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Iran tells Middle East militias: prepare for proxy war

May 16, 2019 theguardian.com reported: "Iran's most prominent military leader has recently met Iraqi militias in Baghdad and told them to "prepare for proxy war", the Guardian has learned.

Two senior intelligence sources said that Qassem Suleimani, leader of Iran's powerful Quds force, summoned the militias under Tehran's influence three weeks ago, amid a heightened state of tension in the region. The move to mobilise Iran's regional allies is understood to have triggered fears in the US that Washington's interests in the Middle East are facing a pressing threat. The UK raised its threat levels for British troops in Iraq on Thursday.

While Suleimani has met regularly with leaders of Iraq's myriad Shia groups over the past five years, the nature and tone of this gathering was different. "It wasn't quite a call to arms, but it wasn't far off," one source said.

The meeting has led to a frenzy of diplomatic activity between US, British and Iraqi officials who are trying to banish the spectre of clashes between Tehran and Washington and who now fear that Iraq could become an arena for conflict. The gathering partly informed a US decision to evacuate non-essential diplomatic staff from the US embassy in Baghdad and Erbil and to raise the threat status at US bases in Iraq."..."

Two U.S. Warships Enter Persian Gulf Without Incident

May 16, 2019 news.nsn.org reported: "Two U.S. guided-missile destroyers entered the Persian Gulf on Thursday without incident as the likelihood of an armed confrontation between Iran and the U.S. appears less likely, two U.S. defense officials confirmed to USNI News on Thursday.

USS McFaul (DDG-74) and USS Gonzalez (DDG-66) transited the Strait of Hormuz in the late afternoon local time without challenge from Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Navy (IRGCN), the sectarian military force responsible for Iran's coastal defense and operations in the Strait of Hormuz, the defense officials confirmed.



U.S. Central Command did not provide additional details on the transit when reached by USNI News. The transit of the two warships through the strait with no harassment from the IRGCN is a sign that tensions between Washington and Tehran have simmered since last week's buildup of U.S. military forces in the Middle East.

As of Thursday, the Abraham Carrier Strike Group was operating off the coast of Oman while the USS Kearsarge (LHD-3) was off the coast of the United Arab Emirates near the entrance to the Persian Gulf, USNI News has learned.

Earlier this week, McFaul and Kearsarge left the Persian Gulf while carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72) and its strike group quickly left the Mediterranean Sea and sailed swiftly through the Red Sea to the Gulf of Oman.

If the U.S. were to launch a military attack from the sea, it would best be able to do so from outside of the Persian Gulf, where Iranian forces have less maritime domain awareness and American ships would be further from hostile anti-ship missiles, USNI News understands.

The White House and the Pentagon claimed "indications of heightened Iranian readiness to conduct offensive operations against U.S. forces and our interests" as justification to move the Lincoln strike group into the Middle East earlier than planned and to deploy an Air Force bomber task group and an Army Patriot anti-ballistic missile battery to the region."..."

U.S., Iran say not seeking war as tensions spike

May 15, 2019 spacedaily.com reported: "US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo on Tuesday said his country is not seeking war with Iran, despite a spike in tensions that has seen the Pentagon dispatch nuclear-capable bombers to the region.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei meanwhile insisted the showdown between the Islamic republic and the United States was a test of resolve rather than a military encounter.

'We fundamentally do not seek a war with Iran,' Pompeo said during a visit to Russia, a key backer of Tehran which has blamed the current crisis on Washington's decision to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal.

But Pompeo added: 'We have also made clear to the Iranians that if American interests are attacked, we will most certainly respond in an appropriate fashion.'

'We are looking for Iran to behave like a normal country,' Pompeo said, pointing in part to Tehran's backing of Huthi rebels in Yemen who are under attack from US ally Saudi Arabia..."

Europe warns U.S. against Iran escalation as tensions mount

May 14, 2019 spacedaily.com reported: "Europe on Monday urged the US not to further escalate tensions over the Iran nuclear deal, with Britain issuing a stark warning of the risk of conflict erupting 'by accident' in the Gulf.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a last-minute change of plan scrapping an expected Moscow trip to instead visit Brussels and meet his counterparts from Britain, France and Germany.

The ministers, from the European signatories to the 2015 accord that curbed Iran's nuclear ambitions in return for sanctions relief, all publicly criticised the hardline US approach.

