

Bush administration concocts a “dossier” for war against Iran

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The Bush administration stepped up its propaganda war against Iran with a press briefing in Baghdad on Sunday, setting out claims that the Iranian regime is supplying arms to anti-US militias in Iraq. While the “dossier” fails to prove a case against Tehran, its release demonstrates that the White House is intent on manufacturing a justification for a military confrontation with Iran.

The obvious parallel is with the lies about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction that were concocted as the pretext for the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. The timing of the press briefing points to its real purpose. Even though the US has, for more than a year, accused Iran of supplying sophisticated roadside bombs to Iraqi groups, it is only now, amid an American military buildup in the Persian Gulf, that the so-called evidence has been released.

The threadbare character of the “dossier” has itself been the subject of debate within the Bush administration. Its release was delayed twice because, as National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley bluntly explained, “we thought the briefing overstated”. State Department and intelligence officials privately told the media that the evidence was “inconclusive”. In the end, the press conference in Baghdad was given, not by US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as previously announced, but by three American military officials, who insisted on remaining unnamed.

On display to the select audience of reporters were an array of mortar shells and rocket-propelled grenades with serial numbers, which the officials claimed linked the weapons to Iranian factories. Emphasis was placed on a type of roadside bomb known as an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) capable of punching through most armour, including that of an Abrams tank. According to the presenters, the weapon has been responsible for the deaths of more than 170 US troops since June 2004.

No proof, however, was provided that the Iranian regime was directly involved. One of the three officials, described as a senior defence analyst, insisted that the weapons smuggling was organised by a special unit of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps known as the Quds Force. The

involvement of the IRGC-Quds Force, he declared, meant that operations were being directed “from the highest levels of the Iranian government”. Questioned about evidence, he admitted that it was just “an inference”.

The *New York Times* pointedly noted: “Nonetheless that inference, and the anonymity of the officials who made it, was bound to generate skepticism among those suspicious that the Bush administration is trying to find a scapegoat for its problems in Iraq, and perhaps even trying to lay the groundwork for war with Iran.” In other words, it is widely recognised in US ruling circles that the present accusations against Iran are simply the excuse for an attack on Iran.

Evidence for the involvement of the IRGC-Quds Force in Iraq is also flimsy. The US officials claimed that IRGC-Quds Force members were among the Iranians arrested in separate raids in Baghdad in December and in the northern city of Irbil in January. The only Iranian official named was Mohsin Chizari, whose arrest in Baghdad, along with at least four others, provoked protests not only from Iran, but also from the Iraqi government. Two of those arrested were credentialled diplomats invited by Iraqi President Jalal Talibani to Baghdad for talks.

The arrests highlighted the contradictions of the Bush administration’s policies. In ousting the regime of Saddam Hussein, the US has had to rely on a puppet government in Baghdad dominated by Shiite fundamentalist parties that have longstanding associations with neighbouring Iran. While claiming a UN mandate to protect the Iraqi government, US officials are accusing associated Shiite militias of obtaining assistance from Iran.

At the press briefing the accusations were directed primarily against “rogue elements” of the Mahdi Army of Moqtada al-Sadr, which is the main target of the “surge” of US troops in Baghdad. US officials also charged, however, that weapons had reached the Badr Brigade connected to the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)—one of Washington’s closest allies in Iraq.

Iran has vigorously denied supplying arms to Iraqi militias. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed the

allegations, saying that his country's security was dependent on stability in Iraq. Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini declared: "Such accusations cannot be relied upon or be presented as evidence. The United States has a long history in fabricating evidence. Such charges are unacceptable."

In Baghdad, senior Shiite leader Abu Firas al-Saedi pointed out to *Time* magazine that the US was making accusations against Iran, while remaining silent on the support flowing to Sunni militias from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan. "We don't deny that Iran has an interest in Iraq, and that is a matter of concern," he said. "But the real question is: 'Why are the Arab states allowing terrorists to enter Iraq through their borders, and why are they financing them?'"

The explanation lies in the fact that the accusations against Tehran are nothing more than an excuse as the Bush administration prepares for a military attack. Washington remains silent on the involvement of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan in Iraq because it has for the past several months been engaged in a sustained diplomatic effort to secure an alliance with these Arab states against alleged "Iranian expansionism". As well as moving additional warships into the Persian Gulf, the US has been supplying Patriot anti-missile systems to bolster the defence of the Gulf States and their US military bases.

It is an open secret in Washington that the Bush administration, or a significant section led by Vice President Dick Cheney, is aggressively pushing for an attack on Iran. On the CBS program "Face the Nation" last Sunday, Democratic Senator Chris Dodd expressed "a degree of skepticism" in the latest allegations against Iran, pointing to the recent Pentagon inspector-general's report detailing the activities of the Under Secretary of Defence for Policy Douglas Feith in manufacturing "intelligence" to justify the Iraq invasion.

Asked directly if the Bush administration was laying the groundwork to attack Iran, Dodd answered: "Well, it could be. There are certainly those who I think are in favor of that. We've seen that in the past, that they would like nothing more than to build a case for that. Some of us call this, the year 2007, the year of Iran in a sense, and I'm worried about that. That's how we got into the mess in Iraq. That's why some of us supported those resolutions, because of doctored information.

"So I'm very skeptical, based on recent past history, about this administration leading us in that direction. It worries me. It's not to say I'm not worried about Iran. I am worried about Iran, and there's steps that could be taken, I think, to try and change the direction they seem to be heading in. But I'm very nervous about what the groundwork being laid

here as a premise for military action in Iran."

There is nothing in Dodd's remarks to indicate that either he or the Democratic Congress would oppose a war on Iran, any more than they opposed the invasion of Iraq or Bush's current escalation of the war. The American ruling elite as a whole is determined to establish and maintain US dominance over the Middle East and its huge energy reserves. But there is a distinct nervousness that an attack on Iran would have disastrous consequences and lead to a widening war throughout the region.

In a comment in yesterday's *New York Times* entitled "Scary Movie 2," columnist Paul Krugman warned of the danger of a re-run of the war on Iraq. "Attacking Iran would be a catastrophic mistake, even if all the allegations now being made about Iranian actions are true. But it wouldn't be the first catastrophic mistake this administration has made, and there are indications that, at the very least, a powerful faction of the administration is spoiling for a fight," he wrote.

Krugman pointed out that one of the White House's reasons for focussing on the supply of Iranian arms to Iraq was to avoid the need for Congressional approval. "If you can claim that Iran is doing evil in Iraq, you can assert that you don't need authorisation to attack—that Congress has already empowered the administration to do whatever is necessary to stabilise Iraq. And by the time the lawyers are finished arguing—well, the war would be in full swing," he commented.

The same pretext could be used to justify an attack on Iran without UN Security Council approval. Senior US military officials in Baghdad emphasised to the media that the press briefing showed their concern for "force protection," which, they claimed, was already guaranteed under the UN resolution authorising the US occupation of Iraq. By claiming to defend US troops, the Bush administration is seeking to sidestep the objections of US rivals as it prepares another war of aggression.

While the American media has highlighted the alleged threat to US forces posed by Iranian-made weapons, the very last concern of the Bush administration in fabricating its "dossier" is for the lives of American troops in Iraq.



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