

Obama menaces Iran with military threat

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17 March 2012

US President Obama issued another menacing threat to Iran during a joint press conference at the White House with British Prime Minister David Cameron on Wednesday. He warned that the Iranian regime needed “to seize this opportunity of negotiations with the P5 plus 1 to avert even worse consequences for Iran in the future.”

Obama underlined the threat by adding: “Because the international community has applied so many sanctions, because we have employed so many of the options that are available to us to persuade Iran to take a different course, the window for solving this issue diplomatically is shrinking.”

The P5+1—the US, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany—last week accepted an Iranian proposal to reopen negotiations, but no apparent agreement has been reached on the date or the terms of any discussions. Obama’s comments are clearly aimed at bullying Iran to make major concessions prior to and during any talks.

An article this week in the Russian newspaper *Kommersant* based on foreign ministry sources reported that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had asked her Russian counterpart on March 12 to tell Iran that it has one “last chance” to reach a negotiated settlement over its nuclear program and avoid US military action. An unnamed Russian official said that Moscow expected a military strike on Iran by the end of the year.

Washington has denied the report, but its content is fully in line with Obama’s declaration that the window for negotiation was shrinking. During the press conference, he reiterated remarks last week that he was “determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear

weapon.” Cameron indicated Britain’s support for the present crippling sanctions on Tehran, adding that “the president and I have said nothing is off the table.” These are code words for a devastating military attack on Iran by the US and its allies.

Obama’s threat is just the latest sign that the US and its allies are preparing for war on Iran.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the P5+1 will insist that Iran freeze its production of uranium enriched to the 20 percent level and then ship its stockpile of the nuclear fuel to a third country. US officials are also pushing for International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials to visit the Parchin military base—a non-nuclear facility that falls outside the IAEA ambit.

These demands are simply the first in what will be an endless list of US ultimatums designed to force the Iranian regime to capitulate to Washington. They are aimed at providing the pretext for war, rather than reaching a negotiated settlement.

Speaking to ABC News on Thursday, Mohammad Javad Larijani, a top foreign policy adviser to Iran supreme leader Ayatollah Khamaneï, declared that Iran had no intention of building nuclear weapons. He said that Tehran would offer “full transparency” in return for cooperation from the West, including the sale of 20 percent enriched fuel needed for a reactor in Tehran used to produce medical isotopes.

Larijani insisted on Iran’s right to continue its nuclear programs for peaceful purpose. The country is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that allows the development of all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle, including uranium enrichment. He ruled out

any IAEA visit to the Parchin military site prior to negotiations. He also warned that “every possibility is on the table” to defend the country if talks broke down and Iran was attacked.

Economic pressure on Iran intensified this week after the Belgium-based Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, or Swift, announced that it would ban, as of today, electronic transactions by all Iranian banks under sanction by the European Union (EU). Swift is the financial communication and clearing system used by most of world’s largest banks.

As a result, Iran will be compelled to use non-European currencies, gold or to barter in order to maintain external trade, including for its vital oil exports. Oil sales account for 80 percent of the country’s exports and half of government revenues. Faced with possible US sanctions that come into full force in July, the major Asian customers for Iranian oil, including Japan, Singapore, India and South Korea, have begun reducing imports.

Swift chief executive Lazaro Campos declared on Thursday: “Disconnecting banks is an extraordinary and unprecedented step for Swift.” Confirming that the organisation had come under strong pressure, he added: “It is a direct result of international and multilateral action to intensify financial sanctions on Iran.”

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* yesterday reported that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had insisted on “Swift sanctions swiftly” during talks with Obama in Washington last week. Netanyahu has repeatedly indicated that Israel will attack Iran’s nuclear sites unless its nuclear programs are dismantled. He pressed Obama to establish so-called “red lines” that would trigger US military action.

At this stage, Obama appears reluctant to launch a strike against Iran prior to the November presidential election as a war in the Persian Gulf would send global oil prices rocketing. Netanyahu has hinted at a far shorter deadline, possibly as short as a few months.

The US and Israel are closely close collaborating in military preparations against Iran. Israel’s Chief of

Staff Lieutenant General Benny Gantz began a visit to the US and Canada this week that is the latest in a series of exchanges. Late last month the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey made a trip to Israel to meet senior political and military figures.

The Pentagon is continuing its military build-up in the Persian Gulf. It has already increased the number of aircraft carriers in the region from one to two. This week the US Navy announced that it will double the number of minesweeping ships from four to eight and send four more MH-53 minesweeping helicopters to the Gulf.

The US and Israeli threats of war against Iran take place alongside moves to intervene against the Syrian regime of President Bashir al-Assad, an Iranian ally. While ruling out military action, for the present at least, Obama and Cameron repeated on Wednesday that Assad had to go. “We should try to bring that about through diplomatic pressure, sanctions pressure, political pressure,” Cameron said.

The US and British threats are not about “democracy in Syria” or Iran’s nuclear programs but are aimed at refashioning the Middle East in line with the economic and strategic interests of the US and its allies.



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