

“Tempo of Attack Planning” Increases for U.S. Military Strikes on Iran

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Based on high-level sources inside the U.S. government and military, journalist Seymour Hersh reports: “This summer, the White House, pushed by the office of Vice President Dick Cheney, requested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff redraw long-standing plans for a possible attack on Iran.” (“Shifting Targets—The Administration’s plan for Iran,” *New Yorker*, October 8, 2007.) Hersh writes that the focus of U.S. attack plans has shifted from “a broad bombing attack” to “surgical” strikes on Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps. Hersh says Bush recently told U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, “he was thinking of hitting Iranian targets across the border and that the British ‘were on board.’”

Hersh details the military plans being put in place: “The strategy calls for the use of sea-launched cruise missiles and more precisely targeted ground attacks and bombing strikes, including plans to destroy the most important Revolutionary Guard training camps, supply depots, and command and control facilities.” One former intelligence official called it “fast in and out” and told Hersh the necessary forces are already within striking distance. “The Navy’s planes, ships, and cruise missiles are in place in the Gulf and operating daily. They’ve got everything they need—even AWACS are in place and the targets in Iran have been programmed. The Navy is flying FA-18 missions every day in the Gulf.” A Pentagon consultant told Hersh that the air assault “would be accompanied by a series of what he called ‘short, sharp incursions’ by American Special Forces units into suspected Iranian training sites.”

Hersh’s revelations are the latest (and most comprehensive) in a growing wave of reports on a gathering momentum toward a U.S. military confrontation—and very possibly war—with Iran. (Go to revcom.us for previous *Revolution* alerts and coverage.) “There has been a significant increase in the tempo of attack planning,” Hersh sums up. One recently retired CIA official told him, “They’re moving everybody to the Iran desk... It’s just like the fall of 2002” (before the U.S. launched war on Iraq).

The latest indication of this acceleration includes a *New York Times* report (9/30) that “Freedom Watch,” a new lobbying group with close ties to the White House, plans to raise \$200 million to launch a campaign targeting Iran, among other things. And there are reports that Vice President Cheney’s office is directing an anti-Iran propaganda offensive by a constellation of government institutions, right-wing organizations, think tanks, political figures, and media. According to Britain’s *Telegraph* (9/30/07), “American diplomats have been ordered to compile a dossier detailing Iran’s violations of international law that some fear could be used to justify military strikes against the Islamic republic’s nuclear programme.”

The *Telegraph* also reports there was recently a conference aimed at the U.S. Air Force coordinating “with military leaders from the Gulf to train and prepare Arab air forces for a possible war with Iran.”

Notably, these reports have mainly appeared in British papers or the alternative U.S. press. Major U.S. media—ABC, NBC, CBS, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*—have refused to seriously report on these heightened military preparations.

Shift in Pretext Building: From Counter-proliferation to Counter-terrorism

In recent months, the focus of the Bush regime’s propaganda campaign against Iran’s Islamic Republic has shifted somewhat from charges that Iran is building nuclear weapons to claims that Iran is waging a “proxy” military campaign against U.S. forces in Iraq. “What had been presented primarily as a counter-proliferation mission has been reconceived as counterterrorism,” Hersh writes.

Maintaining a stranglehold on the Middle East is crucial to the U.S. global power and the functioning of its capitalist-imperialist system. Bush’s so-called “war on terror” was launched to solidify this U.S. stranglehold by defeating anti-U.S. Islamic fundamentalism and taking down states like Iraq and Iran that stood in the way of the goal of U.S.-controlled regional transformation. But today, six years after launching their war for greater empire, the Bush regime is finding that its plans have backfired in important ways. Instead of weakening Iran (and Islamic fundamentalism more broadly), the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have strengthened it. “There has been a growing recognition in Washington and throughout the Middle East that Iran is emerging as the geopolitical winner of the war in Iraq,” Hersh concludes. The *Guardian* (9/30) quoted former UN Ambassador John Bolton saying, “If we were to strike Iran it should be accompanied by an effort at regime change.”

