

Pursue Diplomacy, Not War, With Iran

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Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to the United States has prompted an outcry, including protests and tabloid headlines calling him "evil" and a "madman." As Juan Cole says, "The real reason his visit is controversial is that the American right has decided the United States needs to go to war against Iran. Ahmadinejad is therefore being configured as an enemy head of state." The Bush administration, which maintains that "all options" remain on the table with Iran, should vigorously pursue the diplomatic option, instead of moving inexorably toward the military option.

Ahmadinejad said in a "60 Minutes" interview, "It's wrong to think that Iran and the U.S. are walking toward war. Who says so? Why should we go to war? There is no war in the offing." Iran has not threatened to attack the United States, or Israel for that matter, except if it is attacked first. Iranian authorities sent a proposal to the United States in May 2003 offering negotiations on a deal for Iran to freeze its nuclear program if the United States would end its hostility against Iran. The Bush administration thumbed its nose at the Iranian proposal, then tried to cover up the story, according to Trita Parsi, in his new book, *Treacherous Alliance : The Secret Dealings of Israel , Iran , and the United States* .

Bush has pursued a belligerent policy toward Iran ever since he inaugurated it into his "axis of evil" in January 2002. General David Petraeus and Bush both menacingly mentioned Iran five times in their respective August speeches touting how well things are going in Iraq . Petraeus referred to "malign actions" by Iran; Bush discussed Iran and al-Qaeda in the same breath even though Iran has never attacked us.

U.S. plans for war with Iran continue to escalate. Centcom (U.S. Central Command) has engaged in detailed contingency planning for an attack on Iran for more than two years. In June, the U.S. Air Force established Project Checkmate tasked with "fighting the next war." The Pentagon is building a military base near the Iran-Iraq border. Earlier this month, British forces, at the request of the Americans, were sent from Basra to the Iranian border. Two aircraft carrier groups (USS Nimitz and USS Truman) are reportedly en route to the Persian Gulf to join the USS Enterprise.

Philip Giraldi wrote last month in *The American Conservative* that Dick Cheney ordered the U.S. Strategic Command to draw up a "contingency plan" for a large-scale air assault on Iran using both conventional and tactical nuclear weapons. "As in the case of Iraq," according to Giraldi, "the response is not conditional on Iran actually being involved in the act of terrorism directed against the United States. Several senior Air Force officers involved in the planning are reportedly appalled at the implications of what they are doing - that Iran is being set up for an unprovoked nuclear attack - but no one is prepared to damage his career by posing any objections."

Bush will likely provoke a confrontation with Iran, then strike back in “self-defense.”

The Sunday Telegraph reported, “A strike will probably follow a gradual escalation. Over the next few weeks and months the U.S. will build tensions and evidence around Iranian activities in Iraq . . . Under the theory – which is gaining credence in Washington security circles – U.S. action would provoke a major Iranian response, perhaps in the form of moves to cut off Gulf oil supplies, providing a trigger for air strikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities and even its armed forces.”

Steve Clemons likewise wrote on Salon that David Wurmser, a member of Cheney’s national security staff, allegedly discussed convincing Israel to launch a low-yield cruise missile strike against the Natanz nuclear reactor in Iran , to “hopefully” prompt a military reaction by Iran against U.S. forces in Iraq and the Gulf.

Former CIA counter-terrorism chief Vincent Cannistrano, now a security analyst, stated, “The decision to attack was made some time ago. It will be in two stages. If a smoking gun is found in terms of Iranian interference in Iraq, the U.S. will retaliate on a tactical level, and they will strike against military targets. The second part of this is: Bush has made the decision to launch a strategic attack against Iranian nuclear facilities, although not before next year. He has been lining up some Sunni countries for tacit support for his actions.”

Patrick Cronin, director of studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, concurs. “Washington is seriously reviewing plans to bomb not just nuclear sites, but oil sites, military sites and even leadership targets. The talk is of multiple targets,” he said. “In Washington there is very serious discussion that this is a window that has to be looked at seriously because there is only six months to ‘do something about Iran’ before it will be looked at as a purely political issue.”

The United Nations’ chief nuclear weapons inspector, Mohamed ElBaradei, warned against an “out of control” drift to war with Iran. “I would not talk about any use of force,” he said. “There are rules on how to use force, and I would hope that everybody would have gotten the lesson after the Iraq situation, where 700,000 innocent civilians have lost their lives on the suspicion that a country has nuclear weapons.” The UN Charter only permits the use of force in self-defense or with the blessing of the Security Council. “Many of the potential targets are in populated places, endangering civilians both from errant bombs and the possible dispersal of radioactive material,” cautioned Peter Galbraith in the New York Review of Books. The failure to protect civilians violates the Geneva Conventions.

Yet Bush continues his march to war. In an end run around the UN Security Council, “Washington and its allies are developing a parallel track to the UN effort in the event that a third resolution ends up only modestly increasing pressure on Iran,” according to the Washington Post. “We’ll continue on the UN track, but we also have the track of the U.S.-E.U.,” a State Department official said.

Former General Wesley Clark is a likely presidential running mate for Hillary Clinton, who also intends to keep the military option against Iran on the table. In Sunday’s Washington Post, Clark laid out a detailed military plan to ensure that we “win” the next war. “Today, the most likely next conflict will be with Iran ,” he wrote, while cautioning that war is the last resort.

Senators Joe Lieberman and Jon Kyl just introduced an amendment to the defense

authorization bill that would authorize Bush to attack Iran . Here is the language from the amendment:

(3) that it should be the policy of the United States to combat, contain, and roll back the violent activities and destabilizing influence inside Iraq of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, its foreign facilitators such as Lebanese Hezbollah, and its indigenous Iraqi proxies;

(4) to support the prudent and calibrated use of all instruments of United States national power in Iraq, including diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and military instruments, in support of the policy described in paragraph (3) with respect to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies.

If the Congress adopts this amendment, U.S. policy would be to “combat” Iran with “all . . . military instruments.” It is imperative that this amendment be defeated.

As Bush and Cheney once again go through the motions of diplomacy as they did during the run-up to war with Iraq , they move steadily toward war. They would do well to heed the sentiments of the Bipartisan Security Group, which advocates the Middle Powers Initiative. That statement says, “Resolution of differences between the United States and Iran through diplomatic means has become imperative. The catastrophe of Iraq should inform us that the use of force under present circumstances will bring even greater tragedy to the war-torn Middle East. Any threat to unilaterally use overwhelming force is irresponsibly hazardous. There is no imminent threat posed by Iran. There is a practical, legal and moral obligation to obtain security through peaceful and law abiding means.”

The initiative points to the United States’ hypocrisy of condemning Iran for seeking nuclear weapons while maintaining the right to use nukes against Iran. “The United States and other nuclear weapon states can more credibly insist on Iranian compliance with its international obligations if they meet their own. To decry the Iranian potential of developing nuclear weapons while brandishing arsenals of unimaginable destructive capacity on launch-on-warning status is inconsistent . . . Accordingly, the United States is required to renounce the use of nuclear weapons against Iran rather than to maintain that ‘all options are on the table.’”

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