

Sharon Prepares To Strike Iran

by Dean Andromidas

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his generals have completed contingency plans for striking Iran's nuclear installations, and developments over the past weeks indicate that the strike date could be fast approaching. The big question is, will it occur before or after the U.S. elections.

The *Sunday Times* of London, a traditional leak sheet for Israeli hardliners, cited Israeli "sources" July 18, to claim that Israel "had completed rehearsals for a strike against Iran." The same sources told the *Sunday Times*: "Israel will on no account permit Iranian reactors—especially the one being built in Bushehr with Russian help—to go critical. . . . If worse comes to worst and international efforts fail, we are very confident we'll be able to demolish the ayatollahs' nuclear aspirations in one go."

In the weeks after the *Sunday Times* article, the Bush Administration began increasing pressure on Iran over its nuclear program; both President George W. Bush and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice have issued warnings to Iran.

The *Sunday Times* piece also cites the report "Project Daniel: The Strategic Future of Israel" to back up its story. This report, which was the subject of an *EIR* article June 18, calls for Israel to adopt a pre-emptive strike policy against any country, especially Iran, before it acquires nuclear weapons. It also calls for Israel to have a second-strike capability that can destroy "between 10 and 20" major Arab and Iranian cities. The *Sunday Times* claimed that the report was "classified," but as *EIR* reported, it was made public by the Ariel Center for Policy Research, which is a neo-conservative think-tank based in the illegal Israeli settlement of Ariel on the West Bank. Israeli experts told *EIR* that the report had semi-official backing, since it was written by three senior Israeli military officers, who had worked with Israel's nuclear weapons program.

On July 21, just three days after the *Sunday Times* article, Israel's Military Intelligence branch, known in Hebrew as Aman, presented its "National Estimate of the Situation" to the Israeli Security Cabinet, headed by Sharon. According to the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*, this report declared "the development of unconventional weapons in the Middle East" to be "the most important existential threat to Israel." "The report focussed on Iran, both as the country most likely to acquire weapons of mass destruction capabilities, and as the biggest backer of terrorism," *Ma'ariv* stated. The newspaper also

noted that the military is "extremely concerned by Iran's ongoing pursuit of nuclear capabilities and launching systems," and that the report warned that Iran could produce a nuclear weapon as early as 2007.

Further, the report claimed that Iran's ally, Syria, is developing chemical and biological weapons that could fall into the hands of the Hezbollah militant organization in Lebanon, which Israel claims is being sponsored and supplied with weapons by Iran.

Israeli Shin Bet General Security Service director Avi Dichter briefed the Knesset (Parliament) on July 21 and claimed absurdly that "the Iranians are certainly aiming to create a Trojan Horse among Israeli Arabs," and that Iran is the main backer of the Palestinian groups Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Tanzim. He then made the outrageous allegation that Hamas was a "front for Iran" and that the Islamic Jihad is an "entirely Iranian organization."

A Hawk's Window of Opportunity?

The Saturday edition of the London *Times* July 17, the day before its article on Israel's strike plans, also ran an article quoting "hawkish"—that is, neo-con—sources in the Bush Administration who "hinted" at a possible military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, saying that there was a "window of opportunity for destroying Iran's Bushehr reactor." The article claimed that the United States would stand aside if Israel launched a strike against Iran.

Although the neo-cons in the Bush Administration would like nothing better than to attack Iran, no decision has been made, primarily because of the ongoing disastrous situation in Iraq. Nonetheless, Israel has made its position clear to the United States. On July 10, Israeli military commentator Ze'ev Schiff revealed in the daily *Ha'aretz* that a high-level delegation from the Bush Administration was in Israel to discuss Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. The details of these discussions were not revealed.

Israel's position was also made clear to the director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohammed ElBaradei, when he visited Israel in the first week of July on the invitation of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission. Sharon was among the Israeli officials whom ElBaradei met. According to Schiff, the visit was arranged under the cover of focusing on "technical and medical issues," but its real purpose was to express "Israel's strategic concerns to El Baradei. . . . A conversation with him makes it clear that he understood these concerns—first and foremost Iran, but also Pakistan, which turned out to be a leading proliferator of nuclear information."

