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The U.S. neoconservative agenda to Sacrifice the Fifth Fleet - The New Pearl Harbor

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[The Canadian](#)

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The Bush administration has covered up and ignored **dissenting Pentagon war games analysis that suggests an attack on Iran's nuclear or military facilities will lead directly to the annihilation of the Navy's Fifth Fleet now stationed in the Persian Gulf.** Lt. General **Paul Van Riper** led a hypothetical Persian Gulf state in the 2002 Millennium Challenge war games that resulted in the destruction of the Fifth Fleet. His experience and conclusions regarding the vulnerability of the Fifth Fleet to an asymmetrical military conflict and the implications for a war against Iran have been ignored. *Neoconservatives within the Bush administration are currently aggressively promoting a range of military actions against Iran* that will culminate in it attacking the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet with sophisticated cruise anti-ship missiles. They are ignoring Van Riper's experiences in the Millennium Challenge and how it applies to the current nuclear conflict with Iran.

Iran has sufficient quantities of cruise missiles to destroy much or all of the Fifth Fleet which is within range of Iran's mobile missile launchers strategically located along its mountainous terrain overlooking the Persian Gulf. The Bush administration is deliberately downplaying the vulnerability of the Fifth Fleet to Iran's advanced missile technology which has been purchased from Russia and China since the late 1990's. The most sophisticated of Iran's cruise missiles are the 'Sunburn' and 'Yakhonts'. These are missiles against which U.S. military experts conclude modern warships have no effective defence. **By deliberately provoking an Iranian retaliation to U.S. military actions, the neoconservatives will knowingly sacrifice much or all of the Fifth Fleet.** This will culminate in a new Pearl Harbor that will create the right political environment for total war against Iran, and expanded military actions in the Persian Gulf region.

The Fifth Fleet's Vulnerability to Iran's Anti-Ship Missile Arsenal

The U.S. Navy Fifth Fleet is headquartered in the Gulf State of Bahrain which is responsible for patrolling the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Suez Canal and parts of the Indian Ocean. The Fifth Fleet currently comprises a carrier group and two helicopter carrier ships. Its size peaked at five aircraft carrier groups and six helicopter carriers in 2003 during the invasion of Iraq. Presently, it is led by the USS Enterprise (CVN-65), the

first nuclear powered aircraft carrier commissioned in 1961, and on November 2, began participating in a Naval exercise in the Persian Gulf. [LINK](#).

The Fifth Fleet's base in Bahrain, is only 150 miles away from the Iranian coast, and would itself be in range of Iran's new generation of anti-ship cruise missiles. Also, any Naval ships in the confined terrain of the Persian Gulf would have difficulty in manoeuvring and would be within range of Iran's rugged coastline which extends all along the Persian Gulf to the Arabian sea.

Iran began purchasing advanced military technology from Russia soon after the latter pulled out in 2000 from the Gore-Chernomyrdin Protocol, which limited Russia's sales of military equipment to Iran. [LINK](#). Russia subsequently began selling Iran military technology that could be used in any military conflict with the U.S. This included **air defence systems and anti-ship cruise missiles in which Russia specialized to offset the U.S. large naval superiority.** [LINK](#)

The SS-N-22 or 'Sunburn" has a speed of Mach 2.5 or 1500 miles an hour, uses stealth technology and has a range up to 130 miles. It contains a conventional warhead of 750 lbs that can destroy most ships. Of even greater concern is Russia's SSN-X-26 or 'Yakhonts' cruise missile which has a range of 185 miles which makes all US Navy ships in the Persian Gulf vulnerable to attack. [LINK](#).

More importantly the **Yakhonts** has been specifically developed for use against Carrier groups, and has been sold by **Russia** on the international arms trade.

Both the Yakhonts and the Sunburn missiles are designed to defeat the Aegis radar defence currently used on U.S. Navy ships by using stealth technology and low ground hugging flying manoeuvres. In their final approaches these missiles take evasive manoeuvres to defeat anti-ship missile defences. So great is the threat posed by the Sunburn, Yakhonts and other advanced anti-ship missiles being developed by Russia and sold to China, Iran and other countries, that the Pentagon's weapons testing office in 2007 moved to halt production on further aircraft carriers until an effective defence was developed. [LINK](#).

Iran has purchased sufficient quantities of both the Sunbeam and Yakhonts to destroy much or all of the U.S. Naval Fifth Fleet anywhere in the Persian Gulf from its mountainous coastal terrain.

