

Let's Stop a US/Israeli War on Iran

It's More Important Than Halting Nuclear Proliferation

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The peace movements of the entire world should be in crisis mode right now, working non-stop to prevent the U.S. and Israel from starting a war against Iran. (See the James Petras article in CounterPunch on December 24, 2005 titled *Iran in the Crosshairs* for the best summary of the present situation.) The reckless and unnecessary dangers arising from such a war are so obvious that one wonders why normal political forces in the two aggressor countries — both of whom love to glorify themselves as democracies — would not prevent such a war from happening.


But the “normal political forces” in both the U.S. and Israel have become badly distorted. Democracy has been seriously undermined in both. The cowboy-like personalities and aggressive tendencies of both countries’ leaders tend to feed on each other. Domestic political difficulties and coming elections in both countries probably add to the macho inclination of the ruling elites to use force to remove any problems facing them. The glue binding these tendencies together is the ever-strengthening institutional link between defense establishments and military-industrial complexes in both countries, as well as, in the U.S., the growing power and influence of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) over both major political parties. The entire mix increases the probability, against all common sense, that this absurd war will actually happen.

Nothing else more dangerous to the world, to the Middle East, to the oppressed Palestinians, or to the true interests of the United States is happening today — anywhere. Americans who do not want an eruption of a new world war, started by our own government, ought to be strongly lobbying the Bush administration and all members of Congress against supporting any military action by the U.S. and Israel against Iran. Globally, people who oppose such a war should be lobbying their own governments in similar fashion.

Background

It is worthwhile to discuss briefly the broader context of why a war with Iran today seems a real possibility. During his all-out public relations effort in late 2005 to regain support for his policies in the Middle East, Bush has made it clear that he plans to continue his drive for complete victory in the “War on Terrorism,” without making significant changes in his own, very aggressive, foreign policies. Those policies will make this planet a less safe, more unjust place to live for most people around the world, as well as for most of us living in the U.S. The special relationship between the U.S. and Israel has long played an important role in these aggressive policies.

Outside the United States, it is widely understood that one of the true motives — not the exclusive motive but a real and significant one — behind the Bush administration’s 2003

invasion of Iraq was the desire of the neocons in Washington to conquer Iraq in order to benefit Israel. Although a few of the big-name neocons (Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Lewis "Scooter" Libby) have left high-visibility positions for various reasons, many remain, and it is clear that Bush himself, Cheney,  Rumsfeld, and Rice have taken as their own the main tenets of neocon beliefs.

Inside the U.S., on the other hand, the pressure of the neocons for war on Israel's behalf, or any hint that Bush himself participates in that pressure, is hardly ever mentioned. This taboo on discussing the Israeli link to the war in Iraq, enforced by the threat of being labeled anti-Semitic, introduces major distortions into practically every effort to examine and change policies that are causing massive hatred of the U.S. around the world.

But right now, three of the long-existing "problems" in the Middle East (i.e., situations that have been made problems largely by our own actions) have reached critical stages that may, if Washington's policies do not change quite quickly, result in our losing even the remnants of stability and peace that remain in that region today. The world could face instead nuclear warfare or, at a minimum, a practically unending "clash of civilizations" and conventional warfare at a much higher level than exists now. The first, and the most important right now, of the three problems is the main subject of this article: the problem that arises from the determined U.S. and Israeli policy of preventing Iran from ever acquiring nuclear weapons. The second and third problems, also situations brought on by the U.S. itself, have to do with Syria and the Palestinians. In the long run, they are also very important, but they are less urgent for now. These other problems will be considered briefly at the end of this article.

As was the case with the U.S. invasion of Iraq, one of the underlying causes of all these "problems" in the Middle East has been the success of the neocons in persuading the Bush administration to support aggressively the goals of the Israeli government throughout the area. And here again, the fear of being charged with anti-Semitism causes many Americans quietly to accept the taboo on discussing the Israeli link to the Bush administration's foreign policies. This is an absurd situation. Criticizing Israeli (or U.S.) policies and urging specific changes in those policies is not anti-Semitic (or anti-American). The arrogance of anyone who suggests the contrary is appalling. The following paragraphs contain suggestions on how we should work to remedy those aspects of this absurdity that bear on Iran and nuclear weapons.

What should be done to change U.S. policy on Iran's nuclear program?

First of all, don't fall into the trap of accepting Iran's public claims that it is *not* attempting to acquire nuclear weapons. Many of the nations that now have such weapons made similar claims while they were developing the weapons. Israel did so throughout the first half of the 1960s, engaging in elaborate subterfuges even when dealing with U.S. inspectors who occasionally came looking for weapons work. The Israeli claims were so much garbage (see Israeli author Avner Cohen's book, *Israel and the Bomb*). Then, after it acquired its first nuclear explosive device almost 40 years ago now, Israel simply adopted a well publicized policy of ambiguity and stopped talking publicly about whether it had any weapons. India and Pakistan also both claimed not to be working on weapons when in fact they were. Their claims were garbage too, which they quickly threw away once they joined the nuclear club and possessed their own deterrent. Iran almost certainly intends to do the same, and its public claims to the contrary are also almost certainly worthless.

