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IRAN ESCALATION: All the Elements for War Are Coming Together

By Tom Burghardt

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With all the bluster of late in Western media that President Obama is assiduously working to "restrain" Israel from launching a preemptive attack on Iran, recent developments should put paid the lies of this dog-and-pony show.

Last Sunday during an interview with NBC News, the president made it clear that "all options" regarding plans for a joint U.S.-Israeli attack "are on the table." Far from distancing his government from the strident rhetoric emanating from Tel Aviv, Obama added that the administration is working "in lockstep" with Israel to "prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon."

Never mind that unlike Israel, which is estimated to possess upwards of 200 nuclear weapons, as a signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Iran is perfectly within its rights under international law to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes.

Indeed in December 2003, the Islamic Republic signed an additional protocol authorizing IAEA inspectors to make intrusive, snap inspections of their nuclear facilities and have expressed a willingness to negotiate an end to the Western-manufactured "standoff."

In our Orwellian Empire however, "diplomacy" is a convenient cover--and political talking point--for war and regime change. "Again," Obama told NBC News, "our goal is to resolve this

diplomatically. That would be preferable. We're not going to take options off the table, though."

The president followed-up his threats on Monday when he signed an executive order freezing "all Iranian government and financial institutions' assets that are under U.S. jurisdiction," [Bloomberg News](#) reported.

According to the White House, Obama took the additional step towards cratering Iran's economy and cited "'deceptive practices' of the Iranian central bank in hiding transactions of sanctioned parties and its failure to prevent money laundering, concluding that Iran activities pose an 'unacceptable risk' to the international financial system."

If only Obama's "neocon-lite" regime had taken similar measures to rein-in the fraudulent and patently "deceptive practices" of the big Western capitalist financial firms that continue to pose an "unacceptable risk" to the economic and social well-being of the global proletariat!

Nigel Kushner, the CEO of the London-based Whale Rock Legal told [Bloomberg](#) that "the practical impact is less important than the message it sends to Iran." The analyst went on to say that the new executive order is "a declaration of economic warfare, to the extent that it's not already been declared," [Bloomberg](#) averred.

Accordingly, the asset freeze blocks "all property and interests in property belonging to the Iranian government, its central bank, and all Iranian financial institutions, even those that haven't been designated for sanctions by the U.S. Treasury Department," and is one more sign that "hope and change" fraudsters in Washington have taken these steps as deliberate provocations.

This is spelled out quite clearly by neocon Mark Dubowitz, the executive director of the oxymoronic Foundation for Defense of Democracies ([FDD](#)), which has rightly been described as the successor organization of the infamous Project for the New American Century.

Last summer, an exposé of the organization by Eli Clifton at [Think Progress](#) revealed that FDD's über-rich donors include individuals who, like Obama, march "in lockstep" with Israel's Likud party.

According to Clifton's research, FDD sugar daddies include: U.S. Healthcare CEO Leonard Abramson, the head of the Abramson Family Foundation (\$822,000); Edgar M. and Charles Bronfman, heirs to the Seagram liquor fortune ((\$1,050,000); Home Depot cofounder Bernard Marcus (\$600,000); mortgage backed securities "pioneer," Lewis Rainieri (\$350,000); "hedge fund mogul" Michael Steinhardt (\$850,000) and Ameriquest owner and former Bush administration ambassador to the Netherlands, Roland Arnall (\$1,802,000).

"Most of the major donors," Clifton wrote, are active philanthropists to 'pro-Israel' causes both in the U.S. and internationally," who "helped promote the 'Bush doctrine' which led to the invasion of Iraq" and are doing so today with the ginned-up crisis over Iran.

Dubowitz told [Bloomberg](#) that Obama's new executive order was "the logical next step in the 'administration's economic war on the Iranian regime'." He gloated that "freezing assets of Iran's

central bank and its government institutions, including the National Iranian Oil Company, makes them 'subject to much tougher enforcement by the U.S. government and the global financial sector'."

In response, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ramin Mehmanparast told *Tehran Times* Tuesday, that "the issue of sanctions pursued by Western countries and U.S. officials is not a new issue. The issue... is regarded as a hostile measure and indicates that officials of Western countries, particularly the Americans, have not yet come to know our great nation."

"If illogical pressure and inhumane methods are used to hinder the progress of the country and to prevent it from achieving its rights," Mehmanparast said "they (countries that impose sanctions) will definitely not receive a pleasant response from our nation."

