

America's Covert War Against Iran. Do 'All Options' Mean Nukes?

Slouching Towards Disaster

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Legendary investigative journalist I.F. Stone famously observed: "All governments lie, but disaster lies in wait for countries whose officials smoke the same hashish they give out." Amongst Washington elites and the courtier press, it appears that more than a pipe or two has been passed around of late as the political and psychological ground is prepared for a military attack on Iran.

Do 'All Options' Mean Nukes?

During a White House press briefing Thursday, President Barack Obama said that "No options off the table means I am considering all options."

Many of those "options" are already in play. Ranging from a covert program of assassination and industrial sabotage to planting computer malware as "beacons" for future attacks on civilian and defense infrastructure, the United States, NATO and Israel are already engaged in a campaign of violent destabilization inside the Islamic Republic.

As former CIA officer Philip Giraldi pointed out on [Antiwar.com](#), "the White House has issued several findings to the intelligence community authorizing stepped-up covert action against both Damascus and Tehran."

"A 'finding,'" Giraldi noted, "is top-level approval for secret operations considered to be particularly politically sensitive. Taken together, the recent findings, combined with the evidence of major intelligence operations being run in Lebanon, amount to a secret war against Iran and its allies in the Mideast."

In 2007, President Bush "authorized attacks against Iranian nuclear scientists and other facilities in Tehran and elsewhere as well as coordination with the Israelis to develop computer viruses to disrupt the Iranian computer network, a program that led to the production of the Stuxnet worm."

"While the media credits 'the Israelis' in the assassination of Iranian scientists," Giraldi noted "the reality is that no Israeli (or American) intelligence officer could possibly operate effectively inside Iran to carry out a killing."

"The assassinations, which are acts of war, have actually been carried out by followers of the dissident Iranian Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK), the separatist Baluch Jundallah, and the

Kurdish PJAK, all acting under direction from American and Israeli intelligence officers,” Giraldi grimly observed.

More ominously however, five years ago [The New Yorker](#) revealed that “One of the military’s initial option plans, as presented to the White House by the Pentagon this winter, calls for the use of a bunker-buster tactical nuclear weapon, such as the B61-11, against underground nuclear sites,” such as the one at Nantaz.

At the time, a “senior intelligence official” familiar with the plans told Seymour Hersh: “‘Nuclear planners go through extensive training and learn the technical details of damage and fallout—we’re talking about mushroom clouds, radiation, mass casualties, and contamination over years. This is not an underground nuclear test, where all you see is the earth raised a little bit. These politicians don’t have a clue, and whenever anybody tries to get it out—remove the nuclear option—they’re shouted down’.”

As Global Research analyst Michel Chossudovsky warned in [Towards a World War III Scenario](#): “Code named by US military planners as TIRANNT, ‘Theater Iran Near Term’, simulations of an attack on Iran were initiated in May 2003 ‘when modelers and intelligence specialists pulled together the data needed for theater-level (meaning large-scale) scenario analysis for Iran’.”

“In 2004,” Chossudovsky wrote, “drawing upon the initial war scenarios under TIRANNT, Vice President Dick Cheney instructed USSTRATCOM to draw up a ‘contingency plan’ of a large-scale military operation directed against Iran ‘to be employed in response to another 9/11-type terrorist attack on the United States’ on the presumption that the government in Tehran would be behind the terrorist plot. The plan included the pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state.”

Writing on Iran war plans back in 2005, Philip Giraldi disclosed in [The American Conservative](#) magazine, “The plan includes a large-scale air assault on Iran employing both conventional and tactical nuclear weapons. Within Iran there are more than 450 major strategic targets, including numerous suspected nuclear-weapons-program development sites. Many of the targets are hardened or are deep underground and could not be taken out by conventional weapons, hence the nuclear option.”

“As in the case of Iraq,” Giraldi wrote, “the response is not conditional on Iran actually being involved in the act of terrorism directed against the United States. Several senior Air Force officers involved in the planning are reportedly appalled at the implications of what they are doing—that Iran is being set up for an unprovoked nuclear attack—but no one is prepared to damage his career by posing any objections.”

While Israel is portrayed as an irrational actor which the United States is powerless to control, this manufactured reality is a smokescreen meant to conceal America’s hidden hand.