Millennium Challenge War games

The "Millennium Challenge" was one of the largest war games ever conducted and war games involved 13,500 troops spread out at over 17 locations. The war games involved heavy usage of computer simulations, extended over a three week period and cost \$250 million. [LINK](#) Millennium Challenge involved asymmetrical warfare between the U.S military forces, led by General William Kernan, and an unnamed state in the Persian Gulf. According to General Kernan, the war games "would test a series of new war-

fighting concepts recently developed by the Pentagon." [LINK](#). Using a range of asymmetrical attack strategies using disguised civilian boats for launching attacks, planes in Kamikaze attacks, and Silkworm cruise missiles, much of the Fifth Fleet was sunk. The games revealed how asymmetrical strategies could exploit the Fifth Fleet's vulnerability against anti-ship cruise missiles in the confined waters of the Persian Gulf.

In a controversial decision, the Pentagon decided to simply 'refloat' the Fifth Fleet to continue the exercise which led to the eventual defeat of the Persian Gulf state. The sinking of the Fifth Fleet was ignored and the war games declared a success for the "new war-fighting concepts" adopted by Gen. Kernan. This led to Lt General Paul Van Riper, the commander of the mythical Gulf State, calling the official results "empty sloganeering". In a later television interview, General Riper declared "when the concepts that the command was testing failed to live up to their expectations, the command at that point began to script the exercise in order to prove these concepts. This was my critical complaint." [LINK](#)

Most significant was General Riper's claims of the effectiveness of the older Cruise missile technology, the Silkworm missile which were used to sink an aircraft carrier and two helicopter-carriers loaded with marines in the total of 16 ships sunk. When asked to confirm Riper's claims, General Kernan replied: "Well, I don't know. To be honest with you. I haven't had an opportunity to assess what happened. But that's a possibility. The specifics of the cruise-missile piece. I really can't answer that question. We'll have to get back to you." [LINK](#)

The Millennium Challenge war games clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of the U.S. Naval Fifth Fleet to Silkworm cruise missile attacks. This replicated the experience of the British during the 1980 Falklands war where two ships were sunk by three Exocet missiles. Both the Exocet and Silkworm cruise missiles were an older generation of anti-ship missile technology that were far surpassed by the Sunburn and Yakhonts missiles. If the Millennium Challenge was a guide to an asymmetrical war with Iran, much of the U.S. Naval Fifth Fleet would be destroyed. It is not surprising Millennium Challenge was eventually scripted so that this embarrassing fact was hidden. To date, there has been little public awareness of the vulnerability of the U.S. Fifth Fleet while stationed in the Persian Gulf. It appears that the Bush administration had scripted an outcome to the war games that would promote its neoconservative agenda for the Middle East.

The Neo-Conservative Strategy to Attack Iran

Neoconservatives share a political philosophy that U.S. dominance of the international system as the world's sole superpower needs to be extended indefinitely into the 21st century. In early 2006 neoconservatives within the Bush administration began vigorously promoting a new war against Iran due to the alleged threat posed by its nuclear development program. Iran has consistently maintained that its nuclear development is lawful and in compliance with the **Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT)**. Since 2004, The Bush administration has been citing intelligence data that Iran is secretly developing nuclear weapons and must under no circumstances be allowed to do this.

Much of Iran's nuclear development has occurred in underground facilities built at a depth of 70 feet with hardened concrete overhead that protect them from any known conventional attack. This led to the Bush administration arguing in early 2006 that tactical nuclear weapons would need to be used to take out Iran's nuclear facilities. [LINK](#) This culminated in a fierce debate between leading neo-conservatives such as **Dick Cheney** and **Donald Rumsfeld**, with the Joint Chiefs of Staff which remained adamantly opposed. **Seymour Hersh** in May 2006, reported the opposition of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.' [LINK](#)

Subsequent efforts by the neo-conservatives to justify a conventional military attack have been handicapped by widespread public scepticism by the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program, and Iran's compliance with the Nonproliferation Treaty according to **Mohamed ElBaradei**, the head of the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**. [LINK](#).

ElBaradei cites U.S. military assessments that Iran is a few years away from developing weapons grade nuclear fuel that could be used for nuclear weapons. The Bush administration, frustrated by the determined opposition both within the U.S. bureaucracy, military and the international community to its plans has adopted a three pronged track strategy for its goal of 'taking out' Iran.

The first strategy is to drive up public perceptions of an international security crisis by warning of a Third World War if Iran's nuclear program is not stopped. In a Press Conference speech on October 17, President Bush declared: "if you're interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them [Iranians] from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon." [LINK](#). Bush's startling rhetoric was followed soon after by Vice President Cheney on October 23 who warned in a speech that the U.S. and its allies were "prepared to impose serious consequences" on Iran. [LINK](#)

The second strategy has been shift emphasis from removing Iran's nuclear facilities, to emphasizing its support for terrorism. Given widespread military and political opposition to attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities, the Bush administration is now depicting Iran as a supporter of terrorism in Iraq." [LINK](#).

