Israel threatens war against Iran within months

Peter Symonds
4 February 2012

Even as the US and its European allies intensify punitive economic sanctions against Iran, there are growing signs that Israel is threatening military strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities in the coming months. While the Obama administration has cautioned Israel against military action at this stage, there is no indication that Washington has vetoed such an attack.

Washington Post columnist David Ignatius reported yesterday that US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta "believes there is a strong likelihood that Israel will strike Iran in April, May, or June—before Iran enters what Israelis described as a 'zone of immunity' to commence building a nuclear bomb."

Panetta, who had no doubt briefed Ignatius directly or indirectly, refused to comment on the column. But he did not deny the substance of the report. Questioned further, Panetta confirmed: "Israel indicated they're considering this [a strike], we've indicated our concerns."

Any differences between the US and Israel are purely tactical. While, publicly at least, the US is appealing for more time for sanctions to bite, Israel is pressing for immediate action, on the pretext that Iran's Fordo uranium enrichment plant is nearing completion and could be "immune" from attack. Both countries have repeatedly declared that "all options are on the table"—that is, including all-out war—unless the Iranian regime bows to their demands.

Ignatius also reported: "The White House hasn't yet decided precisely how the United States would respond if the Israelis do attack. The administration appears to favour staying out of the conflict unless Iran hits US assets, which would trigger a strong US response." He also noted that "administration officials" have warned that "if Israel's population centres were hit [in retaliation by Iran], the United States could feel obligated to come to Israel's defence."

Washington could of course use its considerable influence to veto an attack by Israel, which is heavily dependent on the US, diplomatically, economically and militarily. The article makes no mention of this possibility. In effect, the Obama administration appears to be giving Israel a tacit green light for an illegal, unprovoked attack on Iran, and threatening its own military action if Iran retaliates.

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak argued again on Thursday that military action had to be taken soon. "The Iranian military nuclear program is slowly but surely reaching the final stages," he claimed, declaring that if the project entered "the immunity stage" it could be completed "without any effective intervention." Stressing the urgency, Barak warned: "Those who say 'later' may find that later is too late."

Barak provided no evidence that Iran has a military nuclear program, let alone that it is nearing completion. Tehran has repeatedly denied any plan to build a nuclear weapon. Panetta recently acknowledged that the Iranian regime had taken no decision to build a nuclear bomb.

Israeli moves toward attacking Iran are driven by other considerations, not least of which is to maintain an unchallengeable military superiority in the Middle East. Israel, which has its own sizeable stockpile of nuclear weapons, is determined to prevent Iran or any

© World Socialist Web Site

other country from having even the potential to build a nuclear device.

Moreover, as Ignatius pointed out, “Israeli leaders are said to accept, and even welcome, the prospect of going it alone, and demonstrating their resolve when their security is undermined by the Arab Spring.” Sections of the ruling elite want to plunge the region into conflict, in order to demonstrate Israeli military might and derail the growing movement of working people for democratic rights and social equality, including in Israel itself.

The Obama administration has broader aims to secure its hegemony in the oil-rich Middle East and regards the Iranian regime as the chief obstacle to American ambitions. Since the beginning of the year, the US has been steadily increasing the pressure on Iran through harsh new sanctions, a naval build up in the Persian Gulf and the targeting of Tehran’s regional allies, especially the Syrian regime of President Bashir al Assad.

A US Senate committee on Thursday approved a new battery of sanctions against Iran, likely to be adopted by Congress. The package is aimed against foreign banks that handle transactions for Iran’s national oil and tanker companies, as well as any companies or individuals involved in the mining or transportation of uranium in Iran. In particular, the legislation would require the US administration to penalise the Belgium-based company Swift, used by many banks to shift funds electronically around the world, if it failed to shut out Iran’s central bank and other financial institutions.

The US confrontation with Iran is being accompanied by what can only be described as an escalating propaganda war to vilify the Iranian regime and create the political climate for war. As in the months leading up to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, a compliant American and international media is the vehicle for a deluge of distortions, half truths and outright lies designed to poison public opinion.

Yesterday, for instance, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article entitled, “US fears Iran’s links to al Qaeda,” based on claims by unnamed American officials that Tehran was about to release five Al Qaeda leaders detained since 2003. Despite the obvious conflict between the Shiite fundamentalist regime in Tehran and the Sunni extremist Al Qaeda, the article reported as good coin that “some officials and experts worry conditions may be ripe for a more direct partnership.”

Likewise, the “inspection game” has begun. At Tehran’s invitation, UN inspectors visited Iran this week for discussions about its nuclear programs. Instead of taking up the offer to tour existing nuclear facilities, including the Fordo plant, the team demanded access to the Parchin military complex to investigate unsubstantiated nuclear allegations. Not surprisingly, given the US and Israeli threats of war, Tehran refused. The refusal was then highlighted in the American media, along with claims of “secret arms programs.” All of this recalls the never-ending demands for greater access to Iraq’s military bases, presidential palaces and “secret” facilities that preceded the US invasion.

This media campaign contributes directly to the intensifying tensions in the Persian Gulf, heightening the risk of war. If Israel does attack Iran, it will not simply be “a surgical strike” that destroys Iran’s key nuclear facilities. Any Iranian retaliation will be used by the US as a pretext for a massive air war aimed at destroying the country’s military and infrastructure. As a result, any conflict carries a real danger of becoming a regional war that could embroil the major powers.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site