

Bush the Liar Escalates War Threats Against Iran

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Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Bush clashed over Iran, highlighting just how extreme tensions are and the danger of a U.S. attack (as well as the sharpening imperialist rivalry between the U.S. and Russia overall).

Putin, on the first visit to Iran by a Russian head of state in over 60 years, denounced U.S. threats, declaring, "We should not even think of making use of force in this region.... Not only should we reject the use of force, but also the mention of force as a possibility." Putin, who has so far resisted U.S. demands for more punitive sanctions against Iran, also stated there was no evidence that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons.

Two days later, President Bush hit back and took the war threats to a new level: "I've told people that if you're interested in avoiding World War 3, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing [Iran] from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon." The White House tried to downplay Bush's remark, claiming it was just "a rhetorical point." But the threat of world war was out there (implicitly directed at Russia as well!). And Bush was clearly demanding that Russia go along with his insistence that Iran be prevented from having even a nuclear energy program (which is legal under current treaties), because the technology needed could be used for weapons.

The Bush-Putin clash comes as the Bush regime, with support of most of the U.S. ruling class, has increasingly targeted Iran as the main obstacle to its Middle East agenda, and may be preparing for war. The administration has orchestrated a propaganda campaign centered on accusations that Iran is building nuclear weapons and directing attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq. The House and Senate have both passed resolutions labeling Iran's Revolutionary Guards a "terrorist organization"—potentially a war trigger. The Bush regime is waging a "financial war" on Iran and trying to get other big powers to tighten economic sanctions. Nearly half the U.S.'s warships have recently been stationed near Iran. The Pentagon has been drawing up military plans for striking Iran for over a year. Earlier this month, the New Yorker magazine's Seymour Hersh reported that "There has been a significant increase in the tempo of attack planning."

U.S. Allegations Against Iran: Lies, Hypocrisy, and a Cover For An Imperial Agenda

What of U.S. charges that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons and attacking U.S. forces in Iraq?

First, there's the enormity of U.S. hypocrisy. The U.S. already has thousands of nuclear warheads, and while the Bush regime condemns Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions, it refuses (in its negotiations with Russia) to accept any limits on the number of nukes the U.S. can build.

The U.S.—not Iran—illegally invaded and occupied Iraq. Yet Bush and company denounce Iran for “interference” in Iraq. Meanwhile, the U.S. is funding and organizing covert military and political operations inside Iran!

So the imperialist logic at work here is that only the U.S. has the right to threaten the world with nuclear weapons (and have more than anyone else), and to intervene and wage war against other countries.

Second, the U.S. has produced no conclusive evidence for its charges. Secretary of State Rice recently declared that Iran was “lying” about its nuclear program, but she offered no proof. People should remember that these are the same proven liars in the Bush regime who knowingly spread the lie that Saddam Hussein had WMD before the Iraq war.

After many inspections, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has found no proof that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. If, however, it is the case that Iran’s reactionary Islamic Republic wants to build nuclear weapons, and they are concealing such a program, who is the U.S. to declare itself the global enforcer of nuclear restraint? The United States is the only country in the world to have used the atomic bomb—twice, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki—to massacre civilians. And why does the U.S.’ massive current arsenal of nuclear weapons give it the right to threaten or carry out military aggression against Iran?

And what about Iran’s involvement in attacks on U.S. forces?

The U.S. military has held press conference after press conference displaying Iranian weapons allegedly found in Iraq. But none have provided any firm evidence that these weapons came from Iran, that they were used to attack U.S. forces, or that the Iranian government was directly involved. The captured weapons could have come from old Iraqi stockpiles or the region’s extensive arms black market. Former chief U.S. arms inspector David Kay told Hersh that his team had been astounded at “the huge amounts of arms” it found in Iraq right after the 2003 invasion, including “stockpiles of explosively formed penetrators” or “EFPs.” These are the weapons the U.S. has been claiming could only have come from Iran.

