

DEBKAFfile - We start where the media stop

Three major US naval strike forces due this week in Persian Gulf

DEBKAFfile Special Report

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DEBKAFfile's military sources note that the arrival of the three new American flotillas will raise to five the number of US strike forces in Middle East waters – an unprecedented build-up since the crisis erupted over Iran's nuclear program.

This vast naval and air strength consists of more than 40 carriers, warships and submarines, some of the last nuclear-armed, opposite the Islamic Republic, a concentration last seen just before the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Our military sources postulate five objects of this show of American muscle:

1. The US, aided also by France, Britain and Canada, is finalizing preparations for a partial naval blockade to deny Iran imports of benzene and other refined oil products. This action would indicate that the Bush administration had thrown in the towel on stiff United Nations sanctions and decided to take matters in its own hands.

2. Iran, which imports 40 percent of its refined fuel products from Gulf neighbors, will retaliate for the embargo by shutting the Strait of Hormuz oil route chokepoint, in which case the US naval and air force stand ready to reopen the Strait and fight back any Iranian attempt to break through the blockade.

3. Washington is deploying forces as back-up for a possible Israeli military attack on Iran's nuclear installations.

4. A potential rush of events in which a US-led blockade, Israeli attack and Iranian reprisals pile up in a very short time and precipitate a major military crisis.

5. While a massive deployment of this nature calls for long planning, its occurrence at this time cannot be divorced from the flare-up of the Caucasian war between Russia and Georgia. While Russia has strengthened its stake in Caspian oil resources by its overwhelming military intervention against Georgia, the Americans are investing might in defending the primary Persian Gulf oil sources of the West and the Far East.

DEBKAFfile's military sources name the three US strike forces en route to the Gulf as the *USS Theodore Roosevelt*, the *USS Ronald Reagan* and the *USS Iwo Jima*. Already in place are the *USS Abraham Lincoln* in the Arabian Sea opposite Iranian shores and the *USS Peleliu* which is cruising in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

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