

U.S. Arms Persian Gulf Allies For Conflict With Iran

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Global Research, November 18, 2011

[Stop NATO](#) 18 November 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#), [US NATO](#)
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Rumors and reports of, speculation over and scenarios for attacks against Iran's civilian nuclear power facilities and military sites by the United States, Israel or both have flared up periodically over the past several years, especially since early 2005.

However, recent statements by among others the president and defense minister of Israel and a leading candidate for the American presidency in next year's election - Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak and Mitt Romney respectively - before and after the latest International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report on Iran's nuclear program manifest a more stark and menacing tone that has been heard in a long time. Standing U.S. head of state Barack Obama recently stated, "We are not taking any options off the table."

The above threats and others of the same tenor have been noted in the capitals of countries around the world.

Last week the Global Times, a publication of the Communist Party of China, featured an unsigned editorial entitled "Winds of war start blowing toward Iran," which contained these excerpts:

"The financial crisis is showing cracks in the Western lifestyle, making people anxious and irritable. History teaches us that war can quickly raise its ugly head at such times. There are always those who think wars can be a catalyst to move past a crisis."

"While the US and other Western countries are struggling economically, their military power reigns supreme. This contrast is inevitably tempting in their strategic thinking but would have a profoundly negative impact on world peace."

"Military rhetoric is usually heard from Western mouths. Where will the next war happen? War first exists in the minds of those obsessed with military might. If war is treated as a tool to solve problems, new excuses for it can easily be found."

"The last few days have seen tensions over Iran take a sharp turn for the worse. Some feel that the US and Israel should combine to strike at Iranian nuclear facilities. This is reminiscent of those who encouraged NATO to hit Syria a few weeks ago." [1]

On November 14 former Cuban president Fidel Castro warned that "a U.S.-Israeli attack on

Iran would inevitably unleash a bloody war,” adding that because of the country’s size and comparative military strength “an attack on Iran is not like the previous Israeli military adventures in Iraq and Syria.” In fact, with a population as high as 75-77 million, Iran is larger in that regard than the last four nations attacked by the U.S. and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies combined: Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Four days earlier Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the Russian Duma Committee for International Affairs, in casting grave doubts on the accuracy and purpose of the recent IAEA report on Iran, said:

“A military operation against Iran could have grave consequences. And Russia should make every effort to control emotions, bring negotiations back into the field of political and expert discussion, and not allow any such action against Iran.” [2]

The following day it was announced that Iran was pursuing full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, whose members are Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Iran’s fellow observers in the group are India, Pakistan and Mongolia), with the Supreme National Security Council’s Secretary Assistant Ali Bageri stating, “We have already submitted a relevant application.” [3]

Slightly over two years ago the U.S, and Israel held the world’s largest-ever live-fire anti-ballistic missile drills in the second country, Juniper Cobra 10. [4]

Over a thousand U.S. and an equal amount of Israeli troops participated in the war games which included three of the four tiers of rapidly the evolving American global interceptor missile network: The Patriot Advanced Capability-3, Standard Missile-3 and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense systems.

Early next year Juniper Cobra 12 will be held in Israel with the involvement of over 5,000 U.S. and Israeli troops, the largest joint military exercise ever conducted by the two nations.

Last summer the Jerusalem Post ran a feature with the title “Israel, US to hold massive missile defense drill next year,” which stated:

“Called Juniper Cobra, the exercise will be held in early 2012 and will include the Arrow 2 and Iron Dome as well as America’s THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) and the ship-based Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System. The exercise will likely include the actual launching of interceptors from these systems.”

The Israeli daily added:

“The purpose of the exercise is to create the necessary infrastructure that would enable interoperability between Israeli and American missile defense systems in case the US government decided to deploy these systems here in the event of a conflict with Iran, like it did ahead of the Gulf War in Iraq in 1991.” [5]

Another major Israeli newspaper, Ha’aretz, ran a story last week under the title “Israel, U.S.

to embark on largest joint exercise in allies' history," which cited Andrew Shapiro, Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, stating that the upcoming missile drills will represent the "largest" and "most significant" joint military maneuvers ever held by the U.S. and Israel.

The account added:

"Our security relationship with Israel is broader, deeper and more intense than ever before," said Shapiro, adding that Israel's military edge was a 'top priority' for himself, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and U.S. President Barack Obama." [6]

The intensification of already unprecedented missile interception coordination between two of the world's main military powers indicates preparation for withstanding potential Iranian retaliation following Israeli, American or joint strikes against Iran.

