

Column one: Preventing World War III

Caroline Glick , THE JERUSALEM POST

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It goes without saying that if and when a decision is made in Jerusalem or Washington to carry out an attack against Iran's nuclear installations the public will only learn of the decision in retrospect. All the same, over the last few weeks, it has been impossible to miss the fact that the Iranian nuclear program has become the subject of intense and ever increasing international scrutiny. This naturally gives rise to the impression that something is afoot.

Take for example the head of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency Muhammad elBaradei's recent remarks on the subject. Speaking to *Le Monde* on Monday, elBaradei asserted that it will take Iran between three to eight years to acquire a nuclear arsenal. Consequently, he argued, there is no reason to consider conducting a military strike against Teheran's program. There is still plenty of time for diplomacy, or sanctions or even incentives for the ayatollahs, he said.

ElBaradei's statement is only interesting when it is compared to a statement he made in December 2005 to the *Independent*. Back then Baradei's view was that Iran was just "a few months" away from producing atomic bombs. But then too he saw no reason to attack. As he put it when he warned that Iran was on the precipice of nuclear weapons, using force would just "open Pandora's box." "There would be efforts to isolate Iran; Iran would retaliate, and at the end of the day, you have to go back to the negotiation table to find the solution," elBaradei warned.

Given that the IAEA's Egyptian chief has been unstinting in his view that no obstacle should be placed in Iran's path to nuclear bombs, what makes his statements from 2005 and today interesting is what they tell us about his changing perception of the West's intentions. At the end of 2005, he was fairly certain that the West - led by the US - lacked the will to attack Iran. By making the statement he made at the time, he sought to demoralize the West and so convince it that there was nothing to be done to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Now, when faced with a real possibility that the US or Israel or a combination of states are ready and willing to attack Iran's nuclear installations, elBaradei seeks to undermine them by questioning the salience of the threat.

ElBaradei's statement of course was not made in a vacuum. It came against the backdrop of an increasing unanimity of opinion among top Bush administration members that Iran must be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons. Last Thursday, President George W. Bush said that a nuclear armed Iran would foment World War III.

The next day, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who until recently was known to oppose military action against Iran and to minimize the danger that a nuclear-armed Iran would constitute to the US, said at a press briefing that a nuclear-armed Iran would likely spark a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and was liable to foment a major war. Gates added that in light of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's stated desire to

destroy Israel, "Washington couldn't trust that Iran would handle nuclear weapons responsibly." Standing next to Gates last Thursday was Admiral Michael Mullen, the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Mullen rebuffed assertions that the US campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have strained military resources to the point that the US today cannot mount an effective campaign against Iran. As he put it, "From a military standpoint, there is more than enough reserve" to mount an attack against Iran's nuclear installations.

While Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice continues to champion negotiations with the mullahs, in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday Rice acknowledged that "the policies of Iran constitute perhaps the single greatest challenge for American security interests in the Middle East and possibly around the world." And then there is Israel. It appears that both the IDF and the government are earnestly preparing for the possibility of war. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's sudden visits to Moscow, Paris and London, and Defense Minister Ehud Barak's trip to Washington this week were all devoted to the Iranian nuclear project.

One of the main things that we have learned from these reports about the September 6 Israeli strike against the North Korean nuclear installation in Syria is that Israeli intelligence on nuclear proliferation is more comprehensive, and at least in certain areas, superior to US intelligence. According to media reports of the strike, the US approved the Israeli operation after Israel brought the US incontrovertible evidence of the threat posed by the nuclear site.

In light of Israel's apparent intelligence prowess, it seems reasonable to assume that Olmert and Barak did not fly to those foreign capitals empty-handed. Indeed by some accounts they brought with them new and incriminating information regarding the current status of Iran's nuclear program.

Then there is Iran's neighbor Turkey to consider.

This week Turkish Prime Minister Recip Erdogan paid a sudden visit to London. There he met with Olmert, who was also in the city that day. The meeting took place less than two weeks after Turkey's Foreign Minister Ali Babacan visited Israel. In an analysis this week in *The Asia Times*, M.K. Bhadrakumar, India's former ambassador to Turkey tied Turkey's pro-Hamas government's sudden interest in speaking to Israel to the tension between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. Bhadrakumar noted that Israel has close relations with Kurdish President Massoud Barzani. He hypothesized that the intensification of high-level discussions likely signals that a deal is being crafted which involves Turkey's position on Iran, and Iraqi Kurdistan's position on Turkey and the PKK. His view is buttressed by the fact that Erdogan is scheduled to meet with Bush at the White House on November 5.