Iran last week announced it was suspending some of its commitments under the agreement, a year after US President Donald Trump withdrew from the accord and imposed swingeing sanctions on the Islamic republic — putting the deal in peril.

On Monday US President Donald Trump warned that Iran would ‘suffer greatly’ were it to ‘do anything,’ after US intelligence suggested Tehran was planning to attack US interests in the region...”

US ‘plans to deploy 120,000 troops to Middle East’ if Iran attacks American forces in chilling echos of Iraq War

May 14, 2019 thesun.co.uk reported: “The U.S. is planning to deploy as many as 120,000 troops to the Middle East if Iran attacks American forces, a bombshell report claimed last night.

In chilling echoes of the invasion of Iraq, US defence chiefs have reportedly drawn up fresh military plans that would see a huge response to Iranian aggression. Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan revealed the audacious strategy to America's top national security aides last Thursday, according to the New York Times.

The top secret plans are said to spell out how a vast land, air and sea force would be sent to America's regional allies bordering Iran should its foe attack US forces.

The deployment could also be sparked if Iran accelerates its work on nuclear weapons, according to defense sources - in breach of an international treaty.

President Trump's hard-line national security adviser John Bolton is said to have ordered the heavily beefed-up military plans in response to growing tensions in the region. It is unclear if President Trump - who has tried to scale back US military involvement in the Middle East - would order the deployment. Such a large force would be able to launch an invasion on the scale of Iraq in 2003 - and would almost certainly be met with a military response from Iran.

Mr Trump yesterday refused to play down the prospect of an all-out war. When asked if an invasion was on the table, the president said: "We'll see what happens with Iran.

"If they do anything, it would be a very bad mistake.”...”

2nd U.S. school district caught promoting Islam

May 13, 2019 World Net Daily reported: “A legal team has dispatched a cease-and-desist letter to a school district in Washington state that promoted Islam through a Ramadan policy that provides special privileges for Muslim students.

It's the second district in the state found to have the special policy in just the last week.

The Freedom of Conscience Defense Fund confirmed it has written to Michelle Reid, superintendent of the Northshore School District in Bothell, Washington, to insist that the policy be revoked.

The policy directs teachers to create ‘safe spaces’ for Muslims, plan with Muslim students to let them ‘quietly slip away’ from class for prayer, ‘privately offer information’ about nutrition during their Ramadan fast, give ‘a lesson’ on Ramadan and privately ask Muslim students what accommodations they want.

FCDF warned that if the district does not revoke the policy and begin compliance with the First Amendment, ‘then parents and students will have a legal cause of action against you and the school district.’...”

Iranian commander: U.S. forces must leave the region

May 13, 2019 Arutz Sheva 7 reported: “Iranian navy commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi on Sunday called on the US forces in the Persian Gulf to leave, Reuters reported, citing the ISNA news agency.

‘The presence of the Americans in the Persian Gulf region has reached its end and they must leave the region,’ Khanzadi said.

In addition, a senior Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander said the US military presence in the Gulf used to be a serious threat but now represents a target.

‘An aircraft carrier that has at least 40 to 50 planes on it and 6,000 forces gathered within it was a serious threat for us in the past but now it is a target and the threats have switched to opportunities,’ said Amirali Hajizadeh, head of the Guards’ aerospace division, according to Reuters.

‘If (the Americans) make a move, we will hit them in the head,’ he warned...”

US sends naval strike group as tensions rise with Iran

May 12, 2019 SpaceDaily.com reported: “The United States is deploying an amphibious assault ship and a Patriot missile battery to bolster an aircraft carrier and B-52 bombers already sent to the Gulf, ratcheting up pressure Saturday on archfoe Iran.

In response to alleged threats from Iran, the USS Arlington, which transports marines, amphibious vehicles, conventional landing craft and rotary aircraft, and the Patriot air defence system will join the Abraham Lincoln carrier group, the Pentagon announced Friday.

The carrier and a B-52 bomber task force were ordered towards the Gulf, as Washington reiterated that intelligence reports suggested Iran was planning some sort of attack in the region.

CENTCOM, the US forces for the Middle East and Afghanistan, said Friday on Twitter that the B-52 bombers arrived at the area of operations on May 8, without saying where they had landed.

US President Donald Trump’s national security advisor John Bolton has said the deployment aimed to send a ‘clear and unmistakable’ message to Iran about any attack against the US or its partners in the region...”