The deployment of a U.S. Forward-Based X-Band Radar in Israel's Negev Desert three years ago and this past summer's first deployment of an Aegis class guided missile warship, USS Monterrey, to the Eastern Mediterranean as part of the U.S.-NATO Phased Adaptive Approach interceptor missile system endorsed at NATO's summit in Portugal a year ago, which will further entail the stationing of missiles and radar in Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Turkey and other, as yet undisclosed, countries, are further signs of systematic plans for guaranteeing that the U.S. NATO allies and partners (like Israel) are invulnerable to counterattacks. [7]

The withdrawal of American and allied troops from Iraq and the beginning of a drawdown of their counterparts in Afghanistan can also be seen in this context, as removing targets for possible retaliation should a large-scale attack be staged against Iran.

In the last three weeks features have appeared in two of America's major newspapers, the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal, which reveal another source for prospective attacks against Iran: The six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). All are close military allies of and recipients of weapons from the U.S. and are linked with NATO through the eponymous Istanbul Cooperation Initiative launched at the 2004 NATO summit in Turkey. [8] A recent headline in Britain's Guardian alluded to a "mini-NATO" in the Persian Gulf and Voice of Russia featured an article with the title of "US envisions NATO of the Gulf."

A New York Times report of October 29 mentioned that Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta recently confirmed the Pentagon currently has 40,000 troops in the Persian Gulf region (excluding Iraq), including 23,000 in Kuwait. The daily stated that new U.S. plans could include the deployment of more combat troops to the latter state and a heightened presence of American warships in the area.

The account further detailed that the Obama administration "is also seeking to expand military ties with the six nations in the Gulf Cooperation Council — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. While the United States has close bilateral military relationships with each, the administration and the military are trying to foster a new 'security architecture' for the Persian Gulf that would integrate air and naval patrols and missile defense." [9]

On November 11 the Wall Street Journal revealed that the White House will provide the

United Arab Emirates (UAE) with “thousands of advanced ‘bunker-buster’ bombs and other munitions, part of a stepped-up U.S. effort to build a regional coalition to counter Iran.” The weapons will “vastly expand the existing capabilities of the country’s air force to target fixed structures, which could include bunkers and tunnels — the kind of installations where Iran is believed to be developing weapons.” [10] Another source mentioned 500 Hellfire air-to-surface missiles in addition to the other munitions. A news story four days later disclosed that the U.S. Air Force has received “super-heavy bunker buster bombs” from Boeing to be carried by B-2 bombers. The new bunker-busters weigh “13.6 tons and [have] a built-in satellite navigation system, with “experts not[ing] that this type of bomb which is capable of breaking 18-meter-thick concrete walls is a perfect weapon for attacking nuclear facilities in Iran.” [11]

The Wall Street Journal report, echoing that of the New York Times earlier, added:

“The Obama administration is trying to build up the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which comprises Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, U.A.E. and Kuwait, as a unified counterweight to Iran.

“In recent months, the U.S. has begun holding a regular strategic dialogue with the GCC bloc. And the Pentagon has been trying to improve intelligence-sharing and military compatibility among the six countries.”

The newspaper reminded its readers of a \$67 billion arms deal initiated by the White House with Saudi Arabia in 2010 to supply the second nation with 84 F-15 fighter jets and 2,000-pound bunker-busting bombs, 72 Black Hawk and 70 Apache Longbow attack helicopters, Patriot Advanced Capability-2 and other missiles, and warships. The largest bilateral weapons sale in history. Two years ago a Financial Times feature estimated that Washington plans to sell \$123 billion worth of arms to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

The Wall Street Journal also reported that the U.S. Defense Department plans to supply Stinger missiles and medium-range air-to-air missiles to Oman.

Citing Pentagon officials, the paper added:

“The U.A.E. has a large fleet of advanced U.S.-made F-16 fighters that could carry the bunker-busters. The U.A.E. currently has several hundred JDAMs [joint direct attack munitions/bunker-busters] in its arsenal, and the 4,900 in the new proposal would represent a massive buildup [of] direct attack munitions.”