According to Chossudovsky, “What we are dealing with is a joint US-NATO-Israel military operation to bomb Iran, which has been in the active planning stage since 2004. Officials in the Defense Department, under Bush and Obama, have been working assiduously with their Israeli military and intelligence counterparts, carefully identifying targets inside Iran.”

“In practical military terms,” Chossudovsky averred, “any action by Israel would have to be

planned and coordinated at the highest levels of the US-led coalition.”

With these disturbing facts in hand, and the chilling implications of policies which have been concealed from the American people, one can reasonably inquire: Is this what President Obama means when he says “no options off the table means I am considering all options”?

Given the heated rhetoric employed by the president and his national security team, moves towards economic- and other forms of warfare by Congress, as well as even-more bellicose threats by Republican presidential contenders angling for the Oval Office, the use of a nuclear weapon in any attack upon Iran cannot be ruled out.

‘Sentinel Down’

Much to their consternation, Iran may not be the pushover claimed by the war hawks and their media acolytes.

After decades of regaling the public with lurid tales of U.S. technological prowess, replete with grandiose plans for “full-spectrum dominance,” the Aerospace Division of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) released [video](#) Thursday of the captured RQ-170 Sentinel spy drone brought down last Sunday some 140 miles from the Afghan border, well into Iranian territory.

The incident has become a huge embarrassment to the Pentagon and chest-thumping American politicians who have oversold their oft-repeated claim that the United States is the world’s “sole superpower.”

According to [PressTV](#), a Tehran-based English language media outlet which reflects the views of the Iranian government, Brigadier General Amir-Ali Hajizadeh said: “After the aircraft’s entry into the country’s eastern [air]space, it fell in the electronic ambush of the Iranian Armed Forces and was brought to the ground with minimum damage [caused to it].”

Also on Thursday, [DebkaFile](#), a Jerusalem-based military intelligence web site with close ties to ultra-rightists in Israel and the United States, reported that the RQ-170 captured December 4 in “almost perfect condition confirmed Tehran’s claim that the UAV was downed by a cyber attack, meaning it was not shot down but brought in undamaged by an electronic warfare ambush.”

How did the Iranians bring the Sentinel down? While speculation is rife amongst aviation experts, a plausible theory has emerged.

According to the Israeli defense industry publication, [Defense Update](#), “Russia has transferred a number of Kvant 1L222 Avtobaza Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) systems to Iran in October.” Each “system includes an passive ELINT signals interception system and a jamming module capable of disrupting airborne radars including fire control radars, terrain following radars and ground mapping radars as well as weapon (missile) data links.”

The Russian-supplied system, Defense Update analysts report, is also “capable of intercepting weapon datalink communications operating on similar wavebands. The new gear may have helped the Iranians employ active deception/jamming to intercept and ‘hijack’ the Sentinel’s control link.”

On Saturday, the [AviationIntel](#) web site, citing photographic documentation released by Iran

that the “evidence is unbelievably conclusive” that Iranian cyberwarriors captured the U.S. spy craft.

In other words, AviationIntel analysts averred, “there is no reason why [that] system [Avtobaza] could not have detected the Sentinel’s electronic trail and either jammed it and/or have alerted fighter aircraft and SAM [surface-to-air missile] installations as to its whereabouts.”

While the RQ-170 “could have operated with limited electronic connectivity, making it less visible,” AviationIntel reported that a “more likely scenario” would be that the Sentinel actively transmitted “live video, detailed radar maps, or electronic intelligence, in real-time,” making detection all-the-more easier when “pinged” by the Russian-designed system.

However you care to spin this story, the Iranian military are no slouches; an attack on the Islamic Republic would hardly be the proverbial “cake-walk” touted by the neocons and other armchair warriors.

In a further sign that the Tehran government take ongoing terror attacks by London, Tel Aviv and Washington very seriously, [The Daily Telegraph](#) reported that IRGC commander, General Mohammed Ali Jaafari, “raised the operational readiness status of the country’s forces, initiating preparations for potential external strikes and covert attacks.”

The Telegraph disclosed, citing unnamed “Western intelligence officials,” that Iran’s armed forces “had initiated plans to disperse long-range missiles, high explosives, artillery and guards units to key defensive positions.”

