

Mounting US war threats against Iran

Bill Van Auken
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Leading Republican Senator Lindsey Graham signaled a turn following the midterm elections toward an escalation of US threats against Iran, publicly calling for an all-out war that would “neuter” Tehran and leave it incapable of resistance.

Graham made the statement Saturday at a conference on international security in Halifax, Canada. “Containment is off the table,” he declared in relation to Iran’s nuclear program.

Washington and its allies have accused Tehran of developing its nuclear program for the purpose of building a weapon. The Iranian government has consistently denied this charge, insisting that its program is solely for peaceful, civilian purposes.

Employing the kind of total-war rhetoric that was heard from Germany in the 1930s, the South Carolina Republican vowed that a US attack would be carried out “not to just neutralize their nuclear program, but to sink their navy, destroy their air force and deliver a decisive blow to the Revolutionary Guard. In other words, neuter that regime. Destroy their ability to fight back.”

Graham added that, despite the Democrats’ defeat at the polls last week, if President Barack Obama “decides to be tough with Iran beyond sanctions, I think he is going to feel a lot of Republican support for the idea that we cannot let Iran develop a nuclear weapon.”

Joining Graham in addressing a forum at the Halifax conference was Senator Mark Udall (Democrat, Colorado), who advocated a continuation of the sanctions regime against Iran but added that “every option is on the table,” a euphemism for US military aggression.

Speaking at the same conference, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak described Iran as “a major, major threat to any conceivable world order.” He charged that Tehran is “determined to reach military nuclear capability,” which he said would be “the end of any conceivable nonproliferation regime.”

Israel, which has defied the UN’s nonproliferation efforts and is the only nuclear-armed power in the region, has repeatedly threatened military strikes against Iran.

Last month, Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz advocated a naval blockade of Iran—an act of war—if Tehran fails to bow to Washington’s demands.

These latest threats come barely a week before the next round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1, which includes the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—Britain, China, France, Russia and the US—plus Germany. The talks are slated to take place in Vienna.

The Republican triumph in the midterm elections will drive US foreign policy even further to the right and intensify the threat of a war against Iran. Taking the chairmanship of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in January is Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Republican, Florida). She has opposed diplomacy with Iran, advocating the kind of economic embargo that she has vociferously supported against Cuba.

Ros-Lehtinen is also a fervent backer of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), which has claimed credit for terrorist attacks inside Iran and has been designated by the US State Department as a “foreign terrorist organization.”

Nearly a third of House Republicans backed a resolution last July providing explicit support for Israel carrying out military strikes against Iran.

The Obama administration and congressional Democrats have already been ratcheting up threats against Iran. After ramming another round of anti-Iranian sanctions through the United Nations Security Council, the administration last July signed into law a new set of unilateral US sanctions aimed at crippling the Iranian economy and creating increased misery for the country’s population so as to destabilize the government.

These sanctions penalize foreign banks and corporations that invest in or trade with Iran, restricting their access to American markets and denying them opportunities for US government contracts. The sanctions particularly target Iran’s key energy sector.

According to a *New York Times* article last week by David Sanger, even if Iran does come to the talks in Vienna next week, Washington will merely go through

the motions of negotiating. Its main aim in participating in the talks will be to gauge “whether a new and surprisingly broad set of economic sanctions is changing Iran’s nuclear calculus.”

The article states that the new proposal from the US is “even more onerous than a deal that the country’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameni, rejected last year.” It would require that Iran halt nuclear fuel production and give up more than two-thirds more uranium than was stipulated in a tentative agreement reached in talks a year ago.

The *Times* article states that Washington believes it has “little to show for” the sanctions thus far, “which has prompted a discussion inside the White House about whether it would be helpful, or counterproductive, to have him [Obama] talk more openly about military options.”

Dennis Ross, Obama’s senior Middle East advisor, sounded a similar note in an October 25 address to a conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the principal US pro-Israel lobby.

After bragging that US sanctions had produced mounting economic crisis, inflation and unemployment in Iran, Ross raised the implicit threat of war: “Ultimately, we hope that the severe pressure Iran faces today will compel a change in behavior. The door for diplomacy is still open and we certainly seek a peaceful resolution to our conflict with Iran. But should Iran continue its defiance, despite its growing isolation and the damage to its economy, its leaders should listen carefully to President Obama, who has said many times, ‘we are determined to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.’”

Perhaps the most chilling call for an escalation of the military threat against Iran came in a column entitled “The War Recovery?”, written on the eve of the midterm elections by *Washington Post* columnist David Broder, the so-called “dean of the Washington press corps.”

Complaining that the deepening economic crisis was creating a “daunting situation” for Obama to win a second term in 2012, Broder, an unabashed supporter of the Democratic president, spelled out two scenarios through which this challenge could be overcome. The first is the vain hope that the economic crisis will be overcome by a turn in the business cycle. Broder concludes that “the market will go where it is going to go” and that such an outcome is unreliable.

He suggests another solution based on the tumultuous history of the 20th century.

“Look back at FDR and the Great Depression,” he

writes. “What finally resolved that economic crisis? World War II.

“Here is where Obama is likely to prevail. With strong Republican support in Congress for challenging Iran’s ambition to become a nuclear power, he can spend much of 2011 and 2012 orchestrating a showdown with the mullahs. This will help him politically because the opposition party will be urging him on. And as tensions rise and we accelerate preparations for war, the economy will improve.”

There one has it: a modest proposal for economic revival and a successful reelection campaign prepared through the deaths of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people.

Underlying such bloodthirsty proposals are not merely the cynical political calculations of one or the other of America’s two right-wing, pro-imperialist parties, but rather the historic decline of American capitalism and the deepest crisis of the world capitalist system since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Militarism is embraced by both parties. This reflects the consensus within the ruling elite that American capitalism can offset its economic decline through the use of military force to establish US hegemony in the energy-rich and geostrategically critical regions of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The words of Broder and the Republicans, together with the actions of the Obama administration, underscore the threat of a new and far bloodier war that would carry with it the danger of a global conflagration.

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