



IRAN IN THE CROSSHAIRS

HOW TO PREVENT WASHINGTON'S NEXT WAR

A PRIMER BY:
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As George W. Bush's administration enters its last year in office, the danger of a U.S. military attack on Iran looms. Widening opposition to the illegal Iraq War, growing recognition that the war in Afghanistan has failed to bring stability or democracy to that beleaguered country, new tensions rising in Pakistan, escalating violence and humanitarian crisis in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, all have brought new fears but also heightened interest in the wider Middle East region, especially interest in Iran. It is to address this new and renewed interest in Iran, to answer questions, and propose some ideas to prevent another looming disaster, that this pamphlet is designed.

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Introduction

Washington watched as 2007 came to a violent and inglorious end. U.S. wars raged in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S.-backed Israeli occupation suffocated Palestinians, U.S.-allied governments in Pakistan and Kenya faced national explosions over false democratization and stolen elections, and U.S. corporate-driven poverty and resource wars ravaged Africa. Powerful forces in the United States had already begun to critically reassess what they saw as the diminishing value of the Bush administration's reckless global interventionism.

By the end of the year, that elite divide—with the Bush White House increasingly isolated and discredited—had shown up in a leaked story of how Bush's CIA hid and then destroyed videotapes documenting the interrogation-by-torture of detainees in the so-called “global war on terror.” There was an explosive story documenting how Bush's billions of dollars in “anti-terrorism” military aid to Pakistan had completely failed to stabilize that war-wracked country.¹ Another leak exposed damning views that the United States and its allies were losing the war in Afghanistan, the invasion and occupation that were supposed to shine as Washington's “good war”—the war that no one could criticize because of September 11.²

But the most important evidence of the split within the powerful elites came with the release of a new National Intelligence Estimate on Iran (NIE) on December 3, 2007.³ The NIE, reflecting the consensus view of all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies, made clear that Iran did *not* have a nuclear weapon, did *not* have a program to build a nuclear weapon, and was *less* determined to develop nuclear weapons than U.S. intelligence agencies had earlier claimed.

How could anyone now claim there was any legal or moral pretext for threatening Iran? But somehow the release of the NIE did not stop Washington's talk of war. The day after the NIE was released the *Washington Post* headline read, “U.S. Renews Efforts to Keep Coalition Against Tehran.”⁴ The White House, the President, and especially the Vice-President, all continued ratcheting up the rhetoric. In fact, the president had been told of the NIE's overall conclusions months earlier, back in the summer of 2007.

When Bush arrived in the Middle East in January 2008 for his first trip to the region as president, Iran remained top of the agenda. One of his primary goals was to reassure Israel that the NIE had changed nothing in U.S. policy trajectories towards Iran and that despite the intelligence agencies' consensus that Iran was not building a nuclear weapon, “all options” remained on the

table. According to *Newsweek*, “in private conversations with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the President all but disowned the document, said a senior administration official who accompanied Bush on his six-nation trip to the Mideast. ‘He told the Israelis that he can’t control what the intelligence community says, but that [the NIE’s] conclusions don’t reflect his own views.’”

Newsweek went on to recognize that:

“Bush’s behind-the-scenes assurances may help to quiet a rising chorus of voices inside Israel’s defense community that are calling for unilateral military action against Iran. Olmert, asked by *Newsweek* after Bush’s departure whether he felt reassured, replied: ‘I am very happy.’ ... Bush told Olmert he was uncomfortable with the findings and seemed almost apologetic But the president may be trying to tell his allies something more: that he thinks the document [the NIE] is a dead letter.”⁵

Just a couple of days before Bush’s January 2008 trip to Israel, the Pentagon reported an “incident” in the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian speed boats had allegedly swarmed between and among three large U.S. warships heading into the Persian Gulf, broadcasting threatening messages that the U.S. ships were about to explode and dropping small box-like objects onto the seas. Just as the sailors were aiming their guns at the provocateurs, the Iranian boats reversed course and sped away.

Reuters described how the boats “aggressively approached” the U.S. ships. The Pentagon called it “careless, reckless and potentially hostile,” the White House “reckless and provocative.”⁶ Numerous Persian speakers pointed out that the voice making the threats did not sound like a Persian accent. The U.S. Navy itself acknowledged that they had no idea where the voice making the threats had actually come from.⁷ Quickly the words “Tonkin Gulf incident” were on many lips. Many remembered August 4, 1964, the “attack on a U.S. Naval ship” off the coast of Vietnam Lyndon Johnson used as a pretext for sending troops to Vietnam. Years later the world learned that the alleged attack had never occurred at all; it was cooked up. Would the “swarming boat incident” in the Strait of Hormuz serve as George Bush’s Tonkin Gulf?

