

What Will We Do Then? The Day After We Strike Iran

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Let us suppose that the Bush-Cheney administration answers the neocons' prayer and does indeed bomb Iran sometime soon. The plan apparently involves more than the destruction of nuclear facilities, replicating Israel's attack on Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981. (That attack, by the way was condemned by the whole world, including a furious President Ronald Reagan). It includes an all-out assault on the Iranian political and religious leadership. Government buildings and officials' residences will be targeted, guaranteeing collateral damage. Since Iran is a highly complex society, and its government widely unpopular, there may well be some local support for a "shock and awe" campaign. We know that the administration has cultivated ties with the Mujahadeen Khalq (even though they remain on the State Department's terrorist list) and the Pakistan-based Balochi separatist group Jundallah (the Party of God). These among other organizations will get their marching orders amid the "creative chaos" produced by the attack. There can be no large deployment of U.S. troops in Iran, unless they evacuate from Afghanistan and Iraq which is unlikely.

I doubt that administration plans for the construction of a post-attack Iranian polity are any more sophisticated than their plans for post-Taliban Afghanistan or occupied Iraq. Some have suggested that the neocons' goal is actually to plunge the Muslim Middle East into prolonged pandemonium, insuring that all foes of Israel are off-balance and terrorized by the might of Israel's protector for generations to come. "Neocons," writes Paul Craig Roberts, "have convinced themselves that nuking Iran will show the Muslim world that Muslims have no alternative to submitting to the will of the US government."

They are "total Islamophobes" who believe that "Islam must be deracinated and the religion destroyed. . ." Others note that Cheney is obsessed with the imagined threat of a rising China and the need to establish permanent U.S. bases in Central and Southwest Asia to "contain" the world's most populous nation. The desire to control the flow of oil, the urge to check China, the passionate drive to destroy Israel's enemies (alongside this neocon Islamophobia) are all reflected in U.S. foreign policy since 9-11.

Surely a lot of Iranians know this. And they can look over their northern border into Afghanistan and their western border into Iraq and see what disaster U.S. imperialism has wrought in these neighboring countries. Bush calls them "democracies" and boasts of having gifted them with the universally applicable model pioneered by America's founding fathers. But I'd imagine Iranians paying attention see in Afghanistan a regime dominated by warlords more reactionary than their own mullahs, resisted by an equally reactionary resurgent Taliban. In Iraq they find an emerging regime under the strong influence of conservative Shiite Muslim clerics in an unusual alliance with U.S. occupation forces. Many young Iranians chafing under Islamic law might consider this a step backwards for Iraq, which under the despised Saddam had at least been a secular society. The Iraqi puppet government is of course far weaker than the one in Tehran, and humiliatingly dependent

upon the invaders who cannot provide a modicum of security while they demand oil concessions.

So I would think that the Iranian survivors of this planned criminal assault would not appreciate it. Rather they will resent it deeply, especially if it produces numerous civilian casualties. As Roberts suggests, the neocons believe that the Iranian people and Muslims around the world will be so terrified that they will capitulate to all U.S. demands and the U.S. will be better able to attain its geopolitical objectives without the use of unacceptable numbers of ground troops. I have to wonder about this.

Perhaps the neocons suppose that there will be no resistance from a shocked and awed Iranian population as America's Iranian allies—a mix of quasi-left guerrillas, terrorist separatists, monarchists and exiles—create a provisional government. They may underestimate the social base of the present Iranian government, the sincerity of popular opposition to U.S. policy in the world, the depth of Iranian nationalism and national pride at the accomplishments of the nuclear power program. They probably underestimate the outrage an attack will cause, in Iran and everywhere.

Perhaps they overestimate the power of their weapons. The neocons know that nuclear weapons (even dire predictions about nuclear attack) produce fear—and that frightened people may voluntarily give up much of their freedom. They saw that happen here in the USA between 9-11 and the attack on Iraq. All that talk by Bush, Cheney and Rice about mushroom clouds over New York City got the masses scared, got them to support a war. The neocons may assume that this frightening thing they hold in their hand—that they can deliver (intoning with John McCain, "Bomb bomb bomb Iran") as soon as Bush (after prayerful deliberation) gives his okay—can fix the Middle East. They may figure that a country once nuked will submit to any aftermath.

