

TBR News December 7, 2007

The Voice of the White House

Washington, D.C., December 6, 2007: "Some things of interest, perhaps. Is there blame to assess over the failed war in Iraq? Is this futile and destructive struggle the fault of a mentally defective President, egged on by a vicious and unbalance Vice President?"

The recent revelation by the U.S. intelligence community that Iran, often put forward by Bush and Cheney as planning to attack everyone with atomic bombs, has been revealed to be utterly false. In spite of these revelations, Bush continues to mumble and rant about his determination to attack Iran. There is an interesting, and frightening, background to all of this non-stop lying and it is not the weak character of George Bush or the manic viciousness of Dick Cheney.

The Pentagon has long been outraged at the piecemeal destruction of both the U.S. Army and the Marine Corps in the meat grinder that Iraq has become. They know who the real culprits are because they have identified them and been reading their top secret messages for two years now.

Are they listening to the White House? No, they are watching Israel like a hawk, reading their top secret diplomatic and military traffic, getting reports almost daily from U.S. intelligence personnel stationed in Israel and they have long ago extended their surveillance to the Israeli diplomatic messaging.

From this, they have built up a massive dossier that shows very clearly that the driving force behind the Iraq invasion and now, the frenzy to attack Iran is purely Israeli.

That country has so subverted our official institutions with money as the carrot and attacks by their almost complete control of the American print and television media as the stick. Israel has used the neo-cons to put forward Israel's needs to Bush...who listens raptly and obeys without question.

They hated Saddam Hussein because he dared to fire rockets into Israel during the Gulf War and they suggested that if American forces destroyed their enemy, we could all share in the revenues from Iraqi oil. That this plan collapsed is certain but most Americans do not know that the so-called "Yellowcake uranium" story upon which Bush based his war was a pure Israeli invention.

Now, with even the possibility that Iran might be working on an atomic bomb, a bomb which would certainly be used against Israel, that country has doubled and redoubled its clandestine efforts to push America into pulling their chestnuts out of the Mideast fire.

Israel, according to intercepted conversations by the Pentagon (and now circulating in Washington) is prepared to fight to the last American life. And those who mourn the young American dead and mangled soldiers in Iraq do not need to look at the manic and deluded White House but to Tel Aviv who killed and maimed their sons, brothers, fathers and husbands.

In a very true sense, the leaking of the report on the halt in the Iranian atomic development program was a form of very high level mutiny on the part of Bush's military high command. This was not any kind of an error but a deliberate and hopefully successful, plan to force the United States away from blind obedience to Israel's murderous wishes.

Bush made no objections when the Israeli government told him they were going to flatten Beirut and they quickly resupplied the IDF with more cluster bombs whose sole purpose was to kill civilians. When Hezbollah struck back, rocketing sacred Israel and doing terrible damage to the IDF, Israel demanded that Bush send American troops to help them kill more Arabs. Bush could not because, thanks to Israeli demands, our troops were pinned down in a vicious guerrilla war in Iraq. Now, we see that Israel is livid with rage because of the revelations of the American intelligence community and are bending every effort to get their co-religionists in America to continue to demand American military action against Iran.

In the long view, it would be better if we threw out the neocons, most of whom are Israeli citizens, stopped all military aid to that instigator of death and destruction, disbanded the AIPAC organization, and warned the American media that this is the United States, not Israel, and that there are times when silence is golden.

All of this manipulation is becoming very obvious, even to the chronically disinterested American

public and if you stop up the spout of a boiling tea kettle, the lid always blows off.”

Dispute over Iran’s nuclear program throws Israel-US relations into grave crisis

December 4, 2007

Debka

A friendship on the rocks

Tel Aviv- Senior Israel security and intelligence officials report: Washington is refusing to heed the intelligence Israel has gathered on Iran’s covert military nuclear program which refutes its latest estimate, denies Israel access to authentic US intelligence and has embarked on steps detrimental to Israel in relation to Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Lebanon, without informing its government.

Defense minister Ehud Barak challenged the US intelligence estimate on Iran Tuesday, Dec. 4. He said that Iran may have stopped its military program in 2003, but has since apparently restarted it.

Prime minister Ehud Olmert, left in the dark by Israel’s senior ally, is at a loss to arrest the serious deterioration in their relations. At pains to conceal the gaping rift with Washington, the prime minister’s office released word of George W, Bush’s coming visit to Jerusalem, his first as president. However, DEBKAFfile’s sources disclose Israel will be only one stop along an extensive Middle East tour, which will take Bush to Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Ramallah, where he intends to make a big deal of proclaiming his support for forthcoming Palestinian statehood.

He will also visit Beirut, by which time Gen. Michel Suleiman will be installed as president. Bush will hail his administration’s diplomatic success in securing Saudi, Iranian and Syrian approval for the election of a pro-Syrian Hizballah supporter as Lebanese president.

