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counterpunch

edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair

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Weekend Edition
December 23 / 24, 2006

Are Bush and Cheney Planning an Early Attack on Iran?

Crime of the Century

By DAVE LINDORFF

Back on October 9, I wrote in *The Nation* that it looked like the Bush-Cheney gang, worried about the November election, was gearing up for an unprovoked attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, with a carrier strike group led by the USS Eisenhower being ordered to depart a month early from Norfolk, VA to join the already-on-station USS Enterprise. That article was based on reports from angry sailors based on the Eisenhower who had leaked word of their mission.

There was, thankfully, no attack on Iran before Election Day, but it is starting to look like I may have been right about the plan after all, but wrong about the timing.

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As the threat of a catastrophic US election-eve attack on Iran started to look increasingly likely, reports began to trickle out of the Pentagon that the generals and admirals were protesting. They knew that the US military is stretched to the limit in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that a war with Iran would be a disaster of historic proportions. To bolster their blocking efforts, the Iraq Study Group, headed by Republican fixer and former Secretary of State (under Bush Pere) James Baker, which had been slated to release its report on what to do about Iraq in January, 2007, pushed forward its report. Baker, together with co-chair Lee Hamilton, went prematurely public with the group's conclusion that the Iraq war was a failure, and that the US should be trying to negotiate with Iran, not attack that country.

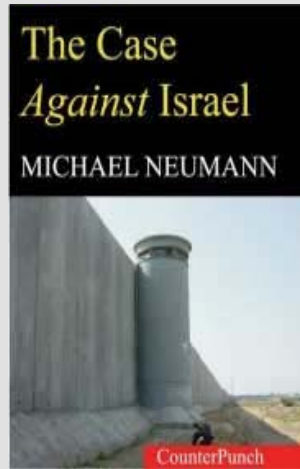
That joint effort appeared to have blocked Bush and Cheney's war plan, but the reprieve may have only been temporary.

It now appears that the idea of attacking Iran is again moving forward. The Eisenhower strike force, armed with some 800 Tomahawk cruise missiles as well as a fleet of strike aircraft, and already on station in the Arabian Sea for over a month and a half, has moved into the Persian Gulf. A second carrier group, led by the USS Stennis, is steaming toward the Gulf, too. Already in position are three expeditionary strike groups and an amphibious warship, all suitable for landing Marines on Iranian beaches. On December 20, the New York Times, citing Pentagon sources, reported that both Britain and the U.S. are moving additional naval forces into the region "in a display of military resolve toward Iran that will come as the United Nations continues to debate possible sanctions against the country." (We've all seen what "displays of force" by the Bush administration actually turn out to be.)

The idea of hitting Iran may make sense from the Bush-Cheney bunker, where the only consideration is not what's good for the country, but what's good for Bush and Cheney. After all, if you're losing your war in Iraq, and if you have hit bottom politically at home (Bush's ppublic support ratings are now down in the 20s, where Nixon's were just before his resignation, and Cheney's numbers have been in the teens for months), and if the public is clamoring for an end to it all--and maybe for your heads, too--expanding the conflict and putting the nation on a full war footing can look like an attractive even if desperate gambit.

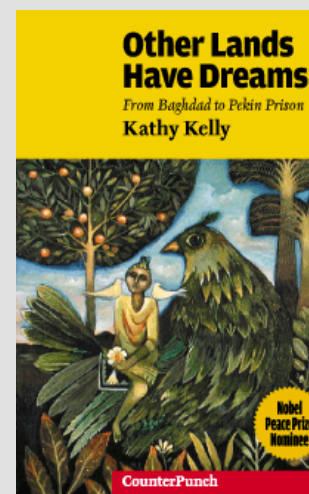
From the nation's point of view, of course, an attack on Iran would be an unmitigated disaster. There are no more troops that the U.S. could throw into battle (the Pentagon is scrambling just to find another 20,000 or so bodies that Bush wants to throw into the Iraq quagmire), so an attack would have to be basically that--an attack.

Certainly the forces the Navy is assembling in the Persian Gulf, together with the B-52s and B-1s and B-2s available at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and at bases in other countries in the region, are capable of destroying most of



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Iran's nuclear facilities, as well as its military infrastructure. But in terms of conquering territory, the most the U.S. could hope to do would be to perhaps hold a beachhead on the Straits of Hormuz, where the Persian Gulf links to the Arabian Sea. And even that would be a bloody challenge.

