

U.S. Ramps Up Threats Against Iran

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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

The air is thick with intensifying U.S. threats against Iran. New diplomatic and economic assaults by the U.S. are in the works, and there are reports that discussion within the Bush regime has “tilted” toward war with Iran. Since our last alert (“[Alert: Bush Regime Escalates Iran War Preparations](#)” in issue #101, online at revcom.us), the trajectory toward confrontation, possibly war, has accelerated.

Six years into the bloody conquests and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. is bogged down and facing major difficulties. Its global war was launched post-9/11 with the aim of crushing anti-U.S. Islamic fundamentalism and remaking the Middle East and Central Asian regions, as part of a sweeping plan to create an unchallenged and unchallengeable empire. But in many ways this has backfired. Anti-U.S. anger rages across the region; Islamist movements have been further unleashed and fueled; the U.S. has been unable to secure its imperial grip on Iraq and faces years, perhaps decades, of combat; and the U.S. military is strained.

The U.S. rulers have staked their global power on this war for greater empire, waged under the banner of a “war on terror.” So now they’re increasingly focusing on Iran, a prime target of this war from day one. The imperialists’ problem with Iran’s Islamic Republic is not that it’s a reactionary theocracy that has imprisoned or executed thousands of progressives and revolutionaries and enforces very oppressive social relations. Far from it: the U.S., in fact, has supported—or inflicted—bloody repression and oppressive relations across the region, including in Iran during the reign of the tyrant Shah. No, the U.S. rulers’ problem with the Islamic Republic is that it’s a growing obstacle to their predatory agenda of unfettered hegemony and regional transformation. Iran’s fundamentalist regime has been strengthened by the fall of Saddam Hussein to its west and Afghanistan’s Taliban to its east. In Iraq, Shi’a parties with close ties to Tehran are the predominant faction in the new government, and Iranian influence has greatly increased. It has a nuclear energy program, which has the potential to give it the ability to make nuclear weapons at some point in the future. It’s an ideological and material center of support for Islamist groups and trends throughout the region.

In recent speeches on the U.S. war in Iraq, Gen. Petraeus, Ambassador Crocker, and Bush all targeted Iran. Winning in Iraq, Bush argued, was key to countering the “destructive ambitions of Iran” and not allowing it to “dominate the region.” Crocker declared that “Iran plays a harmful role in Iraq.” Petraeus denounced Iran’s “malign actions.”

This week both Bush and Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are speaking at the UN, and New York has become a stage for whipping up anti-Iran hysteria and hatred. New York authorities refused Ahmadinejad’s request to visit “ground zero” where the World Trade Center stood. Controversy swirls over Columbia University’s decision to allow Ahmadinejad

to speak there. And right-wing tabloids are in an anti-Iranian frenzy—the *NY Post* ran a picture of Ahmadinejad with the caption “NO DOGS ALLOWED.” No doubt Bush will attempt to stoke this belligerent atmosphere in his September 25 UN speech.

This war of words is being accompanied by new diplomatic and economic assaults on Iran. Bush officials were furious when the UN International Atomic Energy Agency recently reported that Iran was being “unusually cooperative,” and the IAEA director, Mohamed ElBaradei, stated that “This is the first time Iran is ready to discuss all the outstanding issues. It’s a significant step.” U.S. officials dismissed the agreement between Iran and the IAEA and denounced ElBaradei for “irresponsible meddling.” This reveals that the U.S. imperialists have never just wanted to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons—they’re out for “regime change,” whether Iran’s ayatollahs want to make a deal or not.

Rather than lessen tensions, the U.S. is intent on further tightening the screws. The U.N. Security Council has so far passed two punitive measures against Iran, and the U.S. and Europe are waging what some are calling a “financial war” against Iran, designed to cripple its imperialist-dominated economy. Now the U.S. wants yet more sanctions—“with teeth” in the words of Condoleezza Rice. U.S. officials are meeting with other major powers to try and push this through, although China and Russia remain opposed at this point.

On Sept. 20, U.S. forces seized and arrested another Iranian official in Iraq, claiming that he is part of an elite Iranian military unit. Iraqi President Jalal Talabani condemned the action and demanded that the official—who is part of a trade delegation—be released immediately. And the stream of U.S. military “briefings” charging Iran with arming and directing anti-U.S. militias continues.

“A CAREFULLY CALIBRATED PROGRAMME OF ESCALATION”?

Within the Bush administration, a sharp debate has reportedly been taking place between Secretary of State Rice and Vice President Cheney over whether to deal with Iran through continued diplomatic and economic pressure (at least for now), or to more immediately use military means. Rice and Defense Secretary Gates insist that the U.S. still wants to deal with Iran “through diplomatic and economic means,” but a number of recent news stories report that those advocating war are winning the debate. Senior officials believe that “Bush and his inner circle are taking steps to place America on the path to war with Iran,” the *Sunday Telegraph* reported (9/16). “Pentagon and CIA officers say they believe that the White House has begun a carefully calibrated programme of escalation that could lead to a military showdown with Iran.” The *Telegraph* also states that Rice “is prepared to settle her differences with Vice-President Dick Cheney and sanction military action.” The *New York Times* (9/16) says Bush’s recent speeches “indicated that the debate, at least for now, might have tilted toward Mr. Cheney.”

