

Israeli threats heighten danger of Middle East war

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The latest Israeli threats to launch an unprovoked war of aggression against Iran underscore the recklessness and criminality of the Obama administration's drive to reshape the Middle East and reassert US dominance over the region. While Israeli political leaders may more openly declare their intentions, they only echo Obama's oft-repeated statement that the US keeps all options on the table, including war, for dealing with Iran.

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon last Sunday called on the US and its European allies to "declare today that the talks [with Iran] have failed," and to set a deadline for Iran to end its nuclear program. Asked how long the Iranian regime should be given, Ayalon replied, "weeks, and not more than that".

Ayalon's comments came amid intense speculation in the Israeli media that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his security officials were close to making a decision to attack Iran. On Tuesday, the *Ma'ariv* newspaper reported that Netanyahu and Defence Minister Ehud Barak had set September 25 as the date for Obama to commit to taking military action against Iran.

On Wednesday, a leaked memo outlined Israeli war plans that included "an unprecedented cyber-attack" to shut down Iran's communications; the use of carbon fibre munitions to collapse the country's power grid; as well as "a barrage of tens of ballistic missiles" and "hundreds of cruise missiles", supplemented by air strikes, aimed at Iran's nuclear facilities, its military apparatus and its political and military leaders.

Also on Wednesday, Israel's ambassador to the US, Michael Oren, told a public forum that Israel would be willing to attack Iran even if it could not completely destroy Iran's nuclear programs. "Diplomacy hasn't succeeded," he bluntly declared. "We've come to a very critical juncture where important decisions do have to be made." Asked when Israel's window of opportunity to attack would close, he answered: "Not in the too-far distant future."

These latest threats are partly aimed at intimidating critics within Israel, where there is widespread opposition to a war on Iran, as well as to pressure the Obama administration to escalate its own threats against Iran. Regardless of Israeli officials' conscious purpose in making these statements, their warmongering only heightens tensions throughout the region and adds to the dangers of war.

Moreover, Iran is not the only target. Israeli ambassador Oren expressed concerns about Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons amid the country's worsening civil war. He said that the situation was "highly fluid, highly flammable" and indicated that Syria might have to be "dealt with first" before Iran. Israel has already threatened to attack Syria's chemical

weapons.

The pretexts being exploited by the US and its allies to justify war against Iran are entirely cynical. The US is threatening to attack Iran over unsubstantiated allegations that it is developing a nuclear weapons capacity, while turning a blind eye to the Israel's large stockpile of nuclear bombs and delivery systems. Likewise the US and Israel are making inflated claims about Syria's chemical weapons to provide an excuse for military aggression.

For US and Israeli strategists, the civil war in Syria and the preparations to attack Iran are closely interlinked. Iran through its support for its ally, the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad, as well as the Lebanese militia, Hezbollah, and the Palestinian organisation Hamas, is regarded as the chief obstacle to the consolidation of the Middle East under American hegemony. As the US-backed military intervention in Syria escalates, so does the military build-up by the US and its allies in Persian Gulf against Iran.

Israel, with US support, is already engaged in a highly provocative, covert war of sabotage and assassination inside Iran.

Moreover, by enlisting the support of the reactionary Sunni monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as the Turkish government, the US is deliberately stoking the flames of a regional sectarian war along Sunni-Shiite lines.

The Syrian opposition militias being armed by the US and its allies include Sunni extremist fighters, including Al Qaeda-linked groups, which are pathologically hostile to the "Shiite" regimes of Iran and Syria. Having raised the political temperature to boiling point, a relatively minor episode—a naval clash in the Persian Gulf, or a border incident between Syria and Turkey—can become the trigger for a regional war that would draw in the major powers.

The escalating intervention of US imperialism and its allies into the Middle East is a response to the revolutionary movements of the working class that erupted last year in Egypt and Tunisia. The NATO war to oust the Libyan regime of Muammar Gaddafi on bogus humanitarian grounds has become the model for US-led efforts to remove President Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

The promotion of Sunni Islamists and extremists in Libya, Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East meets up with the deepest needs of US imperialism and the Middle East's venal ruling elites to divide the working class.

The only social force capable of preventing the descent into a catastrophic war in the Middle East and internationally is the working class. Workers throughout the region, regardless of their language, religion or ethnicity, share common class interests in opposing imperialist intervention, militarism and war, as well as the relentless assault on their living standards and democratic rights. What is needed is a unified struggle of the working class directed against the root cause of war—the profit system itself—and for a United Socialist States of the Middle East.

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