

Iran Is Not, Must Not, Be Another Iraq

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

If the Bush-Cheney Administration wants to target Iran as the next “outpost of tyranny” to be “liberated,” as President Bush reiterated in his State of the Union address, it will have to fly in the face of the opposition of the rest of the world (with the exception of Israel).

The mission of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, on her rushed trip to Europe, was clearly this: to dictate to the Europeans, albeit in softened terms, that they must wield the stick as well as the carrot, in their talks with Iran on the issue of its nuclear energy program. The Europeans had made clear, prior to Rice’s arrival, that they, the “EU-3” (Great Britain, Germany, and France), would continue to pursue their dialogue with Iran, and they urged the U.S. to support their diplomatic approach. French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier was quoted in the press as saying: “I cannot explain American policy to you. That would be French arrogance and I am not someone who is arrogant. But I think that the Americans must get used to the fact that Europe is going to act. And in this case, without the United States, we run the risk of failure.”

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has spoken out almost every day, against the military assault threatened by Washington’s neo-cons. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, he said: “This is a hotbed region, the last thing we need is a military conflict in that region. I’m very explicit and outspoken about this because I want everybody to know where Germany stands.”

Rice exploited every available opportunity, during talks with German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, his French counterpart Barnier, and others, to issue warnings to Tehran. She summed up her message in a Feb. 9 interview on Fox News: “The Iranians need to hear that if they are unwilling to live with verification measures . . . then the Security Council referral looms,” she said. “I don’t know that anyone has said that as clearly as they should to the Iranians. The international community has got to be certain to speak with one very tough voice to the Iranians that it is not going to be acceptable for Iran to build a nuclear weapon under cover of civilian nuclear power.”

Repeating that the U.S. would like to refer the issue to the UN Security Council, Rice added: “But they need to hear that the discussions that they’re in with the Europeans are not going to be a kind of way-station where they are allowed to

continue their activities, that there’s going to be an end to this, and that they’re going to end up in the Security Council.”

Barnier’s response was unequivocal. In order for the international pressure to yield results, he said, “we need Russia, we need China, and we also need the support of the United States in this delicate phase.” Tony Blair was the only one who kowtowed to Rice, echoing the refrain that Iran supported terrorists, and “that they cannot breach the rule of the atomic energy authority and cannot develop nuclear weapons capability.”

Adding to Rice’s menacing words, President Bush then issued a statement Feb. 9: “The Iranians just need to know,” he said, “that the free world is working together to send a very clear message: Don’t develop a nuclear weapon. And the reason we’re sending that message is because Iran with a nuclear weapon would be a very destabilizing force in the world.”

Not coincidentally, International Atomic Energy Agency head Mohammad ElBaradei, whose fine-tuned negotiating powers have been instrumental in reaching the agreement between Europe and Iran, was put under fire. Wire reports circulated about U.S. plans to dump ElBaradei. Unnamed “diplomats” in Vienna said, that at the Feb. 28 meeting of the IAEA, Washington would seek to shoot down ElBaradei’s bid for a third term, because he is considered “too soft” on Iran. U.S. Undersecretary of State John Bolton and other senior State Department officials were reportedly “still lobbying the capitals” against ElBaradei.

New Line-Up at the United Nations

If the U.S. were to proceed along the lines established in the Iraq war, it would take the Iranian nuclear case to the UN Security Council, call for sanctions, and then, arguing non-compliance, move towards military options. So much has been indicated by Bolton, Rice, and President Bush himself. But this time around, the chairs on the Security Council have been rearranged. The Russian government has explicitly endorsed the EU-3 approach (see *EIR*, Feb. 4, 2005).

In late January, a high-level Russian delegation visited Iran, for “strategic talks,” to be followed by the arrival of Russian Atomic Energy Agency Director Alexander Rumyantsev, on Feb. 25. Rumyantsev is to finalize plans for opening the Bushehr nuclear power plant, and discuss the construction operations required to build the plant’s second of seven more planned units. The two sides are to sign the contract on returning the plant’s spent nuclear fuel to Russia. The 100-megawatt plant will be launched in late 2005 and reach full capacity in 2006.

