

Iran, the US and the UN Nuclear Conference

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The Obama administration and the US media have exploited the visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to New York to again threaten Iran with further UN sanctions and military action over its nuclear programs and demonise the Iranian president.

Ahmadinejad was present for the opening on Monday of the eighth five-year review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), taking place at the UN headquarters. The US is attempting to use the conference to press for tougher inspections and tighter controls over the nuclear activities while retaining its own huge arsenal of nuclear weapons—all under the fraudulent banner of nuclear disarmament.

The Obama administration is currently seeking to impose a fourth round of punitive sanctions on Iran in the UN Security Council for allegedly seeking to build nuclear weapons—a claim that Tehran has repeatedly denied. At the same time, the White House continues to declare that all options are on the table—that is, including military strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities.

When Ahmadinejad addressed the conference on Monday, the US and its European allies led a theatrical walkout by the delegates from 35 of the 189 countries in attendance. While motivated by the interests of the Iranian regime, the speech nevertheless highlighted the hypocrisy of the US stance toward the NPT and to Iran in particular.

Ahmadinejad noted that the US was the only country to have used nuclear weapons—to obliterate the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945—and “continues to threaten to use such weapons against other countries, including Iran”. Last month Obama, as part of the latest Nuclear Posture Review, ruled out the use of nuclear arms against non-nuclear-armed states—except in the case of countries deemed not in compliance with the NPT. The revised policy effectively makes Iran a US nuclear target.

Ahmadinejad highlighted the failure of the US and other nuclear-armed powers to comply with the NPT. When the treaty was signed in 1970, countries without nuclear weapons agreed to stringent safeguards to their civilian nuclear programs in return for the progressive dismantling of existing nuclear arsenals by the US, the Soviet Union, China, Britain and France. Thirty years later, these countries retain large stockpiles of sophisticated weapons capable of hitting any spot on the planet. The US revealed for the first time this week that it has 5,113 nuclear bombs—more than enough to reduce Iran and large areas of the globe to rubble.

While it denounces Iran for its alleged failure to comply with the NPT, the US tacitly supports its allies—Israel, India and Pakistan—each of which has nuclear weapons and has refused to

sign the treaty. In the case of India, Washington has signed an agreement with New Delhi providing access to nuclear technology and fuel while allowing India to retain its nuclear arsenal. By making India an exception, the US has effectively undermined the entire basis of the NPT.

Ahmadinejad focussed attention on Israel, which received “the unconditional support of the United States government and its allies” despite having “waged many wars in the region and continues to threaten the people and nations of the region with terror and invasion”. Iran backs a move by the 118-member Non-Aligned Movement for the Middle East to be formally declared a nuclear-weapons-free zone and for pressure on Israel to sign and ratify the NPT.

Speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa declared that Israel jeopardised the entire NPT regime by implicitly threatening to trigger a nuclear arms race of “a catastrophic regional and international potential”. Egypt’s UN ambassador Maged Abdelaziz said last week: “We don’t think that there should be first-class countries that are acquiring nuclear weapons and second-class countries that are not in possession of nuclear weapons in the Middle East.... We say that in order to be able to deal with the Iranian issue, you have to address the nuclear capabilities of Israel.”

Speaking on Monday after Ahmadinejad, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton dismissively declared that the Iranian president had provided “the same tired, false and sometimes wild accusations against the United States”. She accused Iran of attempting “to evade accountability” and cited the decision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) board of governors to declare Tehran in noncompliance.

In reality, Iran remains a signatory to the NPT—unlike Israel, India and Pakistan—and allows IAEA inspections of its nuclear facilities. It has branded the extra steps demanded by UN and IAEA resolutions as “illegal”—that is, outside the NPT’s terms. The US and its allies are insisting that Iran shut down its uranium enrichment plants and end construction of a heavy water reactor, even though these are permitted for civilian purposes under the NPT.

Clinton attempted to skirt around the issue of Israel’s nuclear weapons by declaring the US supported “the objective” of a nuclear-weapons-free Middle East and would support “practical measures” to achieve that aim. The US has not the slightest intention, however, of pressuring Israel to sign the NPT, let alone give up its estimated stockpile of 200 nuclear weapons. A resolution for a nuclear-free Middle East passed at the 1995 NPT review conference remains a dead letter and Washington will once again thumb its nose at the Non-Aligned Movement—that is, the majority of countries represented at the latest meeting.

The Obama administration has also effectively ruled out efforts by Brazil and Turkey, supported by China and Russia, to defuse the standoff over Iran’s nuclear programs. The two countries are attempting to revive a deal reached last year to exchange most of Iran’s present stockpile of low-enriched uranium for fuel rods needed for a research reactor in Tehran. Brazil and Turkey are currently members of the UN Security Council and have indicated they may not support a new sanctions resolution. While Iran declared it agreed in principle with Brazil’s proposal, US State Department spokesman Philip Crowley declared on Tuesday that Washington was “increasingly skeptical” about any negotiations.

In a press interview on Tuesday, Ahmadinejad said any new UN sanctions would mean “the

relationship between Iran and the United States will never improve” and would be a “reversal to the Bush era”. He reiterated Tehran’s support for a fuel swap deal, saying it would “provide a field for cooperation and eliminate the clash” and warned that the imposition of sanctions would damage the US more than Iran.

As well as pressing ahead with its plans for further UN punitive measures against Iran, the Obama administration is threatening unilateral sanctions together with its European and other allies. While playing down the possibility of a military attack on Iran, the Pentagon has made clear that plans have been drawn up. Hundreds of bunker-buster bombs have been shipped to the US base on Diego Garcia, within striking distance of Iran, and the US has been assisting allies in the Persian Gulf to bolster their missile defence systems.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates told a US Navy conference on Monday that Iran was challenging US naval power in the Middle East through its build up of anti-ship missiles, mines and speedboats. Gates employed the term “asymmetric” to obscure the fact that Iran’s military is dwarfed by that of the US, including the huge presence of troops, warplanes and warships in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the region. The continued warnings of an Iranian military threat serve only one purpose: to justify any future US attack.

Ahmadinejad’s visit was also seized upon by the open supporters of a US war on Iran to denounce the Obama administration for wasting time on diplomacy, and the UN and NPT for failing to bring Tehran to heel. In its comment on Tuesday, the *Wall Street Journal* ridiculed the US-led walkout of the Iranian president’s address, declaring: “The truly humiliating spectacle is the sight of the world’s leading powers devoting a month to updating a treaty designed to stop proliferation even as Mr Ahmadinejad makes a mockery of that effort before their very eyes.”

If Obama and other world leaders were serious, the newspaper concluded, they would not merely walk out on Ahmadinejad, but “would rally the world to stop him... making clear to Iran that there is a deadline to diplomacy and that military force will be used if diplomacy fails”. Like the Iranian “military threat,” the demonisation of Ahmadinejad serves to deflect public attention from Washington’s underlying aims, which have little to do with Iran’s nuclear programs. In line with the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the confrontation with Iran is to further US ambitions to secure its domination over the key strategic regions of the Middle East and Central Asia.

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