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The Urge to Bomb Iran

By Tom Engelhardt

November 4, 2012

The Obama administration has engaged in a [staggering](#) military [buildup](#) in the [Persian Gulf](#) and at U.S. and allied [bases](#) around Iran (not to speak of in [the air](#) over that country and in [cyberspace](#)). Massive as it is, however, it hasn't gotten much coverage lately. Perhaps, after all the alarms and warnings about possible Israeli or U.S. military strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities this election season, it's become so much the norm that it doesn't even seem like news anymore. Still, two recent stories should jog our memories.

Barely a week ago, the commander of the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *John C. Stennis* was temporarily replaced and [called home](#) to face an investigation into "inappropriate leadership judgment." What this means is unclear, but it happened while the *Stennis* and its attending strike group including destroyers, guided missile cruisers, and other ships, were deployed in the Persian Gulf. We forget just what an "aircraft carrier" really is. It's essentially a floating U.S. airbase and small town with a crew of about 5,000. As it happens, the *Stennis* was sent back to the Persian Gulf [four months early](#) to join the U.S.S. *Eisenhower*, because Washington wanted two such strike groups in the area. Even if there were no other build-up, this would be impressive enough.

At about the same time, what might be thought of as the creepy story of that week surfaced. Behind the scenes, [reported](#) the *Guardian*, the British government had rejected Obama administration requests for access to some of its bases as part of preparations for a possible war with Iran. ("The *Guardian* has been told that U.S. diplomats have also lobbied for the use of British bases in Cyprus, and for permission to fly from U.S. bases on Ascension Island in the

Atlantic and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, both of which are British territories.”) The rejection — “the government does not think military action is the right course at this point of time” — was not, of course, the creepy part of the story. For some strange reason, British officials don’t feel that war is the optimal approach to Iran and, stranger yet, don’t want to be dragged into a potential regional conflagration. The creepy part of the story was the request itself, given the [traffic jam of bases](#) Washington already has access to in the region.

And remember, this is the Obama administration, not the Romney one! As [TomDispatch regular](#) Jeremiah Goulka makes clear, we’re talking about the party of “restraint” in Washington. If that doesn’t make your heart sink, I don’t know what would. *Tom*