

IRAN: DRUMS OF WAR BEATING LOUDER: U.S. Mounts Further Military Build-Up in Persian Gulf

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With the drums of war beating ever louder against Iran, the U.S. military has quickly moved to reestablish a war footing in the Persian Gulf. The preparations for a looming military confrontation thus continue apace.

According to the *Washington Post* ([1/27](#)), “The Pentagon is rushing to send a large floating base for commando teams to the Middle East.” As the paper reports, the *USS Ponce*, a 40-year old amphibious transport dock previously set for decommission, will now be converted into a special ops hub, and then likely sent to the Persian Gulf.

The Pentagon, the *Post* reports, is seeking to retrofit the *USS Ponce* on an accelerated timeline. In fact, the military has gone ahead and waived “normal procurement rules because any delay presented a ‘national security risk.’”

At the same time, the *Wall Street Journal* reports ([1/28](#)) the Pentagon has notified Congress that it will divert an additional \$82 million to refine the Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP). (The MOP is a 30,000-pound “bunker-buster” bomb “specifically designed to take out the hardened fortifications built by Iran and North Korea to cloak their nuclear programs.”)

The decision to seek an upgrade in the MOP reportedly comes after a series of tests revealed that the ordinance remains incapable of destroying certain Iranian nuclear facilities, such as the enrichment site at Fordow, located near the holy city of Qom. (Fordow is buried deep within the mountainside, below 260 feet of rock and soil).

The *Journal* also reports that, “The decision to ask now for more money to develop the weapon was directly related to efforts by the U.S. military’s Central Command to prepare military options against Iran as quickly as possible.” And thus much the same as with the retrofitting of the *USS Ponce*, the Pentagon has decided to sidestep the normal budgetary request process in seeking additional funds for the MOP. As *Journal* notes, “The Pentagon deems the MOP upgrades to be a matter of some urgency.”

Meanwhile, it was also [reported Friday](#) that the joint Israel-U.S. war games—deemed Austere Challenge 12—have been rescheduled for October 2012. The games were originally scheduled for spring, but were postponed on January 15 for reasons that were unclear. But with Austere Challenge 12 now set to take place in October, U.S. military officers are scheduled to begin arriving in Israel this coming week in preparation for the largest joint operation ever conducted between the two armed forces.

These latest military maneuvers come on the heels of an announced U.S. troop build-up in the region revealed earlier this month. As the *Los Angeles Times* first reported ([1/12](#)), the build-up, including the stationing of 15,000 U.S. troops in Kuwait, is “intended as a quick-reaction and contingency force in case a military crisis erupts in the standoff with Tehran over its suspected nuclear weapons program.”

Yet despite the ongoing military preparations, the power elites in both Washington and Tel Aviv remain divided as to whether to go ahead with a strike against Iran. As Jim Lobe [noted](#), this growing debate has actually led to “a number of influential members of the [U.S.] foreign policy establishment – including several prominent liberal interventionists who had supported the Iraq war – to warn against any further escalation either by the US or Israel.”

This rhetorical drawback by certain segments within the power structure has also been seen in Israel. On January 18, for example, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak refused to speculate on whether Israel would unilaterally strike Iran, while also going on to [state](#) that Israel was “very far off” from even making such a decision.

Barak, however, already seems to have changed course. Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Friday, the Israeli defense minister [argued](#) that the world must act quickly to stop Iran from reaching the point at which time a strike becomes ineffective. As he stated, “It seems to us to be urgent, because the Iranians are deliberately drifting into what we call an immunity zone where practically no surgical operation could block them.” Very far off appears to be rapidly approaching.

Indeed, writing in the latest *New York Times Magazine* ([1/25](#)), Ronen Bergman argues that Israel remains poised to strike Iran. As Bergman concludes his piece: “After speaking with many senior Israeli leaders and chiefs of military and the intelligence, I have come to believe that Israel will indeed strike Iran in 2012.” Of course, an Israeli strike would quickly ensnare the U.S., along with many others, in a regional, if not global, conflict.

Yet, even as all signs continue to point towards an impending war, a glimmer of hope has perhaps also begun to emerge. Organized popular resistance to yet another imperial conquest is now finally visible within the U.S. As was [announced earlier this month](#), a “broad spectrum of U.S.-based anti-imperialist and anti-war organizations,” including many Occupy movements, have called for a coordinated nationwide protests on February 4 to resist the drive to war with Iran. The protesters will demand: “No war, no sanctions, no intervention, no assassinations against Iran.”

And with the power elite in both Israel and the U.S. still debating and divided over when to launch a strike against Iran, and with the Occupy movement already active in cities across the country, a window of opportunity exists (however brief) for a powerful working class-led push back to gain traction nationally against the further expansion of U.S. militarism into Iran. In fact, the only assured hope for warding off war-establishment doves, after all, rarely prevail against their hawkish counterparts–will be for the U.S. working class to demonstrate its opposition to imperialism by taking to the streets in protest. In the end, such resistance offers the only real hope for a peaceful resolution to the present crisis.

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