

Bush administration demands UN action against Iran

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The Bush administration has seized on last Friday's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report on Iran's nuclear programs to issue a new round of demands and threats, directed as much against its European and Asian rivals as against Tehran.

Washington is pressing for the UN Security Council to adopt a binding resolution under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter that would declare Tehran a threat to "international peace and security" and formally pave the way for economic sanctions and military measures.

Russia and China have initially rejected such a resolution, well aware that the US would exploit it as a flimsy justification for aggression against Iran. China's UN ambassador Wang Guangya declared last week: "I think Chapter 7 means many things, including the worst scenario, and I don't want to elaborate on that."

In a round of interviews on Sunday, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice accused Iran of "playing games with the international community". In reality, it is the Bush administration that is engaged in an elaborate diplomatic charade as it steps up efforts to destabilise the Iranian regime and draws up war plans.

The situation bears an eerie resemblance to the steps taken by the Bush administration prior to its illegal and unprovoked invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Washington is again using the threat of unilateral action to bully and threaten the UN Security Council, particularly its permanent veto-wielding members, into sanctioning punitive measures against Iran.

Even the language is similar. In place of the so-called "coalition of the willing", US officials are now speaking of an alliance of "like-minded states". "I absolutely believe that we have a lot of diplomatic arrows in our quiver at the Security Council and also like-minded states that would be able and willing to look at additional measures if the Security Council does not move quickly enough," Rice told CBS on Sunday.

President Bush told the media last Friday, "the diplomatic process is just beginning". However, the US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, has indicated that the US would seek a Chapter 7 resolution giving Iran "a short time" to comply before considering targeted sanctions or possible trade restrictions. "We do think there's a sense of urgency here and we hope that we can get council action just as soon as possible... There are a variety of things that could be undertaken within or without the Security Council," he stated.

The US has already launched a new round of diplomatic bullying. US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns, is due to meet today in Paris with officials from the other permanent UN Security Council members—Britain, Russia, France, China—as well as Germany to decide on action against Iran. Burns declared last week that the IAEA report proved that Iran was an "international outlaw" and called for "a major international reassessment of doing business with Iran". Rice is due to meet with the foreign ministers of the same countries in New York on May 9.

Bush and his officials all speak as if the IAEA report concludes that Iran is seeking to build nuclear weapons, which Tehran has repeatedly denied, insisting that it is only exercising its rights to peaceful nuclear activities under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). The report only confirms what Tehran has publicly announced—that it has restarted uranium enrichment.

While it is certainly possible that the Iranian regime is seeking to build nuclear weapons, the IAEA report provided no direct evidence of such a program. As in the case of Iraq's alleged nuclear programs in 2002, the IAEA is being called on to prove a negative—that nowhere in Iran are there any activities that could lead to the production of nuclear bombs. Every attempt by Tehran over the last three years to comply with the IAEA has been followed by provocative new allegations emanating

from Washington and further IAEA demands for wider access to sites, documents and personnel.

For the Bush administration, Iran's nuclear programs are simply a convenient pretext to exert pressure on the UN and to whip up a campaign of fear at home. American officials absurdly brand Iran as the greatest security threat to the US, knowing full well that this economically backward country, even with a handful of nuclear weapons, is no match for the US military. Even if Tehran were to fully comply with IAEA requirements, the White House has lined up a long list of equally bogus excuses to press ahead with "regime change" in Tehran.

Washington's greatest political asset is the Iranian bourgeois regime itself, which through its empty nationalist bluster plays directly into the Bush administration's hands. The divisive xenophobic and anti-Semitic rhetoric of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which is aimed at propping up his fragile government, directly cuts across a unified opposition by working people in the Middle East and internationally. In response to the latest IAEA report, Ahmadinejad bombastically declared: "The Iranian nation won't give a damn about such useless [UN] resolutions."

In accelerating a confrontation with Iran, the Bush administration is pressing ahead with long-held ambitions to secure untrammelled US dominance over the resource-rich region. As well as having huge reserves of oil and gas itself, Iran stands at the strategic crossroads between the Middle East, Central Asia and the increasingly important Indian subcontinent. The installation of a pliant pro-US regime in Tehran would directly undercut the efforts of Washington's rivals in Europe and Asia over the last decade to establish economic relations with Iran. Russia and China, as well the EU, Japan and India all have substantial interests in the country.

The emerging fault lines in the UN Security Council underscore the dangers not just of a US military assault on Iran, but of a broader conflict over oil and resources involving the major powers. In response to US aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia and China in particular have been forging closer economic and strategic relations through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The two countries held their first joint military exercise last year in China and are planning a second next year.

Moscow, in particular, has been quietly challenging the growing US presence in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. At its meeting last year, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) called on the US to set a deadline for the withdrawal of its military bases from

Central Asia in the lead up to its intervention into Afghanistan. The Pentagon has already been forced to pull out of its Karshi-Khanabad base in Uzbekistan and confronts demands for a huge increase in rent for its other main base in Kyrgyzstan.

Significantly Iran was admitted as an observer, along with India and Pakistan, to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting last year and is seeking full membership. At a meeting of the organisation in Beijing last month, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Ivanov was quick to dismiss any military support for Iran against the US, declaring: "Iran is an observer state in the SCO, so no one bears any responsibilities to protect it. I discard right away any idiotic ideas that the SCO will defend Iran." Nevertheless, the vehemence of the reply highlights the fact that the formation of such a bloc challenges US ambitions in the region and raises the prospect of future military conflict.

To date, Russia and China, along with other countries that have economic interests in Iran such as Britain, France and Germany, have backed away from any direct confrontation with the US. All of these powers voted for the IAEA resolution in February to refer Iran to the UN and then in March for a non-binding presidential statement in the UN Security Council setting a 30-day deadline for Iran to cease uranium enrichment. In all likelihood, Moscow and Beijing will again seek to appease Washington in forthcoming meetings on Iran and try to limit the scope of any UN action.

Far from inhibiting US plans in any way, support for a Chapter 7 resolution on Iran's nuclear programs will be one step closer to a confrontation. Facing slumping political support at home and a deepening quagmire in Iraq, the Bush administration has desperately latched onto Iran as a means for diverting public attention while further advancing US strategic and economic ambitions.



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