

Recipe for war: Israeli hysteria and imperial logic

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“Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.” -Voltaire

The Bush administration’s agreement to join international talks with Iran has been hailed as a bright hope for a peaceful resolution of the engineered crisis in the Persian Gulf.

But the agreement carries a poison pill; Iran must subject its legal rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to negotiation, something it has sworn never to do again. Washington is telling Tehran to surrender its main point before it sits down to the negotiating table.

It’s simply another move in the effort to establish a great power consensus against uranium enrichment in Iran, which the Bush administration hopes to use as an excuse for war, much as it used UN Security Council Resolution 1441 as a fig-leaf for its illegal invasion of Iraq.

The poison pill should protect the US from the threat of serious talks by forcing Tehran to reject a “generous package” of international incentives, which should make it more difficult for Moscow and Beijing to exit the “international consensus” that Washington has already declared.

More evidence that the US change of heart is nothing of the sort emerged with the news that it was all pre-approved by the Israeli government. Bush and Rice had consulted separately with Israeli PM Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Both Israelis said they were in ‘complete agreement’ with US plans for Iran.

A few days earlier, Olmert had told Congress that Iran threatens Israel’s very existence and an Iranian nuclear weapon “cannot be permitted to materialize.”

In response to mistranslations of the Iranian president’s comments about Israel, Israeli Vice Premier Shimon Peres recently said that Ahmadinejad “should bear in mind that his own country could also be destroyed.” In an interview last month Peres confidently stated, “In the end there will be no choice but war with Iran.” The newspaper reassured its Israeli readers that he was “referring to the international military option against Iran’s nuclear program, not a war between Israel and Iran.”

The Israeli lobby sees the development of Iran’s nuclear program as a convenient timetable for war, a golden opportunity to weaken or destroy Israel’s enemies in Tehran and settle Israel’s strategic horizon for a generation, preferably by goading others (the US) to do the job.

Unlike its relatively coy public position in pushing the US war on Iraq, Israel's warmongering against Iran has been unabashed and relentless. Bush has also been explicit in linking Iran's nuclear development to Israel's security. He has pledged on more than one occasion to protect Israel from Iranian attack.

The codependence of this binational hysteria has become so obvious that several American Jewish groups recently sent quiet requests to the White House to cool it. The linkage was becoming embarrassing. Abraham Foxman, the head of the ADL, explained that "... because there is this debate on Iraq, where people are trying to put the blame on us, maybe you shouldn't say it that often or that loud."

Those of us who work for an end to Israel's war on the Palestinians would not mind seeing Israel's government take the blame for the disasters that would follow a US attack on Iran. If Israel's American political machine is hitched to Bush's star, may they both go down together.

But we should know by now that the issues imperialists emphasize in public almost never reflect the dimensions of the struggle at hand. The public scenario usually serves to inflame passions and divert public attention from crimes in progress.

In the US, Israel is useful as a propaganda cutout, to portray the innocent potential victim of an Islamic terrorist "Hitler." This gambit electrifies Bush's political base and breathes new life into the old Zionist lies about 'poor defenseless Israel.'

Internationally, Israeli leaders understand that the disaster in Iraq has reduced the diplomatic pressure to end their relentless destruction of Palestine. They might conclude that creating a new crisis over the "Iranian threat" would buy them the elimination of another enemy, plus a few more years of international diversion, during which they might complete their theft of Palestine.

Yet, despite all the political muscle that Israel brings to the game and all the advantages it stands to win, it appears to be but one of several subtexts to the impending US war on Iran.

Nuclear non-proliferation is the other public issue bandied about by Washington and the EU, but it, too, is nothing but smoke and mirrors. There is no legal basis for halting Iran's nuclear program at this time. Its current enrichment work is necessary to develop nuclear power generation and is allowed under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran is a party to the treaty and has submitted to IAEA inspections, unlike US favorites India and Israel, which rejected the NPT in order to secretly build their own nuclear arsenals.

As David Peterson points out in *Iran's Manufactured Crisis*, the current US-EU demands are so absurd that they would actually force Iran to violate the NPT, and if this tactic is sustained it could fatally undermine the battered treaty.

We assume that Iran wants to "build a bomb," but it is never made clear why this would be an intolerable event. By conventional geostrategic standards, it is logical for Iran to seek nuclear deterrence. For starters, the US has demonstrated a brutal will to invade and destroy nations on the terrorism pretext, provided they do not have nukes. And Iran now stands encircled by nations "hosting" the nuclear-tipped US military.

Iran has reasonably good relations with its balanced nuclear neighbors to the east, Pakistan

and India, and Russia and China, but on its western front it has long been vulnerable to attack by the fifth strongest military force in the world — nuclear Israel.

Tehran must be further concerned that, since Baghdad fell three years ago, Israel's diplomats, spooks, and politicians have been steadily selling Iran as an "existential threat" to the survival of the "Jewish State."

