

Bush menaces Iran with threat of military attack

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President George Bush's inflammatory comments last Friday menacing Iran with military attack have again underscored the lawless character of the US administration. His declaration that "all options are on the table," that is, including the military one, directly undermines European efforts to negotiate a deal with Iran over its nuclear programs and signals that Washington is moving toward unilateral military aggression.

Like the US-led invasion of Iraq, any US military action against Iran—either strikes on its nuclear facilities or a full-scale attack—has not a shred of justification in international law. Iran has repeatedly declared that its nuclear programs are for peaceful purposes and has complied with the demands of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), including intrusive new inspections of its sensitive facilities.

In fact, it is Washington rather than Tehran that is breaching the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The US, along with the so-called EU-3 (Britain, France and Germany), is demanding that Iran dismantle its uranium enrichment programs—a clear infringement of its right to develop all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle for peaceful purposes. The US, on the other hand, is adding a new generation of nuclear weapons to what is already the world's largest nuclear arsenal, in flagrant disregard of the NPT's requirement that existing nuclear powers progressively disarm.

That Bush made his remarks on Israeli television is particularly provocative. Israel is one of Washington's main partners in crime in the Middle East, with a long history of political assassination and military provocation. In 1981, Israeli warplanes bombed Iraq's French-built Osirak nuclear reactor, and the current Sharon government has warned that it is prepared to do the same to Iran's nuclear facilities. While claiming without any evidence that Tehran is secretly building nuclear weapons, Washington turns a blind eye to the fact that Israel has refused to sign the NPT, has barred inspection of its nuclear facilities and has covertly built atomic weapons.

If Iran is secretly developing nuclear weapons, it has every justification for doing so. It confronts a nuclear-armed Israel and a hostile US that has branded it part of an "axis of evil" and has large armies stationed in two of its neighbours. Both the US and Israel have declared that they are prepared to attack Iran's nuclear installations, as Bush underscored in his comments. The US and Israel, he pointedly declared, "are united in our objective to make sure that Iran does not have a weapon".

Washington's hypocritical double standards are not limited to

Israel. Two other US allies—India and Pakistan—have refused to sign the NPT and developed and tested nuclear weapons, yet no action is threatened against them. In the case of India, Washington recently lifted the remaining sanctions put in place after India tested a nuclear device in 1998.

If Bush feels he is able to get away with his bullying and threats against Iran, it is because he knows his bogus justifications will not be challenged in the media or by the Democratic Party. No light will be shed on the real history of US-Iranian relations. Significantly, the origins of the Iranian atomic program lie not in Tehran but in Washington, which actively encouraged its despotically—Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi—to invest extensively in nuclear research.

The Bush administration repeatedly points out that Tehran has constructed secret nuclear facilities, including the Natanz uranium enrichment plant, claiming this to be evidence of its malevolent intentions. But Iran had every reason to keep its nuclear programs hidden from US view. Since the Shah's fall in 1979, Washington has done everything in its power to prevent Iran from gaining access to any nuclear technology. For years, the US effectively blocked Iranian attempts to complete its nuclear power reactor at Bushehr, by pressuring Germany to terminate the construction contract.

All recent evidence demonstrates that Iran has no nuclear weapons program and has bent over backward to comply with the IAEA requirements. Last November, under pressure from the EU-3, it agreed to maintain a voluntary freeze on its uranium enrichment activities while negotiations took place over its nuclear programs and a package of economic and political incentives. Tehran insisted that it would not allow talks, and thus the freeze, to be strung out indefinitely, and that any agreement had to recognise its rights under the NPT.

Frustrations have mounted in Tehran amid growing signs that the EU-3, particularly after the US agreed to "cooperate" in negotiations in March, had no intention of negotiating in good faith. The final European offer presented to Iran just over a week ago, with Washington's approval, confirmed those fears. The package required that Iran dismantle a number of programs, including uranium enrichment, and rely on the EU for fuel supplies to its nuclear power reactors. Tehran dismissed the offer as "an insult" and restarted its uranium conversion plant at Isfahan—under IAEA supervision. The facility produces uranium hexafluoride gas—the feedstock for its uranium enrichment plant at Natanz,

which remains under IAEA seal.

