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Red Lines and Ticking Clocks: U.S. War Plans Against Iran

The possibility of Russia's Military Involvement...

By Tom Burghardt

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Before the first bomb falls disinformation specialists prepare the ground. Leading media outlets, foreign policy journals and a plethora of think tanks funded by elite foundations, energy and weapons' conglomerates, "right," "left" or "center" take your pick, churn out war propaganda disguised as "analysis."

From the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI) to the neoliberal Center for American Progress (CAP), rhetorical skirmishes aside, the line is remarkably similar. Indeed, for "conservative" and "liberal" elite bloviators alike, Iran poses an "existential threat" to Israel and America's regional "allies," a disparate crew of land-grabbing colonizers, murderous princes and profligate potentates.

Only U.S. intervention, in the form of an overt military attack now or crippling economic sanctions followed by military action later, can save the day and bring "democracy" to the benighted Iranian people.

If we're to believe neocon acolyte Thomas Donnelly, "The rapid ticking of the Iran nuclear clock also marks an increasingly dark hour for the United States and its closest allies and partners, because it coincides with a third clock ... the timetable of retreat set in motion by Barack Obama."

Meanwhile, liberal interventionists Rudy deLeon and Brian Katulis over at CAP tell us that "President Barack Obama and his administration are ratcheting up the pressure on the Iranian regime, building an international coalition that is increasingly isolating and weakening Iran--making it pay a price for not living up to its international responsibilities."

While AEI and their fellow-travelers claim that "in the after-midnight hour when the Obama retreat is complete, the United States would find itself with few options at the chiming of the nuclear clock," CAP's liberal hawks loudly proclaim that the "Obama administration has adopted a tough approach to Iran, centered on three main components: Unprecedented defense cooperation with regional allies that enhances their security and independence; An international coalition that holds Iran accountable for its actions; Smart, targeted economic sanctions."

In other words, while elite Washington factions may disagree over tactical issues, they are in full agreement on the wider strategic goals: undisputed American hegemony over energy corridors in Central Asia and the Middle East.

From the darkest days of the Cold War to the present moment, American policy is designed with one goal in mind: smash the competition, firstly China and Russia, but also the crisis-ridden European Union, whose main task is to keep quiet and fall in line.

Red Lines

Last week in an interview with the [CBS Evening News](#), U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said that "despite the efforts to disrupt the Iranian nuclear program, the Iranians have reached a point where they can assemble a bomb in a year or potentially less."

"So are you saying that Iran can have a nuclear weapon in 2012?," reporter Scott Pelley asked. Panetta replied, "It would probably be about a year before they can do it. Perhaps a little less. But one proviso, Scott, is if they have a hidden facility somewhere in Iran that may be enriching fuel."

Never mind that the U.S.-controlled International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has not discovered a so-called "secret facility," or that two National Intelligence Estimates produced by all 16 U.S. secret state agencies, the latest one this year, reported there is not a shred of credible evidence supporting claims that Iran has diverted uranium towards the development of a bomb.

No matter; as we learned in the aftermath of the disastrous invasion of Iraq, "the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy" and therefore, the march to war with Iran will continue, indeed accelerate in the near term.

"If the Israelis decide to launch a military strike to prevent that weapon from being built," Pelley asked, "what sort of complications does that raise for you?"

Panetta replied, "Well, we share the same common concern. The United States does not want Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. That's a red line for us and that's a red line, obviously, for the

Israelis. If we have to do it we will deal with it."

When Pelley asked what "it?" is, Panetta said: "If they proceed and we get intelligence that they are proceeding with developing a nuclear weapon then we will take whatever steps necessary to stop it."

Pelley: "Including military steps?"

Panetta: "There are no options off the table."

Ticking Clocks

While the media have gone to great lengths to portray the Israelis as proverbial loose cannons who just might launch an Iran attack without first consulting their American partners, this is a smokescreen providing political cover for the Obama administration during an election year.

