https://www.acdn.net/spip/spip.php?article161

WWIII or Bust: Implications of a US Attack on Iran

- Homepage - News - External sources -

Publication date: Saturday 25 February 2006

Copyright © www.acdn.net - All rights reserved

"This notion that the United States is getting ready to attack Iran is simply ridiculous... Having said that, all options are on the table." George W. Bush, February 2005

Witnessing the Bush administration's drive for an attack on Iran is like being a passenger in a car with a raving drunk at the wheel. Reports of impending doom surfaced a year ago, but now it's official: under orders from Vice President Cheney's office, the Pentagon has developed "last resort" aerial-assault plans using long-distance B2 bombers and submarine-launched ballistic missiles with both conventional and nuclear weapons.

How ironic that the Pentagon proposes using nuclear weapons on the pretext of protecting the world from nuclear weapons. Ironic also that Iran has complied with its obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, allowing inspectors to "go anywhere and see anything," yet those pushing for an attack, the USA and Israel, have not.

The nuclear threat from Iran is hardly urgent. As the Washington Post reported in August 2005, the latest consensus among U.S. intelligence agencies is that "Iran is about a decade away from manufacturing the key ingredient for a nuclear weapon, roughly doubling the previous estimate of five years." The Institute for Science and International Security estimated that while Iran could have a bomb by 2009 at the earliest, the US intelligence community assumed technical difficulties would cause "significantly delay." The director of Middle East Studies at Brown University and a specialist in Middle Eastern energy economics both called the State Department's claims of a proliferation threat from Iran's Bushehr reactor "demonstrably false," concluding that "the physical evidence for a nuclear weapons program in Iran simply does not exist."

So there's no urgency - just a bad case of déjà vu all over again. The Bush administration is recycling its hype over Hussein's supposed WMD threat into rhetoric about Iran, but look where the charade got us last time: tens of thousands of dead Iraqi civilians, a country teetering on civil war and increased global terrorism.

Yet the stakes in Iran are arguably much higher.

Consider that many in the US and Iran seek religious salvation through a Middle Eastern blowout. "End times" Christian fundamentalists believe a cataclysmic Armageddon will enable the Messiah to reappear and transport them to heaven, leaving behind Muslims and other non-believers to face plagues and violent death. Iran's new Shia Islam president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, subscribes to a competing version of the messianic comeback, whereby the skies turn to flames and blood flows in a final showdown of good and evil. The Hidden Imam returns, bringing world peace by establishing Islam as the global religion.

Both the US and Iran have presidents who arguably see themselves as divinely chosen and who covet their own country's apocalypse-seeking fundamentalist voters. And into this tinderbox Bush proposes bringing nuclear weapons.

As expected, the usual suspects press for a US attack on Iran. Neo-cons who brought us the "cakewalk" of Iraq want to bomb the country. There's also Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, busy coordinating the action plan against Iran, who just released the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review calling for US forces to "operate around the globe" in an infinite "long war." One can assume Rumsfeld wants to bomb a lot of countries.

There's also Israel, keen that no other country in the region gains access to nuclear weapons. In late 2002, former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Iran should be targeted "the day after" Iraq was subdued, and Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the Likud Party, recently warned that if he wins the presidential race in March 2006, Israel will "do what we

Copyright © www.acdn.net

did in the past against Saddam's reactor," an obvious reference to the 1981 bombing of the Osirak nuclear facility in Iraq. It doesn't help that Iran's Ahmadinejad has called the Holocaust a myth and said that Israel should be "wiped off the map."

In the eyes of the Bush administration, however, Iran's worst transgression has less to do with nuclear ambitions or anti-Semitism than with the petro-euro oil bourse Tehran is slated to open in March 2006. Iran's plan to allow oil trading in euros threatens to break the dollar's monopoly as the global reserve currency, and since the greenback is severely overvalued due to huge trade deficits, the move could be devastating for the US economy.

So we remain pedal to the metal with Bush for an attack on Iran.

But what if the US does go ahead and launch an assault in the coming months? The Pentagon has already identified 450 strategic targets, some of which are underground and would require the use of nuclear weapons to destroy. What happens then?

You can bet that Iran would retaliate. Tehran promised a "crushing response" to any US or Israeli attack, and while the country - ironically - doesn't possess nuclear weapons to scare off attackers, it does have other options. Iran boasts ground forces estimated at 800,000 personnel, as well as long-range missiles that could hit Israel and possibly even Europe. In addition, much of the world's oil supply is transported through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow stretch of ocean which Iran borders to the north. In 1997, Iran's deputy foreign minister warned that the country might close off that shipping route if ever threatened, and it wouldn't be difficult. Just a few missiles or gunboats could bring down vessels and block the Strait, thereby threatening the global oil supply and shooting energy prices into the stratosphere.

An attack on Iran would also inflame tensions in the Middle East, especially provoking the Shiite Muslim populations. Considering that Shiites largely run the governments of Iran and Iraq and are a potent force in Saudi Arabia, that doesn't bode well for calm in the region. It would incite the Lebanese Hezbollah, an ally of Iran's, potentially sparking increased global terrorism. A Shiite rebellion in Iraq would further endanger US troops and push the country deeper into civil war.

Attacking Iran could also tip the scales towards a new geopolitical balance, one in which the US finds itself shut out by Russia, China, Iran, Muslim countries and the many others Bush has managed to piss off during his period in office. Just last month, Russia snubbed Washington by announcing it would go ahead and honor a $700 million contract to arm Iran with surface-to-air missiles, slated to guard Iran's nuclear facilities. And after being burned when the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority invalidated Hussein-era oil deals, China has snapped up strategic energy contracts across the world, including in Latin America, Canada and Iran. It can be assumed that China will not sit idly by and watch Tehran fall to the Americans.

