

Keeping all eyes focused on Iraq while Bush and Israel plot an attack on Iran

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Global Research, January 12, 2007

[Online Journal](#) 12 January 2007

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Even a cursory review of Bush's speech shows that the president is less concerned with "security" in Baghdad than he is with plans to attack Iran. Paul Craig Roberts was correct in his article Wednesday when he questioned whether all the hoopla over a surge was just "an orchestrated distraction" to draw attention away from the real war plan. ("[Distracting Congress from the Real War Plan](#)")

Apparently, it is.

As Roberts noted, "The US Congress and the media are focused on President Bush's proposal for an increase of 20,000 US troops in Iraq, while Israel and its American neoconservative allies prepare an assault on Iran."

Roberts' analysis is further supported by yesterday's news that American troops stormed the "Iranian consulate in the northern Iraqi city of Arbil and arrested 5 employees." (Reuters)

Iran had set up the embassy at the request of the Kurdish governor-general who was not informed of US intentions to raid the facility and kidnap its employees. The American soldiers confiscated computers and documents just five hours after Bush had threatened Iran in his address to the nation.

Clearly, Bush is looking for a way to provoke a military confrontation with Iran. Now he has five Iranian hostages at his disposal to help him achieve that goal.

Will the mullahs overreact or will they show restraint and try to prevent a larger conflict?

Bush's hostility towards Iran was evident in comments he made in Wednesday night's speech:

"Succeeding in Iraq also requires defending its territorial integrity and stabilizing the region in the face of extremist challenges. This begins with addressing Iran and Syria. These two regimes are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move in and out of Iraq. Iran is providing material support for attacks on American troops. We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We will interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq."

"Seek and destroy"? Is that the plan?

A region-wide conflagration with results as uncertain as they are in Iraq?

So far, there's no solid evidence that Iran is "providing material support for attacks on American troops." All the same, the administration has consistently used "material support" as the basis for preemptive war. In fact, the so-called Bush Doctrine is predicated on the assumption that the US is free to attack whomever it chooses if it perceives a threat to its national security. The normal rules of self-defense or "imminent danger" no longer apply.

Bush knows that if Iran were seriously involved in arming the Iraqi resistance, we'd be seeing the Russian-made, armor-piercing rocket launchers that were used so effectively by Hezbollah during their 34 day war with Israel. That hasn't been the case. Iran is undoubtedly active in Iraq, but in ways that are much subtler than Bush claims. In fact, Bush's great ally, Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, who runs the feared Badr Brigade out of the Iraqi Interior Ministry, has strong ties to Iran (having lived there for 20 years.) He is probably using the US military to remove his enemies (the Sunni-backed resistance and al Sadr's Mehdi Army) before he turns his attention to his US benefactors.

Iran clearly has interests in Iraq, but it is the Bush administration's reckless war that has assured that Iran will be the "default" superpower in the entire region. Bush has shattered the fragile balance of power between Sunnis and Shiites while eliminating Iran's main adversaries in Afghanistan (Sunni-Taliban) and Iraq (Saddam-Ba'athist Party). Bush now seems to think that the only way he can challenge Tehran's ascendancy is by launching a Lebanon-type assault on military and civilian infrastructure in Iran.

If Iran is set back 20 years, Bush assumes, then our trusted-friend Israel will be the prevailing power in the Middle East. That, of course, was the plan from the get-go.

To that end, Bush averred: "We're taking steps to bolster the security of Iraq and protect American interests in the Middle East. I recently ordered the deployment of an additional carrier strike group to the region. We will expand intelligence sharing and deploy Patriot Air Defense Systems to reassure our friends and allies . . . And we will work with others to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons and dominating the region."

All the pieces are being put in place for a much larger and more destructive conflict.

It's an ambitious plan, but it has no chance of succeeding. The United States is hopelessly bogged down in Iraq and its actions in Somalia, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine have only ensured that the US's days in the Middle East are quickly drawing to a close.

As for Iraq, Bush's speech provided few details of how the miniscule and incremental increase in troop-strength (only 17,000 to Baghdad over a four-month period) was expected to quell the raging violence that has gripped the capital since the last major operation in August. Operation "Forward Together" turned out to be a complete disaster, precipitating a sharp boost in attacks on US troops as well as an increase in sectarian violence.

