

# Neo-Cons Light Fuse on Iran Crisis

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

A number of operations are converging, which indicate that the Bush Administration neo-cons have set a June 2005 timetable for confrontation with Iran. Once it is understood that the timetable has been set by a bunch of lunatics in Washington, it should be clear that a confrontation, and war, can be stopped, by effective action to neutralize the neo-con command center.

Most commonly cited as a detonator for confrontation is the anticipated failure of the ongoing talks between Iran and the Europeans on Iran's nuclear energy program. Although the timetable for the "inevitable" failure of the talks is considered to be June, there is no set deadline for reaching any conclusions, and the talks could continue for as long as the two sides want them. The "June deadline" has been asserted by U.S. officials, with the clear intent of getting a crisis that would allow the nuclear impasse to be sent to the United Nations Security Council.

One reason given for the June deadline, is that elections for President will be held in Iran that month. Some hold that by increasing pressure on the country before the late June elections, figures more open to compromise will win the day. Others explain the deadline by saying that the United States has to wait to see who comes out on top in Iran, in order to adjust policy on the nuclear issue.

Both arguments are fallacious. The fact is that no candidate for public office in Iran who were to hesitate on the issue of the right to nuclear (and other advanced) technologies, would have a prayer of being elected. This includes the current front-runner, Hashemi Rafsanjani, who served two terms as President after the Iran-Iraq War.

What may be relevant to this trigger-date, however, is that a group of Senators has begun to mobilize around S. 333, the Iran Freedom and Support Act, which calls for U.S. action to ensure "free, transparent, and democratic elections." Although it would be a wild adventure, there are reportedly a number of hotheads who are fantasizing about a "velvet revolution" in Iran in June, and planning to put a lot of money into such a project.

U.S. intelligence sources have also indicated to *EIR* that the rush to force through the confirmation of John Bolton as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, is connected to the intention of Cheney et al. to put the point man for the anti-Iran crusade into a key position, at the time the issue should be referred to the Security Council. The Bolton nomination,

of course, has hit a significant snag, and it is by no means clear that the other elements of this scenario will fall into place.

## The 'Iran Freedom' Act

On Feb. 9, 2005, a bill was presented by Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) which constituted a lead-up to a declaration of war on Iran. Most probably, neither the sponsors of the resolution nor the broader American public has any inkling of the implications and political consequences of this move. Unless they become cognizant of its strategic implications, they could find themselves among the crusaders for a new war.

The "Iran Freedom and Support Act of 2005" calls for imposing sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran, unless it desists from allegedly supporting terrorism, and halts its nuclear energy program, identified as a cover for a nuclear weapons program. Designed in part as amendments to the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996, the clauses also call for supporting, politically and financially, groups that "support democracy and the promotion of democracy in Iran"—that is, regime change. An appropriation of \$10 million is named to support "indigenous efforts in Iran calling for free, transparent, and democratic elections." The bill specifically demands a halt to cooperation related to the nuclear sector between Iran and Russia, as well as between Iran and individuals from China, Malaysia, and Pakistan.

The sponsors of the bill, or their advisors, obviously know that Iran is not going to concede to these demands. What they have in mind is the precedent of the "Iraqi Freedom Act," which served as the instrument for setting deadlines and ultimatums and which also permitted the pouring of millions of dollars into covert operations in the target country, with the not-very-secret intent of regime change.

After the bloody mess which the U.S. invasion of Iraq has created, it would seem that these Senators would think twice about launching the same kind of confrontation with Iran, which has more than twice the population, and considerably more industrial capability than the sanctions-depleted Iraq.

Not surprisingly, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is mobilizing around S. 333. One of the key drafters of a House of Representatives version, is the notorious Republican neo-con Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, who has organized more than 200 co-sponsors. AIPAC will be bringing the bill into the center of their upcoming annual meeting in Washington this month. "It will certainly, along with other things, be part of the agenda when thousands of members of AIPAC go to Capitol Hill" to lobby Congress, said Josh Block, AIPAC spokesman. Senators Evan Bayh (D-Ind.) and Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) are the sponsors of the Senate version, which has drawn 18 other Senators.

