

Bush administration consolidates plans for war against Iran

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For months, a debate has been taking place within the Bush administration over the launching of a new war of aggression against Iran. As US propaganda against Tehran has become more shrill, media leaks have pointed to a factional tussle in the White House between the “diplomatic approach” advocated by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the demand for military action by Vice President Dick Cheney. Articles in the US and British press over the weekend indicate the debate is all but over, with the war faction prevailing.

The most explicit media report, entitled “Bush setting America up for war with Iran”, published in yesterday’s *Sunday Telegraph*, concluded that Rice was “prepared to settle her differences with Vice President Dick Cheney and sanction military action. According to a State Department official, Rice was now working with Cheney “to find a way to reconcile their positions and present a united front to the president.”

The differences between Cheney and Rice, both of whom share responsibility for the criminal invasion of Iraq, were only ever tactical. Rice’s “diplomacy” was aimed at bullying and threatening Russia, China and the European powers into imposing an economic blockade on Iran, backed by the threat of military action. Now, according to the *Sunday Telegraph*, she is prepared to support Cheney and sanction a unilateral US attack.

“When you go down there and see the body language, you can see that Cheney is still The Man. Condi pushed for diplomacy but she is no dove. If it becomes necessary she will be on board,” the State Department official told the British newspaper. In these discussions, Rice’s only proviso was that “if the administration is to go to war again it must build the case over a period of months and win sufficient support on Capitol Hill.”

The shift in Washington was underscored by a blunt public warning yesterday in France from Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner. While calling for tougher sanctions against Tehran, Kouchner told RTL radio and LCI television: “We must prepare for the worst. The worst, sir, is war.” He admitted that the French military was already drawing up plans. “We are preparing ourselves by trying to put together plans that are the chiefs of staff’s prerogative, [but] that is not about to happen tomorrow,” he said.

Senior Pentagon and CIA officials, who spoke to the *Sunday Telegraph*, laid out a scenario for war against Iran, using the pretext that Tehran is aiding anti-US insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan. “[A] senior intelligence officer warned that public denunciation of Iranian meddling in Iraq—arming and training militants—would lead to cross border raids on Iranian training camps and bomb factories,” the newspaper explained.

“A prime target would be the Fajr base run by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards-Quds Force in southern Iran, where Western intelligence agencies say armour-piercing projectiles used against British and US troops are manufactured. Under the theory—which is gaining credence in Washington security circles—US action would provoke a major Iranian response, perhaps in the form of moves to cut off Gulf oil supplies, providing the trigger for air strikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities and even its armed forces.”

According to the *Sunday Telegraph*, “two major contingency plans” have been drawn up. “One is to bomb only the nuclear facilities [in Iran]. The second option is for a much bigger strike that would—over two or three days—hit all of the significant military sites as well. The plan involves more than 2,000 targets,” an intelligence officer said. The *Sunday Times* published a similar article a fortnight ago, citing Alexis Debat from the right-wing Nixon Centre, who explained that the US military was preparing to strike 1,200 targets. “They’re about taking out the entire Iranian military,” Debat explained approvingly.

Chillingly, yesterday’s *Sunday Telegraph* added to the persistent leaks that the Bush administration is considering the use of nuclear weapons against Iran. “The vice-president is said to advocate the use of bunker-buster tactical nuclear weapons against Iran’s nuclear sites. His allies dispute this, but Mr Cheney is understood to be lobbying for air strikes if sites can be identified where Revolutionary Guard units are training Shia militias,” the article stated.

The scenario for war outlined to the British newspaper is not just idle speculation. Since the beginning of the year, the Bush administration has been waging a propaganda war, accusing Tehran of arming and training not only Shiite militias in Iraq, but Sunni insurgents in both Iraq and Afghanistan. No convincing proof has been provided to substantiate these claims

nor any explanation offered as to why Tehran's Shiite regime would arm Sunni extremist groups that regard Shiites as religious heretics, and "Persians" as their sworn enemy. It is of course utterly hypocritical for the US to accuse Iran of "meddling" while it maintains neo-colonial occupations of the two countries at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives.

