

Washington pushes through new UN resolution against Iran

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After a year of cajoling and bullying by Washington and its allies, the UN Security Council passed a resolution on Monday imposing a third round of sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programs. While the Bush administration has hailed the vote as proof that the “international community” regarded Iran as a threat, Washington’s campaign for the resolution was a rather desperate attempt to shore up waning support for action against Tehran.

The resolution repeated previous demands for Iran to halt its uranium enrichment program and construction of a heavy water research reactor. The new sanctions represent an incremental increase on those contained in two previous resolutions in December 2006 and March 2007. Five more Iranian officials now face travel bans. The foreign assets of 13 more Iranian companies and 13 officials will be frozen. The list of items that cannot be sold to Iran now includes dual-use equipment that can potentially be used for military purposes. The resolution calls for member states to “exercise vigilance” in providing financial support for trade with Iran and the activities of Iranian banks operating within their territories. It also provides for the inspection of Iranian ships and aircraft suspected of transporting prohibited goods.

The measures fell well short of US demands. As in the horse-trading over previous resolutions, Russia and China blocked the imposition of tougher sanctions and sought to protect their own interests in Iran. As permanent members of the UN Security Council, the two countries could have vetoed the resolution, but have consistently refused to openly challenge Washington’s bogus case against Iran. The final vote on the resolution was delayed after several non-permanent members of the UN Security Council raised objections. Libya, Vietnam and South Africa were pressured into line, but Indonesia persisted with its limited criticisms and abstained from the final vote. Unlike the two previous UN resolutions, Washington could not claim a unanimous vote.

Bitter behind-the-scenes divisions quickly surfaced at this week’s International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors meeting in Vienna. According to the latest wire reports, American allies—Britain, France and Germany—were compelled to drop plans yesterday for the meeting to adopt a further resolution on Iran after China, Russia and so-called developing countries opposed the move. In recent months, Moscow has exhibited a determination to forge closer relations with Tehran, providing fuel for Iran’s nearly completed nuclear power reactor at Bushehr, despite strenuous opposition from Washington.

While no text was made available, the planned IAEA resolution

was undoubtedly aimed at forcing the UN watchdog to take tougher action against Iran. The US and its European allies have been bitterly critical of IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei in particular. They lodged a formal complaint against ElBaradei after he reached a deal with Iran last July to systematically answer all outstanding questions over its nuclear programs. The agreement cut directly across the Bush administration’s efforts to intensify its campaign against Tehran and lay the basis for military strikes against Iran.

The White House’s propaganda suffered a further blow last December when 16 American spy agencies issued a public version of their joint National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which found that Iran had ceased any nuclear weapons programs in 2003. The NIE reflected sharp tactical divisions in the US intelligence and foreign policy establishment over US preparations for a new war against Iran. Bush struggled to regain ground by insisting that the NIE confirmed that Iran remained a threat. But the report’s findings directly exposed the lies, repeated ad nauseum by Bush officials, that Tehran posed an imminent danger to the US and its allies.

Washington’s plans began to run into other problems. Russia and China seized on the NIE to justify their opposition to a further UN resolution. American allies in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, that were being cultivated as part of an anti-Iran coalition concluded that the danger of a US war with Iran had receded and initiated moves to establish working relations with Tehran. Washington’s puppet government in Baghdad invited Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Iraq where he declared this week that the continuing US-led occupation was an “insult to [the] region”.

In seeking to regain the initiative, the Bush administration pulled out all stops to push through the UN Security Council resolution on Monday. In the lead-up to the vote, the White House released intelligence to the IAEA that appeared to confirm that Iran had been engaged in preparations to build a nuclear weapon. The release served several purposes: to undercut the NIE, resurrect US claims that Iran had plans for a nuclear bomb and cut across a plan by ElBaradei to resolve all outstanding issues. The release of the intelligence was carefully timed to maximise its propaganda impact and minimise any opportunity for Tehran to respond.

