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U.S. Worries Israel is About to Strike Iran

By IsraelNationalNews.com & YnetNews.com

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta believes there is "a strong likelihood" that Israel will strike Iran in April, May or June, according to the Washington Post's David Ignatius. Israel believes that after this time, Iran will have entered a "zone of immunity" that will enable it to build a nuclear bomb at its leisure, Ignatius wrote. Defense Minister Ehud Barak used the same words Thursday in his speech at the Herzliya Conference.

"Very soon, the Israelis fear, the Iranians will have stored enough enriched uranium in deep underground facilities to make a weapon — and only the United States could then stop them militarily," explained Ignatius. The U.S., however, does not intend to hit Iran until it has intelligence that Iran is actually building a bomb, and "Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu doesn't want to leave the fate of Israel dependent on American action..."

When Barak asked last month to postpone a planned U.S.-Israel military exercise, he may have been signaling that an Israeli attack is imminent, the senior journalist wrote. Barak "apologized that Israel couldn't devote the resources to the annual exercise this spring."

President Obama and Panetta cautioned Israel against an attack, because they believe it would derail "increasingly successful international economic sanctions" against Iran. The White House hasn't yet decided precisely how to react to an Israeli attack on Iran. The U.S. appears to favor staying out of the conflict unless Iran hits American assets, which would trigger a strong U.S. response. But administration officials "caution that Tehran shouldn't misunderstand: The United States has a 60-year commitment to Israeli security, and if Israel's population centers were hit, the United States could feel obligated to come to Israel's defense."

Ignatius quotes an Israeli official who reportedly told the U.S.: "You stay to the side, and let us do it." The pundit mentions a "short-war" scenario that assumes five days or so of limited Israeli strikes, followed by a U.N.-brokered cease-fire. This, too, jibes with comments made yesterday by Israeli Chief of Staff Lt. Col. Benny Gantz. U.S. officials don't think that Netanyahu has made a final decision to attack, says Ignatius, but "senior Americans doubt that the Israelis are bluffing."

The columnist stated that "Israeli leaders are said to accept, and even welcome, the prospect of going it alone and demonstrating their resolve at a time when their security is undermined by the 'Arab Spring.'" The Israeli scenario, according to Ignatius, is a five day limited offensive, followed by a UN-brokered ceasefire. The relatively light damage that is expected to be inflicted on Iranian nuclear facilities will require Israel to stage another offensive a few years down the line.

Ignatius noted that American officials see two possible options to dissuade Israel from attacking: Serious talks with Iran — including full access and supervision over its nuclear program — or increased US covert operations that will undermine the nuclear program to the extent that Israel is convinced an attack is no longer necessary. However, such options might be in vein because Prime Minister Netanyahu has already made a decision to attack in the next six months, Ignatius claimed.

Iran's Destroyed Missiles Could have Reached U.S.

By DEBKAFfile & IsraelNationalNews.com

Iran has completed the development of a nuclear weapon and awaits nothing more than a sign from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to start assembling its first nuclear bomb, said Israeli Military Intelligence Chief Major General Aviv Kochavi on Thursday. Assembling a bomb would take up to a year, Kochavi estimated. With 100 kilograms of uranium enriched to 20% grade and another 4 tons of uranium enriched to 3.5% already in stock, Iran would need another two years to make four nuclear bombs. Therefore, by the end of 2012 or early 2013 Iran may have a single nuclear bomb, but by 2015 the figure would jump to four or five.

The officer was essentially amplifying the words of his predecessor, Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin, who said on Jan. 26 that as long ago as 2007 or 2008, Iran had already passed the point of no return in developing nuclear weapons. Kochavi agreed with him that none of the sanctions imposed thus far had persuaded Iran to slow down, least of all shut down, its drive for a nuclear weapon. His comments coincided with the findings published Thursday by the Enterprise Institute, an American think tank, that Iran would be able to manufacture a 15-kiloton nuclear bomb as soon as August of this year, just seven months from now.

Also Thursday, Deputy Prime Minister Moshe Yaalon disclosed that the big blast at the Iranian missile base near Tehran last November blew up a new missile system with a range of 10,000 kilometers, capable of targeting the United States.

Kochavi gave a chilling presentation as he told listeners that Israel's enemies had 200,000 rockets and missiles pointed at the country, and could reach all parts of Israel — even the ostensibly safe "center" of Tel Aviv and its suburbs.

Most of the missiles have a range of about 40 kilometers — the range of Qassam and most Katyusha rockets — but thousands of missiles have ranges of hundreds of kilometers, making every location in Israel within their reach. Not only that — but the missiles are more lethal now than ever before. "The warheads on these missiles contain hundreds of kilograms of explosives, not dozens, as in the past. And their firing precision and ability to hit specific targets is also greater," Kochavi said. The rockets are largely located in Lebanon and Syria, with a smaller amount in Gaza — and in Iran, as well, which has thousands of missiles that could reach Israel. "Every tenth house in Lebanon is now a weapons depot," Kochavi said.

Iran Mulls Samsung Boycott over Israeli Ad

By YnetNews.com

Iran is mulling a plan to boycott Samsung after the South Korean electronics giant's tablet computer was featured in a humorous Israeli commercial, the Iranian state-owned channel Press TV reported Thursday. (See it at <http://youtu.be/fnBrr5hRpsA> before it is removed.) The offending television ad depicts the cast of a popular Israeli show, Asfur, traveling to the Islamic Republic and destroying a nuclear facility. The commercial promotes a HOT Telecommunications cable deal that grants subscribers Samsung tablets.

According to the report, the chairman of the Iranian parliament's Energy Committee, Arsalan Fat'hipour, said Thursday that Tehran is considering a bill that would impose a complete ban on all Samsung products — a measure that "would make the company regret making the insulting teaser."

The Iranian lawmaker accused Samsung of producing an ad that portrays Iran as a primitive country and implies that Israel is strong enough to obliterate the Islamic Republic's nuclear sites. He further claimed that Samsung made the clip "to curry favor with Israel," and said an apology would not be enough. The company must be held accountable, he said.