

U.S.-Israeli Assault on Iran Escalates – Danger of War Grows

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The danger of a U.S.-Israeli war on Iran is escalating rapidly. The U.S. and its allies are ramping up their all-around assault on Iran, including new crippling sanctions, and openly threatening to attack. Ground is being laid daily in the headlines and statements by politicians of every stripe in mainstream U.S. politics calling for aggression against Iran—all justified by unsubstantiated assertions that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons.

Whether or not Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons technology (and there is no proof it is), this U.S. imperialist narrative and framework is an outrageous effort to turn reality upside down—the reality of which of the clashing oppressive forces in the region is the dominant threatening oppressor and bully.

Iran is a non-nuclear, Third World country. The U.S. is the world's most powerful nuclear weapons state—with over 4,000 warheads. It's the only country to ever use nuclear weapons, killing 150,000-240,000 people in the 1945 bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan (with many more dying of the effects of radiation for years after). It's the main backer of the one country in the Middle East that actually does have nuclear weapons—Israel.

Now the U.S. and its allies have launched a massive, all-around campaign of aggression against Iran in the name of stopping the spread of nuclear weapons. These weapons are horrible, and they should be banished from the earth. If the U.S. rulers were really against these tools of mass murder they'd insist everyone get rid of them—but they're not. They and their media mouthpieces aren't saying word one about getting rid of their nukes, or Israel's nukes, or Britain or France's nukes.

Instead, the U.S. and its allies are threatening war over the possibility that Iran could get a bomb, a war that would be terrible for the people of the world. In a 2006 statement, Kurt Gottfried, Chairman of the Union of Concerned Scientists, and emeritus professor of physics at Cornell University, said: "The [Bush] administration is reportedly considering using the B51-11 nuclear 'bunker buster' against an underground facility near Natanz, Iran. The use of such a weapon would create massive clouds of radioactive fallout that could spread far from the site of the attack, including to other nations. Even if used in remote, lightly populated areas, the number of casualties could range up to more than a hundred thousand, depending on the weapon yield and weather conditions." And any attack by the U.S. and Israel on Iran would be military aggression to preserve their military dominance—including their nuclear monopoly—in the Middle East. There is absolutely no justice in anything the U.S. is doing in pursuit of this criminal goal.

The last half of December saw a sharp spike in the U.S.-led assault on Iran's Islamic Republic. On December 31, President Obama signed a defense authorization bill that included by far the harshest sanctions the U.S. and its allies have yet imposed on Iran. These new sanctions target Iran's oil exports (which account for well over half of government revenues) for the first time, as well as its financial sector. (One provision calls for punishing foreign firms and banks which purchase Iranian oil, including through its central bank.)

In late December, with these new sanctions looming, Iran staged large-scale naval maneuvers in the Persian Gulf and the commander of Iran's naval forces declared, "Closing the Strait of Hormuz [the narrow chokepoint at the mouth of the Gulf through which one-fifth of the oil traded on the world market flows] is very easy for Iranian naval forces." The U.S. Fifth Fleet, stationed in Bahrain (directly across the Persian Gulf from southern Iran), immediately warned that "any disruption" to shipments through the Gulf "will not be tolerated," adding that "The U.S. Navy is a flexible, multi-capable force ... always ready to counter malevolent actions to ensure freedom of navigation."

This latest U.S. saber-rattling comes after several months of escalating actions and rhetoric directed against Iran, including open threats of war.

In early November, 2011, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak were reportedly actively "trying to muster a majority in the cabinet in favor of military action against Iran." A few days later, Israeli President Shimon Peres warned that such an attack was becoming increasingly likely. ("Netanyahu trying to persuade cabinet to support attack on Iran," Haaretz, November 2, 2011)

On November 8, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an imperialist-controlled international body monitoring nuclear activities, issued a new report on Iran, claiming that "Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device." The U.S., Israel, Britain and France, seized on the report to call for more diplomatic, political, and economic aggression against Iran—while explicitly leaving the military option "on the table."

