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Conspiracy Theories

Poll of the Week

News Alerts

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Israeli plans for military confrontation with Iran and Syria near completion

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Israel has long been drawing up secret plans for air and ground attack on Iran if negotiations failed to force the Islamic Republic suspend its nuclear programme.

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But recently, *The Sunday Times*, citing Israeli political and military sources, said that Israel's plans for an attack to knock down Iran's nuclear sites and another one on Syria are near completion.

Last year UK's *Times Online* reported that the inner cabinet of Ariel Sharon, the then Israeli

prime minister, gave "initial authorisation" for an attack on Iran at a private meeting in February 2005 on his ranch in the Negev desert, adding that the Israeli army has been using a mock-up of Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment plant in the desert to practise destroying it.

Plans to attack Iran, according to *Times Online*, are a combination of raids by Israel's elite Shaldag (Kingfisher) commando unit and airstrikes by F-15 jets from 69 Squadron, using bunker-busting bombs to penetrate underground facilities.



The Israeli leadership reportedly discussed those plans with American officials who promised that Washington wouldn't stand in Israel's way if what the Bush administration calls "diplomatic" efforts aimed at persuading Iran suspend uranium enrichment failed.

But the Israeli army's recent military confrontation with the Lebanese resistance movement; *Hezbollah* has led to a strategic rethink in Israel.

Israel has acknowledged that it has given too much attention to Palestinian

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fighters in Gaza and the occupied territories instead of Iran and Syria, who pose a far greater danger to its hegemony and existence.

"The challenge from Iran and Syria is now top of the Israeli defence agenda, higher than the Palestinian one," said an Israeli defence source.

Before the conflict broke out in Lebanon, Major-General Eliezer Shkedi, the commander of the air force, was given charge of the "Iranian front" to command any future strikes on Iran and Syria.

Israeli defence officials believe that Iran's pursuit of a [nuclear programme](#) means war is likely to become unavoidable.

"In the past we prepared for a possible military strike against Iran's [nuclear facilities](#)," said one insider, "but Iran's growing confidence after the war in Lebanon means we have to prepare for a full-scale war, in which Syria will be an important player."

The Israeli army set up a new infantry brigade, named Kfir (lion cub), believed to be its largest.

"It is a partial solution for the challenge of the Syrian commando brigades, which are considered better than [Hezbollah's](#)," a military source said.

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, Iran and Syria are believed to possess ballistic missiles capable of reaching Israel and Tel Aviv.

Israel has assigned emergency budget to build modern shelters.

"The ineptness of the Israeli Defence Forces against [Hezbollah](#) has raised the Iranians' confidence," said a leading defence analyst.

On the other hand, officials in Washington believe that military attack on Iran's [nuclear sites](#) is more serious than battling the poorly equipped [Hezbollah](#) fighters in Lebanon.

"Fixed targets are hopelessly vulnerable to precision bombing, and with stealth bombers even a robust air defence system doesn't make much difference," said Richard Perle, a leading neoconservative.



American State Department favours launching a new round of talks with the Syrian President [Bashar Al Assad](#) in an effort to persuade him end his country's alliance with the Islamic republic. But hawks believe that Israel should have attacked Syria during the fight against [Hezbollah](#) in Lebanon.

"If they had acted against Syria during this last kerfuffle, the war might have ended more quickly and better," Perle said, adding that "Syrian military installations are sitting ducks and the Syrian air force could have been destroyed on the ground in a couple of days."

The Syrian President triggered Israeli fears during the war in Lebanon, when he said "If we do not obtain the occupied Golan Heights by peaceful means, the resistance option is there."

Israeli analysts believe that Syria would try again to take a strategic Israeli post on top of Mount Hermon on the Golan Heights, which it seized in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

The post overlooks the Syrian capital, Damascus.



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Israel has set up three elite brigades that proved ferocity during Lebanon offensive under one headquarters, so they can work together on deep cross-border operations in Iran and Syria, according to *The Sunday Times*. The U.S., backed by the Jewish State and the European Union, claims that Iran is using its [nuclear programme](#) as a guise for some hidden developments aimed at producing nuclear weapons, allegations that had been rejected by Tehran on several occasions.

Iran has repetitively stated that its [nuclear programme](#) is solely used for peaceful purposes but Israeli and American intelligence officials — who have met to share information in recent months, if not years- believe otherwise.

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