

Cables expose US-Israeli war talks

By Bill Van Auken
5 January 2011

US diplomatic cables quoted by the Norwegian daily newspaper *Aftenposten* expose discussions between US legislators and Israeli officials on preparations for the next Middle East war.

These documents make clear both Israel's preparations for another major war in the region and the full support of visiting members of the US Congress, Democratic and Republican, who apparently subordinated themselves to the secrecy demands of the Israeli state.

Aftenposten, Norway's largest newspaper, reported last month that it has all 250,000 secret US diplomatic cables that were obtained by WikiLeaks and has begun publishing articles based on these documents, while not reproducing the cables themselves.

One of the cables from the US Embassy in Tel Aviv to the State Department in Washington recounts a meeting between the visiting American congressional delegation headed by former Democratic Representative Ike Skelton (the head of the House Armed Services Committee, who was defeated for re-election last November) and Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, the Israeli chief of staff, which took place on November 15, 2009. Another details a briefing given by Israeli generals to another delegation led by US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (Democrat, New York) on September 2 and 3 of the same year.

The cables, the Norwegian paper reported, send a "clear message" that "The Israeli military preparations for a new war in the Middle East are in full swing."

General Ashkenazi is quoted in the November 2009 cable as saying that the Israeli military is preparing to wage the next war "in the same areas where the previous wars took place, namely in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip."

He told the visiting members of the US Congress: "I'm preparing the Israeli army for a major war since it is easier to scale down to a smaller operation than to do

the opposite."

Ashkenazi gave the US legislators an inflated estimate of the alleged threat to Israel posed by Iran, the Lebanese Hezbollah movement and the Hamas movement, which governs the Gaza Strip. The claims fit Israel's unwavering practice of portraying every one of its wars of aggression as an unavoidable act of self defense.

He claimed that Iranian ballistic missiles together with rockets stockpiled by Hezbollah and Hamas pose a threat to 1 million Israelis, including the residents of Tel Aviv.

Hezbollah, the general asserted, has a stockpile of 40,000 rockets. Curiously, the briefing given by the Israeli military to Senator Gillibrand little more than two months earlier placed the number at 20,000, including anti-tank rockets and other weapons that would be of use only in defending Lebanese territory from Israeli attack.

The Israeli chief of staff confided to the US delegation that the Israeli military is continuously flying unmanned drone aircraft over Lebanon, in open contempt for the country's sovereignty, to identify targets for attack. He also expressed his gratitude to the US National Security Agency (NSA) for its aid in spying on Israel's enemies.

The cable also quotes Ashkenazi as telling the US representatives that in the next war Israel cannot accept any restrictions on conducting warfare in urban areas. He apparently was warning that its conduct would be even more savage than in the waging of Operation Cast Lead, the three-week Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2008-2009. That operation claimed the lives of over 1,400 Palestinians, including more than 900 civilians, more than half of them women and children. Ashkenazi assured the congress members that, while "mistakes" may have been made, the Israeli military never intentionally targeted civilians.

A similar claim was made in the briefing given in September 2009 to the delegation led by Senator Gillibrand. Israeli General Yoav Galant told the American politicians that the Israeli army had acted with “great restraint” and “limited power,” claims that were apparently accepted without question by Gillibrand and her colleagues.

The Israeli officer claimed that despite the massive destruction inflicted by the Israeli offensive, Hamas had managed to obtain as many weapons as it had before the invasion, meaning that the next Israeli war would be “more difficult” than the last.

A separate secret cable posted by WikiLeaks last November recounts the proceedings of a November 2009 meeting of the Joint Political Military Group (JPMG), a US-Israeli body that coordinates military policy between the two governments. The main topic of discussion was Iran’s nuclear program, with Israeli military officials warning that time was running out in the run-up to a military strike against Iranian facilities.

“The GOI [Government of Israel] described 2010 as a critical year—if the Iranians continue to protect and harden their nuclear sites, it will be more difficult to target and damage them,” the document states. “Both sides then discussed the upcoming delivery of GBU-28 bunker-busting bombs to Israel, noting that the transfer should be handled quietly to avoid any allegations that the USG is helping Israel prepare for a strike against Iran.”

The GBU-28 is a 5,000-pound laser-guided bomb developed by the US military in preparation for the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq. It was designed to penetrate below ground and through reinforced concrete to destroy Iraqi command and control centers. *Aftenposten* reports that Israel has obtained 100 of the powerful bombs from the US for use against Iran.

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