Military Build-Up Accelerates

War is not pursued by economic means alone, however.

On the military front, *Navy Times* reported last week that the "essence" of a massive war game carried out along the U.S. east coast, "Bold Alligator 2012" was "planning, staging and getting them here--and not a few platoons, not a Marine Expeditionary Unit but an entire Marine Expeditionary Brigade that could number upwards of 14,500 Marines and sailors."

According to the right-wing Israeli publication *Debkafile*, the "Bold Alligator" drill "is the largest amphibian exercise seen in the West for a decade, staged to simulate a potential Iranian invasion of an allied Persian Gulf country and a marine landing on the Iranian coast."

As part of the exercise, three Marine Corps gunship carriers that practiced an amphibious landing and attacked a "hostile" mechanized enemy division which had "invaded its neighbor."

Practicing alongside their U.S. counterparts, "French, British, Italian, Dutch, Australian and New Zealand military elements are integrated in the drill."

Debkafile reported that "Bold Alligator" is "led by the USS Enterprise nuclear carrier with strike force alongside three amphibian helicopter carriers, the USS Wasp, the USS Boxer and the USS Kearsage."

"On their decks," the Israeli publication averred, "are 6,000 Marines, 25 fighter bombers and 65 strike and transport helicopters, mainly MV-22B Ospreys with their crews. Altogether 100 combat aircraft are involved."

Coinciding with naval exercises currently underway in the Persian Gulf, when the "Bold Alligator" war games end, "the participants are to be shipped out to Persian Gulf positions opposite Iran. Altogether three American aircraft carrier strike groups, the French Charles de Gaulle carrier and four or five US Marines amphibian vessels will be posted there," *Debkafile's* military sources report.

As war drums beat louder, researcher Rick Rozoff at [Stop NATO](#) revealed that during a January 30 meeting, President Obama "met with his Georgian counterpart Mikheil Saakashvili in the Oval Office at the White House for an unprecedented private meeting between the heads of state, a tête-à-tête initiated by Washington."

Rozoff reports that "Obama had summoned the ambitious and erratic Georgian leader to Washington to propose a quid pro quo: The use of Georgian territory for American attacks on Iran in exchange for the U.S. exercising its not inconsiderable influence in Georgia--with a population of only 4.7 million the third largest recipient of American foreign aid--to assist in securing Saakashvili's reelection in next year's presidential poll."

The move was denounced by former Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, "who was overthrown by Saakashvili's self-styled Rose Revolution in 2003," a U.S.-financed "civil society coup" that installed an American-educated puppet in power in Tbilisi. Shevardnadze warned, "I don't rule out that to retain the [presidential] chair Saakashvili may join a military campaign against Iran, which would become a catastrophe for our country."

"Georgian analysts and opposition party leaders seconded Shevardnadze's suspicions, specifying that the Saakashvili regime would provide air bases and hospitals, of which a veritable proliferation have appeared in recent months, for such a war effort."

"A Georgian opposition analyst estimated that 30 new 20-bed hospitals and medical clinics were opened last December and that new air and naval sites are being built and modernized, military air fields in Vaziani, Marneuli and Batumi most ominously," Rozoff wrote.

Similarly, [The Jerusalem Post](#), citing a piece that appeared Saturday in *The Times*, reported that Azerbaijan, which shares a long border with Iran, "is teeming with Mossad agents working to collect intelligence on the happenings within the Islamic Republic."

"This is ground zero for our intelligence work," an anonymous Mossad intelligence operative told *The Times*. "Our presence here is quiet, but substantial. We have increased our presence in the past year, and it gets us very close to Iran. This is a wonderfully porous country."

One might say, a "wonderfully porous country" for staging terror attacks, as [NBC News](#) revealed last week.

According to Richard Engel and Robert Windrem, "deadly attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists are being carried out by an Iranian dissident group that is financed, trained and armed by Israel's secret service, U.S. officials tell NBC News, confirming charges leveled by Iran's leaders."

That group the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department, enjoys considerable support amongst Washington's power elite as [The Christian Science Monitor](#) disclosed last summer.

Indeed, "a high-powered array of former top American officials," from Rudy Giuliani to Howard

Dean, "have been paid tens of thousands of dollars to speak in support of the MEK."

