US, Israel issue ultimatums to Iran

Peter Symonds
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On the eve of international talks, the US and Israel have issued provocative ultimatums to Iran to dismantle key aspects of its nuclear program or face devastating economic sanctions and the prospect of war.

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak declared in an interview with CNN on Sunday that "the threshold for successful negotiations" would be a halt by Iran to uranium enrichment to the 20 percent level and the transfer of all uranium already enriched to this level to "a neighbouring trusted country."

Barak also demanded the decommissioning of Iran's enrichment plant at Fordo, the transfer of all low enriched uranium out of Iran, and more extensive supervision of Iran's facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Barak bluntly warned that there was "limited time," adding, "We don't have to make a decision next week and we cannot wait years."

Iran is due to meet with the so-called P5+1—the US, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany—on Friday in Istanbul. But the laying down of a "threshold," in reality a nonnegotiable ultimatum, makes the prospect of a deal highly unlikely. Iranian officials have already declared that Tehran will reject "conditions set before the talks."

Barak and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have repeatedly indicated that Israel is preparing to take military action to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities, hinting that Israeli attacks could take place within months. Barak spoke dismissively of US and international economic sanctions, declaring he did not believe that they were enough to pressure Tehran "to stop their nuclear military program."

The Iranian regime has consistently maintained that it has no plans to build a nuclear weapon and that its enrichment of uranium is for peaceful purposes. The 20 percent enriched uranium is needed to fuel a research reactor in Tehran that produces medical isotopes. Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its facilities are already subject to IAEA inspections and stocktaking.

The Obama administration has already issued the same ultimatum to Tehran. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton last week demanded that Iran prove that its rejection of nuclear weapons was "not an abstract belief," insisting that it ship its 20 percent enriched uranium out of the country and accept "constant inspections and verifications."

A *New York Times* article on Sunday revealed that American and European negotiators had adopted a joint "hard-line approach" that included the closure of the Fordo enrichment plant. White House press secretary Jay Carney yesterday again made clear that this week's talks amounted to a last chance, declaring, "It is important for Iran to understand that the window is closing."

The demand that Iran give up the Fordo plant is particularly provocative, as the underground nuclear facility is the most difficult for the US and Israel to attack. In effect, Washington is insisting that Tehran voluntarily leave its nuclear programs vulnerable to air strikes. While denouncing Tehran as a threat to regional peace, the Obama administration is preparing an illegal, unprovoked attack on Iran that could trigger a war throughout the Middle East.

The utter cynicism of Washington's rhetoric is underlined by the fact that its coconspirator, Israel, already has a substantial nuclear arsenal and the means for delivering nuclear weapons, and has neither signed the NPT nor allowed IAEA inspections. The US is seeking to buttress its military dominance in the Middle East by ensuring that Iran has no possibility of building nuclear weapons. The Obama administration's aim is to install a pliable regime in Tehran to conform to US economic and strategic interests.

Washington has not only intensified diplomatic

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pressure on Iran, it has stepped up its menacing military operations. The US Navy announced yesterday that two aircraft carriers—the USS Abraham Lincoln and the USS Enterprise—would shortly be in place within the Persian Gulf region. While the US is calling this deployment "routine," the two carriers and their associated battle groups give the US the ability to launch a massive air war on Iran at short notice.

The criminal character of US policy towards Iran was highlighted by a lengthy article by veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* last week. Based on unnamed US military and intelligence sources, the article reported that the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) had trained members of an Iranian opposition outfit, the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), for intelligence operations inside Iran.

Operatives of MEK, which the US State Department has designated a terrorist organisation, are widely regarded as responsible for cooperating with Israel's intelligence agency, Mossad, in a campaign of sabotage and assassination inside Iran over the past five years. However, Hersh's article is the first pointing to direct US involvement in training MEK agents. According to Hersh, they have undergone training at a special JSOC site in Nevada.

A *Washington Post* article published Sunday detailed a "surge" in US intelligence operations against Iran that began during the Bush administration and continued under Obama. The newspaper reports that the Iran Operations Division has swelled to "hundreds of [CIA] officers" and has "a robust budget." Its operations involve electronic and satellite espionage, the extensive use of unmanned drones, and "an expanded network of spies" inside Iran.

If the Istanbul talks collapse, Obama has already authorised the imposition of crippling economic sanctions on Iran from July that will severely restrict Tehran's oil exports, on which its economy is completely dependent. Current sanctions have already seriously disrupted economic activity and sent inflation inside Iran soaring. These punitive measures amount to an economic war on Iran that is leading inexorably to a military conflict.

Workers and youth in the United States and internationally must oppose the war drive by the Obama administration and its allies, which threatens to set the Middle East aflame and trigger an even broader conflict. The only basis for preventing war is the independent mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist strategy to put an end to the root cause of war—the crisis-ridden profit system.

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