There is no way the U.S. could hope to conquer Iran.

Nor would the Iranian people rise up and overthrow their theocratic leaders--the same neoconservative fantasy that Bush war-mongers promised ahead of the Iraq invasion, and which they are re-cycling now to justify an attack on Iran. In fact, an attack on Iran, far from sparking a rebellion against the government there, would crush the new wave of reform that was evidenced in last week's local elections in Iran, which dealt a blow to the country's hardliners. Iran is a proud nation with a history reaching back thousands of years. If attacked, its people can be counted on to rally around their current rulers, and its war-hardened soldiers can be counted on to fight to the death to defend their country.

Moreover, while its military may be no match for America's, Iran has many asymmetrical options for retaliation. As the key player in Iraq, with close links to Iraq's Shia factions, Iran's military has trained and armed the Badr Brigades--the largest and best-armed faction in Iraq, and one which to date has stayed out of the fighting against US forces. Iran is also close to the Mahdi Army of Moqtada al Sadr, and could unleash his fanatical troops too, against US forces in Iraq. If this happens, count on American casualty rates leaping to or even surpassing Korea or Vietnam-era levels overnight.

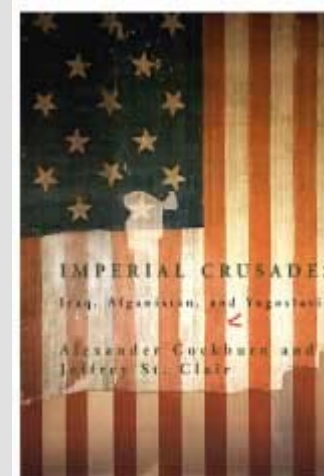
Additionally, Iraq's intelligence services have connections with Shia groups in Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing countries, and can be expected to quickly organize cells to strike at economic and US military targets there.

More seriously, of course, an attack on Iran will jack the price of oil to levels never seen before. Even if the US managed to militarily control the Straits of Hormuz, Iran's hundreds of stockpiled anti-ship missiles, which are buried in bunkers all along the Persian Gulf, would cause insurance rates to soar so high that no tanker could afford to sail that route, effectively cutting off over one quarter of the world's oil supply. Virtually all of the oil produced in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait and the Arab Emirates would be trapped in the ground. As well, the network of pipelines that bring oil from wellheads to refineries and to storage and pier facilities would be virtually indefensible against Iran-inspired sapper attacks.

Oil industry analysts have talked of oil leaping in price to \$200 a barrel or more in the event of a US war with Iran, and given how panicked this country got when oil reached \$80 a barrel recently, there's no need to go into detail explaining what \$200/barrel oil would do to the U.S. economy--or to the global economy.



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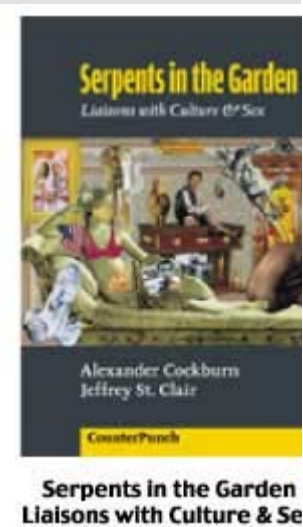
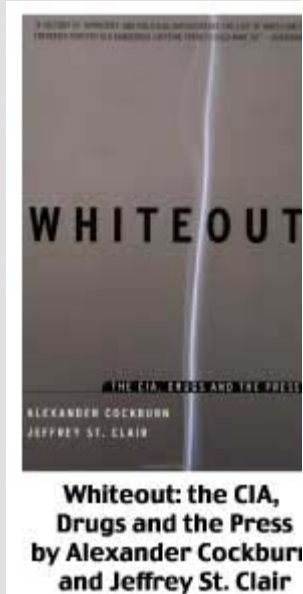
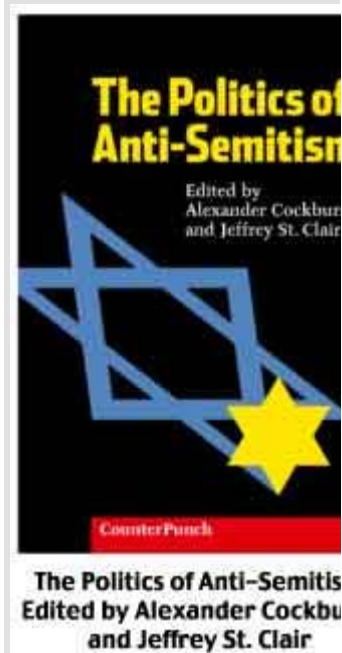
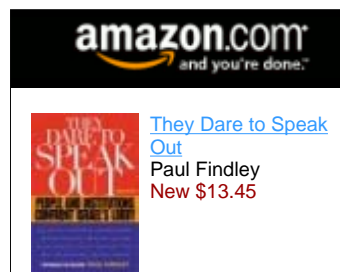
Of course, the biggest issue is that attacking Iran would be yet another war crime by this craven administration. No one can argue that Iran poses an imminent threat to anyone, least of all to the U.S.--the only legitimate grounds under the U.N. Charter and the Nuremburg Charter, to which the U.S. is a signatory, for initiating a war. Attacking a country that poses no such threat is defined as the most heinous of war crimes: a Crime Against Peace.

