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Global Research

US, Britain Gear Up for War on Iran

By Bill Van Auken

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The military commands in both the US and Britain have sought increased funding and stepped up deployments of arms and personnel to the Persian Gulf in preparation for an anticipated war against Iran.

According to the Wall Street Journal, the Pentagon, acting on the request of the Central Command, which oversees US military operations in the region, has requested the re-allocation of some \$100 million in military spending to ratchet up war preparations.

The Journal cast these preparations as defensive measures aimed at countering an Iranian threat to close the Strait of Hormuz, the waterway through which some 20 percent of the world's exported oil flows. Iran's threat came in response to trade sanctions and embargoes imposed by the US and Western Europe that amount to a blockade, an act of war, as well as open Israeli threats to bomb the country.

“The US military has notified Congress of plans to preposition new mine-detection and clearing equipment and expand surveillance capabilities in and around the strait, according to defense officials briefed on the requests,” the Journal reports. “The military also wants to quickly modify weapons systems on ships so they could be used against Iranian fast-attack boats, as well as shore-launched cruise missiles, the defense officials said.”

Under the Pentagon's plans, US warships would be equipped with anti-tank weapons, rapid-fire machine guns and light weapons for use against the Iranian navy's small speedboats. They would be backed by increased numbers of unmanned drones.

The Journal adds that "US special-operations teams stationed in the United Arab Emirates would take part in any military action in the strait should Iran attempt to close it."

The US has already doubled the number of aircraft carrier battle groups it has stationed in the Persian Gulf area, deploying both the USS Abraham Lincoln and the USS Carl Vinson. It also has substantial numbers of warplanes operating out of the Arabian Peninsula and tens of thousands of troops near Iran's borders in Afghanistan and Kuwait.

The new war preparations, the Journal states, show "the extent to which war planners are taking tangible steps to prepare for a possible conflict with Iran, even as top White House and defense leaders try to tamp down talk of war and emphasize other options."

The report in the Journal indicates that the Pentagon wants the military buildup in the Gulf in place by autumn, when Pentagon planners anticipate that Israel will launch an unprovoked military strike on Iran.

High-level discussions on Iran between Washington and the Israeli state are scheduled over the next several days, with Defense Minister Ehud Barak having left Israel Monday for two days of talks with US officials, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu set to hold talks with Obama on March 5.

The newspaper noted that the latest move to fund an anticipated war with Iran follows the Pentagon's request in January for \$82 million "to improve its largest conventional bunker-buster bomb, the 30,000-pound Massive Ordnance Penetrator. The bomb, officials said, was designed to take out bunkers like those used by Iran to protect its most sensitive nuclear development work."

There are indications that a heated debate continues over whether to supply Israel with these 30,000-pound weapons, which are substantially more powerful than the 5,000-pound Guided Bomb Unit 28 (GBU-28) bunker busters that the Obama administration transferred to the Zionist state last year.

David Sanger, the chief Washington correspondent for the New York Times, summed up the growing drumbeat within sections of the US ruling establishment Sunday as follows: "Arm the Syrian rebels! And, while we're at it, give the Israelis the tools they need — bunker-busters, refueling aircraft — so that if they decide to strike Iran's nuclear facilities, they'll get it right the first time."

Acknowledging that Washington's aims in Syria have everything to do with weakening Iran in preparation for "regime change" there as well, Sanger continued: "The argument commonly heard inside and outside the White House these days is that if the Assad government cracks,

Iran's ability to funnel weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas will be badly damaged — and its influence will wither accordingly. Similarly, if Iran's effort to walk up to the edge of a nuclear weapons capability can be set back with a few well-placed GBU-31 bunker-busters, the country's hopes of challenging Israel and Saudi Arabia to be the region's biggest power will be deferred."

In other words, behind all of the hyped warnings about Iran's imminent acquiring of nuclear weapons, the reality is that US imperialism and its allies are engaged in a campaign of economic, political and military aggression against Iran, whose aim is to prevent the country from emerging as a regional power capable of challenging Washington's hegemony over the energy-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

The nuclear issue has been used as the pretext for preparing a new war in the region, just as the claims about "weapons of mass destruction" were employed in the run-up to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Just as in Iraq a decade ago, the International Atomic Energy Agency's nuclear inspection regime serves as a cat's paw in preparing imperialist aggression. As in Iraq, the IAEA, manipulated by US, Israeli and Western European intelligence agencies, is demanding that Iran do the impossible: prove a negative, that it is not engaged in the development of nuclear weapons. And, similar to its operations against Baghdad, the IAEA is provoking Tehran by demanding that it submit to diktats that are in no way required of signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Thus, the IAEA issued a report last Friday, stressing that a small amount of uranium metal was missing from a nuclear research site—far less than would be needed for building a bomb—and that Iran has increased its enrichment of uranium, not to the grade necessary for weapons, but rather for nuclear power plant fuel, perfectly legal under the treaty.

It also charged that a team it sent to Iran was denied permission to visit the Parchin military complex, located about 18 miles southeast of Tehran. The US has repeatedly incited the IAEA to demand inspections of the site, which is a non-nuclear facility and not subject to the agency's oversight. Between 2004 and 2006 Iran allowed inspectors into the sensitive facility after Washington charged that a bunker there was being used to test explosive triggers for nuclear bombs. The inspections found nothing of the kind.

Iranian officials, who have insisted that the country's nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, said that the IAEA team sent to Tehran was there to negotiate a "framework" for continued collaboration between the agency and Tehran and that it was not composed of nuclear inspectors and had no right to request entry to the Parchin facility.

Both Israel and the US seized upon the report as the pretext for escalating pressure against Iran. Netanyahu issued a statement saying that it "provides more proof that Israel's estimations are accurate, Iran is continuing with its nuclear program unchecked." Israel itself has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or accept any IAEA oversight of its nuclear facilities, which have produced an estimated 400 nuclear weapons.

“Iran’s actions demonstrate why Iran has failed to convince the international community that its nuclear program is peaceful,” White House spokesman Tommy Vietor said. Unless Iran submitted to US and Western European pressure, “its isolation from the international community will only continue to grow,” he added.

Meanwhile, under the jingoistic headline “Britain’s battle plan for war with Iran”, Rupert Murdoch’s Sunday Sun cited unnamed British “defense chiefs” as saying “it is a matter of WHEN not IF war breaks out—with 18 to 24 months the likely timescale.”

In preparation for an attack on Iran, the paper reported, Britain will “fly an infantry battalion to the United Arab Emirates, our strong ally in the region.”

The Sun added. “Under the war plan, a second sub armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles would be deployed. The RAF would send Typhoon and Tornado Jets to reinforce helicopter and transport plane crews already stationed in Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and the UAE.”

The paper quoted a senior Whitehall official as saying: “MoD [Ministry of Defense] planners went into overdrive at the start of the year. Conflict is seen as inevitable as long as the regime pursue their nuclear ambitions.”