

U.S.-IRAN: From War Of Nerves To Full-Scale War?

By [Boris Volkhonsky](#)

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Apparently U.S. authorities want to create an assumption that a war with Iran is inevitable, and the only remaining questions are, who is to launch the first strike, and when will it happen?

The U.S. sticks to the scenario under which it will be Israel who initiates the war. In that case, it will give the U.S. a plausible excuse for being involved with the sole purpose to defend its core ally.

For the U.S., whose aim is obvious – that is the change of regime in Iran – the stalemate cannot last too long. Therefore, in the coming weeks and months we will probably see an escalation of war games, which by now have been games of muscles and nerves only, but have a potential of turning into a full-scale war.

As reported by *The Los Angeles Times*, the U.S. Navy is upgrading its defensive and offensive capabilities in the Persian Gulf to counter threats from Iran to seize the Strait of Hormuz and block the flow of oil.

Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert told reporters that the Navy will add four more mine-sweeping ships and four more CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopters with mine-detection capability. The Navy is also sending more underwater unmanned mine-neutralization units to the region.

On the other hand, according to reports, the Iranians have boasted that they could “swarm” large U.S. ships with their smaller, fast-moving craft. They have also reportedly been laying mines along their coastline.

In January, the chief of the Iranian army warned the U.S. not to send another ship to the Persian Gulf after the aircraft carrier John C. Stennis departed. Another carrier, the Abraham Lincoln, entered the gulf weeks later without incident.

Almost simultaneously, U.S. President Barack Obama issued an executive order titled “National Defense Resources Preparedness.” The executive order, published on the official White House website, “delegates authorities and addresses national defense resource policies” “in times of national emergency.” Several media have already labeled the document as an attempt to impose a state of emergency in peacetime. In any case, this is definitely a new indication of the U.S. readiness for any course of development in the most volatile region of the world.

And, as if to further strengthen the impression, the New York Times reported on Monday

that “a classified war simulation held this month to assess the repercussions of an Israeli attack on Iran forecasts that the strike would lead to a wider regional war, which could draw in the United States and leave hundreds of Americans dead.”

Although U.S. officials said the so-called war games were not designed as a rehearsal for American military action, they have raised fears among top American planners that it may be impossible to preclude American involvement in any escalating confrontation with Iran.

So, apparently U.S. authorities want to create an assumption that a war with Iran is inevitable, and the only remaining questions are, who is to launch the first strike, and when will it happen?

In fact, both sides (or, all three, if we think of Israel as an independent side) are acting in order to give the other one a chance to launch the first blow. Definitely, starting a war does not seem to be in Iran's interest, since it will further increase the international isolation the country has found itself in, and if Iran emerges as the initiator, it might mean that it will lose what remains of at least some support it has now. And total isolation would only mean a collapse of Iran's already strained economy – possessing oil is a good thing, but you can never feed your subjects with oil.

Also, for the U.S. it does not seem to be in its national interest (at least, obviously not in the partisan interests of the Democrats and President Obama) to appear as the initiator. Much has been said about the Iranian nuclear program, but so far no consistent evidence that the program pursues any other ends apart from peaceful ones has been presented. And the memories of similar insinuations concerning the alleged weapon program in Iraq under Saddam Hussein are still fresh. As everyone remembers, alleged weapons of mass destruction served as an excuse for the U.S. to launch a war in 2003, but no such weapons have been found.

This probably explains why the U.S. sticks to the scenario under which it will be Israel who initiates the war. In that case, it will give the U.S. a plausible excuse for being involved with the sole purpose to defend its core ally.

But again, a war in the pre-election period would hardly improve the incumbent president's standing. Hence, the U.S. is trying to lay off the bottom line till better times.

The only casus belli that could be easily fed to the U.S. public is an Iranian strike. But that needs a lot of effort to force Iran into coercive action. As has been shown constantly, Iran is quite satisfied with the present state of “neither war nor peace” which enables it to keep at least some national unity at home and not to subject itself to extensively strict sanctions.

But for the U.S., whose aim is obvious – that is the change of regime in Iran – the stalemate cannot last too long. Therefore, in the coming weeks and months we will probably see an escalation of war games, which by now have been games of muscles and nerves only, but have a potential of turning into a full-scale war.

Boris Volkhonsky, senior research fellow, Russian Institute for Strategic Studies

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