

# THE DRUMBEATS OF WAR ARE GETTING LOUDER

By George Galloway

**It is 12 months since the heroic shabab of Tunisia overthrew EU-favourite Ben Ali and set in motion the Arab masses across the region. Now we see clearly the response of the ailing**

**Western powers which were thrown off kilter as their system of client states creaked, cracked and began to fall apart.**

**It is war – actual and threatened.**

The drumbeats for war with Iran are getting louder, and the escalating provocations by Western capitals are developing a logic of their own. It admits of no alternative and points in only one direction – towards military conflict. Or to put it more accurately, towards open military conflict. The head of Britain's MI6 has already called for covert military operations in Iran – which are, of course, an act of war – and they have been taking place. So are the drone overflights, which are also legally an act of aggression.

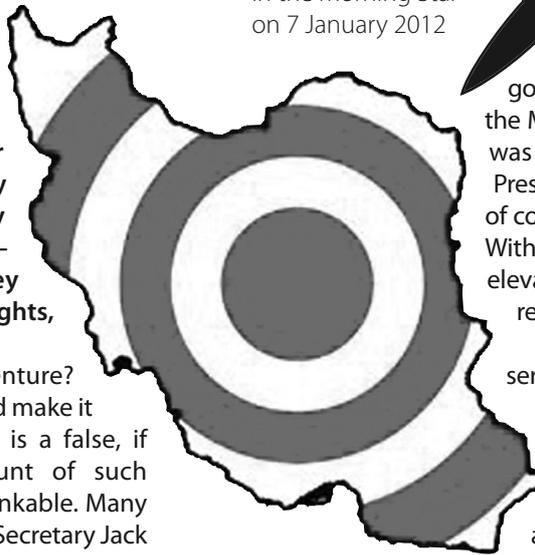
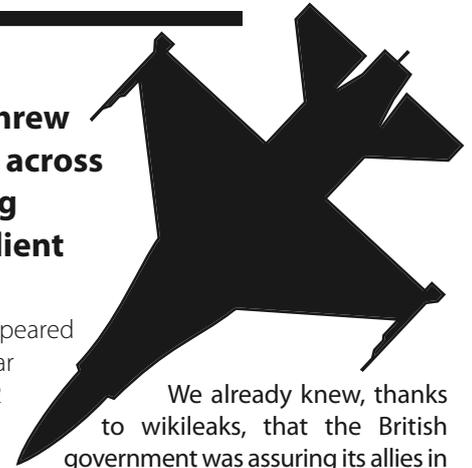
Are there great difficulties facing any such venture? There most certainly are – huge ones, which would make it a disaster of world historic proportions. But it is a false, if comforting, logic which says that on account of such catastrophic consequences war with Iran is unthinkable. Many will recall that *'unthinkable'* was the then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw's response to the proposition a few years ago. We now know, thanks to some first class journalism at the Guardian, that that is no longer the position of the mandarins of the British state. It is, in fact, to sign up our country to a war in advance.

## DOUBLE STANDARDS

And now we have the British government taking Iran's English language Press TV station off the Sky platform. The justification will bring a smile even to those who are most inured to the catalogue of double standards applied by the West to the Middle East. There was a mistake, you see, in the original application for a broadcasting licence. It should not have been granted because Press TV is not headquartered in Britain and therefore could not pass the tests for editorial accountability required by the regulator. All fair, impartial and very British is the reasoning. Nothing to do with our bellicose foreign policy.

Except there is the rather glaring inconsistency that CNN, Fox News, etc are also not headquartered in Britain, yet were not only given broadcasting licences but still have them and face no prospect of this impartial rule being applied to them. I don't know which of David Cameron's Eton/Oxford-trained chums came up with this wheeze imagining that it would convince anyone, but their parents and the taxpayer have wasted their money on his education.

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We already knew, thanks to wikileaks, that the British government was assuring its allies in the Middle East and elsewhere that it was investigating all avenues to get Press TV off Sky. One of those allies is, of course, the bloated House of Saud. With the fall of Mubarak, it has been elevated to the role of gendarme of reaction within the region, invading Bahrain (which was reported on seriously only by... Press TV), leading up Gulf Cooperation Council (the monarchical states, including the distinctly non-Gulf Jordan and Morocco) interference across the region under the shameless guise of promoting *'democracy'*, and fomenting murderous sectarian division aimed at weakening Iran and anyone who supports its independence.

## BLOODY SLOPE

This is the same House of Saud which received the other week \$30 billion of war planes from a US which is busy telling us it is for the people against the military in, for example, Syria. And it is a US where the grotesques in the Republican primaries are outbidding each other over who would be first to pull the trigger in the Gulf and who is more in thrall to Israel's Binyamin Netanyahu.

The rapid turn of events is alarming even some establishment figures – from the foreign policy wonks in Washington to former heads of Israel's internal and external spy agencies. We can be sure that there is tortured deliberating at the highest levels. But it would be lightminded in the extreme to imagine that the existence of those making plausible and rational arguments against unleashing what would turn out to be a major war – much bigger than the one-sided assault on beggared Iraq – means that they will either prevail or necessarily act as a brake on the slide down the bloody slope.

