

Britain's Guardian promotes Bush administration war propaganda against Iran

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The *Guardian* offered its May 22 front page as a propaganda conduit for the Bush administration to provide preemptive justification for an escalation of the US military “surge” in Iraq and possible military action against Iran.

Under the headline, “Iran’s Secret Plan for Summer Offensive to Force US out of Iraq,” the newspaper printed almost without qualification statements made to it by an anonymous “senior US official in Baghdad”. With no other source cited and no evidence asked for, the *Guardian* reported,

“Iran is secretly forging ties with al-Qaida elements and Sunni Arab militias in Iraq in preparation for a summer showdown with coalition forces intended to tip a wavering US Congress into voting for full military withdrawal, US officials say.”

The anonymous official then states, “Iran is fighting a proxy war in Iraq and it’s a very dangerous course for them to be following. They are already committing daily acts of war against US and British forces.”

He continues, “They [Iran] are behind a lot of high-profile attacks meant to undermine US will and British will, such as the rocket attacks on Basra palace and the Green Zone. The attacks are directed by the Revolutionary Guard who are connected right to the top [of the Iranian government].”

As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site* on May 22, the Pentagon is considering mounting a major military offensive against Sadr City sometime after June 1, when the fifth and final brigade mobilized for the military “surge” in Iraq is in place. The article drew attention to a *Washington Post* report that said, “If political avenues are exhausted, the US military has formulated other options, including plans for a wholesale clearing operation in Sadr City that would require a much larger force ...”

Guardian article, authored by Simon Tisdall, further serves the propaganda interests of the Bush administration by suggesting a link between Iranian foreign policy aims and criticisms of the administration’s Iraq war policy by the Democratic-controlled Congress, thereby echoing White House smears that war critics are aiding and abetting “terrorist” governments and organizations.

The *Guardian* report continues, “The official said US commanders were bracing for a nationwide, Iranian-orchestrated summer offensive, linking al-Qaida and Sunni insurgents to Tehran’s Shia militia allies, that Iran hoped would trigger a political mutiny in Washington and a US retreat. ‘We expect that al-Qaida and Iran will both attempt to increase the propaganda and increase the violence prior to [US commander Gen. David] Petraeus’s report in September,’ the official said.”

There is a great deal riding on the Bush administration’s attempts to portray any opposition to its Iraq policy as a capitulation to Iran. Tisdall acknowledges that “Washington analysts and commentators predict that Gen Petraeus’s report to the White House and Congress in early September will be a pivotal moment in the history of the four-and-a-half-year war—and a decision to begin a troop drawdown or continue with the surge policy will hinge on the outcome. Most Democrats and many Republicans in Congress believe Iraq is in the grip of a civil war and that there is little that a continuing military presence can achieve.”

The *Guardian* continues, “Tehran’s strategy to discredit the US surge and foment a decisive congressional revolt against Mr. Bush is national in scope and not confined to the Shia south, its traditional sphere of influence, the senior official in Baghdad said.

It included stepped-up coordination with Shia militias such as Moqtada al-Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi Army as well as Syrian-backed Sunni Arab groups and al-Qaida in Mesopotamia”.

The official also insists that US forces have “turned-up ... huge stockpiles of Iranian weapons” and adds, “The relationships between Iran and groups like al-Qaida are very fluid ... the whole Iran-al-Qaida linkup is very sinister.”

The *Guardian* merely notes, almost in passing, that Iran, which is a Shia regime, “has previously eschewed collaboration with al-Qaida and Sunni insurgents,” but then reports that “US officials now say they have firm evidence that Tehran has switched tack as it senses a chance of victory in Iraq.”

The report then cites the same “US officials” as “proof that Iran has reversed its previous policy in Afghanistan and is now supporting and supplying the Taliban's campaign against US, British and other NATO forces.”

There are a mass of contradictions in this presentation of Iran's supposed alliances. There are numerous reports of Sunni militias in the west of Iraq engaging in fighting against the Organisation for the Foundation of the Holy Struggle in Mesopotamia—usually referred to by the US as Al Qaeda guerrillas. Yet somehow Iran is supposedly uniting these forces and allying itself with both of them.

Moreover, the government against which Al Qaeda is fighting is a Shiite-dominated regime whose leading party was long sponsored by Iran and whose militia, the Badr Brigade, was trained by Iranian forces.

As for Afghanistan, the Taliban is a fundamentalist Sunni organization Iran supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban when the latter were in power, and allied itself with the US when Washington invaded in the fall of 2001 to overthrow the Taliban regime.

The US official cited by the *Guardian* goes on to implicate Syria as well as Iran. The newspaper quotes him as stating, “Their co-conspirator is Syria, which is allowing the takfirists [fundamentalist Salafi jihadists] to come across the border ...” The article continues, “80% to 90% of the foreign jihadis entering Iraq were doing so from Syrian territory, he said.”

The article contains an ominous threat. It declares, “Any US decision to retaliate against Iran on its own

territory could be taken only at the highest political level in Washington ... But he indicated that American patience was wearing thin.”

For the *Guardian* to simply broadcast these allegations against Iran in a sensationalist front-page splash is a gross abdication of editorial responsibility, particularly given its reputation as a critic of the Iraq war and an opponent of military hostilities against Iran. Tisdall is himself an experienced foreign affairs journalist with respects to both the Middle East and the United States. His CV lists him as having served as the *Guardian's* foreign editor and its US editor, based in Washington DC.

Yet the only attempt at questioning the entirely unsubstantiated claims of an unidentified US military spokesman is a pro-forma sentence in the article's final paragraph, stating, “Iranian officials flatly deny US and British allegations of involvement in internal violence in Iraq or in attacks on coalition forces.”



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