

Israeli press reports US pledge of war on Iran—is Bush preparing an October Surprise?

By Bill Van Auken
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An Israeli press report that US President George W. Bush intends to launch a military attack on Iran before he leaves office at the beginning of next year prompted a heated denial from the White House Tuesday.

The article, which appeared in Tuesday's *Jerusalem Post*, cited a report on Israeli Army Radio, quoting Israeli officials who had met with Bush and his delegation during their visit to Israel last week.

"A senior member of the president's entourage said during a closed meeting that Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney were of the opinion that military action was called for," the article quoted an Israel official as saying.

The report cited the US official as stating that "the hesitancy of Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice" had delayed a decision on military action against Iran.

The recent crisis in Lebanon and the evident ease with which the Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement seized control of Beirut, according to the report, had placed a US attack on the Islamic Republic back on the front burner.

Bush expressed the opinion that "the disease must be treated, not the symptoms," according to the Israeli officials.

The White House denial—issued within hours of the story appearing on the *Jerusalem Post's* web site—was notably harsh in its tone. "An article in today's *Jerusalem Post* about the president's position on Iran that quotes unnamed sources—quoting unnamed sources—is not worth the paper it's written on," read the statement.

Later on Tuesday, however, Bush's spokesperson Dana Perino was pressed by several reporters, who expressed skepticism in regard to the denial. "Do the President and the Vice President feel that an attack is called for—whether someone said that in Israel, or not?" asked one.

Dana Perino refused to answer, reiterating the official position that Washington is working to resolve its

confrontation with Iran "diplomatically" but that it would not take any "options off the table."

In reality, the *Jerusalem Post* story is hardly the only indication that the Bush administration is preparing for a military attack on Iran.

Ample physical evidence exists in the stepped up US military deployments in the region, with the Navy once again having two aircraft carrier battle groups—the USS Lincoln and the USS Harry S. Truman—within striking distance of Iran.

Meanwhile, the flagship of the 6th Fleet, the USS Mount Whitney, has been deployed off the coast of Lebanon, in what the Navy has described as an "unscheduled mission." The ship is the Navy's most advanced command, control and intelligence vessel, capable of coordinating a major attack over a wide region. It joined the USS Cole, a missile destroyer, already there.

In Washington, Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, appeared before a Senate committee Tuesday to reiterate the Pentagon's unsubstantiated charges that Iran is responsible for violence in Iraq. The lack of a US military response thus far, he stressed, "does not signal lack of resolve or capability to defend ourselves against threats."

In his speech before the Israeli Knesset last week, Bush placed Iran at the center of his pledge of unconditional support for Israel. "America stands with you in firmly opposing Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions," he said. "Permitting the world's leading sponsor of terror to possess the world's deadliest weapons would be an unforgivable betrayal of future generations. For the sake of peace, the world must not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon."

After Bush's visit, a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told the press that Olmert and Bush had agreed on the need for "tangible action" to thwart Iran's supposed drive to develop a nuclear weapon.

“We are on the same page. We both see the threat... And we both understand that tangible action is required to prevent the Iranians from moving forward on a nuclear weapon,” Olmert spokesman Mark Regev told the Israeli daily *Ha’aretz*.

Referring to diplomatic efforts to exert pressure on Iran, Regev added, “It is clearly not sufficient, and it’s clear that additional steps will have to be taken.”

Even as the US and Israel stepped up the drumbeat about an alleged Iranian nuclear threat, Mohammad El-Baradei, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) spoke before a World Economic Forum session in Egypt Monday, declaring that the UN nuclear watchdog agency has no evidence that Iran is building a bomb.

Well before the story appeared in the *Jerusalem Post*, *Ha’aretz* reported that “Iran’s nuclear program has held center stage” in the talks between Bush and Olmert. Israeli officials, the paper reported, presented Bush with intelligence data that supposedly contradicted the National Intelligence Estimate produced by US spy agencies last year, which concluded that Iran had halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003.

“Will this be enough to alter the position of the administration on the possibility of a US strike of the nuclear installations in Iran? It is not clear,” the paper reported. It added, however, that the Israeli government is insisting that Iran is approaching the “point of no return,” and immediate action is required.

As for Bush, it commented, the closer he “comes to the end of his tenure, he is certainly thinking about the legacy of his presidency, beyond the contentious war in Iraq.”

The suggestion being made is that one way to change the subject from the disastrous legacy embodied in the continuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is the launching of yet another act of military aggression, one which would undoubtedly throw the entire region into chaos.

One clue to the political thinking within the top echelons of the Bush administration came in the form of an audiotape. The tape was part of the material the Pentagon turned over recently to the *New York Times* in response to a Freedom of Information Act request for its article exposing the Defense Department’s relationship to a group of retired officers who regularly appeared on television news, promoting the administration’s line on Iraq.

The tape was of a December 2006 luncheon meeting between then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and a group of these “military analysts”—referred to by the

Pentagon itself as “message force multipliers.”

The mood at the meeting was clearly one of dismay and even anger over the results of the 2006 midterm election, in which a wave of popular antiwar sentiment delivered control of both houses of Congress to the Democrats.

Retired Marine Lt. Gen. Michael DeLong is heard noting to Rumsfeld that with the new political configuration on Capitol Hill, “you’re not going to have a lot of sympathetic ears up there until it [a terrorist attack] happens.”

Rumsfeld agreed, responding: “We haven’t had an attack in five years. The perception of the threat is so low in this society that it’s not surprising that the behavior pattern reflects a low threat assessment ... *The correction for that, I suppose, is an attack.* And when that happens, then everyone gets energized for another [inaudible] and it’s a shame we don’t have the maturity to recognize the seriousness of the threats...the lethality, the carnage, that can be imposed on our society is so real and so present and so serious that you’d think we’d be able to understand it...”

The “correction” for the failure of the American people to support the war in Iraq and the global eruption of American militarism under the mantle of the “war on terrorism” is, in Rumsfeld’s view, another “attack,” along the lines of September 11, 2001. Clearly, the conception is that another round of “lethality” and “carnage” would serve to stun the public and create conditions for the administration to impose its political will by extraordinary means.

Certainly, one means of making such an attack all the more likely would be the launching of a military strike against Iran.

The reports from Israel and the military buildup in the region raise an obvious question: With the approach of the 2008 elections, are elements within the Bush administration preparing an “October Surprise” in the form of an unprovoked attack on Iran?

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