

American intelligence agencies, media stoke war drive against Iran

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Provocative testimony by US officials at a January 31 US Senate Intelligence Committee hearing has become the focus of a media campaign, accusing Iran of posing a terrorist threat to the United States.

The US is already waging a campaign to impose an oil embargo on Iran and backing a covert campaign of bombings and assassinations, apparently carried out by Israel, against Iran's nuclear program. It is now further turning up pressure on Tehran, reviving accusations that were earlier abandoned by Washington last October that Iran plotted to assassinate Saudi Ambassador Adel al-Jubeir in Washington, DC.

Presenting the US intelligence agencies' "Worldwide Threat Assessment," US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified: "The 2011 plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States shows that some Iranian officials—probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—have changed their calculus and are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived US actions that threaten the regime. We are also concerned about Iranian plotting against US or allied interests overseas."

Clapper is referring to claims last October by US Attorney General Eric Holder that Iran had contacted a failed Iranian-American used car dealer from Texas, Manssor Arbabsiar, in Mexico. According to Holder's story, Iran wanted Arbabsiar to hire the Mexican drug cartel Los Zetas to kill al-Jubeir by blowing him up in a restaurant in Washington, DC.

The story was widely viewed as fabricated at the time. Robert Baer, a former CIA case officer, told ABC News that the charges against Iranian intelligence were "not credible," adding that the plot "doesn't fit their *modus operandi* at all." Washington dropped the story shortly after Holder introduced it, while Iran

denied that such a plot existed and demanded an official US apology.

Nonetheless, US intelligence officials and senators speaking at the January 31 hearing picked up the story, treating it as good coin. In her opening statement, Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein noted that the alleged Iranian plot was "so unusual and amateurish that many initially doubted that Iran was responsible." She set the tone for the hearing by adding: "Well, let me state for the record, I have no such doubt."

No one speaking at the hearing, including Feinstein or Clapper, offered any evidence to back up this position, or say what attacks they thought Iran might carry out inside the United States.

No one raised the significance of the fact that, by the US intelligence community's own assessment, Iran would be provoked to carry out attacks "in response to real or perceived US actions." That is to say that in this confrontation, it is the United States and its allies that play the role of the aggressor.

US senators present at the hearing struck belligerent positions against Iran. Responding to questions from Republican Senator Dan Coats, Democratic Senator Bill Nelson promised that the US would go to war with Iran if necessary, citing Defense Secretary Leon Panetta's comments Sunday on *60 Minutes*: "If we have to do it, we will do it."

Coats, for his part, proposed a naval blockade of Iran, demanded to know if China and India would be willing to cut back purchases of Iranian oil. He stressed his agreement with Feinstein that the US-Iran confrontation is the "number one challenge of 2012."

The hearing and its reception in the media resemble nothing so much as the preparation of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Then, as now, crude fabrications about threats from weapons that do not exist—first Iraq's

alleged “weapons of mass destruction,” now the nuclear weapons that Iran has yet to build—are combined with manufactured allegations of terrorist activity to whip up a media frenzy.

US media eagerly parroted Clapper’s claims. CBS News described the report as “dire,” flatly predicting that “Iran would likely launch terrorist attacks on US soil as pressure mounts against the regime in Tehran.”

On NBC, where journalist Andrea Mitchell described Clapper’s report as “alarming,” host Matt Lauer asked if the threshold for a “preemptive nuclear strike” by Israel had been reached.

Mitchell responded by noting that between Israel and the United States, there had been “a lot of coordinated covert activity, killing five Iranian nuclear scientists, and other computer attacks against the Iranian nuclear program.” Citing Israeli intelligence briefings to the CIA, she added that the Israeli government believed the “window” for covert operations was closing quickly and that if it decided to change policies, Israel might act “without warning.”

These statements are remarkable for a number of reasons, including Mitchell’s confirmation that Israel and the United States are working together on a terrorist campaign, assassinating nuclear scientists in Iran. Together with a series of mysterious bombings at Iranian military facilities, these show that Israel and the Western powers have already begun an undeclared war with Iran.

Mitchell’s comments also sketch out a scenario in which the United States could attack Iran: a sudden Israeli military strike against Iran, coordinated with, but not openly supported by Washington, would provoke an Iranian retaliation that the US would seize upon to go to war.

Above all, however, they are an exposure of the political and moral state of the American media establishment, which functions as a mouthpiece of Washington. It uncritically reports the latest fabrications of US intelligence agencies, then calmly discusses assassination and preemptive nuclear war—an act of mass murder in flagrant violation of international law—mixed in with reports on the personal lives of Hollywood actors and the weather.

Having aided and abetted the US invasion of Iraq based on lies in 2003, they now are laying the foundation for a larger, even more devastating conflict

with Iran.



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