

America's Next War: Iran

Seymour Hersh and the limits of liberalism

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U.S. policy towards Iran is not based on 'intelligence,' faulty or otherwise; it is based on the desire to dominate a geo-strategic region.

"There is a large body of evidence including some of America's most highly classified intelligence assessments, suggesting that the United States could be in danger of repeating a mistake similar to the one made with Saddam Hussein's Iraq eight years ago-allowing anxieties about the policies of a tyrannical regime to distort our estimations of the state's military capacities and intentions."

Seymour Hersh on prospect of U.S. attack on Iran, Democracy Now, June 3

Seymour Hersh is probably the best-known investigative reporter in the United States today. He broke the story of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam in 1970 and helped expose the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in Iraq in 2004. These and other articles critical of U.S. government actions, and a network of connections inside the national security state, have made Hersh a listened-to figure in progressive circles and beyond.

Since 2005, an imminent U.S. military attack on Iran has been a central theme of many of Hersh's articles. This theme is repeated in his latest article for the New Yorker magazine, "Iran and the Bomb: How Real is the Threat." In the article, he correctly points out that, contrary to U.S. contentions, there is no evidence that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, but warns of a U.S. assault along the lines of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Some of Hersh's earlier predictions of U.S. military action against Iran have been quite time-specific. None have proven accurate. Much of his writing on the U.S. and Iran has been based on "insider" information from Pentagon and other intelligence agency sources, whom he often praises. In such a relationship, the question must be asked: Is the writer using the sources or is it the other way around?

Another question: How could the U.S. military, already bogged down in the Iraq and Afghanistan/Pakistan wars, undertake another war, against Iran, a much larger and stronger state?

There is no question that the Obama administration, like its predecessor, is seeking regime change in Iran. It has been using a variety of methods to contain, divide and subvert Iran through economic sanctions, covert operations and surrounding the country with U.S. military power. Washington is strongly supporting the "Green Movement" in Iran, which has a mass base mainly within the upper and middle classes.

Psychological warfare, too, is being waged as another aspect of the regime-change campaign. Is Hersh being fed disinformation by psychological warfare units aware that because of his credibility his articles will be read far and wide, including by the Iranian leadership?

Iraq war: No 'mistake' based on 'bad intelligence'

In "Iran and the Bomb," Hersh reinforces a fundamental fallacy about why the U.S. invaded and occupied Iraq in 2003: namely, "bad intelligence."

He expresses worry that U.S. leaders could be about to replicate the "mistake" that led to the Iraq invasion, suggesting that the "mistake" was caused by "allowing anxieties about the policies of a tyrannical regime to distort our estimations of the state's military capacities and intentions."

The idea that the 2003 invasion was a mistake based on faulty intelligence information has been thoroughly discredited.

The U.S. has carried out a Twenty Years War against Iraq, with shifting pretexts. The George H.W. Bush administration launched the first U.S.-Iraq war in 1991 in order to "liberate Kuwait." Iraq had occupied Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990, following a long and bitter dispute between the al-Sabah royal family and the Iraqi government. In the short war that followed, the United States, Britain and other allied forces destroyed much of Iraq's civilian infrastructure as well as inflicting massive casualties on an outmatched Iraqi army.

Washington then imposed a devastating sanctions/blockade on the country that killed more than a million Iraqis over 13 years. The blockade was maintained by the Clinton administration for its entire reign, 1993-2001, during which Iraq was subjected to constant bombing by U.S. and British warplanes. The supposed reason for the lethal blockade was to force Iraq to give up its "weapons of mass destruction."

In 1998, Clinton signed the "Iraq Liberation Act," making "regime change" the official goal of U.S. policy. The ILA clarified that the real aim of the sanctions and bombing was to overthrow the Iraqi government.

Regime change was "Topic A" of the first meeting of President George W. Bush's National Security Council on Jan. 30, 2001, according to then-Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neil: "From the very beginning, there was a conviction, that [former Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein ... needed to go." (O'Neill interview, *60 Minutes*, Jan. 11, 2004)

The purported WMD threat posed by Iraq was a complete fraud, as top U.S. and British government officials and their spy agencies well knew. Nevertheless, in the run-up to the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, Vice President Dick Cheney, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and British Prime Minister Tony Blair repeatedly made statements to the media about the grave threat of Iraq's alleged nuclear weapons: "We don't want the smoking gun ['proof' of Iraq's possession of such weapons] to be a mushroom cloud," said Rice in September 2002.

After Iraq was occupied in April 2003, Bush, Blair and other officials feigned surprise and dismay when no WMD turned up, but their acts were hardly convincing.

The gears shifted once more. Defending “human rights and democracy,” became the new justification for an occupation that has continued now for eight years, killed more than a million Iraqis and thousands of U.S. soldiers, and torn the country apart.

None of this—the invasions, bombings and blockades—had anything to do with “anxieties” about Iraq’s “capacities and intention.” Iraq never threatened the United States. Its military was decimated in the first U.S. Gulf war, and had been reduced to 15-20 percent of its 1991 strength by the time of the second war.

‘Downing Street Memo’ shows that ‘intelligence’ was fixed to support policy

The argument that “intelligence failure” caused the U.S. and British invasion of Iraq was dealt a fatal blow by the release of the “Downing Street Memo” in May 2005. The memo is really the minutes of a meeting with Blair and other top British officials at the prime minister’s residence in London on July 23, 2002, nearly eight months before the assault on Iraq began.

At the meeting, Richard Dearlove, the head of Britain’s MI6, Secret Intelligence Service, reported on a meeting he had just attended in Washington with top U.S. national security officials: “Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military actions, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.” (DowningStreetMemo.com)

In other words, it was not faulty intelligence or bad information that led to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. The decision was first made to launch a new war and then a deliberately falsified story was cooked up to justify the attack.

There is no mystery about what has driven the relentless war against Iraq, the sanctions and threats against Iran, and the blanketing of the entire area with U.S. military bases. The goal has been domination of a key strategic region that holds two-thirds of the world’s known petroleum reserves.

In seeking to attain this objective, U.S. policy over the past six decades has sought to destroy any independent state or progressive movement, while propping up the most regressive and aggressive regimes in the region, from Saudi Arabia to Israel.

Iran’s real “crime” in the eyes of Washington has nothing to do with “democracy” or a purported weapons program. It is that Iran refuses to accept the dictates of the Empire.

To believe that the current aggressions against Iraq and Iran are due to “mistakes” is an expression of liberalism, of faith in the inherent goodness of what is in fact a system inherently driven to war and conquest—imperialism.

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