

Risk of Misreading US-Iran Dispute

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The ongoing war of words between US President George W. Bush and Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, coupled with deluded western media misconceptions or intentional misrepresentations of the true nature of the escalating conflict, can be utterly misleading, and must promptly be brought back to their sensible parameters of analysis.

Following President Ahmadinejad's fiery speech at the United Nations General Assembly on September 19 – second in its effrontery to Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, calling Bush the 'devil' – and also his talk to journalists at a packed United Nations conference hall two days later, US media, with the help of official 'experts' strove to further highlight the growing chasm between the two positions.

The New York Times, as it often does, took the lead, reducing Ahmadinejad's statements to a cluster of key positions that the editors of the Times found crucial. The Iranian president, according to Warren Hoge (NYT, Sep. 21) "refused to say whether he would comply with a Security Council demand for the disarmament and disbanding of Hezbollah, the Tehran-backed guerrilla group that fought a 34-day war with Israel".

Hoge identified yet another noteworthy theme; that of the Iranian president's "threat to wipe Israel off the map." More, Ahmadinejad's "attitude (at the press conference) was less belligerent than it had been in his speech to the General Assembly," according to the writer.

Aside from prioritizing its editorial agenda around Israel, its security and some mythical threat to wipe it off the map – at a time when the latter illegally occupies lands belonging to three Arab countries – the Times conveniently failed to duly support its claim that Ahmadinejad's speech to the assembly was belligerent.

True, the Iranian President's past questioning of the Holocaust was most insensitive, to say the least. However, such comments must not be used as a ready-to-serve rationale behind chastising every Iranian foreign policy position.

Regardless of the Iranian president's exact intentions behind his General Assembly address, only a self-deceiving person would argue that the United Nations represents a truly democratic institution, and that the international body was set up for any reason other than securing the military achievements and political and economic interests of the victorious allies emerging from WWII. Moreover, few could objectively argue that the US is not subjugating the United Nations to its militaristic whims and strategic ambitions.

If one rejects such claims – more or less introduced by Ahmadinejad – then one must also be ready to bring forth a convincing explanation as to why the US has always managed to

instigate brutal and deadly wars – with Iraq being the latest tragic example – unhindered, with or without a UN rubber stamp. Moreover, how can the UN maintain its relevance and respect at a time when the most ardent violators of international law such as Israel carry on with their inhumane ‘belligerent’ activities, often supported – also in Israel’s case – by an ever growing list of American vetoes in the Security Council, enough to shield the pariah state even from mere verbal criticism?

Since the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran initiated territorial aggression against no one. While human rights violations within the Islamic Republic were and are still rife, their overall damage if contrasted in number or intensity, can hardly be compared to the collective harm that Israel has inflicted on Palestinians, Lebanese and other Arab nations.

While religious decrees in Iran prohibited the pursuit of nuclear weapons years ago, various countries, notwithstanding Israel, have for decades stockpiled nuclear weapons, enough to blow up our planet hundreds of times over. But Western hypocrisy is limitless: democratic states, by definition, produce responsible governance, and since Israel (like the US, Britain, the UK, etc) is a democracy, then only Israel has the right to hold enough power to blow up our planet many times over.

Although I have intentionally ridiculed this argument to highlight its deficiency, it certainly captures the essence of the Western argument regarding the possession of nuclear weapons, with the word ‘democracy’ being completely stripped of its theoretical meaning, and turned into a blank check to refer to anything from the right to launch ‘pre-emptive’ wars, to the use of torture, to the ownership of weapons of mass destruction as a ‘deterrence’ against rogue nations, just like Iran.

This is precisely what makes leaders like Ahmadinejad – like Chavez in South America – appealing to most Iranians (and increasingly to Arabs and other Third World nations.) For the New York Times, like other haughty mainstream media in the United States, the mere questioning of America’s right to “administer” the world is the pinnacle of belligerence.

The intellectual arrogance and logically flawed reasoning of the American media is often a cover for its indubitable ignorance. Reducing a conflict to that of Ahmadinejad’s character and overstating the political worth of his personal views, divert attention from the real conflict at hand, and helps Republican warmongers further cement their drive for war.

Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute, a major hub for America’s neoconservatives, was refreshingly honest albeit injudicious in his recent analysis in Middle Eastern Outlook (AEI, Sep 1). Rubin summarized the US position in a few simple words: “A nuclear Iran would represent a fundamental shift in strategic balance.” It means that Iran with nuclear capabilities would simply upset America’s military encroachment in the Middle East, which would also create a rival to the state of Israel, whose military prowess is under immense scrutiny following its humiliating defeat in Lebanon.

This must not mean that Iran’s intentions are most unadulterated either; the temporary alliance Iran had reached with the US, vowing to assist or at least not upset its military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, are all characteristic of a country with pure political and strategic attitude, not necessary to guarantee universal justice, but primarily to advance its own interests.

It is vital that the Iran-US row, regardless of its future direction or level of escalation, be

understood for what it really is: a clash of interests between a superpower no longer so fearsome, and an aspiring regional power with clear objectives and aims. It's neither about America's burning desire to safeguard democracy and the human race from mad Iranian mullahs, nor is it exactly about Iran's quest for a just world. Further misinterpretation of this topic shall yield even more erroneous outcomes, of horror scenarios, of smoking guns, and eventually of one more tragic 'case for war.'

Ramzy Baroud's latest book: "The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle" (Pluto Press, London) is now available.

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