

War on Iran? Peace Movements must act now !

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Global Research, October 02, 2006

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October 2006

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(02 October 2006) - <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/Iran/KenCoates.htm>

For some years now there has been concern about the confrontation between the United States and Iran. This has continuously given rise to apprehension, as leaks from the American Intelligence Services, and the notable dispatches of Seymour Hersh have raised alarm from time to time.

But there have been other voices which, without being sanguine, have been somewhat more reassuring. Discounting the apologists for the American administration, there have been serious voices from the United States Intelligence, and the American military, explaining why the military and social costs of an extension of the Middle East war to Iran would be prohibitive, wreaking far more damage on American interests than it would be rational to risk. This view has not usually been founded on any moral rejection of the awful consequences of war, but on calculations of its likely consequences.

Quite generally this nowadays excludes the possibility of any ground offensive. What has been a more open question has been whether the United States might launch air attacks. Rational people might have expected that. The remarkable story of the offensive against Lebanon, which suffered prolonged Israeli bombardment and immense destruction, and yet remained undefeated, would have given serious thought to military planners in the United States. It certainly seems that the opposition of the British and American Governments to an immediate ceasefire was based on the calculation that given sufficient time the Israelis would be able to destroy Hezbollah, even if this process involved the most widespread destruction, and very large numbers of civilian casualties. But Hezbollah was not crushed, and indeed, according to its leader Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, it emerged from that terrible conflict stronger in popular support, and indeed, even in a stronger military position than it had at the beginning.

But there have been insistent noises from the Bush entourage, not only accusing Hezbollah of being proxies for Iran, but also threatening to visit a similar destruction upon Iran from

the air, like that which has afflicted Lebanon. As sometimes happens, events that might provide an awesome deterrent to rational people may sometimes be an incentive to military adventurism.

Now there is a careful report from Sam Gardiner, the retired Air Force Colonel who has been evaluating the prospects for a military onslaught on Iran. Gardiner thinks that the consequences of a serious air strike on Iran can be incalculable. But he thinks that whereas military rationality might have prevailed heretofore, today the issue is perilously more uncertain.

His conclusion is very chilling. Just prior to any anticipated strike, he says we can expect the quiet deployment of Air Force tankers to staging bases, and "we will see additional Navy assets moved to the region". There will also be a fierce intensification of the propaganda preparations for war on terrorism.

All of us are well aware of some of the recent propaganda moves in this direction. Now, more ominously, the latest news is that a significant "Strike Group" of ships is heading for the Persian Gulf. On September 21st it was reported in **The Nation** that:

"the Eisenhower Strike Group bristling with Tomahawk cruise missiles, has received orders to depart the United States in a little over a week ... other official sources ... confirm that this armada is scheduled to arrive off the coast of Iran on or around October 21st".

If such an air strike is scheduled, then we need only look at the Israeli onslaught on Lebanon to see what is likely to happen. Certainly, just as the Lebanon was comprehensively flattened, we can expect immense devastation to be wrought on Iran. This is adequately reported by Gardiner. We can also expect serious retaliation, and quite possibly immense economic damage as oil supplies are cut off.

Of course, Gardiner may not be right about the economic consequences. Oil may not reach the spike of \$125 per barrel, leave alone \$200. The anticipated paralysing recession may not happen. If the state of mind of American military planners can be deduced from what is said by Gardiner, there can be little doubt that they have been intensively studying the lessons of Hezbollah in Lebanon, which are most likely to be applied in Iran when that is levelled by even larger air attacks. But the global economic consequences of attacks on the Lebanon will not be in any way comparable with the potential ruin that can be brought about by attacks on Iran.

Colonel Gardiner has tried to estimate what these might be. The only conclusion a sane person can draw is that the very idea of such an offensive is suicidal lunacy. There is quite a lot of evidence that this appreciation extends deep into the leadership of the military intelligence communities in the United States, and is shared by diplomats and other opinion-shapers around the world.

Will their view prevail on the United States Government? Is the American Fleet voyaging to the Gulf simply in order to make belligerent threats? Is it thought that such threats alone might conduce to an election victory in the mid-term, based upon fear and irrationalism?

We do not know the answer to these questions. Not so very long ago it would have been unthinkable that anyone could ask them. If ever there was work for the peace movements to do, surely it is here, and never was it more pressing.

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