“Proponents of the deal point to the U.A.E.’s support for U.S. efforts to isolate Iran, and its critical backing to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization air campaign in Libya. Officials said providing JDAMs and other U.S. weapons systems to the U.A.E. will make it easier for the country to participate in similar missions in the future.” [12]

The role of the UAE and its GCC partners this year in NATO’s war against Libya and in interventions in Bahrain and Yemen and against Syria will be addressed later. [13]

A Russian expert, Professor Sergei Druzhilovsky at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, characterized the intensification of American arms sales to its Gulf

clients in the following words:

“Clearly, the aim is to provoke Iran to respond by some inadequate moves, which would enable the Americans to justify subsequent violence and military force. Because no further arming of U.S. allies in the Arab Middle East will make them any stronger. It’s not the strength of its allies, which simply doesn’t exist, but its own military bases in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain and its own fleet in the Persian Gulf that Washington relies upon. So, this is a pure provocation.” [14]

The Wall Street journal article also discussed the integration of the six GCC states into U.S. plans for an international interceptor missile system:

“The U.S. has also sought to build up missile-defense systems across the region, with the goal of building an integrated network to defend against short- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles from Iran.” [15]

Last year Washington announced the sale of land-based interceptor missiles to Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, mainly of the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 model.

With land- and ship-based interceptor missiles in the Persian Gulf, Washington will link the NATO system in Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean with that being developed in the Asia-Pacific region with partners Australia, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan and, with what of late has been an initiative of U.S. permanent representative to NATO Ivo Daalder, India joining the NATO missile interception system [16] to increasingly surround Iran, Russia and China.

On November 13 Aviation International News reported that Washington is planning to provide Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) batteries to the United Arab Emirates, adding to nine Patriot Advanced Capability-3 units on order. The Pentagon has deployed two THAAD active batteries to date, both in the U.S., so the stationing of the interceptors (96-144 missiles) in the UAE would be the first time they have been deployed overseas.

The news site supplied these details:

“[T]he UAE was the first export customer to be cleared to receive the system. THAAD has completed 12 successful flight tests, nine of which involved target engagements. The latest test, FTT-12, was undertaken on October 5 at the Pacific Missile Test Range at Barking Sands, Hawaii. Two interceptors were launched successfully against two targets in a near-simultaneous engagement.”

“[T]here is significant interest in upgraded Patriot and THAAD systems [in the region]. Kuwait and Qatar have both reported interest in the latter.

“As well as anticipating finalization of the THAAD contract, Lockheed Martin is awaiting the outcome of another UAE decision concerning an air defense battle management system.” [17]

According to Press TV earlier this month, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad warned

that the NATO missile system, particularly the deployment of an X-Band radar unit in Turkey, “jeopardizes the interests of the country and the entire region.”

This year has seen the emergence of Persian Gulf monarchies grouped in the Gulf Cooperation Council as a military adjunct to NATO, as a combat-ready and -proven force ready to collaborate with their Western arms suppliers and allies to intervene and wage war in the Middle East and North Africa.

The United Arab Emirates provided six U.S. F-16 and six French Mirage warplanes for NATO’s Operation Unified Protector and its 26,000 air missions and nearly 10,000 combat flights over Libya. Qatar supplied six Mirage fighter jets and two C-17 military transport planes. News reports at the time remarked that the above represented the first time Gulf Cooperation Council states had joined a NATO combat mission. (Although the UAE has a contingent of troops serving under NATO in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.)

In June Robert Gates, while still U.S. defense secretary, praised the role of the UAE, Jordan and Morocco in the war against Libya - Jordan and Morocco have since applied for membership in the GCC - stating, “In Libya, the involvement of Jordan, Morocco, the UAE and others in the Middle East have been hugely important.”

The then-Pentagon chief added this significant comment:

“I am not sure we would have moved forward to the UN, even undertaking this enterprise, had it not been for the vote in the Arab League that then paved the way for the UN Security Council resolutions.” [18]

Gates paralleled repeated statements by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during the war citing the Arab League initiative against Libya on February 22 when the organization, then dominated by the GCC as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were in turmoil and Syria soon to join them, condemned and suspended the membership of the North African country, a move recently repeated in relation to Syria.

The GCC’s participation in NATO’s naval blockade and air war against Libya was accompanied by its first armed intervention in a member state, the deployment of 1,500 Saudi and Emirati troops to Bahrain in the middle of March in an operation called Peninsula Shield. [19]

After Libya, Bahrain and Afghanistan, GCC members, severally and collectively, have been prepared for a military conflict closer to home, in the Persian Gulf.

In May Poland’s Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski announced after meeting with his UAE counterpart that the Gulf state will “become the first Arab country to open an embassy at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation,” according to Agence France-Presse.

The following day the Kuwait News Agency quoted a statement from the French Foreign Ministry supporting the initiative:

“The United Arab Emirates has just asked for the accreditation of an ambassador to NATO.

“We fully support this request.