A few days later, on November 12, massive explosions rocked a base near Tehran where Iran's ballistic missiles were being developed. Seventeen people were killed, including a top ranking Iranian military official. This follows the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists, an attack on Iranian nuclear facilities by the Stuxnet computer worm earlier this year, as part of what Roger Cohen of the New York Times called almost certainly a "covert American-Israeli drive to sabotage Iran's efforts to develop a military nuclear capacity." Cohen

concludes, "An intense, well-funded cyberwar against Tehran is ongoing." ("Doctrine of Silence," November 28, 2011)

On November 21, the U.S., Britain and Canada imposed new, more punishing sanctions against Iran's central and commercial banks, with the U.S. also announcing sanctions against Iran's nuclear and petrochemical industries. These moves are aimed at cutting Iran off from the international banking and financial system and crippling its economy.

A week later, on November 29, pro-regime Iranian protesters stormed Britain's embassy in Tehran in retaliation, prompting Britain to formally break diplomatic relations and close down Iran's embassy in London. On December 1, 2011, the U.S. Senate and the European Union also passed new sanctions against Iran.

The early December downing of a U.S. RQ-170 Sentinel surveillance drone in eastern Iran, 140 miles from the Afghan border, possibly due to an Iranian electronic counter-measure against the drone flights, sparked a flurry of speculation in the U.S. media over whether Iran—or Russia and China which have ties to Iran—could gain any military advantage from studying the near-intact drone. The blatantly aggressive and illegal nature of this violation of Iranian sovereignty and airspace, and how drones could be part of any military attack on Iran, was pointedly not part of imperialist press discussion. Iran rebuffed President Obama's request to return the unmanned aircraft, and warned Afghanistan not to permit further U.S. drone flights over its territory. "Until this week, the high-altitude flights from bases in Afghanistan were among the most secret of many intelligence-collection efforts against Iran," the New York Times (December 7, 2011) reported, "part of an increasingly aggressive intelligence collection program aimed at Iran."

"[A]cross the region the largely hidden 'cold war' between Tehran and its enemies is escalating fast, bringing with it wider risk of conflict," reports Lebanon's Daily Star. "From proxy wars in Iraq and Syria to computer worm attacks and unexplained explosions in Iran—to allegations of an assassination plot in Washington—a confrontation once kept behind the scenes is breaking into increasingly open view." ("New cold war with Iran heats up Middle East, raises risk of conflict," December 6, 2011)

The Imperialists' Real Nuclear Concern: Preserving Their Unchallenged Military Superiority

The U.S.-European-Israeli charge that Iran is trying to obtain nuclear weapons, which could then plunge the region into a nuclear conflagration, has been the central justification for imperialist aggression against Iran. When the IAEA report was released, the U.S. media called it "definitive" proof of these claims.

But on closer inspection, the report contained no such proof. Instead it was largely a rehash of unproven suspicions and allegations along with "evidence" refuted years earlier. Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh concluded that the IAEA report was a "political document," not an objective report, and that "no evidence" has been produced "of a facility to build the Bomb." ("Iran and the I.A.E.A.," New Yorker, November 18, 2011; see also, "New Threats of U.S.-Israeli Aggression Against Iran," Revolution #251, November 27, 2011)

Why are the U.S. and its allies stepping up their attacks even if there's no conclusive proof Iran is attempting to build nuclear weapons? Because the core issue has never been whether or not Iran is actually trying to build a nuclear weapon. The U.S. and Israel's real concern has always been that even if Iran gained the technological know-how for a nuclear weapons program or was seen to have crossed that "threshold"—it would undermine the perception of unchallengeable U.S.-Israel military regional supremacy, thus strengthening Iranian influence and undercutting U.S. imperialist dominance. (This is also the central U.S.-Israeli concern should Iran obtain nuclear weapons.)

From that logic, the logic of a big time gangster worried about a small time gangster infringing on his turf, even allowing Iran to continue its nuclear power program is seen as dangerous.