On Aug. 8, Israel announced that it was distributing Lugol radiation antidote capsules to people, including soldiers, who live and work in the triangle formed by Dimona, Arad, and Eilat on the Red Sea. The Nuclear Center in Dimona, with its reactor, is Israel's primary production center for weapons-grade uranium. The Israeli government as-



Iran's Natanz gas centrifuge uranium enrichment plant is a prime target for an Israeli strike, according to Israeli military sources.

serts that the distribution of Lugol was to stem growing fears of an accidental leak of radiation from the aging reactor, built at the end of the 1950s, which has never undergone any international inspections. Whether or not such fears are well-founded, the move has fueled speculation among Israel's Arab neighbors, as well as Iran, that Israel is preparing for retaliatory strikes by Iran, in the event that Israel launches an attack on Iran's nuclear sites.

Can Israel Strike Iran?

Over the past decade, Israel's strategic doctrine has centered on building up its "deep strike" capabilities against targets in Iran, Pakistan, and North Africa, including Egypt, Libya, and Algeria. It is in the process of completing receipt of 24 F-15Is. With a combat radius of 4,500 kilometers, these fighter-bombers are capable of hitting any of Iran's nuclear facilities, without refueling. Israel has also begun receiving the first shipments of more than 100 F-16I fighter-bombers, which have been especially redesigned for deep-strike missions. And within the last decade, Israel has launched a network of satellites capable of directing sophisticated guided-weapon systems to target all of Iran's nuclear facilities.

The Bushehr nuclear reactor project, located on the coast of the Persian Gulf, is just one of Iran's potential nuclear targets. Others include a facility at Natanz, where it is alleged that uranium is being enriched, and one at Arak, where it is claimed that heavy water is being produced. These targets are even more accessible to Israeli attack than Bushehr. According to a recent report by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker*

magazine, Israeli agents are using the Kurdish region in Iraq to gather intelligence on, and use as a base for possible commando attacks on the facilities in Natanz, which is just 200 kilometers from the Iraqi border.

This was confirmed by an Israeli military source, who told *EIR* that Israel no longer considers Bushehr as essential to Iran's nuclear weapons program, because it is now believed that Iran has decided to take a different route to enriching uranium. Israel would be more concerned with other facilities, like those at Natanz and Arak, he said. Although the source noted that the Israeli Air Force, "like any other air force," has its contingency plans, including plans for these targets, he did not think a decision to strike has been made.

Another Israeli military source said it would be mad to launch such attacks because they would not successfully end the Iranian program. "It would not be worth paying the diplomatic and political price" such an attack would entail. On the other hand, this source did not dismiss the idea that Israel, under an Ariel Sharon, would launch attacks.

For Sharon and his generals, attacking Iran has less to do with knocking out Iran's alleged nuclear program than with Sharon's broader and longer term goals: to engineer a regional war that would overthrow the Syrian regime of President Bashar Assad, an ally of Iran, and to continue his attacks on the Palestinians.

While threatening Iran with a military strike, Sharon's generals have been conducting an intelligence war with the Hezbollah, the militant organization based in southern Lebanon. According to a report in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, the Mossad is planning the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. Hezbollah, which represents the Shiite Muslims in Lebanon, has strong ties with Iran as well as with Syria, and the assassination of Nasrallah could ignite a regional conflagration. A massive retaliation by Hezbollah against Israel along its northern border would then provide Israel with a pretext to attack both Syria and Iran. Israel already bombed alleged "terrorist training camps" in Syria last year.

The Mossad was accused of assassinating Ghaleb Awali, a senior Hezbollah operative whose car blew up on July 19 when he turned on the ignition. This was followed by Hezbollah's shooting of two Israeli soldiers along the Lebanese-Israeli border in retaliation. *Ha'aretz* noted: "The intelligence war between Israel and Hezbollah had not really started this month. Last August, a car bomb attack killed Ali Hussein Salah, a Hezbollah man who served as a driver in Iran's embassy in Lebanon. Salah, it appears, was not the target of the strike—a senior Hezbollah figure was supposed to be in the car."

Making clear who that "senior" figure was, *Ha'aretz* added, "A few months ago, Lebanese security forces reported that they detained a group of Palestinians suspected of carrying out intelligence work for Israel, with the aim of assassinating Nasrallah."