

Middle East Madness

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In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

Administration rhetoric is heated and the dominant media keep trumpeting it. It signals war with Iran of the “shock and awe” kind – intensive, massive and maybe with nuclear weapons. Plans are one thing, action another, and how things play out, in fact, won’t be known until the fullness of time that may not be long in coming. For now, waiting and guessing games continue, and one surmise is as good as another. The more threatening they are, the less likely they’ll happen, or at least it can be hoped that’s so.

It’s not media critic, activist and distinguished professor emeritus Edward Herman’s view. He writes “the situation now is even more menacing than we faced in 2002-2003 when the Bush gang was readying us for the invasion (and) occupation of Iraq. There is strong evidence that Bush-Cheney and company are about to attack Iran (and) the groundwork is being set with a flood of propaganda, helped by the media and Democrats.” It may be “his last (crazed) hope for immortality” and possible attempt to revive “Republican strength through this classic maneuver of cornered-rat politicians.”

Most frightening is that the Bush administration doesn’t have enough of a bad thing and may want more of it. This time, however, the stakes are incalculable, the risks over the top, and the chance for success (from an American perspective) almost nil if post-WW II history is a good predictor. Distinguished historian Gabriel Kolko notes in all its conflicts since 1950, America never lost a battle and never won a war. It’s a world class bumbler, never learns from its mistakes, and only succeeds, in Kolko’s words, in making an “unstable world far more precarious” than if it left well enough alone.

Enter Iran with George Bush having a way with words about the Islamic Republic. They’re hotting up and sending ominous signals. At the American Legion Reno convention August 28, Bush, with typical bluster, accused Iran of threatening the Middle East with a nuclear holocaust and said he authorized US military commanders in Iraq to “confront Tehran’s murderous activities.” He accused the Ahmadinejad government of supporting violent Iraqi forces he calls “radicals and extremists....Either the forces of extremism (or freedom) succeed. Either our enemies advance their interests in Iraq, or we advance” ours.

Earlier in the month, Bush threatened Iran stating: “When we catch you playing a non-constructive role, there will be a price to pay.” He added recent US-Iranian meetings in Baghdad were “to send a message that there will be consequences for....people transporting, delivering EFPs (roadside bombs)....that kill Americans in Iraq.”

This type language points to a widened Middle East war with Iran the target in mind and sanity of those planning it in question. Or maybe not? Questions remain in the run-up to the September 11 Iraq progress report General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will deliver to Congress. Packaging is everything, and the date chosen was planned to heighten public fear

of the event on that day that may help explain what's going on – not attacking the Islamic Republic but shoring up flagging support for a war gone sour and worry later about more of it with Iran.

Or maybe not, according to a report called “Considering a war with Iran: A discussion paper on WMD in the Middle East.” On August 28, the Raw Story web site published a summary of what two respected figures wrote. They are: British scholar and arms expert Dan Plesch, Director of the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London and Martin Butcher, former Director of the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) and former adviser to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament.

Their work compliments others saying war with Iran is coming, and things are too far along to stop it. Their analysis is detailed, elementary in their opinion, and very frightening. They conclude the Pentagon has plans for a “massive, multi-front, full-spectrum” shock and awe-type attack on Iran short of a ground invasion. It involves destroying enough of the country's military capacity and armed forces, nuclear energy sites, economic infrastructure and more to destabilize and oust its regime or reduce its status to “a weak or failed state.” It continues saying:

- 10,000 sites are targeted using bombers and long range missiles;
- the US has enough ground, air and Marine forces in the region to devastate Iran on short notice;
- covert US (and possibly UK) and armed popular resistance activities are already ongoing in the Iranian provinces of Azeri, Balujistan, Kurdistan and the country's major oil producing region of Khuzestan in the southwest bordering Iraq and the Persian Gulf.
- nuclear weapons are deployed but unlikely to be used short of clear evidence Iran already has them, may in short order, or if its believed only these weapons can destroy its hardened Natanz nuclear facility;
- the Bush administration has avoided publicizing its war preparations leading Plesch and Butcher to believe confrontation is more likely;
- no information is available on possible Iranian WMD weapons, but the authors state its military “has missiles and probably some chemical capacity;” those aren't WMDs and many other nations also have them; at least eight of them (not Iran) have nuclear ones as well, several are prepared to use them, and the US states it as first-strike policy;
- significant “risks and impediments” exist but eliminating Iran as a regional power and regime change are stated goals in the administration's National Security Strategy (updated in 2006);
- except for the UK and Israel, no other nations are known to support US plans;
- according to anonymous UK military sources, the Bush administration switched its main focus to Iran after March, 2003 even when its forces became bogged down in Iraq;
- region-based Marines outside Iraq are deployed to protect oil tankers, shipping lanes in