Much of the information is not new and involves plans, designs and experimental results purportedly found on a laptop computer smuggled out of Iran in 2004 in unexplained circumstances. While

providing details to the IAEA, the US administration refused to formally release the intelligence, or allow the IAEA to discuss its details with Iran. By giving the IAEA the data on the eve of a scheduled report by ElBaradei, the US blocked any resolution of the questions raised by the intelligence. In effect, it gave Iran just a week to answer allegations that Iran had plans to modify its Shabab missile to carry a nuclear device, had conducted “green salt” experiments involving the production of uranium tetrafluoride and had tested high explosives needed to manufacture a warhead.

ElBaradei’s report, which was finalised on February 22, concluded that all remaining issues were “no longer outstanding at this stage”, except for one—the “alleged studies on the green salt project, high explosives testing and the missile re-entry vehicle”. While Tehran had previously dismissed the allegations as groundless and fabricated, the IAEA was only authorised on February 15 to show Iranian officials the new material. Noting that Iran had not had time to respond, ElBaradei concluded that the IAEA was “not yet in a position to determine the full nature of Iran’s nuclear program”.

In a sign that the nuclear agency itself has become a political battleground, IAEA deputy director general Olli Heinonen held his own private “technical briefing” for IAEA member states on February 24. Based on the newly released intelligence, he concluded that Iran’s experiments and plans were “not consistent with any application other than the development of a nuclear weapon”. Notes from the meeting were leaked to the press and featured prominently in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*.

An article, “Meeting on Arms Data Reignites Iran Debate” published in *New York Times* on the day of the UN vote was a particularly insidious piece that had all the hallmarks of a deliberate plant by senior Bush officials. While revealing something of the bitter debates in American ruling circles over the White House policy toward Iran, the article by two senior writers was clearly aimed at giving credence to the “new” evidence presented by Heinonen and undermining the credibility of the NIE report. A series of officials, named and unnamed, were cited to the effect that the NIE had been “a big mistake”.

A common complaint running through the article was the NIE had shifted the goal posts in assessing whether Iran intended to build a nuclear bomb. As the *New York Times* explained: “For years, Washington had based its assessment that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons largely on its steady work to enrich uranium... The December estimate, by contrast, focused on weapons design.” The comment is more revealing than the newspaper perhaps intended, making clear that the Bush administration knew that Iran had no current weapons program and based its allegations solely on Iran’s enrichment program, which is monitored by the IAEA and which Iran has declared to be for purely peaceful purposes.

The Iranian regime has insisted on its rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to enrich uranium and construct a heavy water reactor. In response to the latest UN resolution, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini declared that it was “contrary to the spirit and articles of the International Atomic Energy Agency. It has been issued based on political motivations and a biased approach. It is worthless and

unacceptable.” The Bush administration’s demand that Iran halt its nuclear programs only highlights the hypocrisy and cynicism of Washington, which turns a blind eye to the manufacture of nuclear weapons by its allies Pakistan, India and Israel, and has its own huge arsenal of atomic bombs.

The WSWS holds no political brief for the theocratic regime in Tehran. It is possible that sections of the Iranian establishment have ambitions to manufacture a nuclear bomb—a move that would in no way advance the interests of the working class in Iran and the region or defend Iranian people against a US military attack. Washington, however, has provided no proof that Iran has had plans to build a bomb. The nuclear allegations are simply a convenient pretext for the Bush administration to ratchet up its diplomatic and economic offensive against Iran and to justify preparations for a military attack.

The much publicised laptop is simply the latest in a long line of murky “evidence” that may well have been concocted by US or Israeli intelligence agencies. The very fact that it has taken three years to release the data points to its rather dubious origins.

The nuclear allegations are simply a convenient vehicle for the Bush administration to advance its ambitions for US hegemony in Iran and throughout the Middle East. In the final analysis, the US threats are not aimed primarily against Tehran but at undermining the economic and strategic interests of its European and Asian rivals in the region. What is at stake in Iran is not only the country’s vast oil and gas reserves, but its strategic position between the resource-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. Even if Tehran were to capitulate completely to US demands to shut down its nuclear program, a string of other pretexts have already been prepared to justify US aggression, including alleged Iranian meddling in Iraq.

Following the release of the NIE report, there was no shortage of commentators who concluded that the danger of the Bush administration ordering a military attack on Iran had ended. The ruthlessness with which the White House rammed through the latest UN resolution demonstrates that a new eruption of US militarism in the last year of Bush’s term is not off the agenda.



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