

Following intelligence report exposing administration's lies

Bush continues threats against Iran

Bill Van Auken
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President Bush reiterated Wednesday that he will continue his provocative policy against Iran despite the release of a US intelligence report demonstrating that his administration deliberately and systematically lied to the American people and the world about Iran's nuclear program.

"The Iranians have a strategic choice to make," Bush declared after arriving in Omaha, Nebraska for a Republican fund-raising event. "They can come clean with the international community about the scope of their nuclear activities and fully accept the long-standing offer to suspend their enrichment program and come to the table and negotiate, or they can continue on a path of isolation."

"The choice is up to the Iranian regime," the US president added.

The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) released Monday flatly contradicted the claims made in a similar document published two years earlier that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons. Instead, the latest NIE, which is the joint product of Washington's 16 spy agencies, claimed that Iran had pursued a nuclear weapons program but shut it down four years ago. It also debunked the administration's dire warnings about the imminent threat of an Iranian bomb, estimating that such a weapon could not be produced—even if Teheran were seeking to do so—before 2015.

The release of the NIE, which had been opposed by Bush, Vice President Cheney and the administration's director of national intelligence Mike McConnell, clearly reflects deep and bitter divisions over Iran, particularly within the US military. The Pentagon oversees nine of the 16 spy agencies that jointly draft the NIE.

With American combat forces stretched to the breaking point by the protracted deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, some of the top US commanders have openly expressed their opposition to another military adventure—this time in Iran.

These include the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, Admiral Michael Mullen, the head of Central Command, Admiral William Fallon, and even Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Speaking to reporters in Afghanistan Tuesday, Gates stressed that the revised NIE "validates the administration's strategy of bringing diplomatic and economic pressures to bear on the Iranian government to change its policies."

Bush asserted Wednesday that it is "clear from the latest NIE that the Iranian government has more to explain about its nuclear intentions and past actions, especially the covert nuclear weapons program pursued until the fall of 2003."

The president's language is significant. The demand that Teheran "come clean" about its "covert nuclear weapons program" echoes virtually word-for-word the rhetoric coming out of Washington in the months leading up to the Iraq war, in which administration officials incessantly demanded that the Saddam Hussein regime "come clean"

about its non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

Just as in the case of Iraq, no evidence is presented in the NIE and none has been produced elsewhere demonstrating that Iran maintained a covert nuclear weapons program, either before or after 2003.

If there is any "coming clean" to be done, it is by the Bush administration. Having dragged the American people into the debacle in Iraq based upon lies about non-existent WMDs and fictional ties between Baghdad and terrorists, it has been exposed doing the same thing in relation to Iran—a country four times larger than Iraq and with three times its population—while invoking the threat of "World War III."

Faced with the unwanted publication of the NIE, the president and his aides have claimed that the US president had been briefed on its contents only the previous week. Bush claimed that while intelligence director McConnell told him last August that there was new information on Iran, he didn't tell him what it was. This is a patently absurd attempt at cover-up.

First, the media in Israel has reported that the government there was briefed on these same findings over a month ago, and that Bush discussed the NIE's implications with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at the Annapolis conference on November 27.

Second, the *Washington Post's* Dan Froomkin published a column Wednesday reviewing Bush's statements on Iran since the beginning of the year, revealing a subtle but definite shift in rhetoric beginning last August. Bush went from assertions that Iran was "pursuing nuclear weapons" to claims that it was pursuing "technology that could lead to nuclear weapons" or wanted "to have the capacity, the knowledge, in order to make a nuclear weapon."

The obvious implication is that Bush was informed in August that the claim about an Iranian weapons program was unsustainable. But instead of "coming clean," the administration launched a clear attempt at obfuscation, ratcheting up its rhetoric—including the specter of a third world war—while carefully crafting its charges to avoid an outright lie. All the talk about "technology," "capacity" and "knowledge" boiled down to the fact that Iran had a uranium enrichment program dedicated to producing power for civilian use.

Finally, investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published an article in the *New Yorker* magazine over a year ago citing a draft assessment by the CIA that there was no evidence of an Iranian weapons program. Appearing on CNN Tuesday, Hersh stated, "The intelligence we learned about yesterday has been circulating inside this government at the highest levels for the last year—and probably longer."

The White House feels under no compunction to come clean however, given the craven response of the ostensible political opposition, the Democratic Party, and the major media to a stunning about-face that has once again exposed the criminality of the

administration.

Democrats in Congress responded with half-hearted calls for investigations, not so much into the lies of the White House as into, as Senator Ben Nelson, a Nebraska Democrat and member of the Armed Services Committee put it, “why there is such a difference between one report and the other.”