the Gulf, the Straits of Hormuz and be able to confront and destroy Iranian forces;

— US Special Forces will continue covert search and destroy missions in Iran and efforts to incite internal uprisings against the Iranian government;

— there's no assurance Iraqi Shias will support their Iranian allies; their leaders may act in their own best interests inside Iraq that may preclude backing Iran under US attack;

— US 2008 presidential candidates are posturing to see who can be toughest on confronting a potential Iranian threat even though there is none; Europeans are puzzled that political expediency trumps reality especially concerning a wider Middle East war; the Bush administration may worry most about an "Iran of the regions" and may attack the Islamic Republic to avoid it;

— if an attack on Iran succeeds (with long odds against it) and the US is better able assert "its global military dominance....then the risks to humanity....and to states of the Middle East are grave indeed."

Enter the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

IAEA's August 30 report on Iran was bad news for the Bush administration based on what its Director, Mohamed ElBaradei, told the press: "This is the first time Iran is ready to discuss all outstanding issues which triggered the crisis in confidence. It's a significant step. There are clear guidelines, so it's not, as some people are saying, an open-ended invitation to dallying with the agency or a ruse to prolong negotiations to avoid sanctions....I'm clear at this stage you need to give Iran a chance to prove its stated goodwill."

The Bush administration was dismissive to enraged in response with statements claiming the agreement is inadequate and Tehran must suspend all (its perfectly legal) nuclear enrichment, or else. State Department spokesman Tom Casey disdainfully said: "There is no partial credit here. Iran has refused to comply with its international obligations, and as a result of that the international community (meaning the US and other nations it can bully, bribe or threaten) is going to continue to ratchet up the pressure."

The message is clear and all known information confirms it. Washington wants regime change in Iran. The open question is by what means and when. It doesn't matter that Iran is a signatory to the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is in full compliance with it, and in 1974 entered into an agreement with the IAEA "for the application of safeguards in connection with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons" to remain in force as long as Iran is so obligated under NPT provisions. The agreement stipulates all Iranian "source or special fissionable materials" and activities relating to them are subject to IAEA Safeguards "with a view to preventing diversion of nuclear energy from peaceful purposes."

IAEA reported Iran's uranium enrichment program slowed, is operating well below capacity, and isn't producing nuclear fuel in significant amounts. As of August 19, it had 1968 centrifuges operating and 656 others in various stages of assembly or testing. IAEA verified this level of enrichment is well below what's needed to build a nuclear bomb. IAEA also said an outstanding issue related to plutonium experiments was satisfactorily resolved.

Iran and IAEA also announced a timetable to resolve by year end "all outstanding questions" regarding the implementation of Iran's Safeguards Agreement as well as other non or less relevant questions. They include: lab experiments involving minute amounts of plutonium

and plutonium-210 and the source of the enriched uranium micro-contamination at a technical University in Tehran. Although not obligated to do so, Iran also agreed to resolve other minor issues as a show of good faith. As it's now proceeding, Iran is on track to verify total compliance with its Safeguard Agreement obligations by yearend. That should make it less vulnerable to a US attack, but don't bet on it. Bush administration officials are never short on reasons to justify its plans and facts on the ground won't deter them.

