

Democrats, Republicans back Bush war provocations against Iran

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While the Bush administration's decision Thursday on a unilateral escalation of sanctions against Iran has provoked consternation and anger overseas—Russian president Vladimir Putin, for instance, compared the US policy to “running around like a madman with a razor blade in his hand”—the response from the US political establishment has been generally supportive.

Presidential candidates of both the Democratic and Republican parties backed the administration action designating the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a nuclear proliferator and the IRGC's foreign section, the Quds Force, as a terrorist organization. All the leading Republicans and the frontrunning Democrat, Hillary Clinton, are on record supporting even more provocative actions, such as designating the entire IRGC, Iran's most powerful military branch, as a terrorist group.

Both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* have soft-peddled the Bush administration decision, unprecedented in world diplomacy, to apply the “terrorist” designation to the armed forces of a major country.

The *Post* published an article Friday headlined, “Iran Sanctions Are Meant to Prevent War, Bush Aides Say,” which dutifully reported that Bush “intends to pursue a strategy of gradually escalating financial, diplomatic and political pressure on Tehran, aimed not at starting a new war in the Middle East, his advisers said, but at preventing one.”

The *Post* continued: “White House and other administration officials have expressed frustration over the talk of war, emphasizing that Bush remains convinced that his strategy of nonmilitary pressure can work.”

“This decision today supports the diplomacy and in no way, shape or form does it anticipate the use of force,” Undersecretary of State R. Nicholas Burns told the newspaper. “We are clearly on a diplomatic track, and this initiative reinforces that track.”

Neither the diplomat nor the newspaper addressed a key aspect of the sanctions program announced by Bush—that by targeting Iran's most powerful and effective military force, the sanctions aim to degrade the country's ability to defend itself against an impending US military strike.

The *Post* seemed to admit, however, in another passage in the article, that the US government, not Iran, was pushing the conflict to the brink of war. “Whether Bush will break from diplomacy and employ force is the great unknown,” the newspaper noted.

An accompanying editorial endorsed the new US sanctions as “A Boost for Diplomacy,” claiming that they were “the alternative

to military action,” rather than a giant step towards war. The editorial conceded that there was little or no international support for an escalation of sanctions—support which is critical to enforcing them—but nonetheless pretended that the unilateral sanctions could be effective in “forcing Iran to end its defiance of the Security Council and begin serious negotiations to stop its bomb program.”

The *Post* went on to declare that the measures “are restrained when set against the Revolutionary Guard's escalating campaign to kill Americans in Iraq by supplying sophisticated bombs, rockets and training to allied Shiite militias.” In other words, Bush would have been justified in taking even stronger action, like the use of military force.

The newspaper also attacked those who portray “the sanctions initiative as a buildup to war by Mr. Bush. We've seen no evidence that the president has decided on war...” Apparently, the *Post* is willing to overlook the threats of “World War III” from Bush and Cheney, the repeated cross-border provocations by US covert forces (reported in the international press and by *New Yorker* correspondent Seymour Hersh), and the recent declarations of readiness for action from US military commanders.

The *New York Times* published no editorial endorsing or opposing the new Iran sanctions, a significant decision in its own right. A news article Friday highlighted the administration claims of restraint, noting “assurances on Thursday that at least for now, the United States is not going to war with Iran.” The *Times* said that the action “reflected some caution by an administration that has also accused the Quds force of aiding Shiite militia attacks on American soldiers in Iraq, and has even detained some Quds force members there, but has resisted calls for retaliatory strikes inside Iran.”

The real meaning of the US government action can be seen in the reaction of the candidates who are seeking to succeed George W. Bush in the White House, and who fully expect Iran to be one of their principal foreign policy targets.

The most bloodthirsty comments came from one of the leading Republican candidates, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, who for the first time advocated bombing if Iran did not agree to abandon its supposed drive to build nuclear weapons. “If for some reasons they continue down their course of folly toward nuclear ambition, then I would take military action if that's available to us,” Romney said. “I really can't lay out exactly how that would be done, but we have a number of options, from blockade to bombardment of some kind.”

Senator John McCain of Arizona cited predictions that Iran was “within two years of a tipping point” in terms of acquiring nuclear weapons technology. “They are inexorably on the road to attaining nuclear weapons,” he continued. At a recent debate, McCain remarked, after a round of bellicose statements by his fellow Republican candidates, that a US attack on Iran was “maybe closer to reality than we are discussing tonight.”

