US intelligence report shows war drive against Iran based on lies

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President Bush used a White House press conference Tuesday to defend his administration's policy of aggression towards Iran. He insisted that new findings by US intelligence agencies that Teheran has no active nuclear weapons program would not change his policy in the slightest.

The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) that was issued on Monday, reflecting the assessments made by 16 US spy agencies, reversed the conclusion made two years earlier that Iran was seeking to develop nuclear weapons and instead claimed the country had "halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003."

It also expressed the opinion that Iran would be unable to produce a nuclear weapon, if it were to attempt to do so, before the year 2015.

These findings constitute a damning indictment of the Bush administration's relentless fear-mongering in relation to an alleged nuclear threat from Iran. They demonstrate that just as in the buildup to the war against Iraq five years ago, the White House has been engaged in a systematic campaign to drag the American people into another war based on lies.

Nonetheless, Bush seized upon the claims made in the document about a previous arms program to argue that Iran could revive it at any time, using its civilian program to develop fuel for atomic power plants to speed up the building of a bomb.

"What's to say that they couldn't start another covert nuclear weapons program?" he asked.

Based upon this pretext, he laid out—in terms that directly echoed the rhetoric preceding the unprovoked 2003 US invasion of Iraq—the case for preventive war.

In a heated response to a reporter's question about the administration's "credibility gap," Bush declared at the end of his press conference: "If Iran shows up with a nuclear weapon at some point in time, the world is going to say, 'What happened to them in 2007? How come they couldn't see the impending danger? What caused them not to understand that a country that once had a weapons program could reconstitute the weapons program?'"

Asked specifically whether the new intelligence findings meant that Washington would refrain from utilizing a "military option" against Iran, Bush insisted that "all options are on the table."

While Bush insisted that the NIE bolstered his case for an aggressive policy against Iran and confirmed that policy's effectiveness, the document had the effect internationally of a political bombshell.

In the first instance, it has apparently scuttled Washington's attempts to push another round of punishing anti-Iranian sanctions through the United Nations Security Council. "Officially, we will study the document carefully; unofficially, our efforts to build up momentum for another resolution are gone," a European official involved in sanctions negotiations told the *New York Times*.

China, which had reportedly bowed to US pressure at a meeting of Security Council members in Paris, now indicated that its position had changed in light of the NIE. Asked whether sanctions were now less likely, China's ambassador to the UN, Guangya Wang, responded, "I think the council members will have to consider that, because I think we all start from the presumption that now things have changed."

The ambassador of Russia, which has opposed stepped-up sanctions, said that the NIE vindicated Moscow's position. "We have always been saying there is no proof they are pursuing nuclear weapons," said Vitaly Churkin.

More significant is the way in which the document serves to discredit not only the White House, but the entire political establishment in America. Just as in the run-up to the Iraq war, when the Democratic leadership and the mass media echoed the administration's lies about Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction," the media and the Democrats have joined with the Bush administration in attempting to cast a non-existent Iranian nuclear weapons program as an imminent threat.

In presenting the NIE to the media Monday, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley acknowledged that Bush had been informed about the existence of new intelligence on the Iranian nuclear program as early as last August.

Bush confirmed this account, declaring at his press conference: "In August, I think it was, [Director of National Intelligence] Mike McConnell came in and said, 'We have some new information.' He didn't tell me what the information was."

While the American president is famous for his lack of intellectual curiosity, the claim that he was informed in August by his intelligence director that there was new information about Iran's nuclear program, but was content to wait until it came out in a published report four months later, is simply not credible.

The reality is that in August the administration was engaged in a major propaganda campaign against Iran, with Bush delivering speeches containing unsubstantiated charges that Iran was responsible for attacks on US occupation forces in Iraq and was threatening the world with a "nuclear holocaust." At the same time, the US was staging provocations against Iran, with the arrest of its diplomatic officials in Iraq. It was then that the White House first announced its threat to brand the country's largest uniformed security force, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), as a "terrorist organization."

In light of the well-known campaign by the administration to obtain any intelligence report—including demonstratively false ones—to justify its war against Iraq, it is unimaginable that Bush and Vice President Cheney would not have demanded to know what new information had been uncovered regarding their latest target for aggression.

In short, Bush and Cheney were delivering speeches invoking a "nuclear holocaust" and, in the case of Bush's October 16 press conference, threatening "World War III," all the while knowing that the nuclear weapons program that they were warning against did not even exist.

Presenting the official response of the Democratic Party to Bush's press conference, House Democratic Caucus Chairman Rahm Emanuel of Illinois was asked by a reporter whether he believed Bush had deliberately

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misled the American people over the alleged Iranian threat.