On the other hand, if it is the case that Iran is providing weapons to forces in Iraq, who is the United States, the country that has illegally occupied the whole country, to use Iranian interference in Iraq as a cause for war on Iran? It is as if someone carried out a home invasion robbery, ransacked a home, raped and brutalized the inhabitants, and continued to terrorize the people there. And then, because they suspected that someone else, in the house next door, was trying to steal from the house they were terrorizing, they threatened to go on and attack and carry out another home invasion of the house next door.

Nor is the U.S. being driven by its feigned concern for the very real suffering of the region’s people at the hands of Islamic fundamentalism, Iran’s Islamic Republic in particular. The U.S. sees Islamic fundamentalism as a major obstacle to their ambitions not because the U.S. imperialists have a problem with the repressive and obscurantist program of the Islamic fundamentalists. They work with and through such forces where they can do so in a way that fits their needs. But the problem the U.S. has with the Islamic fundamentalists is that they present a widespread counter-force and threat to what the U.S. is trying to impose on the world, and—to the U.S. imperialists—an intolerable threat to their interests.

Any U.S. Aggression Against Iran Is...

Aggression

Even if the Iranian regime is attempting to build nuclear weapons, or is behind some of the attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq, or further intensifies its oppression of the Iranian people—none of this would justify any U.S. war on Iran. Such a war would make things much worse for the people in the region (and the world), including because it would further fuel Islamic fundamentalism and strengthen the current nightmarish framework in which imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism are held forth as humanity's only choices. Any U.S. war would not be aimed at ending oppression or freeing the people; it would be aimed at perpetuating their enslavement—under a strengthened U.S. domination over the whole region.

This is not to say that the U.S. doesn't have real—imperialist—concerns about Iran. Far too many people are downplaying the danger of a U.S. attack on Iran because they think Bush is too unpopular to launch another war, or too bogged down in Iraq, or not "crazy" enough to risk a regional conflagration. Or, that the stresses and strains on the U.S. "alliance" (including the withdrawal of British troops from Basra, and the increasing tension between the U.S. on the one hand, and Russia on the other) will deter the U.S. from launching an attack on Iran. Or they think the U.S. is simply making things up about Iran out of sheer arrogance or irrational belligerence.

Bush is certainly unpopular and a proven liar, and the U.S. is definitely bogged down in Iraq. Even many in the ruling class worry that attacking Iran could end up greatly weakening the U.S. position in the Middle East and the world (and these divisions may be one reason war hasn't yet taken place). And there are both strains in the U.S. "alliance," and increasing contention with other powers in the region.

But there are actual imperialist necessities and concerns driving the U.S. rulers. And some of the reasons that people don't believe there will be a war on Iran are actually reasons why the U.S. rulers do see a need to attack Iran. They cannot, for example, just let other powers perceive their alliance as crumbling, and let their rivals of any kind make a move on "their" global domination. They cannot be perceived as having their asses kicked by the Islamic fundamentalists, any more than a big time mobster can let people see a small time gangster get away with defying his authority.

The US "war on terror" is not about ending "terror" as they claim, or "bringing democracy to Iraq" or anywhere else. It is essentially a war for greater empire. This war is focused on defeating Islamic fundamentalism and those who support or fuel it. It's a war with many targets, employing many means. The Bush regime feels that victory would enable the U.S. to transform the Middle East-Central Asian regions, cut the ground from under anti-U.S. jihadism, and solidify and deepen U.S. control.

For decades, control of the Middle East—for its strategic location at the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe and its vast oil reserves—has been a key component of America's imperialist superpower status. Today, the U.S. rulers view the control of these regions as even more critical to perpetuating their status as global overlords, and to the future of their empire and rule at home. So for them, the stakes really are enormous.