Talking to the media Tuesday, the US president ducked the question of whether the new US Intelligence Estimate had changed Washington’s Iran policy. Next month, our sources report, he will have ample opportunity to demonstrate his abrupt, tidal policy reversals when he tours Middle East capitals.

DEBKAFfile’s Jerusalem sources report Olmert, loath to admit the loss of Israel’s most powerful friend, is under mounting pressure by leading political, intelligence and military officials to stand up and articulate an independent Israeli stance in the light of the Bush administration’s actions, especially in response to the true facts of Iran’s nuclear activities. The rift with Washington is not just political, they say, but touches on critical security issues that affect Israel’s very survival.

One immediate proposal is for the establishment of a national emergency government.

<http://debka.com/article.php?aid=1320>

Bush: No change in Iran policy

December 4, 2007

by Mark Tran, Simon Jeffery in Washington and agencies

Guardian Unlimited

George Bush today ruled out a change in Washington’s Iran policy following the declassification yesterday of a US intelligence report that concluded Tehran had abandoned its nuclear weapons programme in 2003.

The US president denied the national intelligence estimate (NIE) - which said Tehran’s determination to develop nuclear weapons "is less ... than we have been judging" - had undercut his administration’s repeated assertions that Iran was building nuclear weapons.

"Iran was dangerous. Iran is dangerous. And Iran will be dangerous if they have the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon," Bush told his first White House press conference in nearly seven weeks.

He said the US would continue to work to "isolate" Iran, claiming the NIE was a "warning signal" to the international community.

"I think it is very important for the international community to recognise the fact that if Iran were to develop the knowledge that they could transfer to a clandestine program, it would create a danger of the

world.

"And so, I view this report as a warning signal that they had the programme, they halted the programme. The reason why it's a warning signal is they could restart it."

As recently as October, Bush was invoking the threat of a third world war if Iran was not prevented from obtaining the necessary knowledge to make a nuclear weapon.

Asked if he had been "hyping" the threat from Iran, Bush said he was only made aware of the NIE last week and insisted it had changed nothing. "I still feel strongly that Iran is a danger. I think the NIE makes it clear that Iran needs to be taken seriously as a threat to peace. My opinion hasn't changed."

The US intelligence estimate is unfortunate timing for the Bush administration because it could take the steam out of its efforts to push for further sanctions against Iran at the UN.

Iran today welcomed the NIE as proof of its peaceful nuclear intentions. The Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, speaking before Bush, said he welcomed the US move to "correct" its previous assertions.

"It's natural that we welcome it when those countries who in the past have questions and ambiguities about this case... now amend their views realistically," he told state radio. "The condition of Iran's peaceful nuclear activities is becoming clear to the world."

The report was, however, contradicted by Israel. Its defence minister, Ehud Barak, claimed that Iran had restarted its military nuclear programme.

"It's apparently true that in 2003 Iran stopped pursuing its military nuclear programme for a time. But in our opinion, since then it has apparently continued that programme," he told army radio.

Barak said Israel was "familiar with this American assessment" but there "are differences in the assessments of different organisations in the world about this, and only time will tell who is right."

Israel has not ruled out military action against Iran, but says it prefers a diplomatic solution. Asked if the new US assessment reduced the likelihood of a US military strike on Iran, Barak said it was "possible".

Israel has backed US-led efforts at the UN to impose sanctions on Iran for its refusal to halt uranium enrichment, a process that can be used to develop nuclear weapons.

Britain, which has backed the US campaign for sanctions against Iran, also said the risk remained of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons despite the US intelligence report.

The report, Downing Street said, "shows the intent is there and the risk of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon remains a very serious issue".

Gordon Brown's spokesman added: "We do need to examine the details of this report. But in overall terms the government believes that the report confirms we were right to be worried about Iran seeking to develop nuclear weapons."

Critics of the administration's policy on Iran have seized upon the report to argue against military action.

The intelligence finding removes, "if nothing else, the urgency that we have to attack Iran, or knock out facilities", said Chuck Hagel, a Republican senator. "I don't think you can overstate the importance of this."

The Democratic leader of the US senate, Harry Reid, urged the White House to adjust its policy and pursue "a diplomatic surge" to engage with Iran.

British GCHQ eavesdropping played role in US intelligence U-turn on Iran

· *Time lag as agencies checked out conversations*

· *Ahmadinejad basks in 'great victory' of report*

December 6, 2007

by Ewen MacAskill in Washington and Robert Tait in Tehran

The Guardian

The US intelligence U-turn on Iran was partly based on telephone conversations in Iran intercepted by the

British intelligence listening station GCHQ, according to a source in Washington speaking on a basis of anonymity.

In an updated assessment of Iran published on Monday, the US intelligence agencies concluded that the country had ceased work on a nuclear weapons programme four years ago, in contrast with its assessment in 2005 that the country was pushing ahead with its weapons programme.

George Bush said on Tuesday that the decision to change the assessment was based on "a great discovery". Diplomatic and official sources in the US said this was mainly based on human intelligence, almost certainly a major defector, but that intercepts were also a factor.