“The Iranian leadership fears the country is being subjected to a carefully co-ordinated attack by Western intelligence and security agencies to destroy key elements of its nuclear infrastructure,” The Telegraph reported.

In response to bellicose threats emanating from Western capitals, a new round of crippling sanctions meant to crater the economy and attacks by intelligence agencies and terrorist assets operating inside Iran, orders were issued “to redistribute Iran’s arsenal of long-range Shahab missiles to secret sites around the country where they would be safe from enemy attack and could be used to launch retaliatory attacks.”

On Friday, [The Christian Science Monitor](#) reported that conservative lawmaker Mohammad Kossari warned that “‘Iran will target all US military bases around the world,’ in case of further violations ... [and that] Iran’s response would be ‘terrifying’.”

Investigative journalist Scott Peterson, who has done yeoman’s work exposing the propaganda blitz by current and former U.S. intelligence officials and lawmakers to [delist](#) the bizarre Iranian political cult, the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) from the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations, disclosed that “the drone flights have apparently not yielded new evidence that would change conclusions by the United States and the United Nations that Iran stopped systematic nuclear weapons-related work in 2003.”

This of course, confirm Iranian assertions that efforts by Western imperialists over Iran’s alleged “nuclear weapons programs” is a pretext for “regime change.”

Defense journalist Robert Densmore, a former Navy electronic countermeasures officer told

Peterson that the capture of the RQ-170 drone is “very significant.”

“Strategically,” Densmore told the Monitor, “the US will suffer from the loss of this because ... it has radar, a fuselage, and coating that makes it low-observable, and the electronics inside are also very high-tech.”

But perhaps the biggest loss to the Pentagon is not the drone’s bat-wing design nor coatings which render the craft less visible to detection by radar—long known to America’s capitalist rivals China and Russia—but the “cutting-edge cameras and sensors that can ‘listen in’ on cellphone conversations as it soars miles above the ground or ‘smell’ the air and sniff out chemical plumes emanating from a potential underground nuclear laboratory,” as the [Los Angeles Times](#) disclosed.

Built by defense giant Lockheed Martin at a cost to taxpayers of some \$6 million dollars per unit, the secret state’s drone program, greatly expanded by the Obama regime, may be a boon to Washington’s opaque Military-Industrial-Surveillance Complex but it is also something of an Achilles’ heel.

“Ever since it was developed at Lockheed Martin Corp.’s famed Skunk Works facility in Palmdale,” the Los Angeles Times averred, “the Sentinel drone has been cloaked in tight secrecy by the U.S. government. But now the drone that the Iranian military claims to have brought down for invading its airspace might be made far more public than the Pentagon or Lockheed ever intended.”

On this count, along with many other assumptions underpinning the doctrinal constructs of Washington’s technophilic military, they have no one to blame but themselves.

As [Antifascist Calling](#) reported back in 2009, Iraqi insurgents deployed \$26 off-the-shelf spy kit that enabled them to intercept live video feeds from Predator drones.

According to [The Wall Street Journal](#) the Pentagon’s “potential drone vulnerability lies in an unencrypted downlink between the unmanned craft and ground control.” Although this flaw was known to the Pentagon since the 1990s during imperialism’s campaign to dismember socialist Yugoslavia, nothing was done since it might prove too costly to the drone’s prime contractor, General Atomics Inc.

The Journal noted “the stolen video feeds also indicate that U.S. adversaries continue to find simple ways of counteracting sophisticated American military technologies.”

In fact, as the [Journal](#) disclosed in a subsequent report, the video feed wasn’t encrypted “because military officials have long assumed no one would make the effort to try to intercept it.”

Talk about imperial hubris!

“‘It’s bad—they’ll have everything,’ in terms of the secret technology in the aircraft,” an unnamed U.S. official told the Los Angeles Times. “‘And the Chinese or the Russians will have it too.’”

The [Associated Press](#) reported that “Iran will not return a U.S. surveillance drone captured by its armed forces, a senior commander of the country’s elite Revolutionary Guard said Sunday.”

“Gen. Hossein Salami, deputy head of the Guard, said in remarks broadcast on state television that the violation of Iran’s airspace by the U.S. drone was a ‘hostile act’ and warned of a ‘bigger’ response. He did not elaborate on what Tehran might do.”

