

The propaganda war against Iran

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The US media, led by the *New York Times*, is continuing its concerted propaganda campaign against Iran over charges that the government stole the June 12 presidential election. There is not even a semblance of objectivity in the media coverage, which parrots the charges of the opposition headed by defeated presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi as fact and dismisses the government's claims as lies.

The opposition is lauded as democratic and reformist, while incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his supporters are portrayed as virtual fascists. One would scarcely imagine that the two men represent rival factions within the same ruling establishment.

Responsibility for the violence in the streets of Tehran is attributed entirely to the government and its security forces.

No connection is drawn between these events and the broader situation in the region, where the US is waging two wars, on Iran's eastern and western borders, both aimed at establishing American hegemony over the oil-rich territory.

Suggestions that the US and its intelligence agencies are involved in the turmoil in Iran are dismissed as ludicrous, fabrications by an Iranian government trying to divert public opinion. This, in a country where Washington overthrew a democratically elected government in 1953, propped up a brutal dictator, the Shah, for more than a quarter of a century, and has carried out covert CIA operations in the recent period involving the use of special operations troops on Iranian soil.

The *New York Times* and Venezuela

If all of this sounds familiar, it should. Little more than seven years ago, a very similar media campaign, once again spearheaded by the *New York Times*, was carried out against the government of President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.

Then, as now, standards of journalistic objectivity were thrown out the window. Chávez was vilified and his opponents, drawn largely from Venezuela's oligarchy and privileged layers of the middle class, were portrayed as crusaders for democracy. Statements by the opposition were reported as fact or treated with the utmost respect, while the government's

contentions were subjected to derision.

A few quotations from the *New York Times* of March and April 2002 give the flavor of this campaign. On March 26, the newspaper published a story entitled "Venezuela's President vs. Military: Is Breach Widening?" The content of the piece made it clear that the answer was, hopefully, yes.

"The rebellious officers helped energize a disjointed but growing opposition movement that is using regular street protests to try to weaken Mr. Chávez, whose autocratic style and left-wing policies have alienated a growing number of people."

It continued, "Although he promised a 'revolution' to improve the lives of the poor, Mr. Chávez has instead managed to rankle nearly every sector—from the church to the press to the middle class—with his combative style, populist speeches and dalliances with Fidel Castro..."

In the *Times*' coverage of Venezuela—as in Iran—the phrase "nearly every sector" was used to exclude the overwhelming majority of the population, the urban and rural poor, which had twice given Chávez the widest electoral victories in the country's history.

Subsequent articles described Chávez as a "left-wing autocrat" and "a mercurial left-leaning leader whose policies had antagonized much of Venezuelan society."

The newspaper favorably presented a speech by a former energy minister to a group of "striking" managers at the state-run oil company, who declared, "This can only end with the president resigning... This is about him or us. It is a choice between democracy and dictatorship."

There was the question of violence. When unidentified gunmen opened fire during a mass opposition march on the Miraflores presidential palace—a throng comparable in both its size and class composition to those that have taken to the streets of Iran—the 19 deaths that resulted were all attributed to government security forces or Chavez's armed supporters.

It subsequently emerged that a number of the dead were among the crowd that had gathered to defend Chávez and that much of the fire had come from the Caracas metropolitan police force, loyal to the city's mayor, Alfredo Peña, a fierce opponent of the president who enjoyed US support.

In its coverage of the clash, the *Times* sought out Peña, who, unsurprisingly, blamed all of the carnage on Chávez.

The purpose of all of this became clear in the wake of the

demonstration, when a section of the military, together with Venezuela's big business association and the US-sponsored bureaucracy of the right-wing union federation, joined in a coup that briefly overthrew Chávez.

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, the *Times* showed its hand in an editorial entitled "Hugo Chávez Departs."

"Venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened by a would-be dictator," the *Times* crowed. "Mr. Chávez, a ruinous demagogue, stepped down after the military intervened and handed power to a respected business leader..."

The newspaper insisted that Washington had no role in the overthrow, "denying him [Chávez] the role of nationalist martyr. Rightly, his removal was a purely Venezuelan affair."

Nothing could more clearly express the conception of "democracy" shared by the *Times* and the US ruling establishment. A regime created through the military overthrow of an elected government was "democratic" so long as it was more amenable to US interests. In Venezuela, which supplies 15 percent of US imported oil, these interests are clear.

As for the claim that the coup was "purely Venezuelan," this was a cover-up of a concerted and protracted US destabilization operation, in which the *Times* played an indispensable role.

The "democratic" coup, however, lasted just two days. Chávez was restored to power as a result of masses of urban poor taking to the streets against the new regime and sections of the military turning against it. The *Times* backpedaled slightly, admitting that it had greeted Chávez's overthrow with "applause," while regretting that it had "overlooked the undemocratic manner in which he was removed."

In Iran, the *New York Times* is following essentially the same script, albeit it on a grander scale.

Once again: Who is the *Nation's* Iran correspondent, Robert Dreyfuss?

The *Nation* has not provided any answer to the question posed by the *World Socialist Web Site* on Monday: "Who is Robert Dreyfuss?"

As we explained, Dreyfuss is a contributing editor of the magazine, which presents itself as the voice of "progressive" politics in America. He wrote a book—*Hostage to Khomeini*—in 1981, calling for the Reagan administration to organize the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran and denouncing President Jimmy Carter for having betrayed the Shah.

At the time, Dreyfuss was a member of the fascistic organization led by Lyndon LaRouche, serving as "Middle East intelligence director" for its magazine *Executive Intelligence Review*.

This is the man that the *Nation* relies upon as its chief commentator on "politics and national security" and who it sent

to Iran to cover the election. He has echoed the line promoted by the *New York Times*, declaring himself in favor of a "color revolution" in Iran.

A comparison of what he wrote then and what he writes today only makes it all the more urgent that the *Nation* explain why such an individual is one of its editors.

This arises particularly in relation to one of Dreyfuss's principal sources during his recent trip to Iran, Ibrahim Yazdi, Iran's former foreign minister and a so-called "dissident." An article published by the *Nation* on June 13 entitled "Iran's Ex-Foreign Minister Yazdi: It's A Coup," consisted largely of an interview with this man, who said the election was rigged and illegitimate.

In his book *Hostage to Khomeini*, however Dreyfuss said that Yazdi was part of a "coterie of experienced, Western-trained intelligence agents."

He claimed that Yazdi's "directions from Washington and London came via the 'professors,' men such as Professor Richard Cottam of the University of Pittsburgh," whom he described as a former "field officer for the CIA attached to the US embassy in Tehran."

Dreyfuss wrote: "Yazdi's wife once described Cottam as 'a very close friend of my husband, the one person who knows more about him than even I do.'"

Elsewhere in the book, Dreyfuss refers to Yazdi as "Mossad-tainted."

The question is: which Dreyfuss are we to believe—the one who exposed Yazdi as an intelligence agent for the US, Britain and Israel, or the one who now quotes him at length as an advocate of "democracy" and "reform"?

Dreyfuss has never publicly repudiated what he wrote in 1981. Was he lying then, or is he lying now? The *Nation* is obliged to answer. Its readership deserves to know what Dreyfuss is doing at the magazine.



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