

BBC reports on US military plans to strike Iran

By Peter Symonds
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Despite its menacing naval build up in the Persian Gulf, the US has repeatedly denied any plans for war against Iran. Last Thursday Defence Secretary Robert Gates brazenly told a Pentagon press conference: “For the umpteenth time, we are not looking for an excuse to go to war with Iran. We are not planning a war with Iran.” The statement is another of the Bush administration’s lies.

A BBC report on Monday made clear that the Pentagon has completed contingency planning for extensive air strikes on Iran that go “beyond nuclear sites and include most of the country’s military infrastructure”. The article continued: “It is understood that any such attack—if ordered—would target Iranian air bases, naval bases, missile facilities and command-and-control centres.”

The Bush administration insists it is pursuing diplomatic means to force Iran to shut down its enrichment facilities. But as the BBC explained: “Diplomatic sources have told the BBC that as a fallback plan, senior officials at Central Command in Florida have already selected their target sets inside Iran. That list includes Iran’s uranium enrichment plant at Natanz. Facilities at Isfahan, Arak and Bushehr are also on the target list.”

The BBC report is not the first to leak details of the Pentagon’s preparations for war against Iran. Citing senior Pentagon, State Department and intelligence sources, veteran US journalist Seymour Hersh has published several detailed articles in the *New Yorker* over the past year outlining the US plans for attacking Iran, including the possible use of nuclear weapons. Several British newspapers, including the *Times*, have described advanced US and Israeli military preparations against Tehran.

An article in the British-based *New Statesman* on Monday also detailed the US plans. “American military operations for a major conventional war with Iran could be implemented any day. They extend far beyond suspect WMD facilities and will enable President Bush to destroy Iran’s military, political and economic infrastructure overnight using conventional weapons.

“British military sources told the *New Statesman*, on

condition of anonymity, that ‘the US military switched its whole focus to Iran’ as soon as Saddam Hussein was kicked out of Baghdad. It continued this strategy, even though it had American infantry bogged down in fighting the insurgency in Iraq. The US army, navy, air force and marines have all prepared battle plans and spent four years building bases and training for ‘Operation Iranian Freedom’.”

What is significant about the BBC report is that it identified two “triggers”, demonstrating that an attack on Iran is under active discussion. According to security correspondent Frank Gardner, the first was “any confirmation that Iran was developing a nuclear weapon”. This trigger provides a sweeping excuse for military action, as the Bush administration insists that Tehran already has a nuclear weapons program, despite the lack of definite proof and repeated denials by the Iranian regime.

As in the lead up to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration is quite capable of fabricating evidence to provide “confirmation” of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. To use this trigger, however, the White House would, formally at least, need to seek approval for a new war from the Democratic-controlled Congress and also the UN Security Council, raising the prospect of opposition, even if very limited, and delays.

The second trigger would provide an excuse for immediate action on the grounds of defending US troops in Iraq. As reported by the BBC: “Alternatively, our correspondent adds, a high-casualty attack on US forces in neighbouring Iraq could also trigger a bombing campaign if it were traced directly back to Tehran.” President Bush has already laid the basis for such a provocation, accusing Iranian and Syrian networks of arming and training anti-US insurgents in Iraq. Over the past month, the US media has published increasingly lurid accounts of the alleged activities of Iranian agents inside Iraq.

The BBC account echoes the remarks of former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 1. In a stinging

attack on the Bush administration's policies in the Middle East, Brzezinski suggested that a "plausible scenario" for war with Iran would be: "Iraqi failure to meet the benchmarks; followed by accusations of Iranian responsibility for the failure; then by some provocation in Iraq or a terrorist act in the US blamed on Iran; culminating in a 'defensive' US military action against Iran that plunges a lonely America into a spreading and deepening quagmire eventually ranging across Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan."

Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei, the two top UN weapons inspectors dealing with Iraq prior to the 2003 US invasion, have joined growing chorus of voices warning of the dangers of a US war against Iran.

In an article in the *International Herald Tribune* on Monday, Blix asked: "Will the United States use armed force against Iran? Hardly any foreign policy issue is hotter right now. American planes are reported to be patrolling along the borders between Iraq and Iran, and US forces have been authorised to kill Iranian agents in Iraq. Two US aircraft carriers are in the Gulf and missile defences have been installed in Gulf states. The military build up is either to scare Tehran or to prepare for American attacks on Iran."

Blix noted that Iran had refused to abide by the UN Security Council resolution passed in December calling for the suspension of its uranium enrichment and other nuclear programs. "Iran is thus on collision course with the resolution adopted by the council. While Washington declares that diplomacy rather than military action is on the agenda, the administration evidently believes that naval demonstrations may have an impact. A recent column in the *Washington Times* suggested an even more explicit demonstration: the launching of a missile on the former US embassy in Tehran—now used by the Iranian revolutionary guards."

Retired US Admiral James Lyons, former commander in chief of the US Pacific Fleet, called in the February 9 issue of the right-wing *Washington Times* for a tomahawk missile strike to send "a swift and unmistakable" signal to Tehran. "The fact that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards use our embassy is immaterial. The message would be clear to all and serve notice to Iran what will happen if they don't stop meddling in Iraq and come instead to the negotiating table on all issues. The alternative for Iran would be unimaginable devastation."

While Blix has retired as a UN weapons inspector, ElBaradei, as head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), is at the centre of the confrontation between the US and Iran over its nuclear programs. The deadline for Iran to meet the demands of the UN resolution expires today. Earlier this month, ElBaradei appealed for

both sides to take a "time out" to negotiate an end to the standoff. The Bush administration, however, has adamantly refused to enter into talks with Iran unless it shuts down its nuclear programs—i.e., concedes to US demands in advance of any negotiations. Senior Iranian officials declared yesterday they would not suspend their uranium enrichment activities.

In a lengthy interview yesterday with the British-based *Financial Times*, ElBaradei was deeply pessimistic about the prospect for negotiations. He is due to present a report to the UN Security Council on Iran's compliance with the December resolution. While noting Iran may be as close as six months to industrial scale enrichment, ElBaradei explained that it was five to ten years, according to British and US intelligence, from producing a nuclear bomb. Iran continues to insist that its enrichment plant is solely to fuel its power reactor at Bushehr.

Commenting on "the perpetual rumbles that Washington or Israel might yet contemplate the use of force," ElBaradei replied: "[E]ven if [the Iranians] were not going to develop a nuclear weapon today, this would be a sure recipe for them to go down that route... Go for the military option and then either you'll have a repeat of North Korea [which has developed nuclear weapons] or you have a repeat of Iraq, and these are not our greatest achievements as civilised human beings."

The Bush administration's hostility to negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programs and alleged support for anti-US insurgents in Iraq stems from the fact that these issues are pretexts for the pursuit of broader US ambitions for economic and strategic dominance throughout the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. The Bush administration's "diplomacy" is simply a smokescreen behind which it is preparing for military action against Iran to achieve these ends.

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