In addition to the Russians’ unwavering commitment to assisting Iran’s nuclear energy program, the Chinese have made clear that they will not sit back while another Iraq war is being staged. Speaking in New Delhi, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawer told Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam

Saran, that China was talking to Russia, France, and Germany, in order to take steps against any U.S. hostile action against Iran. Wu said China would urge Pakistan not to allow its airspace to be used for a U.S. strike against Iran, and urged India to follow suit.

Any neo-con fanatic might respond: To hell with the UN Security Council; unilateralism is a reality and, if need be, Bush-Cheney will go to war alone. Preparations for military and/or political action are well under way. As Richard Sale documented in a Jan. 26 UPI story, the U.S. Air Force is conducting overflights in Iranian air space, in an attempt to provoke the Iranians to lock on their radar, thus identifying the locations of their air defenses. This is what the U.S. did for years prior to the last Iraq war, when it flew regularly over the “no fly zones” to detect anti-aircraft capabilities, which were then bombed. Iran, which is not on its knees as Iraq was, could respond to espionage overflights by firing on the aircraft.

The MKO Option

The other operations Sale exposed were related to intelligence-gathering by Israeli-trained Kurds in northern Iraq, and the MKO-MEK (Mujahedeen e-Khalq), the Iraqi-based anti-Iranian terrorist organization.

At this point: enter Maryam Rajavi, leader of the so-called National Council of Resistance, the political front organization of the MKO. Rajavi authored an op-ed in the Jan. 28 *International Herald Tribune*, pleading with the U.S. State Department for “removal of the terrorist tag that has been put” on the MKO, to allow it to play its role as “the pivotal force in the largest Iranian opposition coalition,” that is, her National Council of Resistance, “which has revealed Tehran’s nuclear, missile, and terrorist plans.” (In fact, the MKO is the entity which has supplied the U.S. with “intelligence” on Iran’s alleged weapons of mass destruction, just as Ahmed Chalabi had fed it lies on Iraq.)

Rajavi argued that the Iranian people were ripe for “democracy,” adding that “The Iranian resistance is committed to holding free and fair elections within six months of *regime change*, to electing a constituent assembly, and handing over affairs to the people’s elected representatives.” Days later, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* sported a half-page ad, announcing a mass demonstration to be held in Berlin on Feb. 10, in support of Rajavi’s operation.

As Rajavi boasted, there are U.S. Congressmen lobbying to remove the MKO from the State Department’s terrorist list. In fact, on Feb. 4, Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) announced that he was redrafting a bill to authorize U.S. funding for opposition groups in Iran. “The bill also notes the futility of working with the Iranian government,” Santorum told Fox News. In addition, the House of Representatives has a bill, backed by Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.), and 48 others, known as the “Iran

Freedom Support Act,” which calls for the MKO to be taken off the terrorist list, so that it can be unleashed against the Iran regime. Finally, none other than Paul Wolfowitz has been an active participant in NCR/MKO public events in Washington.

Thus the MKO option is not idle chatter. The organization has a hard core of some thousands of ideologically brainwashed, militarily trained terrorists, who, over the last years, have successfully deployed into Iran to set off bombs and assassinate dozens of leading political figures.

That the United States is using the MKO, is the best proof of the fraud of Bush-Cheney’s rhetoric about the “war against terrorism.” Although kept under wraps, it is a hard fact that beginning in 2003, it was made known in Washington, that the Iranians had a significant number of top al-Qaeda terrorists in their custody, and a prisoner exchange—al-Qaeda for MKO—could have been arranged. A first step would have been the exchange of information, that is, the names of those al-Qaeda and MKO leaders in custody. The second step would have been the exchange of prisoners. Were Bush, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, et al. truly interested in defeating al-Qaeda, they would have jumped at the chance. That they did exactly the opposite—refusing any such proposition—confirms the fraud, as well as the intention to deploy such terrorists against Iran, perhaps as the maiden voyage for Rumsfeld’s new fleet of Salvador-style death squads.

