



As Tensions Mount With Iran, Israel Announces Missile Test

As the debate rages over whether or not Iran is actively working toward dangerous nuclear capabilities, and how far it might be from actually creating a bomb, one thing remains clear: Israel considers Iran's nuclear enrichment program a serious personal threat and continues to rattle its saber in warning of an eventual strike against its antagonistic neighbor.



On March 1 Israel announced that it plans to test out its [Arrow 3](#) anti-ballistic missile system designed to intercept incoming missiles from such enemies as Iran and Syria, its other neighboring enemy. The UK's [Guardian](#) newspaper reported that the "unusual advance notification of the test follows an unannounced test in November of a long-range ballistic missile which intensified speculation that Israel was preparing for a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities."

The [New York Times](#) said that Israel's departure from its typical top-secret approach to testing "is meant, at least in part, to avoid misunderstandings by other countries in the region and by Israelis themselves in the current highly charged atmosphere surrounding Iran's nuclear program. Israel has repeatedly stated that it will not allow Iran to reach nuclear weapons capacity and that it retains the option of a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities as a last resort." The Arrow 3 system would provide crucial protection against a retaliatory missile strike from Iran should Israel launch a promised attack against Iran's program of uranium enrichment, which it argues is a precursor to Iran's eventual production of a nuclear device.

The announcement came as Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (pictured above) was heading to the United States for meetings with President Obama, during which he is expected to press for a military commitment from the United States against Iran should the "diplomacy and sanctions" strategy the President has said he prefers ultimately fail. While Iran insists that its nuclear program is for domestic purposes only, and [U.S. intelligence has apparently confirmed](#) that the country is not presently working on the production of a nuclear weapon, Israel is taking Iran's nuclear enrichment efforts as proof of destructive intent.

The [Guardian](#) reported that Netanyahu is expected to press the United States "to be more explicit about threatening military action when he meets Obama in Washington on [March 5]. Some analysts believe that Israel has deliberately talked up its threats of airstrikes on Iranian nuclear sites in order to push the U.S. administration into raising its game...."



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 2, 2012

That appeared to be the tactic of Israeli President Shimon Peres when he told the *New York Times*: “We need a total and clear commitment that the catastrophe of Iran will not create an impossible situation.... You have to be decisive. You have to make a choice.”

That rhetoric was followed up in Israel’s media, with Ari Shavit, a columnist for the nation’s daily [Haaretz](#) newspaper, writing: “If the U.S. president wants to prevent a disaster, he must give Netanyahu iron-clad guarantees that the United States will stop Iran in any way necessary and at any price, after the 2012 elections. If Obama doesn’t do this, he will obligate Netanyahu to act before the 2012 elections.”

And writing in the *New York Times*, Amos Yadlin, former chief of Israeli military intelligence, worked off the same template, complaining: “It doesn’t help when American officials warn Israel against acting without clarifying what America intends to do once its own red lines are crossed.... What is needed is an ironclad American assurance that if Israel refrains from acting in its own window of opportunity — and all other options have failed to halt Tehran’s nuclear quest — Washington will act to prevent a nuclear Iran while it is still within its power to do so.”

Yadlin cited America’s superior firepower as reason for Israel’s need of its partnership against Iran. “America could carry out an extensive air campaign using stealth technology and huge amounts of ammunition,” he wrote, “dropping enormous payloads that are capable of hitting targets and penetrating to depths far beyond what Israel’s arsenal can achieve.”

In response, the White House offered its own round of no-nonsense rhetoric, with President Obama telling the *Atlantic* magazine that while he is pursuing sanctions and diplomatic measures with regard to Iran, a “a military component” is also an option. “I think that the Israeli government recognizes that, as president of the United States, I don’t bluff,” Obama told the *Atlantic*’s Jeffrey Goldberg in an interview published March 2. “I also don’t, as a matter of sound policy, go around advertising exactly what our intentions are. But I think both the Iranian and the Israeli governments recognize that when the United States says it is unacceptable for Iran to have a nuclear weapon, we mean what we say.”

The fact that no evidence has been found to indicate Iran is anywhere close to nuclear capability didn’t deter the President from raising that specter as motivation for the nation’s next military adventure. “You’re talking about the most volatile region in the world,” he told Goldberg. “It will not be tolerable to a number of states in that region for Iran to have a nuclear weapon and them not to have a nuclear weapon.... The dangers of an Iran getting nuclear weapons that then leads to a free-for-all in the Middle East is something that I think would be very dangerous for the world.”

Air Force Chief of Staff Norton Schwartz added to the President’s swaggering rhetoric, with the *Guardian* quoting him as boasting that the U.S. military was standing by with the firepower to strike Iranian nuclear sites if need arose. “What we can do, you wouldn’t want to be in the area,” Schwartz was quoted as telling reporters in Washington.

Even as Obama and Netanyahu prepared to meet March 5, Israel indicated that should it decide to launch an attack against Iran, it would not necessarily alert the United States in advance. As reported by the [Associated Press](#), in top-level conversations with U.S. officials, “Israeli officials said that if they eventually decide a strike is necessary, they would keep the Americans in the dark to decrease the likelihood that the United States would be held responsible for failing to stop Israel’s potential attack, said one U.S. intelligence official familiar with the discussions.”

The AP reported that, according to the U.S. official making the claim, “Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin



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Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak delivered the message to a series of high-level U.S. visitors to the country, including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the White House national security adviser, the director of national intelligence, and top U.S. lawmakers, all trying to close the trust gap between Israel and the U.S. over how to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions."

According to the AP, in addition to protecting the United States, Israel's decision to keep America in the dark "stems from Israel's frustration with the White House. After a visit by National Security Adviser Tom Donilon, the Israelis became convinced the Americans would neither take military action, nor go along with unilateral action by Israel against Iran. The Israelis concluded that if there were any strike they would have to conduct it unilaterally."

U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Mich.), chairman of the House intelligence committee and part of the U.S. delegation that met with Netanyahu and Barak, told CNN that he got the sense "that Israel is incredibly serious about a strike on [Iran's] nuclear weapons program.... They believe they're going to have to make a decision on their own, given the current posture of the United States."

But U.S. Rep. Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told [Fox News](#) that she thought the notion Israel would attack Iran without consulting with the United States is "hogwash.... A lot of communication is taking place. Israel is our steadfast ally."

She also said that for better or worse, should Israel pull the trigger on her neighbor, the United States would back up its ally. "Like it or not, if Israel takes this action, the United States will help and we'll help Israel," she speculated. "If the worst takes place, the scenario would be Israel taking unilateral action against Iran. If that happens, we've got to protect Israel...."



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