

America 'Poised to Strike at Iran's Nuclear Sites' from Bases in Bulgaria and Romania

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Report suggest that 'US defensive ring' may be new front in war on terror.

President Bush is preparing to attack Iran's nuclear facilities before the end of April and the US Air Force's new bases in Bulgaria and Romania would be used as back-up in the onslaught, according to an official report from Sofia.

"American forces could be using their two USAF bases in Bulgaria and one at Romania's Black Sea coast to launch an attack on Iran in April," the Bulgarian news agency Novinite said.

The American build-up along the Black Sea, coupled with the recent positioning of two US aircraft carrier battle groups off the Straits of Hormuz, appears to indicate president Bush has run out of patience with Tehran's nuclear misrepresentation and non-compliance with the UN Security Council's resolution. President Ahmeninejad of Iran has further ratcheted up tension in the region by putting on show his newly purchased state of the art Russian TOR-MI anti-missile defence system.

Whether the Bulgarian news report is a tactical feint or a strategic event is hard to gauge at this stage. But, in conjunction with the beefing up of America's Italian bases and the acquisition of anti-missile defence bases in the Czech Republic and Poland, the Balkan developments seem to indicate a new phase in Bush's global war on terror.

Sofia's news of advanced war preparations along the Black Sea is backed up by some chilling details. One is the setting up of new refuelling places for US Stealth bombers, which would spearhead an attack on Iran. "The USAF's positioning of vital refuelling facilities for its B-2 bombers in unusual places, including Bulgaria, falls within the perspective of such an attack." Novinite named Colonel Sam Gardiner, "a US secret service officer stationed in Bulgaria", as the source of this revelation.

Curiously, the report noted that although Tony Blair, Bush's main ally in the global war on terror, would be leaving office, the president had opted to press on with his attack on Iran in April.

Before the end of March, 3000 US military personnel are scheduled to arrive "on a rotating basis" at America's Bulgarian bases. Under the US-Bulgarian military co-operation accord, signed in April, 2006, an airbase at Bezmer, a second airfield at Graf Ignatievo and a shooting range at Novo Selo were leased to America. Significantly, last year's bases negotiations had at one point run into difficulties due to Sofia's demand "for advance warning if Washington

intends to use Bulgarian soil for attacks against other nations, particularly Iran”.

Romania, the other Black Sea host to the US military, is enjoying a dollar bonanza as its Mihail Kogalniceanu base at Constanta is being transformed into an American “place d’arme”. It is also vital to the Iran scenario.

Last week, the Bucharest daily Evenimentul Zilei revealed the USAF is to site several flights of F-15, F-16 and A10 aircraft at the Kogalniceanubase. Admiral Gheorghe Marin, Romania’s chief of staff, confirmed “up to 2000 American military personnel will be temporarily stationed in Romania”.

In Central Europe, the Czech Republic and Poland have also found themselves in the Pentagon’s strategic focus. Last week, Mirek Topolanek, the Czech prime minister, and the country’s national security council agreed to the siting of a US anti-missile radar defence system at Nepochy. Poland has also agreed to having a US anti-missile missile base and interceptor aircraft stationed in the country.

Russia, however, does not see the chain of new US bases on its doorstep as a “defensive ring”. Russia’s defence chief has branded the planned US anti-missile missile sites on Czech and Polish soil as “an open threat to Russia”.

Sergey Ivanov, Russia’s defence minister, spoke more circumspectly while emphasizing Moscow’s concern. He said: “Russia is not worried. Its strategic nuclear forces can assure in any circumstance its safety. Since neither Tehran, nor Pyongyang possess intercontinental missiles capable of threatening the USA, from whom is this new missile shield supposed to protect the West? All it actually amounts to is that Prague and Warsaw want to demonstrate their loyalty to Washington.”

Bush’s Iran attack plan has brought into sharp focus the possible costs to Central and Eastern Europe of being “pillars of Pax Americana”.

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