As analyst Michel Chossudovsky pointed out on [Global Research](#), "In late December 2008, coinciding with the onslaught of Israel's 'Operation Cast Lead' directed against Gaza, the Pentagon dispatched some 100 military personnel to Israel from US European Command (EUCOM) to assist Israel in setting up a new sophisticated X-band early warning radar system as part of a new and integrated air defense system."

Chossudovsky observed this development indicates that there has been "a fundamental turning point in the structure of Israel's Air Defense system and its relationship to the US global missile detection system."

Although "casually heralded as 'military aid,'" Chossudovsky wrote, "the project consisted in strengthening the integration of Israel's air defense system into that of the US, with the Pentagon rather than Israel calling the shots."

Since the Obama regime came to power, Chossudovsky noted there has "been a significant hike in US military aid to Israel," and "in fact much of this so-called military aid constitutes a veiled increase in the U.S. Defense budget."

This has been borne out by several reports in the Israeli press.

Last week, [Israel National News](#) disclosed that the "United States will double the special aid it gives Israel for the development and implementation of anti-missile systems, the Globes financial newspaper reported on Thursday."

Indeed, "the House and Senate's Committees on Appropriations approved the aid following a request by the U.S. Administration to approve aid totaling \$106.1 million for the Arrow 3 anti-ballistic long-range air defense system, for the program to improve the basic capabilities of the Arrow systems, and for the David's Sling mid-range anti-missile system."

Significantly, both "Appropriations Committees went far beyond the request, the report noted,

and raised the amount of aid from \$129 million to \$235.7 million in 2012," Israel National News reported.

These developments were underlined in a report last week by the right-wing [Jerusalem Post](#).

According to the Post's defense correspondent Yaakov Katz, "Israel is moving forward with plans to hold the largest-ever missile defense exercise in its history this spring amid Iranian efforts to obtain nuclear weapons."

"Last week," Katz wrote, "Lt.-Gen. Frank Gorenc, commander of the US's Third Air Force based in Germany, visited Israel to finalize plans for the upcoming drill, expected to see the deployment of several thousand American soldiers in Israel."

The Jerusalem Post disclosed that "the drill, which is unprecedented in its size, will include the establishment of US command posts in Israel and IDF command posts at EUCOM headquarters in Germany--with the ultimate goal of establishing joint task forces in the event of a large-scale conflict in the Middle East."

"The US," Katz noted, "will also bring its THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) and shipbased Aegis ballistic missile defense systems to Israel to simulate the interception of missile salvos against Israel," and that the "American system will work in conjunction with Israel's missile defense systems--the Arrow, Patriot and Iron Dome."

Similar deployments are also underway in Turkey, the staging area for terrorist attacks targeting the Syrian government for "regime change" à la Libya.

As analyst Sibel Edmonds pointed out for [Boiling Frogs Post](#), a "joint US-NATO secret training camp in the US air force base in Incirlik, Turkey, began operations in April-May 2011 to organize and expand the dissident base in Syria."

Edmonds noted that "weekly weapons smuggling operations have been carried out with full NATO-US participation since last May."

According to Edmonds' Turkish and Pentagon sources, "the HQ also includes an information warfare division where US-NATO crafted communications are directed to dissidents in Syria via the core group of Syrian military and Intelligence defectors."

It now appears that U.S.-NATO war plans against Iran will also rely heavily on Turkish participation.

The [PanArmenian News Agency](#) reported Saturday (h/t [Stop NATO](#)) "NATO's Malatya-based ballistic missile early warning radar system will begin functioning next week, a senior Turkish official said Dec 23, reiterating that the device 'is defensive and not directed at any particular country, especially Iran'."

However, with U.S.-NATO plans already underway to install so-called Ballistic Missile Defense

systems in Eastern Europe which threaten Russia with a nuclear first-strike, the deployment of these systems in Turkey can only be viewed as a shot across the bow by both Iran and Russia.

After all, as [The New York Times](#) reported earlier this month, "the American commitment to work with NATO allies and deploy the missile shield is founded on a belief that Iran is accelerating its program to field missiles capable of reaching across NATO territory in Europe."

The American ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daadler, told the Times, "our estimate of the threat has gone up, not down. It is accelerating--this is the Iranian ballistic missile threat--and becoming more severe than even we thought two years ago."