Finally it is important to note Barak's crash-program aimed at purchasing and deploying missile defense systems capable of covering all of Israel as quickly as possible, and last week's media reports that US, British and Australian commandos are fighting Iranian forces inside of Iran close to the Iran-Iraq border by Basra.

Assuming that all of these developments do in fact mean that the day is quickly approaching where Iran's nuclear installations come under attack, a discussion of some of the likely outcomes of such a strike seems in order. How would Iran respond? What would be the long-term effect of such a strike? Until Israel attacked the North Korean nuclear installation in Syria last month, according to the foreign reports, most analysts assumed that Iran will retaliate against such a strike with as much force as it is able to muster, and that a successful attack against Iran's nuclear sites will push back Iran's nuclear program for approximately five years.

As this scenario has it, Iran will direct a counter-strike against Israel that will include a ballistic missile attack carried out jointly by Iran, Syria and Hizbullah in Lebanon. Furthermore, Iran will direct Hizbullah terror cells

throughout the world to carry out attacks against Jewish and American targets.

But again, as bad as it may be, there is no comparison between an Iranian missile and terror offensive and Armageddon. By pushing back Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons by several years, a strike against Iran gives the world the opportunity to bring down the regime through non-military means by fomenting an internal revolution of Iranians.

This outcome remains the most likely scenario. And it is because it remains the likeliest consequence of an attack that Barak is keen to get a missile defense system up and running. And it is because this is the likeliest scenario that most analysts have suggested that Israel will have to attack Syrian and Hizbullah missile sites at the same time as Iran's nuclear sites are under attack, But the Israeli strike on Syria also points to other possible scenarios - for better and for worse. In an interview with the *British Spectator*, a senior British governmental said of the Israeli operation: "If people had known how close we came to World War III that day there'd have been mass panic." According to reports in the *Washington Post* and the *Sunday Times*, in the days before the attack IDF commandos collected soil samples which indicated the presence of fissile materials at the site. That together with intelligence regarding the transfer of nuclear materials, perhaps even a nuclear warhead from North Korea some three days before the attack, leads to the conclusion that far from being the start of a long-term undertaking, the site in Syria was advanced and nearly operational. Given the strategic nature of the installation that Israel attacked, perhaps the most astounding aspect of the operation is Syria's decision not to respond.

Syria's non-response may be telling something very optimistic about the consequences of an attack against Iran. It is possible that what we learn from Syria's decision not to respond is that under certain circumstances Iran too may opt not to react to a strike against its nuclear installations.

On the negative side, the Israeli strike on Syria brought a harsh reality into full view. The nature of the target and subsequent reports make clear that the nuclear collaboration between Syria, Iran, North Korea and perhaps other states is close, active, deep and strategic. In an article published in last Saturday's *Wall Street Journal*, the ranking Republican members of the House Intelligence and Foreign Relations committees, Peter Hokstra and Ileana Ros-Lehiten - who both received classified briefings on the Israeli strike - emphasized the threat arising from this close collaboration. Their article complemented a report in *Jane's Defense Weekly* from last month. According to that report, Syrian and Iranian engineers were killed when a North Korean Scud-C missile they were attaching a mustard gas warhead to exploded accidentally. The explosion took place at a Syrian military depot near Aleppo on July 26.

What this is liable to mean is that even if an attack against Iran's nuclear installations inside of Iran were completely successful, there is a possibility that Iran's nuclear capabilities will not be significantly downgraded. What the Syrian operation indicates is that Iran's program may be dispersed in Syria, North Korea, and in Pakistan which transferred nuclear technologies to Iran and North Korea, (as well as Libya and Egypt). In other words, there is now a distinct possibility that Iran is not the only country that will have to be attacked to prevent Iran and its allied rogue states from acquiring nuclear weapons.

And yet, when one looks at Iran, and sees the genocidal fanaticism not merely of Ahmadinejad but of the regime as a whole, one understands that whatever the cost, Israel and all who wish to prevent a massive worldwide conflagration cannot allow Iran to become a nuclear power. Everything must be done everywhere to prevent Teheran from acquiring the wherewithal to foment a new world war and destroy the State of Israel.

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