

Washington and Iran: The reckless policy of provocation

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At a White House press conference Thursday, President Barack Obama said his administration would make Iran “pay a price” for an alleged plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States. He described it as “part of a pattern of dangerous and reckless behavior by the Iranian government.” In the same remarks, Obama stressed that his administration will not “take any options off the table in terms of how we operate with Iran”, a phrase that is universally understood as a threat of US military aggression.

The remarks signaled Washington’s decision to utilize this bizarre incident, about which there are far more questions than answers, as a pretext for escalating tension with Iran to the point of saber-rattling threats of war.

The more that emerges about the purported Iranian “terrorist plot” to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States, the more it appears to be a crude concoction by elements of the American state apparatus to blackguard Iran and create the pretext for an escalation of US aggression.

Even the media, outside of the inevitable hyper-ventilating by CNN and Fox News, has taken a skeptical view of the allegations of the White House and the US Justice Department. For example, the *Financial Times* editorialized: “It is far from clear, however, that the plot enjoyed the backing of the Iranian regime. Indeed, there are reasons to be skeptical that it did.” To put it bluntly, nothing about it makes any sense.

The administration has been compelled to note the wild character of its allegations. FBI Director Robert Mueller said the Justice Department indictment “reads like the pages of a Hollywood script.” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton referred to the improbable connections in the case, with Iran’s secret service supposedly asking Los Zetas, a Mexican drug cartel, to carry out the assassination as a paid hit, only to find itself dealing with a Drug Enforcement Agency informant. “Nobody could make that up, right?” she asked rhetorically.

As a matter of fact, they can and they have. Paid FBI informants posing as terrorists entrapped the so-called Liberty City Seven in Miami in a fabricated plot to blow up the Sears Tower in Chicago. There was the case of the Newburgh Four, in which a veteran FBI

agent-provocateur, offering large amounts of cash, entrapped four young African-American men in a plot to put explosives in New York area synagogues. Like dozens of such incidents, these plots never involved any real threat and would never have existed without government agents creating them as part of the phony “war on terrorism.”

In the alleged plot to kill the Saudi ambassador, the supposed “mastermind” of the conspiracy is one Mansoor Arbabsiar, an Iranian-American failed used car dealer from Texas. He was previously arrested for passing bad checks, and college associates recall him as being hostile to the Iranian regime. That Iran’s Quds Force, considered by most analysts to be one of the world’s more professional covert agencies, would entrust what ostensibly would have been the first act of Iranian terrorism on US soil to such an individual is preposterous on its face.

The most plausible explanation for this unlikely set of circumstances is that Mr. Arbabsiar became entrapped in a drug deal by US agents, who then made him the lynchpin of a US frame-up of Iran on terror charges.

It is due to the improbable character of this “Hollywood script” that US officials, from President Obama on down, have joined in branding the Iranian regime as “reckless.”

Senator John McCain, Obama’s Republican opponent in 2008, stressed Thursday that the “ridiculously inept” character of the alleged plot only proved how “reckless” Iran is, and what a “real serious problem” its acquiring of nuclear weapons would pose.

Apparently, Washington’s definition of “reckless” refers to any action taken by another government that cuts across US interests and so might make it a target for US aggression. For a decade Iran has faced a relentless war of nerves with the US, the most powerful imperialist power on the planet, which has occupied neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan, surrounding Iran with a ring of US military bases. How can Iran’s behavior be described as “reckless”, outside of its failure to obey American dictates?

If the word “reckless” applies in this case, it is to the policies of Washington itself. Once again, US imperialism is seeking to advance its global interests by means of crude provocations and

threats of military aggression. The fabricated “terror plot” is not an isolated event.

Obama waxed indignant at his Thursday press conference about Iran allegedly acting outside “accepted norms of international behavior.” But the US itself is the only country that has asserted the “right” to assassinate anyone in the world it deems a potential threat, including its own citizens. It has even created a secret sub-committee of the National Security Council to draw up “kill lists” of those to be murdered by Predator drones, in gross violation of international law.

Iran has been on the receiving end of these kinds of operations, with a string of assassinations of leading scientists involved in its nuclear program, as well as lethal terrorist attacks by CIA-backed armed groups. In 2008, it was revealed that the Bush administration had issued a presidential finding authorizing a covert CIA destabilization campaign against Iran, which Congress then funded to the tune of \$400 million. This operation continues under Obama.

After a decade of military debacles in Afghanistan and Iraq, Washington is now threatening to launch a new war against the country that lies between them, Iran, with its 75 million people and the world’s fourth-largest proven oil reserves. This turn to war is driven by both the strategic failures of Washington’s previous adventures, and the ever-sharpening contradictions of crisis-ridden American capitalism. A war against Iran would prove a far bloodier and more catastrophic enterprise than those that preceded it.

Iran has not backed down to Washington’s onslaught. Instead it has denounced the charges as “vulgar” and “fabricated”, while asserting, with much justification, that the entire affair is meant to divert public attention in the US from the country’s deepening economic crisis and mounting social unrest.

The way in which the US has moved towards open confrontation with Iran together with the domestic context calls to mind the manner in which internal crisis drove the Nazi regime that headed imperialist Germany to war in the 1930s.

The late British historian Tim Mason wrote in his *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class* the following about the turn to war by Hitler’s Third Reich:

“The economic, social and political tensions within the Reich became steadily more acute after the summer of 1937; while it seems safe to say that Hitler himself understood very little of their technical content, it can be proved that he was informed of their existence and was aware of their gravity. If the existence in the winter of 1937-8 of a conscious connection in Hitler’s mind between this general crisis and the need for a more dynamic foreign policy cannot yet be established, functional relationships between these two aspects may nonetheless be suggested...

“The only ‘solution’ open to this regime of the structural tensions and crises produced by dictatorship and rearmament was more dictatorship and rearmament, then expansion, then war and terror, then plunder and enslavement. The stark, ever-present alternative was collapse and chaos, and so all solutions were temporary, hectic, hand-to-mouth affairs, increasingly barbaric improvisations around a brutal theme.”

Obama is not Hitler and the US has not fallen to fascism. Nonetheless, similar “functional relationships” can be detected between, on the one hand, the economic and social crisis gripping the United States and, on the other, the increasingly reckless character of the operations of the US military and intelligence apparatus on the world stage.

Changing what needs to be changed, there is the same “temporary, hectic, hand-to-mouth” character of the US administration’s policies. They too are characterized by wild and “barbaric” improvisations, from the drone war and political provocations in Pakistan, to the war for “regime change” in Libya and now to a belligerent confrontation with Iran.

The turn toward war abroad and the promotion of “terror” scares at home is driven largely by domestic considerations. Increasingly nervous over mass social discontent and the threat of renewed class struggle reflected in the nationwide demonstrations against Wall Street, the American ruling elite is desperate to somehow change the subject. This consideration undoubtedly played a pivotal role in the decision to make public the mad allegations of an Iranian plot to kill the Saudi ambassador.

This strange case constitutes a serious warning. The decision to turn it into an international confrontation is indicative of increasing disorientation at the highest levels of the American state. No one knows precisely how the events flowing from it will unfold, but it seems that the question is not if, but when, another major war will be sprung upon the American people.

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