According to the source, there was a lengthy time-lag between the conversations being intercepted by GCHQ and the US intelligence agencies checking out whether they were genuine or whether those involved knew they were being listened to and put out false information.

In remarks to the press yesterday, Bush reiterated his warning that, in spite of the new intelligence assessment, Iran remained a threat and Tehran faced a choice between negotiation or isolation.

The president said that the secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, had been in touch with Britain and France to discuss a push for a new round of UN sanctions against Iran.

A White House spokesman, Tony Fratto, was pressed by journalists yesterday over why Bush had continued to ramp up rhetoric against Iran in October if he had been informed by the national intelligence director, Mike McConnell, in August, of the new intelligence. Bush was only told of the national intelligence office's final assessment last Wednesday, he said.

The questions came against a background of speculation, particularly among bloggers, that the intelligence community put out the assessment to pre-empt a military strike being ordered by Bush and the vice-president, Dick Cheney, next year.

Fratto refused to say how much detail McConnell had provided in August. "What director McConnell said is that we're going to go back and do rigorous analysis of this intelligence, and when we can be certain of it, we're going to come back and talk to you - and that's what they did," he said.

The conclusions of the national intelligence estimate, the consensus view of the 16 US intelligence agencies, are largely supposed to be independent of the White House. But, contrary to the speculation among bloggers about mutiny by the intelligence community, the president retains control over whether and when the estimates are published. There is a long list of other estimates that Bush has determined should remain classified.

The Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, basked in the "great victory" of the US intelligence report.

"Today the Iranian nation is victorious but you [the west] are empty handed," he said in a speech to a rally in the western city of Ilam. "This was a final shot to those who, in the past several years, spread a sense of threat and concern in the world through lies of nuclear weapons. If you want to start a new political game the united Iranian nation will resist you and will not retreat one iota from its nuclear programme."

However, Ali Larijani, Iran's former chief nuclear negotiator, who resigned in October over policy differences with Ahmadinejad, cautioned against seeing the report as a triumph and warned that it might presage a new phase of US pressure.

"The report refers to Iran's 2003 voluntary suspension of uranium enrichment, which we undertook to build trust, as resulting from threats and pressure," Larijani said. "This means they have got the wrong impression from Iran's [previous] suspension of enrichment. The intention of this part of the report is to claim that if we want Iran now to abandon its nuclear plan we should impose the policy of pressure again."

Baghdad's Refugees

Trapped in the Green Zone

December 5, 2007

by Ulrike Putz

Spiegel

Hundreds of Iraqi families have sought refuge in Baghdad's Green Zone in recent years. Now the authorities want them out — but beyond the barricades, death awaits. A visit to a no-man's land in the Iraqi capital.

Entry into the Green Zone is strictly prohibited. But Iraqi families living inside the zone are being forced out and fear they will be killed for collaborating.

The paper that has protected the lives of the Al Jaaf family has been presented so often that its folds have torn. It instructs anyone wanting to evict the family from its home under the "14th of July Bridge" in Baghdad to contact the name given. The letter is signed by one Chip Bell, captain of the US Army in Iraq. Various stamps and a military letterhead lend the document additional weight. But even though the Al Jaafs continue to treat the letter like hidden treasure, it has lost its value. "So have our lives," says Mrs Al Jaaf.

The Al Jaafs are one of hundreds of Iraqi families that have sought refuge in Baghdad's so-called Green Zone in recent years. The international enclave, home to the headquarters of the Americans and their allies, is a city within a city; Nestled in a bend in the Tigris, the quarter belonged to the elite under Saddam Hussein. This is where the dictator's palaces stood and still stand, off limits to ordinary mortals.

Entry to the zone remains restricted today. Behind its high walls, tens of thousands of soldiers, diplomats, foreign workers and Iraqis live in relative safety. For the Al Jaafs, it's become safety on demand. Since the Iraqi government took over management of the zone, it has been trying to drive Iraqi families away. "They want us to move back into the city," says the father of the Al Jaaf family. The 52-year-old is certain that he and his family wouldn't survive a single day on the outside. "Anyone who has worked for the Americans is considered a traitor and is as good as dead," he says.

Kidnapped because He Worked for the Americans

The Al Jaafs know what they're talking about. On Aug. 11, 2006, Isam, their eldest son, was kidnapped. He had been working as a security guard in the Green Zone, employed by Triple Canopy, one of the big American security companies in Iraq. Isam's family is certain that the 30-year-old was kidnapped because of his job. They can't bring themselves to say what is virtually certain: that he is dead.

It's uncomfortably cool in the kitchen where the Al Jaafs receive visitors. The living room is not presentable. Their daughter-in-law apologizes: they used to clear aside the mattresses where the parents sleep during the day, but now they can't be bothered. "We've left our friends and relatives behind. Nobody visits us anymore."

