

US Military Weaknesses: Top Pentagon Brass reluctant to wage war on Iran

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While US attack plans against Iran are in an advanced state of readiness, there are growing divisions between the military and the White House regarding these attacks.

“U.S. defense officials have signaled that up-to-date attack plans are available if needed in the escalating crisis over Iran’s nuclear aims, although no strike appears imminent Among the possible targets, in addition to nuclear installations like the centrifuge plant at Natanz [are] Iran’s ballistic missile sites, Republican Guard bases, and naval warfare assets that Tehran could use in a retaliatory closure of the Straits of Hormuz, a vital artery for the flow of Gulf oil.” (AP, November 8, 2007)

These ongoing war preparations are consistent with official statements and political threats directed against Iran by the US president and vice president. On October 12, President Bush dropped a bombshell by intimating that the confrontation with Iran could lead to a “World War III”. In a recent TV interview Bush clarified that the reason he mentioned World War III was “because this is a country [Iran] that has defied the IAEA...” This statement is a barefaced lie by the US head of State. The IAEA confirmed in an August report the civilian nature of Iran’s nuclear program.

Vice President Dick Cheney stated on Oct. 21 that Iran would face “serious consequences” if it did not conform to US demands regarding its nuclear program. Cheney is still committed to triggering a pretext, including a “Second 911” or a “catatrophic emergency” in the US, which would provide a justification for waging war on Iran.

Meanwhile, presidential candidates Republican Rudi Giuliani and Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton have tacitly endorsed the administration’s stance on Iran.

US Military’s “Ability to Fight Wars”

These aggressive White House statements are in contrast with those emanating from the US military.

The new chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen, who took office in early October, while broadly supportive of the White House, has acknowledged US military weaknesses. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan “may have undermined the military’s ability to fight wars against major adversaries - including Iran.” (quoted in Haaretz, October 22, 2007).

“...the risks could be very, very high.... We’re in a conflict in two countries out there right now... We have to be incredibly thoughtful about the potential of in fact getting into a conflict with a third country in that part of the world.”

In an interview with the New York Times, Mullen stated :

“We have to be incredibly thoughtful about ... getting into a conflict with a third country [Iran] in that part of the world.”

Mullen’s hesitations to wage war on Iran are not based on a divergent political stance but on a realistic assessment of US military capabilities. Admiral Mullen recognizes that the US military is overstretched and that in relation to Iraq, the US military is facing serious problems in military recruitment.

Moreover, tacitly acknowledged by the Pentagon, US and coalition forces are facing fierce resistance in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Adm. William Fallon, Commander of US Central Command (USCENTCOM) and a staunch supporter of Bush-Cheney war plans, has also played down the possibility of a war with Iran. “We are not going to do Iran on my watch.” Fallon is acutely aware of Iran’s ability to retaliate militarily and inflict significant losses to US and coalition forces.

On the Diplomatic Front

Meanwhile, the White House is pressuring Germany and France to impose tough economic sanctions on Iran.

President Sarkozy expressed his unbending support of the US president in his speech to the US Congress. Bush and Sarkozy presented at a November 7 Press Conference, in what was described by political analysts as a “joint front” calling for the imposition of tough economic sanctions against Iran.

On Saturday November 10, German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived at Bush’s Texas ranch for talks with president Bush. Merkel stated that : “if Iran does not give way, [Germany] is prepared for further and tougher sanctions.”

What is now emerging are efforts on the part of Washington to isolate Iran. Through ongoing negotiations with Germany and France, Washington is pushing for the imposition of an economic sanctions regime (under European Union auspices) directed against Tehran. What is at stake are European business interests, including EU oil companies, in Iran. Vice President Cheney has threatened European multinationals in a November 8 statement, that if they remain in Iran they will have trouble doing business in the US. (Guardian, November 9, 2007)

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