

Iraq's colonial occupier, the US, denounces "foreign meddling"

David Walsh
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In recent weeks US government and military officials, aided and abetted by the American media, have stepped up the war of words against Iran. As they did precisely four years ago, in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, the political and media establishment is attempting to build up a case for military action against a country that has no designs on American territory and represents no threat to the US population.

The campaign of misinformation is proceeding as though the claims about weapons of mass destruction and Iraq's links to Al Qaeda had never been exposed as lies. The Bush administration has no credibility whatsoever in its new propaganda campaign against Iran. Indeed, it is viewed by broad layers of the world's population as a criminal outfit, bound and determined to impose its will against all opposition. This does not prevent the US mass media from transmitting the administration's latest claims as the gospel truth.

One of the most outrageous aspects of the current offensive is the contention, repeated innumerable times by various US officials, that Iran has to be prevented from "meddling" in Iraqi affairs. The superpower responsible for the deaths of countless Iraqi citizens over the past decade and a half and the virtual disintegration of Iraqi society through war, sanctions and invasion, which currently has 150,000 troops stationed on Iraqi soil, has the gall to accuse others of "interference." In fact, nothing has been more catastrophic for the Iraqi people in history than its encounter with American "meddling."

The Ahmadinejad regime in Tehran is of course pursuing its interests in Iraq. One might point out that its hand has been immeasurably strengthened by the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the installation of a puppet government in Baghdad with a strong pro-Iranian, Shiite representation, but that is another matter.

The American propaganda effort is directed toward justifying an expansion of the war in the Middle East and furthering US plans to establish control over the region's vast energy reserves. Everything else is mere dust in the public's eyes.

The current campaign began in earnest with George W. Bush's January 10 speech during which he warned that American military forces would "seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq." US troops raided the Iranian consulate in Irbil in northern Iraq the next day, seizing five Iranian nationals. No evidence has been presented about their activities.

Last week it was learned that the American military has a policy of hunting down and killing Iranian government personnel working in Iraq. Bush defended this policy last Friday, stating, "It makes sense that if somebody is trying to harm our troops or stop us from achieving our goal, or killing innocent citizens in Iraq, that we will

stop them."

Vice President Cheney has been one of the most vociferous of the attack dogs on this front. Following Bush's initial comments and the provocative raid in Irbil he told the press that the US government thought it was very important that the Iranians should "keep their folks at home."

Cheney went on to say that Tehran was "fishing in troubled waters" by allegedly aiding attacks on US forces and backing Shiite militias involved in sectarian violence. "I think the message that the president sent clearly," remarked the vice president, "is that we do not want [Iran] doing what they can to try to destabilize the situation inside Iraq."

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley have issued similar warnings about Iranian and Syrian efforts to "destabilize" Iraq. American ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalizad, according to a news report, recently indicated that Iran should "keep its hands off" Iraq. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, "reiterated that he believed the problem of Iranian interference could be dealt with inside Iraq, without crossing the border." National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe asserted that Iran was playing a "destructive role in the affairs of Iraq." In his recent appearance before a congressional committee, the new US military commander in Iraq, Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, denounced "the threats posed by Iranian and Syrian meddling in Iraq."

Various claims are being floated about Iranian activity by the US government and military through their mouthpieces in the media. In *Newsweek*, Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball claim that Iran is providing the insurgents with electronic sensors, "which cost as little as \$1 a piece," used in improvised explosive devices. The proof? "Recent reports from US intelligence agencies show that Iranian agents or brokers have ordered the devices in bulk from manufacturers in the Far East, said one US counterterrorism official, who asked not to be identified discussing sensitive matters."

Isikoff and Hosenball continue, "In recent weeks, the Bush administration, along with the government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, has made increasingly dramatic assertions about Iranian interference in Iraq—alleging the existence of a pipeline that flows between Iran and Shia extremists who have been implicated in attacks on US troops."

Iranian Revolutionary Guards are actively training insurgents in Iraq. The Iranians are providing financing for the Shiite militias. The Iranians are supplying information on explosive formed projectiles, etc.

The media echoes the Pentagon's claims without comment and

adopts its language. Terence Hunt of the Associated Press writes, "The White House says there has been growing evidence over the last several months that Iran is supporting terrorists inside Iraq and is a major supplier of bombs and other weapons used to target US forces." Reuters comments, "The United States has also accused Iran of fueling instability in Iraq, and President George W. Bush on Friday warned Iranians that they would be stopped if they attacked US or Iraqi forces inside Iraq." ABC News reports breathlessly, "Out of all the enemies the United States faces in Iraq, the most troubling ones come from Iran, and according to US officials, the Pentagon will soon present evidence that Iran is providing deadly weapons to insurgents."