“No one returns the symbol of aggression to the party that sought secret and vital intelligence related to the national security of a country,” Salami said.

On the diplomatic front, the drone’s capture was a tactical boost for Tehran.

On Thursday, Iran’s UN Ambassador Mohammad Khazaee complained in a letter to the UN Security Council that the “blatant and unprovoked air violation by the United States Government is tantamount to an act of hostility against the Islamic Republic of Iran in clear contravention of international law, in particular, the basic tenets of the United Nations.” Khazaee demanded “condemnation of such aggressive acts.” Needless to say, none will be forthcoming.

A One-Two Punch: Iran and China

As Washington seeks to impose a stranglehold over vital petrochemical resources in Central Asian and Middle Eastern energy corridors, efforts to overthrow the Tehran government, as with U.S. machinations against Libya and now Syria, are daggers aimed directly at Washington’s largest creditor and geopolitical rival, China.

Writing in [Asia Times Online](#), analyst Kaveh L. Afrasiabi warned that the “United States government is on the verge of taking its problems with the Islamic Republic of Iran to a whole new and ominous level that portends clashing interests with China and a number of other countries, including in Europe, which receives some half a million barrels of oil from Iran on a daily basis.”

As previously reported, the 2012 Defense Authorization Act, wending its way through Congress will impose new crippling economic sanctions on Iran, and threaten any corporation or financial institution that does business with Iran’s Central Bank with stiff punitive measures.

“Unwilling to compromise, hawkish lawmakers sponsoring the bill and their impressive army of pro-Israel lobbyists have mounted a counter-attack,” Afrasiabi averred, “arguing that the bill is sound and does not require any ‘watering down’ that would weaken its impact on Iran—the hope being that this will bring Tehran to its knees over the nuclear issue.”

Last week, pro-Israel lobby groups, including the the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the American Jewish Committee, “began a loud campaign in favor of the latest US sanctions bill, pressuring Obama to go along and reminding him of his ‘waiver authority’” under terms of the draconian legislation.

“This argument traps the White House into difficult choices, for example, exempting China, which receives 13% of its imported oil from Iran, would ignite a bush fire of political criticism, and not doing so on the other hand would inevitably harm US-China relations,” Afrasiabi wrote.

Indeed, the current legislation is a double-edged sword aimed at both Iran and China because “the bill in effect asks Beijing to forego its energy ties with Iran and look elsewhere, clearly not something the Chinese are prepared to do in today’s age of energy insecurity.”

“That insecurity,” Asia Times reports, “would be exacerbated as a result of an oil embargo on Iran, which relies on its oil exports for some 80% of its foreign income. Oil prices would jack up, perhaps to about US\$250 a barrel as warned by Tehran,” and would have a deleterious effect on countries “such as Spain and Greece, which receive 14% of their oil from Iran, some on Iran credit,” directly impacting their already troubled economies.

Reframing Western Propaganda

Underscoring Western unity regarding the terrorist campaign targeting Iran, the director of “Germany’s Institute for Security and International Affairs (SWP), Volker Perthes, and their Iran expert Walter Posch” argued in a secret 2010 diplomatic cable published by [WikiLeaks](#) that “a policy of covert sabotage (unexplained explosions, accidents, computer hacking etc) would be more effective than a military strike whose effects in the region could be devastating.”

As [German Foreign Policy](#) reported last month, the “German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) recently recalled the cause for the renewed escalation of tensions. ‘Since the demise of British colonial rule and the announcement of the 1957 Eisenhower Doctrine,’ according to the think tank’s recent analysis, the USA has been pursuing the objective of thwarting the rise of any Middle East country to become a regional predominating power-‘if necessary by military means’.”

“‘The growth of power and influence of a regional player’ would ‘automatically be equated with loss of US power and influence in that region.’ Washington has always sought, through ‘alliances and inter-alliance policies, to create a regional balance of power’ that guarantees western hegemony in this resource-rich region.”

“Therefore,” GFP’s analyst concludes, “the conflict between the West and Iran—regardless of ideological wrappings—is simply a hegemonic conflict.”

