

Countdown to the end of Bush-Cheney regime: War with Iran: What Could Happen If ... ?

If war is averted, hopefully a Democratic President may enter the White House, then, who knows? Dialogue with Iran?

By [Muriel Mirak-Weissbach](#)

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As the countdown to the end of the hated Bush-Cheney regime proceeds, calls for the U.S. and/or Israel to take military action against Iran, have been multiplying almost in inverse proportion. At the same time, the Islamic Republic has redoubled its efforts to thwart such aggression, in a two-pronged maneuver. On the one hand, the government, and the new leadership in the Majlis (parliament) under Ali Larijani, have reiterated Tehran's rejection of blackmail regarding the country's nuclear program; on the other, Iran has launched a campaign to engage its leading international interlocutors in discussion of concrete cooperation aimed at defusing, if not solving, major strategic crisis situations. The recent solution to the prolonged Lebanon crisis is but the most eloquent example of what could and can be achieved in pursuing peace in many crises plaguing the region, {if} Tehran's role and contribution were accepted.

That the war party is still committed to an attack against Iran, is no secret, and continues to be an item discussed daily in anti-war websites. Writing in Asia Times on May 27 (www.atimes.com and picked up by www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=9099), Muhammed Cohen revealed that there were plans for the Bush cabal to attack Iran by August. His "informed source" told him, that two members of the U.S. Senate, Sen. Diane Feinstein of California and Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana, informed of the plans, had intended to go public, but that their op-ed piece slated for the New York Times, had been blocked. The source, identified as "a retired U.S. career diplomat and former assistant secretary of state still active in the foreign affairs community," as well as an ambassador under the reign of Bush senior, told him there was a plan to launch air strikes against the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Qods force headquarters. Neo-con Daniel Pipes added his two cents, saying that if Barack Obama were elected in November, then President George W. Bush would wage war on Iran before leaving office.

In parallel, the issue of what to do about "unruly" Iran has been placed high on the agenda of the unofficial presidential contenders from the two major U.S. parties. John McCain, who apparently cannot function psychologically without deference to his de facto alter ego, George W. Bush, has assailed the presumed Democratic Party contender Barack Obama for his declared willingness to sit down and talk with Iran's leadership. Obama, for his part, not only qualified and requalified his openness to dialogue with Tehran, but focussed on Iran as a strategic threat to Israel — and therefore — the U.S., in a most unfortunate speech to AIPAC on June 4. One might argue, and with reason, that no speaker at AIPAC dare say anything that might conflict with the agenda of anti-Iran Zionist forces in Israel, but Obama

did not need to go so far. Not only, but Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, taking the podium at AIPAC a day later, lashed out at Iran, and demanded that Bush take appropriate measures. Olmert proceeded then to hold talks with lame-duck President Bush, in hopes of convincing him that the time were ripe for an Iran war. Israeli Transport Minister Shaul Mofaz, who is a former army chief and defence minister, was explicit: "If Iran continues with its program for developing nuclear weapons, we will attack it," he said in discussion with Yediot Ahronoth on June 6. "Attacking Iran, in order to stop its nuclear plans, will be unavoidable."

The option of an Israeli strike against Iran has been discussed at length, also on this website. What was quite unusual was that someone like Joschka Fischer, former foreign minister of Germany, would publicly warn against such an event. Fischer, whose chequered political career in the 1960s-1970s, rendered him, so to speak, a not-totally sovereign, independent player, was expected, as foreign minister, to make certain gestures to Israel, which he punctually did when in office. Now, however, the old '68er, of all people, comes out with a bloodcurdling forecast, featured in Lebanon's Daily Star May 30, and carried by Global Research June 1, entitled, "As things look, Israel may well attack Iran soon."

Iran's Global Proposal

What might Iran do, to prevent such an attack, be it from Washington or Tel Aviv? As reported on this website(www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=8868), Iran has been pursuing a global war-avoidance strategy based on forging ties with nations throughout Eurasia, beginning with Russia, China and India, and extending through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which it hopes to join as a full member. Iran's Eurasian policy is based on economic cooperation, especially in transportation and energy infrastructure, as well as security agreements. The same applies to its policy in the Persian Gulf.

