

Neocon 'godfather' Norman Podhoretz tells Bush: bomb Iran

Sarah Baxter, Washington

ONE of the founding fathers of neoconservatism has privately urged President George W Bush to bomb Iran rather than allow it to acquire nuclear weapons.

Norman Podhoretz, an intellectual guru of the neoconservative movement who has joined Rudolph Giuliani's 2008 presidential campaign as a senior foreign policy adviser, held an unpublicised meeting with Bush late last spring at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York.

The encounter reveals the enduring influence of the neoconservatives at the highest reaches of the White House, despite some high-profile casualties in the past year.

Karl Rove, who was still serving in the White House as Bush's deputy chief of staff, took notes. But the meeting, which lasted 45 minutes, was not logged on the president's schedule.

"I urged Bush to take action against the Iranian nuclear facilities and explained why I thought there was no alternative," said Podhoretz, 77, in an interview with The Sunday Times.

"I laid out the worst-case scenario – bombing Iran – versus the worst-case consequences of allowing the Iranians to get the bomb."

He also told Bush: "You have the awesome responsibility to prevent another holocaust. You're the only one with the guts to do it." The president looked very solemn, Podhoretz said.

For the most part Bush simply listened, although he and Rove both laughed when Podhoretz mentioned giving "futility its chance", a phrase used by his fellow neoconservative, Robert Kagan, about the usefulness of pursuing United Nations sanctions against Iran.

"He gave not the slightest indication of whether he agreed with me, but he listened very intently," Podhoretz said.

He is convinced, however, that "George Bush will not leave office with Iran having acquired a nuclear weapon or having passed the point of no return" – a reference to the Iranians' acquisition of sufficient technical capability to produce a nuclear weapon.

"The president has said several times that he will be in the historical dock if he allows Iran to get the bomb. He believes that if we wait for threats to fully materialise, we'll have waited too long – something I agree with 100%," Podhoretz said. The question of how to stop Iran has acquired renewed urgency after Mahmoud Ahma-dinejad, the Iranian president, declared at the United Nations last week that the dispute over his country's nuclear programme was now "closed".

He added that Iran would disregard any sanctions imposed by "arrogant powers" for pursuing peaceful nuclear energy.

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France said flatly: "Everyone knows that this programme has military aims." However, his call for stronger sanctions against Iran was ignored in favour of further delays.

The UN security council, facing deadlock with Russia and China, agreed on Friday to give Iran until November to answer questions from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) about its nuclear programme.

The National Council of Resistance of Iran, a controversial opposition group that first revealed the existence of the Natanz uranium enrichment plant, claimed last week that Iran was fooling the IAEA by constructing a secret underground military facility three miles south of Natanz under a granite mountain.

Kayhan, one of the most influential pro-regime newspapers in Iran, hinted in a recent editorial entitled "Why there won't be a war" that there are more nuclear projects than have been disclosed. "Are Iran's nuclear installations confined only to those places which have been declared?" it asked.

"Can America be sure that if it destroys these it will have eradicated the whole of Iran's nuclear programme, or at least set it back for a long time?"

The paper, which is edited by Hossein Shariatmadari, a senior member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and a close adviser of Ayatollah Ali Khome-inei, Iran's spiritual leader, concluded that the "hullaballoo" about American military action was "psychological warfare aimed only at frightening us".

The editorial touched on several sore points, as US military and intelligence sources admit that not all Iran's suspected nuclear facilities have been identified and others may be buried almost impenetrably deep in mountainous areas of the country.

Admiral William Fallon, US commander in the Middle East, said last week that the "constant drumbeat of war is not helpful". But he added that the pressure on Iran would continue: "We have a very, very robust capability in the region, especially in comparison to Iran. That is one of the things people might like to keep in mind."

Podhoretz told Bush that he thought America could strike Iran militarily without nuclear weaponry. "I'm against using nuclear weapons and I don't think they are necessary," he said. He believes the British response to Iran's seizure of Royal Navy hostages last spring will have convinced Tehran's leaders that they will be able to act with even greater impunity if they became a nuclear power.

Podhoretz has laid out his views in a new book, *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism*. He believes that it has a good deal in common with the cold war, an ideological battle lasting 42 years, which he describes as world war three.

"The key to understanding what is happening is to see it as a successor to the previous totalitarian challenge to our civilisation," he said.

Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran are merely different fronts of the same long war, he believes.

Podhoretz, who described himself as a neoconservative before the term was invented, has seen the movement develop from a small band of "dissident intellectuals" to one of the intellectual forces behind Ronald Reagan and, later, the war in Iraq.

Along the way, key people such as "Scooter" Libby, the senior aide to Dick Cheney, the vice-president, and Paul Wolfowitz, the former World Bank president, have fallen from grace. "Some of us have been picked off and others have lost heart," Podhoretz said.

However, neoconservatives are helping to shape the foreign policy of Giuliani, the Republican frontrunner for the White House, who said in London recently that he would not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran.

Podhoretz has already explained his theory about Islamofascism to the former New York mayor. "He doesn't call it world war four, but I know he thinks it is," Podhoretz said.

[Watch the video](#)

During the CNN Republican Presidential Debate, Giuliani said he would consider using nuclear weapons to destroy Iranian nuclear power (June 2007)

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