## The Bill of Indictment

The case against Iran, as detailed in the bill, has three main prongs: Iran is accused of developing weapons of mass destruction, specifically nuclear weapons; of government

support “for acts of international terrorism”; and of thwarting efforts toward a Middle East peace, through support for Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, and Hamas, and opposing U.S. “efforts to bring peace and democracy to Iraq.” Iran is also accused of having tested the Shahab-3 missiles, capable of hitting “both Israel and the United States troops throughout the Middle East and Afghanistan.”

One must point out, in response to these accusations, certain elementary facts of political reality. The Hezbollah party, as well as its militia organization, have been recognized by all political factions and figures in Lebanon, in the wake of the political crisis there, as an integral part of national institutional life, and an invaluable military defense against threatened Israeli aggression. As for al-Qaeda, it and its Afghan affiliate, the Taliban, have been historical enemies of Shi’ite Iran, having perpetrated terrorist attacks against Iranians. Offers by the Iranian government, to exchange information about al-Qaeda, and even leading members it had captured and imprisoned, with the United States, in exchange for the same regarding the U.S.-protected MKO/MEK anti-Iranian terrorist group, have gone unanswered.

The issue of Iran’s role in Iraq is not so simple. To be sure, Iran has a significant influence in post-Saddam Iraq, given that the majority Shi’ite faction which won the January elections, comprises, in large part, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a political organization and militia which spent more than a decade in exile in Iran. The supreme Shi’ite authority in Iraq, Iranian-born Ayatollah Ali Hussein al-Sistani, had insisted on the elections in the first place, and encouraged participation. He has regularly declared his opposition to the Iranian model for Iraq. The recent visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi to Baghdad featured statements by him pledging Iran’s cooperation in border security, to prevent infiltration of militants into Iraq, and promising not to support the insurgency. Kharrazi’s expressed view is that Iran will work with the Iraq government in hopes that, after a Constitution has been drafted, passed, and elections have been held in that context, a real government can emerge which can end the occupation.

The main indictment against Iran, as formulated in the Senate bill, is that, behind the facade of a peaceful nuclear energy program, it is developing nuclear weapons. In a section of the Sense of the Congress regarding Diplomatic Assistance, the bill states: “(3) efforts to bring a halt to the nuclear weapons program of Iran, including steps to end the supply of nuclear components or fuel to Iran, should be intensified, with particular attention focussed on the cooperation regarding such program—

“(A) between the Government of Iran and the Government of the Russian federation; and

“(B) between the Government of Iran and individuals for China, Malaysia, and Pakistan. . . .”

As is well known, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, as well as President Bush himself, have pressured Russian President Vladimir Putin to cut off cooperation with Iran,



*Iran’s Bushehr nuclear reactor is under construction with Russian assistance, and more such projects are planned. U.S. Secretary of State Rice is pressuring Russian President Putin to cut off such cooperation, but Putin is not interested.*

which features the completion of the Bushehr nuclear plant, and plans for the construction of several more reactors.

The aim is to kill Iran’s entire nuclear program. A by-product would be the establishment of a regime of technological apartheid, whereby nations of the developing sector, whether “rogue states” or not, would be denied access to nuclear power. At the conference of the member nations of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), held at the United Nations in early May, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control Stephen Rademaker demanded that the solution to “the Iranian nuclear problem . . . must include *permanent* cessation as well as *dismantlement of equipment and facilities related to such activity*” (emphasis added). Iranian Foreign Minister Kharrazi responded with a powerful defense of the right of all states, according to the NPT itself, to develop nuclear technology. (See “Bush Policy, Not Proliferation, Threatens World Security,” *EIR*, May 20, 2005.)

