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Is War With Iran Imminent? This time, it's more than a rumor...

The shooting has already **started** in the Persian Gulf – and chances are we'll be at war with Iran before President Bush's term is up. An American ship under contract with the U.S. Navy – the *Western Venture* – claims it was in international waters when Iranian speedboats approached and failed to answer radio calls. Shots were fired on the American side. Iran denies the whole thing. Yet you'll recall that in **the last incident**, involving the capture of British sailors, the story about being in international waters was the same – except, it turns out, they weren't in international waters, but in **disputed waters**, just as we speculated in **this space**. There's no reason to expect anything different this time. Clearly, the U.S. and Britain are trying to trigger a new conflict with the most brazen provocations, and they don't really care how it happens – only that it does.

The indications of an imminent attack – the latest incident, the **steady stream** of **accusations** coming from the U.S. regarding Iranian influence in Iraq, the **nuclear charade**, etc. – have suddenly taken a more ominous turn with the recent statement of America's top military officer that the U.S. is **weighing military action** against Iran. The *Washington Post* reports:

"The nation's top military officer said yesterday that the Pentagon is planning for 'potential military courses of action' as one of several options against Iran, criticizing what he called the Tehran government's 'increasingly lethal and malign influence' in Iraq. Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said a conflict with Iran would be 'extremely stressing' but not impossible for U.S. forces, pointing to reserve capabilities in the Navy and Air Force."

Speaking of malign influences: since when does an American military officer make foreign policy pronouncements, as if he were the president? It's an indication of the **advances** militarism has made in what used to be a republic that no one has so much as blinked at the brazenness of such blatant Caesarism.

The reasons for the uptick in the rhetorical and physical assault on Iran by the Americans are entirely due to domestic politics, not anything occurring on the ground in the region.

Hillary Clinton's demagogic threat to **"obliterate"** Iran, uttered on national television just before the Pennsylvania primary, was meant to buttress her newfound **image** as a **shot-swilling** macho up against the effete, Adlai Stevenson-esque Barack **"Arugula"** Obama. It's the Old Politics, trying to revive the red state-blue state dichotomy, and it's driving us down the road to war with Tehran. **McCain**, too, is helped by the ratcheting up of tensions in the Persian Gulf: think what the outbreak of war with Iran would do for his underdog candidacy.

Standing behind this developing pro-war Popular Front, the central factor in turning the U.S. toward a policy of confrontation rather than constructive engagement with Iran has been **the Israel lobby**. Since 1993, the Lobby has been demanding that the U.S. take a more aggressive approach to the mullahs of Tehran, and, with few exceptions, has been largely successful.

The policy of **"dual containment"**, conceived by the Clinton administration during the early 1990s, meant that the U.S. was committed to hostile relations with both Iraq and Iran. The policy, as **John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt** point out, "was essentially a copy of an Israeli proposal." It meant stationing **troops in Saudi Arabia** and Kuwait to offset an alleged threat to American interests. Yet there was no reason to assume Tehran had hostile intentions toward the U.S. At the time, Iranian President **Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani** was eager to establish friendly relations with the U.S. As pressure built to abandon "dual containment" and initiate a more workable policy that would give the U.S. more flexibility, the Lobby went on the offensive

with a relentless campaign to impose economic sanctions on Iran.

The Iranians, determined to signal their willingness to be reasonable, chose an American oil company, Conoco, to develop the Sirri oil fields. As Trita Parsi **points out** in *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*:

"For AIPAC, the Conoco deal 'was a coincidence and a convenient target.' The organization went into high gear to use the Iranian offer not only to scuttle the Conoco deal, but also to put an end to all U.S.-Iran trade. In a report that it released on April 2, 1995, titled 'Comprehensive U.S. Sanctions Against Iran: A Plan for Action,' AIPAC argued that Iran must be punished for its actions against Israel. 'Iran's leaders reject the existence of Israel. Moreover, Iran views the peace process as an American attempt to legalize Israel's occupation of Palestinian, Muslim lands,' it said. Pressured by Congress, AIPAC, and the Israelis, President Clinton swiftly scrapped the deal by issuing two executive orders that effectively prohibited all trade with Iran. The decision was announced on April 30 by Clinton in a speech before the World Jewish Congress."

This wasn't enough for the Lobby, which brought pressure on Sen. Alphonse D'Amato to introduce a bill that imposed sanctions on any countries doing business with either Libya or Iran. The **Iran-Libya Sanctions Act** passed the House with not a single dissenting vote, and the same scenario went down in the Senate. The Lobby made sure the Iranian peace offering was rudely rebuffed – and the president reminded of just who was in charge of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The White House meekly went along with the Lobby's wishes: after all, the presidential election was but three months away.