The principal point to start with is that, unless the U.S. and Israel (and other nations as well) *all* agree to work seriously toward eliminating their own nuclear weapons, any Iranian government will consider that it has as much right as the rest of us to such weapons. Essentially, even if Iran, under pressure, were to sign new agreements, now or in the future, to forgo nuclear weapons, the new agreements would be meaningless unless the U.S., Israel, and other nuclear nations ended their own monumental hypocrisy of insisting that they can keep and expand their nuclear arsenals, while non-nuclear nations may not acquire such arsenals. In the eyes of most Muslims around the world and many other people too, Iran, with a population of close to 70 million, has at least as much right as Israel, with a population less than one-tenth as large, to have nuclear weapons

Most supporters of the global peace movements by definition oppose the solving of international problems through warfare, and they also oppose the further proliferation of nuclear weapons. Most are also aware that the critical bargain reached in the 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) — the bargain that made the treaty possible — was a trade-off: the acceptance of continued non-nuclear-weapons status by states without those weapons, in return for the simultaneous agreement by states possessing nuclear weapons to pursue good-faith negotiations on nuclear, and complete and general, disarmament. This latter provision had no teeth, and certainly many “realists” in the U.S. foreign policy establishment expected that it would not and could not be enforced. Nevertheless, the existence of this provision was necessary to the NPT’s ratification by numerous countries, and it gives any state dissatisfied with progress toward nuclear disarmament an excuse to abrogate or ignore the treaty.

Most people will not bother to make the niceties of international law an issue in this matter, but the question of which is more important, stopping the further proliferation of nuclear weapons to Iran or stopping our own side from instigating a war against Iran, is vital. The answer should be clear: *The single most urgent objective we should have right now is to prevent a war, possibly nuclear, from being started by the U.S. and/or Israel against Iran.* To repeat, such a war would be disastrous, and we should be doing whatever we can, with the highest possible priority, to prevent it from ever happening.

Every peace activist on the globe ought to be in the streets and elsewhere lobbying in support of something very simple: *do not attack Iran, even if this means allowing Iran to develop its own nuclear weapons.* We should put out the message that it is simply not worth a war, with consequences impossible to foresee, to prevent Iran from obtaining such weapons. From 1945 until we invaded Iraq in 2003, we never once took military action to prevent other nations from developing nuclear weapons. We relied instead on deterrence and containment (to prevent other nations from *using* such weapons after they had been developed). These may not be perfect policies, but they have a successful track record and can probably be applied more successfully than other policies to subnational groups as well as nation-states. The point is that these are still better policies than the recklessness of preemption, and we should use these policies in lobbying against U.S. involvement of any kind in military actions or coup attempts against Iran. We should also very definitely support an effort to tie future U.S. aid to Israel to Israel’s not engaging in military action against Iran.

We are talking here about supporting (by our silence), or opposing (by vociferous lobbying), what could become major, serious warfare — warfare that could easily become global, and also could easily cause greater difficulties for the peoples of the Middle East than any they have yet faced from U.S. policies. With an election campaign intensifying the political volatilities of Israeli politics, with possibly fast-moving new uncertainties and vulnerabilities

arising among both Republicans and Democrats jousting for advantage in a U.S. election year, and with a new, inexperienced president in Iran who, so far at least, believes aggressive speech strengthens his political position, the dangers in the situation are evident. As each week passes and no movement occurs anywhere — particularly in Washington — to reduce tensions by changing policies, the risk grows of a mistake that will lead to new hostilities, and possibly nuclear warfare. How many Iranians might we and the Israelis kill? How many Israelis might die? How many Americans?

How should the U.S. change its policies with respect to Syria?

The issues of Syria and Palestine are related to U.S. policy toward Iran. Policy on Syria today is to put constant pressure on that country's ruler, Bashar al-Assad, with the ultimate objective of ousting and replacing him with someone (not yet named by the Americans) who would be even more subservient to U.S. and Israeli desires. Assad himself has moved a considerable way toward subservience, giving the U.S. considerable help on intelligence matters and accepting certain U.S. prisoners "rendered" to his regime for purposes of torture, but the U.S., unsatisfied, keeps intensifying the pressure. The U.S. and Israel have succeeded in making it more difficult for Syria to provide support for the Palestinian resistance against Israel's occupation, but Damascus still provides some refuge for Hezbollah personnel.

The recent assassinations of anti-Syrian leaders in Lebanon have provided new opportunities for the Bush administration to ratchet up its criticism of Syria still further, although the evidence of Syrian involvement in the assassinations is weak. It is at least possible that other groups, such as the Israel's Mossad or the CIA, are responsible.

