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Israel Ramps up Push for Attack on Iran

By John Glaser

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Israeli officials have apparently been engaged in an aggressive public relations offensive to broaden support for a military attack on Iran, with particular emphasis on American audiences.

Israel's strategy conference this week in Herzliya, a Tel Aviv suburb, has featured highly publicized speeches by many Israeli officials. Specifically, they have claimed that Iran currently possesses long range missiles that could reach the United States and enough the material to build four nuclear weapons.



For months, Israeli officials have been feeling out the Obama administration's appetite for a war with Iran. [Reports have revealed](#) that U.S. officials have tried to assure Israel that a military strike is in principle on the table, while simultaneously urging them not to attack unilaterally.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey told Israeli leaders on Jan. 20 that the [U.S. would not participate in a war against Iran begun by Israel](#) unless explicitly agreed upon beforehand. But Israeli officials have not been satisfied with this reluctance.

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta [has expressed concern](#) that Israel will unilaterally attack Iran sometime in "April, May or June," something a number of U.S. military and intelligence officials have argued against.

At the conference, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak put an attack on Iran in a global context, claiming that [support for such a strike is coming from the whole world](#) as opposed to couching it in terms of America having his back. "Today as opposed to in the past," Barak said, "there is wide world understanding that in the event that sanctions won't reach the intended result of stopping the military nuclear program, there will be need to consider action."

Vice Prime Minister and Strategic Affairs Minister Moshe Ya'alon, too, fought back against arguments that a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities would be insufficient, and perhaps counterproductive, in halting their enrichment. "It's possible to strike all Iran's facilities," [Ya'alon declared](#).

Ya'alon also tried to frame U.S.-backing as really a tit-for-tat exchange as well as a security imperative for Washington. He claimed, without any evidence, that Israel had been behind an explosion at an Iranian missile base late last year [where Iran was developing missiles](#) "with a range of 10,000 kilometers" that could have reached the United States.

Yoram Cohen, head of the Shin Bet security service, [made unfounded claims about alleged Iranian attacks on "Israeli targets"](#) around the world, although he gave no firm evidence to back them up. "Over the past year three serious attacks were thwarted that were on the verge of being carried out," the Shin Bet head said. "In Turkey against the general consul in Istanbul; in Baku, Azerbaijan; and two weeks ago in Thailand."

Also at the conference, [Israeli Major-General Aviv Kochavi claimed that](#) "Iran has accumulated more than 4 tonnes of uranium enriched to a level of 3.5 percent and nearly 100 kilos at an enrichment level of 20 percent. This amount of material is already enough for four atomic bombs."

Nuclear bombs require uranium enriched to 90 percent, but Kochavi said Iran could quickly get there if it wanted. "From the moment Khamenei gives an order...to speed up production of the first nuclear explosive device, we estimate it will take about a year to complete the task," adding that arming a missile with a nuclear warhead could take a year or two longer.

On this score, Israelis have faced reluctance from the U.S. because [there is no evidence of any military dimension to Iran's nuclear program](#). The [opinion of the U.S. intelligence community](#),

the [Obama administration](#), and [the latest IAEA report](#) is that Iran's enrichment is so far civilian in nature.

All 16 U.S. intelligence agencies concluded in 2007, [and again in 2011](#), that there is no military dimension to Iran's nuclear program. And despite the hyperbolic reporting on it, the [latest report from the IAEA said](#), "the Agency continues to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material."

As Adm. Dennis Blair, Obama's former director of national intelligence, [told Congress](#) in March 2009, "We judge in fall 2003 Tehran halted its nuclear weapons design and weaponization activities" but that Tehran "is keeping open the option to develop them."

Mohamed ElBaradei, former head of the IAEA, [said that same year](#) that he did not "believe the Iranians have made a decision to go for a nuclear weapon, but they are absolutely determined to have the technology because they believe it brings you power, prestige and an insurance policy." This is likely [a deterrence strategy](#), as opposed to a desire to actually attain nuclear weapons.

Despite the near consensus that Iran has not yet chosen to have a nuclear weapons program, the United States has [heaped a crippling set of sanctions on Iran, partially to satisfy Israeli concerns](#) and pressure. This is unlikely to have any effect on Iranian nuclear policy and has already had terrible consequences for ordinary Iranians in a struggling economy.

The Obama administration has also bolstered the U.S. military presence in the Gulf region as a bulwark against Iran. "With an eye on the threat of a belligerent Iran," the *New York Times* [reported in October](#), "the administration is also seeking to expand military ties with the six nations in the Gulf Cooperation Council — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman."

In addition to all of this, has been engaged in extensive covert operations against Iran including [funding dissident groups](#) that aim to undermine the regime, [cyber-terrorism](#), commercial sabotage, and [targeted assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists](#).

Despite all of this overt and covert aggression, Israelis are not satisfied, continuing to push for war. But Israel is not unanimous on the issue. Notably, top former Israeli intelligence official Meir Dagan has been outspoken against an attack on Iran, noting the dangerous potential for a protracted, bloody war.

Along with the intelligence community's near-consensus on the civilian nature of Iran's nuclear program, the Iranian government itself denies any intention to build the bomb. As a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), they have legally bound themselves to non-proliferation, while Israel refuses to sign the treaty and has hundreds of secret nuclear warheads.