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Six Lies You Shouldn't Believe About Iran, Especially Since, Hey, There's People Down Here.

By Rosa Schmidt Azadi

It feels so different watching an aircraft carrier group coming toward you than watching it sailing away from you toward another part of the world.

I'm an American who used to live in New York City. All my life, when I heard about warships, it was US warships going places far away. I never even imagined hostile warships sailing toward New York. Now I'm in Tehran, and aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis is heading our way. And as it sails, people are discussing Israel and/or the US bombing Iran as if my family and 69 million other people weren't even here. I'm getting scared.

Most Iranians that I know don't worry about this as much as I do, though they're wondering how the sanctions will affect the economy. Khomeini had a famous saying that we actually saw on a sign yesterday in another town: "America can't do anything to us." Some friends here speculate that Bush just needs an enemy so that he can continue his programs in the US, and that Iran is the enemy du jour. I wish I could believe that.

The way I see it, somebody has to stop the US president right now, and it's very upsetting that the Congress isn't doing it. My frustration is greater because I'm in a country where the Internet is not completely available. For example, I tried to send a donation to Dennis Kucinich, but PayPal wouldn't take it because of the embargo. I tried to write to my Congressperson, but the Islamic Republic blocked the communication, presumably because it was with the US government. (Sometimes news stories that I want to read are blocked, too, but there are ways around that.)

If the US and/or Israel attack Iran, it will be a war based on lies, just like the Iraq war. Iraq didn't have WMD, but Iraqis died in the hundreds of thousands. The lies about Iran seem intended to, first, make Iran look like the new Nazi state that must be bombed so as to avoid a new Holocaust, and second, make Americans fear that Iran will hurt our soldiers in Iraq or give nuclear weapons to terrorists who will hurt us in "the homeland."

History shows that Americans are very susceptible to demonization of particular leaders of countries that the US wants to attack. Remember Castro? Noriega? Saddam? Now it's Ahmadinejad. Whatever people think of views attributed to Ahmadinejad, it remains the case that it's not morally acceptable to kill people because of their president, whether that president be Saddam Hussein, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, or George Bush.

I want to discuss six big lies we are hearing to justify expanding the war to Iran.

LIE NUMBER 1: President Ahmadinejad "has repeatedly threatened to wipe Israel off the map."

Even Al Jazeera English version based in Qatar keeps saying that. Why hasn't this mistranslation been corrected after it's been thoroughly exposed? ([in the Guardian](#) and [prisonplanet.com](#))

Juan Cole, in Informed Comment, explained how "wiped off the map" was a mistranslation; Ahmadinejad was restating the official Iranian policy that the government system based on Zionism must end. And why the heck can't newscasters learn to pronounce the man's name? Anyone who knows Farsi could teach them in a minute. Why should we think they know what he said, in Farsi, if they can't even say his name?

LIE NUMBER 2: The Iranian government is run by 1930s-style anti-Semites.

Last Spring, a story was planted that the Iranian parliament had passed a law forcing Iranian Jews to wear yellow badges. "Fourth Reich," screamed a banner headline on one of the New York City tabloids. In a few days, the neocon source was disclosed and the story was completely retracted by the Canadian paper in which it was first published. The New York paper never apologized. When I mention the "yellow badges" to people here in Iran, they look incredulous. "But ... that didn't happen." I know. But I'll bet there are some Americans, and Israelis, who actually believe Jewish Iranians are walking around wearing yellow badges.

LIE NUMBER 3: Iran is bent on wiping out the Jews.

Maybe Americans should have a little humility and remember how recalcitrant the US was about accepting Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler during WWII. Iran has a very good history, under Cyrus the Great, of protecting the Jews. The long history of Jews in Persia is indicated by a monument to the Jewish prophet Daniel in the south of Iran. As for the European Holocaust deniers who were among the speakers at the Holocaust conference in Tehran, I just can't figure it out, unless Ahmadinejad is trying to win popularity points with pro-Palestinian regional populations by appearing to be unafraid of Israel and the US. Or he could be a fool and/or a religious fundamentalist (like some other presidents who shall go unnamed).

LIE NUMBER 4: Iran is causing trouble in Iraq and threatening Arab states.

Everyone should be very clear: Who's meddling in Iraq, who's flying thousands of missions shooting at Iraqi citizens, who attacked whose diplomatic mission, who is detaining whose citizens, and who has announced that it is supporting subversive operations inside whose country and across whose border (from Iraqi Kurdistan)? Most likely some of the undemocratic and unpopular rulers in the Middle East are afraid that their own citizens may be attracted to the Iranian model. That may concern the US oil men and financiers who have business and military ties with them, but it's not a reason for Americans to back destruction of Iran.

LIE NUMBER 5: Iran is dangerous to humanity because it's trying to get nuclear weapons.

Other people who know more than I are writing about the nuclear issues. But regarding threats by Israel and the US to bomb Iranian nuclear research sites, that's a violation of international law, not to mention a danger to innocent civilians. Regulating nuclear activities is the responsibility of the IAEA. So far, the IAEA has declared that Iran does not have nuclear weapons and is in compliance with the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. That's more than we can say about the USA, which is supposed to be actively disarming its 10,000 warheads, not refurbishing them and developing new kinds of nuclear weapons. Though there are good reasons to think Iran does not want nuclear weapons, let's imagine, just for the sake of argument, that Iran would someday acquire them. Humanity has managed to live with other countries having nukes. The only reason Iran's having nukes would be of greater concern would be if the lies spelled out above were true. But they're lies.

LIE NUMBER 6: Iranians are looking to the USA to bring them democracy, just like the USA has brought democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq.

I'm living here in Tehran, Iran, now, with my family, as are many other Americans, Europeans, Asians, and other foreigners. We are inviting friends and relatives to come and visit. The skiing's fine. More democracy and more civil liberties would be better, but there are elections and there are laws and there are non-governmental organizations and you can approach public officials. Whatever's not right with this country is the business of the people here to work on. Some Iranians living in other countries want the US to "save" Iran. I don't know, but I suspect people like that would like the US to magically bring back the good old days when the US-allied Shah sat on his throne and the well-off classes had a fine life. If anyone finds any overseas Iranians who actually are willing to see Iran bombed, I hope the reporters ask them if they have any relatives currently living in Iran. I hope Americans don't take these has-beens too seriously.

Authors Bio: Rosa Schmidt Azadi is a long-time peace activist, an anthropologist, and a retired civil servant who's also a wife, daughter, sister, aunt, great-aunt, godmother, and the mother of two college students. After walking out of the smoke of the 9-11 attacks in New York City and returning to participate in the recovery effort, Rosa began working to prevent further death and destruction in other countries at the hands of the U.S. government. Participating in a peace vigil at the World Trade Center site for more than three years gave her the privilege of talking with thousands of people from all over the world about things that matter most. Dr. Azadi has earned two advanced degrees and is still learning. Currently, she's splitting her time between Tehran, Iran, and upstate New York.

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