Whatever the truth behind events in Lebanon, the events themselves could offer a U.S. president who is in some trouble at home the possibility of a low-cost, low-risk foreign policy victory if he could pull off, perhaps with the help of Mossad, a quick covert action that ousted Assad. Act II of a grand show might then proceed — another U.S. occupation installed, another nation in the Middle East "democratized," elections held a year or two later and a puppet government set up, step-by-step takeovers of the economy implemented by U.S. and Israeli interests, further isolation of the Palestinians from other Arabs — all in all, another great victory for the U.S-Israeli partnership.

Or so Bush, at least, might believe. In reality, the situation might turn into another morass like Iraq. But months might pass and the U.S. congressional election of November 2006 might be history before we knew that for sure. Might not a man like Bush who revels in chance-taking consider this a pretty good gamble? Meanwhile, how many Syrians would we kill? How many badly wounded Americans would come home to a questionable quality of life because bulletproof vests saved their lives? If Israeli military units moved into Syria (to help us, of course), how many Israelis would die?

We should all be lobbying members of Congress not to cast any votes in favor of aggressive U.S. policies toward Syria. Such votes cannot help, and will only take resources from, a majority of the world's peoples and a majority of Americans. Syria (and Lebanon) are not places where the United States benefits in any way from being a global policeman. While the neocons and probably some present top Israeli officials do see benefits to be gained from U.S. intervention in Syria, other senior and many ordinary Israelis do not. We also should urge members of Congress to tie further aid to Israel to Israel's not becoming

involved in any military actions against Syria.

How should the U.S. change its policies with respect to the Palestinians?

We should make it as clear as we possibly can to members of Congress that the Palestine-Israel problem is *the most central long-term issue* to the peoples of the Middle East. Most Arab leaders have been so co-opted by the U.S. that they no longer object to our support for Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, but the peoples of the area are a different story. They do care about and object strenuously to that oppression.

Regardless of what happens anywhere in the Middle East, we will never end the "War on Terrorism" without, first, a solution to the Palestine-Israel issue that provides as much justice to the Palestinians as to the Israelis. Although many supporters of Israel try to compare the several-centuries-long U.S. conquest of American Indians to the Israeli attempt to conquer the Palestinians, there is no valid comparison. Quite apart from the immorality of any attempt to emulate the U.S. atrocity against its indigenous population, there are practical reasons why the comparison cannot be made. The population balances, for instance, are entirely different; there are proportionately far more Palestinians than there were American Indians.

Nevertheless, Israeli and U.S. policy in the West Bank, semi-hidden by a bogus withdrawal from Gaza, continues to seek permanent conquest of more and more territory. The daily injustices and cruelties imposed by Israel and the U.S. on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are today worse than they have been in the previous 38 years of occupation. This is not only a major human rights issue facing the United States. It is also a very large cause of the hatred against the U.S. throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds.

What is new in the last few months is Israeli intensification of settlement activity in the West Bank, particularly in East Jerusalem; intensification of land-confiscation (with no recompense to Palestinians); a speed-up in construction of the separation wall and of new "Israeli-citizens-only" roads, both of which also require more land-confiscation; more demolitions of Palestinian houses; and new, harsh Israeli measures of other types aimed specifically at forcing Palestinians out of areas, in which they have lived for generations, in and near Jerusalem.

All of this takes place with little Western media attention; the media devoted considerably more attention to the carefully televised "suffering" of the relatively few Israeli settlers forced to move from their luxurious homes in Gaza. The Israelis, with heavy U.S. financing, are busily establishing more "facts on the ground" that will make any peaceful solution providing equal justice to both sides less possible. That does not mean that Israel will "win." Given the determination and inexhaustibility (*and* large numbers) of Palestinians, it just means more terrorism, killing, and cruelty on both sides. It is a shocking waste of lives, and the U.S. is prolonging it by its one-sided support of Israel. Let's put it baldly. U.S. policy on Israel and Palestine is simply immoral in its one-sidedness. It should take no one who investigates what is actually happening to Palestinians in the West Bank more than 30 seconds to decide that the oppression and cruelties that can be seen there daily should be stopped. Here too, further U.S. aid to Israel should be directly tied to Israel's stopping the oppression and cruelties to Palestinians.

The position we should take in lobbying members of Congress is simple and obvious: *Stop*

the one-sidedness. It is a blot that will stain all our other activities and policies in the Middle East, and probably elsewhere, for years to come. The longer we avoid changing this situation, the larger the blot will become.

Conclusion

All of these issues — Iran, Syria, and Palestine-Israel — are interrelated, and each issue enhances the perception around the world that the U.S. is hypocritical, oppressive, and interested only in advancing Israel's interests. All grow out of the one-sided U.S. support for Israel, and none will be resolved without a change in the U.S.-Israeli relationship. To put it baldly again, the widespread perception of the U.S. as immoral and unjust interferes in a quite serious way with the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. Neither we nor Israel "wins" if U.S. policy continues on the same path.

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