and that approach is one that I think Prime Minister Netanyahu is committed to." You may wish to ask Vice President Biden to remind you of the kind of surprises he has encountered in Israel.

Blindsiding has long been an arrow in Israel's quiver. During the emerging Middle East crisis in the spring of 1967, some of us witnessed closely a flood of Israeli surprises and deception, as Netanyahu's predecessors feigned fear of an imminent Arab attack as justification for starting a war to seize and occupy Arab territories.

We had long since concluded that Israel had been exaggerating the Arab "threat" — well

before 1982 when former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin publicly confessed:

“In June 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that [Egyptian President] Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.”

Israel had, in fact, prepared well militarily and also mounted provocations against its neighbors, in order to provoke a response that could be used to justify expansion of its borders.

Given this record, one would be well advised to greet with appropriate skepticism any private assurances Netanyahu may have given you that Israel would not surprise you with an attack on Iran.

Netanyahu’s Calculations

Netanyahu believes he holds the high cards, largely because of the strong support he enjoys in our Congress and our strongly pro-Israel media. He reads your reluctance even to mention in controversial bilateral issues publicly during his recent visit as affirmation that he is in the catbird seat in the relationship.

During election years in the U.S. (including mid-terms), Israeli leaders are particularly confident of the power they and the Likud Lobby enjoy on the American political scene.

This prime minister learned well from Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon.

Netanyahu’s attitude comes through in a video taped nine years ago and shown on Israeli TV, in which he bragged about how he deceived President Clinton into believing he (Netanyahu) was helping implement the Oslo accords when he was actually destroying them.

The tape displays a contemptuous attitude toward — and wonderment at — an America so easily influenced by Israel. Netanyahu says:

“America is something that can be easily moved. Moved in the right direction. ... They won’t get in our way ... Eighty percent of the Americans support us. It’s absurd.”

Israeli columnist Gideon Levy wrote that the video shows Netanyahu to be “a con artist ... who thinks that Washington is in his pocket and that he can pull the wool over its eyes,” adding that such behavior “does not change over the years.”

As mentioned above, Netanyahu has had instructive role models.

None other than Gen. Brent Scowcroft told the *Financial Times* that former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had George W. Bush “mesmerized;” that “Sharon just has him “wrapped around his little finger.”

(Scowcroft was promptly relieved of his duties as chair of the prestigious President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and told never again to darken the White House doorstep.)

If further proof of American political support for Netanyahu were needed, it was manifest when Senators McCain, Lieberman, and Graham visited Israel during the second week of

July.

Lieberman asserted that there is wide support in Congress for using all means to keep Iran from becoming a nuclear power, including “through military actions if we must.” Graham was equally explicit: “The Congress has Israel’s back,” he said.

More recently, 47 House Republicans have signed onto H.R. 1553 declaring “support for Israel’s right to use all means necessary to confront and eliminate nuclear threats posed by Iran ... including the use of military force.”

The power of the Likud Lobby, especially in an election year, facilitates Netanyahu’s attempts to convince those few of his colleagues who need convincing that there may never be a more auspicious time to bring about “regime change” in Tehran.

And, as we hope your advisers have told you, **regime change, not Iranian nuclear weapons, is Israel’s primary concern.**

If Israel’s professed fear that one or two nuclear weapons in Iran’s arsenal would be a game changer, one would have expected Israeli leaders to jump up and down with glee at the possibility of seeing half of Iran’s low enriched uranium shipped abroad.

Instead, they dismissed as a “trick” the tripartite deal, brokered by Turkey and Brazil with your personal encouragement, that would ship half of Iran’s low enriched uranium outside Tehran’s control.

The National Intelligence Estimate

The Israelis have been looking on intently as the U.S. intelligence community attempts to update, in a “Memorandum to Holders,” the NIE of November 2007 on Iran’s nuclear program. It is worth recalling a couple of that Estimate’s key judgments:

“We judge with high confidence that in fall of 2003 Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program. ... We assess with moderate confidence Tehran has not restarted its nuclear program as of mid-2007, but we do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons ...”

Earlier this year, public congressional testimony by former Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair (February 1 & 2) and Defense Intelligence Agency Director Gen. Ronald Burgess with Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. James Cartwright (April 14) did not alter those key judgments.

Blair and others continued to underscore the intelligence community’s agnosticism on one key point: as Blair put it earlier this year, “We do not know if Iran will eventually decide to build a nuclear weapon.”

The media have reported off-the-cuff comments by Panetta and by you, with a darker appraisal — with you telling Israeli TV “... all indicators are that they [the Iranians] are in fact pursuing a nuclear weapon;” and Panetta telling ABC, “I think they continue to work on designs in that area [of weaponization].”

Panetta hastened to add, though, that in Tehran, “There is a continuing debate right now as

to whether or not they ought to proceed with the bomb.”

