

Israel to brief George Bush on options for Iran strike

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ISRAELI security officials are to brief President George W Bush on their latest intelligence about Iran's nuclear programme - and how it could be destroyed - when he begins a tour of the Middle East in Jerusalem this week.

Ehud Barak, the defence minister, is said to want to convince him that an Israeli military strike against uranium enrichment facilities in Iran would be feasible if diplomatic efforts failed to halt nuclear operations. A range of military options has been prepared.

Last month it was revealed that the US National Intelligence Estimate report, drawing together information from 16 agencies, had concluded that Iran stopped a secret nuclear weapon programme in 2003.

Israeli intelligence is understood to agree that the project was halted around the time of America's invasion of Iraq, but has "rock solid" information that it has since started up again.

While security officials are reluctant to reveal all their intelligence, fearing that leaks could jeopardise the element of surprise in any future attack, they are expected to present the president with fresh details of Iran's enrichment of uranium - which could be used for civil or military purposes - and the development of missiles that could carry nuclear warheads.

In an interview with the Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharonot this weekend, Bush argued that in spite of the US intelligence assessment, Iran still posed a threat.

"I read the intelligence report carefully," Bush said. "In essence, what the report said was that Iran had a secret plan to develop nuclear weapons.

"I'm saying that a state which adopted a nontransparent policy and had a secret plan for developing nuclear weapons could easily develop an alternative plan for the same purpose. So to conclude from the intelligence report that there is no Iranian plan to develop nuclear weapons will be only a partial truth."

Israeli security officials believe the only way to prevent uranium enrichment to military grade is to destroy Iranian installations. Many Israelis are eager to know whether America would give their country the green light to attack, as it did last September when Israel struck a mysterious nuclear site in Syria.

Bush refused to be drawn when asked whether he would support an Israeli attack. "My message to all countries in the region is that we are able to solve the problem in a diplomatic way," he said, "but all options are on the table."

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article3137521.ece