When the elder Al Jaafs talk about their lost son, they do so in evasive language, suppressing the truth. "I pray that he's doing well," says the mother. "I long for the day when I can hug him again," says the father. "I hope your son returns soon, and in good health," says the visitor. It's almost embarrassing; everyone avoids eye contact. The mother stands up sluggishly to fix the gas flame. The father reaches for a brush to comb his moustache.

But the moment passes and Hamsi Al Jaaf continues to talk. The kidnapers only contacted the family once, a day after Isam's capture. "They said they were from the Mahdi army and they wanted \$50,000 ransom," he says. The Mahdi army is one of the most feared Shiite militias in Iraq. The Al Jaafs are Sunni. "I simply didn't have that kind of money," says the father, who worked as a businessman in the Jordanian capital Amman prior to the war. Since then, they've heard nothing from their son.

No Turning Back

A week after the kidnapping, the family bought a paltry house in the Green Zone for \$3,500. The women packed up a few things, the father closed the door to their old apartment in the Taalbiye district. Since then the Al Jaafs have been living on the banks of the Tigris.

Their new home lies in the shadow of the major bridge that connects the Green Zone with Baghdad. But the Al Jaafs can't cross it. They can't return to their old neighborhood, city and lives. It's the same for their neighbors.

Hamsi Al Jaaf and his daughter Isra who works for the American security company Triple Canopy.

All seven families living under the bridge share the same fate, says Mrs. Al Jaaf. All of them were taken under the wings of the Americans after a member of their families was killed for having collaborated. "For the family behind us, it was the daughter, for the family across the way, the son," recounts the 50-year-old woman.

People like the Al Jaafs are prisoners of a no-man's land whose demise has already begun.

But what happens when the American troops leave for good and leave their employees to their own devices: that's the least of the father's concerns. What's really worrying is that an employee of the Iraqi management of the Green Zone has been coming by almost daily. Next week he's going to bring Iraqi police, then things will get serious.

The Iraqi administration wants to clear out the former army barracks that the Al Jaafs and their neighbours have bought. Why, the father doesn't know. He suspects that other Iraqis are to move in: families

with government connections. The carousel of elites spins on.

Two of the Al Jaaf daughters and one daughter-in-law are now working for the Americans, and feeding the family of 12. And more than that, their jobs could be tickets to the USA. Isra, one of the daughters, explains that if she can gather enough work experience with American companies, she might get an American visa one day. "Inshallah" or "With God's will." And once one of them makes it over, they might be able to bring over the remaining 11. Isra says "Inshallah" often.

Wearing baggy pants, a khaki T-shirt and a cap bearing the company logo, Isra is on her way to her afternoon shift. Triple Canopy pays her \$3 an hour to frisk women at checkpoints. A good job, but a dangerous one. "Hundreds of Iraqi women who have business in the Green Zone see me every day," she says. They can all read her name on her badge, they can all pass it on to the men who "want to punish the collaborators."

She's not alone with her fears, according to one of the American military policemen who visits the Al Jaafs regularly while on patrol. The previous day, he and a few colleagues had been horsing around with their Iraqi translators. One of the Iraqis got a knee in the face; his cheek bone was clearly broken. But the military hospital in the Green Zone only takes Iraqis with potentially fatal wounds.

"He was in desperate need of a hospital but he refused to go into the Red Zone," says the military policeman. "He was in a total panic and kept saying: I'll be dead in five minute because I work for you guys." The soldier concluded: "The medical provisioning for Iraqis in the Green Zone needs to be improved immediately."

"Red Zone" — when the Al Jaafs speak of their hometown on the other side of the river, they use the American term. It seems strangely distant and maybe that's the point. "Red Zone" evokes no memories of what has been lost.

"We were so much happier before the war, and even after the Americans came," says a tired Mrs. Al Jaaf. Since her son was kidnapped, all happiness has left her. Her husband pulls out two pictures of their son. The resemblance is striking. "I know, I know," Hamsi Al Jaaf cries. "He was more than a son to me, he was my friend, my brother."

Now the facade falls and the tears flow down the father's cheeks. "I still hope that he's alive and will come back to us," he sobs. "Inshallah", murmurs his wife. "Inshallah," Hamsi replies. Faith in God is the last resort in a situation that seems hopeless.

The Pot Calls the Kettle Black

Why shouldn't Russian observers supervise America's dodgy elections? For example, in Chicago, where the dead routinely vote; in Florida, where blacks are turned away; or Ohio where rigged voting machines gave Republicans victory in 2004 elections.

December 5, 2007

ICH

As expected, Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party won a landslide victory in yesterday's parliamentary elections, garnering over 63% of the vote as of this writing, which will give it 70% of the seats in the Duma, or national assembly.

The Communist Party won only 11.6%. Its leader, Gennady Zugarov, cried foul, claiming the elections were fraudulent, a pretty rich accusation from the party that never held an honest vote in its entire history.

Two other small parties that vote with Putin's United Russia gained about 15% of the vote. One of them is led by the Russian neo-fascist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Liberal, western-oriented parties were shut out.

