

International Mobilization To Stop U.S. Attack on Iran

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Global Research, January 24, 2007

Dissident News 24 January 2007

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Anyone, including those in Iranian political circles, who cherished the illusion that the Cheney-Bush cabal was not committed to a new war in Southwest Asia, has had to abandon such dreams in the wake of George W. Bush's Jan. 10 speech on his "new" policy for Iraq. The so-called "surge" in troop strength for Iraq which Bush announced, was recognized, correctly, by all in the region, as a commitment to open a new war front, this time against Iran or Syria. This analysis, which EIR had been circulating for weeks, including during a visit to Tehran in late November-early December, was finally embraced as the correct reading.

Bush said that he would not only deploy 21,500 more troops to Iraq, but that he would pursue foreign elements working with the insurgency (read: Syria and Iran). Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad both echoed the new policy. Not only would the U.S. forces now pursue Iranian and Syrian elements inside Iraq, suspected of working with the insurgency, but they would also engage in "hot pursuit" into Iran itself. National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, when asked by ABC's George Stephanopoulos, whether he thought the Administration did not have the authority to engage in cross-border incursions into Iran, said, "I didn't say that."

Thus, what is "new" in the crazy line emanating from the White House, is not the number of troops to be beefed up in Iraq. What is "new" is the propaganda line being spread to justify military action against Iran. Due to the fact that the U.S. has not succeeded in producing any smoking gun to show that Iran's nuclear program were military, and in fact, could not do so, it is difficult for Washington to present the nuclear program as a casus belli, even despite the unfortunate UN Security Council's December resolution, calling on Iran to suspend its enrichment activities. The new indictment against Iran is therefore that it has been feeding the anti-U.S. resistance in Iraq with men and matériel.

'Sheer Insanity'

Combined with the highly visible increase in U.S. military deployments to the Persian Gulf, the President's announcement has led to a dramatic escalation of activity opposing military action against Iran on Capital Hill, and in other quarters. Leading Senators, including Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), Joe Biden (D-Del.), Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), and Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) have come forward to assert that the President has no authority to do something as insane as to attack Iran. Legislation on that precise point has already been introduced by a group of Republicans and Democrats in the House, and can be expected to be pursued in the Senate as well. Columnists are also warning about the potential of a provocation being carried out by the U.S. forces in the area, which could serve as a "Gulf of Tonkin" pretext for war.

Retired military figures have also upped their profile in opposing action against Iran. These include retired Generals Barry McCaffrey, Joseph Hoar, and William Odom, who testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Jan. 18, primarily against the Iraq “surge” policy. Most blunt was McCaffrey, who said the public threats against Iran by the Administration were “sheer insanity,” and that if the plan for military action went ahead, “this is truly the most significant blunder in strategic thinking we will have seen since World War II.”

Internationally, initiatives have been taken by French President Jacques Chirac, who is sending a special envoy to Iran, and by Russian officials, who are blowing the whistle on U.S. plans. As for the Arab states in the region, who are being wooed to support the plan, they have coolly recommended to the Administration that it carry out talks with Iran. They have been rebuffed.

Overall, a certain degree of fatalism pervades the capitals of Europe and Asia, vis-à-vis being able to stop the British-crafted, but Bush/Cheney initiated plans to hit Iran. They rightly look to the United States for the decisive action. For that to be effective, the timetable will have to be moved rapidly indeed, but the aggressive intention to prevent such a disaster is palpable on Capital Hill.

War Preparations Ongoing

Col. San Gardiner (USAF ret.), who has an excellent track record regarding military operations in the Southwest Asia theater, issued a new warning on Jan. 16, entitled “Escalation Against Iran.” After noting the fact that a second carrier strike group was leaving the U.S. on Jan. 16, Gardner listed a number of steps he expects the U.S. will take, if indeed it is on the warpath. First, he said to expect a barrage of articles in the media, planted by a National Security Council staff-led group, commissioned to produce “outrage” against Iran.

Then, he wrote, expect some European-based missile defense assets to be deployed to Israel, plus additional U.S. Air Force fighters deployed into Iraq and perhaps Afghanistan. He wrote that some of the “surge” troops sent into Iraq will be sent to the Iranian border. Then, “As one of the last steps before a strike, we’ll see the USAF tankers moved to unusual places, like Bulgaria. These will be used,” Gardiner writes, “to refuel the U.S.-based B-2 bombers on their strike missions into Iran. When that happens, we’ll be only days away from a strike.”

Gardiner’s forecast of a massive media campaign has already been confirmed. Arabic media in the region have begun denouncing Iran’s nuclear program as being dangerous, and claiming that Hezbollah, Hamas, et al., are Iranian agents committed to destabilizing the region. British and other Western press organs have been working overtime to paint the picture of the looming Iranian threat, which, they claim, is poised to take over security, political, and oil installations in Basra, for example, as soon as British troops leave.

Gardiner is one of the most competent analysts in the field, but not the only one to blow the whistle. Former CIA and Bush Administration National Security Council senior official Flynt Leverett wrote in the Washington Note after Bush’s Jan. 10 speech, that the aircraft carrier groups deployed to the region must be there “to provide the necessary numbers and variety of tactical aircraft” for attacks against Iran, because land-based assets could not be used for political reasons. Furthermore, Leverett wrote, the only reason Bush would deploy Patriot

batteries to the Persian Gulf, is to deal with Iran's Shahab-3 missile, "the only missile threat in the region."

A full-page article in the Jan. 13 *Le Figaro* made the same point, stressing that the second aircraft carrier group being sent in, the USS *Stennis*, "will not only be deployed to make a show of force, but will be involved in combat operations." A most telling sign of a move toward a conflict came in a report issued by the ING bank in the Netherlands, which forecast the impact on financial flows of a military confrontation with Iran.

