

Congressional Shame and Duplicity

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The latest October Reuters/Zogby Index shows record low approval ratings for George Bush and Congress - 24% for the president that looks almost giddy compared to the bottom-scraping 11% level for the nation's lawmakers. It's more evidence that the criminal class in Washington is bipartisan and hoping November, 2008 will change things is pure fantasy.

A voter groundswell sent a message last November to end the Iraq war and occupation. Instead, the Democrat-led 110th Congress continues to fund it generously. In May, the House overwhelmingly passed HR 1585, the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act. It calls for \$506.8 billion for DOD plus \$141.8 billion (of the \$150.5 billion White House request) for ongoing Iraq and Afghanistan operations. The Senate followed with a similar bill on October 1 with only three opposing votes against it. Neither bill proposed an Iraq withdrawal timeline, and final legislation has yet to be sent to the president.

Add on further amounts like George Bush's latest \$46 billion request putting FY 2008 supplemental war-funding above \$196 billion and rising. Congress will approve it and more in spite of Democrats signaling a protracted budget showdown ahead. The only showdown will be over how much pork will be added to the final appropriation and for what purpose.

Democrats also back the administration's push to attack Iran by echoing what the Israeli Lobby calls "The Iranian Threat." War with Iran is AIPAC's top priority, and key Democrats in Congress are on board hyping a non-existent threat to prepare the public for what may be coming. Earlier in March, Speaker Pelosi removed a provision from an appropriations bill that would have required George Bush to get congressional approval before attacking Iran. Then in July, the Senate unanimously (97 - 0) passed the Lieberman amendment that practically endorses war if it's declared. It affirmed George Bush's baseless charges that Tehran funds, trains and arms Iraqi resistance fighters "who are contributing to the destabilization of Iraq and are responsible for the murder of members of the United States Armed Forces."

The House added its voice on September 25 by voting 397 - 16 for the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act of 2007 that imposes sanctions on non-US companies investing in Iran's oil sector. The next day the Senate acted again by overwhelmingly (79 - 22) passing the Kyl-Lieberman amendment that calls for US policy to "combat, contain and (stop Iran by use of) diplomatic, economic, intelligence and military instruments." Other bellicose language in the resolution stated:

— "the United States should designate Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp as a foreign terrorist organization....and place (it) on the list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists....it should be the policy of the United States to stop inside Iraq the violent activities and destabilizing influence of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, its foreign facilitators such as Lebanese Hezbollah, and its indigenous Iraqi proxies."

This measure helped smooth the way for George Bush's October 25 unilateral imposition of sanctions discussed below. It was an unprecedented move against another nation's military. Senator Jim Webb (voting no) said provides "a backdoor method of gaining congressional validation for military action, without one hearing (or) serious debate (and that the action) is Dick Cheney's fondest pipe dream."

George Bush acted provocatively twice. At his October 17 news conference, he menacingly said he believes Iran "want(s) to have the capacity, the knowledge in order to make a nuclear weapon....it's in the world's interests to prevent them from doing so....If Iran had a nuclear weapon, it would be a dangerous threat to world peace....So....if you're interested in avoiding World War III" this possibility must be prevented implying war (potentially using first-strike nuclear weapons) is the way to do it.

On October 25 Bush acted again to counter China and Russia's opposition to sweeping UN Security Council measures. He unilaterally imposed harsh new sanctions against Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRGC), its Quds Force, three state-owned banks and over 20 Iranian companies. The IRGC was named as "proliferators of weapons of mass destruction," and the Quds Force was called a "supporter of terrorism."

Democrats buy this stuff and ignore IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei's latest October 28 statement that repeated his earlier ones. He said he had no evidence Iran is building or seeks to build nuclear weapons and accused the Bush administration of adding "fuel to the fire" with its bellicose rhetoric. The "loyal opposition" prefers instead to accept White House press secretary Dana Perino's October 29 charge that Iran "is a country that is enriching and reprocessing uranium and the reason one does that is to lead towards a nuclear weapon."

This accusation and new administration sanctions ratchet up tension further and amount to what one analyst called "a warning shot across the bow (that stops short of) a signal we're going to war," but it's got other observers thinking the likelihood is greater than ever with Congress on board. The move also caught Vladimir Putin's attention in Lisbon where he was attending an EU leader summit. "Why worsen the situation and bring it to a dead end" with sanctions or military action," he said. He then added a pointed reference to George Bush stating: "Running around like a madman with a razor blade, waving it around, is not the best way to resolve the situation."