Again, one has to consider both the source of the message and the character of the messenger. The US government claimed that the Hussein regime already possessed substantial quantities of deadly chemical and biological weapons, that it was seeking to possess nuclear weapons and that Iraq was directly or indirectly behind the September 11 suicide attacks in New York City and Washington. The American media obediently passed on these claims as facts to the public, facilitating the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq, with disastrous results. Why should the reports about Iranian activity be given the slightest credence?

However, even if every report were true, the level of Iranian "interference" in a neighboring country would not even register on any objective measuring device when compared to the systematic havoc wreaked on Iraq by American imperialism over the past fifteen years.

Leaving aside US and CIA intervention in Iraq during the postwar years and Washington's support for the Hussein regime in its suppression of left-wing opponents and its murderous war with Iran in the 1980s, the Gulf War in 1991 did incalculable damage to Iraq.

The US military dropped 88,500 tons of bombs on Iraq and Kuwait in one and a half months. The attack destroyed essential infrastructure, electrical and water supply facilities in particular, as part of a deliberate strategy. One million rounds of depleted uranium were also used during the conflict, with horrifying consequences for the Iraqi population and many US military personnel.

The US Defense Department estimated that 100,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed and 300,000 wounded in the Gulf war. The civilian death toll is unknown; Washington had no interest in exploring the issue. According to *BusinessWeek*, in 1991 US Census Bureau demographer Beth Osborne Daponte arrived at the following estimates: "13,000 civilians were killed directly by American and allied forces, and about 70,000 civilians died subsequently from war-related damage to medical facilities and supplies, the electric power grid, and the water system."

Daponte, who was fired by the Census Bureau for allegedly publishing "false information," but fought the case and won her job back, has since revised her estimates, concluding that "205,500 Iraqis died in the war and postwar period," *BusinessWeek* reports.

The first conflict was followed by 12 years of devastating sanctions. A report by UNICEF and the Iraqi Health Ministry in 1999 estimated that there would "have been half a million fewer deaths of children under-five in the country as a whole during the 8-year period 1991 to 1998."

The war against Iraq never stopped. The bombings continued under the Clinton administration, during Operation Desert Strike in September 1996 and Operation Desert Fox in December 1998, for example, as the US military enforced its so-called 'no-fly' zones.

Then came the US-led invasion in March 2003 and the occupation

of the country. Entire cities where resistance to the US colonial occupation was particularly fierce, like Fallujah, have been leveled. And American policy has consciously stoked up sectarian divisions with horrifying results. In October 2006, the British medical journal *Lancet* published a study suggesting that the most recent American intervention was responsible for the deaths of an estimated 655,000 Iraqis. The study, carried out according to the most up-to-date research methods, was conducted by a team of Iraqi physicians under the direction of epidemiologists at Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health in Maryland.

In pursuit of a stranglehold over oil supplies, American capitalism has declared war on Iraqi society. When Cheney and the others speak angrily about foreign "meddling" they are no doubt entirely sincere; they see nothing untoward about an occupying power complaining about "outside interference." To the US ruling elite, and its most prominent thugs like Cheney, the entire globe *is* an American possession, especially its oil-rich regions. America's "national interest," to this way of thinking, endows it with the right to interfere at will in any spot on the planet, while denouncing any other regime's activity as impermissible and "destabilizing."

Not everyone in the media is acting like an amnesiac. Even if they are fully capable of carrying out the same operation in regard to Iran as they did in relation to Iraq, certain figures in the media recognize that the popular mood has changed dramatically. They feel the need at least to explain why *this time* the US government should be believed.

On January 28 the *New York Times*' David Sanger published a piece headline "On Iran, Bush faces haunting echoes of Iraq," which began, "As President Bush and his aides calibrate how directly to confront Iran, they are discovering that both their words and their strategy are haunted by the echoes of four years ago—when their warnings of terrorist activity and nuclear ambitions were clearly a prelude to war. This time, they insist, it is different."

On CNN Monday morning, Pentagon correspondent Barbara Starr presented as unimpeachable evidence the various claims of the US military and State Department about Iran's nefarious doings in Iraq. Anchorman Miles O'Brien mildly pointed out, "Of course, Barbara, the Bush administration has a little credibility problem with this, given the faulty intelligence in the run-up to the war in Iraq. How are they going to get around that?" Starr replied, "Well, it's very clear that that is one stumbling block at this point, especially at the State Department, where they are very aware that their, you know, claims of WMD in Iraq didn't prove to be true. What officials say is this time it is different."

There are differences, but insatiable US geopolitical ambitions, the American elite's ability to lie to advance those aims and the media's willingness to go along with the lies remain the same.



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