

Euro-Russian Deals With Iran Seek To Derail Attack

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

During the U.S. election campaign, Lyndon LaRouche repeatedly warned that, were George W. Bush and Dick Cheney to be reelected, the world would enter a new phase of wars, starting with a military strike against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The truth of this was spelled out at a conference of the Gulf Research Center in Dubai on Jan. 5-6, by Patrick Clawson of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (see article, p. 4).

Clawson was challenged to provide justification for an attack, given that Iran had been given a clean bill of health by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding its nuclear program; he was asked by an Egyptian participant, if the United States would fabricate phony intelligence as it had done in the case of Iraq. There was no comment by the speaker.

However, the nuclear issue is clearly the track being pursued. Members of the Israeli government, which has been mooted as a proxy for a U.S. attack, have been championing the same cause, arguing, as Defense Minister Gen. Shaul Mofaz did in London on Jan. 27, that Iran was approaching the “point of no return” in its nuclear program, and would have to be stopped. Mofaz proposed moving to the UN Security Council for sanctions, presumably leading to military action.

The fact that Iran, to date, has complied with IAEA strictures and has submitted to wide-ranging inspections of its nuclear installations, has been cheerfully ignored by those bent on pursuing aggression at any cost. One possibility raised by a continental European strategic analyst, in discussions with *EIR*, is that Iran will indeed come to a comprehensive, final agreement with the European Union, regarding renunciation of its uranium-enrichment program. In exchange, Iran

would demand access to technology for peaceful nuclear energy, extensive trade agreements, and a hands-off policy toward Iran’s internal political affairs.

Such a development, which is considered feasible, would present Bush and Cheney with a dilemma: Given that their war drive is fuelled by their need for a dramatic foreign-policy “success,” in order to push through their domestic agenda of fascist austerity, a peaceful solution to the nuclear issue would be unacceptable. Their actual strategic aim, which is instituting “regime change” in Tehran, would have to be pursued by other means.

In this light, the question of timing is important. Most analysts concur, that the Washington neo-cons are working on a fast track, with an April-August time frame. June is a key inflection point, because talks between Iran and the EU could come to a happy conclusion by that time. It should be noted that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has stated that he will resign only after the Iran issue has been dealt with.

Can a War Against Iran Be Stopped?

Although the planning has been completed, and the machinery is in place, there is nothing inevitable about a military strike against Iran, nor a political destabilization. If this insane assault is to be stopped, it will be stopped from within the United States, through the political mobilization of the opposition led by LaRouche. That largely Democratic opposition has been baring its teeth, in challenging key Bush nominations (like Alberto Gonzales and Condoleezza Rice), continuing the fight against voter suppression, and organizing to defeat Bush’s proposed Social Security privatization. It is the combination of forces in the opposition—from the ranks of the

military, the Congress, intelligence, and intellectual circles—which can defeat the drive to war.

Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh exposed key elements of the Iran operation, in a piece in *The New Yorker* on Jan. 28. Think-tankers, including the neo-conservatives, have questioned the feasibility of attacks such as those revealed by Hersh. “There are no good military options,” was the blunt assessment of James Carafano, a military expert with the conservative Heritage Foundation, on Jan. 21. The United States, he said, could launch pinpoint strikes on targets in Iran from U.S. warships or from the air. But short of an imminent threat from nuclear-armed Iranian missiles, any gain would likely be outweighed by the trouble Iran could cause U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, he said. “When you’re trying to stabilize Iraq and you’ve got this long border between Iran and Iraq, and you’re trying to keep the Iranians from interfering in Iraq so you can get the Iraq government up and running, you shouldn’t be picking a war with the Iranians,” said Carafano. “It just doesn’t make any sense from a geopolitical standpoint.”

A ground war with Iran, he said, would be unsustainable. “We couldn’t do another large-scale ground operation without a major mobilization that would require mobilizing basically all of the National Guard. Even if we wanted to do that, it would be pretty obvious because it would take us months, if not years, to get the National Guard up and ready to go.”

Anthony Cordesman, an Iran expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, said Iran “would see any pre-emptive attack as encirclement.” “It would probably react hard to whatever happened, and that would make it more destabilizing than stabilizing,” he said in an interview quoted by Agence France Presse on Jan. 22.

