

Resistance to Israeli Attack on Iran

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Oct. 2—On Sept. 28, *Foreign Policy* magazine published a lengthy article by historian Mark Perry, exposing Israeli plans to conduct an Entebbe-style commando raid on the nuclear enrichment facility at Fordow, Iran. Perry received detailed intelligence on studies just completed by the U.S. Central Command on how Israel might conduct an attack on Iran's nuclear program in preparation for his article, "The Entebbe Option: How the U.S. Military Thinks Israel May Attack Iran."

Gen. Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, has repeatedly warned Israel against launching a unilateral attack on Iran, arguing that an attack would only do minimal damage, and would impel Iran to go forward with a nuclear weapons effort, which they are not now pursuing. Dempsey is also concerned that an Israeli attack would trigger asymmetric retaliation against vulnerable U.S. military forces in the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan, and could easily escalate into a general war, pitting the United States against Russia and China.

The Perry article was complemented, the same day, by an article by William Broad in the *New York Times*, headlined "How To Help Iran Build a Bomb." He quoted former CIA Director Gen. Michael Hayden (ret.), warning that an Israeli attack would drive Iran to seek a nuclear bomb. Broad reported that a growing number of U.S. and Israeli national security specialists have concluded that an attack, doing limited damage, would drive Iran to launch a "Manhattan Project" to build a nuclear bomb. Right now, the latest U.S. National Intelligence Estimate—which is supported by Israeli intelligence—maintains that Iran's leadership has not yet made the decision to go for a nuclear weapon, and that all work on weaponization was terminated in 2003, following the U.S. and British invasion of Iraq and overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Broad also quoted Mark Fitzpatrick, a nonproliferation expert at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), who declared that he was

"almost certain" that a military attack would result in "a Manhattan-style rush to produce nuclear weapons as fast as possible."

A group of American national security veterans, including Adm. William Fallon (ret.), Gen. Anthony Zinni (ret.), former Sen. Chuck Hagel, former Rep. Lee Hamilton, and former Ambassador Thomas Pickering also weighed in against any military action against Iran, without a full public debate on all the pros and cons of such military action. They warned, in a signed article in the Sept. 29 *Washington Post*, that two consequences of a U.S. attack on Iran would be a broader regional war and a blowout of the world economy.

All of these recent war-avoidance interventions reflect a growing concern, among a large and growing segment of sane national security experts, that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is capable of ordering an attack on Iran at any moment, and that President Obama has so far failed to deliver the kind of unambiguous warning to Israel that could greatly reduce the risk of an Israeli "breakaway ally" attack, triggering world war.

Perry's Warnings

The Perry article in *Foreign Policy* has created a firestorm internationally. For one thing, according to Perry's sources at the U.S. Central Command, the Pentagon is adamant that the United States should not be dragged into war with Iran on the basis of an Israeli preemptive attack. For the past two years, according to the Centcom sources, the U.S. military has been conducting war games to determine exactly how Israel might launch a preventive strike, what chances it would have of halting Iran's nuclear program, and how the U.S. can avoid being dragged into the fiasco.

According to Perry, U.S. war planners have determined that the Israelis have three basic options. The first is a bombing campaign, involving their limited number of long-range bombers, armed with a small number of bunker-buster bombs, and backed up by land-based and submarine-based missiles. By all U.S. estimates, this would be a "one-shot" operation, given the limits on the size and strength of the Israeli arsenal; and the damage to Iran's program would be limited.

The second option—what Perry calls "the Entebbe option," referring to the 1976 Israeli commando raid to free passengers from a hijacked Israeli plane in Uganda—would involve Israeli special forces flying



UN Photo/J. Carrier

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "red line" stunt at the UN General Assembly on Sept. 27 led one Israeli journalist to suggest that he is heading for a mental breakdown.

into the Fordow site, where Iran has a hardened enrichment facility, carrying out a lightning assault on the compound, and stealing as much enriched uranium as possible before blowing up the facility and escaping.

While some military planners, such as retired Air Force Col. Sam Gardiner, told Perry that they believe Israel could pull off such a strike, Adm. Bobby Ray Inman (ret.), former head of the National Security Agency and Deputy Director of the CIA, said that the mere fact that Israel is contemplating such a high-risk venture is proof that Israeli strategists know that the bombing option would not succeed.

The third option, said Centcom planners, is "regime decapitation."

Perry wrote: "A third operation is less exotic, but perhaps most dangerous of all: regime decapitation. 'The Israelis could just take out the Iranian leadership,' the senior Pentagon war planner said. 'But they would only do that as a part of an air strike or a commando raid.' The downside of a decapitation strike is that it would not end Iran's nuclear program; the upside is that it would almost certainly trigger an Iranian response targeting U.S. military assets in the region, as it would leave the Iranian Revolutionary Guard forces in charge of the country. It would be the one sure way, U.S. offi-

cers with whom I spoke believe, for Israel to get the United States involved in its anti-Iran offensive, with the U.S. mounting operations in a conflict it didn't start."

According to Perry's sources, U.S. military planners are adamantly opposed to the U.S. being dragged into a war with Iran triggered by Israel. They worry that Iranian factions may also be itching for a fight, and could, as General Dempsey has warned repeatedly, launch retaliatory strikes against U.S. forces, even if the initial attack came solely from Israel. Under such circumstances, the United States would be obliged to enter the conflict, and hit Iran with full force.

This, for many U.S. strategists interviewed by both Perry and *EIR*, is the nightmare that Netanyahu may be counting on.

Furthermore, while Perry's Pentagon sources insist that there is "no daylight" between the U.S. military and President Obama when it comes to opposition to an Israeli preventive strike on Iran, other sources close to the Obama Administration are far less confident in the President's resolve—particularly if an Israeli strike were to come before the Nov. 6 U.S. Presidential elections. Will Obama run the risk of being accused of abandoning Israel and siding with the ayatollahs? That is doubtful. Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak know that they have the greatest leverage over Obama *before* the elections. One senior U.S. intelligence source says that "there is a 40% chance of an Israeli attack on Iran" in the coming weeks.

Has Netanyahu Gone Insane?

In his Sept. 28 speech before the UN General Assembly, Netanyahu displayed a primitive cartoon of a bomb, showing that Iran had already crossed Israel's "red line" for an attack. One prominent Israeli journalist responded to the stunt by reminding his readers that former Prime Minister Menachem Begin had gone through a mental breakdown, following the death of his wife, and had to be removed from office for the sake of the safety of Israel. Netanyahu, he warned, is no longer mentally fit to be prime minister, with hands on the trigger, and his Cabinet should say so.

That may be absolutely true. But, for the time being, it is Netanyahu and Barak who have their fingers on the Israeli trigger. And that trigger could be the detonator for world war.