

Countdown for Iran

When Commonsense is Nonsense

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The relationship between Iran and the United States is one of peculiar temperament: intense but accommodating at times, barefaced and seemingly self-destructive at others.

Currently, the latter estimation rings truer: the US naval military build up in the east Mediterranean and the Gulf, conjoined with an intense and sinister propaganda campaign that is being drummed up at home, among other signals, are all pointing to one ill-fated conclusion: the Bush administration, entranced in its foolishness, has decided to discard, and in its entirety, the Baker-Hamilton recommendations; instead of engaging Iran politically, the US is opting to engage it militarily.

Is it possible that the increasingly prevailing analyses are true, as fluently communicated in a recent commentary by Australian journalist John Pilger, that the Bush administration is gearing up for an attack against Iran as a way of “buying time for its disaster in Iraq”?

Pilger suggests another motivating factor for Bush’s new possible war: “As the American disaster in Iraq deepens and domestic and foreign opposition grows, neocon fanatics such as Vice-President Cheney believe their opportunity to control Iran’s oil will pass unless they act no later than the spring.”

But how can attacking Iran buy the ‘Bushites’ time, if they, more than any one of us know the deeply entrenched Iranian presence and influence in Iraq, often directly over prominent elements of the pro-American Shia government: one of whom is the indestructible Abdel Aziz Al Hakim?

“Al Hakim spent 20 years in Iran prior to the fall of Saddam and is clearly allied to the Mullahs,” writes US commentator Mike Whitney. “His militia, the Badr Brigade, was trained by the Iranian Republican Guards (as well as the CIA) and is perhaps the most feared death squad in all of Iraq. Al Hakim’s militia operates out of the Iraqi interior ministry and is deeply engaged in the purging of Sunnis from Baghdad.”

Isn’t it rational to envisage that an attack on Iran would upset the cozy relations that the Americans have cultivated with al-Hakim and such disreputable characters, thus lead to further destabilisation of Iraq, to more of the same unmitigated violence, where well over 3,000 US soldiers, nearly 1,000 contractors have met their doom, not counting the 45 thousand who were evacuated due to injuries and other medical emergencies, as indicated by [Iraqbodycount.org](#)?

US sources claim that innumerable Iraqis receive their salaries from Tehran (that is aside from the alleged 40,000 Iranian agents in Iraq, which the US media ceaselessly talks about),

an indication of Iran's incessant efforts to obtain the loyalty of many of Iraq's Shia, and to dig into such valuable human reserves whenever needed, such as in the case of a war with the United States.

Considering Iran's "natural affinity with the Shia majority of Iraq", as accurately depicted by Pilger, by provoking a military showdown with Iran, the US is condemned to broaden its military confrontation in Iraq, which would then include Shia as well as Sunni, in a most imprudent barter to achieve an impossible military mission in Iran. Since airpower and commando style 'surgical' operations inside Iranian territories — that would most likely involve some Israeli special army units — are all that the US can conjure up at the moment, for ground troops are no longer a palpable option (half of the recently announced US military surge of 21,000 troops in Iraq will constitute from the same soldiers who are already serving in the country, simply by prolonging their tours and cancelling some vacations) one can safely conclude that any US military adventure in Iran will bring an indecisive outcome, at best, if not a wholesale disaster, a most likely possibility.

How about the other suggestion, that neocon fanatics believe their opportunity to control Iran's oil will pass unless they act no later than the spring?

This suggestion would also seem doubtful, for the neocon's war architects are still scrambling to avoid the blame of the Iraq fiasco and are at odds with Bush himself and his war generals, using their wide sway over US mainstream media to blame the president for all the ills that have befallen the country — ills that were born mostly from their own ominous war stratagems and their unwarranted commitment to Israel's security at the expense of their country's own. How can such a group of intellectuals still effectively hold sufficient clout to lead the US into another ill-advised war? Moreover, how can Cheney and his discredited ilk even contemplate the seizure of Iran's oil if Iraq's oil industry is still in shambles and has proven ineffective to settle the heavy bill of war, which is moving its way toward the half trillion dollar mark?

Considering these difficult questions, one must assume that any attack on Iraq is both irrational from a military viewpoint and self-defeating from a political one. However, the quandary with any political analysis of this subject that consults reason or even Machiavellian realpolitik is that it fails to consider history, and in this case, recent history which taught us that the Bush administration functions in a vacuum, separate from commonsense or any other kind of sense. It was around this time, some four years ago, that many hoped that the American military buildup in the Gulf region was aimed at strengthening the US political position against Iraq, to simply convey to former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein that the US 'means business'. It was clear from the outset to any even-headed observer that a war against Iraq would destabilise the region and harm the United States' overall interests in the Middle East. I stated that numerous times on American radio programmes, receiving all sorts of censure for being anti-American and unpatriotic.

Now, we stand at the same critical junction, four years later, as US news networks are readying for another awesome fireworks show, this time over Tehran; dehumanisation of the Iranians has already begun; the public is being fed with all kinds of half-truths and all sorts of rubbish about the Islamic Republic and its people; insanity has returned and the voices of reasons are again, labelled, shunned and marginalised. But for obvious reasons, this time around, war is an evident mistake, a fact that should irk and make every sensible American, every Congressman, every commentator question the wisdom of a new war while the

country is on the verge of defeat in another.

Such a reality suggests that the Bush administration is working against the interests of his own people and makes Pilger's analysis the more poignant; indeed, as irrational as it may seem, the US could very much be on its way to war with Iran.

But as explained by Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998-2005, "getting into Iraq and defeating Saddam was easy. But today, America is stuck there and knows neither how to win, nor how to get out." Fischer writes: "A mistake is not corrected by repeating it over and over again. Perseverance in error does not correct the error; it merely exacerbates it."

But this is exactly the key trait that has defined the current Bush administration since its early years in office. It's committed to duplicating failures; instead of abandoning the Iraqi ship, it insists on setting sail in the same tumultuous sea, another defected one.

Indeed, the US is again back on the same self-destruct mode, in the name of national security, regional stability, staying the course, and all the rest. Reality cannot be any further from the truth, however. A war against Iran will further exasperate the instability of the region and compromise the security of the United States, at home and abroad. It might also be the end of American military adventurism in the region for some time, but at a price so heavy, so unbearable. If Iraq's cakewalk has cost the lives of 650,000 Iraqis, how many more must die in broader war before Bush bows to commonsense and brings the grinding wheel of war to a halt?

Ramzy Baroud's latest book, *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle* (Pluto Press), is available at Amazon.com and also from the University of Michigan Press. Baroud is a veteran journalist and a human rights advocate at a London-based NGO; he is the editor of PalestineChronicle.com; his website is www.ramzybaroud.net

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