

## Iran under the threat of war?

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Is the United States going to attack Iran? This question is being asked around the world. The big American military build-up in the Persian Gulf has gone on for some time, and there is every reason to believe that Washington is setting stage for a major offensive against Iran.

In fact, the Bush administration has followed a carefully orchestrated strategy with a view to pave the way for a major conflict with Iran. The clearest signal comes from US Vice President Dick Cheney's latest comments on February 23. At a joint news conference with Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Cheney said that 'all options' are on the table if Iran continues to defy UN-led efforts to get Tehran to abandon its nuclear programmes. The news conference was held amidst tight security because thousands of protesters were voicing their anger at his visit. They called the main architect of invasion and occupation of Iraq a 'war criminal' and they called for the withdrawal of Australian soldiers from Iraq.

Cheney said that the United States remained 'deeply concerned' about Iran's activities, including the 'aggressive' sponsoring of Hezbollah and 'inflammatory statements' by President Ahmadinejad: 'We worked with European community and the United Nations to put together a set of policies to persuade the Iranians to give up their aspirations and to resolve the matter peacefully, and that is still our preference.'

'But I have also made the point, and the president has also made the point, that all options are on the table,' said Cheney.

Even though Iran says its nuclear programme is strictly for peaceful purpose, to generate energy, the United States and some of its allies suspect this could lead to Iran producing nuclear weapons that could challenge the nuclear power and political hegemony of the US and Israel in the Middle East.

Only the United States of America and Israel have some kind of 'God-given' right to have nuclear and other destructive weapons of mass destruction and to use them whenever they decide to do so.

The whole world knows that the US occupation forces used internationally banned weapons during their deadly assault on Fallujah. They also used prohibited substances including mustard gas, nerve gas and other burning chemicals in their attacks. Fallujah residents reported that they saw 'melted' bodies in the city, which suggests that US military used napalm gas that makes the human body melt. Last summer, Israeli army littered the whole of south Lebanon with cluster bombs provided by the United States.

Let us recall the similar scenarios in 2002 and early 2003 when Iraq was accused by the United States of possessing weapons of mass destruction. Of course, the Bush

administration knew that no such weapons existed in Iraq. But the pretext was used to justify the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. It was in furtherance of the grand strategy to bring the Middle East under America's political hegemony and to control its oil resources. Now the US administration is using the same methods in the case of Iran.

The BBC recently revealed some clear indications of the US-planned attack on Iran. According to the BBC, the US contingency plans for air strikes on Iran extend beyond nuclear sites and include most of the country's military infrastructure. Any such attack would target Iranian air bases, naval bases, missile facilities and command-and-control centres.

Iran is within an hour's flying time from some American bases or aircraft carriers. In case of war, the US, most probably America and Israel together, will have no difficulty in destroying Iranian army, its military bases and the economic infrastructure of Iran.

**Military plans:** Seymour Hersh, an American Pulitzer Prize winning investigating journalist, reported that American Special Operation Forces were already operating inside Iran in preparation for a possible air ground attack (New Yorker, 24 January 2005). He also later reported that current and former officials told him that one of the options being considered by the Bush administration called 'for the use of a bunker-buster tactical nuclear weapon, such as B61-11, against underground nuclear sites'. (New Yorker, 17 April 2005).

Hersh pointed out last year how the Bush administration had increased the secret activities inside Iran with a view to pave the way for a major air attack. He writes: 'Current and former American military and intelligence officials said that Air Force planning groups are drawing up lists of targets, and teams of American combat troops have been ordered into Iran, under cover, to collect targeting data and to establish contact with anti-government ethnic-minority groups.' (New Yorker, 17 April 2006).

The United States has been deeply involved in the affairs and politics of Iran since the Second World War. The Shah of Iran who had inherited throne from his father in 1941 was forced into exile in 1951 by the popular government headed by the Iranian leader Dr Mohammad Mossadegh. He nationalised the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. US intervened in 1953 and installed the Shah to power again. He established a dictatorship. In 1957 Washington helped the Shah create SAVAK, the notorious secret police, which silenced all those who criticised the policies of the Shah.

The brutal regime of the Shah came to an end in 1979 and Ayatollah Khomeini established the Islamic Republic. America cut off all diplomatic relations and imposed tight economic sanctions against Iran. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), Washington provided seed stock for biological weapons, weapons and financial backing to Iraq.

Iran continues to be a major concern to the US for a number of reasons. Iran, like Iraq, is a big country. It has oil wealth, water resources and a large population. After having occupied Iraq and its oils resources under control, in Washington's calculation, Iran is the only country in the region that can challenge its domination of the Middle East. As the US controls the political developments throughout the Middle East, the only major country that has not capitulated to Washington is Iran. The stage is set for a new war of aggression and the Bush administration has been busy preparing for a massive attack on Iran.