Despite the NIE, the possibility of a U.S. military strike on Iran remains a very real threat. Neither operative intelligence estimates nor actual facts on the ground would have much sway over the ideologues in the Bush White House.

The Current Crisis

1. IS IRAN A THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES?

The Bush administration has claimed, almost since coming into office, that Iran is a “threat” to the United States. Even U.S. intelligence agencies agree that Iran doesn’t possess nuclear weapons or a nuclear weapons program, and that it is very unclear whether Iran even wants to build such a weapon. Iran has never threatened the United States. And unlike many countries in its neighborhood, Iran has not invaded another country in over a century.

In terms of actual power, there is little question. In 2007, according to the CIA, Iran spent about \$5.1 billion on its military—about 2.5% of its GDP. The United States, on the other hand, spent—\$626 billion on the military that same year, amounting to 4.5% of its GDP of \$13.7 trillion. More relevant, perhaps, the United States spent almost half of the total of global arms spending—about 46%. So Iran does not represent a strategic military threat to the United States.

In early 2006, new assertions began to emerge from the White House claiming that Iran was directly responsible for killing American troops, ostensibly through providing Iraqi resistance forces with some of the powerful explosives used in roadside bombs. No evidence of Iranian involvement was ever made public; the claims have been limited to unsubstantiated assertions by military and government officials. But the notion of Iran as a direct threat to the United States began to broaden.

In April 2006, Bush lowered his attack-Iran bar still further, focusing his threat not on an actual Iranian bomb but on “the knowledge as to how to make a nuclear weapon.” The significance lay in the reality that of course Iran, like every country enriching fuel for nuclear power, has long had “the knowledge” to make weapons grade uranium—since it’s the same technology.

2. DOES IRAN HAVE NUCLEAR WEAPONS OR A NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM?

No. Iran does not and has never had a nuclear weapon—and no one, not even the Bush administration, claims they have. Despite claims by Bush and

others, the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) agrees there is also no evidence Iran ever had a military program to build nuclear weapons. And even the Bush administration's own intelligence agencies acknowledged in the December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that the weapons program they claim once existed, had ended by 2003.

Iran does have an active nuclear power program, including a program to enrich uranium to fuel the program. Iran was one of the original signers of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and like all other "non-nuclear weapons states" that sign the treaty, Iran has a legal right to produce and use nuclear power for peaceful purposes. But despite Iran's legal right to nuclear power, the United States still didn't like it, and pressured other countries to impose UN Security Council sanctions against Iran for exercising that internationally-guaranteed right.



The UN's nuclear watchdog, however, remained clear. Despite what it identified as some ambiguities and the need for greater transparency regarding Iran's past nuclear programs, the IAEA position has not changed. IAEA inspectors on the ground have repeated, as they had from the beginning, they have not found any evidence that Iran is diverting nuclear facilities to military use.¹

In August 2002, the Iranian opposition militia known as the Mujahedin el-Khalq (MEK), which had fought for years against the Iranian government while operating in Iraq under the protection of Saddam Hussein and now, U.S. occupation forces, announced that Iran had two undeclared nuclear facilities in Iran: a centrifuge-based uranium enrichment plant at Natanz and a heavy water production plant at Arak. Despite questions about the source of the information, the dissidents' claim that Iran had a covert nuclear program proved to be true—but the Bush administration's follow-on claim that it was a weapons program was not. Over the next six months, the IAEA carried out new inspections of the nuclear facilities there, criticizing Iran for a lack of transparency in reporting its activities, but not accusing Iran of any violations of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.²

For the U.S. the IAEA's assessment wasn't good enough. In June 2003 the U.S. refused to rule out a military attack on Iran; in September, while claiming Iran was in fact violating its non-proliferation obligations (challenging the IAEA view), Bush agreed to back a European initiative designed to pressure Iran.³ Tehran suspended its enrichment activities as a goodwill gesture and accepted the additional intrusive IAEA inspections. The IAEA again reported there was no evidence Iran was building a nuclear weapon, and the U.S. dismissed the report as "impossible to believe."⁴

Throughout late 2003 and into 2004, the United States continued to ratchet up pressure on Europe and other countries. The Bush administration succeeded in getting the IAEA to censure Iran, despite the report denying evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. Eventually the Administration had the issue referred to the Security Council which, unlike the IAEA, has the power to impose sanctions. In an initial step in March 2004, the United States pressured the Council to pass a resolution condemning Iran for its lack of complete transparency. Later that year, and into 2005, U.S. pressure led to both the IAEA and the Security Council passing resolutions demanding that Iran halt its enrichment activity; the European negotiating team, acceding to U.S. demands, issued a similar ultimatum.

