

Is It Just Drumbeats We Hear, or Is It Actual War?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Leading circles in Washington are expressing fears that the escalating press drumbeat around former Iraq Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's campaign against current Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is a very strong signal of possible war-fighting with Iran within as soon as days. The evidence available, is that strikes against Iran targets could come within days, but there is no proof yet that an actual commitment to launch such attacks has been issued. Nevertheless, the drumbeats are cause for alarm.

During the middle of August, an international media campaign on behalf of former Prime Minister Allawi suggested to leading strategic analysts that someone inside U.S. governing circles is intent on military strikes against Iran, perhaps in the immediate days ahead. Allawi has issued a steady stream of statements, calling upon Sunni officials to leave the Maliki government, which he has characterized as "sectarian" (meaning Shi'ite) and Iranian-backed. The media's promotion of Allawi, who was the appointed Iraqi head of state, during the period of the Coalition Provisional Authority of Amb. Paul (Jerry) Bremer, coincides with growing pressure from Saudi Arabia and from the Cheney-connected BAE faction in the Bush Administration, for launching strikes on Iranian targets, on the pretext that the Iranian government is behind the Shi'ite insurgency, which is killing American GIs inside Iraq. The estimate is, that if such an attack is intended now, the first such strike might come as soon as days before the Congress reconvenes.

Since the beginning of August, a series of news reports, corroborated by well-informed Washington policy-makers, indicates that Cheney has been pressing the President to authorize strikes on sites inside Iran, associated with the Revolutionary Guard. Some of these sources share the concerns of Lyndon LaRouche, that such strikes on Iranian targets could be just days away.

LaRouche commented that, while he is not saying that

such attacks are imminent, the "intent" to launch such attacks is clearly there, and the promotion of Allawi's calls to replace the Maliki government is part of this effort. LaRouche added that the hyping of Allawi should end now, as one way to pull back from the Cheney-led war drive.

Other analysts have warned that the promotion of Allawi could signal that U.S. factions are considering a "Dien option"—a violent coup against the elected government. South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem was assassinated in 1963, in a U.S. covert effort to install a "strongman" regime, better able to counter the North Vietnamese insurgency. The outcome was disastrous.

Congressmen Join In

So far, some leading members of Congress have, if anything, given further cause for alarm. On Aug. 20, Sens. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) and John Warner (R-Va.), the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, issued a joint statement at the conclusion of a visit to Baghdad, assailing the Maliki government for failing to meet political "benchmarks." Levin's remarks were particularly harsh, calling the Iraqi regime "non-functional," and declaring, "I hope the parliament will vote the Maliki government out of office and will have the wisdom to replace it with a less sectarian and more unifying prime minister and government." Other members of the Senate have bought into the Bush Administration's hyperinflationary claims that the so-called troop "surge" in Iraq has improved the security situation in many parts of the country, although the political progress lags seriously behind.

The actual assessment from senior military sources interviewed by *EIR* is that there is still no military solution to the Iraq quagmire, that the military "improvements" are marginal or non-existent, and the war is, in effect, already lost. Furthermore, these sources point to the fact that the British military



White House/David Bohrer

The growing crescendo of calls for the ouster of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, is part of Vice President Cheney's drive for imminent war against Iran. Here, the treacherous Cheney "greet" Maliki at the Naval Observatory July 26.

forces in the southern provinces of Iraq around Basra have failed to secure the region, and have turned over the entire area to Shi'ite militias. In the Kurdish North, American military commanders are bracing for new eruptions of ethnic conflicts, surrounding the upcoming referendum in the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, where Kurds have been engaged in ethnic cleansing of Arab and Turkic residents, to assure that the region is absorbed into the quasi-independent Kurdish autonomous area. Such a Kurdish oil grab would provoke a harsh response from Turkey.

Cheney's Permanent War Dreams

Whether witting or not, Senator Levin's calls for the ouster of the Maliki government play into a "permanent war" scheme being promoted by Vice President Cheney since no later than his secret November 2006 visit to Riyadh, where he promoted the buildup of a Sunni Arab/Israeli military alliance against Iran.

According to Middle East specialists interviewed by *EIR*, Cheney's Riyadh visit, arranged by Prince Bandar bin-Sultan, the former Saudi Ambassador to Washington, and the top national security advisor to King Abdullah, signaled that the United States has shifted policy, away from the promotion of "democracy" in the Persian Gulf—even if it means the ascent of pro-Iranian Shi'ite religious forces in Iraq—to a revival of the old Anglo-American "Sunni stability belt," built around a string of Arab monarchies and strongman regimes. The Sunni Stability Belt policy was the anchor of British imperial rule in the oil-rich Persian Gulf, since the time of the Sykes-Picot agreement at the end of World War I, which replaced the Ottoman Empire with an Anglo-French imperial concert. Later, following the death of Franklin Roosevelt, the British brought in the United States as a partner in the scheme, which was temporarily broken with the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003

and the ouster of Saddam Hussein (a Sunni).

