

The witch-hunt of Günter Grass and the preparations for war against Iran

Ulrich Rippert
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In the political poem “What Must Be Said,” the author of *The Tin Drum* accused the Israeli government of preparing to launch a war of aggression against Iran and endangering world peace.

Günter Grass pointed out that Israel secretly possessed nuclear weapons and had neither signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nor permitted weapons inspections. Yet it was Iran, whose government had signed the NPT and which granted access to inspectors, that was accused of building nuclear weapons and punished for it, although no evidence had been produced to back up the charge.

Grass also spoke out against Germany supplying U-boats to Israel and cynically calling them reparations for the crimes of the Nazi dictatorship. He urged all who were concerned about Israel’s war policy to break their silence and not allow themselves to be intimidated by the “ubiquitous” accusation of anti-Semitism.

The reaction was swift. Fierce media attacks on Grass were the prelude to a propaganda war recalling the jingoism on the eve of World War I and World War II. Grass was insulted, denounced as an anti-Semite, and attacked for his brief membership in the Waffen SS when he was a teenager in the final weeks of the war. The actual target of Grass’s criticism—the preparation of a war of aggression against Iran—was either ignored or openly defended.

Those leading the attack are journalists who have long been known as propagandists of imperialist war in the Middle East.

One of the first to speak out was the journalist and editor of *Die Zeit*, Josef Joffe. In 2003, Joffe enthusiastically supported the US military offensive and colonial subjugation of Iraq. At that time, the lies about supposed Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (of which there was no evidence) played a similar role as the propaganda about Iran’s nuclear weapons today.

Die Welt, Henryk M. Broder launched a tirade of abuse against Grass, accusing him of anti-Semitism and playing down the crimes of the Nazis. Broder began his journalistic career at the Hamburg pornographic tabloid *St. Pauli Nachrichten*. He is known for his vulgar journalistic attacks. He, like Joffe, was a cheerleader for the Iraq war.

Now Broder demands that the Europeans help the United States and Israel in the “disarmament of the mullahs.” His book *Hooray, We Surrender* (Berlin, 2006) is a racist attack on Muslims and Islam. Before his murderous rampage, Norwegian fascist and terrorist Anders Breivik posted a political manifesto in which he repeatedly and approvingly quoted Broder.

Grass’s warnings of an Israeli military strike against Iran are more than justified. Every day, new articles and reports appear on the issue.

Last week, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak made it clear that Israel retained the option of a military strike against Iran during the current negotiations over Iran’s nuclear programme. In an interview with the Israeli Army broadcaster, Barak doubted that negotiations would lead to a satisfactory conclusion. He called for a swift end to the talks and stressed, “Any loss of time is against our interests.”

It is striking that this interview, which was widely reported in the Israeli and international press, has not been mentioned in the German media.

Back in February, *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius referred to the intensive preparations for war in Israel. US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said he believed it was “very likely that Israel will strike against Iran in April, May or June—before Iran, as Israel calls it, enters an ‘immunity zone’ and begins to build a nuclear bomb.”

Just a day before, Panetta’s Israeli counterpart, Barak, had said in the Knesset (parliament) that a military strike

would take place soon. “The nuclear programme of Iran’s military is slowly but surely reaching the final stage,” he claimed, and warned: “Those who say ‘later’ could soon find that it is too late.” Barak’s remarks were addressed to the administration in Washington.

Die Zeit also published an article at that time entitled “The Fear of War in the Middle East is Growing.” It wrote: “The sabre-rattling gets louder. The US is currently conducting mega-naval manoeuvres on the east coast of America involving 25 warships, 20,000 soldiers and a simulated landing operation.”

That was in mid-February. Since then, further talks have taken place in Washington and the sanctions against Iran have intensified dramatically.

Any disagreements between Washington and Jerusalem are purely tactical. While Israel intends to remain the dominant military power in the Middle East, the Obama administration is pursuing more ambitious goals. Washington wants to secure its hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East and regards the Iranian regime as the biggest obstacle to its ambitions. Since the beginning of the year, the US has constantly increased the pressure on Iran.

A glance at history makes clear what is at stake. Since the end of the Second World War, Iran has played a central role in US foreign policy. One of the first major post-war conflicts that erupted between the United States and the USSR concerned Soviet troops stationed in northern Iran. At that time, the Soviet Union withdrew its troops in order to avoid the risk of an armed conflict with the United States and Britain.

The subsequent radicalization of the Iranian workers led the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh to nationalize the oil companies and the country’s oil reserves in the early 1950s. In 1953, the CIA organized so-called “Operation Ajax”—the overthrow of the democratically elected Mossadegh government and the return of Shah Reza Pahlavi to the Peacock Throne.

During the following quarter-century, the Shah’s regime was a loyal defender of American interests in the Persian Gulf. The mainstay of his regime was SAVAK, the secret police who tortured and murdered the Shah’s political opponents.

The good relations between the United States and the Shah’s regime were strategically very important for Washington. US national security advisor and later Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote in the first volume of his memoirs, *White House Years*: “Under the leadership of the Shah, the land bridge between Asia and

Europe, on which often hung the fate of the world’s history, was firmly in the hands of the Americans and the West.”

The overthrow of the Shah by the revolution of 1979 changed strategic relations in the Middle East and Central Asia to the disadvantage of the United States. Although the Khomeini regime quickly turned against the working class and many of the Shah’s opponents at home, it never resumed the old foreign relations. The US government responded to the loss of their man in the Persian Gulf by upgrading relations with Israel.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union twenty years ago, Iran has moved even more to the centre of the geo-strategic interests of the United States. Washington is determined to restore the situation that existed before 1979. It wants to force regime-change and install a puppet government in Tehran. After pro-American presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi failed in the 2009 elections, and the bourgeois opposition “Green Movement” was unable to bring about regime-change, the preparations for war against Iran were stepped up.

The conflict between the US and China plays an important role in this regard. The war against Libya was also aimed at curbing China’s growing influence in the Middle East and Africa. The war resulted in Chinese projects worth several billion dollars being placed at risk, and 36,000 Chinese workers were forced to leave Libya. A war against Iran would have far worse economic consequences for China. Eleven percent of its oil imports come from Iran, and China has been investing heavily in Iran’s construction and energy industries.

When Günter Grass warns of a war against Iran and a threat to world peace, he is completely correct. His critics want to suppress discussion about the catastrophic consequences of an Israeli-American military strike against Tehran and pave the way for German participation in such an imperialist crime.



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