Russia and China have developed strong ties recently, both with each other and with Iran. Each possesses nuclear weapons, and arguably more threatening to the US, each holds large reserves of US dollars which can be dumped in favor of euros. Bush crosses them at his nation's peril.

Yet another danger is that an attack on Iran could set off a global arms race - if the US flouts the non-proliferation treaty and goes nuclear, there would be little incentive for other countries to abide by global disarmament agreements either. Besides, the Bush administration's message to its enemies has been very clear: if you possess WMD you're safe, and if you don't, you're fair game. Iraq had no nuclear weapons and was invaded, Iran doesn't as well and risks attack, yet that other "Axis of Evil" country, North Korea, reportedly does have nuclear weapons and is left alone. It's also hard to justify striking Iran over its allegedly developing a secret nuclear weapons program, when

Copyright © www.acdn.net

India and Pakistan (and presumably Israel) did the same thing and remain on good terms with Washington.

The most horrific impact of a US assault on Iran, of course, would be the potentially catastrophic number of casualties. The Oxford Research Group predicted that up to 10,000 people would die if the US bombed Iran's nuclear sites, and that an attack on the Bushehr nuclear reactor could send a radioactive cloud over the Gulf. If the US uses nuclear weapons, such as earth-penetrating "bunker buster" bombs, radioactive fallout would become even more disastrous.

Given what's at stake, few allies, apart from Israel, can be expected to support a US attack on Iran. While Jacques Chirac has blustered about using his nukes defensively, it's doubtful that France would join an unprovoked assault, and even loyal allies, such as the UK, prefer going through the UN Security Council.

Which means the wildcard is Turkey. The nation shares a border with Iran, and according to Noam Chomsky, is heavily supported by the domestic Israeli lobby in Washington, permitting 12% of the Israeli air and tank force to be stationed in its territory. Turkey's crucial role in an attack on Iran explains why there's been a spurt of high-level US visitors to Ankara lately, including Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, FBI Director Robert Mueller and CIA Director Porter Goss. In fact, the German newspaper Der Spiegel reported in December 2005 that Goss had told the Turkish government it would be "informed of any possible air strikes against Iran a few hours before they happened" and that Turkey had been given a "green light" to attack camps of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Iran "on the day in question."

It's intriguing that both Valerie Plame (the CIA agent whose identity was leaked to the media after her husband criticized the Bush administration's pre-invasion intelligence on Iraq) and Sibel Edmonds (the former FBI translator who turned whistleblower) have been linked to exposing intelligence breaches relating to Turkey, including potential nuclear trafficking. And now both women are effectively silenced.

The US public sees the issue of Iran as backburner, and has little eagerness for an attack on the country at this time. A USA Today/CNN Gallup Poll from early February 2006 found that a full 86% of respondents favored either taking no action or using economic/diplomatic efforts towards Iran for now. Significantly, 69% said they were concerned "that the U.S. will be too quick to use military force in an attempt to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons."

And that begs the question: how can the US public be convinced to enter a potentially ugly and protracted war in Iran?

A domestic terrorist attack would do the trick. Just consider how long Congress went back and forth over reauthorizing Bush's Patriot Act, but how quickly opposing senators capitulated following last week's nerve-agent scare in a Senate building. The scare turned out to be a false alarm, but the Patriot Act got the support it needed.

Now consider the fact that former CIA Officer Philip Giraldi has said the Pentagon's plans to attack Iran were drawn up "to be employed in response to another 9/11-type terrorist attack on the United States." Writing in The American Conservative in August 2005, Giraldi added, "As in the case of Iraq, the response is not conditional on Iran actually being involved in the act of terrorism directed against the United States."

Chew on that one a minute. The Pentagon's plan should be used in response to a terrorist attack on the US, yet is not contingent upon Iran actually having been responsible. How outlandish is this scenario: another 9/11 hits the US, the administration says it has secret information implicating Iran, the US population demands retribution and bombs start dropping on Tehran.

Copyright © www.acdn.net

That's the worst-case scenario, but even the best case doesn't look good. Let's say the Bush administration chooses the UN Security Council over military power in dealing with Iran. That still leaves the proposed oil bourse, along with the economic fallout that will occur if OPEC countries snub the greenback in favor of petro-euros. At the very least, the dollar will drop and inflation could soar, so you'd think the administration would be busy tightening the nation's collective belt. But no. The US trade deficit reached a record high of $725.8 billion in 2005, and Bush & Co.'s FY 2007 budget proposes increasing deficits by $192 billion over the next five years. The nation is hemorrhaging roughly $7 billion a month on military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and is expected to hit its debt ceiling of $8.184 trillion next month.

So the white-knuckle ride to war continues, with the administration's goals in Iran very clear. Recklessly naïve and impetuous perhaps, but clear: stop the petro-euro oil bourse, take over Khuzestan Province (which borders Iraq and has 90% of Iran's oil) and secure the Straits of Hormuz in the process. As US politician Newt Gingrich recently put it, Iranians cannot be trusted with nuclear technology, and they also "cannot be trusted with their oil."

But the Bush administration cannot be trusted with foreign policy. Its military adventurism has already proven disastrous across the globe. It's incumbent upon each of us to do whatever we can to stop this race towards war.

Heather Wokusch

Other article on the same subject:

Calculating the Risk of War in Iran

by F. William Engdahl

Copyright © www.acdn.net