The Islamic Republic announced last month that it had issued a proposal for solving the major problems in the world, through discussion and cooperation. The proposal, which has since been made public, has received nowhere near the attention it deserves. The document, entitled "The Islamic Republic of Iran's Proposed Package for Constructive Negotiations," was first presented to the Russians, then to the Chinese, the United Nations, EU, and so on. It starts from the premise that respect for justice, sovereignty, peace, democracy and different cultures, must be stressed, and proceeds to list areas of possible cooperation, such as "security issues, regional and international developments, nuclear energy, terrorism, democracy, etc." Iran proposes negotiations on these and other issues (drugs, the environment, economic, technological and other cooperation, especially energy), in which "the main objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to reach a comprehensive agreement, one that is based on collective goodwill — that will help to establish long-term cooperation between the parties, and will contribute to the sustainability and strength of regional and international security and a just peace."

Iran says it is ready to start negotiations on the following issues: protecting the "rights and dignity of [the] human being and respect for the culture of other nations"; and, advancing democracy regionally and worldwide in the context of respect for the rights of nations and national sovereignty. Here, the document makes specific reference to the possibility of solving certain burning regional issues. Such cooperation, it says, may occur in various regions, "most specifically in the Middle East, the Balkans, Africa and Latin America. Cooperation to assist the Palestinian people to find a comprehensive plan — one that is

sustainable, democratic and fair — to resolve the 60-year old Palestinian issue can become a symbol of such cooperation.” Common efforts against various security threats, like terrorism, drugs, organized crime, etc. are also solicited.

Regarding economic issues, the proposal stresses cooperation on energy, trade and investment, fighting poverty, and — most intriguing — “Reducing the impact of sharp price fluctuations and retooling global monetary and financial arrangements to benefit the nations of the world.”

The final paragraph deals extensively with the nuclear issue per se, in which Iran reiterates its commitment to the IAEA and NPT, and calls for “Establishing enrichment and nuclear fuel production consortiums in different parts of the world – including Iran.”

Russia’s Interested Response

This proposal has been pooh-poohed as mere rhetoric or “nothing new,” and has been essentially ignored. But it contains several extremely important ideas which deserve attention. Moscow, for one, has taken note. First, regarding the nuclear issue, Iran agrees here to the Russian proposal for international enrichment centers, for example in Russia, but repeats that it wants one in Iran as well. Secondly, the document raises suggestions for international cooperation to deal with the financial, monetary and economic crises that are ravaging the world. Finally, Iran proposes intervening directing to solve — not exacerbate — regional crises in the Middle East.

Regarding the nuclear issue, it is not coincidental perhaps that Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stated unequivocally in an interview to Le Monde on May 31, that he did {not} believe Iran were pursuing a weapons program. “I don’t think the Iranians are looking to make a nuclear bomb,” he said. “We have no reason to believe this.” He went on: “I should say that formally Iran hasn’t violated any rules. It even has the right to carry out enrichment.... I repeat there is no official basis for legal claims against Iran.” Putin elaborated Russia’s total rejection of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and explained his country’s enrichment idea. “We offered an international program of enrichment, because Iran is only part of the problem. A lot of countries are on the threshold of the peaceful use of nuclear energy. And this means that they will need enrichment technology. And if they create their own closed cycle to solve the problem, there will always be the suspicion that they could produce military grade uranium. It is difficult to control. That is why we propose carrying out the enrichment on the territory of those countries which are beyond suspicion because they already possess nuclear weapons,” (i.e. Russia.) In short, Russia still has hesitations regarding enrichment facilities on Iranian soil, but the discussion process is ongoing, and that is what is important.

As for the financial and monetary crises, it is quite unusual for Iran to address them in these terms. Here, the Iranian government, in talking about “retooling global monetary and financial arrangements to benefit the nations of the world,” is implicitly saying the current dollar-based system is collapsing and needs to be replaced. Russia’s new President Dmitry Medvedyev made the same point on June 7, in an address to the opening session of the 12th St. Petersburg Economic Forum

(www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=12757537and12757608&PageNum=0).

Medvedyev stated: “Russia’s role on global economic and raw markets enables us to take an

active part in the discussions of ways of concrete settlement of the above mentioned problems [problems on the world financial and raw materials markets]." According to a German radio report (Deutschlandfunk) on June 7, he said he did not believe that the U.S. could handle the crisis alone. ITAR-TASS reported that he proposed Russia as a site for such discussions, concretely that it organize an international conference this year with finance experts and scientists. He also suggested Moscow become "a powerful world financial center" and that the ruble become "one of the leading regional reserve currencies." ITAR-TASS headlined its coverage of the speech, "Medvedyev calls to reform global financial architecture."

