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US military, intelligence officials raise concern about possible preparations for Iran strike

Larisa Alexandrovna Published: Thursday May 11, 2006

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Use of Iraq terror group bypassed Congress, sources say

Concern is building among the military and the intelligence community that the US may be preparing for a military strike on Iran, as military assets in key positions are approaching readiness, RAW STORY has learned.



According to military and intelligence sources, an air strike on Iran could be doable in June of this year, with military assets in key positions ready to go and a possible plan already on the table.

Speculation has been growing on a possible air strike against Iran. But with the failure of the Bush administration to present a convincing case to the UN Security Council and to secure political backing domestically, some experts say the march toward war with Iran is on pause barring an "immediate need."

"In March/April of this year [the US] was pushing for quick closure, a thirty day window," says a source close to the UN Security Council, describing efforts by the Administration to "shore up enough support" to get a UN Chapter 7 resolution.

A UN Chapter 7 resolution makes it possible for sanctions to be imposed against an uncooperative nation and leaves the door open to military action.

The UN source also says that a military analysis suggests that no military action should be undertaken in Iran until spring of 2007, but that things remain volatile given this administration's penchant for having "their own way."

Strike could come earlier than thought

Other military and intelligence sources are expressing concern both privately and publicly that air strikes on Iran could come earlier than believed.

Retired Air Force Colonel and former faculty member at the National War College Sam Gardiner has heard some military suggestions of a possible air campaign in the near future, and although he has no intimate knowledge of such plans, he says recent aircraft carrier activity and current operations on the ground in Iran have raised red flags.

Gardiner says his concerns have kept him busy attempting to create the most likely scenario should such an attack occur.

"I would expect two or three aircraft carriers would be moved into the area," Gardner said, describing what he thinks is the best way air strikes could be carried out without disengaging assets from US fronts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Two air-craft carriers are already en route to the region, RAW STORY has found. The USS Abraham Lincoln, which recently made

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a port call in Singapore, and the USS Enterprise which left Norfolk, Virginia earlier this month, are headed for the Western Pacific and Middle East. The USS Ronald Reagan is already operating in the Gulf.

In addition to aircraft carrier activity, Gardiner says, B-2 bombers would be critical.

"I would expect the B-2's, the main firepower asset, to be flown on missions directly from the United States," Gardiner explained. "I would expect B-52's to be flown in strikes from the UK and Diego Garcia."

"Finally," he added, "a large number of cruise missiles would be fired from the carrier support ships."

Steven Aftergood, senior research analyst at the Federation of American Scientists, says that the B-2 bomber is capable of such long range activity.

"The B2 bomber was designed, with the Soviet Union in mind, for intercontinental operations," Aftergood said. "With aerial refueling, it has a range of up to 10,000 miles."

Like Gardiner, Aftergood has heard similar claims with regard to a June strike, but has not been able to confirm them independently.

Intelligence sources confirm hearing the allegations of a June attack, but have been unable to fully confirm that such an attack is in the works. Both the [New Yorker](#) and the [Washington Post](#) have previously reported that the Pentagon is studying military options on Iran.

All sources, however, agree that given the administration's interest in regime change, an attack on Iran is likely, regardless of international support or UN backing. Furthermore, all sources agree that Gardiner's scenario is the most probable, including an estimated duration and "pause" assessment.

Gardiner believes that the entire initial operation could run quickly, roughly 24-72 hours. "Most of the strikes would be at night," he said. "The Iranian nuclear facilities will be targeted; more important however, a major effort would focus on Iran's capability to retaliate. The US will target missile facilities, air bases and naval assets."

"After the initial effort, there will be a pause during which time the Iranians will be told that if they retaliate, the air strikes would continue," he added.

The Pentagon did not return calls for comment.

### Advance teams under way; Congress 'bypassed'

As [previously reported](#) by Raw Story, a terrorist organization known as Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK) is being used on the ground in Iran by the Pentagon, bypassing US intelligence channels. The report was subsequently covered by the Asia Times ([Article](#)).

Military and intelligence sources now say no Presidential finding exists on MEK ops. Without a presidential finding, the operation circumvents the oversight of the House and Senate Intelligence committees.

Congressional aides for the relevant oversight committees would not confirm or deny allegations that no Presidential finding had been done. One Democratic aide, however, wishing to remain anonymous for this article, did say that any use of the MEK would be illegal.

In addition, sources say that a March attack that killed 22 Iranian officials in the province of Sistan va Baluchistan was carried out by the MEK.

According to [a report](#) by Iran Focus filed Mar. 23, the twenty-two people killed in the ambush included high ranking officials, including the governor of Zahedan.

"Hours after the attack took place, Ahmadi-Moqaddam announced there was evidence the assailants had held meetings with British intelligence officers," the Iranian news service reported.

"Radical Shiite cleric Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi also claimed the people behind the attack were the same as those behind a spate of

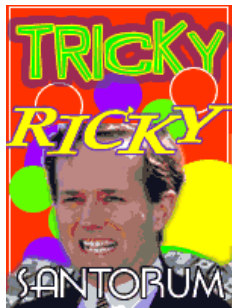
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bombings in Iran's south-western province of Khuzestan earlier this year and in 2005," it added.

Military and intelligence sources say that MEK assets were responsible for this attack, but did not know if the US military was involved or if US military assets were part of the ambush.

One former high ranking US intelligence official described the use of MEK as more of a "Cambone" operation than a "Department of Defense operation."

Undersecretary of Defense Intelligence Stephen Cambone, a stalwart neo-conservative, is considered by many to be Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's right-hand man.

During a [White House briefing](#) in early May, outgoing press secretary Scott McClellan denied that the administration was using MEK, among several other terrorist organizations named, for ground activity in Iran.

"There are numerous reports about low-intensity operations ongoing in Iran from three different places -- PKK going over the border into Iraq, the MEK southern border of Iraq into Iran, and also certain operations from Balochistan involving also the Pakistanis," a reporter asked. "Does the U.S. have a policy, given also reports which I know you won't comment on, on possible special forces operations in Iran?"

"Our policies haven't changed on those organizations," McClellan said. "They remain the same. And you're bringing up organizations that we view as terrorist organizations."

"We would never cooperate with them, in terms of—" the questioner continued.

"Our policy hasn't changed," McClellan replied.

## **Military, intelligence community alarmed**

According to a [New Yorker article](#) by veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, other activities aimed at intimidating and agitating Iranian leadership are also underway.

"One military planner told me that White House criticisms of Iran and the high tempo of planning and clandestine activities amount to a campaign of 'coercion' aimed at Iran," Hersh wrote.

The increase in violence on the southern border of Iran, the movement of aircraft carriers into the region, the insistence of Iran's leadership that they intend to be a player on the nuclear stage and the Bush Administration's focus on regime change make military and intelligence sources nervous.

"[President] Bush thinks that history will judge him as a great leader, not unlike Winston Churchill," one former high-ranking military intelligence official remarked.

For now, Gardiner and others remain on the sidelines as the Administration plots their next move.

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