

Israel steps up its warmongering

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Israel's action against the Gaza aid flotilla is in line with its increasingly bellicose stance on all fronts.

Coinciding with last week's air raid on Gaza, Israel conducted its biggest ever annual war drill. The army, security and rescue services ended their five day military exercises with a mass mobilisation of Israeli citizens who were required to dash to bunkers and safe rooms across the country in response to a simulated missile attack.

The exercise prompted accusations from Lebanon and Syria of warmongering by Israel, which is attempting to pick off Iran's allies in the region. Israel has for some weeks been threatening its northern neighbours, following claims by Tel Aviv and Washington that Syria has been shipping long-range Scud missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon which is supported by both Iran and Syria. Such missiles could reach Israel's southern towns and cities.

Syria and Lebanon have denied Israel's accusation. Hezbollah has, however, rearmed extensively since Israel's war on Lebanon in 2006 that devastated the country's infrastructure without achieving its political and military objective, the eradication of Hezbollah. The Islamist movement is believed to have at least 40,000 missiles and rockets, some of which are capable of reaching Tel Aviv, the Dimona nuclear reactor in the Negev desert, and Ben Gurion International airport. It has bases, complete with bunkers, tunnels and lookout points, in southern Lebanon.

On Sunday, Israeli war planes carried out mock air raids over southern Lebanese villages, flying at medium altitude over Nabatiyeh, Khiam and Marjayoun. Israeli MK surveillance drones also violated Lebanese airspace over villages and towns in the area of Nabatiyeh. Last week, according to the *Daily Star*, Lebanese anti-aircraft guns opened fire on

two Israeli warplanes.

On Saturday, Israeli Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon had directly threatened Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri, warning that he "will pay a high price in the event of a new war."

"We have deterrence and an attack force, and if we retaliated on such an aggression, we won't distinguish between the Lebanese Cabinet and Hezbollah," said Ayalon.

Earlier this year, Israel deployed troops along its northern border with Lebanon, hinting at a military operation later this year. In April, Ehud Barak, Israel's Defence Minister, made clear during his visit to Washington that Israel would hold the government of Lebanon "accountable" should tensions between Israel and Hezbollah escalate into hostilities.

Hariri is opposed to Hezbollah, but the fractured state of Lebanese politics has forced him into a coalition with it.

America is desirous of some kind of agreement between Israel and the Palestinians that will help smooth the way for Arab backing of its hostilities directed against Iran. But whatever difficulties there are in diplomatic relations as a result, Washington continues to finance Tel Aviv's warmongering.

A few weeks ago, the Obama White House announced it would seek an additional \$205 million in military aid for Israel from Congress to support Israel's "Iron Dome", a rocket-shield system designed to protect Israel against short-range rockets fired into Israel by Hamas and Hezbollah. While the Iron Dome was originally expected to be deployed in Israel's southern towns as protection against rockets from Gaza, it is ineffective against short-range missiles. Israeli officials indicated that they were thinking of placing it against Lebanon.

The *Sunday Times* this week also contained an exclusive report on Israel's decision to deploy three

German-built submarines equipped with nuclear-armed cruise missiles in the Gulf near the Iranian coastline, the day after Tel Aviv rejected a new United Nations call to detail its secretive nuclear program.

Israel declared late Saturday that it would not take part in a 2012 conference on establishing a nuclear-free Middle East. The conference was formally endorsed by the United States and the 188 other signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with Washington keen to exploit an opportunity to condemn Iran over its alleged nuclear weapons programme. The US was clearly embarrassed by Israel's hard-line stance, with Tel Aviv calling the conference resolution a "deeply flawed and hypocritical" act that ignores the threat posed by Iran.

The Arab proposal for a Middle East free of nuclear weapons was first endorsed internationally as long ago as 1995, but never acted upon. US National Security Adviser Gen. James Jones supported the call for compliance with arms control and non-proliferation obligations as "essential precursors" of a nuclear-free Middle East. But he held out an olive branch to Tel Aviv by criticising the resolution's decision to single out Israel while failing to mention Iran. He declared Iran the greatest threat of nuclear proliferation in the region. Israel is not a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty.

The *Sunday Times* reported that the first nuclear submarine has already been sent, supposedly in response to fears that ballistic missiles developed by Iran, Syria and Hezbollah could hit sites in Israel. All three submarines of Flotilla 7—Dolphin, Tekuma and Leviathan—have been despatched to the Persian Gulf before, but are now to be permanently stationed there on a rotating basis. "The vessels can remain at sea for about 50 days and stay submerged up to 1,150ft below the surface for at least a week. Some of the cruise missiles are equipped with the most advanced nuclear warheads in the Israeli arsenal," the *Times* wrote.



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