Putting Out Regional Fires: Lebanon

The third area addressed in Iran's proposal, the settlement of regional crises, is potentially the most explosive, because it touches on what the Islamic Republic could contribute positively, were it allowed to. The case in point is the recent solution to the Lebanon crisis. After 19 unsuccessful attempts to convene Parliament to elect a new president, a U.S.-backed provocation by the Siniora government, led to the firing of a pro-Hezbollah security chief at Beirut airport, and the attempt to dismantle Hezbollah's communications system. The outbreak of armed hostility between the opposition and government circles, raised the spectre of a new civil war, and Hezbollah's takeover of part of the capital indicated that the correlation of forces would not favor the government. Then came the breakthrough in Doha, Qatar, where a large gathering of Lebanese political factions came to agreement on a political solution, to elect Gen. Michael Suleiman, and share power.

The details of the Lebanese deal are well known. What is less well known, is the role played by Iran. Significantly, the first foreign guest to be received by President Suleiman was Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki. Both he and Parliament speaker Nabih Berri were quoted expressing gratitude to Iran for its "help" in solving the crisis. Hezbollah leader Seyyed Hassan Nasrullah, in a remarkable address on May 26 (www.presstv.ir, June 1), thanked Iran, Syria, the Qataris and the Arab League for supporting this "victory for Lebanon itself."

According to well-informed Iranian sources, the renewed Lebanese hostilities alarmed both Damascus and Tehran, forcing them to act. Iran approached the Saudis, suggesting that they convene a gathering of the Lebanese factions, which Riyadh rejected. Qatar at that point picked up the proposal and moved on it. Iran pledged its support to organize the meeting, and to use its influence on those Lebanese forces allied to it. One Arab diplomatic source with good contacts to the U.S., noted that whatever the Qataris would do, must have been okayed — or at least not sabotaged — by some circles in Washington. If this reading is accurate, it has immense implications: to wit, that, were there to be a cessation of hostilities between the U.S. and Iran, then indeed the major crises threatening peace in the region, could be settled.

Palestine

The next immediate theatre of confrontation appears to be Gaza, where the Olmert government is threatening a new military incursion. In this context, the reports that Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas has proposed talks with Hamas, and that Hamas leader Ismail Hanniyeh has welcomed the idea, may also indicate some behind-the-scenes activities by Iran. It may or may not be coincidental that Ali Larijani, newly elected speaker of the Majlis (Parliament) spoke to Hanniyeh on June 2. At any rate, Reuters ran an unconfirmed report on June 7 (www.asharqalawsat.com/english/) that delegations of the two sides were in

Dakar, for talks with Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade to reach a common position vis a vis Israel. Wade's spokesman said, "The first phase is an inter-Palestinian phase" to be followed by negotiations planned in seven stages.

The Iranian global proposal contains a crucial reference to the Palestinian crisis, suggesting cooperation on a "comprehensive plan" that is "sustainable, democratic and fair." This means — notwithstanding continuing rhetorical statements by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, — that, were there to be an agreement struck between the Palestinians (i.e. Fatah and Hamas together) and Israel, then Tehran would not object. This was the official position of the Iranian government under former President Mohammad Khatami, and is implicit in the new package proposal.

Iraq

The other leading crisis to be dealt with is, of course, Iraq. Although the fourth round of tripartite talks, among Iraq, Iran and the U.S., has been put on ice for the time being, an exchange of views among the three is being aired indirectly in the press. The subject is the U.S.'s demand that Baghdad sign a Status of Forces Agreement (SFA) by July 31, and that Parliament ratify it well in advance of the expiration of the U.N. mandate, at year's end.

There is {no way} that this deal is going to go through. It will not be due to Iran's opposition (which has been made explicit by Parliament speaker Ali Larijani as well as former President Hashemi Rafsanjani), but to an organic political process inside Iraq, shaped by consciousness of the region's colonial past. Although no details have been made public by an obviously defensive and jittery U.S., leaks indicate that the deal would foresee permanent U.S. bases (numbering from 9 to 50, depending on the source), immunity for U.S. military as well as private contractors, the right to detain Iraqis and conduct military operations, and a de facto continuation of occupation, — perhaps for what John McCain has said could last 100 years.

Moqtadar al-Sadr's faction was the first to take to the streets on May 30 to protest the deal, and he vows to continue mass demonstrations every Friday until the draft has been scrapped. Mainstream Shi'ite parties, like the government coalition member United Iraqi Alliance under Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, have turned thumbs down on the idea, and the major Sunni parties and organizations, like the Association of Muslim Scholars and the National Accordance Front, have followed suit.

