

US bullies IAEA into reporting Iran to the UN Security Council

Peter Symonds
6 February 2006

In a decision that lays the basis for sanctions and future military action against Iran, the governing council of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) caved in to US pressure and voted on Saturday to report Tehran to the UN Security Council.

The Bush administration, which has been pushing since 2003 for Iran to be referred to the UN Security Council for punitive action over its nuclear programs, immediately applauded the vote. President Bush declared that the decision was “a clear message... that the world will not allow Iran to have nuclear weapons.” Speaking in a similar vein in Germany, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld deliberately inflamed tensions, by branding Iran “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism.” “The world does not want, and must work together to prevent, a nuclear Iran,” he added.

To state the obvious, “the world” did not have any say in the matter. Tens of millions of people around the globe, who opposed and continue to oppose the illegal US-led occupation of Iraq, are no doubt looking on in apprehension as Washington once again seizes on unproven allegations concerning “weapons of mass destruction” to threaten economic sanctions and possibly military action against Iran.

The key decision was not taken at the IAEA meeting in Vienna on Saturday but rather at a gathering a week ago in London of the five permanent UN Security Council members—the US, Britain, France, Russia and China—plus Germany. At that meeting, all agreed to support a resolution to “report” Iran to the UN Security if it failed to suspend all uranium enrichment activities and fully cooperate with IAEA inspections.

The meeting marked the first time that Russia and China have supported a UN Security Council discussion on Iran’s nuclear programs. While no consensus was reached on measures to be taken, Moscow and Beijing effectively agreed in principle to action against Iran. The only US concession was to delay any formal UN debate on Iran for a month, giving the two countries a little time to try to bully or cajole Tehran into acceding to US demands.

As in the case of Iraq, Washington’s bellicose stance against Iran is not primarily about its alleged nuclear weapons program. The Bush administration’s actions are guided by its ambitions to establish US economic and strategic dominance in the resource-rich region. Significantly, the only major power with nothing to lose if the UN Security Council were to impose economic sanctions on Iran is the US, which has maintained an economic

blockade of the country since the fall of Shah Reza Pahlavi in 1979.

For the past two years, the EU-3—Britain, Germany and France—has attempted to steer a course between Washington and Tehran, by encouraging Iran to give up its uranium enrichment programs in return for a pact offering economic, technical and security benefits. When negotiations collapsed last year, the European powers, forced to choose between a potential confrontation with Washington and their substantial economic interests in Iran, fell in behind the US.

However reluctantly, Russia and China have now followed suit. Moscow stands to lose heavily on arms sales and contracts to build nuclear reactors in Iran. Beijing, which has invested heavily in Iran’s oil industry, obtains 14 percent of its oil needs from Iran and was expected to shortly become Iran’s largest trading partner. Neither country has agreed to economic sanctions against Iran, but voting for UN Security Council involvement has inevitably brought such punitive measures one step closer.

Having pressured the EU, Russia and China into line, it was relatively straightforward for Washington to obtain a majority on the 35-member IAEA governing council. The emergency session began last Thursday but a vote was delayed until Saturday in order to ensure that the final majority was as large as possible—27 to 3 with five abstentions. While close US allies such as Australia, Japan and Singapore could be counted on, others had to be bullied.

The behind-the-scenes wrangling only highlights the cynicism and hypocrisy that surrounds the international condemnation of Iran. India, for instance, has refused to sign the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has a nuclear arsenal, yet Washington is in the process of signing an agreement with New Delhi to enhance nuclear cooperation between the two countries.

To pressure India, the US ambassador to New Delhi, David Mulford, last month publicly warned that the India-US nuclear pact would “die” in the US Congress if India did not support the US against Iran. While his comment unleashed a storm of protest in India and a formal retraction from the US, it undoubtedly reflected what was taking place behind-the-scenes. In any event, India dutifully voted with the majority.

Another glaring example of US double dealing is the case of Washington’s close ally Israel, which, like India, has refused to sign the NPT and has nuclear weapons but faces no international campaign of condemnation. Egypt and other members of the so-called Non-Aligned Movement timidly appealed to the IAEA

meeting to include a call for “nuclear-free Middle East” in the final resolution. When the US finally conceded a less direct reference to “a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction,” Egypt also voted with Washington.