President Vladimir Putin's earthy phrases seemed to have captured Russia's current muscular mood. Reacting to sharp western criticism of Russia's parliamentary elections, Putin, playing "Vlad the Bad," warned western powers not to "poke their snotty noses" in his nation's business.

Putin, who has been increasingly outspoken of late, mocked President George Bush's double standard in accusing Russia of dubious elections, squashing opposition, and roughing up dissenters while ignoring similar behavior by US ally Georgia. He could have also added other key US clients like Pakistan, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan.

The decision by the US-backed dictator of Pakistan, former Gen. Pervez Musharraf, to exclude former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from January elections made Washington's rebuking of Moscow look particularly two-faced.

President Putin was right to tell off western critics and limit foreign observation of Russian elections. Russia is a great, historic power, not some banana republic. If western observers were really needed to supervise votes in Moscow, Omsk and Kaluga, then why shouldn't Russian observers supervise America's sometimes dodgy elections? For example, in Chicago, where the dead routinely vote; in Florida, where blacks are turned away; or Ohio where rigged voting machines gave Republicans victory in 2004 elections.

It would be better if we dropped the pretense that Russia conducts free, fair, western-style elections. Elections under former US protégé Boris Yeltsin were all rigged or voters bought. Today, Russian opposition parties have almost no funding, they are excluded from most media, which is largely government controlled. Parties winning less than 7% of the vote are excluded, and there is no independent electoral commission.

Sunday's vote was really a referendum on President Putin's popularity. Most polls show him with 70–80% approval, making Putin one of the world's most successful and admired leaders. Election returns confirmed this fact, particularly among young Russians.

Former intelligence officer Putin and his KGB old boys network have worked wonders for Russia. After a coup that ousted the sick, besotted Yeltsin, Putin inherited a bankrupt, demoralized nation subsisting on cash handouts from Washington. So low did "Weimar" Russia sink, much of its advanced military technology was sold to the US for large cash payoffs.

Thanks to tough management, nationalizations, and rising oil prices caused in part by George Bush's foolhardy invasion of Iraq, Russia's national income more than tripled under Putin, and the ruble became a hard currency. Equally important, Putin restored pride and sense of dignity to this fiercely chauvinistic nation.

In the process, he centralized all power in the Kremlin, muzzled the independent press, intimidated opponents, jailed oligarchs, and created a cult of personality. He ruthlessly crushed the life out of independence-seeking Chechnya, thrilling Muslim-hating Russians by vowing to "kill the Chechen bandits in their shithouses." Russians simply didn't care about the atrocities their soldiers and police committed against the Chechen, whom they branded "terrorists," any more than Americans cared about the vast suffering they inflicted on Iraq and Afghanistan.

Most Russians couldn't care less about the feeble little liberal parties clamoring for western-style democracy. It's a sad truism that Russians want order, economic progress and national pride, not democracy. Judo champion, abstemious Putin fits this bill perfectly as the historic "white czar," a good, fatherly autocrat who is strong, manly, and pure.

To most Russians, "democracy" is associated with the thieving oligarchs who pillaged Russia's industries and resources during Yeltsin's rule, and the ivory-tower economists who debauched Russia's currency, leaving millions of pensioners to starve.

Democracy is also seen by many Russians as a Trojan Horse the US used to assert financial and political influence over Russia, and later in Ukraine, Georgia and Central Asia. Meanwhile, President Bush's policies of ordering NATO around the way the Soviets treated the old Warsaw Pact, pushing NATO to Russia's western borders, and the daft scheme to emplace US ABM systems in the Czech Republic and Poland enflamed Russia's nationalist passions and reignited its historic fears of western threats.

Putin says he wants to continue leading Russia. But he is constitutionally banned from a third presidential term. So does Putin plan to run Russia as an all-powerful prime minister? As leader of his United Russia Party? Will he become a youthful elder statesman? Or will he simply get the Duma to change the constitution?

He may follow the example of Czar Ivan the Terrible, temporarily withdrawing from public life until throngs of supplicants beg him to return to Moscow as Czar.

Or he could just remain Citizen Vladimir Putin. The only formal title the great Deng Xiaoping held when he so brilliantly ruled China was Chairman of the Chinese Bridge Association. But no one doubted for a second who ran China.

Whatever Putin's near-term political plans, he clearly intends to restore Russia's role as a world power, and to challenge US global domination. Russia's withdrawal last week from the European conventional arms treaty is the latest ominous sign.

President Putin wants to restore the old Soviet Union's borders, but minus the Communist Party, which has sunk miserably low public support. Putin believes Russia's vast energy and mineral resources will eventually make it the world's leading power. Only 55 years old, Putin might even live to see this triumphant day for Mother Russia.

