US, Israel plan joint strikes on Iran

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The US and Israel are considering a joint "surgical strike" against Iran's nuclear facilities, according to an article by David Rothkopf in *Foreign Policy* magazine cited in the Israeli media.

It is yet another indication that detailed planning for another criminal war of aggression is underway. Rothkopf, who served under the Democratic administration of President Bill Clinton in the 1990s, cited sources "close to the discussions" now taking place between Washington and Tel Aviv.

Rothkopf is well-placed to know. Currently *Foreign Policy's* CEO and editor at large, he has also headed Kissinger Associates, the international advisory firm founded and chaired by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Making clear that the United States would play the main role in an attack, Rothkopf added that Israel did not have the resources to attack the enrichment plants at Natanz and Fordow, which are buried deep underground. Israeli planes are reportedly incapable of firing bunker-busting missiles. Consequently, such a mission had to involve the US, either operating on its own or with Israel and others.

He attempted to downplay the significance of such a war, claiming that the most likely action would be a short strike against Iranian nuclear enrichment facilities. He claimed that "in the best case," this might involve "a day or two" of air attacks by bombers and drones, "without civilian casualties."

This presentation totally obscures the scale of the war Rothkopf is proposing to unleash—which is expected to involve the US in a major regional war, and possibly in a military conflict with Russia and China.

Iranian officials have already said that Iran would reply to US aggression by bombing American bases throughout the Middle East. A recent report by the Iran Project, a group of retired US diplomats, politicians and military men, concluded that US strikes could provoke a war that would last years and cost the US at the very least hundreds of billions of dollars per year. (See also: US elections conceal preparations for war with Iran)

A successful war, Rothkopf wrote, would not only set back Iran's nuclear programs, it would also have region-wide benefits. He quoted one proponent of war who said it would have a "transformative outcome: saving Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, reanimating the peace process, securing the Gulf, sending an unequivocal message to Russia and China, and assuring American ascendancy in the region for a decade to come."

Such remarks are the closest Rothkopf comes to acknowledging the predatory imperialist aims that would motivate a US war: placing Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon firmly under US domination, further isolating the Palestinians, and controlling oil-rich regions in the Middle East and Central Asia. This also makes clear that it could not be a brief war: its aim would be to terrorize not only Tehran, but also Moscow and Beijing, into acquiescing to US hegemony over the entire Middle East.

The article also argues that threatening a brief "surgical strike" is a better strategy for Washington than threatening "more robust action," because it would be less costly to carry out as compared to a major war. This would make it a more credible threat.

In fact, Rothkopf's talk of a "surgical strike" is not meant to intimidate the Iranian government, which is well aware of the scale of the conflict that is being prepared, but to mislead his readers, and more broadly the population of the US and its allies. It hides the fact that what he is proposing is not a few cruise missile strikes, but the planning of a region-wide war that could draw in Russia and China.

That is, Rothkopf is advancing a modest proposal that could kick off World War III.

Rothkopf's article confirms that the Obama administration is planning an aggressive expansion of

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US militarism abroad, with yet another unprovoked military attack, behind the backs of the American people. It comes hard on the heels of the remarks made by President Barack Obama before the United Nations last month, when he insisted that "the United States will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon."

It also has to be seen in the context of the US presidential elections, where Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney has accused President Barack Obama of neither supporting Israel's security nor offering credible military threats against Iran. Rothkopf's advice to the Democrats is to rebut Romney by announcing that joint US-Israeli strikes against Iran are under active discussion.

His presentation of the war as a "surgical strike" aims to hide the broad and devastating implications of the war from the American electorate, which would oppose it. Rothkopf admits that war against Iran, in the wake of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, would be deeply unpopular with the American people.

Tensions in the Middle East are already escalating, as the US proxy war against the Iranian-backed regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad threatens to explode into open war between Turkey and Syria, and also between Israel and its neighbours.

Washington is arming opposition forces in the 18-month-long civil war in Syria in a bid to topple Assad's Ba'athist regime. Largely based in Turkey, the opposition acknowledges that it is being armed by US proxy states, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, despite international embargoes.

On Monday, the BBC reported that weapons being sent to the Saudi military were found in the possession of the US-backed Syrian opposition. It said that three crates from an arms manufacturer, addressed to Saudi Arabia, were found in a base being used by opposition fighters in Aleppo. Saudi officials refused to comment.

Amid escalating border clashes between Turkey and Syria last week, Turkey enacted legislation, unprecedented in the 89 years of the Turkish Republic, granting powers to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to deploy troops anywhere in the world.

The Syrian conflict is also escalating tensions between Israel and its neighbours. Over the weekend, Israel shot down an unarmed drone that entered Israeli airspace from the Mediterranean near the Gaza Strip. It was apparently an Iranian-made drone heading for Dimona, Israel's nuclear plant in the Negev desert. *Ha'aretz* reported that officials believed that it was unlikely that it had come from Gaza, as "a drone is too sophisticated for groups there to use".

It was more likely to have been sent by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah organization in Lebanon, possibly to spy on the Dimona facility or to check Israel's response time to such a mission. On Monday, Israel retaliated by sending fighter planes to fly low over Lebanon.

Israeli gunships and tanks also bombed Gaza, killing 25-year-old Mohammed Makawi, who it claimed was linked to a radical group involved in a recent Sinai border attack that had killed an Israeli. This followed the firing of missiles by Hamas and Islamic Jihad from Gaza that exploded harmlessly in southern Israel, after Israeli attacks on the enclave killed one Palestinian and wounded at least nine others, including several children.

This is the first time since June that Hamas has acknowledged launching rockets against Israel. Hamas has largely adhered to an informal cease-fire with Israel and has sought to rein in militant groups, at Egypt's behest. It is coming under increasing pressure to be seen to be resisting Israel's occupation. A Hamas spokesman said it would not remain passive in the face of "one-sided" Israeli violence.

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