Newly imposed sanctions won't affect US companies. They're already barred from doing business directly in Iran, but they do target their foreign subsidiaries and other foreign-based ones with threats of penalties and exclusion from the US market. It remains to be seen how effective they'll be as key EU countries as well as China, Russia, India and others have growing economic ties to Iran. They won't be eager to sever them or join the US campaign for a wider Middle East war. In addition, Iran is a major oil supplier. With the price of crude touching \$96 a barrel on November 1 (and December futures up to \$125), any cutoff or severe reduction of supply guarantees it'll top \$100 and make a global economic slowdown or recession much more likely.

Nonetheless, the Bush war machine presses on with congressional Democrats aboard. Presidential candidates from both parties support Bush's move, and Democrat front runner Hillary Clinton is as hawkish as Joe Lieberman and John McCain. They both endorse attacking Iran, and McCain believes striking Iran's nuclear sites "is a possibility that is maybe closer to reality than we are discussing tonight."

Clinton is just as bellicose, is close to AIPAC, and in an earlier speech said: "The security and freedom of Israel must be decisive and remain at the core of any American approach to the Middle East. (We dare not) waver from this (firm) commitment." She was also quoted in the current issue of Foreign Affairs saying: "Iran poses a long-term strategic challenge to the United States, our NATO allies and Israel. It is the country that most practices state-sponsored terrorism, and it uses its surrogates to supply explosives that kill US troops in Iraq....(Iran) must not not be permitted to build or acquire nuclear weapons. If Iran (won't comply with) the will of the international community, all options must remain on the table."

The only give in her position (that's hardly any at all) is wanting congressional approval for any future military action. Up to now, that's been pro forma rubber stamp. It'll be no different if George Bush orders an attack as congressional Democrat leaders, including Hillary Clinton, have already signaled their approval.

John Richardson wrote on October 18 in Esquire.com that two former high-ranking Bush administration National Security Council officials fear the worst. They're Middle East experts Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann, and they're reacting publicly. They believe war with Iran has been in the cards for years, and we're "getting closer and closer to the tripline." Key for them was the unprecedented move to name Iran's Revolutionary Guard Quds Force a terrorist organization.

Richardson lays out what they think will happen: UN diplomacy will fail because Russia and China won't agree to harsh sanctions. Iran's policies won't change without "any meaningful incentive from the US. That will trigger a....White House (response with) a serious risk (George Bush) would decide to order an attack on the Iranian nuclear installations and probably a wider target zone." This, in turn, "would result in a dramatic increase in attacks on US (Iraq) forces, attacks by proxy forces like Hezbollah, and an unknown reaction from....Afghanistan and Pakistan, where millions admire Iran's resistance." Attacking Iran "could engulf America in a war with the entire Muslim world." The article also quotes former CIA officer and author Robert Baer (from Time magazine) saying an unnamed highly placed White House official believes "IEDs are a casus belli for this administration. There will be an attack on Iran."

The London Times raised the betting odds further for one in its October 21 report. Columnist Michael Smith wrote: UK defense sources disclosed that "British (Special Air Service - SAS) forces have crossed into Iran several times (along with other special forces, the Australian SAS and American special-operation troops) as part of a secret border war against the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Al-Quds special forces." They engaged in "at least half a dozen intense firefights" along the Iran-Iraq border in what looks like deliberate US-UK efforts to provoke Iran into providing justification for a major American attack.

Speculation one looms has been around for some time, and if it comes, it won't surprise observers like Iran expert Gary Sick. He was a military advisor to three US presidents and was recently quoted in Germany's Der Spiegel magazine saying: The recent shift in US emphasis to "Iran's support for terrorism in Iraq....is a complete change and is potentially dangerous." That's because it's much easier proving (true or not) Iran supports Iraqi resistance fighters than it poses an imminent nuclear threat to the world.

