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## Obama's October Surprise: Largest War Games in US-Israeli History

By Richard Silverstein

June 26, 2012

Israel's daily [Maariv reported](#) yesterday that the long delayed war games between U.S. and Israeli forces will take place in October. It noted that some commentators are calling it a "dress rehearsal" for the aftermath of an Israeli attack on Iran. IDF sources quoted in the article called the exercises "of immense importance."

These will be the largest such military maneuvers in the history of the joint U.S.-Israel relationship. They were originally scheduled for several months ago but were canceled abruptly, according to some, at the behest of Ehud Barak, who wanted to send a message to the U.S. that Israel might be planning an attack and prefer not to have such an event interfere with it.

Three thousand U.S. Air Force personnel and a larger IDF contingent will focus on air warfare and missile defense. The primary goal is to prepare for the aftermath of an Israeli attack on Iran and the expected counterattack against Israel.

The date of the war games is no accident, coming only a few weeks before the presidential election. They will thus serve two purposes: shoring up Jewish support for Obama's campaign and reassuring Israel that the U.S. will provide it every weapon money can buy to defend itself should it counterattack Iran. One expects that all this might be predicated on an Israeli commitment not to attack Iran quite yet — perhaps not until sometime after Nov. 4?

As part of the proceedings, the U.S. will bring new military hardware and technology Israel hasn't yet seen, such as an upgraded battery of the [Patriot PAC-3 missile system](#) designed as a

backup security system in case the higher-level security systems fail to shoot down Iran's missiles and the Aegis anti-missile radar system. Israel will also demonstrate the new Arrow 2 missile, which will be able to detect missile launches even earlier than previously.

Emphasis will be placed on combating the ballistic threat from Iran. This is meant as an explicit message to Iran, which has threatened a broad response to an Israeli attack, that such an attack on Israel will fail and isn't worth trying. Of course, the assumption behind this is that Israel believes that it can both attack Iran and face no consequences from such an attack: one of the most glaring examples of having your cake and eating it too I've yet seen.

Other factors that will play a role in this exercise will be the possibility that Syria and Hezbollah would join with Iran in attacking Israel. In preparation for the exercises, Lt. Gen. Craig Franklin, commander of the 3rd Air Force, visited Israel recently and launched a joint command that would conduct the war games.

[Business Insider](#) also reports that the Defense Department has awarded Raytheon a \$338-million contract for 361 Tomahawk cruise missiles. Most of them will be configured for at-sea launches from guided-missile cruisers such as those patrolling with the Navy's Fifth Fleet just outside Iranian waters. Though they won't be delivered till 2014, they might be ordered in the expectation that current stock could be depleted in the sort of attack Israel and/or the U.S. might launch against Iran.

What is particularly disturbing in all this is that the U.S. seems to be inching ever closer to supporting an Israeli attack on Iran. While Obama and his officials have appeared to be reigning in Netanyahu, holding him back from an attack, this type of military preparation serves as a wink and a nod to such supposed efforts at restraint.

The end result is that if Israel does attack, it will be able to point to this military exercise as an example of U.S. encouragement of such an approach. Bibi will quite reasonably argue: Why did you show us all this missile defense hardware designed to protect us in the event we strike Iran, if you didn't expect us to do so? And he will be right.

Further, military preparations of this sort indicate an acceptance by the U.S. that diplomacy can't possibly work. Instead of serving as a threat toward Iran, as Obama might argue, that this is what lies in store if it doesn't negotiate in good faith, it may instead be seen as a cynical statement by us that we ourselves don't believe negotiations can work. In other words, it could be a self-fulfilling prophecy that leads to war.

Some might argue that scheduling such exercises indicates a tacit acceptance by Israel that it won't attack Iran until the elections. But that might not be so. There is no reason Netanyahu couldn't simply attack, causing the automatic cancellation of the war games. Some Israeli military-security insiders have [told Reuters](#) that they believe Bibi *will* attack before the elections in the belief that Obama will feel compelled to support Israel due to the sensitivity of a potentially close election campaign. Such projection on Israel's part tells much more about its self-involved egoism than it does about any actual U.S. response to an attack.

Meanwhile, Kenneth Waltz, an international relations specialist at Columbia University argues in “[Why Iran Should Get the Bomb](#)” that precisely what’s needed in the Middle East is an Iranian bomb to establish a power balance in the region. He believes that, given the current status of nuclear proliferation in the world, it’s better for states not to have a regional monopoly as Israel does. A balanced standoff such as between Pakistan and Iran, the U.S. and Russia, or China and Japan (the latter has breakout capacity but hasn’t actually created a weapon) actually promotes stability rather than the opposite. It’s a provocative, contrarian approach but quite persuasive.