

US drumbeat against Iran threatens new war of aggression

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With the US war and occupation in Iraq fast approaching its third anniversary, those in the Bush administration responsible for launching this unprovoked aggression based on lies about weapons of mass destruction and through intimidating the American people with fabricated threats of terror are once again beating the same war drums, this time against Iran.

Washington has succeeded in having charges over Iran's nuclear program referred to the United Nations Security Council, where a response is to be debated beginning next week. Representatives of the council's five permanent members met on Friday to draft a statement on the dispute, which the US is demanding include direct condemnation of the Teheran government and a possible threat of UN sanctions.

In a question and answer session with newspaper publishers at a conference in Washington Friday, President Bush described the Iranian nuclear program as a "grave national security concern" and recalled his inclusion of Iran in a so-called "axis of evil" in his 2002 state of the union address. He declared that the US would "continue to work with others to solve these issues diplomatically—in other words, to deal with these threats today."

In a rambling response to a question about the looming threat of civil war in Iraq, Bush repeated his predictions of success and his claims that Washington is fighting for democracy. He then added: "There's a lot of talk about Iran. A free Iraq will inspire reformers in Iran."

Such a claim is clearly ludicrous. The Iranian people, like the rest of the world, have looked with horror upon what the US invasion and occupation has wrought in neighboring Iraq, where over 100,000 civilians have been killed, basic economic and social life has been shattered and an American-dominated government rules through death squads and torture.

If there is an unintended grain of truth in Bush's absurd comment, it is that "reformers," such as Reza Pahlavi, son of the late deposed Shah, are hopeful that the old Washington-backed police state will return through an Iraqi-style, US "shock and awe" campaign being launched against Iran.

Bush's remarks echoed those made the day before by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who told the Senate Appropriations Committee that the US faces "no greater challenge from a single country" than from Iran.

In her deliberately provocative remarks, Rice branded the Iranian government as the "central banker for terrorism" and charged that "Iranian support for terrorism is retarding and, in some cases,

helping to arrest the growth of democratic and stable governments [in the Middle East]."

Rice made the remarks in the context of the administration's appeal for \$92 billion more for waging the three-year-old war that has terrorized the people of Iraq. She likewise asked the Senate to approve an appropriation of \$75 million to "promote democracy" in Iran. Such funding will be funneled to US-backed exile groups that are collaborating with Washington in preparing for military action against Iran.

"This is a country that is determined, it seems, to develop a nuclear weapon in defiance of the international community which is determined that they should not get one," Rice declared of Iran.

Repeating her claim that Iran represents a terrorist threat, she warned the congressional panel, "If you can take that and multiply it by several hundred, you can imagine Iran with a nuclear weapon and the threat they would then pose to that region."

Rice, like Bush, claimed that Washington wants to resolve the confrontation with Iran through "diplomacy."

The remarks by the US president and Secretary of State, however, come on the heels of numerous statements by Bush himself, as well as comments made more recently by Vice President Dick Cheney, US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton and others stressing that as far as Washington is concerned "all options are on the table," a clear and threatening reference to American military action against Iran.

For its part, the Iranian government has denied charges that its nuclear program is directed at anything but peaceful purposes centered on the generation of electricity, and the Bush administration has yet to offer any conclusive evidence to the contrary. Teheran has vowed not to bow to the intense pressure emanating from Washington.

The Bush administration's diplomatic maneuvering at the United Nations over the Iranian nuclear program is for all intents and purposes a re-run of its campaign to manipulate the UN in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq three years ago. Now, just as then, it is going through the motions of diplomacy with the aim of using the international body as a cat's paw in US war preparations, creating a paper trail of UN resolutions as a supposed *casus belli* and pseudo-legal justification for aggression.

Meanwhile, the constant drumbeat of public statements from administration officials warning of Iranian nuclear weapons, support for terrorism and the preposterous insinuation that Teheran would hand over a nuclear weapon to Al Qaeda, all are aimed at

creating a climate of fear within the American public.