It is this agenda, not "stopping terrorism," that was behind the decision to invade and occupy Iraq, as a springboard to further asserting U.S. domination of the Middle East and crushing, or subordinating, Islamic fundamentalist forces that they perceive to be in their

way. But things aren't going as the Bush regime planned. Iraq has become a potential debacle that is tying down thousands of U.S. troops. Pro-Iranian forces have considerable influence in the Iraqi government. Iranian influence in Iraq is growing (last week Iraq signed a contract with Iran and China to build power plants, much to the Bush administration's dismay). Islamic fundamentalism has been fueled across the region. As a sharp expression of the point that U.S. imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism both oppose and reinforce each other, one product of the ongoing U.S. occupation of Afghanistan has been the re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Pro-Iranian forces could become dominant in Lebanon. In sum, the geopolitical "playing field" in the Middle East seems to be tilting against the U.S., and Iran stands to be the beneficiary—whether it is directly behind any particular development or not. And a nuclear-armed Iran would be an even bigger obstacle to U.S. regional hegemony and military dominance.

So the U.S. establishment—including both the hardcore around Bush and Cheney as well as the Democrats and others—is largely united on the need to confront Iran and roll back its influence, one way or another. (In a forthcoming article in *Foreign Affairs*, Hillary Clinton writes, "If Iran does not comply with its own commitments and the will of the international community, all options must remain on the table.")

For now, the U.S. is at the very least pursuing a full-court press of diplomatic, economic, political and military pressure against Iran designed to force the Islamic Republic to cave in to U.S. demands, and/or to trigger internal upheaval and the regime's collapse. Britain's *Telegraph* reported on September 16, "Pentagon and CIA officers say they believe that the White House has begun a carefully calibrated programme of escalation that could lead to a military showdown with Iran." And many in and out of the Bush administration—particularly Vice President Dick Cheney and his allies—are aggressively pushing for strikes on Iran, which, according to Hersh, Bush is actively considering even as he claims to be striving for a diplomatic solution.

In any event, should the U.S. full-court press fail—and Putin's visit to Iran apparently represented a blow to U.S. plans—the rulers may be forced to confront the choice "between the devil and the deep blue sea," as the saying goes; a choice between seeing Iran emerge strengthened, seriously undercutting their entire "war on terror" and all its objectives, or "escaping forward" by rolling the dice of escalation.

A U.S. war on Iran might not even be a fully conscious, much less unanimous, decision of ruling class strategists. The huge U.S. buildup of warships in the Gulf, along with the presence of U.S. operatives inside Iran, has created a situation where war could break out by accident.

In early September, Israeli aircraft reportedly carried out an attack on Syria, which has a defense treaty with Iran. Commentators speculated on whether, and how, this attack might be connected to an Israeli attack on Iran, including whether Israel was testing new Russian anti-aircraft weapons recently acquired by Syria as part of assessing a possible air route for an Israeli strike on Iran. While Israel has its own distinct agenda, the larger framework for Israeli military aggression (and for the very existence of Israel) is the furtherance of U.S. interests. Israel is financially, politically, and militarily sponsored by the U.S. as its "trigger-happy cop" in the region, and it is highly unlikely that this raid on Syria took place outside overall U.S. strategic planning for a war on Iran. Shortly after the raid, *Newsweek* magazine reported that former Cheney Middle East adviser David Wurmser told a small group several months ago that Cheney was considering asking Israel to strike the Iranian nuclear site at

Natanz. And Newsweek added that a military response by Iran could give Washington an excuse to then launch airstrikes of its own.

But regardless of the “trigger,” regardless of the particular role of Israel, and regardless of whether such a war was the result of an unplanned accident, or a conscious decision, a U.S. war on Iran would be an outgrowth of U.S. aggressive actions. It would still be an expression of U.S. imperial interests. And in the event of such an “accidental” war, even bitter opponents of the Bush regime within the ruling class like Zbigniew Brzezinski—who has said that he thinks such a war would be a disaster—have said that they would feel compelled to support it once begun.

The U.S. rulers have shown in Iraq that they are willing to destroy the lives of millions in pursuit of their reactionary ambitions. Those ambitions are unjust, oppressive, and in the service of a world of exploitation and oppression. They are not the interests of the people of the world, including people in this country, and it is the special responsibility of people in the United States to build a movement to oppose any attempt by the U.S. to attack Iran, under any pretense. The development of such a movement will inspire people all over the world, including in the Middle East, to see beyond the so-called “alternatives” of Islamic fundamentalism and U.S. imperialism.

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