Even a high-ranking, active-duty officer of the U.S. military in Afghanistan criticized one option, exposed by Hersh, of using that country as a launching pad for clandestine operations inside Iran. Maj. Gen. Eric Olson, the senior U.S. commander in charge of the campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, said on Jan. 24, that his task would be hampered by any instability in neighboring Iran. “I think it is in Afghanistan’s interest to see stability in Iran, and anything that is destabilizing or causes turmoil in Iran, especially close to the border, would not be good for Afghanistan and would not be good for my mission,” he said. Olsen, who was addressing an assembly of diplomats in Kabul, added that if there were spy missions in Afghanistan, as Hersh alleged, they would not come under his control.

Europe’s Crucial Role

Due to the increasingly visible and aggressive opposition inside the United States, forces in Europe have mustered the gumption to stand up to the new war threat. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who was the first in Europe to object



Russia is committed to helping Iran complete its Bushehr nuclear plant, and proceeding with construction of six more such plants. Europe and Russia are working diplomatically with Iran to try to defuse the crisis and prevent an insane U.S. military strike.

to any new adventures, has been issuing statements almost daily to this effect. Speaking on Jan. 24 at the traditional New Year’s reception of the German Social Democrats, he stated that, “in view of the fact that in Afghanistan, in Iraq, we are still far away from a really satisfying, pacified situation, we do not need new conflicts. And, that is why I think we should support, with clarity and with commitment, that the three European powers—Great Britain, France, and Germany—make use of every means that is available to them, to achieve a political solution of the question posed in Iran. We are opposed to an Iranian capability of atomic weapons. But we want to solve the problem politically. A military intervention must be prevented; that is our view. This will guide the next talks that we have to engage in.”

One day later, Schröder briefed the European Affairs Commission of the German Bundestag (parliament) in Berlin, pledging that his government’s view on the matter has not changed and will not change: The only way to solve the nuclear problem with Iran, is through diplomacy. This is the German view, and it is the broader European view, as well. Considering the degree of instability that still reigns in Afghanistan, and looking at the latest reports from Iraq, “a war against Iran is really the last thing we would need,” Schröder said.

These repeated warnings came as German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer was meeting with U.S. Secretary of

State-designee Condi Rice, discussing, among other issues, the Iran situation. Fischer received no commitment from Rice, that the United States would join the European diplomatic effort.

Russia Backs France, Germany

In parallel to the German interventions, the French mounted a high-level diplomatic initiative in Moscow. Defense Minister Michele Alliot-Marie and Foreign Affairs Minister Michel Barnier visited Moscow on Jan. 21, in the context of the Fourth Cooperation Council on Security Issues. In statements to the press, Alliot-Marie indicated that France intended to be a privileged partner of Russia, to ensure that Russia were not isolated or excluded in the international arena. The “four-way dialogue” was presented by all parties as “unique,” a sign of the very close relations between the two countries.

Military cooperation between them, they stated, would be reinforced, as would collaboration on the fight against terrorism and on Iran. Barnier made clear that France would ruthlessly pursue a political solution to the nuclear issue; negotiations with Tehran, he said “are delicate and we are keeping our eyes wide open, but there is no alternative to this policy.” He added: “The Russians are on the same line as we are, they want the mediation of the European troika.”

This was declared officially by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who, together with Barnier, “stressed in unison that the only way to reach a reliable agreement with Iran was through the political dialogue that France, Britain, and Germany launched 16 months ago,” according to the *International Herald Tribune*. “We are working in parallel to the Europeans, we are backing their efforts,” Lavrov told the newspaper, adding that Russian-Iranian contacts were on a continuing basis. Russia has “has held parallel contacts with the European troika and with Iran.” This is all about “freezing the uranium-enrichment program and continuing close cooperation between Iran and the IAEA without any secret topics,” Lavrov said. “Russia will do everything in order to ensure that the reached accords are put in practice,” he said.

The significance of this shared position, which the *Tribune* correctly characterized as an “unprecedented public show of unity on the issue,” cannot be understated. Russia’s declared support for the EU initiative places tremendous pressure on Washington to follow suit. Barnier was explicit: “The Russians’ backing is very important for us,” he said in a press interview. “Three large European countries have enough credibility to launch this dialogue, but for it to succeed, we need both Russia and the United States to be behind us.”

Britain Chimes In

Shortly after these talks took place, even the British—who are part of the EU-3, the group which has been negotiating for the EU with Iran—announced their dissenting position vis-à-

vis Washington. On Jan. 23, the London *Sunday Times* wrote that a 200-page dossier, prepared by Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, had been discreetly issued to the House of Commons just prior to Bush’s Inauguration speech of Jan. 20, and was kept quiet, to avoid tensions. The dossier, entitled “Iran’s Nuclear Programme,” rules out military action, in favor of a “negotiated solution” to ensure that Iran’s nuclear program remain non-military. It says the peaceful solution pursued by Britain, France, and Germany is “in the best interests of Iran and the international community,” while referring to “safeguarding Iran’s right to the peaceful use of nuclear technology.”

