

When Wishful Thinking Replaces Resistance: Why Bush Can Get Away with Attacking Iran

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Many people in the antiwar movement try to reassure themselves: Bush cannot possibly attack Iran. He does not have the means to do so, or, perhaps, even he is not foolish enough to engage in such an enterprise. Various particular reasons are put forward, such as: If he attacks, the Shiites in Iraq will cut the US supply lines. If he attacks, the Iranians will block the Straits of Ormuz or will unleash dormant terrorist networks worldwide. Russia won't allow such an attack. China won't allow it — they will dump the dollar. The Arab world will explode.

All this is doubtful. The Shiites in Iraq are not simply obedient to Iran. If they don't rise against the United States when their own country is occupied (or if don't rise very systematically), they are not likely to rise against the US if a neighboring country is attacked. As for blocking the Straits or unleashing terrorism, this will just be another justification for more bombing of Iran. After all, a main casus belli against Iran is, incredibly, that it supposedly helps the resistance against U.S. troops in Iraq, as if those troops were at home there. If that can work as an argument for bombing Iran, then any counter-measure that Iran might take will simply "justify" more bombing, possibly nuclear. Iran is strong in the sense that it cannot be invaded, but there is little it can do against long range bombing, accompanied by nuclear threats.

Russia will escalate its military buildup (which now lags far behind the U.S. one), but it can't do anything else, and Washington will be only too glad to use the Russian reaction as an argument for boosting its own military forces. China is solely concerned with its own development and won't drop the dollar for non-economic reasons. Most Arab governments, if not their populations, will look favorably on seeing the Iranian shiite leadership humiliated. Those governments have sufficient police forces to control any popular opposition— after all, that is what they managed to do after the attack on Iraq.

With the replacement of Chirac by Sarkozy, and the near-complete elimination of what was left of the Gaullists (basically through lawsuits on rather trivial matters), France has been changed from the most independent European country to the most poodlish (this was in fact the main issue in the recent presidential election, but it was never even mentioned during the campaign). In France, moreover, the secular "left" is, in the main, gung-ho against Iran for the usual reasons (women, religion). There will be no large-scale demonstrations in France either before or after the bombing. And, without French support, Germany—where the war is probably very unpopular — can always be silenced with memories of the Holocaust, so that no significant opposition to the war will come from Europe (except possibly from its Muslim population, which will be one more argument to prove that they are "backward", "extremist", and enemies of our "democratic civilization").

All the ideological signposts for attacking Iran are in place. The country has been thoroughly demonized because it is not nice to women, to gays, or to Jews. That in itself is enough to neutralize a large part of the American “left”. The issue of course is not whether Iran is nice or not according to our views — but whether there is any legal reason to attack it, and there is none; but the dominant ideology of human rights has legitimized, specially in the left, the right of intervention on humanitarian grounds anywhere, at any time, and that ideology has succeeded in totally sidetracking the minor issue of international law.

Israel and its fanatical American supporters want Iran attacked for its political crimes—supporting the rights of the Palestinians, or questioning the Holocaust. Both U.S. political parties are equally under the control of the Israel lobby, and so are the media. The antiwar movement is far too preoccupied with the security of Israel to seriously defend Iran and it won’t attack the real architects of this coming war—the Zionists— for fear of “provoking antisemitism”. Blaming Big Oil for the Iraq war was quite debatable, but, in the case of Iran, since the country is about to be bombed but not invaded, there is no reason whatsoever to think that Big Oil wants the war, as opposed to the Zionists. In fact, Big Oil is probably very much opposed to the war, but it is as unable to stop it as the rest of us.

As far as Israel is concerned, the United States is a de facto totalitarian society—no articulate opposition is acceptable. The U.S. Congress passes one pro-Israel or anti-Iran resolution after another with “Stalinist” majorities. The population does not seem to care. But if they did, but what could they do? Vote? The electoral system is extremely biased against the emergence of a third party and the two big parties are equally under Zionist influence.

The only thing that might stop the war would be for Americans themselves to threaten their own government with massive civil disobedience. But that is not going to happen. A large part of the academic left long ago gave up informing the general public about the real world in order to debate whether Capital is a Signifier or a Signified, or worry about their Bodies and their Selves, while preachers tell their flocks to rejoice at each new sign that the end of the world is nigh. Children in Iran won’t sleep at night, but the liberal American intelligentsia will lecture the ROW (rest of the world) about Human Rights. In fact, the prevalence of the “reassuring arguments” cited above proves that the antiwar movement is clinically dead. If it weren’t, it would rely on its own forces to stop war, not speculate on how others might do the job.

Meanwhile, an enormous amount of hatred will have been spewed upon the world. But in the short term, it may look like a big Western “victory”, just like the creation of Israel in 1948; just like the overthrow of Mossadegh by the CIA in 1953; just like the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine seemed to be a big German victory after the French defeat at Sedan in 1870. The Bush administration will long be gone when the disastrous consequences of that war will be felt.

PS: This text is not meant to be a prophecy, but a call to (urgent) action. I’ll be more than happy if facts prove me wrong.

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