**DON'T LET THEM UNLEASH WAR ON IRAN**

## PRECURSOR TO WAR

**If this was about rationality and plausibility, we would never have gone to war with Iraq. Cast your mind back exactly 10 years ago.**

We had gone to war in Afghanistan. Indeed, we were told by Tony Blair and George Bush that it was all but over and there would be a swift move to democracy, development and stability. We know now that there had been a sharp debate in the White House immediately following 9/11 over whether to attack Iraq first, or to invade Afghanistan and then Iraq. Both countries, of course, had nothing to do with 9/11 – not a single one of their citizens was involved. The attackers were overwhelmingly Saudi.

But throughout 2002 as the Stop the War movement rolled into towns and cities across the country we were told by wiseheads in the op-ed columns that so great were the risks and so unfeasible the aims of war on Iraq that sense would prevail and it would not take place. And their arguments against the war were cogent. Some of them were a reflection of the some of the arguments we made: that there would be resistance, that the war would lead to further wars, that there were no weapons of mass destruction, that there was no Al Qaida in Iraq but that there would be as a result of invasion, and – as anyone who knew anything about the region could see – that toppling Saddam Hussein would massively increase the power and influence of Iran, in Iraq and throughout the region. The establishment divisions grew and the argument escalated internationally. It was not a prelude to an outbreak of sanity, however. It was a precursor to war, the decision for which had already been made; just as the sanctions and UN resolutions were not an alternative to war, but a prelude to it.

## POPULAR ANGER

**Ten years on, we face an eerily similar situation – but with an Iran which, as predicted, is stronger. It would be folly to hope against all the evidence to the contrary that our leaders this time will bow to rational argument, if left to their own devices. For they have their own warped rationality, summed up by one national security insider in Washington who said, 'You think war with Iran would be tough now? You're right. But it will be even tougher if we leave it five years.'**

Even in their own terms, their attempts to defend their hegemony in the Middle East lead to incendiary contradictions as the plates shift afloat a magma of boiling popular anger. So we have a US administration which is desperate to establish some relationship with (and shackles on) whatever government arises in Egypt as an alternative to military rule. Yet at the same time Obama wields an extremely expensive veto at the UN Security Council at the end of last year yet again blocking condemnation of Israel's settlement building. Obama's approval rating in Egypt stands at 3 percent, lower even than George Bush's – and less than a 15<sup>th</sup> of Presidents Erdogan and Ahmadinejad.

Or we have a French government which knows full well that encouraging a pro-western policy by NATO member Turkey is crucial to attempts to turn the strife in Syria into the imposition of a friendly government that will abandon any notion of resistance to imperialism and Israel. Then the same French government picks a fight with the whole of the Turkish political class by supporting a law that would make denial of the Armenian genocide illegal. As for the systematic murder by French imperialism of the Algerians, Vietnamese and many others – well you can justify that all you want.

Then there is the British government. As well as its own inanities, it also follows the Americans and French in theirs – from Israel to what is increasingly recognised to be the bloody blunder of Libya.

## ECONOMIC CRISIS

**Finally, there is the false counsel that the deepening economic crisis means that they simply don't have the money for war, especially one that would make the previous oil shocks look merely like an irritating case of gazumping. It is true that the Pentagon now faces financial constraint – and the US accounts for 75 percent of Nato military spending.**

Obama has officially announced what has long been known to be the new military doctrine: to draw down as many forces as possible in Europe and the Middle East and to redeploy into a more aggressive posture encircling China. Hence the withdrawal from Iraq and the doomed attempt to exert influence there from an absurdly named '*embassy*' of 16,000 people including 5,000 mercenaries (the private sector picks up the bill for their pensions, missing body parts and so on).

But this is precisely the point. For decade after decade the US state could provide guns as well as butter in the form of rising living standards and economic growth. Now it can provide no butter. But it has every intention of providing guns. Indeed, according to its own warped logic it has no alternative. Facing a growing China and shifting balance in the world economy, the one thing that US capitalists have is a super abundance of guns, which can be used to extract other people's butter.

So don't imagine that financial strictures and the strains of shifting the military balance to the Pacific mean that there is more likelihood of the US, with its allies, accepting Iran as a major, independent regional power in the Gulf – the most important oil producing area on the planet. The opposite is the case. It is more likely to lead them to calculate that it is better to '*take down*' Iran now (which is why they are concerned about Syria) in order not to leave a gigantic problem as they are forced to refocus elsewhere. It's more likely to leave them more dependent on arming bellicose and volatile allies in the region to hold the fort during and after – Saudi Arabia and Israel. And if you think the dysfunctional US political system has a tendency to produce crazies, it is as nothing compared to Riyadh and Tel Aviv.

## DOES THAT MEAN THAT WAR IS INEVITABLE? FAR FROM IT

**The mobilisation of mass opinion can shift the calculus, allied as it now can be with the revolutionary developments in Egypt, Yemen and elsewhere. We need to raise the alarm in order to agitate that mass. We also need to stand foursquare against all the softening up arguments that are being deployed to send us to sleep – from new dodgy dossiers to fanciful arguments that perhaps just a little bit of military action in Libya, or Syria, will be welcome and an alternative to wider suffering and conflagration. It is not. It is what it always has been – stepping stones to greater slaughter.**

