

# US-Iran confrontation enters dangerous new stage

Peter Symonds  
5 July 2012

The US-led confrontation with Iran over its nuclear programs has reached a dangerous new stage, following the stalling of international talks and the imposition of extra sanctions on Iran, designed to cripple its economy. The Obama administration has repeatedly declared that all options, including the military one, remain on the table if Tehran does not bow to US demands.

Speaking this week to the *New York Times*, US officials detailed the military build-up already underway in the Persian Gulf under the guise of keeping shipping lanes open. Two aircraft carriers—the USS Lincoln and the USS Enterprise—are in the region, together with their associated battle groups. The US Navy has doubled the number of mine sweepers in the Gulf, and the US Air Force has reinforced its presence with F-22 stealth bombers and F-15C warplanes.

The Pentagon has stationed a floating operations platform, the USS Ponce, in the Gulf. It can be used for a variety of purposes, including as a base for US special forces. As the platform is stationed in international waters, US troops could conduct operations inside Iran without having to consult regional governments regarding the use of their bases.

A senior US Defense Department official told the *Times*: “This is not only about Iranian nuclear ambitions, but about Iran’s regional hegemonic ambitions. This is a complex array of American military power that is tangible proof to all of our allies and partners and friends that even as the US pivots toward Asia, we remain vigilant across the Middle East.”

The remarks highlight the fact that unsubstantiated US claims about Iran’s nuclear programs are simply the pretext for a reckless policy aimed at extending the hegemony of American imperialism in the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. Washington regards the Iranian regime as a major obstacle to those ambitions.

The reference to the US “pivot” to Asia—that is, the Obama administration’s escalating diplomatic and military efforts to undercut Chinese influence—points to the underlying strategy. The US aims to control energy supplies to its rivals, especially China, by ensuring its strategic dominance over the Middle East and also over key shipping routes through South East Asia to China’s ports.

The Obama administration has now reached the end game of a confrontational strategy toward Iran that was mapped out from its first days in office. The supposed “carrot and stick” approach was laid out in considerable detail in a September 2008 report by the Bipartisan Policy Center, whose authors included, among others, Dennis Ross, who became Obama’s top adviser on Iran. Limited US inducements for Iran to negotiate were to be backed by escalating sanctions and the threat of military strikes.

Obama’s offer of talks was never aimed at genuine negotiations with the Iranian regime. Rather it was meant to ensure the support of key European allies that had been alienated by the policies of the Bush administration. Washington’s intentions became obvious when, with the backing of Britain, France and Germany, Obama mounted a regime-change campaign in Iran during June 2009 to back the middle-class

opposition “Green” movement and overturn the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Talks between Iran and the P5+1 group—the US, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany—all but collapsed in Moscow last month. Iran refused to accept the US-sponsored ultimatum that it end uranium enrichment to the 20 percent level, ship its stockpile of this material out of the country and shut its Fordow enrichment plant. Tehran was well aware that these were just a first instalment in a never-ending series of US demands for intrusive inspections and a halt to all uranium enrichment. Further low-level technical talks took place in Istanbul this week without setting a date for new discussions.

The Obama administration has never negotiated with Iran in good faith, refusing even to countenance a delay or halt to the imposition of new American and European sanctions on July 1. A European Union embargo on Iranian oil imports came into force on Sunday, complementing US legislation penalising foreign corporations for doing business with Iran’s central bank. Iran’s crucial oil exports have already plunged by an estimated 40 percent, creating immense hardships for working people.

Washington has now all but exhausted the “diplomatic option” and imposed what amounts to an economic blockade on Iran—itsself an act of warfare. The next step is the military option. As the 2008 Bipartisan Policy Center report outlined: “We believe a military strike is a feasible option and must remain a last resort to retard Iran’s nuclear program.” The report explained that a US military attack “would have to target not only Iran’s nuclear infrastructure, but also its conventional military infrastructure in order to suppress an Iranian response.”

Nearly four years later, the Pentagon’s build-up in the Gulf has established the military capacity to carry out these plans. The Obama administration further ratcheted up regional tensions with the announcement of large joint US-Israeli war games in October or November, designed to test missile defence systems. The *New York Times* reported that the US would hold a major anti-mine exercise with 19 other countries in the

Persian Gulf in September. Washington is also taking other steps to expand military ties with Iran’s regional rival, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states.

These menacing moves against Iran, even as the US and its allies threaten military intervention against Iran’s ally, the Syrian regime of President Bashir al-Assad, have transformed the Middle East into a dangerous powder keg. Regardless of the Obama administration’s immediate intentions, any military miscalculation or incident could become the starting point for a war that would quickly boil over into a regional conflict that could draw in the major powers.

The only social force capable of putting an end to the danger of war is the international working class, by abolishing the root cause of war—capitalism and its division of the world into rival nation states. Workers throughout the region must unite with their class brothers and sisters in the US, Europe and internationally against the predatory actions of US imperialism and its allies, in a joint struggle for socialist internationalism.

Peter Symonds



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**