Bush has enlisted some support for his "escalation" plan by committing to the "clear-hold-build" strategy promoted by the Council on Foreign Relations. The CFR has been pushing their "model for counterinsurgency" for three years, but have been largely ignored by the Bush administration.

Despite Bush's feeble defense of the policy, he has no intention of putting it into practice.

He is merely pacifying other members of the political establishment who are demanding that their voices be heard.

The reality of the present strategy is manifest in military operations currently underway in Baghdad. These operations are being conducted in a way that is reminiscent of Rumsfeld's activities in Falluja two years ago. The attacks on alleged "insurgent strongholds" on Haifa Street, (which is just a few hundred yards from the Green Zone) show that the military has returned to the policy of using overwhelming force to subdue the resistance. In this case, the US pounded the area with helicopter gun-ships and F-16s, while ground troops went rampaging door to door. The civilian casualties in these scattershot operations invariably skyrocket and further alienate the local population. In one day alone, US forces killed an estimated 50 Iraqis in the predominantly Sunni "residential" area.

Another catastrophic "hearts and minds" operation.

Sunni leaders are now accusing the US military of carrying out ethnic cleansing operations at the request of the Shiite militias.

Is that the plan, purging Baghdad of the Sunnis?

It appears so.

Certainly, the lynching of Saddam was intended to send a message to the Ba'athist-led resistance that there would be no more efforts at negotiations or compromise. The US is now pursuing Cheney's "80-20" plan — a strategy to throw their support behind the Shiites while eradicating the Sunnis (20 percent of the population).

Bush hinted at this new approach in his speech when he said, "Our efforts to secure Baghdad failed for two principle reasons: There were not enough Iraqi and American troops to secure the neighborhoods that have been cleared of terrorists and insurgents AND THERE WERE TOO MANY RESTRICTIONS ON THE TROOPS WE DID HAVE."

"Too many restrictions"? (The respected British medical journal Lancet reported 650,000 casualties in the conflict so far with over 2 million Iraqi refugees. Is that "Too many restrictions"?)

Bush's comments suggest that the "gloves are coming off" and we can expect a return to the scorched earth policy that was so savagely applied in Falluja and other parts of the Sunni Triangle.

Bush also intimated that he would strike out at other "armed militias" in Iraq; an indication that US forces are planning an offensive against Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army. The Shiite cleric, al Sadr, is despised by the Washington Warlords and is described by the Pentagon as "the biggest threat to Iraq's security." Even so, al-Sadr has operatives placed strategically throughout the al-Maliki government (and within the Green Zone) and attacking him now would only make the occupation more perilous. In fact, an attack on the Mehdi Army could create a situation where Shiite militias cut off vital supply lines from the south making occupation virtually untenable.

Bush has decided to abandon all sense of caution and blunder ahead taking on all adversaries without concern for the consequences. It is a prescription for disaster.

Bush's "Victory Strategy": more force, but no political solution

Bush's speech invoked none of the flashy slogans that he typically uses and which normally appear in headlines the next day. Nor did he make any attempt to elicit support for his planned "escalation" of troops. That idea has already been thoroughly rejected by the Iraq Study Group, the Congress, and the American people. Instead, he reiterated the same worn bromides (of "ideological" warfare, 9-11, and terrorism) that have long since lost their power to move public opinion.

The Bush administration has run out of gas. They have no plan for "pacification," security, reconstruction, or regional stability. Their "one-size-fits-all" solution requires ever-increasing levels of violence for an intractable Iraqi Resistance and which is now fated to spread mayhem throughout the entire Middle East.

Carl von Clausewitz said, "War is not a mere act of policy, but a true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means."

Bush and his fellow-neocons are incapable of thinking politically, so America's decline in Iraq is likely to be precipitous. The crackdown in Baghdad and the anticipated bombing of Iran will have no significant affect on the war's outcome. America has lost its ability to influence events positively or to arbitrarily assert its will. We're now facing "death by a thousand cuts" and the steady erosion of US power.

Brute force alone will not produce a political solution in Iraq. Those who think it will are bound to fail.

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