

**Un mare exercitiu americano-israeliene de apărare anti-rachetă care a fost planificată să aibă loc în primăvara anului, a fost amânată din cauza unei cereri adresate de către Ministerul Apărării israeliene, au spus oficialii americani și israelieni Yahoo News duminică.**

Ministrul Apărării israelian Ehud Barak a emis o cerere la Pentagon luna trecută ca exercițiul comun planificat să fie amânat, a declarat un oficial american duminică Yahoo News.

"A fost Barak," a declarat oficialul american sub protecția anonimatului.

Agentia Evreiasca Telegraph a agenției Ron Kampeas raportase anterior -duminică - că exercițiu a fost amânat, chipurile din cauza "reducerile bugetare israeliene."

But American officials are privately concerned that the Israeli request for a postponement of the exercise could be one potential warning sign that Israel is trying to leave its options open for conducting a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities in the spring. In that case, it would not wish American forces to then be on the ground, the thinking goes.

An Israeli official downplayed that interpretation. He told Yahoo News Sunday that another possible reason for the delay may be that the Americans and Israelis both considered that such a huge maneuver at this time of heightened tensions between the West and Iran could potentially inflame the situation.

The Israeli Defense Ministry made the decision in consultation with the Pentagon, he said, and the two nations' defense agencies had been expected to issue a joint statement indicating the exercise will be postponed until the second half of the year.

Some Washington observers found both cited Israeli rationales for the delay--budget cuts and Israeli concern about further raising tensions with Iran--as conspicuously thin.

U.S. officials publicly, like their Israeli counterparts, however, said such delays aren't all that unusual.

"I do know there were a variety of factors at play in this case, but in general, leaders from both sides believe that optimum participation by all units is best achieved later in the year," U.S. European Command (EUCOM) spokesman Captain John Ross told Yahoo News by email Sunday.

"Following close consultation between US European Command (EUCOM) and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), exercise 'Austere Challenge 12' will be conducted during the second half of 2012," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told Yahoo News by email Sunday.

"It is not at all uncommon for routine exercises to be postponed," Kirby added.

General Martin Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is due to arrive in Israel Thursday for consultations, the Associated Press [reported](#). It will be Dempsey's first trip to Israel since assuming the top Pentagon military post in September.

"The Obama administration is concerned that Iran's recent statement that it is expanding nuclear operations with more advanced equipment may push Israel closer to a strike," the AP reported said.

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