The issue of nuclear weapons demands a modicum of sobriety and respect for the truth. We must ask the Israelis, Why did you build those 200 to 400 nuclear warheads and place them in submarines and atop intercontinental missiles? Was it not to establish a credible deterrent that would protect you in exactly this kind of scenario? How can you claim to be defenseless?

John Negroponte, the newly minted US intelligence czar, recently said that Iran is probably 10 years away from acquiring a usable nuclear weapon. Does this rehash of previously released CIA estimates signal a change of policy? Probably not, but it confirms that there is no logical basis for the current madness.

Iran's nuclear potential is a symbol, not a tangible threat. In one sense, it's merely a targeting device, a way of marking out Iran for intervention. Yet the symbolism itself is a deadly serious matter to the geostrategists who presume to plan the presumed future of our empire. The US power elite has more than one problem with the idea of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. And it has other problems with the country's resources, geography, economy, and religion.

Iran is a major oil producer and may have the world's largest reserves of natural gas, the projected carbon fuel of the future. According to the unspoken rules of the New World Order, major petroleum sources are not allowed to acquire nukes. That would be "destabilizing." We must always have "access" to vital petroleum resources. Iran's presumed interest in acquiring nuclear weapons is considered a threat to our strategic assets.

Next door, Iraq continues to disintegrate under the watchful guidance of Proconsul Khalilzad. The prospect of a Shia state emerging in the southern half of the country is increasingly plausible. Dividing Iraq into three parts should make it easier for Washington to exploit the whole, but there's concern that a Shia state bordering Iran would be influenced by Tehran, and might even opt to join Iran. If Iraq should manage to stay together, Iran will be considered a threat to its fragile unity.

In the logic of imperialism, when you weaken or destroy a nation for advantage and control, you must also weaken or destroy any neighboring states that might take advantage of the chaos you're sowing for your own benefit. So this is another *casus belli* fueling up our long-range bombers.

And of course Iran is supposed to be our enemy, because it supports Hezbollah and Palestinian militants, which makes it a terrorist state, which by definition can't be allowed to have nukes. Following this line of "reasoning" we join and even trump the Israelis by denying the obscenely larger power of our own deterrent force.

The wonderful thing about a brazenly absurd foreign policy is that when the public accepts it, it is prone to draw predictably logical yet equally absurd conclusions about the policy's assumptions.

If our overkill deterrence can't protect us from Iran's putative nuclear "threat," it must be because the Iranians would not handle a nuclear weapon the way you or I would. Probably they would use it just as soon as they could get their hands on it, despite the consequences, sort of like a national suicide bomber.

Just the sort of Islamophobic mush the war-on-terrorists would have us believe.

As nearly everyone knows by now, Iran has been identified as a prime target for war, before or after Iraq, in several documents produced by neoconservatives later prominent in the Bush administration.

And there's the matter of the Iranian Oil Bourse, which was scheduled to open in March but was postponed indefinitely and without comment by the government. It is planned as a global oil exchange to challenge the two in London and New York that now dominate world oil trade. To add potential injury to this insult to Anglo domination of world oil trades, the IOB plans to buck the US-OPEC "petrodollar" by offering oil for sale in euros.

Everyone expects the deflating dollar's domination of world oil markets to end soon, perhaps by gradually phasing in a mix of currencies. But some analysts believe that if the choice to trade oil in euros or dollars is left up to market forces (per neoliberalism and the IOB), it could dramatically reverse dollar flows and evaporate the value of an already weak greenback, throwing the US economy into a depression.

Most of the elites of Europe and Asia would not relish this prospect; they would rather acquire our crumbling mantle of power and wealth by gradual and predictable means. No one is talking about it, including officials in Tehran, but for now the "threat" of the IOB is on ice.

Whether the IOB ever sees the light of day, powerful people in Washington and elsewhere have already tossed it onto the scales with the nuclear issue and the terrorism charge. And they have passed a dreadful judgment: Iran is not a "reliable" player in global energy markets. This by itself may be deemed sufficient cause to ignore the niceties of national sovereignty and international law.

Meanwhile, the "Great Game" of global empire is quietly coming to a head, and Iran finds itself in the middle of the struggle.

One of the key objectives in the US quest for global supremacy (a goal asserted openly in recent National Security and Defense policy statements) is to acquire control of a broad arc of territory stretching from Southwest Asia through Central Asia to the border of China.

In his exploitation of 9/11, Bush lost no time in destroying and radioactively poisoning Afghanistan and planting US military bases across Central Asia. But we've been kicked out of Uzbekistan and things aren't going well in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, or Tajikistan, either. It seems Central Asia would rather deal with China and Russia than the United States, a very sensible decision under the geographic, economic, cultural, and political circumstances.

When imperial dreams start going up in smoke on contact with reality, imperialists get desperate. Iran may be looming as the last stand for the US campaign to establish a beachhead in the belly of Asia. If the neocons lose this self-manufactured opportunity to take down Iran and cement their "gains" in the Middle East, they will have to admit failure,

even to themselves.

When will they admit that war is the greatest failure of all?

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