"No, I don't think the president tried to do that deliberately...I'm not going to get into his motivations; I don't know him well enough to do that," Emanuel replied.

A prominent Democratic supporter of an aggressive policy against Iran, the House Democratic leader cannot state the simple and obvious fact that Bush lied, because he knows that he and his party are fully implicated in the same attempt to deceive the American people on the crucial question of war.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton stated that the report exposed the Bush administration's attempt "to distort intelligence to pursue its ideological ends," while claiming it "vindicates" the New York senator's own position, which he described as "vigorous American-led diplomacy."

Clinton has repeatedly expressed her support for keeping the "military option" on the table against Iran, and voted with Republicans last September for a non-binding resolution declaring the IRGC a terrorist organization.

The findings of the National Intelligence Estimate are the product of a protracted struggle within the administration and particularly its military and intelligence apparatus. The document's release had been delayed for over a year, reportedly because of attempts by Bush and Cheney to force the intelligence agencies to withdraw findings that exposed as fabrications the administration's charges regarding Iran's supposed weapons program and its alleged support for attacks on US forces in Iraq.

That the final draft not only failed to provide the administration with "intelligence" supporting its claims of an imminent Iranian threat, but directly repudiated the claims made about an Iranian weapons program in the 2005 NIE, is a measure of the extreme tensions and unease within both the military command and the CIA about the prospects of launching a US war against Iran.

Director of National Security McConnell indicated earlier this year that the NIE on Iranian nuclear activities would not be declassified, a position apparently supported by Bush and Cheney. The decision to release some of its findings may have been prompted by knowledge that it would otherwise be leaked to the media, perhaps from within the intelligence apparatus itself.

A number of media reports have stated that the NIE is consistent with the findings of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN watchdog group that has conducted extensive inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities. The agency's director general Mohamed ElBaradei welcomed the report, saying that it would help to defuse the mounting international crisis.

The differences between the US intelligence estimate and the UN agency's findings, however, were made clear in a statement by an IAEA official to the *Times*:

"Despite repeated smear campaigns, the IAEA has stood its ground and concluded time and again that since 2002 there was no evidence of an undeclared nuclear weapons program in Iran. It also validates the assessment of the director general that what the IAEA inspectors have seen in Iran represented no imminent danger."

In other words, the UN agency found no evidence that the nuclear weapons program the NIE now claims was in operation until 2003 ever existed.

In this sense, the shift by the US intelligence agencies from expressing "high confidence" in 2005 that Iran was engaged in an attempt "to develop nuclear weapons," to asserting with the same "high confidence" two years later that the Iranians had halted such a program in 2003 may represent the substitution of one phony pretext for war for another.

No evidence has ever been presented to substantiate the existence of a nuclear weapons program. And no description is offered in the current NIE of precisely what activities were halted in 2003.

Agreements by Teheran to curtail parts of their nuclear program in 2004 and 2005, after negotiations with the major European powers, involved activities that were wholly related to the country's civilian atomic energy program and did not violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Yet, as Tuesday's White House press conference demonstrated, the Bush White House can now claim on the basis of the new NIE that Iran attempted to build nuclear weapons before and can at any moment do so again, necessitating the maintenance of drastic sanctions and the preparation of military intervention.

The release of the NIE was met by sanguine assertions in the media that its findings had essentially defused the danger of war. The *Washington Post* reported that the document's findings could "take off the table the possibility of preemptive military action before the end of his [Bush's] presidency." The *New York Times* speculated that "the zeal for another military conflict has diminished."

But Bush's statements Tuesday followed National Security Adviser Hadley's reiteration Monday of the US president's threat of World War III. "The international community has to understand that if we want to avoid a situation where we either have to accept Iran on the road to a nuclear weapon, with a path to a nuclear weapon, or the possibility of having to use force to stop it, with all the connotations of World War III, then we need to step up the diplomacy," the national security advisor stated.

The threat of another, bloodier war remains real and present. Its source lies not in a non-existent Iranian nuclear weapons program, but in mounting inter-imperialist conflicts and, above all, the predatory drive by American capitalism to offset its economic decline by utilizing military force.

Washington remains determined to assert its hegemony over the vast energy resources of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. It has launched two wars in the last six years to realize this goal, and there is every reason to believe that it is still preparing a third.

The link between a threatened US attack on Iran and the potential for a third world war is based not on the alleged spread of nuclear weapons, but rather the increasing tensions generated by the US attempts to establish a stranglehold over a region upon which its principal economic rivals—Western Europe, China and Japan—depend for energy resources.

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