Dismissing Russian concerns that "the alliance's system of radars and interceptors could blunt Moscow's own arsenal of missiles, and thus undermine Russia's strategic deterrent," Daadler proclaimed: "Whether Russia likes it or not, we are about defending NATO-European territory against a growing ballistic missile threat."

Despite claims by Turkey that the radar deployment is strictly "defensive" and not aimed at Iran, the PanArmenian News Agency informed us that "the agreement signed between Ankara and Washington calls for the deployment of a U.S. AN/TPY-2 (X-band) early warning radar system at a military installation at Kürecik in Malatya as part of NATO's missile defense project."

Remarkably similar to the accord signed with Tel Aviv, the Turkish agreement calls for the deployment of "around 50 U.S. soldiers" at the installations, "accompanied by a number of Turkish troops."

"In addition," the news agency disclosed, "a Turkish senior commander is to be posted at NATO's headquarters in Germany, where the intelligence gathered through the radar system will be processed, Hurriyet Daily News reported."

These reports indicate that the United States, with Israel and NATO as junior partners, are coordinating strategic deployments which the Iranians will undoubtedly view as preparations for a large scale attack.

Coming on the heels of a report earlier this month by [Haaretz](#) that the "Israel Defense Forces is forming a command to supervise 'depth' operations, actions undertaken by the military far from Israel's borders," military action by the U.S., Israeli and NATO forces are perhaps only a provocation away.

[The New York Times](#) reported last week that "Iran put neighbors on notice Thursday that it was about to conduct vast naval exercises in the Arabian Sea, including war games near the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping lane for international oil traffic."

"The exercises," the Times reported, "to start Saturday and last 10 days, are Iran's first since May 2010 and were described by the official news media as the largest the country ever planned."

"The scale of the maneuvers, the Times disclosed, "appeared intended to demonstrate Iran's

military capabilities as it faces increased isolation over its suspect nuclear energy program."

These exercises "are bound to put Iranian warships close to vessels of the United States Fifth Fleet, based in Bahrain, which patrols some of the same waters, including the Strait of Hormuz."

War threats are being taken seriously far beyond the Persian Gulf.

Earlier this month [Russia Today](#) disclosed that the "geopolitical situation unfolding around Syria and Iran is prompting Russia to make its military structures in the South Caucasus, on the Caspian, Mediterranean and Black Sea regions more efficient."

RT's correspondent Sergey Konovalov wrote that "Defense Ministry sources are saying that the Kremlin has been informed about an upcoming US-supported Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. The strike will be sudden and take place on 'day X' in the near future. One could assume Iran's reaction will not be delayed. A full-scale war is possible, and its consequences could be unpredictable."

"Recently," RT reported, "the Northern Fleet's aircraft carrier group with the heavy aircraft carrier 'Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Kuznetsov', headed towards the Mediterranean with plans to ultimately enter the Syrian port of Tartus."

Russian Defense Ministry sources would neither confirm nor deny "that the surface warships are being accompanied by the Northern Fleet's nuclear submarines."

"The tasks that will be carried out by the army and the navy in the event of a war against Iran are, of course, not being disclosed," Konovalov wrote.

That an attack on Iran might set-off a global conflict with far-reaching, and deadly, consequences was underscored by [Russia Today](#).

Analyst Col. Vladimir Popov said that "if in the midst [of an attack on Iran] Azerbaijan supported by Turkey, attacks Armenia, then, of course, all of the adversary's attacks against Armenia will be repelled by Russia in conjunction with Armenian anti-missile defense forces."

"The analyst does not exclude the possibility of Russia's military involvement in the Iranian conflict."

"'In the worst-case scenario'," Popov told RT, "'if Tehran is facing complete military defeat after a land invasion of the US and NATO troops, Russia will provide its military support--at least on a military-technical level.'"

As the United States, Israel and NATO prepare the ground for war against Iran, and with operations already underway by the U.S. and NATO to effect "regime change" in Syria, Iran's close regional ally, the pieces of a slow-motion global catastrophe are falling into place.