Israel probably believes it must give more weight to the official testimony of Blair, Burgess, and Cartwright, which dovetail with the earlier NIE, and the Israelis are afraid that the long-delayed Memorandum to Holders of the 2007 NIE will essentially affirm that Estimate’s key judgments.

Our sources tell us that an honest Memorandum to Holders is likely to do precisely that, and that they suspect that the several-months-long delay means intelligence judgments are being “fixed” around the policy — as was the case before the attack on Iraq.

One War Prevented

The key judgments of the November 2007 NIE shoved an iron rod into the wheel spokes of the Dick Cheney-led juggernaut rolling toward war on Iran. The NIE infuriated Israel leaders eager to attack before President Bush and Vice President Cheney left office. This time, Netanyahu fears that issuance of an honest Memorandum might have similar effect.

Bottom line: more incentive for Israel to pre-empt such an Estimate by striking Iran sooner rather than later.

Last week’s announcement that U.S. officials will meet next month with Iranian counterparts to resume talks on ways to arrange higher enrichment of Iranian low enriched uranium for Tehran’s medical research reactor was welcome news to all but the Israeli leaders.

In addition, Iran reportedly has said it would be prepared to halt enrichment to 20 percent (the level needed for the medical research reactor), and has made it clear that it looks forward to the resumption of talks.

Again, an agreement that would send a large portion of Iran’s LEU abroad would, at a minimum, hinder progress toward nuclear weapons, should Iran decide to develop them. But it would also greatly weaken Israel’s scariest rationale for an attack on Iran.

Bottom line: with the talks on what Israel’s leaders earlier labeled a “trick” now scheduled to resume in September, incentive builds in Tel Aviv for the Israelis to attack before any such agreement can be reached.

We’ll say it again: the objective is regime change. Creating synthetic fear of Iranian nuclear weapons is simply the best way to “justify” bringing about regime change. Worked well for Iraq, no?

Another War in Need of Prevention

A strong public statement by you, personally warning Israel not to attack Iran would most probably head off such an Israeli move. Follow-up might include dispatching Adm. Mullen to Tel Aviv with military-to-military instructions to Israel: Don’t Even Think of It.

In the wake of the 2007 NIE, President Bush overruled Vice President Cheney and sent Adm. Mullen to Israel to impart that hard message. A much-relieved Mullen arrived home that spring sure of step and grateful that he had dodged the likelihood of being on the end of a Cheney-inspired order for him to send U.S. forces into war with Iran.

This time around, Mullen returned with sweaty palms from a visit to Israel in February 2010. Ever since, he has been worrying aloud that Israel might mousetrap the U.S. into war with Iran, while adding the obligatory assurance that the Pentagon does have an attack plan for Iran, if needed.

In contrast to his experience in 2008, though, Mullen seemed troubled that Israel's leaders did not take his warnings seriously.

While in Israel, Mullen insisted publicly that an attack on Iran would be "a big, big, big problem for all of us, and I worry a great deal about the unintended consequences."

After his return, at a Pentagon press conference on Feb. 22 Mullen drove home the same point. After reciting the usual boilerplate about Iran being "on the path to achieve nuclear weaponization" and its "desire to dominate its neighbors," he included the following in his prepared remarks:

"For now, the diplomatic and the economic levers of international power are and ought to be the levers first pulled. Indeed, I would hope they are always and consistently pulled. No strike, however effective, will be, in and of itself, decisive."

Unlike younger generals — David Petraeus, for example — Adm. Mullen served in the Vietnam War. That experience is probably what prompts asides like this: "I would remind everyone of an essential truth: War is bloody and uneven. It's messy and ugly and incredibly wasteful ..."

Although the immediate context for that remark was Afghanistan, Mullen has underscored time and again that war with Iran would be a far larger disaster. Those with a modicum of familiarity with the military, strategic and economic equities at stake know he is right.

Other Steps

In 2008, after Mullen read the Israelis the riot act, they put their pre-emptive plans for Iran aside. With that mission accomplished, Mullen gave serious thought to ways to prevent any unintended (or, for that matter, deliberately provoked) incidents in the crowded Persian Gulf that could lead to wider hostilities.

Mullen sent up an interesting trial balloon at a July 2, 2008, press conference, when he indicated that military-to-military dialogue could "add to a better understanding" between the U.S. and Iran. But nothing more was heard of this overture, probably because Cheney ordered him to drop it.

It was a good idea — still is. The danger of a U.S.-Iranian confrontation in the crowded Persian Gulf has not been addressed, and should be. Establishment of a direct communications link between top military officials in Washington and Tehran would reduce the danger of an accident, miscalculation, or covert, false-flag attack.