The Bush administration reacted by denouncing Iran and demanding that it shut the Isfahan plant or face UN sanctions. An emergency IAEA meeting held last week was under enormous pressure from the US to refer Tehran to the UN Security Council. But Washington and its European allies failed to sway the majority of IAEA members, who are concerned that any action against Iran will set a precedent for future moves by the US to shut down similar NPT-sanctioned programs in other countries.

The final IAEA statement made no mention of the UN or sanctions and simply urged “full suspension of all enrichment-related activities including conversion on the same voluntary, non-legally binding basis”. It also called on the IAEA director general “to produce a comprehensive report on the implementation of Iran’s NPT Safeguards Agreement by September 3.” As in the past, however, the IAEA is likely to conclude that the agency has found no proof that Iran has a weapons program.

Coming in the immediate wake of the IAEA statement, Bush’s comments last Friday make clear Washington’s utter contempt not only for the IAEA, but for the EU-3 negotiations.

“The use of force is the last option for any president,” Bush declared. This is a lie. In the case of Iraq, as has been amply documented, overwhelming military forces was not the last option, but the first. Washington drew up its plans for military invasion, marshalled the support of Britain and Australia, and then concocted a series of lies aimed at providing a pretext for war. When it became evident that the UN Security Council would not approve an invasion, despite intense US bullying, the Bush administration attacked Iraq unilaterally in open defiance of the constraints of international law.

There is no reason to believe that the Bush administration will act any differently toward Iran. In case anyone missed the point, Bush underlined the threat by declaring: “You know, we’ve used force in the recent past to secure our country.”

Insofar as Washington is concerned about Iran having nuclear weapons, it is only because it would enable Tehran to better defend itself against US attack. It is far more likely that Washington would use the nuclear option than Iran. The new generation of US nuclear weapons—so-called bunker busters—are specifically being developed for use against fortified underground bunkers of the type developed by Iran to protect its sensitive facilities.

The British and German governments immediately distanced themselves from Bush’s comments. A British Foreign Office spokesman declared: “Our position is clear and has been made very, very clear by the foreign secretary. We do not think there are any circumstances where military action would be justified against Iran. It does not form part of British foreign policy.”

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder told an election rally last weekend: “Dear friends in Europe and America, let us work out a strong negotiating position. But let’s take the military option off the table. We have seen that it doesn’t work.” While there is clearly an element of electioneering in Schröder’s comments, the statements in Britain and Germany reflect deep concerns that unilateral US military action will once again damage European economic and strategic interests in the Middle East.

Anyone, Schröder included, who imagines that European concerns or the deepening US disaster in Iraq are going to constrain Washington’s actions against Iran is in for a rude shock. While the fact that the US military is currently bogged down in Iraq may present tactical problems, the Bush administration has demonstrated already that it would respond to political crises by embarking on the most reckless military adventures. Not since the days of the Nazi regime in the 1930s and 1940s has a regime so nakedly resorted to the methods of diplomatic thuggery and military aggression as the Bush administration.

Far from being influenced by European pleas, the central thrust of the White House’s strategy is to use its military muscle to establish untrammelled US dominance in the resource-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia, at the expense of its rivals in Europe and Asia. As far as Washington is concerned, the invasion of Iraq has succeeded in achieving one major objective—to reduce the country to a quasi-colonial outpost for US imperialism in the Middle East. Its provocative actions against Tehran, which has huge oil and gas reserves and stands at a key strategic crossroads, are aimed at disrupting Iran’s existing ties with the EU, China, Russia and Japan and ultimately bringing the country under American sway.

The lack of any critical response in the American media or the Democratic Party to the latest threats by Bush against Iran confirms that a consensus has been reached in the US political establishment that all methods, including a new military adventure, can and should be used to achieve US objectives in Iran and more broadly. The lack of serious opposition in US ruling circles underscores the fact that the only way to end the danger of war is to disarm the perpetrators. That requires the independent mobilisation of the working class in the US and internationally to put an end to the profit system which is dominated by competing national ruling cliques who will stop at nothing to preserve their privileges and wealth.



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