Recall how they predicted in 2002 that Iraqis would respond to occupation the same way the Japanese did from 1945 to 1952. How wrong they were. Maybe the attack-planners think that the Iranians will, after this new, planned Hiroshima, unconditionally surrender to the United States. I doubt that. Just as they appear to have overestimated the power of U.S. troops on the battlefield in Iraq, Cheney and his neocons may miscalculate the power of their most vicious weapons to obtain their goals. Mao often referred to nuclear weapons (first those of the U.S. imperialists, then the Soviet ones as well) as "a paper tiger." The imperialists might find that they've sent a paper tiger to arouse an Iranian griffin. (That's a lion with an eagle's head and wings, something not supposed to happen.)

Meanwhile, reaction in Iraq to reports of a U.S. strike on Iran will hardly be positive. Iraqi Shiites (60% of the population) will naturally identify with victimized Shiite Iran and hate the occupiers more, without necessarily fearing them more. If you really want to do something that will fuel the Shiites' historical sense of victimization, and unite Shiites from Lebanon to Oman and beyond, the best thing you could do is bomb Iran—not sparing the holy sites. But Iraq's Sunnis won't be happy either. Whatever their feelings about Iran, they'll feel no joy in the expansion of U.S. operations in the Muslim world. The entire world will respond with revulsion. From Europe to Japan there will be much discussion about how to best distance oneself and protect oneself from a USA gone nuts.

But what will happen here in the U.S. after the Iran attack? How will we react? If it happens, it won't be announced the way the invasion of Iraq was. There will be more and more

unattributed reports of Iranian arms deliveries to unlikely recipients like the Taliban or Sunni “insurgents” in Iraq. More alarmist reports on Iran’s nuclear progress. More propaganda about Iran’s intention to nuke Israel and produce a second Holocaust. More indignant statements about Iran’s defiance of UNSC resolutions. But the timing might come as a surprise.

As the attack gets underway some Democratic leaders in Congress will indicate support for the move, based on the doctored intelligence reports they’ve read, or have had on their desk and possibly perused. Some will withhold comment or maybe even object to the action. I have the feeling both timidity and stupidity will initially prevail. There is little precedent for U.S. politicians condemning a U.S. attack on a country just after it’s occurred.

I would expect those on the contact-lists of the various antiwar coalitions would be out on the streets in force immediately after the (first) attack, shouting “SHAME” and making it clear to the world that Bush doesn’t represent the American people. I’d expect that large numbers of people would gather to demand that the Congress move immediately to impeach Bush and Cheney. I’d hope that the Democrats in Congress would find it in their interest to do so, but if Nancy Pelosi becomes president, will there be any great change? On Iran, Pelosi has deferred to AIPAC.

The antiwar movement has become disillusioned with the Democrats, and even with a mercilessly self-perpetuating system that uses its two parties to convey the illusion that the political status quo is the product of competition. Still, it sees no alternative to a mix of letter-writing, lobbying, voting, rallying, marching, exercising constitutional rights, operating within the paradigm. But Cindy Sheehan officially dropped out of the movement concluding that the “paradigm. . . is now, I am afraid, carved in immovable, unbendable and rigidly mendacious marble.”

She is right. The neocons want us to “think outside the box.” Maybe we should one-up them and think outside the system. The “way our system works,” writes Andrew J. Bacevich, “negates democracy, rendering free speech little more than a means of recording dissent.” In it, “Money maintains the Republican/Democratic duopoly of trivialized politics.” What can the honest dissenter do when informed that the U.S. (“your”) government has committed a spectacular war crime? When can you do when you learn that, once again— without your permission—the U.S. has attacked a sovereign country posing no real threat to you? Generating enormous hatred for America throughout the world? What do we do the day after? I would just like to pose the question for discussion as we approach that moment.

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