And from Russia, former Black Sea Fleet Commander Adm. Eduard Baltin said on Jan. 9 that the presence of so many U.S. nuclear submarines in the Persian Gulf waters points to the likelihood of a U.S. attack against Iran. He emphasized that currently there is a group of up to four submarines in the area. "The presence of the submarines indicates that Washington has not abandoned plans to launch a sudden attack against Iran," the Admiral said. He blamed the Jan. 8 collision between a U.S. submarine and a Japanese oceanliner near the Strait of Hormuz on the fact that U.S. submarines needed to operate at a relatively higher level than their usual depths, to get clearer vision enabling them to zero in on likely targets.

Baltin noted that, in previous conflicts, U.S. submarines "clean up the road" for air strikes by destroying enemy air defense installations.

Facts, Not Words

Bush's threat to go after suspected Iranian elements inside Iran, is backed up by ongoing action. Already, at Christmastime, the U.S. forces in Iraq had seized two Iranians on charges they were planning military attacks. The move was protested by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's office which stated the two were "invited by the President to Iraq ... within the framework of an agreement between Iran and Iraq to improve the security situation." Then, on Jan. 11, U.S. troops raided an Iranian consulate office in Irbil, arresting six staffers and seizing computers and documents. U.S. helicopters had landed on the roof and soldiers had broken down the doors. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ali Hosseini charged the raid was in violation of international law. Other protests came from the Iraqi government, the Kurdish regional government, and the Russian Foreign Ministry, because the persons detained were diplomats.

Furthermore, Washington-based sources have told EIR there are plans ready to launch aerial strikes against a key Iranian Revolutionary Guard site in the suburbs of Tehran, the headquarters of the al-Quds Brigade. Such an insane option is reportedly being hotly debated in Administration circles, as some relatively sane elements recognize this would trigger a regional explosion.

On the diplomatic level, Secretary of State Rice's visit to the region only underlined the threat of military action. Rice met in Kuwait with her counterparts in the Gulf Cooperation Council, Egypt, and Jordan (GCC+2), and attempted to mobilize them against Iran. Although she succeeded in getting the participants to sign a joint declaration accepting the U.S.'s "commitment" (through the surge policy) to "defend security of the Gulf, the territorial integrity of Iraq," etc., the Saudis openly declared they supported only the stated "goal," with reservations about the means. And, most significantly, the Kuwaiti Emir told Rice that if she wanted peace in the region, she should talk to the Iranians and Syrians. Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah, told Rice it was important to have a "dialogue with Syria, in particular, and with Iran in the interest of Gulf security in general."

Iran Responds

The most recent speech by Bush has erased any remaining doubts in Iran that Washington is bent on confrontation. One of the many Iranian political figures whom EIR met in December in Tehran, summed up the mood there in an e-mail message: "Bush and [British Prime Minister Tony] Blair have practically declared war on Iran and have definitely turned up the heat against Iran to the level of a devastating military clash between the Christian West and the Muslim East. I am very disturbed by the prospect of this new development."

On the official level, the government responded by preparing for an assault. Mohammed Saeedi, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, said that, though he deemed it "highly improbable" that the country's nuclear installation would be bombed, they were being protected by special precautions. At the same time, Iran invited members of the International Atomic Energy Agency, from the Non-Aligned, G77, and Arab League, to travel to Iran to visit its nuclear sites.

On the diplomatic level, Ali Larijani, head of the Supreme National Security Council and chief negotiator on the nuclear issue, travelled to Saudi Arabia for talks with the leadership there. He delivered letters from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as well as Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to Saudi King Abdallah, in which Iran offered collaboration to stabilize the situation in Iraq, in particular. The response, said Ahmadinejad, "generally, was positive." Reports (later denied by the Iranians), had it that the letter suggested the Saudis try to intervene with the United States, to prevent the worst.

Chirac Steps In

Just as tensions were reaching a fever pitch, a report appeared of a bold initiative by French President Jacques Chirac, to stave off the war threat. As reported in *Le Monde* on Jan. 16, Chirac wanted to send his Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy to Tehran, to reestablish direct contact, a move which would contrast with the declared Bush-Cheney approach. The French Foreign Ministry confirmed Jan. 16 that a high-level emissary would be sent to discuss matters pertaining to the Middle East, Lebanon, etc. Iranian sources reached by EIR said the Chirac initiative was very important, but could give no details.

According to an account in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* Jan. 17, the secret diplomacy has been going on for some time. In July, Paris sent Jean-Claude Cousseran, former head of foreign intelligence; in September, Chirac received an envoy of Ahmadinejad; in October, diplomatic advisor Maurice Gourdault-Montagne met the Iranian advisor in Geneva. Gourdault-Montagne then met Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, in Bahrain, at a conference last month. Then the idea emerged to invite Douste-Blazy. He was to go in January, but the trip was cancelled two days before.

The line in the French press is that Chirac wants to open talks with the Iranians, to get them to rein in Hezbollah, so that Chirac's planned donor conference (Paris III) on Jan. 25, with Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, will be a success. Given the current drive for military aggression against Iran, it is far more likely that Chirac is hoping to avert a war.

Condi Rice was not pleased, to say the least. When apprised of the French move, she said she thought, "We all need to stay focussed" on Iran's alleged violations of the Security Council. She made clear she did not accept the notion that France could violate U.S. policy on Iran: "I think that at this point in time" (referring to the Security Council resolution of

December), “that this is not the time to break a longstanding American policy of not engaging with the Iranians bilaterally.”

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