Der Spiegel also reports on a leak "by an official close to" Dick Cheney that he's "already asked for a backroom analysis of how a war with Iran might begin (and in) the scenario concocted by (his) strategists, Washington's first step would be to convince Israel to fire

missiles at Iran's (Natanz) uranium enrichment plant." That would provoke Iran to retaliate and give the Bush administration the excuse it needs "to attack military targets and nuclear facilities in Iran." That's OK with Democrats if it comes including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi Black Agenda Report writer Margaret Kimberly calls a "Quisling" and an "absolute disaster for the Democrat Party and....the entire nation (because of her) eagerness to cooperate with the Bush regime (and) her incompetence in leading Congress."

Other key Democrats share those qualities and that assures extremist Attorney General nominee Michael Mukasey's confirmation won't be challenged. That's in spite of reports top Senate Judiciary Committee Democrats Chairman Leahy and Majority Whip Durbin say their votes depend on his admitting waterboarding is torture. During his confirmation hearing, Mukasey was evasive and noncommittal.

When asked during questioning, he incredulously claimed not to know what waterboarding is even though it's been around for centuries and what it entails is common knowledge. Mukasey would only say "IF (waterboarding) is torture, it is unconstitutional." He then repeated the White House line "We don't torture" even though he knows DOJ legal opinions confirm the Bush administration condones the practice by endorsing "the harshest interrogation techniques ever used by the Central Intelligence Agency."

He should also know about the ACLU's new "Administration of Torture" book based on FOIA requested evidence. It documents that "marching orders" for torture came from Donald Rumsfeld so the White House had to be involved as well. That includes George Bush and Alberto Gonzales, who in 2002 as White House Counsel, called the Geneva Conventions "quaint" and "obsolete" and as Attorney General authorized physical and psychological brutality as official administration policy.

Mukasey promises business as usual as AG and confirmed it by claiming "I don't think (Guantanamo prisoners) are mistreated." He also supports the president's right to imprison US citizens without charge and deny "unlawful enemy combatants" their habeas rights, but that's OK with Democrats on the Judiciary Committee with a large party majority sure to agree.

In a follow-up letter Senator Leahy requested, Mukasey was just as evasive and noncommittal as during his confirmation hearing. He sidestepped commenting on presidential surveillance powers limits beyond what FISA allows and continued to avoid admitting waterboarding is torture. Instead he said: "...there is a real issue (whether) the techniques presented and discussed at the hearing and in your letter are even part of any program of questioning detainees."

He then added if confirmed he'll concentrate on "solving problems cooperatively with Congress," advise George Bush appropriately on any "technique" he determines to be unlawful, and the president is bound by constitutional and treaty obligations that prohibit torture. This man and the president defile the law and practically boast about it, but Democrats will confirm him anyway as the next Attorney General.

House Democrats Pass New Terrorism Prevention Law

Almost without notice, the House overwhelmingly (404 - 6) passed the Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007 (HR 1955) on October 23 some are calling "the thought crime prevention bill." It now moves to the Senate where if passed and signed

by George Bush will establish a commission and Center of Excellence to study and act against thought criminals.

The bill's language hides its true intent as "violent radicalization" and "homegrown terrorism" are whatever the administration says they are. Violent radicalization is defined as "adopting or promoting an extremist belief system (to facilitate) ideologically based violence to advance political, religious or social change." Homegrown terrorism is used to mean "the use, planned use, or threatened use, of force or violence by a group or individual born, raised, or based and operating primarily with the United States or any (US) possession to intimidate or coerce the (US) government, the civilian population....or any segment thereof (to further) political or social objectives."

Along with other repressive laws enacted post-9/11, HR 1955 may be used against any individual or group with unpopular views - those that differ from established state policies even when they're illegal as are many under George Bush. Prosecutors henceforth will be able to target anti-war protesters, believers in Islam, web editors, internet bloggers and radio and TV show hosts and commentators with views the bill calls "terrorist-related propaganda."

If this legislation becomes law, which is virtually certain, any dissenting anti-government action or opinion may henceforth be called "violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism" with stiff penalties for anyone convicted. This bill now joins the ranks of other repressive post-9/11 laws like Patriot I and II, Military Commissions and Protect America Acts that combined with this one are grievous steps toward a full-blown national security police state everyone should fear and denounce.

Blame it on Congress and the 110th Democrat-led one that was elected to end these practices but just made them worse....and there's still 14 months to go to the term's end with plenty of time left to vaporize Iran and end the republic if that's the plan.

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