The reactionary state of Iran has its own ambitions in the region, and its role in Iraq and the scope of its nuclear program are not completely clear. But the Bush regime has yet to produce any substantial, concrete evidence for its charges that Iran is behind attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq, or that Iran is trying to build nuclear weapons. Hersh was told by one former high-level C.I.A. official that “the intelligence about who is doing what inside Iran ‘is so thin that nobody even wants his name on it.’” And according to Hersh, ongoing International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) inspections have found that “There’s no evidence that Iran is significantly into weapons fabrication or that Iran has done any of the kind of testing it needs to do to develop an actual warhead. And so, they are enriching, and they may have ambitions, but there’s no rush.”

The difficulty of trying to attack Iran in a way that will not end up backfiring on the U.S. has given rise to sharp debate within the U.S. ruling class, along with diplomatic, political, and military maneuvering. For instance, U.S. strategists have worried that even massive bombing might not destroy Iran’s nuclear and military infrastructure and might provoke an Iranian counterattack with the potential of uncorking an uncontrollable regional conflagration.

Bush, Cheney, and others may hope U.S. threats, coupled with diplomatic and economic sanctions, may trigger upheaval in Iran, and the collapse or capitulation of the regime. Smaller military strikes on the Revolutionary Guards, a pillar of Islamic rule, could be aimed at the same result—without the dangers of a full-scale bombing campaign. Cheney et al may

hope limited strikes don't remain limited, but provoke an Iranian response that the U.S. would then use to justify a massive U.S. counterstrike. Or Cheney could just do an "end run," putting the rest of the ruling class in a position where they feel compelled to go along. In short, the U.S. imperialists are creating an extremely dangerous situation, including the potential for war to break loose as a result of miscalculations by either side, or an unanticipated incident.

Democrats Paving the Way for War

And what are the "anti-war" Democrats doing in the face of this growing drumbeat for attacking Iran? They're paving the way for it. On September 26, the Democratic-controlled Senate passed an amendment 76-22 blaming Iran for U.S. deaths in Iraq and calling on the State Department to designate its Revolutionary Guard Corps "a foreign terrorist organization." The day before, the House of Representatives, also controlled by the Democrats, approved a resolution (introduced by Democrat Tom Lantos) 397-16 calling for new energy sanctions against Iran and also labeling the Revolutionary Guards a terrorist group.

At a debate between Democratic presidential candidates, former Sen. Mike Gravel lashed out at the leading candidates: "This is fantasy land. We're talking about ending the war. My god, we're just starting a war right today. There was a vote in the Senate today...and it is essentially a fig leaf to let George Bush go to war with Iran.... I'm ashamed of you, Hillary, for voting for it.... And Obama was not even there to vote." Clinton burst out laughing as if Gravel's opposition to war was ludicrous. She then repeated Bush regime charges that Iran's Revolutionary Guards are "promoting terrorism" and demanded the U.S. "put some teeth into all this talk about dealing with Iran." Bush had "ignored" Iran, Clinton charged. "Now we've got to make up for lost time."

Urgently Needed: Mass Resistance to a U.S. War on Iran

While war on Iran may not be inevitable (Hersh writes that he was told "the President has yet to issue the 'executive order' that would be required"), many signs show it's a rapidly growing danger and a real possibility. A U.S. attack on Iran would in all likelihood have catastrophic consequences for the people of Iran, the peoples of the Middle East and the world. It would be an escalation of the U.S.'s global war of aggression for greater empire—no matter what pretext the Bush regime used to launch it—and it would be totally unjust.

Massive resistance in this country must put an end to the war in Iraq and prevent a U.S. war with Iran. Millions of ordinary people from all segments of society, acting now, could change the political terrain—and the calculations of those in power. Today, the Bush regime is planning to stay in Iraq indefinitely and preparing for a possible attack on Iran and it calculates that—and is counting on—people going along with all this. We need to change that calculus. Now.

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