There is no indication that the Bush administration has any interest in reaching an accommodation with Teheran. It appears determined to maintain the confrontation over the alleged weapons program, even if it requires brushing aside any possibility of a peaceful resolution.

Speaking to reporters Friday while traveling to Chile—where there have been demonstrations demanding that she be declared persona non grata for her role in the war against Iraq—Rice rejected a call by Russia for a continuation of talks outside the UN Security Council aimed at easing the crisis atmosphere.

On Thursday, Ambassador Bolton took the same position, implicitly threatening that if the UN Security Council failed to take steps against Iran—backed by a threat of military force—Washington would pursue its own methods for doing so. “This is a test for the council,” he declared. “And if the Iranians do not back off from their continued aggressive pursuit of nuclear weapons, we will have to make a decision of what the next step will be.”

The stark resemblance of the current campaign against Iran at the UN to the one initiated by Washington three years ago against Iraq was referred to explicitly Thursday by Russia’s foreign minister. “We aren’t reminding (everyone) who was right and who was not in Iraq, although the answer is obvious,” Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview on Russian state television. He called for the UN nuclear inspection agency to be given more time to review the Iranian nuclear program.

China has likewise criticized Washington’s bellicose threats against Iran. In a front-page statement published Friday, Beijing’s *People’s Daily* warned against the Security Council taking action against Iran.

“What is distressing is that the US government seems purposely to push the issue towards exacerbation,” the newspaper commented.

The statement continued by declaring that the US effort could result in “passing a resolution on economic sanctions over Iran, e.g., oil embargo and freezing its overseas assets. However, such sanctions are unbearable for the current world oil market and large oil-consuming countries.”

It went on to pose the question: “Since referring to the Security Council will not necessarily bring a solution to the issue, why is the US so eager to do it?” If Iran fails to capitulate, the newspaper predicted, “the US in its turn will be able to find reasons for eventual surgical attack on Iran for itself and Israel, although the reasons would be barely enough.” It went on to warn that such action “will further exasperate the Muslim community whose anti-US sentiment has already gone out of control and then lead to confrontation between the US and the entire Muslim world.”

Meanwhile, the European Union’s foreign policy chief Javier Solana warned Thursday that the increasingly belligerent exchanges between Washington and Teheran are “not in line with normal diplomacy.”

Russia, China and European countries all have multi-billion-dollar economic interests in Iran and depend upon it as a principal supplier of energy resources. The US, on the other hand, has maintained economic sanctions against the country since the overthrow of the Shah’s CIA-backed dictatorship. Sanctions bar

US firms from doing business with the Islamic republic.

Washington’s aggressive campaign against Teheran is aimed at furthering the principal strategic aims that underlay the invasion of Iraq three years ago: the use of military force to impose US domination over the vast oil reserves of the Persian Gulf and thereby assure American hegemony over its principal economic rivals in Europe and Asia.

That the US administration dares to use the same discredited strategy of lies and provocations against Iran that it employed in preparing the catastrophic war in Iraq is the clearest expression of this government’s criminality and desperation.

Why would anyone believe their warnings about a supposed Iranian threat of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, when these very same charges were exposed as a lying pretext for waging an illegal “pre-emptive war” that has killed and wounded hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and thousands more US soldiers?

All of these officials—Bush, Cheney, Rice, Rumsfeld, Bolton—stand exposed before the entire world as war criminals. Within the US itself—as well as within the ranks of the American military—the Iraq war is broadly opposed and seen as a political disaster. Popular opposition to another military campaign against Iran would undoubtedly be even greater.

Yet, within the ostensible US political opposition, the braying for action against Iran is, if anything, even louder. Leading Democrats, such as Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, have attacked Bush from the right. She recently accused the administration of having “lost critical time in dealing with Iran because the White House chose to downplay the threats and to outsource negotiations.”

That the American ruling elite would, under conditions of mounting disintegration of the US Iraqi occupation, even consider launching a second war against a country four times as large and with nearly triple the population seems insane on its face. Yet, it is historically proven that weak and desperate governments frequently take strong measures.



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