While Obama administration officials have tried to distance the U.S. secret state from the Mossad's assassination program, as Richard Silverstein noted on the left-wing *Tikun Olam* web site: "One aspect of this report, however, is misleading. The U.S. officials who confirm Mossad involvement in these plots carefully note that the U.S. is not participating. That, unfortunately is not quite true. The Bush administration allocated \$400-million for this black ops war against Iran. A good portion of this is suspected of funding Israel's efforts. So it is highly likely that we are the paymasters for this effort and our denials ring hollow."

But the Iranian terror cult's connections to the CIA don't stop there. In fact, "law enforcement officials have told NBC News that in 1994, the MEK made a pact with terrorist Ramzi Yousef a year after he masterminded the first attack on the World Trade Center in New York City," Engel and Windrem wrote.

"According to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, Yousef built an 11-pound bomb that MEK agents placed inside one of Shia Islam's greatest shrines in Mashad, Iran, on June 20, 1994. At least 26 people, mostly women and children, were killed and 200 wounded in the attack."

Yousef, the nephew of reputed "9/11 mastermind" Khalid Sheik Mohammad, was the top bombmaker for Osama Bin Laden's Afghan-Arab database of disposable Western intelligence assets, also known as Al Qaeda, who had a long history of close collaboration with the CIA and Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence agency before "going off the reservation" in the early 1990s.

These connections, and links, to Western destabilization operations are hardly historical relics of Washington's anticommunist jihad against the former Soviet Union, as Peter Dale Scott pointed out in *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* last summer.

Scott noted that "Americans have used al-Qaeda as a resource to increase their influence, for example Azerbaijan in 1993. There a pro-Moscow president was ousted after large numbers of Arab and other foreign mujahedin veterans were secretly imported from Afghanistan, on an airline hastily organized by three former veterans of the CIA's airline Air America."

And today, with foreign fighters flooding into Syria, including Libyan jihadist elements armed and trained by the CIA and MI6, it should hardly come as a shock that Al Qaeda's "emir," Ayman al-Zawahri, in a reprise of Islamist-backed efforts in alliance with the CIA in Afghanistan during the 1980s "urged Muslims in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan to come to the aid of Syrian rebels confronting Assad's forces," *Reuters* reported Sunday.

Western operations against Syria are viewed as a prelude to an all-out attack on Iran as Michel Chossudovsky and other analysts describe in a new series published by *Global Research*.

Indeed, U.S. war planners have presented regional military commanders with a target list that include "beyond Iran's nuclear facilities, communications systems; air defense and missile sites;

Revolutionary Guard Corps facilities; munitions storage facilities, including those for sea mines (remember the Strait of Hormuz); airfields and aircraft facilities; and ship and port facilities, including midget submarines, missile boats and minelayers," *The Washington Post* disclosed.

"Aircraft employed," the *Post* averred, "would include B-2 stealth and B-52 bombers, fighter-bombers and helicopters, along with ship-launched cruise missiles."

In other words, Washington is contemplating a massive air and sea bombardment followed by a *land invasion*, as the "Bold Alligator 2012" drill suggests, with the express purpose of forcing "regime change" in Tehran.

As analyst Peter Symonds pointed out in the *World Socialist Web Site*, "While the US and its allies insist that Iran must satisfy 'international concerns' about its nuclear programs, the demands for 'clarification' are endless."

"IAEA inspectors visited Iran on January 29-31 and are due to return for further discussions later this month," Symonds wrote. "No report has been released, but the US and international media nevertheless accused Tehran of 'obfuscation' and 'time wasting'."

Ominously, *Haaretz* reported that a new dossier "to be issued next month by the International Atomic Energy Agency on Iran's nuclear program is expected to be harsher than the last one, which the IAEA released in November."

According to *Haaretz*, "the agency's board of governors is scheduled to convene on March 5 in Vienna, the same day on which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is due to give a speech in Washington at a meeting of the annual policy conference of the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee."

Netanyahu is also scheduled to meet with Obama where talks on the "international response" to the "threat from Tehran" will take center stage. Isn't that a coincidence!

"The reality," the *World Socialist Web Site* noted, "is that nothing short of complete capitulation to all Washington's demands--not only on the nuclear issue, but its relations with the Syrian government and groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as its alleged 'interference' in Iraq and Afghanistan--would end the US build-up to war."

"In short," Symonds observed, "Washington is pressing for a regime in Tehran that bows to American economic and strategic interests in the Middle East and Central Asia on every significant issue."

"For all the talk about 'diplomacy' and 'sanctions,' the *World Socialist Web Site* warned, "the US is recklessly setting course for a war with Iran that threatens to engulf the Middle East and spread internationally."

The clock is ticking...

