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COUNTDOWN TO WAR WITH IRAN

11:00 - 17 February 2007

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Ad mullahs and crazed ayatollahs - if US and British newspapers couldn't find them, they'd have to make them up. Especially now when the US's response to its military failure in Iraq is to fabricate the case for war on Iran. In coming months, vast acreage of newsprint will be devoted to pump-priming us with fear that Iran is nuclear enemy number one. The Iranian President Ahmedinejad will fill the post of "New Hitler" vacated by Saddam. Politicians will perform somersaults to justify a pre-emptive strike, possibly as soon as April. Ready-made dossiers are already being circulated to provoke the necessary agitated mood. Which is why the US chose this moment to leak "evidence" that the Iranians are promoting Sunni insurgents' attacks on its troops. Why Iran would do this when its natural affinity is with the Shia majority in Iraq, condemned the 9/11 attacks, and supported the US in Afghanistan, is not made clear. It will not be examined too closely because to do so would be to allow too many questions to muddy our vision.

It will not be explained that in 2005 the supreme authority in Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, issued a fatwa which forbade the stockpiling, production, and use of nuclear weapons. Nor the complication that others believe an Iranian nuclear weapon is the only safeguard against the US using a "battlefield" - or low-yield - nuclear bomb on Iran. And will anyone pick up on this observation by President Chirac - stating the obvious? "Where would it (Iran) fire that bomb? At Israel? It wouldn't have travelled 200 metres through the atmosphere before Tehran was razed."

A script is being played out as surely as during the lead-up to the war on Iraq - but this time at an accelerated rate.

Already, for instance, the fiction is perpetuated on mainstream TV that Ahmedinejad called for Israel to be "wiped



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off the map". I have no illusions about this populist and regressive president. But Ahmedinejad never made the quoted remark. Farsi speakers have pointed out that he was mistranslated. The Iranian president was quoting a statement by Iran's first Islamist leader, the late Ayatollah Khomeini, that "this regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time", just as had the Shah's regime in Iran.

That reference to the "page of time" suggests he did not expect it to happen soon, nor even believed that Iran would be involved in making it happen. But the propaganda impact of this distortion increases each time it is repeated. It entrenches the view that Iran is threatening to exterminate Jews.

These anomalies will be overlooked if we are panicked into supporting the Bush administration's next act of military lunacy. Those Christian fundamentalists of the White House feel they have nothing left to lose. The "cakewalk" of Iraq has become a bloodbath. US imperialism has lost the political, ideological and moral argument, and it is left only with the gun, the boot, and the bomb to ensure tame or favourable regimes.

Attacking Iran will be an 11th-hour attempt by the US to reassert its superpower status in a world where this is challenged by nations such as China. War now seems to be the option of choice for a country which is the world's largest debtor nation, and whose politicians regard militarism as a means of enforcing corporate interests, not least in respect of gas and oil links to Israel and the Mediterranean Sea.

This policy falls under the aegis of what the neo-cons themselves call the Project for the New American Century, named after an institute which mapped out its vision as far back as 2000 - before the 9/11 attacks. (To access details, for your own reference, see www.newamericancentury.org)

How soon might the next war start? Some reports suggest the US is only awaiting the most opportune moment - which could be any time this year - or may prompt Israel to act as its proxy. That could mean bombing nuclear facilities close to Tehran which could pump radioactive plutonium over a city of around 12 million people. The result could be a Middle East war cascading worldwide. Several senior Pentagon and White House figures, after all, have openly canvassed for the use of "battlefield" nukes on Iran. This might not be the spark for outright nuclear conflagration, but it would bring that possibility much closer.

In any event, we would be told that wartime realities dictate we must rally in common purpose. War abroad would be paralleled by political and legalistic authoritarianism at home.

Little of this seems close as we sit in the comfort zone of our liberal democracy and are largely unmolested by the state.

Yet historical evidence suggests that we often sleepwalk into the most cataclysmic events. There may be little prospect of us halting this descent into hell once it has begun. Bush and his sponsors will have unleashed a war of uncontrollable savagery.

I hope I am very wrong. But if this sounds crazy, consider what those crazies in the White House have already done in Iraq.

Why would they stop now?

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