These stories come in the wake of French President Sarkozy’s statement (immediately after his “heart-to-heart” meeting with Bush this August) that war with Iran is a real possibility—and the ominous declaration by the French Foreign Minister, who said in mid-September that France must “prepare for the worst” and that “The worst, sir, is war.”

Meanwhile, two U.S. naval battle groups are positioned near Iran, including an aircraft carrier battle group headed by the U.S.S. *Enterprise* and the *Kearsarge Expeditionary Strike*

Group, with some 10 warships, two submarines, and attack aircraft. The U.S. reportedly plans to build a military base on the Iraq-Iran border. And Adm. Fallon, the U.S. commander for the Middle East, is touring the region, “pressing Arab allies to form a more united front against Iran.” (AP 9/18)

While publicly discounting the possibility of a U.S. attack, Iran’s leaders are making counter-threats of their own. Iran has been shelling Iraqi bases of anti-Iranian Kurdish forces and warns that they will send troops into Iraq if the attacks in Iran by these Kurdish forces don’t stop. The new leader of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards publicly warned that Iran has identified U.S. “weak points” in Iraq and Afghanistan and would “launch a crushing response to any attack.” Iranian officials have declared that they will launch missile strikes at U.S. and Western targets across the region, including Israel, if Iran is attacked.

THE DANGER OF WAR & THE URGENCY OF RESISTANCE

The U.S.’s belligerent threats, “financial war,” demand for tougher sanctions, and its funding of covert operations and anti-regime groups inside Iran (as reported by Seymour Hersh last year) may be aimed at forcing the Islamic Republic to capitulate to U.S. demands or to trigger an internal collapse short of war. The Bush regime could also be waiting to see how these moves play out before deciding on war. But it’s also quite possible that the rulers have begun a “calibrated programme of escalation,” as the *Telegraph* puts it, in preparation for war.

In any case, Iran is increasingly the focus of U.S. imperialist bullying, and the current trajectory is clearly moving toward confrontation. Given these extreme and growing tensions, war could even start by accident or miscalculation by either side—perhaps as the result of a border clash, a naval incident in the Persian Gulf, or some other event. War could also be triggered by what Steve Clemons (Salon.com, Sept. 19) calls an “engineered provocation” by those close to Cheney (perhaps Israel), leading to an “end run” around the rest of the U.S. decision-making apparatus. A dry run for such a provocation may have already taken place on Sept. 6 when, under still mysterious circumstances, Israeli planes attacked targets in Syria. Bush’s former UN Ambassador John Bolton called this air strike “a clear message to Iran that its continued efforts to acquire nuclear weapons are not going to go unanswered.”

What are the Democrats doing as Bush pours gasoline on the flames in the Middle East? A few leading Democrats say they’re opposed to attacking Iran, but when Congressional Democrats have actually done anything, it’s been to pave the way for war—first, by removing legislative language early this year demanding that Bush consult Congress before any attack on Iran; and second, by voting overwhelmingly this summer for a war-like resolution blaming Iran for killing U.S. soldiers in Iraq. The top Democrats all agree, as Barack Obama recently put it, that Iran “poses a grave challenge.” Obama, Hillary Clinton and John Edwards have all said at one time that “all options” against Iran were on the table. As a ruling class party, the Democrats share with Bush and the Republicans the imperialist goal of defeating Islamic fundamentalism, giving full support to Israel, and maintaining the U.S. stranglehold on the region—even as they have various differences over just how to navigate all the roiling contradictions their empire faces.

Any U.S. attack on Iran—no matter the pretext—would be launched to further America’s imperialist aims, not to liberate anyone, save lives, or lessen the danger of nuclear war. It would be unjust and criminal, and could cause enormous suffering and death in Iran and

spark bloodshed across the region. U.S. aggression and war threats are already fueling a very bad dynamic in which the reactionary poles of imperialism on one side and Islamic fundamentalism on the other reinforce each other, even as they clash.

All this makes it urgent for people to speak out and protest U.S. bullying and war preparations *now*. The organization World Can't Wait-Drive Out the Bush Regime has called for people broadly to take up the "Declare It Now! Wear Orange!" campaign. Anti-war protests are scheduled for September 29 and October 27. (See www.worldcantwait.org for details.) Read and distribute *Revolution* so that many, many more can get the truth and be inspired to politically resist the crimes that the U.S. imperialists are committing and further crimes that they are planning.

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