The change in strategy was given a powerful boost by the passage of the Kyle-Lieberman Amendment by the U.S. Senate on September 26 which designated "the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps as a foreign terrorist organization" [LINK](#) . This would enable the Bush administration to authorize strikes against Iranian Revolutionary Guard facilities inside Iran on the basis that they are supporting Iraqi terrorist groups targeting U.S. military forces.

The third and most dangerous strategy used by the Bush administration is to sanction an alleged covert mission that would create the necessary political environment for a war against Iran. This is arguably best evidenced in the infamous B-52 'Bent Spear' incident on August 30, 2007 where five (later changed to six) nuclear armed cruise missiles were found *en route* to the Middle East for a covert mission. [LINK](#)

The nuclear warheads had adjustable yields of between 5 to 150 kilotons, and would have been ideal for use against Iran's underground nuclear facilities or in a false flag operation that would be blamed on Iran. However, Air Force personnel stood down 'illegal' orders that most likely came from the White House, and averted what could have been the detonation of one or more nuclear devices in the Persian Gulf region.

Consequences of Iran being Attacked

In an effort to intimidate Iran, the Bush administration has regularly placed two aircraft carrier group formations in the Persian Gulf, [LINK](#). The size and timing of possible U.S. military attacks on Iran's nuclear and/or military facilities, will influence the speed and scale of an Iranian response. Iran's response will predictably result in a military escalation that culminates in Iran using its arsenal of anti-ship cruise missiles on the U.S. Fifth Fleet and closing off the Strait of Hormuz to all shipping. Iran's ability to hide and launch cruise missiles from mountainous positions all along the Persian Gulf will make all Fifth Fleet ships in the Persian Gulf vulnerable. The Fifth Fleet would be trapped and unable to escape to safer waters. The Millennium Challenge war games in 2002 witnessed the sinking of most of the Fifth fleet.

If an attack on Iran were to occur before the end of 2007, it would lead to the destruction of the USS Enterprise with its complement of 5000 personnel on board. Further losses in terms of support ships and other Fifth Fleet naval forces in the Persian Gulf would be catastrophic. An Iranian cruise missile attack would replicate losses at Pearl Harbor where the sinking of five ships, destruction of 188 aircraft and deaths of 2,333 quickly led to a declaration of total war against Imperial Japan by the U.S. Congress.

The declaration of total war against Iran by the U.S. Congress would lead to a sustained bombing campaign and eventual military invasion to bring about regime change in Iran. Military conscription would occur in order to provide personnel for the invasion of Iran, and to support U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan that would come under greater pressure. Tensions would rapidly escalate with other major powers such as Russia and China who have supplied Iran with sophisticated weapons systems that could be used against U.S. military assets. The closing of the Strait of Hormuz to all shipping and total war conditions in the U.S. would lead to a collapse of the world economy, and further erosion of civil liberties in a U.S. engaged in total war.

Conclusions

The above scenario is very plausible given the military capacities of Iran's anti-ship cruise missiles and the U.S. Navy's vulnerability to these while operating in the Persian Gulf. **The Bush administration has hidden from the American public the full extent of the Fifth Fleet's vulnerability, and how it could be trapped and destroyed in a full scale conflict with Iran.** This is best evidenced by the controversial decision to downplay the real results of the Millennium Challenge war games and the dissenting views of Lt. General Van Riper over the lessons to be learned. This culminated in

General Van Riper joining a group of retired generals in calling for the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld. [LINK](#).

Neo-conservatives within the Bush administration are fully aware of the vulnerability of the Fifth Fleet, yet have at times tried to place up to three carrier groups in the Persian Gulf which would only augment U.S. losses in any war with Iran. Yet the Bush administration has still attempted to move forward with plans for nuclear, conventional and/or covert attacks on Iran which would precipitate much of the terrible scenario described above.

A reasonable conclusion to draw is that neoconservatives within the Bush administration are willing to sacrifice much or all of the U.S. Fifth Fleet by militarily provoking Iran to launch its anti-ship cruise missile arsenal in order to justify 'total war' against Iran, and force regime change. A new Pearl Harbor can be averted by making accountable Bush administration officials willing to sacrifice the Fifth Fleet in pursuit of a neoconservative agenda.

Note: An expanded version of the above article is available at: [LINK](#)

About the Author:

Dr. Michael Salla is an internationally recognized scholar in international politics, conflict resolution, U.S. foreign policy and the new field of 'exopolitics'. He is author/editor of five books; and held academic appointments in the School of International Service & the Center for Global Peace, American University, Washington DC (1996-2004); the Department of Political Science, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia (1994-96); and the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, Washington D.C., (2002). He has a Ph.D in Government from the University of Queensland, Australia, and an M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Melbourne, Australia. He has conducted research and fieldwork in the ethnic conflicts in East Timor, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Sri Lanka, and organized peacemaking initiatives involving mid to high level participants from these conflicts. Website: [LINK](#)

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