

Teetering on the Brink of Disaster: The NeoCons' Decision to Bomb Iran

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Global Research, April 09, 2007

9 April 2007

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Can Neoconservative Belligerent Dogmatism be Halted by the Empire's Realists?

In mid-September 2006, CNN invited retired Air Force Colonel Sam Gardiner, previously a strategic scholar at various U.S. Army War Colleges, to discuss the probability of a U.S. military strike against Iran. Responding on how close, in his opinion, the Bush Administration was away from giving the go-ahead order regarding Iran, Gardiner unmistakably said: "It's been given. In fact, we've probably been executing military operations inside Iran for at least 18 months. The evidence is overwhelming." (emphasis added) He is now promptly interrupted by his interviewer's anticipatory obedience, who recalls that the President had underlined that he wanted diplomacy to work in order to convince the Iranian government to stop enriching uranium. Quoting Bush, in an interview by David Ignatius of the *Washington Post* from the day before, with the words "I would tell the Iranian people that we have no desire for conflict," CNN's familiar face Wolf Blitzer turns back to Gardiner and repeats his initial question. Almost desperately the colonel replies with great emphasis: "We are conducting military operations inside Iran right now. The evidence is overwhelming, from both the Iranians [and] Americans, and Congressional sources." (emphasis added)

This blunt affirmation came from someone who was closely affiliated with the issue of how to handle the Iran case. It was in 2004 that Gardiner conducted a war game organized by the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine to gauge how an American president might respond, militarily or otherwise, to Iran's alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons, concluding that military strikes would at the end represent a quite inadequate instrument to confront the issue. However, the go-for-war crew at the White House further underscored their firmness of 'all options being on the table.' In that same CNN appearance, Gardiner laid out that despite serious concerns of military leaders about whether U.S. attacks on Iran would be effective, the Neoconservative officials remained fervent to their regime change goal: "The House Committee on Emerging Threats tried to have a hearing some weeks ago in which they asked the Department of State and Defense to come and answer this question [of military operations in Iran underway—the *author*] because it's serious enough to be answered without congressional approval, and they didn't come to the hearing." He stressed the gravity of the situation as the Pentagon war plans have gone to the White House, which is "not normal planning. When the plan goes to the White House, that means we've gone to a different state."

The United War Front Gathers

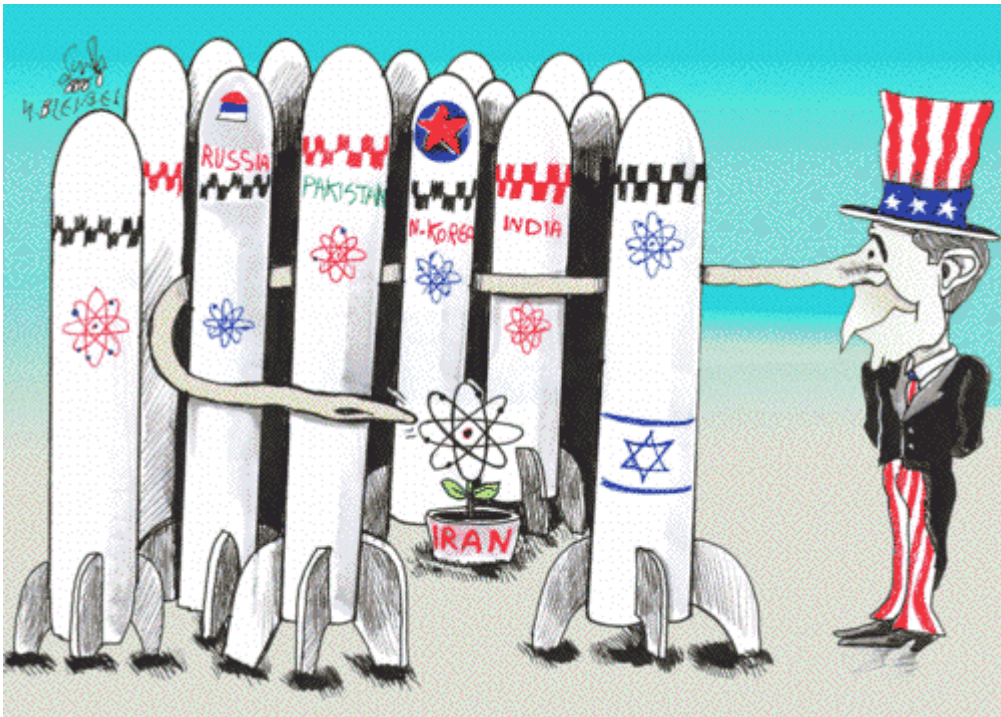
It is that different state that we are in for a half a year now. With covert military operations inside Iran still underway, war preparations with huge military troops lurking in the Persian Gulf being completed, the outbreak of an all-out war only needs the President's nodding through. In this light, the recent capture and due-time release by Iran of the British Royal Navy mission 'gathering intelligence' in and around its waters has finally avoided the escalation emanating from an act of provocation by Anglo-American troops in the region.

