

Hell-Bent on War

Putin is right: the US is 'plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts'

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The United States government is hell-bent on [a wider war in the Middle East](#), and there doesn't seem to be anyone – not Congress, not any of our allies, not Divine Providence itself – capable of stopping them. Threats against the Iranians come on an almost daily basis: only yesterday U.S. officials convened a press conference where anonymous officials made baseless assertions about Tehran arming anti-American Shi'ite militias in Iraq.

It is the culmination of a years-long campaign to isolate and attack Iran. In a virtual replay of the routine we had to endure in the run-up to war with Iraq, we are being subjected to an intense propaganda campaign based on phony "intelligence" – with, once again, the main "evidence" provided by a dubious exile group, in this case the kooky-cult known as the National Council of Resistance.

The NCR is a front for an Iranian Marxist group led by Maryam Rajavi, the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, which has carried out armed attacks on American interests and facilities and initially supported the Khomeini "revolution." Driven out by the mullahs, these "Islamic Marxists" were given shelter and aid by Saddam Hussein in return for their support in the Iran-Iraq wars. In what is either a fit of megalomania or justified optimism fueled by U.S. support, Rajavi has already proclaimed herself president of Iran.

No doubt "President" Rajavi expects to be installed in office by U.S. force of arms. In any case, there seems little doubt, among those in the know, that an American strike is coming. Ken Silverstein of *Harper's* is compiling a compendium of expert opinion over the next few days, from government and academia, to address the question of whether war with Iran is imminent, and if so, just what the consequences will be. Today's edition has some interesting perspectives. A. Richard Norton, professor of international relations at Boston University, an adviser to the Iraq Study Group, and author of the soon-to-be-released *Hezbollah: A Short History*, warns:

"Remember that in 1990-91 and then again in 2003 the very fact that the United States assembled a formidable array of forces in the Gulf region became an argument for using those forces and launching wars. The United States will soon have two carrier task forces on station, and perhaps a third carrier task force will soon be deployed. It will be difficult for the United States to step down from its combative perch without Iran accepting some fairly significant concessions. "

No sooner were those words posted on the Internet than the third carrier was on its way. The War Party isn't wasting any time: these guys are in a big hurry to launch an attack before Bush's term is up and the neocons are thrown out on their collective ears.

The Middle East Institute's Wayne White, former deputy director of the State Department's Office of Analysis for the Near East and South Asia, thinks the Bush administration is giving diplomacy "one more shot," with the Feb. 21 reporting deadline approaching. He notes, however, that the components of a military strike are being put into place. War, in his view, "would generate a major crisis in the Gulf – and, perhaps most importantly, one without a clear endgame. "

The endgame – as far as the neocons are concerned – is the complete ["transformation," at gunpoint, of the Middle East](#) into a bastion of liberal democracy. This, at least, is the ostensible rationale, according to the most ideological proponents of the Bush Doctrine. In moments of candor, however, the more flamboyantly belligerent reveal the real spirit and intent of the War Party, e.g., Michael Ledeen's infamous celebration of "creative destruction." Not to mention the so-called Ledeen Doctrine, as related by neocon columnist Jonah Goldberg:

"Every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some small crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business."

It seems incredible that this kind of revolutionary nihilism – like something out of a Dostoyevsky novel – is really motivating American policymakers, yet according to Bahman Baktiari, director of academic and research programming at the University of Maine's William S. Cohen Center for International Policy and Commerce, there are numerous indications that war with Iran is all too likely. Aside from the military buildup in the Gulf and the accusations of Iranian interference in Iraq, Baktiari points to "the appearance of Undersecretary of State Nick Burns and Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England at a security conference in Israel with pro-war elements of the Israeli military. Also, the administration has armed Iran's Arab neighbors with Patriot missiles. The Pentagon halted all sales of spare parts from its recently retired F-14 fighter jet fleet because of concerns they could be transferred to Iran."

As incredibly crazy as it sounds, this administration is intent on starting yet another war in the Middle East – this time against a far larger, [more formidable enemy](#), one that has the power to strike back on an international scale. In that case, can we really say that we're fighting them over there so that we don't have to fight them over here?

All three of Silverstein's experts, I'm afraid, would concur with professor Norton's trenchant comment:

"Surveying U.S. history, one is hard-pressed to find presidential decisions as monumentally ill-informed and counterproductive as the decision to invade and occupy Iraq; however, a decision to go to war against Iran would arguably surpass the Iraq war as the worst foreign policy decision ever made by an American president."

Russian President Vladimir Putin had it right when [he told the recent Munich conference](#) on European security,

"Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force – military force – in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts. As a result we do not have sufficient strength to find a comprehensive solution to any one of these conflicts. Finding a political settlement also becomes impossible."

[“One state,”](#) averred Putin, “first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way.”

[Putin](#) has correctly ascertained that something quite apart from the “war on terrorism” and the Middle Eastern crusade is going on here: an ideological commitment to what the neoconservatives hail as “benevolent global hegemony.” Putin put his finger on it when he challenged the neocon vision of a “unipolar” world (I believe Charles Krauthammer coined the usage):

“The history of humanity certainly has gone through unipolar periods and seen aspirations to world supremacy. And what hasn’t happened in world history?

“However, what is a unipolar world? However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making. It is a world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within.”

History is full of ironies, but to be told by an ex-KGB officer that we are in danger of losing our republican form of government and succumbing to the temptations of empire – are we to be spared *nothing*? Putin’s words sting only because they ring so true.

In a sane world, the economic consequences alone would be a sufficient deterrent to even considering war with Iran. Skyrocketing oil prices, a huge “correction” in the financial markets, the sudden immiseration of great numbers of people – these are events that no American leader would want to occur, yet economic turmoil could help the War Party in a number of ways.

To begin with, it would create a wartime atmosphere of constant crisis, uncertainty, and fear. A new war would also have more political support than the present conflict in Iraq, as Bizarro World as that political reality seems to be: both Hillary Clinton and John Edwards (the supposed “antiwar” candidate) have not ruled out any “option” when it comes to Iran, and surely the leading Republican candidates concur wholeheartedly. As sick of war as the American people are, their leaders never seem to get their fill.

As I have been saying for what seems like years, we are a border incident away from a regional conflagration. This should put in context the importance of this Web site and the need your continued support. We’re right in the midst of our quarterly fundraising effort, and, as the American government hurtles toward a confrontation with Iran, it seems almost superfluous to make the case for the importance of Antiwar.com. Our readership has increased by leaps and bounds, and so, with the ratcheting-up of the crisis, has our responsibility to them – and to you, personally. We are a small organization, with not even one one-hundredth of the War Party’s vast resources, but we have made a real impact – and we continue to upgrade our ability to educate the public about what is really going on in the Middle East.

For over a decade, we’ve been holding the fort against the War Party, pointing out the danger posed by the neoconservatives and their ideologically-driven militarism, and calling for a return to rational foreign policy. Now we are facing our greatest test. We are appealing to you, both longtime readers and relative newcomers, to give us the support we need to continue our mission – which is, you’ll agree, more vitally important than ever.

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