One can only guess at the inducements or threats that were used to ensure the vote of small countries such as Yemen, Sri Lanka and Ghana. Only three countries voted against the resolution—Cuba, Syria and Venezuela. They were promptly branded “the gang of three” by US Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns—a clear warning that the US intends to exact future retribution for this vote as well as the other “crimes” of which they are already accused.

Iran immediately condemned the IAEA vote. Javad Vaidi, head of the Iranian delegation, declared that the “resolution is politically motivated since it is not based on any legal or technical grounds”. Tehran has repeatedly declared that its nuclear programs are for peaceful purposes and that its research into uranium enrichment is designed to provide fuel for its ambitious plans for nuclear power. Iranian leaders have insisted on their legal right under the NPT to operate all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle.

Following the vote, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ordered the country’s nuclear commission to restart its uranium enrichment program and declared that Iran would no longer cooperate with snap IAEA inspections of its nuclear facilities. At a press conference last Friday, he denounced the attempts of a few nuclear powers to “dictate their policies... from a domineering position, assuming that the Middle Ages’ relations are still valid.”

Ahmadinejad’s nationalist demagoguery has nothing to do with a genuine struggle against imperialism. Rather, confronted with a deepening social crisis at home, the Islamist regime in Tehran is seeking to shore up a base of support by whipping up patriotic hysteria while pressuring the major powers for a more advantageous economic and strategic relationship. While the exact status of Iran’s nuclear programs is unclear, there is no doubt that sections of the ruling theocracy advocate acquiring nuclear weapons to enhance Iran’s position as a regional power and as a deterrent to US aggression.

While opposing US aggression against Iran, the *World Socialist Web Site* does not in any way support the reactionary theocratic regime in Tehran or any effort on its part to build nuclear weapons. Far from acting as a deterrent, a handful of crude nuclear weapons would only act as a further spur to a military attack by Washington. The Bush administration has time and again declared that “all options are on the table” and its close ally, Israel, has threatened to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities. Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert responded to the IAEA vote with the menacing warning that Iran would pay “a very heavy price” for resuming uranium enrichment.

The danger of imperialist aggression cannot be combatted through the construction of nuclear weapons by countries like Iran and North Korea and threats to wipe out millions of innocent working people. Such threats play directly into the hands of Washington and cut directly across the necessary political struggle to unify workers around the world in an offensive against war and imperialist oppression based on socialist policies. Needless to say, the regime in Tehran is organically hostile to any such campaign.

The IAEA vote on Saturday does not automatically mean that the

UN Security Council will impose economic sanctions on Iran next month. Russia, China and the European powers are all anxious to avert a confrontation that will have disastrous consequences for their economic position in Iran and the broader Middle East. As a way out, Moscow has offered to establish a joint uranium enrichment facility on Russian soil with Iranian involvement—a proposal that Tehran has ruled out following the IAEA vote. Although a temporary compromise is possible, the Iranian regime is acutely aware that any backdown threatens to produce a political backlash from the very right-wing nationalist layers it has been stirring up.

An editorial today in the London-based *Financial Times* was pessimistic about the chances for averting a confrontation and thus salvaging European economic fortunes in Iran. “There is probably, at best, no more than a one-in-five chance of the standoff between Iran and the international community being resolved without conflict.” It noted that Iran was unlikely to back down, pointing out: “The ruling mullahs are widely despised by their people, but Iranians across the political spectrum support their country’s right to both technology and deterrence—making the nuclear controversy a God-given issue around which to rally the nation.”

The newspaper then held out the faint hope that Iran would accept the Russian proposal for a joint uranium enrichment facility. “In exchange for full nuclear transparency, Iran could expect some sort of US security guarantee (not to invade say) and international underwriting of regional security arrangements binding Iran, Iraq and the Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia into cooperation,” it stated.

In other words, a solution depends above all not only on a retreat by Iran and cooperation from its traditional rivals in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, but above all on the willingness of the Bush administration to magnanimously give Iran an unqualified security guarantee and to acknowledge Tehran as a regional power. As the editorial concluded: “It is but a slim chance.”



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