The Democratic congressman chosen to respond to Bush’s press conference Tuesday, Rahm Emanuel of Illinois, the head of the Democratic congressional caucus, flat out denied that Bush had deliberately misled the American people, when asked by a reporter.

Other Democrats close to the Israeli lobby, such as Congressman Eliot Engel of New York, cast suspicion on the new NIE, apparently because it posed an obstacle to military action against Iran. The new report was “troubling,” Engel said. “It makes one question which is more accurate, this one or the previous one which came to the opposite conclusion.”

Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton—who has attacked the Bush administration from the right, accusing it of underestimating the Iranian danger and dragging its feet on taking action—spoke for the dominant sections of the party during a pre-primary debate in Iowa Tuesday.

“None of us is advocating a rush to war,” she declared. At the same time she defended her vote for a Senate resolution calling for the administration to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Iran’s largest security force, as a “terrorist organization” describing the provocative move as “one of those sticks” needed to be employed against Iran.

Significantly, the debate’s moderator played a tape of Senator Joseph Lieberman, the so-called Independent Democrat from Connecticut, calling for military action, including striking “bases around Teheran,” over the unsubstantiated charges that Iran bears responsibility for attacks on US occupation forces in Iraq. Asked to respond, none of the candidates repudiated Lieberman’s statement.

The language used by Clinton is telling. It is not a matter of rejecting war, but rather a “rush to war.” Her criticisms of the Bush administration revolve entirely around tactical means for pursuing the same strategic ends. Once again there is the echo of 2002, when Democrats did not oppose a war against Iraq, but sought a greater semblance of legality than the Bush administration.

A pamphlet by Keith Jones

The Democrats’ response to the latest NIE demonstrates that the election of a Democratic president in 2008 will in no way lessen the danger of a wider military conflagration in the Middle East and the threat of a global conflict.

The two most influential US daily newspapers—the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*—responded to the NIE and Bush’s statements with editorials Wednesday that were remarkably similar in their conclusions. The *Times* editorial was headlined “Good and Bad News about Iran,” while the one run by the *Post* carried the subhead: “The new US assessment has some good news—but the reaction to it could be bad.”

Both papers, after faithfully parroting the discredited official line that Iran was actively pursuing a nuclear weapon, now report as fact the new claim made in the US intelligence report that the country had such a program until 2003, but has discontinued it. That Washington has failed to substantiate this claim and that the United Nation’s nuclear inspection arm, the International Atomic Energy Agency, has found no evidence of such a pre-existing program is passed over in silence.

Times asserts that the report has effectively taken “going to war against Iran” off the agenda and commends the US intelligence apparatus for daring “to question its own assumptions.” So much for the “good news.”

It goes on to lament that the report “is going to make it harder to keep up international pressure on Iran.” It warns that the document “is not an argument for anyone to let down their guard when it comes to Iran’s nuclear ambitions.”

The principal indictment that the *Times* makes of Bush is not that he has been caught attempting once again to launch a catastrophic “preemptive” war based on a fabricated pretext, but that he has done “more damage to the country’s credibility,” making the pursuit of US interests more difficult.

As for the *Post*, it stresses that, while the NIE reports with “high confidence” that the Iranians ended their alleged nuclear weapons program in 2003, it cited only “moderate confidence” for the finding that it had not relaunched this supposed effort.

Echoing the *Times* it declares, “The new report may have the effect of neutering the very strategy of pressure that it says might be effective if ‘intensified.’”

Again, there is the same pattern as in the Iraq war. The Democrats in Congress had no inclination to pursue an investigation into the Bush administration’s lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. While before the 2006 elections, Democrats on the Senate Intelligence Committee had protested the refusal of Republicans to organize such a probe, once they came into the leadership the matter was swiftly dropped.

And both the *Times* and the *Post*, after willingly disseminating (and in some cases embellishing upon) the government’s lies and misinformation about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, systematically whitewashed this criminal campaign of mass deception with claims that the government had been misled by “faulty intelligence.”

What emerges from the NIE controversy is the exposure not just of Bush, but of the entire US ruling establishment, which, whatever its tactical divisions, is supportive of military aggression in pursuit of strategic interests and is utterly unconcerned with the maintenance of democratic processes and democratic rights.

In the case of Iran, the hysteria generated by both major parties and the media over the country’s purported nuclear weapons program has its roots in the general consensus within the American ruling elite that “regime change”—including by means of direct US armed intervention—is necessary in order to further American imperialism’s drive to establish its hegemony over the strategic energy resources of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

On the one hand, the supposed threat of an Iranian bomb provides a useful pretext for promoting such aggression, both in the form of draconian economic sanctions and the threat of outright military aggression. On the other, Teheran’s obtaining a nuclear device could considerably complicate Washington’s preparations to once again pursue a policy of preemptive war.



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