The Conoco affair should dispel any myths about the supposedly supreme power of the "oil lobby" as the decisive factor in shaping U.S. policy in the region: the Israel lobby beat them hands down. As James Schlesinger put it, "It is scarcely possible to overstate the influence of Israel's supporters on our politics in the Middle East." The harder the Iranians tried to approach the Americans, the more rudely they were repulsed.

The election of the even more pro-American Mohammad Khatami as Iran's president in 1997 did not break the back of "dual containment" – dubbed "a nutty idea" by Brent Scowcroft, albeit one with plenty of domestic political traction. The U.S. had **every reason** to pursue a policy of engagement, while that was possible, giving Iranian moderates the political breathing space they needed to ensure the growth of pro-American forces in the country. The benefits of opening up Iran to American investment are similarly obvious, yet our leaders chose to do otherwise due solely to the power of the Lobby. As Ephraim Sneh, a prominent figure on the Israeli Right, acknowledged: "We were against it ... because the interest of the U.S. did not coincide with ours."

In short: Washington policymakers weighed the interests of both the U.S. and Israel, and made their decision accordingly...

From dual containment to **regional transformation** and "**regime change**" was not a long road to travel. After 9/11, Washington embarked on a campaign to topple the governments of both Iraq and Iran, as well as Syria, and rid Lebanon of Hezbollah while they were at it. As soon as "**mission accomplished**" was declared in Iraq, the Israelis and their American amen corner began demanding action against Iran.

In an interview with the *Times* of London, Ariel Sharon declared that Washington had better start threatening to march on Tehran "**the day after**" Baghdad was secured. By late April 2003, the Israeli ambassador to Washington was complaining that the demise of Saddam's regime was "**not enough**." Those indolent Americans must be made to "follow through" by taking action against "great threats of that magnitude coming from Syria, coming from Iran."

Shimon Peres rallied the faithful with an **op-ed** in the *War Street Journal* titled "We Must Unite to Prevent an Ayatollah Nuke." The neoconservatives convened a special all-day **conference** devoted to inciting war hysteria aimed at Tehran, with all the usual suspects – Michael Ledeen, Bernard Lewis, Reuel Marc Gerecht – in attendance. The cry went up: "Regime change!" The only question was which exile faction we were going to support: **the royalists**, or the cult-like neo-Marxist **Mujahideen-e-Khalq** (MEK) and its numerous well-connected front groups in the U.S. and Europe.

The leaders of the latter have energetically vied for the role of the Iranian **Chalabi**, coming up with reams of "intelligence" detailing Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. Their "revelations," however, have been definitively debunked by the latest **national intelligence estimate**, which says Tehran abandoned its nuclear

program some time ago. All those **diagrams and documents** coming from MEK by the truckload were evidence of a nuclear program that no longer existed.

If **any** of this **sounds familiar**, then it **should**.

The efforts of the Lobby aren't limited to war propaganda. The **AIPAC spy trial** – in which **two top officials** of the powerful pro-Israel lobbying organization have been indicted for passing top-secret classified information to Israeli embassy officials – is all about Israel's attempt to penetrate U.S. governmental discussions about what stance to take **regarding Iran**, with the goal of exerting maximum influence on American policymaking circles.

Israel considers a nuclear-armed Iran an "**existential threat**" to the Jewish state, a concept **Pre-Order this Book** to little more than absolute nonsense. Their argument goes something like this:

Iran is not a normal state, it is run by ideologues who are profoundly invested in apocalyptic religious visions that can only end in war. Deterrence means nothing to them. They *want* to be incinerated in a nuclear exchange involving Israel, themselves, and quite possibly the U.S., because it fulfills the ancient prophecies and means the return of the Mahdi, or something **along those lines**.

This makes no more sense than the inverse version of the religion-determines-all theory, which would have the "**born again**" George W. Bush intent on provoking a nuclear war in the Middle East in order to bring about the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God on Earth – as the Christian dispensationalists who make up so much of the GOP's base fervently believe is entirely possible and certainly desirable.

These latter, of course, are the **foot-soldiers** of the Israel Lobby in America, a group that GOP presidential candidate John McCain has **actively courted** in the person of the Rev. John Hagee. Rev. Hagee is a **vicious Catholic-hater** and **all-around nut-job** who looks forward to a nuclear war in the Middle East as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Hagee has lately taken up with AIPAC, appearing at their last national confab in a **starring role**.

This administration, which has been **in thrall** to the Israel lobby more than any other, has been increasing the volume in its war of words with Tehran since January of this year, and, as Bush's reign comes to an **inglorious end**, there apparently remains one last act of perfidy the neocons will leave as their legacy. Bush's going away gift to the American people looks more than likely to be another war – one that truly does make the Iraq war seem like a "**cakewalk**" in comparison. It took a few years for the impact of the war in Iraq to be felt by the American people, and its full impact has yet to hit. Not so with the next war. The firing of a few shots at those speedboats sent the price of oil **up three bucks**. Think of what a full-scale all-out war would do to the price of nearly everything. And for what?

