

# US threats against Iran—the specter of nuclear barbarism

WSWS Editorial Board

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The revelation that the United States government has conducted advanced planning and preparation for a bombing campaign against Iran that includes the possible use of nuclear weapons represents the most serious threat posed in an increasingly unstable international situation.

US imperialism has embarked upon a trajectory that will, if not stopped, lead to a world historic catastrophe that will make World War II pale by comparison.

That such an act could even be contemplated by the Bush White House should stun and horrify all those who are concerned with the fate of the world and the future of humanity. Little more than six decades after US imperialism carried out the first atomic bombings against Hiroshima and Nagasaki—inflicting horrors that generations since have vowed must never be repeated—Washington is actively considering the use of such terrible weapons once again, this time without provocation or even credible proof of a future threat. Such an act would have the effect of criminalizing America as a country and a society.

These plans are not only real, but are already being acted upon, as was confirmed by Seymour Hersh in an article published in this week's *New Yorker* magazine as well as by the *Washington Post*. The preparations include the deployment of special operations troops inside Iran to spot targets and the staging of air exercises in the skies over the Arabian Sea, simulating strikes with nuclear tipped missiles against Iranian nuclear facilities.

The threat of war has only intensified since the publication of these articles, with the Iranian government's announcement Tuesday that it has succeeded in enriching uranium for its nuclear power program. Teheran once again insisted that this program is meant solely for peaceful uses, and experts confirmed that the development still left Iran far from being able to produce the weapons-grade enriched uranium needed for a nuclear weapon.

There is undoubtedly a strong element of recklessness in the actions taken by the government in Teheran, which is pursuing shortsighted political aims of its own in the nuclear confrontation, utilizing the nationalist resentment of a large section of the Iranian people towards US bullying as a means of diverting social and political tensions within Iran. The actions of the bourgeois factions that control the Iranian government have done nothing to defend the Iranian people from the threat of war. Indeed, they have played into the hands of the right-wing militaristic clique that controls the White House.

Domestic political calculations play a prominent role in the new US buildup to war. The collapse of popular support for Bush's policies—itsself a manifestation of a deep-rooted social crisis in the US—has encouraged the administration to embark on another campaign of military aggression as a means of stampeding public opinion and suppressing opposition.

Predictably, the Bush administration responded to the latest announcement from Teheran by ratcheting up its bellicose threats. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Wednesday that the United Nations Security Council must take “strong steps” against Iran to

“maintain the credibility of the international community.” She added, “We can't let this continue.”

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld described Iran as “a country... that supports terrorists.” He continued: “It's a country that has indicated an interest in having weapons of mass destruction.”

The administration is following a virtually identical script as that used in the run-up to the war on Iraq, with dark and unsubstantiated warnings of a supposedly imminent threat from “weapons of mass destruction” that can be stopped only through US-initiated “regime change.” Once again, Washington is dismissing United Nations monitoring of the Iranian nuclear program as useless, and there can be little doubt that, given the almost certain refusal of Russia, China and perhaps other members of the Security Council to back military action, the Bush White House will again declare the UN irrelevant and embark on its own unilateral action.

Speaking before an audience at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Bush repeated his bellicose 2002 denunciation of Iran as constituting—along with North Korea and the now US-occupied Iraq—part of an “axis of evil.”

Bush declared that his strategy in relation to Iran was based upon a “doctrine of prevention.” In the language of international statecraft, a preventive war is a war of aggression launched with the aim of preventing a perceived rival from gaining power or achieving a strategic advantage in the future. Under the precedent established by the Nuremberg trials of the German Nazi leadership, it constitutes a war crime.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has drawn attention to the stark parallels that exist between the policies pursued by the US administration and the methods employed by the leaders of Germany's Third Reich in the 1930s and 1940s. The utter contempt for international law, the launching of military aggression on the basis of bogus pretexts, the use of overwhelming force against relatively powerless victims are common to both regimes. Some of our readers may have dismissed such comparisons as exaggerated. With the latest revelations concerning US war plans against Iran, such complacency is no longer tenable.

There is a powerful element of recklessness and even insanity in the US threat to use nuclear weapons—for the first time anywhere on the planet since the end of the Second World War—for the supposed purpose of preventing Iran from gaining the technology that could be used to produce nuclear weapons.

## Drive for oil and strategic advantage

Underlying this apparent madness, however, is a definite policy being pursued by US imperialism. As in Iraq, the primary motive behind the war threats against Iran is not weapons of mass destruction, but oil. The Iranian nuclear program is not, in reality, seen by Washington as a huge

threat. As in Iraq, WMD serves as a *casus belli* for military action in pursuit of other objectives.

We do not support the Iranian government's efforts to obtain nuclear weapons, on the principled grounds that they in no way advance the struggle of workers in Iran or elsewhere in the region. However, even if Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapon, it would have no major military significance, given the overwhelming force in the hands of the US.

Iran is, after all, surrounded by countries with such weapons—Russia, Israel, Pakistan, India—some of them having obtained these weapons with the open support of Washington. Had the US-backed dictatorship of the Shah not been overthrown, the nuclear program that it began, with the direct support of people like Cheney and Rumsfeld, would have undoubtedly long since produced bombs.