If Bush and Cheney perpetrate this crime, the Congress should initiate immediate impeachment proceedings and should simultaneously pass legislation terminating funding for the war. The important thing now is for the American people to register their opposition to this war before it happens. Call your senators and your representative and let them know you don't want it to happen, and you want impeachment if it does. And add your name to the petition against war. Also mark down January 27 in your calendar, for the big march and rally against war and for impeachment in Washington, D.C. (to be followed by two days of lobbying Congress on Jan. 28-29.

Finally, send this story to everyone you know, and urge them to do the same. At this point, with Democrats still cowering in their offices, only the American people can stop this madness.

Dave Lindorff is the author of [Killing Time: an Investigation into the Death Row Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal](#). His new book of CounterPunch columns titled "[This Can't be Happening!](#)" is published by Common Courage Press. Lindorff's new book is "[The Case for Impeachment](#)", co-authored by Barbara Olshansky.

He can be reached at: dlindorff@yahoo.com



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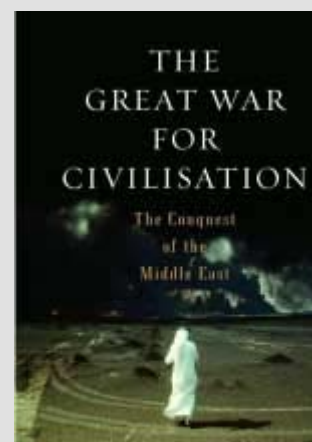
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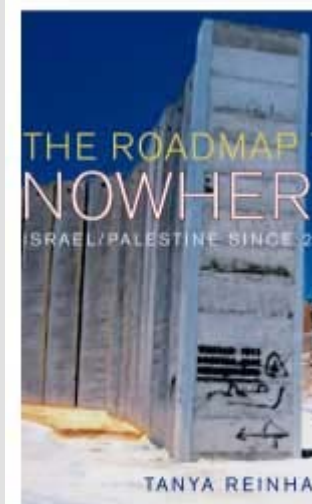
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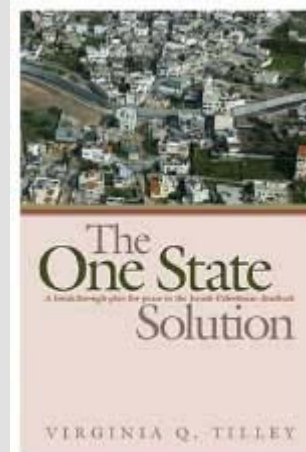
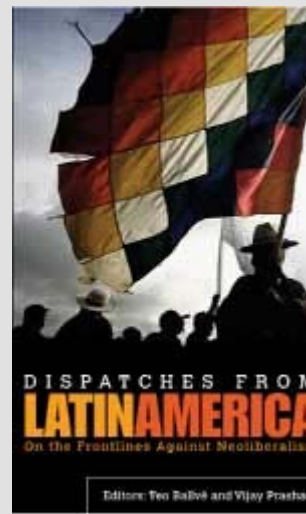
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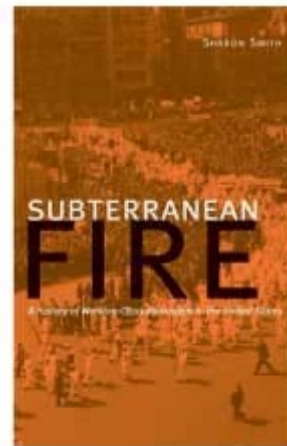
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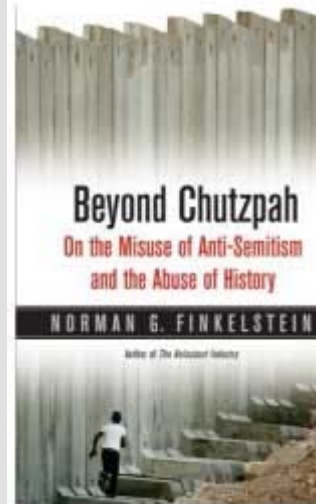
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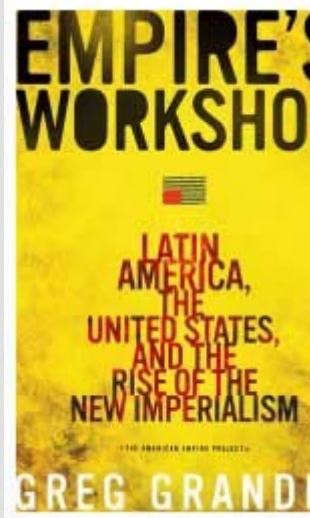
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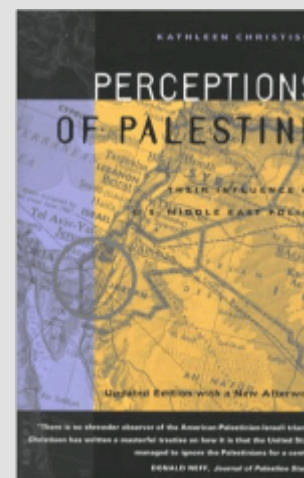
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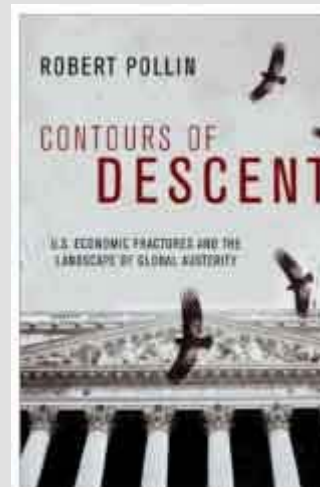
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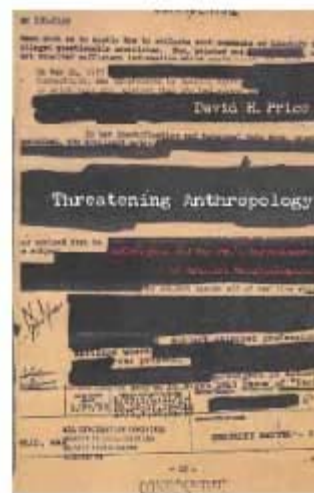
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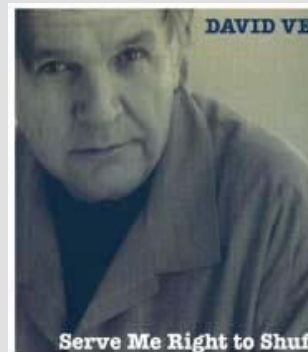
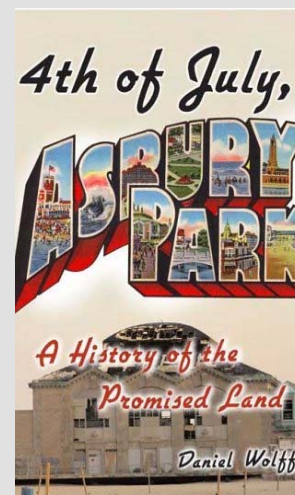
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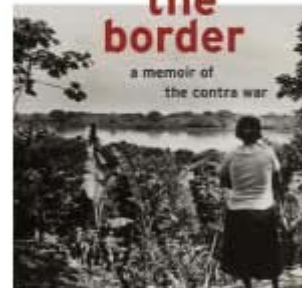


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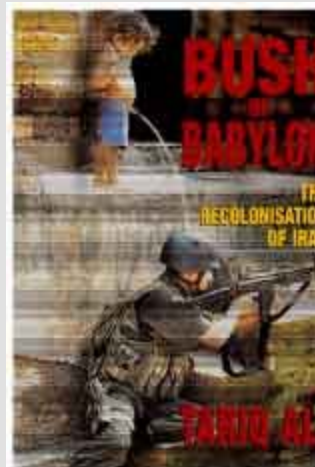
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