During his visit to Washington, Prime Minister Tony Blair discussed the issue with Condi Rice, and told the *Financial Times* afterwards that he thought that Bush Administration preparations for an attack were “wild fantasies.” He did, however, agree theoretically, that Iran’s alleged nuclear ambitions could be stopped by force. Blair conceded that, “if the Iranians keep to the [IAEA] deal, . . . then of course that makes a difference in international attitudes to them.

Several high-level British sources have emphasized to *EIR*, that Blair cannot support a U.S. attack on Iran. One senior British defense establishment source said: “Blair would be out immediately if he tried to do that.” There might be some kind of covert intelligence cooperation on Iran, but that would be maximum from the British side. Pointing to the actions of Straw and Blair’s rival, Chancellor Gordon Brown, Blair “would absolutely not be able to support Bush on Iran,” the source said.

Russia’s ‘Assymmetric’ Political Response

The decision by the Russian government to officially endorse the EU effort for negotiations with Iran is one thrust of what could be called its politically asymmetric response. It must be seen together with Moscow’s recent foreign-policy initiatives toward Syria, as well as Iran itself.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad paid an official visit to Moscow beginning Jan. 24, the first such visit at that level since 1999. In addition to far-reaching economic cooperation agreements, including in the energy sector, they struck an accord to redefine Syria’s debts to Russia, which date back to the Soviet era. The Russians agreed to forgive 73% of the debt, and space out repayment of part of the rest over ten years. The remainder will be in Syrian currency, and will be used for purchases of goods and investments in Syria.

In their joint declaration, President Vladimir Putin and Assad also agreed “to pursue traditional cooperation in the military-technical sphere in keeping with their mutual interests and international obligations.” This includes a four-year cooperation agreement whereby Russia will supply Syria with air defenses. In their joint statement, they also repeatedly stressed the “supremacy of international law, on taking into account the interests of all the states, the mechanisms of working out collective approaches to the solution of international

problems, with the United Nations playing the cardinal coordinating role”—a clear jibe against unilateralism. Furthermore, they set up regular consultations “on matters connected with the strengthening of interaction between the Russian Federation and the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference of which Syria is an active member,” and in which Russia seeks observer status.

The issue of aggression against Iran constitutes a “red line” for Russia. If it is crossed, the Russian government can be expected to shift its stance in the international arena, diplomatically and otherwise. The Russian-Syrian summit marks another step, by Moscow, toward re-establishing a position of influence in the region, in effect, reviving Soviet-era relations.

Regarding Iran directly, Moscow’s stance is unequivocal. Government spokesmen have reiterated their commitment to completing the Bushehr nuclear plant, and to proceeding with up to six more such plants. Several hundred Iranian technicians are being trained by the Russians to run the plant.

Just following the string of threats emanating from Washington against Iran, Russian government representatives engaged in two days of strategic discussions with the Iranians. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Kislyak visited Tehran on Jan. 24-25, for talks with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Gulam Hoshru, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme National Security Council S. Mousavian, and A. Bourujeri, chairman of the Majlis (Parliament) National Security and Foreign Policy Committee. The discussions centered on international issues (chiefly Iraq), and a “broad range of themes of bilateral cooperation and issues concerning transparency and the peaceful character of the Iranian nuclear program,” the Russian ministry official said.

Iran, for its part, knows that relations with the EU and with Russia are the best deterrents for thwarting a military confrontation. Although the leading government representatives of Iran, from President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, to Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, and Defense Minister Al Shamkhani, have reiterated the country’s commitment to defend itself if attacked, Tehran is clearly banking on the political option, through its cooperative relations with Europe and Russia. The Iranians know full well what the military-strategic consequences of a U.S. strike would be. As government spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi put it, in a briefing to the press, “We do not see it [a U.S. attack] as likely, unless someone wants to make a major strategic blunder.”

In late February, Europe, Russia, and the United States will come face to face on the issue. Bush will travel to Europe for the NATO summit in Brussels on Feb. 22, then will meet Chancellor Schröder in Mainz on Feb. 24, and President Putin in Bratislava on Feb. 25. As the opposition to the permanent-war madness continues to grow inside the United States, it can be expected that the Russian-European alliance will draw the line.