Bush in his January 10, 2007 speech not only announced sending further US troops to Iraq;

he also signalled his determination to reshape the entire Middle East under the domination of the United States.

‘Succeeding in Iraq requires defending its territorial integrity and stabilising the region in the face of the extremist challenge,’ Bush declared. ‘This begins with addressing Iran and Syria.’ What he meant by ‘defending Iraq’s integrity’ and ‘stabilising the region’ was to safeguard the military occupation of Iraq without any complaint from any quarter and extending the US domination over Iran and Syria, who have not been brought to their knees yet. In his speech, Bush also declared: ‘We are taking steps to bolster the security of Iraq and protect American interests in the Middle East.’

In fact, a huge military build-up in the Persian Gulf had been gaining momentum. The World Net Daily’s staff writer Dr Jerome Corsi has pointed out that by the end of February, an American armada of 50 warships will be stationed in the area. The USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74) aircraft carrier battle group has gone to join the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) aircraft carrier battle group already stationed there. Besides, the USS Boxer (LDH 4) amphibious assault ship is stationed in the Persian Gulf. The USS Bataan (LHD 5) was also sent to the area in January. A fleet of 12 ships supports each carrier attack group, including two guided missile-cruisers, two guided missile destroyers, and an attack submarine.

American military domination of the Middle East is maintained by a vast network of military bases throughout the region. The US military in case of war has the capacity to crush Iran by round-the-clock bombing using cruise missiles and hundreds of warplanes. Batteries of Patriot anti-missile systems are at present being installed in the Gulf states to protect vital US military assets.

Despite the clear war preparations that are going on, President Bush continues to declare that the US has no immediate plans to attack Iran. The fact remains that his objective is to have an Iran closely allied with the US as under the Shah and the rest of the Arab rulers. Such an objective will not be achieved by negotiations to end the nuclear standoff but by changing the present rulers of Iran. As no clandestine operations have succeeded so far to bring the clerics to capitulation, the Bush administration thinks that a major blitzkrieg will do the job and protect the American interests in the Middle East. But we all know what those interests are.

The dangerous course followed by Washington has not been the focus of only informed media, but also of some important American public figures. At the end of last year, the Baker-Hamilton report, written by a bipartisan commission of Republicans and Democrats, suggested opening talks with Iran and Syria to resolve the Iraqi crisis. However, President Bush has taken a total opposite direction and blames Iran and Syria for the US military losses in Iraq!

Perhaps the most realistic warning of the dangerous policies followed by the Bush administration came in the February 1, 2007 testimony of the former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski to the Senate Foreign relations Committee.

Deeply critical of the disastrous policies followed by Bush, Brzezinski said: ‘The war in Iraq is a historic, strategic, and moral calamity. Undertaken under false assumptions, it is undermining America’s global legitimacy. Its collateral civilian casualties as well as abuses are tarnishing America’s moral credentials. Driven by Manichean impulses and imperial hubris, it is intensifying regional instability.’

Brzezinski fully aware of the policy of the use of overwhelming military power predicted that 'if the United States continues to be bogged down in a protracted bloody involvement in Iraq, the final destination on this downhill track is likely to be a head-on conflict with Iran and much of the world of Islam'.

In a sharp critique of Bush's so-called 'war on terror,' Brzezinski described as 'a mythical historical narrative' where the attempts are being made to equate Islamic extremism and Al Qaeda with the threat posed to the US by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Russia: 'This simplistic and demagogic narrative overlooks the fact that Nazism was based on the military power of the industrially most advanced European state; and Stalinism was able to mobilise not only the resources of the victorious and militarily powerful Soviet Union but also had worldwide appeal through its Marxist doctrine.'

He warned that 'to argue that America is already at war in the region with a wider Islamic threat, of which Iran is the epicentre, is to promote a self-fulfilling prophecy.'

Brzezinski saw the danger of the White House manufacturing 'some provocation in Iraq or a terrorist act in the United States' to blame Iran and using it as a pretext to unleash a 'defensive' military action against Iran.

According to the Kuwait-based Arab Times (January 14, 2007), an attack on Iran can come anytime. This information was obtained from a reliable source, which said that President Bush had held a meeting with Vice president Cheney, Defence Secretary Robert Gates, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other assistants in the White House to discuss the plan for an attack in minute detail. While Gates and Rice seem to have suggested postponing the attack, President Bush and Dick Cheney wanted to go ahead with the attack in the near future.

But there is also opposition to the plans of Bush and Cheney in the military and navy. Some generals and admirals have recently said that they would resign if Bush orders an attack on Iran.

Despite all the military build-up in and around the Middle East, war is not a foregone conclusion. Bush and Cheney also have an alternative course by which they can continue to further the interests of American imperialism short of war. They can engage in a meaningful dialogue with Iran and Syria in order to avoid another war and spare the life and livelihood of millions of people.

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