Eric Margolis, contributing foreign editor for Sun National Media Canada, is the author of War at the Top of the World. See his website. <http://www.ericmargolis.com/>

Two-Thirds of Israelis Oppose Attack on Iran: Poll

December 6, 2007

AFP

JERUSALEM - Two-thirds of Israelis oppose their country launching on its own a military attack against nuclear installations in arch-foe Iran, said a poll published on Thursday

When asked "should Israel alone attack the Iranian nuclear installations," 67.2 percent said no, while 20.9 percent said yes and 11.9 percent had no opinion, said the survey aired on public radio.

The poll questioned people after the publication of a bombshell intelligence report in the United States earlier in the week, which said Tehran had frozen its atomic weapons programme in 2003.

Israel has vowed to keep up its diplomatic offensive against Iran's contested nuclear programme despite the report, saying it believes Tehran has probably restarted an atomic weapons programme.

Widely thought to be the Middle East's sole if undeclared nuclear power, Israel considers Iran its top enemy following repeated statements by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for the Jewish state to be wiped off the map.

Thursday's poll was carried out by Shivuk Panorama marketing group, questioning 562 people, and had a 4.5-percentage point margin of error.

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German ministers say Scientology unconstitutional

December 7, 2007

by Louis Charbonneau

Reuters



Reuters Photo:

Actor Tom Cruise, who plays the role of the homosexual Claus von Stauffenberg

in a forthcoming motion picture, 'Valkurie' gestures after delivering a speech at the inauguration...

BERLIN (Reuters) - German federal and state interior ministers declared the Church of Scientology unconstitutional on Friday, opening the door for a possible ban on the organization.

Federal Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaueble and 16 state interior chiefs agreed "that we do not consider

Scientology an organization that is compatible with the constitution," Ehrhart Koerting, Berlin's interior minister and chairman of a ministers' conference in Berlin, told reporters.

Germany does not recognize Scientology as a religion. seeing it as a cult masquerading as a church to make money. Scientologists reject this view.

The government permits the Church of Scientology to operate in Germany as an organization, and in January it opened a six-storey headquarters in the heart of west Berlin.

Earlier this week, a Berlin district set up an office to deal with complaints about Scientology.

Koerting said Germany's domestic intelligence agencies should continue gathering information on the legality of Scientology's activities in Germany so that a decision could be made on what to do about it next year.

Earlier this year, the German Defense Ministry said it would not allow the makers of a movie about an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hitler to film at German military sites because U.S. actor Tom Cruise, a Scientologist, was appearing in it.

The government later insisted that Cruise's personal beliefs had nothing to do with its initial decision to prevent him from shooting scenes at a site in the Defense Ministry complex and permitted the actor to film there.

The ministers also agreed to examine ways of cutting off funds to far-right organizations by taking a close look at state aid to foundations that supported them, Koerting said.

The far-right National Democratic Party (NPD) entered the regional parliament in the eastern state of Saxony in 2004 after winning more than 9 percent of the vote.

The NPD and another far-right party now hold seats in several state parliaments, giving them the right to financial support from the government.

(Additional reporting by Markus Krah; Editing by Andrew Dobbie)

Why the Council on Foreign Relations Hates Putin: Why Murdoch's Journal Loves Kasparov

December 7, 2007

by Mike Whitney

Counterpunch

On Sunday, Putin's party, United Russia, stormed to victory in the country's parliamentary elections with 63 per cent of the vote. It was a romp. United Russia now controls 306 of the 450 seats in the Duma, an overwhelming majority. The balloting was a referendum on Putin's leadership and it passed in a landslide. Now it's certain, that even if Putin steps down as president next year as expected, he will be the dominant player in Russian politics for the foreseeable future.

Vladimir Putin is arguably the most popular leader in Russian history, although you'd never know it by reading the western media. According to a recent survey conducted by the Wall Street Journal, Putin's personal approval rating in November 2007 was 85 per cent, making him the most popular head of state in the world today. Putin's popularity derives from many factors. He is personally clever and charismatic. He is fiercely nationalistic and has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of ordinary Russians and restore the country to its former greatness. He has raised over 20 million Russians out of grinding poverty, improved education, health care and the pension system, (partially) nationalized critical industries, lowered unemployment, increased manufacturing and exports, invigorated Russian markets, strengthened the ruble, raised the overall standard of living, reduced government corruption, jailed or exiled the venal oligarchs, and amassed capital reserves of \$450 billion.

Russia is no longer up for grabs like it was after the fall of the Soviet Union. Putin put an end to all of that. He reasserted control over the country's vast resources and he's using them to improve the lives of his own people. This is a real departure from the 1990s, when the drunken Yeltsin steered Russia into economic disaster by following Washington's neoliberal edicts and by selling Russia's Crown Jewels to the vulturous oligarchs. Putin put Russia's house back in order; stabilized the ruble, strengthened economic/military alliances in the region, and removed the corporate gangsters who had stolen Russia's national assets for pennies on the dollar. The oligarchs are now all either in jail or have fled the country. Russia is no longer for sale.

