

YOUR SUMMER SCHEDULE: VACATION, BEACH, IRAN WAR

Man, if Leon Panetta doesn't get into trouble for revealing details of Anwar al-Awlaki's targeting or confirming that Pakistani doctor Shikal Afridi was working for the CIA when he collected DNA from Osama bin Laden's compound, I wonder if he'll get in trouble for (apparently) telling David Ignatius when Israel will attack Iran?

Panetta believes there is strong likelihood that Israel will strike Iran in April, May or June – before Iran enters what Israelis described as a “zone of immunity” to commence building a nuclear bomb.

Now perhaps this is another sanctioned leak meant to ruin Bibi Netanyahu's surprise (though I'm not sure how Iran would prepare to defend against an Israeli attack).

If so, Ignatius' article sure sends a divided message. On one hand, it suggests the US would not participate.

The administration appears to favor a policy of staying out of the conflict, unless Iran hits U.S. assets, which would trigger a strong U.S. response.

This U.S. policy – signaling that Israel is acting on its own – might open a breach like the one in 1956, when President Eisenhower condemned an Israeli-European attack on the Suez Canal.

Yet at the same time it lays out the circumstances under which the US would get involved.

Administration officials caution that Tehran shouldn't misunderstand: The United States has a 60-year commitment to Israeli security, and if Israel's population centers were hit, the United States could feel obligated to come to Israel's defense.

I'm sure the Israelis would never be able to cock up a Scary Iran Plot targeted at Tel Aviv.

What Ignatius doesn't emphasize—though he does hint at it—is the real reason for this schedule.

Complicating matters is the 2012 presidential campaign, which has Republicans candidates clamoring for stronger U.S. support of Israel.

Bibi's biggest political donor, Sheldon Adelson, has already dumped \$10 million into the GOP primary. To imagine that Bibi is not, at the same time, gaming out how the electoral schedule might play into the optimal time to pick a war with Iran is naive.

Which, I guess, may be why Panetta is blabbing this particular detail.