

US, Israel coordinate strategy against Iran

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US Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman General Martin Dempsey arrived in Israel yesterday for talks on Iran with top military and political leaders. As the Obama administration escalates its confrontation with Tehran, the obvious purpose of Dempsey's visit is to coordinate hostile moves by the two countries against Iran.

Both sides have deliberately downplayed the prospect for an impending military strike against Iran. Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak told Israeli radio on Wednesday that any attack on Iran's nuclear facilities was "very far off." Asked if the US had pressed Israel for advance notice of any strike, he insisted that no decision had been made on military action. "I don't suggest that we deal with this as if it's about to happen tomorrow," he said.

The US and Israel announced on Monday that their largest-ever joint war games, Austere Challenge 12, would be postponed until later this year. The exercise, involving thousands of US and Israeli soldiers, was to test Israel's anti-missile defence systems—the unstated rationale being likely Iranian retaliation in the event of US or Israeli attack.

The delay has been widely interpreted in the media as evidence that the US is seeking to ease tensions in the Persian Gulf and ensure that Israel does not carry out a unilateral strike on Iran. Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman cited "diplomatic and regional reasons, the tensions and instability" as factors in the postponement.

No one should accept these statements at face value. The US has been inflaming tensions with Iran since the beginning of the year. President Barack Obama has signed into law a measure designed to penalise foreign corporations doing business with Iran's central bank

and thus choke off Iranian oil exports. European Union foreign ministers are due to meet on Monday to finalise details of an embargo on the purchase of Iranian oil.

Such steps can only be regarded as acts of economic warfare. Former US National Security Council official Gary Sick told Reuters: "In this process of ever-accelerating sanctions, we have arrived at a point where sanctions begin to blur into actual warfare. If the sanctions succeed in their purpose of cutting off nearly all oil exports from Iran, that is the equivalent of a blockade of Iran's oil ports, an act of war."

In such an eventuality, Iran has threatened to block the Strait of Hormuz. Washington has responded by declaring such an action would be "a red line"—in other words, the US would respond by attacking Iran. Asked on Wednesday about the key strategic waterway, American Defence Secretary Leon Panetta cautiously explained that the US was not taking "special steps" but was "fully prepared" to deal with any Iranian attempt to close the strait.

In fact, the Pentagon has increased the number of aircraft carrier battle groups near the Persian Gulf from one to two since the beginning of the year, boosting its capacity to wage a devastating air and sea war against Iran.

Israel and the US might have tactical differences over the timing of an attack on Iran, but both countries have repeatedly stated that "all options are on the table." In a clear reference to military action, the US ambassador to Israel, Daniel Shapiro, said on Thursday that Washington had prepared "a set of alternative options" and would implement one of them, in coordination with Israel, should economic sanctions fail.

Sections of the Israeli political and military establishment are pressing for military action against Iran. Former Israeli defence adviser Michael Herzog told the *Financial Times*: “There are some in Israel who argue that this is the year in which big decisions have to be taken on Iran.” He said Iran was “immunising” its nuclear program from attack, creating concern in Israel that there was “very little time to act.”

Iran has repeatedly declared that it is not planning to build nuclear weapons. However, Israel and the US regard as illegitimate a broad range of nuclear programs for peaceful purposes that could potentially be connected to manufacturing an atomic bomb. Israel is particularly anxious about the recent start up of a second, heavily protected uranium enrichment plant near the Iranian city of Qom that could be immune from Israeli air strikes.

While publicly stating this week that any Israeli air strike on Iran was “very far off,” Defence Minister Barak, along with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, agitated inside the Israeli cabinet last November for air strikes against Iran in the near future. The debate was leaked to the press by sections of the intelligence and military establishment alarmed at the prospect of “an eternal war with Tehran.” (See: “Israeli leaders press for attack on Iran”)

The clearest indication that Israel is preparing to strike Iran is the covert war already being waged inside the country. The assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan on January 11 was the latest in a series of murders and acts of sabotage widely attributed to Mossad, with the knowledge, if not active participation, of American spy agencies. Such attacks, which will have only a marginal impact on Iran’s nuclear program, are primarily designed to provoke Iran into retaliating.

Speaking to the WSWS recently, University of Arizona historian David Gibbs commented: “The US elite has long had a gangster-like, outside of the law approach, which naturally raises questions about whether the US was behind this recent assassination. The main effect of all this will be to escalate the likelihood of a military conflict with Iran, either by

Israel or the United States. It could be that the Israelis, assuming that they have pulled off this assassination, are intending to do precisely that—to escalate tensions, possibly leading to a military strike against Iran.”

General Dempsey’s discussions with top Israeli military and political figures will, of course, be a closely guarded secret, but the last thing that one can assume is that the intentions of the US or Israel are benign. In contrast to those who interpreted the postponement of joint US-Israeli exercises as a bid to ease tensions, the Israeli newspaper *Ma’ariv*, citing “security sources,” wrote that the delay was due to “broad operational considerations that include the preparation of the Israel Defence Forces for weighty missions.”

While the article is by no means conclusive evidence, the most obvious “weighty mission” is an Israeli attack on Iran.



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