In its ongoing negotiations with the “EU-3”—Great Britain, France, and Germany as representatives of the European Union—Iran has maintained this position, rejecting demands to give up its uranium enrichment capabilities. Going into the talks scheduled for May 23, Vice President Gholamreza Aghazadeh, who is also head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization, said his country would never renounce this technology, even if it were subjected to sanctions. One of the leading negotiators for Tehran, Hossein Mousavian, said his government would continue its temporary suspension of uranium enrichment activities, for a few more months, if the EU were

prepared to offer incentives, such as the construction of ten more nuclear plants. However, cessation of these activities, not to mention the dismantling of existing facilities, is out of the question.

These are the parameters of the current tug-of-war between the EU and Iran. Those forces committed to using the nuclear issue as a trigger for military action against Iran, like the current Bush Administration, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, and their partners in Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Cabinet, are moving according to a scenario whereby the talks between Europe and Tehran will end in a deadlock, and the issue will be referred to the UN Security Council.

According to the same scenario that was followed in the case of Iraq, the accusation that Iran is developing weapons of mass destruction will be laid out, and an ultimatum formulated, along the lines of what Rademaker said. A resolution will be drafted to this effect, concluding with threats of "all necessary action" to be taken, if the ultimatum were not met.

However, this time around, it may be that not all players will read from the same script. In astonishing remarks made to *USA Today* on May 17, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan warned against taking the Iran nuclear issue to the UN Security Council. "I think," he said, "were the Iran nuclear issue to be referred to the council, the members would have to be

keenly aware that any decision they make will set a precedent. Their action or inaction will have a great impact on future cases and on our efforts to promote nuclear nonproliferation." He added, "Not everything has to come to the Security Council," as there are other means of settling problems. Annan hinted that Russia and China could use their veto powers. Other unnamed diplomats echoed his view, saying that bringing the issue to the Security Council would be an insult to the other members of the Council, and there would not be a consensus for it.

Certainly it should not be assumed that President Putin would passively submit to UN Security Council action against Iran, a country which is not only a major trading partner, but a key ally in the Persian Gulf.

## The Israeli Factor

The third charge in the legislation against Iran is also quite telling: the fact that it has a rocket that can hit Israel. It is an open secret that Israel has hundreds of nuclear warheads and the capability to deliver them, and does represent a potential threat to Iran, among others of its neighbors. Why shouldn't Iran have the capability of defending itself?

The current Sharon government has made no bones about the fact that Iran is high on its hit list. Daily, statements come out of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem calling for action against Iran, including bombing its Bushehr plant, in a repetition of what the Israeli Air Force did in 1981, against Iraq's Osirak nuclear plant. On May 12, Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told national television that the EU-Iran talks were doomed to fail. "The dialogue with Iran today is being held with the European troika. I do not think they will manage to halt the Iranian nuclear arms effort." He went on to say that Iran posed the greatest threat to Israel's existence with its nuclear aspiration and long-range missiles. Mofaz called on the United States to play a greater role: "The U.S., as the only superpower in the world, will have to lead the efforts against the Iranians. To bring it to the Security Council, to use diplomatic methods, to implement sanctions and demand greater more effective inspections."

According to an article by Aluf Benn in the May 13 Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, the leading figure in that superpower who handles the Iran dossier, is Vice President Dick Cheney. Benn wrote that many "Israeli experts monitoring Iran's 'nuclear diplomacy'" believe that Iran will be "careful not to cross any red lines which would propel the Iranian nuclear issue into the UN Security Council." Iran is also "reluctant to become a pariah state." Nonetheless, Ariel Sharon does not share this view, and has been asking the Europeans to bring the issue before the UN Security Council. Benn noted: "U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, who is in charge of the Iran file, supports Sharon's proposal."

In fact, during his last U.S. visit, in April, Sharon had lengthy discussions with Cheney, specifically on the Iran issue.

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