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Countdown To War With Iran?

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In spite of being hopelessly bogged down in \$700 billion wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush/Cheney administration appears set on a collision course with Tehran. In recent weeks, the White House's war of words against Iran has sharply intensified, and grown increasingly bellicose.

What is the White House up to? Either trying to bluff Tehran into abandoning its entirely legal but worrisome civilian nuclear power program, which would allow the administration to claim a major victory after so many reverses.

Or, the lame duck Bush/Cheney Administration is attempting to divert attention from the worsening debacle in Iraq and intends to provoke an air and naval war against Iran as a last desperate, ideologically driven assault against its foes in the Muslim world. One is reminded of the suicidal banzai charges of cornered Japanese troops during World War II.

Time is running out for the pro-war neocons: Bush has less than two years left in office and is facing a revolt in Congress. Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair is expected to leave office by the end of April – or earlier if he is engulfed by a raging scandal over selling titles. The arrest of Lord Levy, Blair's principal fund raiser and pro-war mentor on the Mideast, has seriously undermined the faltering Blair government.

Evidence continues to accumulate that the Bush/Cheney Administration is planning an air and naval war against Iran in spite of a rising chorus of protests by serving and retired senior US military officers and diplomats.

The heaviest concentration of US naval strike forces since the 2003 war against Iraq is concentrating off Iran. In a disturbing replay of that conflict, CIA drones and US Air Force recon aircraft, along with US and British Special Forces are overflying Iran and probing its nuclear and military installations.

CIA and Britain's MI6 are stirring unrest among Iran's Kurds and Azerbaijanis, and arming Iranian Marxist and royalist exiles.

In a clear provocation, President George Bush ordered US forces in Iraq to "kill" Iranians officials or diplomats who appear "threatening." US troops in northern Iraq broke into an Iranian liaison office and arrested its military staff. Bush warned Iran not to "meddle" in neighboring Iraq.

Pentagon sources accused Iran of smuggling weapons and explosive to "Iraqi insurgents" – though the "insurgents" are in fact Shia militiamen allied to the US-installed Baghdad regime. Accusations that Iran is behind attacks on US forces are clearly designed to lay the groundwork for a "casus belli" – justifying war.

Half the 21,000 additional US troops headed to Iraq may be positioned to block an Iranian threat to the vulnerable main US Kuwait-Baghdad supply line in the event of war with Iran. US anti-aircraft and anti-missile batteries are being airlifted to Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman.

New contingents of US Air Force personnel and warplanes are arriving at key forward air bases in Bulgaria and Romania that link the US to the Mideast and Central Asia. US bases in Britain, Germany, Diego Garcia, the Gulf,

Central Asia, and Pakistan are reported on heightened alert. Turkey is being pressed to allow US and Israeli strike aircraft to use its air space to attack northern Iran.

The Pentagon's latest strike plan against Iran includes over 2,300 "high value" targets such as its dispersed nuclear infrastructure and, worryingly, operating reactors, air and naval bases, ports, telecommunications, air defenses, military factories, energy networks, and government buildings. Iran's water and sewage systems, bridges, food storage, and bomb shelters could also be targeted, as were Iraq's in 2001.

A swift "surgical strike" is not likely. Given the large number of potential targets in Iran, and its efforts to defend and disperse some of the high value ones; it is very probable the US would have to launch multiple air and missile strikes against many of them to assure destruction. Iranian ground forces moving toward Iraq and Kuwait would also come under repeated attack, along with their long-ranged artillery and mobile tactical missiles.

The US Treasury has mounted a highly effective campaign to strangle Iran financially, seriously hurting its foreign banking connections, retarding industrial growth and energy production, and scaring off foreign investment.

The Bush Administration and close ally Israel have sharply intensified their war of words against Iran, claiming, implausibly, it poses a nuclear threat to the entire world, though Tehran has no nuclear weapons or long-range delivery systems. Nor do Washington's fear-mongering neoconservatives explain why on earth Iran would want to threaten the rest of the world – even if it could.

The real neocon objective, of course, is not to rid the world of a potential threat, but to get America into attacking and seriously damaging the nation now regarded as Israel's primary foe, Iran. With Egypt sidelined and under tight US control, Iraq demolished and occupied, Syria isolated and petrified, only Iran remains a threat to Israel and seriously challenges its continued occupation of Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Politicians in Israel are in dangerous emotional overdrive and make open threats to attack Iran – even with nuclear weapons. Israeli rightists and their American supporters absurdly claim Iran is a new Nazi Germany and Israel faces a second Holocaust.

The fact that Israel possesses a powerful triad of air, land, and sea-based nuclear forces that can survive any surprise attack is never mentioned. At any given time, Israel has at least one Dolphin-class submarine on station in the northern Arabian Sea that can hit Iran with nuclear-armed cruise missiles.

Though UN inspectors find no evidence Iran is producing nuclear weapons, Tehran, like Saddam's Iraq, is being told to prove an impossible negative – that it has no nuclear weapons or secret programs hidden away. Ironically, there are persistent reports that Iran's nuclear program is moving at a snail's pace and has encountered serious technical problems.

With disturbing déjà vu, the US Congress and American media are swallowing the administration's torrent of unproven accusations against Iran precisely the way they lapped up grotesque White House lies about Iraq.

Amid growing war fever in North America, last week France's President Jacques Chirac sensibly observed, in an off the record interview, that even if Iran had a few nuclear weapons, they would be only for self-defense, and "not very dangerous."

Iran would be obliterated by US and Israeli nuclear counter-strikes if it ever used its nukes against Israel, noted Chirac with Cartesian logic, and are unlikely to commit national suicide.

After his candid comments became public, Chirac retracted them after a storm of protests from Washington, Israel, and even members of his own government who toe the US party line that Iran is a grave threat to world security. Chirac, who is a lame duck, was simply telling a truth that few cared to hear.


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