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Report: Israel could hit Iran within a year

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Israel could attack Iran within a year, even without a green light from Washington to do so, if it believes this is the only way to stop Tehran's nuclear drive, the Atlantic magazine said in a story in its September 2010 issue.

The author of the article, Jeffrey Goldberg, writes that 'a consensus emerged that there is a better than 50 per cent chance that Israel will launch a strike by next July.'

Goldberg based his assessment on conversations with more than 40 past and present Israeli decision-makers, including 'an extended discussion' with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as with many US and Arab officials.

If Israel does attack, Goldberg said, it will tell Washington they are doing so 'because a nuclear Iran poses the gravest threat since Hitler to the physical survival of the Jewish people.'

'The Israelis will also state that they believe they have a reasonable chance of delaying the Iranian nuclear programme for at least three to five years. They will tell their American colleagues that Israel was left with no choice,' he wrote.

Netanyahu refused to discuss with Goldberg his timetable for action, or whether he was considering the military option.

But conversations with other officials led the Atlantic correspondent to conclude that the premier believes Iran is the world's problem, not just Israel's, 'and the world, led by the United States, is duty-bound to grapple with it.'

At the same time, the Israeli leader does not place great faith in sanctions, but will wait until December to see if the West's non- military methods can stop Iran.

Israel is also waiting to see whether President Barack Obama will himself countenance a US strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, but its officials 'are doubtful that a man who positioned himself as the antithesis of George W Bush, author of invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq, would launch a preemptive attack on a Muslim nation. '

If the Israelis reach the firm conclusion that Obama will not, under any circumstances, launch a strike on Iran, then the countdown will begin for a unilateral Israeli attack, Goldberg noted.

Goldberg quoted an unnamed Israeli official as saying that 'if the choice is between allowing Iran to go nuclear, or trying for ourselves what Obama won't try, then we probably have to try.'