The American administration is merely exploiting popular ignorance of the situation and a compliant media to create a smokescreen behind which it is pursuing definite interests. Iran possesses the world's second-largest natural gas reserves and the fourth largest oil reserves, which are expected to produce for some decades after Saudi Arabia's oil runs dry. Moreover, Washington is confronted with the political fact that Iran stands to emerge as the principal beneficiary of the US intervention in Iraq, threatening to thwart the US attempt to establish unchallenged hegemony over the Persian Gulf and the region's strategic energy resources.

An even greater threat to US interests is seen in Iran's growing ties with Russia, China and Europe. Washington has no intention of allowing its major economic rivals to reap a strategic advantage from its decades-long policy of economic sanctions against Iran. In particular, the ties between Iran and Russia are seen as an impediment to the US drive to control the enormous untapped oil and gas reserves in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.

In the final analysis, the threat of a war of aggression against Iran and the use of nuclear weapons express the historic crisis of American and world capitalism, and the accelerating disequilibrium within the entire capitalist nation-state system. This disequilibrium—and its malevolent product, the danger of a new world war—has been exacerbated both by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the relative decline of US capitalism's position within the world economy.

Within America's ruling oligarchy, these parallel developments have fostered a consensus strategy of exploiting US imperialism's military superiority for the purpose of reorganizing the world economy in the interests of US-based banks and transnational corporations. This means the seizure of strategic positions and resources—as in the Persian Gulf—and the use of militarism and war to preclude the emergence of any rival, even of a regional character, that would challenge America's bid for global hegemony.

Bush's dismissal of reported plans for the use of nuclear weapons notwithstanding, there is ample evidence that within the US political establishment what was once unthinkable is now seen as a viable option. Published in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*, which reflects the views of the US foreign policy establishment, is an article entitled "The Rise of US Nuclear Primacy." This article makes the case for a winnable nuclear war based on technological advances in US weapons systems and the deterioration of the former Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal.

"Today, for the first time in almost 50 years, the United States stands on the verge of attaining nuclear primacy," the article states. "It will probably soon be possible for the United States to destroy the long-range nuclear arsenals of Russia or China with a first strike."

A nuclear strike against Iran, which borders Russia, would represent a first step in testing out this strategy. It would serve not merely to devastate Iran and inflict massive civilian casualties on that country, but to threaten Russia, China and any other power that might stand in the way of American imperialist aims.

The US is moving in a direction that leads inexorably toward a wider

and catastrophic war that would claim the lives of hundreds of millions. As for the next act of US military aggression, the question is not if, but only when.

Iraq has already shown that within the existing US political structure there is no means to stop this threat. On the threat of a war against Iran, the Democratic Party has remained virtually silent.

In his *New Yorker* article, Hersh quoted one member of the House of Representatives as saying, "There's no pressure from Congress" against launching a new war.

There has been no call by any section of the Democratic Party leadership for public hearings to consider the political, military, legal and moral implications of reported plans for a war that could involve the use of nuclear weapons. There is no reason to believe that Congress and the Democrats will not be just as complicit in this new criminal act as they were in the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Symptomatic of the reaction of the erstwhile liberals was the editorial appearing in Tuesday's edition of the *New York Times* under the complacent headline, "Military fantasies on Iran."

"Congress and the public need to force the kind of serious national debate that never really took place before the American invasion of Iraq," the *Times* declares, noting that the administration is making threats of "future American military action in language that sometimes recalls statements made before the invasion of Iraq."

The editorial's call for a "serious national debate" on a new war of aggression echoes precisely the language used by the *Times* in the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq. At that time it urged the administration to continue pursuing a pseudo-legal justification for the war, and advocated a "debate" to prepare the public for it. When, however, the White House ordered an invasion without UN sanction, the newspaper supported it anyway.

This latest editorial warns about the possible adverse implications of air strikes against Iran for US troops in Iraq, questions whether such strikes could really "destroy all of Iran's nuclear facilities," and describes a war with Iran as "reckless folly." But the newspaper does not denounce the prospect of unprovoked air attacks and the possible use of nuclear weapons for what they are—war crimes. Clearly, the editors see such things as real possibilities.

## Police state measures at home

The implications for American society itself of such an act of war are staggering. Such attacks would undoubtedly provoke retaliation, which would be seized upon by the administration in Washington to mount a dramatic intensification of the "war on terror," in the form of further military escalation abroad and the elimination of basic democratic rights at home.

The use of nuclear weapons by the US would provoke outrage and horror within the American population, sparking mass opposition. The government would respond with out-and-out repression. The prospect of the American people facing a fascist-military dictatorship as the byproduct of such a military attack is very real.

Posed in the new war threats against Iran is the basic alternative of the present historic epoch: socialism or barbarism. A fight against both this new threat and the ongoing war in Iraq can be waged only through the independent mobilization of American working people, together with workers and oppressed people all over the world. This must assume the form of a political struggle against the American financial oligarchy and both of its political parties.

The danger is that the capitalist crisis and the resulting recourse to

militarism and war are developing very rapidly, but the political means to oppose them lag far behind. This danger has to be overcome through a conscious recognition of the contradiction between the enormity of the issues posed and the lack of any political alternative within the capitalist two-party system.

A new mass revolutionary movement must come forward which bases itself on the international unity of the working class in the struggle for socialism against the outmoded nation state system upon which imperialism rests. The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* are fighting to lay the political foundations for the emergence of such a movement.



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