

Joel C. Rosenberg: Report Shows Iran Nearing Nuclear Red Line

Is Israel gearing up for a pre-emptive strike against Iran's nuclear sites? Is a countdown running towards war in the epicenter? Would Israel move against Tehran even in the face of intense pressure by the Obama administration not to take action? Would Israel move in the face of potentially lethal blowback by Iran's allies, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and most worrisome the Assad regime in Damascus, which has stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons?

I realize this sounds a lot like my forthcoming novel, ***Damascus Countdown***. But in this case, I'm actually talking about Thursday's lead story in Israel.

"Iran has begun installing advanced centrifuges at its main uranium enrichment plant, a UN nuclear report said on Thursday," **according to Reuters and the Jerusalem Post**. "In response, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said that Iran is closer today than ever before to obtaining the necessary enriched uranium for a nuclear bomb. The White House said that the window remains open for diplomacy with Iran but will not stay open indefinitely."

This is particularly troublesome in the light of the fact North Korea recently conducted another nuclear warhead test. Guess who was present at the test? The head of Iran's nuclear program.

Did Pyongyang just help Iran test an A-bomb? **As I've written on my blog**, there is growing evidence that Iran and North Korea are working hand in glove in developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Netanyahu warns that the North Korea nuclear bomb test proves that economic sanctions are not

enough to stop Iran.

In recent weeks, most of the news in Israel has concerned Prime Minister Netanyahu's efforts to cobble together a new government. He's having serious problems. It is possible that Israel will have to hold new elections. It's also possible that someone else could emerge as Israel's leader other than Netanyahu.

A new poll suggests Yair Lapid and his party would win 30 seats in new elections, up from their current 20; and that Netanyahu's Likud-Beitenu party would drop from 31 seats to 22.] But Netanyahu and his team are working around the clock to make sure they do stay in power and build a functioning, stable government before President Obama's expected visit in March.

There has been plenty of other domestic news to keep Israelis busy, too, including a controversial suicide involving a possible Mossad operative. But today the story of Iran approaching the nuclear "red line" was the major story Thursday afternoon on various Israeli news sites, including **Haaretz**, **Ynet News**, and the **Times of Israel**.

Here are more excerpts from the **Reuters/Post article**:

- Netanyahu termed the report "very grave," and said it proved that Iran is moving swiftly toward the red line he set out at the UN in September. He said during that address that Iran must be stopped before it crosses that line, something he said at the time could happen as early as the spring.
- The Prime Minister's Office said that preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons will be the first issue on the agenda when US President Barack Obama comes to visit in less than a month's time.
- In a confidential report, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said 180 so-called IR-2m

centrifuges and empty centrifuge casings had been hooked up at the plant near the central town of Natanz.

- If operated successfully, such machines could enable Iran to significantly speed up its accumulation of material that the West fears could be used to devise a nuclear weapon. Iran says it is refining uranium only for peaceful energy purposes.
- The report also said Iran had increased to 167 kg (367 pounds) its stockpile of uranium refined to a fissile purity of 20 percent – a level it says it needs for conversion into reactor fuel. About 240-250 kg of 20 percent enriched uranium is needed for one atomic bomb if refined to a high degree.

The questions, of course, are these:

1. What will President Obama do to neutralize the Iranian nuclear threat before it is too late?
2. What will Prime Minister Netanyahu do if the U.S. does not take decisive action soon?
3. How will Iran and her allies retaliate if an Israeli first strike occurs?
4. Is it possible that Netanyahu will be unable to put a government together by mid-March, and if he can't, will Israel have to go to elections again, or will someone else become Prime Minister?
5. How would a different Prime Minister handle the Iran threat?

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