Iran Wants Nuclear Energy, Not War

No one in Iran wants war. But it is folly to imagine that the government would capitulate under military assault, or that throngs of Iranians would take to the streets, waving American flags, while moving to the Presidential palace to overthrow the regime. Under attack, Iranians will close ranks in defense of their sovereignty and independence, and precisely those conservative clerical leaders, whom Bush and Co. say must go, will be immensely strengthened.

This was made clear in the official reactions to Washington’s saber-rattling. Hassan Rowhani, head of the Supreme National Security Council, and a negotiator on the nuclear issue, stated on Feb. 6 that Iran’s nuclear centers “cannot be destroyed. Our nuclear technology,” he explained, “comes from our scientists and we can transfer our nuclear workshops under mountains and carry out enrichment where no bomb or missile can be effective.” A day later, President Mohammad Khatami pledged that Iran would not develop nuclear weapons, “But we will not give up peaceful nuclear technology” including the enrichment capability. He made known that Iran would not bend under pressure, even if it came from a Rice-whipped European Union.

“I stress very clearly that all our patience, if we felt others are not meeting their promises, under no circumstances would we be committed to continue fulfilling ours,” Khatami said. This referred to the EU-3’s promise of technology and en-

hanced trade relations, in return for Iran's suspension of its uranium enrichment program. Khatami concluded with a threat: "And we will adopt a new policy, the consequences of which are massive and would be the responsibility of those who broke their commitments."

Even forces inside Iran who are critical of the current government, spoke out against any military aggression. Nobel prize winner Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian human rights activist, penned an op-ed that appeared in the *International Herald Tribune* on Feb. 9, entitled "Why an Attack Would Be Folly." She argued that "the threat of foreign military intervention will provide a powerful excuse for authoritarian elements to uproot these [human rights] groups and put an end to their growth." Any attack would destroy lives and infrastructure, she said. "[G]etting the Iranian government to abide by . . . international standards is the human rights movement's highest goal; foreign military intervention is the surest way to harm us and keep that goal out of reach."

While holding firm to its nuclear program, and vowing to adopt harsh methods if put under undue pressure, leading Iranian politicians also hinted at the possibility of normalizing relations with the U.S., if Washington were to abandon its threats. On Feb. 1, Supreme National Security Council head Hassan Rowhani, extended a hand in the direction of the U.S., saying relations could and should improve between Tehran and Washington, if the latter were to come to reason. Just days later, former President Hashemi Rafsanjani (who is also mooted as a candidate again) gave an explosive interview to *USA Today*.

In his first interview with an American reporter since 1997, Rafsanjani proposed that the U.S. take the first step to open a dialogue with Iran, suggesting "the best positive sign" would be to unfreeze Iran's assets (about \$8 billion) that have been frozen since the 1979 Tehran hostage crisis. He called "Miss Rice . . . a bit emotional" about Iran, and said an entire editorial could be written about President George Bush's frequent "slips of the tongue," which are not "correct or appropriate for someone in that high position as the President of the United States. . . . The U.S. is a big country, but unfortunately, it seems it has the brain of a little bird not befitting the greatness of the country," Rafsanjani commented.

Rafsanjani's son, Mehdi Hashemi, explained to *USA Today* that his father "wants to solve the American problem. Because if he solves the American problem, he solves all Iranian problems."

These interventions should be read as a response not so much to the threats, but to the growing opposition internationally—and inside the U.S.—to another Desert Storm. Just as European politicians have been fortified in their stance, by the emergence of a strong opposition to Bush inside the U.S., so the Iranians have seen that the American political landscape is not painted in black and white, but is multi-colored and nuanced.