Iran, a signatory to the **Nonproliferation Treaty**, **says it is not** seeking to build nuclear weapons, and that the production of nuclear energy for peaceful uses is the one and only goal of its activities on this front. This is more than Israel can say, far more. **Everyone knows** the Israelis have nukes – the technology for which they probably **stole from us** – and they are one of the few civilized countries who haven't signed the NPT and refuse to even discuss doing so.

If ever there was a nuclear rogue nation, then surely it is Israel. As Henry Kissinger **said** of them in a 1969 memo to Richard Nixon: "The Israelis, who are one of the few peoples whose survival is genuinely threatened, are probably more likely than almost any other country to actually use their nuclear weapons." Although the Iranians claim their nuclear program is geared exclusively toward peaceful purposes, that they have the option to act otherwise, should the need arise, is a challenge to Israel's nuclear hegemony. The Iranians, by American and Israeli lights, have no right to a deterrent.

In a world where "**benevolent global hegemony**" is the goal of U.S. foreign policy, there is no right to self-defense; that, along with national sovereignty, has been abolished. Defiance is met with an implacable campaign for regime-change in the offending nation. By all **indications**, Iran is the next victim to be made an example of, sometime in mid-summer, or so the rumor goes.

We know where the presidential candidates stand on this issue. Hillary looks forward to the "obliteration" of Iran and **takes up** Charles Krauthammer's **demand** that we extend our nuclear shield over Tel Aviv just as we would do the same for, say, Toledo. Indeed, there are not a few who would argue that we would be fully justified in sacrificing the latter in order to save the former, and not all of them are to be found among Rev. Hagee's **deluded flock**. In any case, we know what the McCain-Hagee position is without even having to ask.

We also know where Obama stands on all or most of this: he advocates a policy of **engagement** with the Iranians, just as he has endorsed **talking with** South American *caudillo* Hugo Chavez, and for the same very sound reasons: because it's talk or fight. He clearly realizes waging perpetual war is hardly in our interests, even if we had the financial and military capacity to carry out such a crazed policy. Yet, if he's speaking out about this, at this crucial moment – when the chairman of the Joint Chiefs is practically declaring war on the Iranians – then I just can't hear him: he must not be speaking very loudly, or perhaps this gets lost amid all the soaring rhetoric about Change and Hope and A Better Tomorrow.

Hillary voted for the **Kyl-Lieberman resolution**, which designated the Iranian Revolutionary Guards – an official part of the Iranian armed forces – as a "terrorist organization," and now Gen. Petraeus is **telling us** Tehran is funding, arming, and succoring those who are killing American soldiers and **bombing the Green Zone**. The main threat against us in Iraq is no longer the Sunni "dead-enders," as Don Rumsfeld liked to call them, it's the Mahdi Army – Iraqi Shi'ites – and the Iranians, who have **very** close ties to the government our troops are dying to defend. If Bush seeks to obliterate Iranian hopes for regional preeminence by launching an attack before he leaves office, one can hardly see how the Clintons could possibly object: perhaps they'll declare that, this time, we have to send enough troops to "do the job." This, you'll recall, was Hillary's McCain-like critique of the Iraq invasion long before being antiwar was required of all Democratic presidential aspirants. No doubt she'll revert to that when the time comes, but what about Obama?

He could skewer **Hillary the hawk** with one well-placed arrow, aimed straight at her vulnerability on the Iran issue. With the first shots of a new war already fired, apparently, and rumors of an imminent American strike at Iran flying thick and fast, Obama could denounce her as a warmonger, a McCain in drag, whose short-term political opportunism is helping to embroil us in a quagmire far worse than the one in Iraq, where she played a similar role in 2003. Yet I hear nothing like this coming from Obama's camp. Maureen Dowd **nails it**, with her typically acerbic take:

"Despite all his incandescent gifts, Obama has missed several opportunities to smash the ball over the net and end the game. Again and again, he has seemed stuck at deuce. He complains about the politics of scoring points, but to win, you've got to score points."


The American people oppose war with Iran, perhaps more than they want out of Iraq: the economic consequences alone will infuriate them far more than any other foreign policy decision of this administration. What the War Party is hoping is that their fury will be directed overseas, at our alleged "enemies" in Tehran, and not at home, in the direction of Washington, where proper blame belongs.

Americans await the advent of a real leader, the sort who could and would focus that anger on the right target. Whether Obama has the gumption – and the strategic sense – to make this fight about policy, not personalities, race, and gender, remains to be seen. He's promised us a new politics, but that doesn't have to mean blandness and an inability to fight. It can and must mean sharp attacks on wrong ideas – and one looks in vain for an idea as wrongheaded as war with Iran.

~ Justin Raimondo

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