This has been borne out by recent statements by neoconservatives in the United States. Shifting gears, neocons in leading U.S. think tanks are busily manufacturing new reasons why the United States, Israel, or both, need to attack Iran—now.

As journalist MJ Rosenberg pointed out for [Media Matters](#), “suddenly the struggle to stop Iran is not about saving Israel from nuclear annihilation.”

Rosenberg reported that “after a decade of scare-mongering about the second coming of Nazi Germany, the Iran hawks are admitting that they have other reasons for wanting to take out Iran, and saving Israeli lives may not be one of them.”

“Suddenly,” Rosenberg wrote, “the neoconservatives have discovered the concept of truth-telling, although, no doubt, the shift will be ephemeral.”

In late November Danielle Pletka, the head of the American Enterprise Institute’s “foreign policy shop” explained: “The biggest problem for the United States is not Iran getting a nuclear weapon and testing it, it’s Iran getting a nuclear weapon and not using it. Because the second that they have one and they don’t do anything bad, all of the naysayers are going to come back and say, ‘See, we told you Iran is a responsible power. We told you Iran wasn’t getting nuclear weapons in order to use them immediately.’ ... And they will eventually define Iran with nuclear weapons as not a problem.”

Never mind the inconvenient fact that Iran has repeatedly stated their nuclear program is exclusively for civilian purposes, a point clearly established by two National Intelligence Estimates by American secret state agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Indeed, no evidence exists that Iran has diverted enriched uranium towards a secret military program to develop a weapon, despite howls of protest to the contrary by powerful pro-Israel lobby groups and their pets in Congress.

“Earlier this week,” Rosenberg reported, “one of Pletka’s colleagues at AEI said pretty much the same thing. Writing in the Weekly Standard, Thomas Donnelly explained that we’ve got the Iran problem all wrong and that we need to ‘understand the nature of the conflict.’”

Donnelly continued: “‘We’re fixated on the Iranian nuclear program while the Tehran regime has its eyes on the real prize: the balance of power in the Persian Gulf and the greater Middle East’.”

In other words, warmongers on both sides of the rather narrow Washington “divide” view Iran not as a so-called “existential threat” to America’s “stationary aircraft carrier in the Middle East,” Israel, which possesses upwards of 200 nukes, but as a direct competitor for hegemony over the control of the vast petrochemical resources of Central Asia and the Middle East.

As Seumas Milne wrote last week in [The Guardian](#), “a US or Israeli attack on Iran would turn that regional maelstrom into a global firestorm.”

“Iran would certainly retaliate directly and through allies against Israel, the US and US Gulf client states, and block the 20% of global oil supplies shipped through the Strait of Hormuz. Quite apart from death and destruction, the global economic impact would be incalculable.”

As [Reuters](#) reported, “the chance of a military strike on Iran has roughly tripled in the past year, the senior geopolitical risk analyst at Barclays Capital said on Thursday.”

“New York-based analyst Helina Croft, writing in a note titled ‘Blowback: Assessing the fallout from the Iranian sanctions’, said even increased sanctions without an all-out military strike was increasing the risk of a spike in oil prices.”

“We still contend that the risk of either an Israeli or US strike on the Iranian nuclear facilities remains low, but it has risen, in our view, from 5-10 percent last year to 25-30% now,” Croft said.

Despite, or possibly because the severe economic fallout an attack on Iran would threaten their global competitors, the crisis-ridden U.S. Empire just might view the risks as “manageable.”

But as the [World Socialist Web Site](#) warned, “what is being attempted is no less than redrawing the political map of the entire Middle East. It threatens not only region-wide conflict, but to involve those major powers Washington is trying to exclude from this area of vital geostrategic concern: Russia and China.”

This dangerous and deadly game is fraught with peril. As Michel Chossudovsky warned on [Global Research](#): “If such a war were to be launched, the entire Middle East-Central Asia region would flare up. Humanity would be precipitated into a World War III Scenario.”

Such a scenario, as readers undoubtedly surmise, would be anything but “manageable.”

In this light, it is hardly an accident that the same 2012 Defense Authorization Act which threatens to collapse Iran’s economy also targets dissident Americans with loss of their constitutional rights and indefinite detention under a creeping martial law regime.

One crime begets another.

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