

Resistance Flares Worldwide To Bush's New Round of Wars

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Days before George W. Bush's second inaugural speech, a political shot was fired against the neo-con agenda, which ricocheted around the world from the pages of the *New Yorker* magazine. Veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, who was the first to reveal the Abu Ghraib prison torture, published a devastating exposé Jan. 17 of what the second Bush Administration plans to do—or is already doing—to continue its “permanent-war” strategy (see article, p. 4).

The Hersh article, picked up in the world press, set off a series of unusually courageous interventions by leading political figures in Western Europe, as well as in Russia. Hersh's article was read, correctly, as the leading edge of a broader, powerful resistance effort being mounted by a coalition of bipartisan forces from military, intelligence, journalist, and Congressional layers inside the United States, committed to rendering Bush a lame duck.

The *New Yorker* article, titled “The Coming Wars: What the Pentagon Can Now Do in Secret,” unmasked crucial foreign policy initiatives already in motion. The centerpiece is the plan for a military operation against Iran, as part of a wider deployment of special commando groups and special forces against “terrorists,” in up to ten countries. Such operations are to be run not by the CIA, but out of the Pentagon, under Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his neo-con stable, led by Stephen Cambone and William G. Boykin. The Iran assault is intended to target nuclear facilities and aim to destroy Iran's military infrastructure, at the same time igniting a revolt against the government leading to regime change. Pakistani elements are to be used, penetrating Iran through Afghanistan.

A Call to Arms

As the Hersh story flashed across the world press, Lyndon LaRouche characterized it as a “phase-shift, a turning-point in the world strategic situation.” The publication of this article, he said, represented a “direct throwing down of the gauntlet against Bush and Cheney.” As LaRouche has indicated, most recently in a seminar in Berlin (see *Feature*), if the opposition forces inside the United States move aggressively against the Bush agenda, this will encourage like-minded circles abroad to move. This is precisely what has happened.

The European press seized on the Hersh revelations, with headlines like these: “Preparing for an Attack on Iran” (*The Guardian*); “Neo-Cons Turn Their Attack to Iran” (*Financial Times*); “Why the Hawks Are Circling Over Iran” (*The Independent*); “Is Iran the Next Bush Target?” (*Today Singapore*); and “Bush Won't Rule Out Action Against Iran Over Nukes” (Reuters news service). Reports on the article were bolstered by quotes from Bush, who had just reiterated his position of not ruling out any military options against Iran, and Condoleezza Rice's testimony at her Senate confirmation hearings, in which she honed in on Iran as among the “outposts of tyranny” which had to be dealt with by the United States.

The nature of the new neo-con threat was quickly grasped by strategic analysts and politicians in Europe and Asia. One source in the City of London financial community suggested that the driving force behind the Bush-Cheney madness, is an unsustainable current account deficit. Bush et al. are seeking something that can be perceived as compensation for vanishing foreign capital flows into the United States,

he explained; hence, they are bent on privatizing and looting Social Security. But, as people like Karl Rove know, he added, they cannot ram this through without a major foreign policy crisis situation. In the view of this London insider, the Iran operation is very serious; it would be done “on the cheap” (because of financial and logistical restraints), using special units, rather than the Iraq model, with a full invasion.

Responses from Germany came from across the political spectrum, in clear denunciation of the permanent-war policy. Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, asked during a Jan. 18 press conference in Toulouse, France, about Europe’s dialogue policy toward Tehran, replied that he saw no reason whatsoever to divert from the European Union-Iran formula, which led to Iran’s halting the militarily relevant part of its nuclear program, in return for getting EU economic aid (also for peaceful nuclear technology). A military strike against Iran would be in no one’s interest, he added.

Social Democratic Party foreign policy spokesman Gernot Erler went further, saying the remarks by Bush and Rice were unacceptable, and Europe must ask the United States to explain what is going on. The United States must clarify whether it is just conducting reconnaissance flights over Iran, or whether these are part of preparations for a military strike. The fact that the United States has decided to provoke the Iranians at a time when Europe is negotiating a diplomatic solution with Iran—and to provoke without consulting the Europeans beforehand—aggravates U.S.-European relations and the functioning of NATO, Erler said. At the latest, when Bush visits Europe in February, he will have to clarify his policy on Iran, Erler added, urging European governments to bring up the issue with the American President.

