

LAROCHE TELLS BUSH:

Only Diplomacy Can Avert World War III

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The recent progress by Christopher Hill and other Bush Administration negotiators, in working with China and the other Eurasian regional powers to peacefully settle the dispute with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program, offers a model for how the Bush Administration should approach other regional crises in its final 21 months in office. This was the recommendation offered on April 24 by Lyndon LaRouche. “The diplomatic pattern being set in the North Korea talks is potentially a good achievement,” LaRouche observed. “It should be paradigmatic for how other situations are approached.”

LaRouche singled out the willingness of the Bush Administration to work closely with the Chinese in moving towards a comprehensive solution to the Korea crisis, and offered help to those in the Bush Administration who “want to do the right thing.”

LaRouche’s remarks came in the context of an intensification of the crisis in the Persian Gulf, where the United States has built up a large naval presence, to be further expanded by the arrival of a third U.S. Navy carrier group in early May. U.S. military specialists have warned that, with such a massive build-up, “a sneeze” could trigger a shooting war between the United States and Iran—precisely the kind of “Gulf of Tonkin II” incident that Vice President Dick Cheney and his neo-conservative allies would love to provoke.

Senior diplomatic sources in Washington have told *EIR* that, since the beginning of April, there has been a slight reduction in the Persian Gulf war danger, in part, because of an intensification of the policy dispute within the Iranian leadership over the issue of a confrontation with the United States, and in part, because the United States and some factions within the Iranian leadership are both supporting the

efforts of Iraq’s Maliki government to stabilize Iraq, albeit for potentially conflicting reasons.

In addition, a number of Bush Administration officials, including the new Commander-in-Chief of the Central Command (CENTCOM), Adm. William Fallon, are adamantly opposed to any confrontation at this time with Tehran. During a mid-April visit to Abu Dhabi, Fallon told reporters: “I am not interested in planning to attack Iran. I am very interested in trying to get the Iranians to come and start engaging in a meaningful dialogue.” In addition, according to a report in the *New York Times* of April 24, Fallon has ordered his military commanders to drop the use of the terms “long war” and “Islamofascism,” as part of the effort to tone down the confrontational rhetoric.

Prior to assuming the CENTCOM command, Admiral Fallon headed the Pacific Command (PACCOM) and was credited with greatly improving U.S.-Chinese military-to-military contacts. This was, according to Pentagon sources, a factor in the shift in the Bush Administration towards a willingness to allow the diplomatic approach to be taken to the North Korea crisis.

Other Signs of Diplomacy

A high-level source in Washington has told *EIR* that there are also emerging signs that the Bush Administration may be open to a Russian and European Union-brokered compromise with Iran over its alleged nuclear weapons program, and that Tehran, also, may be seeking a face-saving way to avoid a war with the United States. On April 25, EU negotiator Javier Solana and Iranian National Security Council head and chief nuclear weapons negotiator Ali Larijani held five hours of talks in Turkey. Coming out of the meeting, both men said

that the talks were very fruitful, and will be continued in two weeks.

According to the source, and to news accounts on April 25 in *Time* magazine and in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, the discussions between Solana and Larijani revolved around a compromise proposal, first floated by the Russian government and by International Atomic Energy Agency head Dr. Mohammed ElBaradei early this year, calling for Iran to freeze at current levels its small-scale enrichment facilities at Natanz, and to allow the site to be inspected by the IAEA. In return, there would be a freeze on any further sanctions against Iran from the United Nations Security Council.

Until this week's meeting between Solana and Larijani, the Bush Administration has been adamantly opposed to allowing any enrichment by the Iranians. According to the source, prior to his meeting with Larijani, Solana spoke to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who did not rule out U.S. acceptance of a token Iranian enrichment program. The source cautioned, however, that Rice's words did not mean that the Bush Administration had signed on to the agreement, forecasting, in fact, that an intense policy brawl will now occur in the White House over the next two weeks to determine whether the U.S. will go along with such a compromise.