They've already denounced the IAEA report as an Iranian ploy to buy time and seems to imply IAEA partnered with Iran against Washington. ElBaradei's response to this was: "My responsibility is to look at the big picture. If I see a situation deteriorating (and) it could lead to war, I have to raise the alarm or give my advice." Earlier he said: "I have no brief other than to make sure we don't go into another war or that we go crazy into killing each other. You do not want to give (an) additional argument to the new (Bush administration) crazies who say 'let's go and bomb Iran.' "

Bush Administration Strategy: Usually Wrong but Never in Doubt

In the run-up to its March, 2003 attack on Iraq, the Bush administration proved it didn't lack tricks and schemes to justify war. Iran now faces the same threat with one provocative act from Washington after another. In an unprecedented and outrageous move against a sovereign state, the New York Times and Washington Post reported August 15 the administration plans to designate Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (a major branch of its military) a "global terrorist" organization. It's based on unsubstantiated claims IRGC's elite Quds Force is arming, training and directing Shiite militias involved in attacking US Iraqi troops.

It contradicts Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, however, that Iran's role in the region is constructive. That comment runs counter to Bush claiming Iran as "the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, (is) active(ly) pursui(ng)...technology that could lead to nuclear weapons (and) We will confront this danger before it is too late."

Washington further insists IRGC is helping Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, interfering in various other ways in Iraq, and is aiding US-designated "terrorist" groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. It has no evidence, reports are CIA confirms it, but no matter. All that counts is Washington claims it, case closed. That's how schoolyard bullies run playgrounds and global godfathers do it everywhere.

In the long-running US-Iran saga, it remains to be seen how events will play out. Expect more heated rhetoric, and don't ignore Dick Cheney's influence. Barnett Rubin's recent comments about him from his Global Affairs blog are all over the internet. Cheney's already unofficially on record urging war on Iran and presently proposes bombing suspected Quds Force sites in Iraq. Earlier reports were he and other administration hard-liners considered air attacks against Quds Force headquarters near Tehran. If they come, it risks all-out war so, for now, they were tabled.

Barnett now says he has a message from a well-connected insider that "the Office of the Vice-President (plans) to roll out a campaign for war with Iran in the week after Labor Day" to be backed by hawkish think tanks and similar elements in the dominant media. It will involve a "heavy sustained assault on the airwaves" to win over public support that will be considered successful at "35 - 40 percent."

It's already begun on-air and on the pages of the lead and most influential proponent for war on Iraq in the Judith Miller days, The New York Times. It may now be playing the same role promoting war with Iran with one example showing up in Michael Slackman and Nazila Fathi's September 3 article: "On Two Fronts, One Nuclear, Iran Is Defiant." Its headlined tone (differing from explanatory comments buried below) contradicts IAEA evidence and claims "to reaffirm the country's refusal to back down to pressure from the United States over its nuclear program and its role in Iraq."

That came after an opening salvo that "Iran's leaders issued dual, defiant statements on Sunday (September 2)." It continued saying President Ahmadinejad claimed the nation had 3,000 active centrifuges to enrich uranium (IAEA inspections confirm 1968), and "the top ayatollah (Ali Khamenei) appoint(ed) a new Islamic Revolutionary Guards commander who once advocated military force against students." This is just a sampling of what's ahead from the Times and other dominant media elements. They're enlisted, like in 2002, to beat the drums of war and maybe get one for their efforts.

Then there's Congress on both sides of the aisle and presidential candidates hawkishly posturing for whatever they imagine it gains them. The public overwhelmingly opposes more war and wants the Iraq one ended. But those ideas are nowhere in sight on the campaign trail or Capitol Hill where the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act of 2007 will likely pass easily now that Congress is reconvened. It cleared the House Foreign Affairs Committee 37 to 1 June 28 and after passing both Houses will become effective January 1, 2008. It hardens the existing Iran Sanctions Act by closing loopholes in it with the intent to thwart all foreign investment in Iran and strangle the country economically.

It also prohibits nuclear cooperation between the US and any nation aiding Iran's commercial nuclear program and requests the White House designate Iran's IRGC a "terrorist" group and block assets of any nation, organization or group supporting it. As summer wanes, fall approaches and the administration touts progress in Iraq it claims will continue (with Bush's grandstanding six hour visit for a staged performance at Al Asad Air Base in Al Anbar province part of it), the prospect for more "progress" Iraqi-style awaits Iran. That's unless public pressure builds and/or cooler heads in Washington and other capitals denounce what some distinguished analysts believe may ignite WW III if it comes. That's incentive enough for us all to become engaged and stop this rush to madness in the Middle East not likely to be contained where it starts.

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