Volker Rühle, Christian Democrat and former Defense Minister, said bluntly, “If the U.S.A. really wants the Iranian problem solved, it should stop issuing threats and start cooperating with the Europeans for a diplomatic solution.” Rühle said he saw certain problems on the Iranian side, but not such as to justify military action. Other German political parties lined up against the threats against Iran. Only neo-con fellow-traveller Wolfgang Schäuble, of the Christian Democratic Union, claimed Bush’s threats to Iran are “just aimed at increasing pressure on Tehran, nothing else.”

Even the British government of Tony Blair, who has functioned as Bush’s “poodle” for the past four years, had to distance itself from the new war-mongering. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, in an interview with the *Financial Times*, defended the approach of the European nations (France, Germany, and Britain) to Iran: “Those who said we would be split apart by the Iranians are wrong. Those who said we would not be able to negotiate any substantial text [with the Iranians] are wrong. Those who said we could not build up a degree of trust with the Iranians—at the same time building up a strong

consensus with the U.S. and the non-aligned countries—are wrong. It has taken a phenomenal amount of work, but so far so good. And it’s a better strategy than the alternative.”

The Russian Response: ‘We Won’t Be Provoked’

Most significant, and fraught with strategic consequence, was the Russian response. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov gave a press conference in Moscow Jan. 19, underlining that Russia will not be provoked into confrontation on the world stage: “There are some who look at Russia with suspicion, and call for all but confrontation with and opposition to Russian activity in the international arena. We assess such approaches as a call to renew confrontation and will not yield to this. We won’t be provoked,” Lavrov said.

Lavrov added that the entire world community faces the task of preventing a slide towards confrontation. It is from this angle, he said, that Russia is approaching the major events scheduled for the beginning of this year, among them the Russian-American summit; the 60th anniversary commemoration in Moscow of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45, to be attended by many heads of state; a Russia-European Union summit; a G-8 summit; and other important events. In response to statements by Condoleezza Rice, Lavrov said: “Russian internal policy is our internal affair. Life is developing on the basis of our constitution, and decisions that are made on the basis of our constitution by our leadership.”

Indeed, in the dense calendar of diplomatic events, the Bush-Cheney duo will be confronted in ways they have not expected. Schröder is to meet Bush Feb. 23, in Mainz. It is unusual for the Chancellor to receive an American President—especially on his first foreign trip after re-election—anywhere outside the capital, Berlin; meeting in provincial Mainz is tantamount to an insult.

German sources insist Schröder will not back down to any blackmail Bush may attempt, like demanding that Germany cooperate in Iraq deployments, or cut off cooperation with Iran, in return for a seat on the UN Security Council. Schröder knows a German seat on the Security Council is not on the immediate agenda.

On Feb. 24, following his meeting with Schröder, Bush will meet Schröder’s strategic partner, Russian President Putin, in the Slovakian capital, Bratislava. Lavrov described this as one of the most important events of 2005—a summit concentrating on economic, trade, and investment cooperation. Clearly, at its center will be U.S. policy towards Iran and other targeted nations.

Assault on Iran Is Operational

As detailed in Hersh’s article, the operations against Iran are already in place. Indian intelligence sources have reported several indications of this, especially regarding the role Paki-

stan is playing, via Afghanistan. Any U.S. attempt to penetrate Iran would pass through Afghanistan. Plans are under way to release large numbers of Taliban prisoners, and integrate them into the Afghan government. This would be the gesture required by Pakistan, to cooperate with its Taliban allies in such anti-Iranian adventures.

Furthermore, in Afghanistan's Herat Province, near the Iranian border, U.S. Special Forces are building an air strip large enough to accommodate cargo planes like the C130. Not long ago, the pro-Iranian Governor of Herat, Ismail Khan, was unceremoniously removed from power, which constituted a political blow to Tehran. The more recent assassination attempt against pro-Russian warlord Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, can be read in the same context.

