US threatens war in the Persian Gulf

Peter Symonds
31 December 2011

The Obama administration's bellicose stance towards Iran is setting the stage for a dangerous slide towards war in the Persian Gulf. Having provoked Tehran with legislation for what amounts to an oil embargo, the US is threatening Iran with military action if it retaliates by shutting down the Strait of Hormuz.

The press immediately added fuel to the flames by backing Washington and vilifying the Iranian regime. An editorial in the *New York Times* on Thursday fully supported the Obama administration's threat of military action against any Iranian attempt to block the Persian Gulf. The editorial condemned Iran for "its recklessness and its contempt for international law," declaring, "This is not a government any country should want to see acquire nuclear weapons."

Other sections of the media went one step further, giving voice to the clamour in ruling circles in the US and Israel for a pre-emptive attack on Iran to destroy its nuclear and military facilities. The *Wall Street Journal* editorial seized on the tensions over the Strait of Hormuz to warn of the dangers of an Iranian regime "fortified by a nuclear threat," concluding that it would be "better to act now to stop Iran."

The cynicism is staggering. Having waged wars of aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq and backed the NATO bombing of Libya, the US is now deliberately and recklessly raising tensions in the Persian Gulf by threatening severe penalties against any foreign company doing business with Iran's central bank, thereby effectively blocking Iranian oil exports. It is hardly surprising that Tehran has reacted to an act of economic war that would collapse its already fragile economy.

The US and Israel are already engaged in a dirty covert war against Iran's nuclear and missile programs that involves computer viruses, bombings and assassinations. Any one of these illegal acts of sabotage and murder could have precipitated a slide into military conflict. The US has not only drawn up its own detailed war plans, but is arming its allies in the Gulf against Iran. The White House gave great media prominence on Thursday to a huge $30 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia, including 84 of the latest F-15SA fighter aircraft.

As for the Iranian "nuclear threat," it is necessary to recall the lies about WMDs that were used to justify the criminal invasion of Iraq in 2003. The modus operandi of the Obama administration, acting with the bipartisan support of Congress, is no different. Dubious and dated "evidence" is being deliberately distorted and magnified, with the complicity of the new International Atomic Energy Agency chief, Yukiya Amano, into claims that Iran is building a nuclear weapon. Tehran's denials are dismissed out of hand.

The media is silent on Washington's rank hypocrisy in demanding an end to Iran's nuclear programs while fully backing the only nuclear-armed state in the Middle East—its ally Israel, which is notorious for its wars of aggression. The glaring double standard only underscores the fact that Obama's belligerence towards Iran is no more about the "nuclear threat" than the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were about "terrorism" and WMDs.

US aggression against all three countries has been driven by longstanding American ambitions to consolidate its dominance over the region. Iran not only has its own huge oil and gas reserves but forms the strategic bridge between the energy-rich areas of the Middle East and Central Asia. US imperialism has

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never reconciled itself to the loss of American hegemony in Tehran that followed the overthrow its ally, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in 1979. The Bush administration backed away from more aggressive action against Iran only because the American military was bogged down in quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now the Obama administration is exploiting the political upheavals in the Middle East to refashion the region in line with its strategic and economic interests. Having ousted Gaddafi in Libya, the US and its allies are applying similar methods to Syria, where oppositional Sunni factions, supported and armed by Turkey and Saudi Arabia, are exploiting popular discontent to force out the pro-Iranian regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The anti-Assad opposition is now pushing for foreign military intervention along the lines of NATO's war against Libya.

In neighbouring Iraq, the US and its regional allies are fanning sectarian hostility to the Maliki government, which rests on Shiite parties sympathetic to Tehran. Washington is exploiting the Sunni-based Iraqiya coalition as a means for pressuring, or if need be refashioning, the Iraqi government to distance it from Iran. At the same time, the US maintains a studied silence on the repressive measures used by its Gulf allies, including Saudi Arabia, to suppress political opposition to their autocratic regimes.

The central focus of these machinations in the Middle East is the Iranian regime, which is regarded in Washington as the key obstacle to American ambitions—despite its efforts on more than one occasion to reach an accommodation with the US. In 2009, the Obama administration was centrally involved in orchestrating the international cacophony in support of the failed "Green Revolution"—a movement largely composed of more privileged sections of the Iranian upper middle class. Now US military plans are being dusted off.

The relentless intensification of tensions always poses the danger of precipitating conflict, even if at a particular point in time it is unintended. A war against Iran, a country that is crucial to the geopolitical calculations not only of the US, but also major rivals such as Russia and China, inevitably risks escalating into a far broader regional and international conflict with catastrophic implications for humanity.

The driving force behind the eruption of American militarism is the economic decline of the United States, now compounded by the worsening global economic crisis. The only social force capable of preventing the slide into new and more horrific wars is the international working class, through the overthrow of the bankrupt profit system and its outmoded nation-state system and their replacement by a planned world socialist economy.

Peter Symonds

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