

The End of the Beginning

US forces ready to destroy 10,000 targets in the Middle East in a few hours.

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Regardless of any impending ceasefire, the removal of Hizbullah and the Iranian nuclear position sets up the prospect of an US war against Iran

US forces are ready today to destroy 10,000 targets in the Middle East in a few hours. US readiness for more war is just one indicator that the present war is likely to spread and intensify in the coming months.

Unnoticed amidst coverage of the war, Iran has [rejected](#) a UN resolution demanding it halt uranium enrichment. Condoleezza Rice anticipates that on the nuclear issue: “when the Iranians get past this August 31 deadline, I think they’re going to see sanctions from the international system that are going to start to make life pretty miserable.” Ehud Olmert, the Israeli prime minister, [stated](#) back in April that the decisive point in Iran’s development of nuclear arms would come in months.

Both the Iranian and US governments regard the fighting in Lebanon and Israel as related to their own conflict. President Bush made the end of Iranian and Syrian support of Hizbullah a [condition](#) of any ceasefire, though he has since softened his stance at the UN. Condoleezza Rice [remarked](#) that “we do know that this is more than just Hizbullah in Lebanon. This is an extension of Iranian power through a proxy war.”

US Intelligence Chief, John Negroponte, told the US Senate [Intelligence Committee](#) earlier this year that Iran regarded Hizbullah as “a critical regime safeguard by deterring US and Israeli attacks”. With Hezbollah already at war, this “safeguard” is in the process of being removed.

Iran has threatened a world oil price crisis in response to UN sanctions. We do not now know if China, France and Russia will support sanctions or if US will once more regard the UN’s failure as a license to act militarily. These “ifs” require a close look at the US, Israeli and Iranian political intentions and military capabilities.

American intentions towards Iran are fairly clear. If diplomacy and sanctions fail to halt Iran’s nuclear ambitions then military force must be used. No one should be shocked that William Kristol, the neoconservative leader, has already [called](#) for a military strike on Iran in response to Hizbullah’s attack on Israel.

Seymour [Hersh](#)’s [articles](#) claim that President Bush ordered war against Iran shortly after the President’s re-election in 2004. His claim that Bush is determined not to leave Iran to a future president and that he has support from leading Democrats is born out by numerous

conversations I have had with colleagues in Washington. As a senior staffer to Senator Kerry put it: “why should people object if we carry out disarmament militarily?”

There are plenty more reports that war with Iran is either underway or in preparation. Special forces “prepare for Iran attack” [wrote](#) Robert Fox back in 2003. Pat Buchanan’s [American Conservative](#) argues along with Hersh that vice-president Cheney has prepared a war plan for Iran including the use of nuclear weapons by summer 2005. Scott Ritter has claimed that President Bush ordered that the US be ready to attack Iran at any point [after](#) June 2005 and Newsweek [reported](#) that the administration was considering options for regime change. The [Atlantic Monthly](#) concluded after conducting a wargame that attacking Iran was too risky. The [powerpoint slides](#) from that game provide a glimpse into the world of war planning. Their analysis assumes a large ground invasion, clearly not a favoured option of either Don Rumsfeld or the American public. Most recently, the eminent investigative writer, James Bamford, has [described](#) a neoconservative push for regime change.

Speculation aside, we do know that Don Rumsfeld has placed US forces on alert. “We’re now at the point where we are essentially on alert,” lieutenant-colonel Bruce Carlson, commander of the 8th Air Force, said. “We have the capacity to plan and execute global strikes in half a day or less.”

Under the command of marine-general James [Cartwright](#), US Global Strike planning has the potential to destroy over 10,000 targets in Iran in one mission with “smart” conventional weapons. US government [documents](#) obtained by Hans Kristensen and analysed by William [Arkin](#) has described the development of this Global Strike capability.

Awaiting his orders, George Bush has more than 200 strategic [bombers](#) (B52-B1-B2-F117A) and US Navy Tomahawk cruise missiles. One B2 bomber dropped 80,500lb bombs on separate targets in 22 seconds in a [test](#) flight. Using just half the available force, 10,000 targets could be attacked almost simultaneously. This strike power alone is sufficient to destroy all major Iranian political, military, economic and transport capabilities.

Such a strike would take “shock and awe” to a new level and leave Iran with few if any conventional military capabilities to block the straights of Hormuz or provide conventional military support to insurgents in Iraq. If this was not enough, the [latest](#) generation of [smart bombs](#) now being delivered to the US air force [quadruples](#) the number of weapons all US warplanes can carry.

Placing forces on high alert, no more means that the US will actually use them. However, in combination with an increasing crisis, high alert levels mean we should be extra careful how we move forward. We should [heed](#) Tony Blair. When Mike Gapes MP, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, queried the prime minister’s equivocation over pre-emptive war on Iran, asking: “Does that mean, then, we are just left with sanctions? Mr Blair replied: “It means that you take this a step at a time.”

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