Everything now points to a marked escalation of US propaganda and military preparations. Yesterday's *Washington Post* highlighted fresh accusations against Iran by US officials who claimed that NATO forces had intercepted a large arms shipment into Afghanistan, including sophisticated roadside bombs known as explosively formed projectiles. Last week, US military spokesman Major-General Kevin Bergner all but accused Tehran of providing a 240 mm rocket that hit a major US base near the Baghdad airport—the first such attack in Iraq. At the same time, the US and British military are bolstering operations along the Iran-Iraq border, including the construction of a new US military base just inside Iraq and a series of fortified border checkpoints.

In this increasingly tense situation, any incident—accidental or manufactured—could be seized upon by the US as the pretext for a military strike that would rapidly escalate to all-out war. The White House would undoubtedly insist UN Security Council approval was unnecessary as the US military was "defending" itself against Iran's "proxy war" in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the instigation of "independent" Democrat Joseph Lieberman, the US Senate indicated its stance in July by unanimously passing an amendment denouncing Iran for the "murder" of American troops in Iraq.

The trigger for the Bush administration's turn to military action appears to have been deepening international resistance to a third round of tougher UN sanctions against Iran over its alleged nuclear weapons programs. High-level discussions are due to be held in Washington on Friday involving the permanent UN Security Council members—the US, Russia, China, Britain and France—along with Germany. Russia and China have publicly opposed any further immediate action. But it is the wavering of Germany, which previously backed strong measures, that has apparently galvanised the White House.

The *Fox News* website reported last Tuesday that a German decision to withhold support for sanctions against Iran had "pushed a broad spectrum of officials in Washington to develop potential scenarios for a military attack on the Islamic regime." The announcement made to a recent meeting in Berlin of the major powers "stunned the room... and left most Bush administration principals concluding that sanctions are dead." While German officials have since dismissed the report, Foreign Ministry spokesman Martin Jaeger indicated on Friday that Germany supported a delay in any new sanctions to give "Iran a chance to recover the international community's lost confidence". Any delay is anathema to the Bush administration.

The *Fox News* article pointed to the reasons for Berlin's opposition, noting that "the Germans voiced concern about the

damaging effects any further sanctions on Iran would have on the German economy." The passing comment highlights the underlying economic and strategic issues at stake. The Bush administration is preparing for war against Iran, not to stop its alleged nuclear weapons programs or "meddling" in Iraq, but to assert untrammelled US dominance throughout Central Asia and the Middle East. Iran not only has huge oil and gas reserves of its own but is strategically located at the juncture of these two resource-rich regions.

It is enough to consider what would happen if a diplomatic resolution to the standoff were achieved and normal international economic and diplomatic relations with Iran established. The main winners would be the European powers, China and Russia, which have all built a substantial economic stake in Iran. The main loser would be the US, which has maintained a blockade of the country since the ousting of its ally, Shah Reza Pahlavi, in the 1979 revolution. Two figures underscore the huge discrepancy. Last Friday, Iranian officials announced that China was set to overtake Japan as the country's largest trade partner, with two-way trade topping \$20 billion, including huge oil and gas deals. By contrast, 2007 trade with the US was expected to reach just \$160 million, or less than 1 percent of the Chinese figure.

Saturday's *Guardian* also reported predictions of war in response to opposition to tougher UN sanctions. The article pointed to "signs that the Bush administration is running out of patience with diplomatic efforts to curb [Iran's] nuclear program. Hawks led by the vice-president, Dick Cheney, are intensifying their push for military action, with support from Israel, and privately from some Sunni Gulf states."

With US presidential elections looming next year, the Bush administration felt that time was running out, the *Guardian* indicated. "Washington is seriously reviewing plans to bomb not just nuclear sites, but oil sites, military sites and even leadership targets," Patrick Cronin from the International Institute for Strategic Studies told the newspaper. "In Washington there is very serious discussion that this is a window that has to be looked at seriously because there is only six months to 'do something about Iran' before it will be looked at as a purely political issue."

Despite the catastrophes that the Bush administration has created in Iraq and Afghanistan, all the evidence points to it launching a reckless, new military adventure against Iran with disastrous consequences, not only for the Iranian people, but throughout the region and internationally.



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