Despite these diplomatic pressures in February 2005, Condoleezza Rice, newly confirmed as Secretary of State, stated that a military attack on Iran was not on Washington's agenda "at this point in time."⁵ Bush, at the same time, was even more explicit. "This notion that the United States is getting ready to attack Iran is simply ridiculous," he said. "And having said that, all options are on the table."⁶

But the Bush administration was concerned about keeping the increasingly skeptical Europeans on board the anti-Iran crusade. As a result there was a brief shift in U.S. strategy, as Bush announced the United States would back the more nuanced negotiating approach of the EU3 partnership of Germany, France, and the UK. He sweetened the deal a bit further, adding that the United States would call off its ten-year-long effort to keep Iran out of the World Trade Organization, and allow Iran to buy U.S.-made parts for its civilian airliner fleet.

However, by August 2005, Bush maintained the position that he would not rule out a military attack on Iran. Washington's momentary Tehran spring was over. It was later that month that the 2005 National Intelligence Estimate would "assess with high confidence that Iran currently is determined to develop nuclear weapons despite its international obligations and international pressure"

Until the December 2007 NIE was released stating unequivocally that Iran did *not* have a nuclear weapon, it was assumed that the 2005 intelligence document was proof of Iran's nefarious, dangerous intention and capacity to build a nuclear weapon. But many recognized that the 2005 NIE's assessment was far from definitive. In 2005, the *Washington Post* acknowledged that while the NIE referred to "credible indicators that Iran's military is conducting clandestine work," it included "no information linking those projects directly to a nuclear weapons program. What is clear is that Iran, mostly through its energy program, is acquiring and mastering technologies that could be diverted to bombmaking."⁷ The 2007 report confirmed what many ignored in the 2005 report: that there was no evidence of a nuclear weapons program.

3. WHAT ABOUT IRAN'S SUPPORT FOR TERRORISM?

Since the overthrow of the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran, the accusation of Iran being a "state supporter of terrorism" has been a hallmark of U.S. policy through all administrations since 1979. The State Department's *2006 Country Reports on Terrorism* claims that "Iran remained the most active state

sponsor of terrorism.”⁸ But even if all the allegations were true, they would not provide the basis for U.S. threats, sanctions, or attacks against Iran.

The 2006 report begins with the claim that Iran’s “Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) were directly involved in the planning and support of terrorist acts . . . and continued to exhort a variety of groups, especially Palestinian groups with leadership cadres in Syria and Lebanese Hezbollah, to use terrorism in pursuit of their goals.”⁹ But there is no evidence and little detail provided, beyond the broad claim that Iran is providing “extensive funding, training, and weapons” to those groups. There is no acknowledgement that the most important “Palestinian group with leadership in Syria,” Hamas, as well as Hezbollah in Lebanon, are both important political parties that have been elected to majority and near-majority positions in the Palestinian and Lebanese parliaments. Both, while certainly carrying out military activities, provide important networks of social services, from clinics and hospitals to schools, daycare centers, food assistance and financial aid, to the most impoverished, disempowered, and (in the case of Hamas in Gaza) imprisoned populations of Lebanese and Palestinians.

Some of the military actions carried out by Hamas and Hezbollah have in fact targeted civilians in violation of international law and thus might qualify as “terrorist” actions. But the majority of their actions have been aimed at illegal Israeli military occupations, of south Lebanon in the case of Hezbollah, and of Gaza and the West Bank, for Hamas. Even if Iranian support for these elected organizations exists, the United States has no right to attack.

The State Department terrorism report accuses Iran of pursuing “a variety of policies in Iraq, some of which appeared to be inconsistent with its stated objectives regarding stability in Iraq . . . Senior [U.S.-backed] Iraqi officials have publicly expressed concern over Iranian interference in Iraq, and there were reports that Iran provided funding, safe passage, and arms to insurgent elements.” Given the wide disparity of definitions between the U.S. view of “stability in Iraq” and the Iranian view, it is hardly surprising that the United States might judge Iranian actions or even its presence (since no actual actions are detailed) as “inconsistent with its stated objectives.” But to equate such “inconsistency” with “support for terrorism” requires an enormous stretch.