Russia is, once again, a major world power and a vital source of hydrocarbons. Its star is steadily rising just as America's has begun to wane. This may explain why Putin is loathed by the West. Freud might call it petroleum envy, but it's deeper than that. Putin has charted a course for social change that conflicts with basic tenets of neoliberalism, which are the principles which govern US foreign policy. He is not a member of the corporate-banking brotherhood which believes the wealth of the world should be divided among themselves regardless of the suffering or destruction it may cause. Putin's primary focus is Russia; Russia's welfare, Russia's sovereignty and Russia's place in the world. He is not a globalist.

That is why the Bush administration has encircled Russia with military bases, toppled neighboring regimes with its color-coded revolutions, (which were organized by US NGOs and intelligence services) intervened in Russian elections, and threatened to deploy an (allegedly defensive) nuclear weapons system in Eastern Europe. Russia is seen as a potential rival to US imperial ambitions and must be contained or subverted.

In the early years of his presidency, it was believed that Putin would comply with western demands and accept a subordinate role in the US-EU-Israel centric system. But that hasn't happened. Putin has stubbornly defended Russian independence and resisted integration into the prevailing system. .

The triumphalism which swept through Washington after the fall of the Berlin Wall has been replaced with a palpable fear that Russia's power will grow as oil prices continue to soar. The tectonic plates of geopolitical power are gradually shifting eastward. That's why the US has joined in The Great Game and is trying to put down roots in Eurasia. Still, it's easy to imagine a scenario in which America's access to the last great oil and natural gas reserves on the planet--the three trillion barrels of oil and natural gas located in the Caspian Basin---could be completely blocked by a resurgent Russian superpower.

The most powerful of the Washington think tanks, the Council on Foreign Relations, recognized this problem early on and decided that US policy towards Russia had to be reworked entirely.

John Edwards and Jack Kemp were appointed to lead a CFR task force which concocted the pretext for an all-out assault on the Putin. This is where the idea that Putin is "rolling back democracy" began. In their article "Russia's Wrong Direction", Edwards and Kemp state that a "strategic partnership" with Russia is no longer possible. They claim that the government has become increasingly authoritarian and that the society is growing less "open and pluralistic".

Kemp and Edwards provided the ideological foundation upon which the entire public relations campaign against Putin has been built. And it is quite an impressive campaign. A Google News search shows roughly 1,400 articles from the various news services on Putin. Virtually all of them contain exactly the same

rhetoric, the same buzzwords, the same spurious claims, the same slanders. It is impossible to find even one article out of 1,400 that diverges the slightest bit from the talking points which originated at the Council on foreign Relations.

It's interesting to see to what extent the media has become a propaganda bullhorn for the national security state. Putin's personal approval ratings confirm his enormous popularity, and yet, the media continues to treat him like he's a tyrant. It is utterly incongruous.

In most articles, Putin is disparaged as "anti democratic"; a charge that is never leveled at the Saudi Royal family even though women are forbidden to drive, they must be fully-covered at all times, and can be stoned to death if they are found to be unfaithful. Also, in Saudi Arabia, beheading is still the punishment of choice for capital crimes.

When Saudi King Abdullah visits the US, he is not heaped with scorn for his regimes' repressive treatment of his people. Instead he's rewarded with flattering photos of he and George Bush strolling arm-in-arm through the Crawford sage.

Why is Putin blasted for "rolling back democracy" when American client, Mikhail Saakashvili, arbitrarily declares martial law and deploys his truncheon-wielding Robo-cops to beat protesters senseless before dragging them off to the Georgia gulag? The pictures of Saakashvili's bloody crackdown appeared in the foreign press, but not in the US. Rather, the media had all its cameras focused on Garry Kasparov (contributing editor to the Wall Street Journal and right-wing loony) as he was led off to the Moscow hoosegow in handcuffs for protesting without a permit

Putin's real crime is that he serves Russia's national interests rather than the interests of global Capital. He also rejects Washington's "unipolar" world model. As he said in Munich:

"The unipolar world refers to a world in which there is one master, one sovereign; one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making. At the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within.

"What is even more important is that the model itself is flawed because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization."

He added:

"We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law....We are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force — military force — in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts. I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security."

Well said, Vladimir.

Putin's no saint, but he doesn't deserve the thrashing he gets from the western media.

And a final word on Garry Kasparov

On Sunday, while Putin's party "United Russia" was screeching to a landslide victory, Reuters News was busy taking mug-shots of the stony-faced Kasparov holding up Florida-style ballots claiming the voting was rigged. "They are not just rigging the vote," Kasparov moaned, "They are raping the whole electoral system. These elections are a reminder of Soviet elections when there was no choice.....Putin is going to have a hard time trying to rule like Stalin."

Stalin? So now Putin is Stalin? First of all, when did Reuters begin to take such a keen interest in voting irregularities? It must be a recent development, because they were nowhere to be found in the 2000 presidential election. And when did they start to pay attention to "political dissent"? They certainly never wasted any video-footage on the antiwar rallies in the US. Are we to believe that they are more interested in democracy in Russia than America?