“This is a new step in our relations, which have witnessed an intensity and quality in cooperation between the UAE and the Alliance, notably in the framework of Operation Unified Protector in Libya.”

The Iranian response was, according to Press TV, that “This move by the UAE sets the stage to officially authorize the presence of an uninvited guest in the region.”

The preceding month five NATO warships visited the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait “under the 2004 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative” as an Agence France-Presse dispatch phrased it.

In commenting on the earlier-cited New York Times article on the Persian Gulf, a Voice of Russia commentary stated:

“[W]ith Qatar and the United Arab Emirates participating in the latest NATO-led campaign against Libya, this new ‘security architecture’ will mostly likely expand to carry out a similar function throughout the Middle East.

“[A]s the United States moves towards integrating the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council into a security alliance that would increase both US and Saudi domination in the region, Iran could very well find itself the next victim of a US-led ‘humanitarian intervention.’” [20]

In addition to the escalation of U.S. military presence in the region, in 2009 French President Nicolas Sarkozy opened a military complex – with a navy base, air base, and training camp – in the United Arab Emirates, his country’s first permanent base in the Persian Gulf. In doing so Paris joined the U.S., Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand in maintaining a military presence in the country. (Canada has since abandoned Camp Mirage in the UAE.)

The UAE has recently reopened negotiations with France for a military surveillance satellite, which “could also be linked to the protracted negotiations to buy 60 Dassault Aviation Rafale multi-role fighter jets, a deal that could be worth up to \$10 billion.”

According to a United Press International story of late last month, “On April 24, the emirates launched its fifth communications satellite into orbit, the first to provide secure and independent telecommunications for its armed forces amid a drive by Arab states in the gulf to boost their military capabilities against Iran.

“The Emirates’ Y1A satellite was launched from the European Space Center in Kourou, French Guiana, atop an Ariane 5 rocket.”

Another report by the same agency a month before said that “Dassault Aviation hopes to capitalize on France’s participation with the United Arab Emirates in the air campaign against Moammar Gadhafi’s crumbling regime in Libya to promote the sale of 60 Rafale multi-role jets to the Persian Gulf state.” The story mentioned that “The emirates’ military says it wants missiles capable of reaching targets deep inside Iran,” and offered this description of current UAE air capabilities:

“The United Arab Emirates has built up what is widely viewed as the most formidable air force in the Persian Gulf. It has 184 combat aircraft, including 155 ground-attack fighters, mainly 55 Lockheed F-16E Block 60 Desert Eagles, 25 F-16F Block 60 Eagles and 18 French Dassault Mirage 2000-9DADs and 44 Mirage 2000-9RADs.”

The arming of the GCC by the U.S., France and other NATO powers at an exponential rate is, in addition to providing an economic boon to crisis-ridden Western countries, transparently and exclusively directed against Iran.

The advantages accruing to the U.S. and Israel in having a regional grouping of its neighbors attack Iran in lieu of doing so themselves are sufficiently evident not to warrant being belabored.

Washington is using the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies to act as surrogates for its own interests against Iran as it is with Georgia against Russia [21] and the Philippines vis-a-vis China. (NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and the North Atlantic Council just returned from Georgia, the second such visit a NATO chief and the bloc’s 28 ambassadors have paid, the first occurring the month after Georgia invaded South Ossetia in August 2008, provoking a five-day war with Russia. Late last month 2,000 U.S. and 1,000 Filipino marines participated in combat drills near the Spratly Islands, which are contested by the Philippines and China.

Even if the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and their GCC partners don’t launch unprovoked strikes against Iranian nuclear and military sites, a provocation staged, say, by the UAE around the oil-rich island of Abu Musa in the Persian Gulf (frequently referred to by U.S. officials as the Arabian Gulf in a direct affront and challenge to Iran), administered by Iran but claimed by the UAE, will be casus belli enough for the GCC and through it the Arab League it controls. From there, as with Libya earlier this year, the U.S. and its NATO allies will take up cudgels on behalf of the “threatened” Arab Gulf states and enter the lists against Iran.

The Obama Doctrine [22], like the Nixon Doctrine of forty years earlier, emphasizes the role of proxies (identified as allies and victims) in doing what the U.S. chooses not to do, not to do alone or to be seen doing alone. It justifies military aggression in the name of decisions reached by organizations it doesn’t belong to, like the Arab League and the African Union in regards to Libya, and settles geopolitical scores with independent-minded rivals under the guise of intervening on behalf of aggrieved and injured third parties. A lesson that Russia has already learned, China is now learning and Iran may be taught next.

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