

Bush Spins Iran's Centrifuges

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Those who know about the centrifuges used to refine uranium tell me they must spin at an almost unrivaled velocity—almost unrivaled, because Bush administration statements are being spun at equivalent speed by White House and corporate media spiders.

Without weaver-in-chief Karl Rove and former presidential spokesman Tony Snow, it is amateur hour at the White House. And the theater would be as funny as *The Daily Show* were the subject not so serious.

Judging from President George W. Bush's words and body language he is far from giving up on ways to "justify" attacking Iran's nuclear program—weapons-related or not. He appears convinced he must honor the pledge he has made to Israel's current leaders to eliminate what they have called an "existential threat" to Israel.

This came through in a particularly pointed way when an agitated president ad-libbed about the possibility of World War III, complaining loudly, "We've got a leader in Iran who has announced he wants to destroy Israel."

Not at all helpful to the president was the judgment of U.S. intelligence that the Iranians halted their nuclear weapons-related program in 2003, a judgment the administration made public this week.

The White House knew only too well that this bombshell could not be kept secret very long—the more so since Congress' intelligence committees, Pentagon brass, and senior CIA officials reportedly made it clear they would go public if the White House did not publish a sanitized version of the key judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate.

On Oct. 26, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell launched a trial balloon, declaring he would no longer declassify and release summaries of National Intelligence Estimates, but that balloon was quickly shot down.

So what can Cheney and Bush do now to "justify" striking Iran?

Several months ago, about the time new intelligence established there was no active nuclear weapons program in Iran, there were signs in the rhetoric coming from the president and Gen. David Petraeus that the argument was going to hinge on claims that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards were supplying the wherewithal to kill our troops in Iraq.

Petraeus was clearly ready to play that game, but his superior, Admiral "we're-not-going-to-do-Iran-on-my-watch" William Fallon would not play along. And neither would the Joint

Chiefs of Staff.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates is now back from a brief visit to Iraq and his caution so far on this issue suggests he is paying more heed to Fallon than to Petraeus.

In other words, there is no sign that Gates wants to abet using Iranian meddling in Iraq as a pretext for a military strike on Iran. Gates's well-deserved chameleon-like reputation counsels caution here, since a word from Cheney or Bush could conceivably make Gates a fervent champion of this pretext for war.

But people do mature; Gates is smart; and I doubt he would want to be so closely associated with starting a regional war, if not WW III.

Spinning Centrifuges

So where does that leave the beleaguered president?

This week's spinning by the White House and subservient media suggests the administration still thinks it can make a case for war, by obfuscating the nuclear program in Iran.

This has become clearer as administration mouthpieces blur the distinction between uranium enrichment for a civilian energy use (permitted to signatories of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty) and the much more demanding requirements of a nuclear weapons program.

The spinners have resurrected the discredited argument that Iran's nuclear program must be for weapons, because Iran's oil and gas should suffice to meet all its energy requirements.

Thus, the administration's *Pravda*, also known as the editorial page of the *Washington Post*, on Dec. 5: "Iran's massive overt investment in uranium enrichment meanwhile proceeds...even though Tehran has no legitimate use for enriched uranium."

And thus another major administration mouthpiece, also known as the *New York Times*, on Dec. 6, in an op-ed, "In Iran We Trust?" by Valerie Lincy and Gary Milhollin: "Why, by the way, does Iran even want a nuclear energy program, when it is sitting on an enormous pool of oil that is now skyrocketing in value."

This is a familiar canard; i.e., that Iran's claim that its nuclear program is for electricity production is given the lie by its own large oil and natural gas reserves, so uranium enrichment must be for nuclear weapons development.

Condoleezza Rice took that line over a year and a half ago (shades of those (in)famous aluminum tubes that she said could "only" be used in a nuclear application but turned out to be for conventional artillery).

At about the same time Dick Cheney complained that since the Iranians are "already sitting on an awful lot of oil and gas, nobody can figure why they need nuclear as well to generate energy."

It all makes me think of Harry Truman's complaint: "They must think we were born yesterday!"

Rice and Cheney have selective memories—or take us for fools.

Back in 1976—with Gerald Ford president, Dick Cheney his chief of staff, Donald Rumsfeld secretary of defense—the Ford administration bought the Shah’s argument that Iran needed a nuclear program to meet its future energy requirements.

That argument, of course, is even more valid today, with the price that can be obtained for oil and the specter of Peak Oil.

Cheney and Rumsfeld persuaded a hesitant President Ford to offer Iran a deal that would have meant at least \$6.4 billion for U.S. corporations like Westinghouse and General Electric, had not the Shah been unceremoniously dumped three years later.

The offer included a reprocessing facility for a complete nuclear fuels cycle—essentially the same capability that the U.S. and Israel now insist Iran cannot be allowed to acquire.

A pity that our domesticated media seem unable to catch the disingenuousness.

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