

US escalates threats against Iran

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At two forums this week, the United States and its main allies stepped up their threats against Iran, citing the country's alleged nuclear weapons ambitions and pledging to impose a fourth round of sanctions against the regime in Tehran.

This diplomatic offensive has been combined with press reports of highly provocative US military actions.

On Tuesday, President Barack Obama at a joint White House press conference with French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared that he wanted and expected a new round of sanctions to be passed by the United Nations Security Council "in weeks" rather than months.

The same day, following a meeting in Canada of the foreign ministers of the G-8 industrialized nations, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed "optimism" that a consensus would be reached within the Security Council on a new round of anti-Iran sanctions. Clinton roundly denounced Iran, declaring that "the last 15 months have demonstrated clearly the unwillingness of Iran to fulfill its international obligations..."

This was followed Wednesday by a conflicting series of press reports and disavowals that the US military had test-fired a Trident submarine-launched ballistic missile during a joint exercise with Saudi Arabia. The *Washington Post* web site carried a mid-day Associated Press report attributing the revelation to a "Western military official."

The *Washington Post*-AP article noted that the missile was capable of carrying nuclear warheads. It went on to say: "The US has been strengthening missile defenses in allied Arab nations in the Gulf to help counter any potential missile strike from Iran... The Western military official in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, said US Lt. Gen. Patrick O'Reilly, head of the Missile Defense Agency, attended the test launch."

The article concluded by reporting: "On Monday,

Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Prince Khaled bin Sultan said Saudi and US warplanes will carry out joint exercises soon."

The US intelligence web site Stratfor carried a report on the *Washington Post*-AP article, in which it noted that "ultimately, this could be a powerful signal that the United States is moving to counter Iran's nuclear rise by extending the American nuclear umbrella to its allies in the region."

Later in the day, however, Stratfor posted a disavowal under the headline "US: No SLBM Fired—Stratfor Source." The web site wrote: "An American Stratfor source adamantly called false a March 31 AP report that a Trident US submarine-launched ballistic missile was fired in Saudi Arabia during a recent joint military exercise of the United States and the Saudis. The source was not able to speak to the possibility of other types of missile launched, or to the veracity of the claims that the military exercise itself took place."

It is impossible to determine at this point the precise significance of this strange series of reports and counter-reports. However, within the context of an aggressive US diplomatic offensive against Iran and an increasingly strident anti-Iran campaign in the US media, there is reason to suspect that Washington may be seeking to goad the Iranians into some sort of defensive action that could be portrayed as a hostile military act. This would provide the US with a *casus belli* to justify a military attack on Iran, or at least a means of stampeding reluctant Security Council members such as Russia and especially China into backing harsh sanctions.

There are many signs that the Obama administration, the CIA and the US military are moving toward a major escalation in the US drive to destabilize or oust the Iranian regime. On Tuesday night, the ABC network news program featured a report that an Iranian nuclear scientist, Shahram Amiri, defected last June to the US

and has told American intelligence agencies that Iran is secretly building two additional nuclear enrichment facilities. The report cited no named sources and provided no evidence to substantiate the claim that Iran is expanding its nuclear program.

The ABC report followed a front-page lead article in last Sunday's *New York Times* making similarly unsubstantiated charges that Iran is "preparing to build more sites in defiance of United Nations demands."

At a press conference held Wednesday in Kabul, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, charged Iran with sending a shipment of arms to anti-US militants in Kandahar province, in what he called a "significant development." Again, no evidence was provided to back the allegation.

Mullen was in Afghanistan to prepare for a major US military offensive against Kandahar, a city of nearly 1 million inhabitants, which is the capital of Kandahar province, a stronghold of the Taliban. The offensive is expected to be launched in June.

These developments follow several weeks of threatening statements by US officials and news reports of US military preparations against Iran, including the revelation last week that Washington has shipped hundreds of bunker-buster bombs to the American military air base on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia.

The mounting threats and provocations against Iran have gone hand in hand with increasing pressure by the US, France, Britain and Germany on China to end its opposition to new sanctions. As one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, China has a veto power over council resolutions.

On Wednesday, in an apparent softening of China's position, it was reported that Beijing had agreed to begin talks with the other four permanent council members and Germany on the terms of a resolution on new sanctions against Tehran. At the same time, Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, traveled to China for talks Thursday in an evident effort to press Beijing to maintain its previous opposition to new sanctions.

Washington's drive to provoke a crisis with Iran underscores the essential continuity of US imperialist policy, exposing the claims that Obama would pursue policies fundamentally different from those of Bush. In fact, Obama is employing against Iran the same modus operandi of unsubstantiated allegations and lies about

"weapons of mass destruction" used by Bush to justify war against Iraq. This is shown by the CIA's own declassified annual report to Congress.

In it, the CIA admits that it has no hard evidence that Iran is seeking to produce nuclear weapons. The report states: "Iran is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons, though we do not know whether Tehran eventually will decide to produce nuclear weapons."



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