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## US monitoring Israel's Iran options

By **NATHAN GUTTMAN**  
Washington

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The Pentagon is looking into the possibility of Israel launching a strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. In the past months there were several working-level discussions trying to map out the possible scenarios for such an attack, according to administration sources who were briefed on these meetings.

The discussions, which were describes as intelligence-oriented and not policy-oriented, examined the likelihood of an Israeli pre-emptive attack against Iran and the method in which such an attack could be carried out. One of the main questions presented in these discussions was whether Israel would inform the US in advance in case such an attack is to take place and when would such an advance notice be given.



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The sources pointed out that it is clear that Israel would have to coordinate with the US forces air control any attempt to fly over Iraq on the way to Iran, if Israel chooses to attack using the shortest route.

Last week, former Israeli Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon said in Washington that the West does have a military option against Iran and that a joint US-NATO-Israeli air strike against dozens of nuclear facilities in Iran could set back Teheran's nuclear programs for several years.

The sources stresses that Ya'alon's remarks were not the trigger for the Pentagon consultations about a possible Israeli attack but added that there is a sense in the administration that the Iranian issue is gaining urgency.

*The Washington Post* reported Monday that the Bush administration has made Iran a top priority issue and that the president and his team had several meetings on the issue to discuss Iran's nuclear plans.

The Pentagon discussions, according to the sources, did not lead to any conclusion regarding the plausibility of an Israeli attack against Iran, nor did it recommend any action by the US.

Israeli and US sources have said in the past weeks that the US did not convey any message to Israel in which it asked to refrain from an attack and has not raised the issue in bilateral discussions with the Israelis. Both countries share intelligence on the situation in Iran and the advance of the nuclear program, but do not discuss - according to sources who took part in bilateral talks - the possibility of using military force to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The American assumption, according to the administration sources, is that an Israeli decision on attacking Iran is not imminent and that in any case it would not be taken before the Israeli elections, scheduled for March 28.

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One of the questions Pentagon analysts are grappling with is how an Israeli attack - if launched - would affect the US and its forces in the region and whether it would force the US to follow with further strikes in order to complete the mission. The US is also discussing what could be the possible avenues of retaliation Iran would take against US's forces and interests in the region.

US Vice President Dick Cheney said last week that all options are "on the table" regarding Iran and on Sunday leading senators pointed out in TV interviews that the US can stop Iran's nuclear program. Senator George Allen (R-VA) said, relating to the question of using military force against Iran, that it is not the preferable route, but "if necessary, it is an option", and Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE) stressed that he believed that Iran's nuclear program can be stopped "short of war".

The UN Security Council is expected to take on the Iranian issue this week. During the weekend consultations continued between the US and European representatives and those from Russia and China in attempt to reach an agreement on the language of a Security Council presidential declaration regarding Iran.

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The Americans would like to include a clause that would give Iran a 14 day ultimatum to accept the international community's conditions, before moving ahead with sanctions. Western diplomats said Monday that it is not clear if Russia and China would agree to such an ultimatum and speculated that they might insist on a month's period instead of the proposed 14 days.

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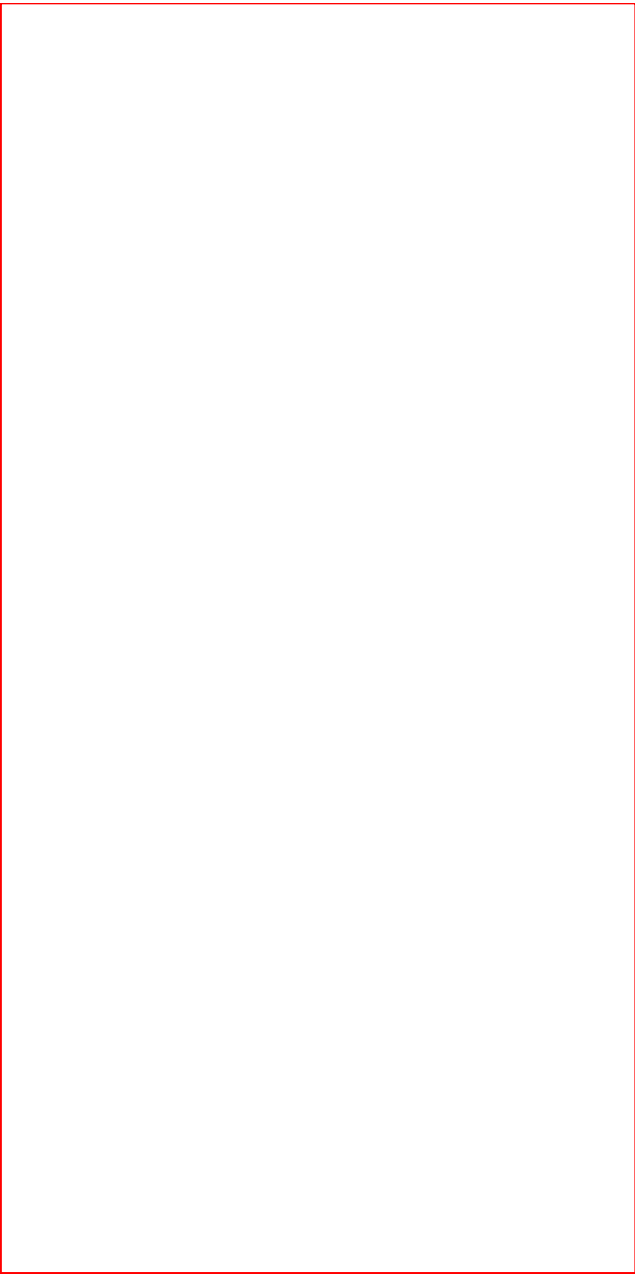
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