

# US covert operations threaten war with Iran

By Chris Marsden  
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The United States is waging a sustained covert campaign of destabilisation against Iran, focusing on efforts to disrupt its nuclear program. Among a growing list of incidents are:

- Two nuclear physicists were killed and the head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, Fereydoun Abbasi-Davani, was wounded after bombs were attached to their cars or detonated near them in 2010.

- The Stuxnet computer worm infected Iranian nuclear facilities in 2010, damaging computers used in industrial machinery; numerous reports suggest this was a US-Israeli attack to cripple Iranian nuclear centrifuges.

- On November 12 this year, an explosion destroyed the Revolutionary Guard base at Bid Kaneh, killing 17, including a founder of Iran's missile programme.

- On November 28, an explosion in the western Iranian city of Isfahan badly damaged a uranium enrichment facility.

- On December 4, Iran shot down a US RQ-170 Sentinel drone after it illegally crossed the eastern border. The “Beast of Kandahar,” which has a wingspan of about 65 feet and can fly at around 50,000 feet, was, according to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, part of an increased US surveillance effort monitoring suspect nuclear sites. The *Wall Street Journal* stated that the US had considered sending covert missions into Iran to recover the drone or to blow it up with an air strike, but decided that this would be considered an act of war.

- On December 5, the US State Department's arms adviser, Robert Einhorn, said: “Iran is violating international obligations and norms. It is becoming a pariah state... The timeline for its nuclear programme is beginning to get shorter, so it is important we take these strong steps on an urgent basis.”

- The list of sanctions against Iran imposed by the US, Europe and other powers is too long to itemize and is getting longer.

The drums of war are being beaten loudest by potential Republican challengers to President Barack Obama in 2012. On Wednesday, former Massachusetts Governor

Mitt Romney said, “Ultimately, regime-change is what's going to be necessary” in Iran, calling for “covert and overt” efforts to support opposition to leaders in Tehran.

Former House speaker and Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich said he would use “covert capability” to bring about “regime replacement” in Tehran. He proposed that the US kill Iranian scientists and disrupt Tehran's suspect nuclear program, “all of it covertly, all of it deniable.”

Former Senator Rick Santorum said, “There have been scientists turning up dead in Russia and in Iran. There have been computer viruses. There have been problems at their facility. I hope that the United States has been involved with that.” Foreign scientists working on Iran's nuclear program would be “termed an enemy combatant” and “taken out by the United States.”

Such grandstanding produced a bemused response from one retired US official, who told the *National Journal*, “Everything that Mitt Romney said we should be doing—tough sanctions, covert action and pressuring the international community—are all of the things we are actually doing.”

President Barack Obama's own reaction was to issue a bellicose statement threatening possible military action: “No options off the table means I'm considering all options,” he said.

A senior Western intelligence official commented to *Israel News*, “There is deep concern within the senior leadership of the Iranian regime that they will be the target of a surprise military strike by either Israel or the US.”

Iran, like its main regional ally Syria, has responded to the threat of US-backed regime-change by staging military manoeuvres. Gen. Mohammed Ali Jaafari has placed Iran's Revolutionary Guards on a war footing. The Iranian air force has formed “rapid reaction units,” which have carried out exercises practising a response to an enemy air attack. Jaafari has ordered all long-range Shahab missiles to be moved to secret locations in preparation for a retaliatory attack against Israel.

On Thursday, Israel's Home Front Command held its own nationwide drill, simulating missile attacks. Air raid sirens were sounded in Jerusalem and across northern Israel.

*Israel Today* commented, “Fears of a regional war have been driven by Israel's public debate over whether or not to launch a pre-emptive attack on Iran's nuclear program...”

The Arab states are being lined up behind regime change in Iran, following their initiative to isolate Syria and supply the opposition Syrian National Council and Free Syria Army with arms and money.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Sunni-ruled Gulf states such as Bahrain have accused Iran of backing Assad's repression of opposition forces and, without evidence, of stirring unrest in their own Shi'ite communities.

Peter Apps, conflict analyst for Reuters, warned of “proxy wars in Iraq and Syria,” with “Saudi or other Arab backing for the increasingly armed opposition... potentially producing a sectarian civil war lasting years and spilling across borders into neighbouring states.”

Alain Gresh, vice chairman of *Le Monde diplomatique*, wrote of how the Middle East “has been divided into two camps: the resistance camp—Iran, Syria and their allies Hamas and Hizbullah—and the pro-West camp dominated by Egypt and Saudi Arabia.”

Media reports are warning that the present covert conflict with Iran could end in a full-scale war, with devastating consequences for the Middle East and the world. Many have pointed to the obvious parallels with the campaign over “weapons of mass destruction” that paved the way for war with Iraq in 2003.

Britain's *Daily Mail* asked bluntly, “Has the West's war with Iran already begun? Mystery explosions at nuke sites, ‘assassinated’ scientists and downed drones fuel fears covert conflict is under way.”

Writing in the *Guardian*, Seamus Milne was less equivocal. “War on Iran has already begun. Act before it threatens all of us,” ran his comment. “For months the evidence has been growing that a US-Israeli stealth war against Iran has already begun, backed by Britain and France.”

Paul Valley, in the *Independent*, was equally blunt, declaring, “War on Iran has begun. And it is madness.”

The motive behind the “madness” is the on-going effort by the US to secure its hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East and Caspian Basin.

Eliminating the regime of Saddam Hussein had the effect of strengthening Iran as a regional power. The US

has long been determined to end Iran's challenge to US strategic interests—a policy it has pursued in a far more reckless fashion after the working class uprisings of the “Arab Spring” and the downfall of long-time US allies Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.

Working with the official “opposition” movements—a motley collection of pseudo-liberals, Islamists and ex-regime loyalists—to maintain close relations with Tunis and Cairo allowed NATO to launch war against Libya and the on-going destabilisation of Syria. In every case, a similar collection of political forces is backed by regional powers that are deemed amenable to US dictates—Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Egypt and Turkey.

What is being attempted is no less than a redrawing of the political map of the entire Middle East. It threatens not only region-wide conflict, but the involvement of those major powers Washington is trying to exclude from this area of vital geostrategic concern: Russia and China.

The experience of the mass anti-war movement that erupted in 2003 testifies to the impossibility of opposing this development on the basis of moral appeals and pressure on the imperialist powers. Everything depends upon the building of a world-wide political movement of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme to bring an end to capitalism and the domination of the world by predatory imperialist powers and their local stooges.

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