

Israeli strike against Iran seems imminent on eve of White House visit

By **Rocio Gonzalez** / VOXXI News Friday, March 2, 2012.

As next week's White House visit from Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** approaches, speculation is growing regarding the likelihood of an Israeli attack against Iran and its nuclear development program.

For months, **Iran's program** — which is not sanctioned by the United Nations — has drawn increased concern. Meanwhile, tensions between Israel and Iran keep growing.

Over the last two years, there have been **four assassination attempts** against Iranian nuclear scientists. Three of those attempts were successful, and Iranian officials blame both Israel and the United States, who have denied any involvement. Most recently, there were the **Feb.13 bombings of Israeli embassy staff** in India and Georgia, which Netanyahu blamed on Iran and Hezbollah.

U.S. National Security Adviser Tom Donilon spent three days in Israel last month, meeting with several Israeli officials, including Netanyahu, and addressing security concerns. Experts say **aggressive action from Israel** is more likely now than ever, and there is much to be concerned about if Israel decides to attack.

"I think the danger of a strike by Israel, which by definition will not be as wide-ranging or complete or be able to hit as many things as a possible **U.S. strike**, is that it gives Iran an excuse to pull from the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**, which is the reason why there are inspectors in the first place," said Peter Juul, a policy analyst from the **Center for American Progress**.

"It forces them to work underground if they are working on a weapon — and there are good reasons to suspect that they are, given the way they have answered to questions — and it will let them present themselves as provoked," Juul added.

The White House has said that the administration has an "**unshakable**" commitment to Israel's security and insists that the cooperation between the United States and Israel has never been better. However, it will not comment on whether Israel or the United States have decided to strike against Iran or what would happen if an attack takes place.

Nevertheless, White House Press Secretary **Jay Carney** took an opportunity during Thursday's press briefing to reiterate the government's policy when it comes to Iran and nuclear development.

"Our policy is to do everything we can to prevent Iran from acquiring a **nuclear weapon**," Carney said. "And obviously, its pursuit of nuclear technology in a way that flouts its international obligations and thwarts the efforts of the international community to divine Iran's true intentions is a huge concern for the President and for a broad coalition of nations around the world..."

According to Juul, an Israeli strike against Iran seems more likely now due to [Iran's claims of progress](#) and the sense among Israelis that sanctions are not working. However, it is difficult to determine exactly when any action would take place.

Dr. Boaz Atzili, a professor of Arab-Israeli relations at American University, agreed that it is very likely to see an **attack soon**.

"Although it's a guess, Iran seems to be in the process of moving its facilities which will enable it to create nuclear weapons, to facilitate it, so it will be much harder to hit and much easier to defend," he said.

There are many factors affecting Israel's next move including the U.S. political climate. With the country focused on the presidential election, Atzili said it may be an opportune time for Israel to strike.

"Politically, this would be the best time to do so, when Obama is, in a sense, more vulnerable," Atzili said. "Of course, if a **Republican candidate** is elected, it might be even easier for Israel to attack."

Meanwhile, Justin Logan, director of foreign policy studies at the [Cato Institute](#), said he thinks it is not in the interest of the United States for either Israel or the United States to bomb Iran, but he doesn't think that the United States could influence Israel's decision-making.

"Obama will be very reluctant to start a big political fight with Netanyahu," Logan said. "A big public fight with Netanyahu could definitely affect **Obama's fundraising efforts** and the narrative surrounding the foreign policy discussion in the campaign. I think Obama knows this and, accordingly, will try to walk a very fine line trying to placate Netanyahu while simultaneously making the case that a war would be a bad idea."

Another part of the political calculus must include **Iran's internal political climate**. There is increasing evidence the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is in disfavor with that country's spiritual head, Supreme Leader **Ayatullah Ali Khamenei**.

A strike by Israel against Iran could help galvanize **Iranian public opinion** and strengthen Ahmadinejad's grip on power.

An attack on **Iran's nuclear program** may set that country's program back by as much as three years, Atzili said.

"My own perspective is that (an attack) would not be worth it," he said. "Because, yes, it might only set back the program two or three years, it will in all likelihood, provoke Iranian response and we don't know how strong this response could be [...] and even though I think in the end Israel has the **capacity to win this kind of war**, it will have to pay a significant price, and I don't think this price is worth it for the relatively minimal time that it will set the Iranian program back." So far, consensus seems to be that an **Israeli strike** would work towards the Iranian government redoubling efforts, not to deter it from pursuing a nuclear weapon.

"That is the problem of a strike," Juul said. "It doesn't actually resolve the problem you want it to resolve. It makes it much more difficult to solve."