

US war game foreshadows Israeli attack on Iran

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Details of a recent Pentagon war game, leaked yesterday in the *New York Times*, underscore the advanced character and recklessness of the Obama administration's preparations for war against Iran. Nominally premised on an attack by Israel on Iran, the conclusion from the exercise was that "the strike would lead to a wider regional war which could draw in the United States and leave hundreds of Americans dead."

The two-week war game was carried out by US Central Command to test communication and coordination between its headquarters in Tampa, Florida and US forces in the Persian Gulf.

"When the exercise had concluded earlier this month, according to the [American] officials, [US Central Command head] General Mattis told aides that an Israeli first-strike would likely have dire consequences across the region and for United States forces there," the *Times* stated.

The article ominously noted that a similar "Internal Look" exercise had been used in December 2002, by Central Command head General Tommy Franks, "to test the readiness of his units for the coming invasion of Iraq." Just three months later, in March 2003, US President George Bush unleashed the illegal US-led war of aggression that cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians and devastated much of the country.

Likewise, the latest "Internal Look" exercise is far from being purely hypothetical. It took place amid a spate of top-level political and military discussions between the US and Israel over Iran. Both countries have repeatedly threatened military action. Last week President Obama issued another warning to Tehran that "the window for solving this issue diplomatically is shrinking."

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who met with Obama earlier this month, told the Knesset last week that he had secured agreement from the US president for Israel's right to launch a military operation against Iran if it saw fit. "This position was positively received in the United States, I would even say in the most profound way," he said.

Speaking to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee yesterday, Israeli Defence Secretary Ehud Barak underlined the necessity for Israel to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, saying the window of opportunity for a strike was rapidly closing. He claimed that Iran's nuclear program was "steadily approaching maturation and verging on a 'zone of immunity'."

The US officials who briefed the *New York Times* on the Pentagon war game declared that they "see an Israeli attack on Iran within the next year as a possibility." Others have

indicated a far shorter timeframe. An article in the *Washington Post* reported last month that US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta “believes there is a strong likelihood that Israel will strike Iran in April, May, or June.”

One purpose of these military threats is to pressure the Iranian regime to make major concessions in negotiations due to take place with the P5+1—the US, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany. But Israeli Defence Secretary Barak has already cast doubts over the planned talks and repeated his view that sanctions would not force Iran to end all its uranium enrichment activity. “We would love to see it, but I’m not sure that that’s going to happen,” he said on Monday.

The *New York Times* sources stated that Israel would probably give the United States little or no warning of any Israeli strike. Given the close collaboration between Israeli and American military officials and Israel’s heavy political, financial and military dependence on the US, such comments are disingenuous. In order to deny involvement, the Obama administration has been carefully distancing itself publicly from any Israel strike.

The Iranian regime, however, will certainly hold Washington responsible. The *Times* stated: “[US] officials said that, under the chain of events, Iran believed that Israel and the United States were partners in any strike against Iranian nuclear sites and therefore considered American military forces in the Persian Gulf as complicit in the attack.”

Clearly concerned at the prospect of a major war with the US and its allies, the Iranian regime has been moderate in its reaction to the mounting warmongering by Israel and the United States. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday warned that Iran would retaliate against any strike, but would not seek to escalate any conflict. “We will attack them at the same level as they attack us,” he said. Khamenei again declared that Iran had no nuclear weapons and no plans to build any.

To whip up public fear and create the climate for war, the US and Israel continue a constant stream of propaganda about Iran’s plans for nuclear weapons. Yet a *New York Times* article published on Saturday made clear that neither the US nor Israeli intelligence establishments believe Iran has decided to build a nuclear device.

American officials told the *Times* that whatever nuclear weapons research had been conducted had been ended in 2003 and had not been revived. One senior official characterised the evidence as very persuasive. Another declared: “That assessment holds up really well.” The article noted: “Mossad, Israel’s intelligence service, agrees with the American intelligence assessments, even while Israeli political leaders have been pushing for quick aggressive action.”

These intelligence assessments only underscore the criminal character of the war being prepared by Israel and the US. The lies about Iran’s nuclear weapons parallel those of the Bush administration prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As with the occupation of Iraq, the Obama administration is seeking to fashion a regime in Tehran in line with American ambitions to maintain its economic and strategic dominance in the energy-rich regions of Middle East and Central Asia.

The scope of a US-led war on Iran would far exceed the invasion of Iraq. The outcome of the latest Pentagon war game hinted at the need for an extended war when it concluded that Israeli and US strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities would only set back Tehran’s nuclear

programs by three years. The *Times* noted that more extensive attacks using long-range bombers, refuelling aircraft and precision missiles could be used to do greater damage.

The *Times* did not attempt to spell out the dangers entailed in “a wider regional war,” but the fault lines of such a conflict are already clear. For months, the US and its European allies, with the support of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, have been pressing for the ousting of a key Iranian ally—the Syrian regime of President Bashir al-Assad. Any war with Iran—whether triggered by an Israeli strike, a naval incident in the Gulf or another pretext—threatens to extend into a wider conflict in the Middle East and internationally.

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