The failure, to date, of the U.S.-European-Israeli covert war and international pressure to force the Islamic Republic of Iran to halt its nuclear program, or to weaken its grip on power, along with Iran's reported progress in mastering aspects of nuclear technology, is helping drive the escalation of tension and increasing the chances that the imperialists will turn to more extreme measures, possibly including war. (See, "Clock Ticking for West to Act on Iranian Nuclear Program," New York Times, December 29, 2011 for imperialist claims and concerns about Iran's technical advances.)

A Battle for Regional Dominance on Rapidly Shifting Terrain

The nuclear issue, however, is not the underlying factor intensifying the U.S.-Iran clash. That conflict is part of something much larger: a sharpening battle for dominant influence across the entire region, a battle with profound global implications.

The U.S. full-court press against it isn't aimed at ridding the region of nuclear weapons (if so, they'd demand Israel dismantle its 150 plus nuclear warheads), or liberating the people. The U.S. rulers are going after the Iranian regime because it's become a major impediment to their continued hegemony over the Middle East. And for over 60 years, control of this region has been a central pillar of their global power and the functioning of world capitalism. As the reactionary Weekly Standard put it, the U.S. rulers have viewed "a favorable balance of power in the greater Middle East as key to a favorable international order." ("Iran's Clock Ticking," December 19, 2011)

But what is that U.S.-dominated "international order"? It is an imperialist system that has caused unimaginable and ongoing suffering and violence, including in the Middle East. To cite but one of many examples, according to a 2006 survey published in the British medical journal Lancet, the 2003 U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq caused more than 650,000 "excess Iraqi deaths as a consequence of the war" up to that point. It also led to over 4.7 million Iraqis fleeing as refugees either inside or outside their country. (See "U.S. Threatens Another War: Who Is the REAL Aggressor in the Middle East?" Revolution #253, December 18, 2011.)

Regional confrontations, escalating fast, becoming harder to control

The Iranian regime has never sought to fully break out of the framework of global capitalism-imperialism, but rather to increase Iran's leverage and reach within that framework, which is linked to preserving their oppressive rule over the Iranian people. In that context, Iran's rulers have their own needs and ambitions, including extending their influence across the Middle East and beyond.

Scan the regional map and you'll find a complex, sometimes behind-the-scenes, battle pitting the U.S., a global imperialist superpower which has strangled the region's peoples for decades, against Iran and its allies. This conflict—which is evident in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and the Persian Gulf—has grown much sharper over the past year as uprisings throughout North Africa and the Middle East, clashes between Iranian-aligned and U.S.-backed forces, and big power interventions shake up the regional political order. In some instances, the U.S. seems to be maintaining its hold, even gaining ground. Its key ally, Saudi Arabia, intervened in Bahrain to suppress an uprising and shore up the solidly pro-U.S. regime there. The U.S. and its allies succeeded in toppling the Qaddafi regime in Libya and seem to have strengthened their hand there. The solidly pro-U.S. army remains the dominant factor in the Egyptian regime. And in Syria, the U.S. is increasingly supporting the uprising against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, a key Iranian ally. One U.S. analyst states, “changing Syria's orientation away from Iran would be a major coup from America's perspective.” (“Why Iran might be worried by Hillary Clinton's meeting with Syria exiles,” Christian Science Monitor, December 6, 2011)

In other instances, Iranian aligned forces seem to be gaining ground. Iran greatly strengthened its position in Iraq in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Now, the U.S. rulers are extremely concerned that the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iraq will further increase Iranian influence. “[T]he U.S. withdrawal from Iraq will create a power vacuum that the Iranians are eager to exploit,” the imperialist think tank STRATFOR notes. “The potential for Iran to control a sphere of influence from western Afghanistan to the Mediterranean is a prospect that not only frightens regional players such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey but also raises serious concerns in the United States ... [which is] seeking to curb Iran's sphere of influence by working to overthrow the Syrian regime, limit Iran's influence in Iraq and control Hezbollah in Lebanon. (“The Covert Intelligence War Against Iran,” STRATFOR Global Intelligence, December 8, 2011)

