

Defense establishment paper: Golan for Syria peace, plan for Iran strike

Contributed by Barak Ravid, Haaretz
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A defense establishment paper recommends making contingency plans to attack Iran, reaching an agreement with Syria that includes leaving the Golan Heights and preventing new elections in the Palestinian Authority, even if this means a confrontation with the United States.

The paper will be presented to the cabinet next month as part of the National Security Council's annual situation assessment.

The document warns that in 2009, Israel may find itself facing a nuclear Iran virtually alone, following a rapprochement between the U.S., Iran and the Arab world that would also undermine Israel's military superiority. Additionally, it warns of a possible collapse of the PA, which would effectively kill the two-state solution.

"Iran's threat to Israel's survival" is at the top of the paper's list of threats, followed by the "strategic threat" of long-range missiles and rockets owned by various countries in the region.

"Israel faces these threats almost alone," the paper says. "It is imperative to mobilize the international community and obtain regional cooperation. The new American administration is an opportunity to do this."

The paper says Israel has a limited "window" in which to act before Iran obtains nuclear arms and regional hegemony. Israel must therefore establish a military option against Iran, in case other countries abandon the struggle. The defense establishment advises the cabinet to "work discreetly on contingency plans to deal with a nuclear Iran."

It also recommends close cooperation with the U.S. to prevent a deal between Washington and Tehran that would undermine Israel's interests.

The paper warns that after PA President Mahmoud Abbas' term ends on January 9, 2009, he might "disappear" from the political arena. That could cause the PA to disintegrate, which would increase the risk of the two-state solution being taken off the table.

Due to this possibility, coupled with the fear that Hamas might win a new election, the paper recommends "preventing elections in the PA, even at the cost of a confrontation with the U.S. and the international community."

The paper also advises continued Israeli pressure on Hamas to isolate and weaken it, along with bolstering alternatives to it. "If the truce collapses and conflict is resumed in the Gaza Strip, Israel must act to topple Hamas' rule there," it says.

Regarding Syria, the paper says "an agreement with Syria must be advanced, despite the heavy price Israel would have to pay." The defense establishment believes that removing Syria from the conflict would lead to an agreement with Lebanon as well, thus significantly weakening the radical Iran-Syria-Hezbollah-Hamas axis.

The new American administration must be harnessed to support this process, the paper adds.

Israel should support moderate factions in Lebanon in next year's scheduled parliamentary elections, but not at the expense of Israel's interests, it continues. At the same time, Israel must strengthen its deterrence against Hezbollah and take "low-profile" action against Hezbollah's arms smuggling.

The paper proposes various steps to strengthen Israel's ties with moderate Sunni Arab countries, and especially Saudi Arabia. "Israel must examine ways to expand its dialogue with Saudi Arabia on various shared interests," the document says. It must also act to neutralize potential risks in Saudi Arabia, such as its development of nuclear capability, its purchase of long-range missiles or its closing of the military gap with Israel.

Jordan, the paper says, is experiencing an acute political and economic crisis. "Jordan feels abandoned in the regional face-off and continues to see Israel and the West as strategic supports," it says. "Strengthening and stabilizing our ties with Jordan is crucial to Israel's security. Economic cooperation with Jordan must be strengthened."

With regard to the new administration in Washington, the document warns that "the U.S. is interested in setting up a regional and international alignment against Iran, and Israel is the one that might pay the price." It predicts that Iran and

the U.S. will begin talks and warns that Israel must work to prevent any agreement that would be "problematic" from its point of view.

The paper recommends persuading the new administration to support the talks with Syria, to which the Bush administration objected. The U.S., for its part, is expected to demand that Israel bolster the moderates in Lebanon by making concessions in Shaba Farms and Ghajar and ending its objection to America's arming of the Lebanese Army.

Israel must also ensure that recommendations prepared by three American generals on Israeli-Palestinian security coordination, which are to be presented to the new administration, correspond with its interests, the paper says.

It also warns that the U.S. is arming moderate Arab states, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia, "in a way that undermines the Israel Defense Forces' edge, especially in the air." Israel must act to prevent this as much as possible, it says.

The paper also discusses Israel's possible responses to a Hamas provocation in the south or a Hezbollah provocation in the north in 2009. It stresses that Israel must avoid a war of attrition or a two-front conflict, and therefore, it must first try to contain the provocation rather than be dragged into a retaliation that would escalate the situation. Afterward, however, it should send a "firm message of deterrence."

If the escalation continues, Israel must "consider embarking on a broad confrontation to hit the enemy severely and end the clash within a short time, and with as clear a result as possible," it adds.

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