

Bush, McCain “gaffes” on Iran echo Iraq war lies

Bill Van Auken
22 March 2008

Within the past week, both US President George W. Bush and the Republican Party’s presumptive nominee for the 2008 presidential election, Senator John McCain, have made widely broadcast statements about Iran that are as demonstratively false as they are provocative.

In an interview taped as part of a US propaganda broadcast to Iran on the occasion of the Persian new year, President Bush said Thursday that Iran’s government has “declared that they want to have a nuclear weapon to destroy people—some in the Middle East.” He added, “That’s unacceptable to the United States, and it’s unacceptable to the world.” The remarks were broadcast over Radio Farda, a State Department-funded, Farsi-language station.

The broadcast prompted an article in Friday’s *Washington Post* that carried the subhead: “Experts Say President Is Wrong and Is Escalating Tensions.”

“The Iranian government is on the record across the board as saying it does not want a nuclear weapon,” Suzanne Maloney, a State Department specialist on Iran until last year, told the *Post*. “There’s plenty of room for skepticism about these assertions. But it’s troubling for the administration to indicate that Iran is explicitly embracing the program as a means of destroying another country.”

Bush’s remarks came just two days after McCain gave a press conference in Jordan in which he delivered his own charges against Iran.

McCain’s statement, which has been widely published and rebroadcast, was given in the context of a Middle East tour together with fellow Senate Armed Service Committee members that was designed to showcase the Arizona senator as a credible “commander-in-chief.”

His assertion that the Iranian government, dominated

by Shia clerics, was supporting the Sunni Islamist group Al Qaeda, was widely described in the media as an “embarrassing gaffe,” and pounced on by the Democrats as indicative of his lack of foreign policy expertise.

Speaking to reporters in Amman, McCain said that he was concerned about the Tehran government “taking Al Qaeda into Iran, training them and sending them back” into Iraq.

He was challenged by a reporter who presumably understood that the Tehran government has close ties with Shia parties in Iraq that have waged a sectarian war against Sunnis in general and that Al Qaeda has been blamed for numerous terrorist attacks on Shia civilians.

McCain said it was “common knowledge and has been reported in the media that Al Qaeda is going back into Iran and receiving training and are coming back into Iraq from Iran. That’s well known, and it’s unfortunate.”

Standing next to him at the microphone, Senator Joseph Lieberman, McCain’s “Democratic-Independent” ally, whispered in the Republican candidate’s ear. McCain then corrected himself: “I’m sorry; the Iranians are training the extremists, not Al Qaeda. Not Al Qaeda. I’m sorry.”

Later, McCain tried to dismiss the assertion as a “misstatement” common to all candidates, comparing it to Democratic Senator Barack Obama’s stated intention to meet with the “president of Canada,” a country whose top elected official is a prime minister.

In reality, however, McCain’s charge against Iran was hardly a slip of the tongue. It represented the fourth time in just over three weeks that he had made the same assertion.

Indeed, just a day before the press conference in

Jordan, McCain did an interview with the nationally syndicated right-wing radio talk show host Hugh Hewitt in which he declared, “As you know, there are Al Qaeda operatives that are taken back into Iran, given training as leaders, and they’re moving back into Iraq.”

Not only was the charge not a “misstatement” by McCain, it represented a deliberate and conscious repetition of a false charge that has been made by both the Bush administration and the Pentagon, which have variously accused Tehran of harboring Al Qaeda members in Iran and supplying armor-piercing EFPs (explosively formed penetrators) to both Iraqi Shia and Sunni militias.

The former accusation flies in the face of the Iranian government’s proven record of arresting Al Qaeda members and extraditing them back to their home countries, while the latter has never been substantiated and, again, is totally at odds with the reality of Sunni-Shia relations inside Iraq.

What is striking about Bush’s “wrong” assertion on Iranian nuclear ambitions and McCain’s supposed “gaffe” about Tehran-Al Qaeda ties is that they echo precisely the pretexts used by the Bush administration to prepare the US war of aggression against Iraq. Baghdad, the American people were told, had stockpiles of “weapons of mass destruction” and was seeking to develop a nuclear weapon. Moreover, the administration asserted, Saddam Hussein was supporting and training Al Qaeda. As is now known, all of this war propaganda was lies.

The new lies against Iran are being repeated with increasing frequency and insistence as Washington is escalating military, diplomatic and economic threats against Iran.

The US continues to maintain a military encirclement of Iran, sending a new naval battle group to the coast of Lebanon recently, augmenting the carrier groups that it maintains permanently in the Persian Gulf and the massive US military deployments across Iran’s borders in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Vice President Cheney is completing a nine-day Middle East tour in which Iran has reportedly topped the agenda in his discussions with rulers in the region.

And, in another provocative action, the US Treasury Department issued a warning to US financial institutions Thursday that conducting transactions with

Iranian banks could place them in jeopardy. “Through state-owned banks, the government of Iran disguises its involvement in proliferation and terrorism activities through an array of deceptive practices specifically designed to evade detection,” the statement said.

The warning listed 59 major Iranian banks or their branches, including Bank Melli, the country’s largest. The warning, which extends to a whole number of Iranian banks that are not covered by United Nations or US sanctions, is clearly aimed at intimidating US and international financial institutions and exerting economic pressure on Iran by cutting the country off from the world banking system.

Significantly, in attacking McCain’s “gaffe” none of the Democrats pointed to the obvious: that the false charges against Iran are aimed at deceiving the American people and paving the way to another war. Instead, the general approach was that they showed McCain was less qualified to lead such a war.

“Just yesterday, we heard Senator McCain confuse Sunni and Shiite, Iran and Al Qaeda,” Barack Obama told an audience in North Carolina, which included several military officers. “Maybe that is why he completely fails to understand that the war in Iraq has done more to embolden America’s enemies than any strategic choice that we have made in decades.”

Obama then went on to issue his own threat against Iran, calling the country “the greatest challenge to American interests in the Middle East in a generation.”

Iran, the Democratic candidate declared, would be presented with a “clear choice.” He continued: “Make no mistake. If and when we ever have to use military force against any country, we must exert the power of American diplomacy first.”



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wswp.org/contact