There are other signs, as well, that some officials in the Bush Administration are seeking to avoid a confrontation with Iran. On April 25, the *Miami Herald* reported that the U.S. has increased back-channel discussions with Iran, "using Switzerland as an intermediary." Since the cutoff of direct diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran, after the taking of hostages at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979, Switzerland has functioned as the communications link between the U.S. and Iranian governments.

Among the issues being discussed through the Swiss-mediated exchanges of diplomatic cables are: the status of five Iranian Revolutionary Guard officials captured by U.S. Special Forces in Irbil in January; the fate of a former U.S. FBI agent, believed to be in Iranian custody; and cooperation between Washington and Tehran on bringing greater stability to Iraq. As reported two weeks ago in *EIR*, at a recent meeting of Bush Cabinet officials, Condi Rice was blocked by Vice President Cheney from releasing the five Iranian Revolutionary Guard officials seized in Irbil. Rice had argued that there was no further intelligence benefit to keeping them, and that their release could facilitate a diplomatic thaw.

In addition, Rice has gone out of her way in the past week to convince Iran to send a high-level emissary to a scheduled conference on Iraq, at the beginning of May, in Sharm al-Sheik, Egypt. Rice enlisted the help of Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, who has close ties to Tehran, in the effort to persuade the Iranians to participate.

The Washington source also commented on the policy fight taking place simultaneously in Tehran, noting that it appeared that some top Iranian officials had taken note of LaRouche's March 30 report, "Current History as Tragedy:

Russia and Iran on Strategy," in which he warned that some Iranian officials, as distinct from Russian President Vladimir Putin, were so focussed on the U.S.-Iran conflict that they failed to understand that the looming Persian Gulf conflict threatened to trigger a global World War III, that would draw in all of Eurasia, beginning with Russia and China.

According to a senior U.S. intelligence source, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has tilted towards a "pragmatic" faction of the country's clerical leadership, centered around former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, which believes that Iran should avoid a head-on confrontation with the U.S. by reaching a compromise on their nuclear program, and using its influence inside Iraq's majority Shi'ite government and political institutions, to bring some degree of stability to Iraq, knowing that this could accelerate a U.S. military withdrawal and/or redeployment.

The source emphasized that the internal situation within Iran has also been affected by growing pressure from both Russia and China for a de-escalation of the conflict with Washington. Several sources have told *EIR* that Moscow played a decisive role in convincing the Iranian government to free the 15 British sailors and marines who had been taken prisoner in March, when their ship allegedly strayed into Iranian territorial waters during a search of a commercial vessel in the Persian Gulf.

In a further indication of the opening for a diplomatic solution, Solana, speaking in Brussels on April 28, at a forum on trans-Atlantic relations in Brussels, called on the Bush Administration to open direct channels to Tehran. "We have to see how far the U.S. is willing to engage," he told reporters in Brussels. "I think at this point in time, to have also the U.S. opening a channel of communication with Iran will be worth thinking about. . . . It is very difficult to continue in a situation where Iran is considered a country with whom you cannot organize some sort of dialogue. I think that would be good. I am going to be talking to Washington in the next few days about it." Asked point blank if he believed that Khamenei was ready to permit direct talks with the Bush Administration, Solana answered, "I say without hesitation, yes."

According to Washington sources, the first sign from Tehran about the seriousness of its willingness to reach a compromise on the nuclear issue will come in the immediate days ahead, after Larijani reports back to Khamenei and a public statement is issued by the Iranian government.

If the Iranian leader does give Larijani the green-light to proceed ahead with the next round of talks with Solana, the focus will then shift to Washington, where a battle is already under way, pitting Cheney and his remaining neo-con allies like Elliott Abrams, against a concert of Administration officials, from Rice, to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, to White House Chief of Staff Josh Bolten, to Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte.

In the meantime, the *USS Stennis*-led carrier group is making its way to the Persian Gulf. A potential asymmetric World War III hangs in the balance.