New York Times on Iran: Neo-colonialism with a liberal twist

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The *New York Times* on August 16 published an editorial in response to reports that the Bush administration plans to declare Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps a foreign terrorist organization. The editorial by the organ of the liberal, Democratic Party wing of the US political establishment, entitled "Amateur Hour on Iran," exemplifies the hypocritical and two-faced character of its critique of the Bush administration's policy toward Iran and the Middle East as a whole.

The piece begins: "The dangers posed by Iran are serious, and America needs to respond with serious policies, not more theatrics."

The problem with branding Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization, the newspaper argues, is that it is a "distraction" from a serious drive to strangle the Iranian regime and compel it to do Washington's bidding. What is needed, the newspaper says, is "opening comprehensive negotiations with Tehran, backed by increasing international economic pressure."

"Those negotiations," the editorial continues, "need to deal with all real and alleged facets of Iran's many dangerous behaviors: its nuclear ambitions; its sectarian meddling in Iraq; its providing of missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the charges it is arming the Taliban and others in Afghanistan."

To clearly grasp the arrogance and hypocrisy of the above lines, it is necessary to consider the alleged "dangerous behaviors" they list. A degree of critical reflection, backed by some basic factual knowledge, suffices to reveal the almost breathtaking double-standard that is the hallmark of all pronouncements on world affairs by the US political and media establishment.

First, there are Iran's "nuclear ambitions." The regime in Tehran insists that its nuclear programs, including its nuclear fuel enrichment facilities, are for peaceful, civilian purposes. It asserts, correctly, that such programs are allowed under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The US categorically maintains that Iran is seeking to build nuclear weapons, although it has failed, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, to prove this claim. One does not have to take Tehran at its word, or support any attempt by the Iranian bourgeois government to obtain nuclear weapons—and the *World Socialist Web Site* does not—to oppose the US effort to use the nuclear issue as a pretext for isolating and removing a regime which it considers an obstacle to its imperialist ambitions in the oil-rich Persian Gulf.

That the Iranian nuclear "threat" is a pretext is demonstrated by the sheer hypocrisy of Washington. The United States is armed to the teeth with all manner of nuclear weapons, and American officials are known to be discussing the possibility of using such weapons against Iran.

The US is, moreover, highly selective in its crusade against nuclear proliferation. It has no problem with allied governments in the Middle East and Asia that possess and are developing nuclear arms, such as India, Pakistan and Israel—all three of which have refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Washington recently finalized an agreement to supply India with American nuclear technology.

The US has been virtually silent on the decision last December of the Gulf Cooperation Council, led by Saudi Arabia, to initiate its own nuclear energy program. It has said nothing about persistent reports that Saudi Arabia has sought to acquire its own nuclear weapons from Pakistan. After a 20-year freeze, Egypt too announced last year its intention to restart its nuclear program with the aim of building four power plants. Turkey has declared its intention of building three.

As far as enrichment plants are concerned, a number of countries without nuclear weapons are building or operating enrichment facilities under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, including Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and Spain.

Then there is Iran's "sectarian meddling in Iraq." Here, the double standard of American imperialism and its apologists is even more grotesque. The unstated, but clearly

implied, premise is that the American invasion and occupation of Iraq are legitimate, while any degree of intervention by another country not allied to the US is "meddling" and must be stopped.

The United States has declared Iran a terrorist state and part of an "axis of evil." It has gone halfway around the world to invade and occupy two countries on Iran's borders—Iraq and Afghanistan, causing death and destruction on a massive scale. The American devastation of Iraq, in particular, ranks among the worst war crimes in history.

Washington has spearheaded the imposition of economic sanctions and acknowledged carrying out covert operations inside Iran aimed at overthrowing the government. It currently has some 160,000 troops in Iraq and thousands more in Afghanistan, and maintains an immense military presence—ground, naval and air—in the Persian Gulf.

But let no one accuse the United States of "meddling." One might ask what the response of Washington would be if Iran invaded Canada and set up a puppet government there, or if Iranian warships massed off of the East Coast of the US. American "meddling" would doubtless be nuclear.

It should be added that the governments of both Iraq and Afghanistan, which Washington likes to refer to as "sovereign," publicly reject American claims that Iran is seeking to destabilize them.

Finally, there is Iran's "providing missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the charges it is arming the Taliban and others in Afghanistan."

Washington announced last month that it plans to provide a total of $63 billion in arms, including sophisticated satellite-controlled weapons, to Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and five Persian Gulf sheikdoms. Thirty billion dollars worth of weapons are to go to Israel, the most aggressive nation in the region, over the next 10 years. In making the announcement, the Bush administration made clear that the primary target of this unprecedented arms buildup is Iran.

As for US allegations—totally unsubstantiated—that Iran is providing arms to the Taliban, they fly in the face of the long-standing enmity between Shiite fundamentalist Iran and the Sunni fundamentalist Taliban, and have been refuted by Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Washington, on the other hand, did support the Taliban for a time when it seized control of Afghanistan in the mid-1990s.

Talks with the Iranians, the *Times* writes, "must take into account Iran's concerns about its own security—with a clear offer that it can come in from the diplomatic and economic cold if it improves its behavior." In other words, the bourgeois regime in Iran is, behind its anti-imperialist rhetoric, looking for a deal with the US, and Washington must be prepared to go some distance in obtaining Iranian compliance with a US-dominated Middle East.

The editorial goes on to assert that the "real audience" for the State Department's decision to brand the Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization is not Tehran, but "conflict-obsessed administration hawks, who are lobbying for military strikes, and conflict-averse European allies, who have resisted more far-reaching multilateral economic sanctions."

"We hope," the *Times* writes, "the State Department prevails in both of those arguments. But it has chosen a particularly blunt instrument to wave around."

The *Times* wants to find a middle ground between a military attack on Iran—at least for now—and the current level of economic sanctions, which it considers insufficiently harsh. It spells this out further on, declaring:

"International asset freezes and foreign travel bans directed at Revolutionary Guard leaders and their business partners are certainly deserved, and would make real sense as part of a program of international sanctions and coupled with a clear American offer for serious negotiations. By themselves they are futile."

The editorial underscores the fact that the differences within the American ruling elite over Iran are entirely of a tactical character. They concern not the goal of removing Iran as an obstacle to US hegemony in the Middle East and Central Asia, but rather the means for achieving that goal. Even on the issue of means, the *Times* is careful not to rule out military force.

Whatever its criticisms of the Bush administration's policy toward Iran, the editorial accepts, and thereby legitimizes, the basic framework of lies and distortions employed by the White House to justify its threats and provocations against Iran and its plans for eventual military aggression.

During the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, the *Times* voiced all sorts of criticisms of the administration's war preparations, while retailing its lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. In the end, it supported the war, and continues to support the occupation. In this, it reflects the position of the Democratic Party.

There can be little doubt that should the Bush administration decide to attack Iran, the *Times* and its Democratic Party allies will once again fall into line.