Iran and U.S. ally Saudi Arabia are fighting “an intricate cold war” across the region, “competing for dominance in global energy markets and nuclear technology and for political influence in the Persian Gulf and the Levant. ... The Iranian-Saudi rivalry has also expanded beyond Iraq and into the greater Middle East, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring.” Advances by one bring aggressive counter moves by the other. “A proxy Saudi-Iranian war in Iraq represents a very considerable threat to oil supplies,” the Daily Star reports. “Many such confrontations across the region appear escalating fast—and becoming much harder for Washington and its allies to control.” (Mohsen M. Milani, “Iran and Saudi Arabia Square Off: The Growing Rivalry Between Tehran and Riyadh,” Foreign Affairs, October 11, 2011; Daily Star, December 6, 2011)

Regional changes have the potential to threaten Israeli interests, including fueling mass protest and rebellion against Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people, creating further international support for the Palestinians, and contributing to the strength of Islamist forces (for instance in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya).

In an article that cites and draws on a number of recent statements by key figures in the Iranian, U.S., and Israeli ruling classes, British journalist Patrick Seale writes, “The danger is that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu may now seek to break out of Israel's current political isolation by mounting a spectacular attack on Iran.” (“Will Israel Bomb Iran?” Agence Global, October 11, 2011)

A U.S./Israel Attack on Iran Would Be a Huge Crime

Efforts by the U.S. imperialists to contain, weaken, even overthrow Iran's current regime have been underway since well before President George W. Bush launched the “war on terror” after the attacks of September 11, 2001 which escalated the U.S. campaign against Iran. War on Iran has been debated at the highest levels of the U.S. government. So far, the U.S., Israel and their allies have calculated that the outcome of such a war would be very uncertain. It may neither topple the Islamic Republic, nor stop its nuclear program, while possibly triggering regional upheaval on a level the imperialists could not control. But these difficulties do not change the U.S. and Israel's need to confront Iran, so they've worked to cripple it through sanctions, diplomacy, and covert operations.

That the U.S., its allies, and Israel routinely carry out such aggression short of all-out war is outrageous and calls for much more visible opposition inside this country. And more, the fact that previous threats to attack Iran have not come to pass should not lull people into a false sense that the U.S. and Israel are just bluffing or using these threats merely to strengthen sanctions and diplomacy. Nor should the fact that Barack Obama not George W. Bush is commander-in-chief of the empire, and that the U.S. is drawing down from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The trajectory toward confrontation between the U.S. and Iran has not only continued, it has become more intense. Sanctions, diplomacy and covert actions can lay the groundwork, including in public opinion, for war. And Iran's ongoing nuclear program, the U.S.'s inability to achieve its objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan, the upheaval across the Middle East, and the sharpening of different contradictions globally, are all increasing the necessity facing the imperialists to avoid another setback and to maintain their hold on the Middle East. So circumstances can shift the U.S. and Israel's calculus of the risks and benefits of war.

And wars, including “covert wars,” have a logic of their own, and things can get out of control. There are many flashpoints between the U.S.-Israel and Iran, and clashes, even accidental clashes, can quickly escalate in a spiral of action and counter-action.

Stepped-up intervention against Iran, no matter how the U.S., Israel, and the United Nations attempt to justify it, is criminal aggression in the service of continued imperialist control

of the planet. Anyone who wants to see an alternative to the “choices” between U.S. imperialist domination and aggression, and the reactionary forces represented by the Iranian rulers, must confront and act on the reality that support for, or passive complicity in the face of a U.S./Israel attack on Iran would strengthen both sides of this unacceptable paradigm. And, on the other hand, resistance to U.S./Israeli aggression could be part of bringing forward a radical alternative to both imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism on a global scale.

Any military attack or war on Iran would be a huge crime that would likely result in many, many killed and wounded along with enormous devastation. People, especially in the U.S., have to say—loudly, clearly, and actively—NO!

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