

## Exclusive: Israel places Lebanese, Syrian, Gaza borders, its cities & highways on high terror alert

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The annual intelligence report submitted to the Israeli government Sunday, March 9, predicted grave dangers to Israeli security in the coming year. However, even in the short term, DEBKAfile's military and Middle East sources report the Israeli army, police and security forces are on guard for stormy events in the second half of March.

1. To bring reluctant Arab rulers to the Damascus Arab League summit on the 29th, Syria has quietly slipped the word that the contentious Lebanese issue will be left off the agenda. Deliberations would be confined to the Gaza crisis. The Saudis were therefore persuaded to accept the Syrian invitation on March 9 after several refusals.

Israeli intelligence has warned that in the interim Hamas and Jihad Islami would make every effort to ignite the Gaza front in order to unite the Arab rulers behind a dramatic Arab resolution in support of the Palestinian Islamists. This tactic would transfer the Gaza issue's center of gravity from Cairo, which is brokering a Hamas-Israel cease-fire deal, to radical Damascus.

Egged on by Syria and Iran, Hamas keeps on stalling this track and raising its demands. Amos Gilead, security adviser in Israel's defense ministry, who traveled to Cairo Sunday to try and break the deadlock, came back empty-handed. He said the coming summit was the key to progress and warned that the current slowdown in Palestinian rocket and missile attacks from Gaza in the last two days was extremely fragile. Hamas was poised to generate a flare-up at any time that it suited the book of Syria and Iran. Nevertheless, Israel has scaled down its anti-rocket operations in the Gaza Strip.

2. Most of all, the coming Arab League summit will for the first time host an Iranian head of state. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will be seated beside Syrian president Bashar Assad as guest of honor to parade the Tehran-Damascus axis's pre-eminent role in Arab Middle East affairs, with Iran setting the pace.

This prospect has raised the military barometer across the region and injected a radical note in "moderate" Arab utterances.

Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak suddenly declared Monday, March 10, that Israel continues to be responsible for the Gaza Strip after its pull-out and its status in both Gaza and the West Bank is that of an occupation force. In an interview, he endorsed the Hamas line which called on Israel to halt military operations not only in Gaza but also on the West Bank.

The Lebanese impasse may have been left off the formal agenda, but it looms large over the Arab world as the key divisive element. Over the weekend, the US navy built up its deployment opposite the Lebanese coast with the USS Ross guided missile destroyer and the USS Philippine Sea cruiser.

Syria responded by placing its air and naval bases, where too Russian warships are docked, on a state of preparedness.

Israel's new national intelligence report affirms that the United States' declining role in the region has left a vacuum for radical elements to fill. Its authors, the chiefs of military intelligence, the Mossad, Shin Bet and the foreign ministry's intelligence unit, warned of the heightened threat from missiles in the arsenals of a future nuclear-armed Iran (within two years) and Syrian. A Hizballah attack and a stronger Hamas were also in prospect.

In the coming two weeks, Syria, Iran, Hizballah and Hamas will be further tightening the military and terrorist loop around Israel — to the north, the south, and among Palestinians and Israeli Arabs, at the expense of Israel's deterrent strength.

According to our military sources, Hizballah is completing its preparations for revenge on Israel, whom it accuses of killing its military commander Imad Mughniyeh last month. The latest estimate is that the Shiite terrorists will strike on the border and/or inside Israel, rather than hit overseas targets.

Israel's prime minister Ehud Olmert steadily refuses to look these facts in the face and insists that Israel's security situation has never been better.

Both he and foreign minister Tzipi Livni are still carefully treading the line drawn by US secretary of state Condoleezza

Rice, whose main preoccupation these days is to keep foreign crises at bay for the rest of the Bush presidency.

In Jerusalem last week, Rice confided that to achieve a lull in the cross-border violence in Gaza, even concessions to Hamas were acceptable. This stance, which Israel accepted, substantially enhanced the Islamists' bargaining position.

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By Debkafile. This Report Expresses the views of Debkafile.

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