

Changing course on Iran

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Ahead of the crucial meeting of the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which starts today in Vienna, Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the IAEA, has greeted the recent accord between the IAEA and Iran as “[a significant step forward](#)”.

Following the July visit of the IAEA to Tehran, agreement was reached on an action plan with defined modalities and timetable to address all outstanding ambiguities in relation to Iran’s nuclear programme within a strict timeframe until November. As the first outcome of this agreement and a strong vindication of its workability, the August 27 announcement of the IAEA [cleared Iran](#)’s plutonium experiments – labelled by the US as major evidence of Iran’s weaponisation programme. Furthermore, according to a statement, “the Agency has been able to verify the non-diversion of the declared nuclear material at the enrichment facilities in Iran and has therefore concluded that it remains in peaceful use.”

Notwithstanding this very promising development, the US government has described Iran’s cooperation with the IAEA as an attempt by the Iranian government to distract from its alleged intention of developing nuclear weapons. This US description prompted the following response from ElBaradei in an [interview with Spiegel](#): “I am familiar with these accusations. They are completely untrue. It’s not possible to manipulate us. We are not naive and we do not take sides.” Dismissive of the head of IAEA, the US, with some supportive words from Gordon Brown, has recklessly called for [a third round of sanctions](#) against Iran by the UN security council, which will no doubt jeopardise the Iran-IAEA agreement as Iran has already warned.

In response to the US stance, ElBaradei warned on Friday that some of the rhetoric against Iran is a reminder of the prelude to the [invasion of Iraq](#) and firmly supported the IAEA agreement with Iran. In this context, and faced with the inevitable prospect of Russia vetoing any new sanctions against Iran, the US then adopted a more diplomatic veneer. The US Ambassador to Vienna, Gregory Schulte, while [acknowledging](#) the potential of the work plan for resolving “historical questions”, reiterated the US persistence that Iran stops its uranium enrichment programme or face sanctions, pressing to force Iran to open “manufacturing and military facilities” to inspection.

In fact, the Bush-Cheney leadership has shown no interest in the resolution of the outstanding problems between the IAEA and Iran since its principal aim is to grossly distort and exaggerate these issues in order to use them as a false pretext for a military action against Iran, very much like the hysteria it created over the alleged but non-existent weapons of mass destruction in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq.

Thus, in contradiction to the recent findings of the IAEA and the agreed work plan with Iran, George Bush, in his belligerent speech of August 28, raising the prospect of US [war against Iran](#), falsely warned that Iran's nuclear programme was spreading the "shadow of nuclear holocaust" over the Middle East. Given the completely discredited WMD charges against Iraq such accusations against Iran are hardly convincing, which is why the US has, since early this year, launched a new propaganda campaign to make Iran a scapegoat for its failures in Iraq and Afghanistan and create a *casus belli* by trying to implicate the Iranian government in supporting the Iraqi anti-occupation forces with roadside bombs that kill American soldiers. In line with this strategy, Bush declared in his speech: "Iran's leaders ... cannot escape responsibility for aiding attacks against coalition forces ... The Iranian regime must halt these actions. And until it does, I will take actions necessary to protect our troops. I have authorised our military commanders in Iraq to confront Tehran's murderous activities."

However, the US allegations of Iranian involvement in aiding attacks against the coalition forces in Iraq have not been supported by any evidence and, as recently as in the last few weeks, President Karzai and Prime Minister Maliki praised Iran. The British foreign secretary, David Miliband, admitted in his [interview](#) with the Financial Times that there was no evidence of Iran's complicity in violence and instability in Iraq.

Strikingly though, their failure to produce a case to attack Iran has not deterred Bush and Cheney to try to sell their new war of aggression to the US public thanks to the massive demonisation of Iran by the western media. If unchallenged, their bellicose statements and call for new sanctions will pave the way for such an assault in what is eerily reminiscent of the prelude to the invasion of Iraq. There are strong warnings from intelligence sources that massive military strikes on Iran's nuclear, military, political and economic infrastructure are ready for execution within the next few months with its widely predicted catastrophic consequences for the people of Iran, the region and the whole world.

Today, a delegation of Iranian academics and MPs alarmed by the threat of an imminent US attack on Iran are urging the Brown government to clearly distance itself from the pursuit of aggressive US foreign policy, to denounce US war plans, oppose another round of sanctions on Iran and persuade the EU as a whole to do the same. The British government, and EU, must insist that the IAEA-Iran agreement be allowed to work within the agreed timeline without any act of sabotage by the US so that the remaining outstanding issues over Iran's nuclear programme are resolved in a peaceful way. Otherwise, if the EU again follows the US to support another round of sanctions on Iran, then it will be complicit in preparing the ground for a new neoconservative illegal war of aggression.

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