A highly significant indicator as to the probability of this Neoconservative covetousness to be realized or not was this year's annual Policy Conference of the *American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)*. Estimated to be the United States' most influential political lobby and renowned for its harsh anti-Iran stance, AIPAC welcomed a number of highest ranking U.S. and Israeli officials to its ever-largest conference held, which was primarily devoted to the issue of the 'Iranian nuclear threat.' Vice President Cheney, welcomed by standing ovations, made a hawkish speech *par excellence*: "We [the American and Israeli people—the *author*] are the prime targets of the terror movement that is global in nature, and yes global in its ambitions. The leader of this movement speak openly and specifically of building a totalitarian empire covering the Middle East, extending into Europe and reaching across to the islands of Indonesia." Unmistakably displaying his commitment to take action against Iran, Cheney called for "moral clarity, the courage of our convictions, a willingness to act when action is necessary and a refusal to submit to any form of intimidation ever." His speech was concluded with the words: "we're in a war that was begun on the enemy's terms. We're fighting that war on our own terms and we will prevail." His statements which were marked by a peculiar version of the historical reality the world is witnessing today in the Near and Middle East, were not all too surprising as he is known as the Administration's key figure pushing for 'regime change' in Iran, but still remain highly perturbing.

That is why it was, however, more interesting to hear the speech by the new Democratic speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi—a long-standing friend of AIPAC, as she was introduced by a former AIPAC president. Her first statement with a political dimension was dedicated to "recall[ing] the history of a Persian leader threatening the Jewish people and the heroine Esther who had the courage to speak out and save them. Today the Israeli people have that same courage to meet that same challenge." Pelosi went on saying: "Let us be very clear; Iran must not be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon. It threatens the security of Israel, the stability of the region and the safety of the world," underlining that "confronting that challenge [...] when Israel has a choice to make it makes courageous choices for peace." At the apogée of fundamentalist rhetoric which was absorbed by an often electrified crowd, the evangelical pastor John Hagee proclaimed that "[t]he sleeping giant of Christian Zionism has awoken!"

Although an explicit claim for waging a war on Iran was not made, implicit hints for the necessity for doing so were not missing at all. But AIPAC's momentary plan seems to be further escalating the nuclear stand-off with Iran. According to its 'Iran memo,' the pro-Israel lobby group called for much harsher sanctions to be pursued on economic and financial grounds with the hope of letting the Iranian regime to collapse. This flows into a new bill entitled the *Iran Counter-Proliferation Act*, introduced by the ranking members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Democrat Tom Lantos and Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. In a single day thousands of AIPAC lobbyists descended to Capitol Hill where "they were greeted by nearly every U.S. senator and more than half the members of the House of Representatives – approximately 500 meetings were held between AIPAC representatives and members of Congress."

But what do such avowals tell us about an imminent threat of a war on Iran? First of all, they show a *pro bellum* camp horrifyingly certain about their mission. They also signal that the spearhead of the Democratic opposition backs the Administration's fervent commitment to confront Iran with all means necessary. There are however some obstacle to be overcome.



The Empire's Realists' Fight Against the White House's "Gut Instincts"

While the current U.S. president received the largest applause among all his predecessors during an AIPAC slide show, at the same time the same president was graded with an 'F' for its foreign policy performance one of the country's leading pundits on foreign policy. In his new book *Second Chance – Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower*, the Realist guru Zbigniew Brzezinski designates presidency of Bush jr. as having "strong gut instincts but no knowledge of global complexities and a temperament prone to dogmatic formulations." Brzezinski bluntly expressed of what is at stake for the American Empire:

"We are facing a very serious crisis regarding the future. Our next twenty months are going to be absolutely decisive. If we surmount the next twenty months without the war in Iraq getting worse and expanding to a war with Iran, I think there is a good chance we'll recoup. [...] But if we do get into that larger conflict, then I'm afraid the era of American global preeminence will prove to be historically very, very short."

With Bush's presidency being in a deep crisis, the decision to expand the 'war on terror' onto Iran can be momentous for the fate of both his administration and his party—but first of all decisive for the future of American global preponderance. It seems that the fragmented camp of war opponents in Congress can hardly prevent the President to unilaterally set the stage for a disastrous war. It is up to influential strategic thinkers affiliated to Realist beliefs to convince Bush not to follow the path predetermined by Cheney. Recently also Henry Kissinger pointed to the very opposite direction of what the Bush Administration is heading to. He proposed an extensive deal with Iran through clever diplomacy. One thing is clear: the outcome of this decisive struggle between the Realist and

Neoconservative camps will determine whether we will face a terrible war theater in the Middle East with tremendous global repercussions.

The situation remains strained as those pushing for war are in the corridors of power—in the American, but also Israeli capital. With Tehran announcing its non-compliance vis-à-vis the recent UN Security Council Resolution 1747's indeed misleading demands, Iranian affinity for negotiations remains. But Tehran's sole precondition for talks must be met if a peaceful settlement should be achieved: And that is, that the preconditions set by its primarily Western counterparts should be put aside.

In the United States, the *pro bellum* camp is sensing that through their president's miserable performance the rug—which is believed to serve them to fully implement the Neoconservative agenda for the Middle East—could be pulled out from under its feet by the final yards. As the godfather of U.S. Neoconservatism Bill Kristol demands in the current issue of their influential organ *The Weekly Standard*, Bush and other Republicans ought to fight back in order to ensure the Administration's survival. As the British *Guardian* just reported, during the recently evoked Anglo-Iranian 'hostage crisis' Washington had offered aggressive air patrols in Iranian airspace. But such action, which could have easily triggered a war, was rejected by London. But what else, if not a new war, for saving the Bush/Cheney crew?

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