Former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, the current leader in Republican opinion polls, called a military strike against Iran a “promise” rather than a threat, but said it would consist of air strikes using precision-guided bombs and missiles and thus should not be characterized as “war.”

A lengthy profile of Giuliani’s foreign policy advisers, published Thursday in the *New York Times*, drew attention to the prominent role of the same group of neo-conservative war hawks who played a leading role instigating the US invasion of Iraq, including such figures as Norman Podhoretz, Daniel Pipes and Michael Rubin. The article quoted Giuliani as downplaying Podhoretz’s call for immediate US air strikes, and then asking rhetorically, “Can we get to that stage? Yes. And is that stage closer than some of the Democrats believe? I believe it is.”

Both the *Post* and the *Times* drew attention to the split among the Democratic presidential candidates, with frontrunner Hillary Clinton advocating a noticeably more hawkish stance in relation to Iran. Clinton was the only Democratic presidential candidate to vote September 22 for the nonbinding resolution urging the Bush administration to declare the entire IRGC a terrorist organization. The White House actions were a step short of this, declaring the Quds Force to be aiding terrorists, while naming the IRGC as a violator of nonproliferation agreements, for its supposed efforts to develop an Iranian nuclear weapon.

Rival Democrats like John Edwards, Christopher Dodd, Joseph Biden and Barack Obama all criticized Clinton for her vote on the Iran resolution, comparing it to the Senate resolution adopted in October 2002 to give Bush authority to take military action against Iraq, for which Clinton also voted.

The less chance the candidate has of wresting the nomination from Clinton, the more strident the criticism of her position on Iran—a clear indication that, whatever the rhetoric of individual candidates, the Democratic Party as an institution is lining up behind the coming war with Iran.

The badly trailing Dodd called the resolution “a dangerous step toward armed confrontation with Iran,” while Edwards, running a poor third, said, “I learned a clear lesson from the lead-up to the Iraq war in 2002: If you give this president an inch, he will take a mile—and launch a war. Instead of blocking George Bush’s new march to war, Senator Clinton and others are enabling him once again.”

Obama, who places second in most polls and has raised nearly as much money as Clinton, was far more cautious in his criticism—a posture made even more necessary because Obama himself supports the designation of the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization.

“It is important to have tough sanctions on Iran, particularly on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard which supports terrorism,” Obama said. “But these sanctions must not be linked to any

attempt to keep our troops in Iraq, or to take military action against Iran.”

Senator Clinton herself continued to posture as an opponent of war with Iran while supporting all the actions the Bush administration is taking to prepare for that war. In a mailing sent out to households in Iowa, where the first presidential nominating contest will be held in less than 10 weeks, Clinton declared, “I am opposed to letting President Bush take any military action against that country without full Congressional approval.”

There is rather less to this than meets the eye, since Clinton did not say what her position would be if Bush actually sought congressional approval. She is merely demanding that Congress become a full partner in the future war of aggression, just as the Democrats participated in approving the drive to war in Iraq.

In a statement hailing the unilateral escalation of economic sanctions against Iran, Clinton described the action as an “opportunity to finally engage in robust diplomacy to achieve our objective of ending Iran’s nuclear weapons program, while also averting military action.”

Newsweek columnist Michael Hirsh, however, pointed to lifted spirits among the advocates of war with Iran, citing a meeting with “a happy hard-liner, a senior White House official, at a Washington party. His good mood, it turns out, had a lot to do with the new, uncompromising stance laid out by his boss, George W. Bush, against Iran.”

Hirsh noted that the administration has advanced so wide a range of charges against Iran that “it is difficult to see how there can be a negotiated solution. Even if Tehran decides to suspend enrichment, for example—as unlikely as that it is—Washington will still suspect it of proliferation of missiles and support to terrorist groups in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. No wonder my White House hard-liner was so ‘relieved,’ as he told me.”

In other words, the Bush administration, with the full support of Hillary Clinton and the congressional Democratic leadership, is concocting a case for war, just as it did in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, so that no matter what the Iranian leadership does it will be unable to stave off a military assault by American imperialism.



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