But far more important, is the intervention made by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the highest religious authority for all Shi'ites, currently based in Najaf, in Iraq. Al-Sistani said, essentially, that such a deal with the U.S. could occur only over his dead body. PressTV reported on May 24 that the Grand Ayatollah, in a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on May 22, had said he would not allow such an accord to be signed with "the U.S. occupiers" as long as he was alive. The same news outlet reported on June 5, that Ayatollah al-Sistani had set clear conditions for any agreement: as al-Hakim stated in a press conference following his meeting with the Grand Ayatollah, "The cleric stressed that any long-term pact in Iraq should should maintain four key terms including safeguarding Iraqis' interests, national sovereignty, national consensus and being presented to the Iraqi parliament for approval." He added that the current draft violates Iraqi sovereignty and does not remove it from the U.N. Charter's Chapter 7; nor does it safeguard Iraq's natural wealth. Although, as al-Hakim said, the leading cleric only set the parameters, leaving details up to the government, it is clear that al-Sistani is the supreme authority, and his stance is

decisive. It was al-Sistani who had forced the U.S. to accept a referendum on the constitution, as well as elections. He supported elections on grounds that only an elected government could end the occupation. His foremost concern remains ending the occupation. Any fatwa issued by al-Sistani, including a call to armed resistance against the occupiers, would be followed by Shi'ites everywhere without question.

As one regional expert put it to this author, the very idea of permanent occupation is repugnant, as it revives memories of the hated "capitulations" imposed by colonial powers, which guaranteed immunity to their lackeys. Such capitulations were imposed on Iran under the Shah in 1964, which led to organized protest under Ayatollah Khomeini, and his subsequent expulsion, followed by his organizing revolutionary forces from exile. One source mooted that, were such capitulations imposed on Iraq today, this could lead to actual revolution in Iraq over the next 5 years or so. Iraq has already experienced revolution against British-backed governments.

This specific matter of the SFA can be resolved only through strictly bilateral discussions between Washington and Baghdad, if there is to be any credibility given to Iraqi "sovereignty." Considering the depth and breadth of the opposition to new colonial-style capitulations, it is to be expected that no Iraqi government could acquiesce. Agreement would be tantamount to a suicide note. At that point, when the U.S. deal were defeated, the issue would be redefined: since the Bush administration's fantasies of permanent occupation will be rejected, how could an orderly withdrawal of U.S. and remaining occupation troops be organized, to ensure their safe withdrawal as well as security for a newly independent, sovereign Iraq? In this context, yes, Iran could and should become an interlocutor, alongside other neighboring states. If the U.S. elections in November bring a Democrat into the White House, and if that new President makes good on his campaign pledges to withdraw from Iraq, and to hold rational discussions with Iraq's neighbors (i.e. including Syria and Iran) on how to guarantee stability and security in the war-torn nation, then anything and everything is possible.

Questions in Washington

The U.S. election campaign to date has been an unprecedented battle, and a serious discussion of its internal workings go far beyond the scope of this article. But a few things may be said. First, both contenders for the Democratic Party nomination, Sen. Hillary Clinton and Sen. Barack Obama, have gone on record pledging their commitment to end the war, and withdraw U.S. troops, within relatively similar timeframes. Republican John McCain, on the other hand, has opted for permanent occupation. Whoever the final candidate voted at the Democratic Party convention in August may be, the consensus among the voters, both those who backed Hillary and those who backed Obama, is for a speedy end to the Iraq war.

Parallel to these party political developments, there have been a number of important events indicating that circles opposed to the Cheney-Bush war party, are mobilizing to prevent an "October surprise" attack on Iran. For one, Zbigniew Brzezinski co-authored an OpEd in the Washington Post on May 27 with William Odom, saying essentially that, since current policy had led nowhere, one had to reassess and redefine U.S. policy to Iran. Denouncing the "widely propagated notion of a suicidal Iran detonating its very first nuclear weapon against Israel" as "more the product of paranoia or demagoguery than of serious strategic calculus," the authors call for a diplomatic approach that "could help bring Iran back into its traditional role of strategic cooperation with the United States in stabilizing the Gulf region." At the same time, it was made known that Defense Secretary Robert Gates

fired two leading figures in the Air Force, allegedly in connection with that branch's security failures regarding nuclear materials. Informed sources in Washington have mooted that Gates's action -- taken months after the cited incident -- had less to do with that, than with plans for a U.S. aggression against Iran, an attack which the Air Force, would be deployed to execute. Gates is known to favor diplomacy over aggression.

In short, even if Bush, Cheney and their Israeli friends are huffing and puffing for war on Iran, influential political and military circles in the U.S. are moving to prevent it. If war can be averted until a new, hopefully Democratic President may enter the White House, then, who knows? Dialogue with Iran might even come back on the agenda.

The author can be reached at mirak.weissbach@googlemail.com

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