Both Cheney and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have been actively promoting the "GCC-plus-2"—an alliance between the Gulf Cooperation Council Sunni Arab oil sheikdoms, plus Egypt and Jordan—as a backbone of anti-Iranian action. These sources further warn that the upcoming "peace conference" on the Israel-Palestine conflict could lead to a further promotion of the anti-Iranian bloc, involving Israel as the de facto added participant. The Bush Administration is reportedly split over whether the policy underlying this alliance system is one of containment of Iran's growing power in the region, or one of backing an American or American-Israeli military campaign against Iran.

At a signing ceremony Aug. 21 for the ten-year, \$30 billion military assistance package from the Bush Administration for Israel, Undersecretary of State Nick Burns made it clear that Iran is the target. Burns referred to Rice's announcement of the arms deal two weeks earlier, in which, Burns said, "she noted that the United States and Israel and many of our friends in the Arab world face a situation where Iran is resurgent, where Iran is seeking a nuclear weapons capability, where it is seeking to expand its conventional power in the Middle East.

"There is now an excess of cooperation among Iran and Syria, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other groups who are responsible for the conflicts in this region—and Iran and Syria in particular—funding and arming those groups that are terrorist in nature and that in every part of the Middle East are the reason why there is violence," Burns continued. "In their assistance to Hamas—Iran's assistance to Hamas—in their assistance to Hezbollah and the destabilizing impact that Hezbollah has in Lebanon, in Iran's assistance to the Shi'a militant groups in Iraq and the adverse consequences that has had for our country."

Burns also cited "our very high level of defense assistance to Egypt," and "increased military assistance to our friends in the Gulf: to Saudi Arabia and to Kuwait and to Bahrain and to Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and to Oman"—all of which meshes perfectly with the Cheney gang's plan for permanent regional war between U.S.- and Israeli-backed Sunni states, and Shi'ite Muslims.

Indeed, since the November 2006 Cheney visit to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia has provided a steady stream of money and weapons to Sunni tribes inside Iraq, to buy their support for the U.S. military "surge." According to one top U.S. intelligence official, the Saudi largesse has turned the earlier anti-Americanism of the Sunni tribes into an anti-Shi'ite ferment, driven by Saudi Salafi fundamentalist clerics, that has, in some areas, taken the form of "ethnic cleansing" of Shi'ites. In anticipation of a conflict with Iran, factions in Saudi Arabia are seeking to build a Sunni "buffer zone" inside Iraq. The source warned that if such a Saudi-Iranian confrontation erupts over Iraq, it would likely lead to a Hundred Years religious war, that would spread around the globe.

Target: Revolutionary Guard

One of the most alarming facets of the ongoing propaganda drive against Iran is the steady stream of allegations that the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is actively engaged in insurgent operations inside Iraq. President Bush's recent announcement that he may list the IRGC as "specially designated global terrorists" has been greeted with alarm by some U.S. military experts, who view it as a prelude to air strikes against IRGC targets inside Iran. In early August, McClatchy newspapers senior analyst Warren Strobel reported that Cheney has been pressing for weeks for President Bush to authorize strikes against IRGC training bases and headquarters facilities inside Iran, but so far, the President has not complied.

As *EIR* first exposed earlier this Summer, in June, the White House dispatched Gen. Kevin Bergner to Baghdad, to take charge of the spin campaign blaming Iran for the continuing success of the insurgency. Bergner's flow of reports to the White House, and his selective leaks to the *New York Times'* Michael Gordon, and to CNN, have been a major factor in the drumbeat for war on Iran. This, despite the fact that CIA Director Michael Hayden has repeatedly downplayed the quality of evidence claiming that Tehran is boosting the anti-American insurgency in Iraq. Given the complex factional situation inside Iran, it is almost impossible to say whether Revolutionary Guard operations in support of Iraqi Shi'ite insurgents

have the backing of the Grand Ayatollah or even President Ahmadinejad. Nevertheless, the Bergner "stovepipe" of lurid stories is feeding the Cheney war drive, in what many see as a virtual replay of the drumbeat for war that proceeded the March 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Bergner, the former military deputy to National Security Council Middle East head Elliott Abrams, Cheney's chief ally in pressing for military action against Iran and Syria, has also been a major source for Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.), Cheney's leading echo-chamber inside the Senate, demanding military strikes against Iran.

One reason for the emphasis on the Revolutionary Guard role inside Iraq is that the other major rationale of the Cheney-Abrams camp for military action against Iran—the alleged Iranian secret nuclear weapons program—is running up against serious opposition. According to former CIA analyst Ray McGovern, the long-awaited National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's quest for a nuclear bomb has been stalled since February. The document, according to McGovern, was sent back to the CIA by the White House—i.e., by Cheney—at least four times, because the findings do not increase the drumbeat for war. Reportedly, the NIE finds that Iran will not be able to build a nuclear bomb until "early to the middle of the next decade"—i.e., well past the Bush-Cheney Administration's tenure.