And why is Reuters so eager to provide valuable column-space to a washed-up chessmaster who's only interested in making a nuisance of himself by bellyaching about voter fraud? That's not news; it's propaganda.

As for Kasparov and his silly accusations; he should be glad that he lives in Putin's Russia rather than Stalin's or he'd be in leg-irons right now boarding a northbound train to the Siberian outback.

What is Kasparov doing in Moscow anyway? And why is this little man --with virtually no political base — such a big part of the western media narrative? Is he only there to discredit the election and throw a

little more muck on Putin or is there more to it than that?

Garry Kasparov should give up politics and do what he does best; stand-up comedy. Watching Kasparov traipse around Moscow with his basket of sour grapes and his entourage of western media-stooges is like watching "Mr. Bean's Excellent Kremlin Adventure", a particularly lame performance in a dismal B-rated burlesque. It's painful to watch.

Kasparov's party, the "Other Russia" couldn't manage even a 2 per cent rating in the polls. The party is a complete dud. In fact, Reuters even (reluctantly) admits as much in its article.

Here's the clip. Reuters: "Kasparov and his "Other Russia" dissident movement are not standing in Sunday's parliamentary election because they could not get registered as a party. **THEY ENJOY LITTLE PUBLIC SUPPORT AMONG RUSSIANS BUT HAVE A BIG FOLLOWING IN THE WEST.**" (Reuters) "Big following in the West"? Why doesn't that surprise me?

So, in other words, Kasparov has no base of support in Russia, and yet he gets his own camera crew and media team to follow him around recording every silly he says. That's just great. Who do they think he is; Nelson Mandela?

Kasparov is a contributing editor of Murdoch's Wall Street Journal; so he already has a regular platform for launching his tirades on the "tyrannical" Mr. Putin. Normally, one doesn't get a spot on the op-ed page of the WSJ unless their politics are somewhere to the right of Augusto Pinochet. That's probably the case with Kasparov, too. In Saturday's edition of the WSJ, Kasparov delivered his latest absurd soliloquy disparaging Putin and recounting his agonizing 5 day ordeal in the Moscow poky.

Although Kasparov has garnered little public support in Russia, he appears to have a loyal following among the Washington elite. According to Wikipedia: "In 1991, Kasparov received the Keeper of the Flame award from the Center for Security Policy (a US think tank), for anti-Communist resistance and the propagation of democracy. Kasparov was an exceptional recipient since the award is given to "individuals for devoting their public careers to the defense of the United States and American values around the world". Hmmm...."For devoting their public careers to the defense of the United States and American values around the world"? Isn't that a definition of an American agent?

Again, according to Wikipedia: In April, 2007 it was asserted that Kasparov was a board member of the National Security Advisory Council of the Center for Security Policy, a non-profit, non-partisan national security organization that specializes in identifying policies, actions, and resource needs that are vital to American security". Kasparov confirmed this and added that he was removed shortly after he became aware of it. He noted that **HE DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE MEMBERSHIP** and suggested he was included in the board by an accident because he received the 1991 Keeper of the Flame award from this organization. But Kasparov maintained his association with the neoconservative leadership by giving speeches at think tanks such as the Hoover Institute."

Here's a list of some of the other fellow travelers who've been given the "Keeper of the Flame Award": 2007-Senator Joe Lieberman. 2004-General Peter Pace. 2003- Paul Wolfowitz. 2002- General Richard Meyers. 1998-Donald Rumsfeld. 1996-Newt Gingrich. 1995-Ronald Reagan. 1990-Casper Weinberger.


Is Kasparov an anomaly or does he fit right in with this coven of far-right loonies? And who are some of the prominent members of the Center for Security Policy? Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, Frank Gaffney, James Roche and Laura Ingraham. Oh, boy. The whole front office of the neocon's cuckoo's nest. Now tell me, dear reader, with friends like that; what should we really think about Kasparov's performance in Moscow? Is he really interested in "democracy promotion" as he claims or is their acting out a script that was prepared in Washington?

In the US, Kasparov has become the focal point of the Russian elections - the primary source of "unbiased" analysis. NPR reiterates his spurious claims every half hour. The other news agencies are no better. He has become the distorted lens through which Americans view Russian democracy. This says a lot more about the choke-hold the neocons still have on the media rather than anything objective about Russia. The Kasparov fiasco gives us a chance to see the inner-workings of the establishment media. It's nothing more than a propaganda bullhorn for far-right organizations executing their bloody imperial strategy. Fidel Castro summed it up best just days ago when he said: "It is the most sophisticated media ever developed by technology, employed to kill human beings and to subjugate or exterminate peoples".

Amen to that, Fidel.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/whitney12052007.html>

Comment: The CIA has been pouring money into Russia in a vain attempt to get rid of the hated Putin. Like all of their other ventures, this one too ended in disaster and more taxpayer's money was poured down the CIA rathole. And like the CIA, everything the sleaze king Rupert Murdoch, touches also turns to



shit. BH