Although Iranian officials have, for obvious reasons, denied penetration of their borders by U.S. special forces, Indian sources say penetration attempts began in 2002, after the murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl. The story they tell is that Washington found out about Pakistani intelligence (ISI) indirect involvement in the brutal murder, and summoned ISI chief Lt. Gen. Ehsanul Haq to Washington. There, reportedly, he was offered a deal: The U.S. could use Balochistan to infiltrate agents into Iran, in return for hushing up the ISI involvement. This led to the resignation of Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdus Sattar, who objected to Pakistani involvement in anti-Iran operations.

The Iranian Response

What would happen if the U.S. went ahead with the mad project exposed by Hersh? The Iranians have responded by saying, first, that the story of special forces inside their borders is "psychological warfare." Second, they say, were their country to be attacked, it would defend itself, using military capabilities not known to the United States. "With reliance on enormous popular support, diplomatic capacity and full military capability, the Islamic Republic of Iran will firmly respond to any unwise measure or plan," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said, responding to "recent comments by U.S. officials," such as Bush's Jan. 17. "We see such moves as a psychological campaign and political pressure," he said, suggesting that one aim was "not to help and encourage Europe to peacefully settle some disagreements through diplomacy and talks, but to disrupt the Iran-EU nuclear talks by pretending they are unsuccessful."

Asefi gave Rice some advice: "We recommend the new American Foreign Minister avoid repeating past mistakes by reviewing America's wrong and unsuccessful policies of unilateralism and oppression. . . . The United States of America has fallen into an abyss of several crises as a result of the wrong attitude of hard-line neo-conservatives. There is no way out unless it reviews and corrects past mistakes."

A spokesman for Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Agha Mohammadi, denied any special units had penetrated Iran, while former President and current head of the

Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said Iran would not be intimidated. "We are not afraid of foreign enemies' threats and sanctions, since they know well that throughout its Islamic and ancient history, Iran has been no place for adventurism." Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani stated: "We are able to say we have strength such that no country can attack us, because they do not have precise information about our military capabilities, due to our ability to implement flexible strategies." He added: "We can claim we have rapidly produced equipment that has resulted in the greatest deterrent."

The Russian Angle

There can be no doubt that Iran, if attacked, would mount an aggressive defense, not only on its territory, but, in asymmetric fashion, by deploying assets in other areas. In addition to the substantive Shi'ite communities in many Persian Gulf countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, and others), the political majority in Iraq today is made up of Shi'ites, many of whom benefitted from Iranian refuge in the Saddam Hussein era. Any attack on Iran would spark rebellions among Shi'ites in the region, and worldwide.

This much is known. What is not known is what Russia would do, if Iran were attacked. According to a German military expert with experience in the Persian Gulf, any anti-Iranian hit would constitute a "red line" for Moscow. The Russian leadership has been forced to swallow a number of humiliations, and has been subjected to infamous attacks, from Chechnya to Beslan, on its own territory, while U.S. subversion operations, backed by the neo-cons, have been launched successfully in Georgia and in Ukraine. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia are on the same target list, as well as, perhaps, Belarus, which Rice listed among the "outposts of tyranny."

For Russia, there is a limit to such provocations. Iran is that limit. Not only does Russia have long-term cooperation agreements with Iran, epitomized by the nuclear energy program starting with the Bushehr nuclear plant, but several strategically crucial infrastructure programs bring the two nations together, which cannot be sabotaged. These include the North-South transportation corridor, as a piece of the Eurasian Land-Bridge.

In addition, Russia has important economic and military agreements with other key nations in Southwest Asia, among them Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. As recent high-level meetings between the Russian leadership and those of Syria and Turkey indicate, Moscow is broadening these ties, and thus expanding its influence in the region. Russia's economic stake in Iraq was enormous, and the government is not expected to allow a repeat of the destruction of that country, in neighboring Iran.

What, then, could Russia do? According to the German military expert cited above, if push comes to shove, asymmetric war would break out worldwide, a new Thirty' Years War. And Russia could "play the atomic card."