In our view, that should be done immediately — particularly since recently introduced sanctions assert a right to inspect Iranian ships. The naval commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards reportedly has threatened "a response in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz," if anyone tries to inspect Iranian ships in international waters.

Another safety valve would result from successful negotiation of the kind of bilateral

“incidents-at-sea” protocol that was concluded with the Russians in 1972 during a period of relatively high tension.

With only interim nobodies at the helm of the intelligence community, you may wish to consider knocking some heads together yourself and insisting that it finish an honest Memorandum to Holders of the 2007 NIE by mid-August — recording any dissents, as necessary.

Sadly, our former colleagues tell us that politicization of intelligence analysis did not end with the departure of Bush and Cheney...and that the problem is acute even at the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which in the past has done some of the best professional, objective, tell-it-like-it-is analysis.

Pundits, Think Tanks: Missing the Point

As you may have noticed, most of page one of Sunday’s *Washington Post* Outlook section was given to an article titled, “A Nuclear Iran: Would America Strike to Prevent It? — Imagining Obama’s Response to an Iranian Missile Crisis.”

Page five was dominated by the rest of the article, under the title “Who will blink first when Iran is on the brink?”

A page-wide photo of a missile rolling past Iranian dignitaries on a reviewing stand (reminiscent of the familiar parades on Red Square) is aimed at the centerfold of the Outlook section, as if poised to blow it to smithereens.

Typically, the authors address the Iranian “threat” as though it endangers the U.S., even though Secretary Clinton has stated publicly that this is not the case. They write that one option for the U.S. is “the lonely, unpopular path of taking military action lacking allied consensus.” O Tempora, O Mores!

In less than a decade, wars of aggression have become nothing more than lonely, unpopular paths.

What is perhaps most remarkable, though, is that the word Israel is nowhere to be found in this very long article. Similar think pieces, including some from relatively progressive think tanks, also address these issues as though they were simply bilateral U.S.-Iranian problems, with little or no attention to Israel.

Guns of August?

The stakes could hardly be higher. Letting slip the dogs of war would have immense repercussions. Again, we hope that Adm. Mullen and others have given you comprehensive briefings on them.

Netanyahu would be taking a fateful gamble by attacking Iran, with high risk to everyone involved. The worst, but conceivable case, has Netanyahu playing — unintentionally — Dr. Kevorkian to the state of Israel.

Even if the U.S. were to be sucked into a war provoked by Israel, there is absolutely no guarantee that the war would come out well.

Were the U.S. to suffer significant casualties, and were Americans to become aware that such losses came about because of exaggerated Israeli claims of a nuclear threat from Iran, Israel could lose much of its high standing in the United States.

There could even be an upsurge in anti-Semitism, as Americans conclude that officials with dual loyalties in Congress and the executive branch threw our troops into a war provoked, on false pretenses, by Likudniks for their own narrow purposes.

We do not have a sense that major players in Tel Aviv or in Washington are sufficiently sensitive to these critical factors.

You are in position to prevent this unfortunate, but likely chain reaction. We allow for the possibility that Israeli military action might not lead to a major regional war, but we consider the chances of that much less than even.

Footnote: VIPS Experience

We VIPS have found ourselves in this position before. We prepared our first Memorandum for the President on the afternoon of February 5, 2003 after Colin Powell's speech at the UN.

We had been watching how our profession was being corrupted into serving up faux intelligence that was later criticized (correctly) as "uncorroborated, contradicted, and nonexistent" — adjectives used by former Senate Intelligence Committee chair Jay Rockefeller after a five-year investigation by his committee.

As Powell spoke, we decided collectively that the responsible thing to do was to try to warn the President before he acted on misguided advice to attack Iraq. Unlike Powell, we did not claim that our analysis was "irrefutable and undeniable." We did conclude with this warning:

"After watching Secretary Powell today, we are convinced that you would be well served if you widened the discussion ... beyond the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic."

<http://www.afterdowningstreet.org/downloads/vipstwelve.pdf>

We take no satisfaction at having gotten it right on Iraq. Others with claim to more immediate expertise on Iraq were issuing similar warnings. But we were kept well away from the wagons circled by Bush and Cheney.

Sadly, your own Vice President, who was then chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, was among the most assiduous in blocking opportunities for dissenting voices to be heard. This is part of what brought on the worst foreign policy disaster in our nation's history.

We now believe that we may also be right on (and right on the cusp of) another impending catastrophe of even wider scope — Iran — on which another President, you, are not getting good advice from your closed circle of advisers.

They are probably telling you that, since you have privately counseled Prime Minister Netanyahu against attacking Iran, he will not do it. This could simply be the familiar syndrome of telling the President what they believe he wants to hear.

Quiz them; tell them others believe them to be dead wrong on Netanyahu. The only positive here is that you — only you — can prevent an Israeli attack on Iran.

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