The Bush administration also accuses Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps of being “increasingly involved in supplying lethal assistance to Iraqi militant groups, which destabilizes Iraq.” It is not clear why the State Department

includes that alleged support, (for which no evidence has been shown), in their report on “terrorism.” The unsubstantiated U.S. claim has consistently been that Iran is providing assistance in the production of “explosively formed penetrator” bombs used against U.S. military patrols in Iraq. The State Department’s own definition of terrorism starts with the recognition that it means an attack on noncombatants, something that certainly does not apply to wartime military attacks against armed soldiers on patrol.¹⁰

State’s report goes on to condemn Iran for being “unwilling to bring to justice senior al-Qaeda members it detained in 2003. Iran has refused to identify publicly these senior members in its custody on ‘security grounds.’ Iran has also resisted numerous calls to transfer custody of its al-Qaeda detainees to their countries of origin or to third countries for interrogation and/or trial.” Given more than six years of U.S. unwillingness to bring to justice senior al-Qaeda members it detained in 2003, refusal to identify publicly these senior members in its custody on “security grounds,” and resisting numerous calls to transfer custody of its al-Qaeda detainees to their countries of origin or to third countries for interrogation and/or trial, the hypocrisy of claiming this as evidence of support for terrorism is breathtaking.

The United States has a history of blaming Iran for a host of nefarious deeds, most of which have little or no evidence to back them. It serves the goal of portraying Iran as part of what Bush called the “axis of evil,” although the scheme predates the Bush administration. (During the 1993 Oslo negotiations President Clinton reportedly promised Israel that it would step up efforts to isolate Iran.) In June 2001, Bush’s newly installed Justice Department alleged that unnamed Iranians had “inspired, supported, and supervised” the bombing of the U.S. military barracks, Khobar Tower, in Saudi Arabia five years earlier.¹¹ But according to then-Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk, “We have not reached the conclusion that the Iranian Government was involved or responsible for the attack.”¹²

4. IS IRAN A THREAT TO ISRAEL?

Iranian President Ahmadinejad’s political opposition to Israel was never in doubt, but as president he does not control Iran’s military. Outrage erupted across the United States and Europe in October 2005 following the assertion that Ahmadinejad had “threatened to wipe Israel off the map.” Israel’s then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called for Iran to be expelled from the United Nations; a few months later Israeli Vice-Prime Minister and Nobel peace

laureate Shimon Peres added, “The president of Iran should remember that Iran can also be wiped off the map.”¹³

But as it turned out, Ahmadinejad had not said those words at all. “Ahmadinejad did not say he was going to wipe Israel off the map because no such idiom exists in Persian,” Juan Cole, a Middle East expert at the University of Michigan told the *New York Times*. “He did say he hoped its regime, i.e., a Jewish-Zionist state occupying Jerusalem, would collapse.” Cole went on to note that since Iran had not “attacked another country aggressively for over a century, I smell the whiff of war propaganda.”¹⁴

In fact, the threat is the other way around. Israel has remained a key player in the United States’ campaign against Iran, both in cheerleading for U.S. military escalation and in gearing up for the potential of its own military strike if the United States doesn’t. While Israel and its U.S. lobbies strongly backed the U.S. invasion and war in Iraq, it is Iran, not Iraq, that has long been a primary target of Israel’s military and ideological mobilization.



On September 8, 2004, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon threatened that Israel would take its own measures against Iran. In 2005, the *London Sunday Times* reported that “Israel’s armed forces have been ordered by Ariel Sharon, the prime minister, to be ready by the end of March for possible strikes on secret uranium enrichment sites in Iran.”¹⁵ By January 2007 Sharon’s replacement, Ehud Olmert, made his own public threats that Israel might launch a military strike against Iran.¹⁶ And within hours after the December 2007 release of the NIE indicating Iran did not have a nuclear weapons program, Israel rejected the NIE’s findings, continuing their threats.

The threats were (and are) not idle. In 1981 Israel carried out a unilateral military attack against Iraq, destroying the half-finished French-built Osirak nuclear power reactor. The action was unanimously condemned internationally. Even President Reagan deemed it illegal. In 2004, Likud Knesset member Ehud Yatom said, “The Iranian nuclear facilities must be destroyed, just as we did the Iraqi reactor.” That same year Israel purchased 500 BLU-109 bunker-buster bombs using U.S. military assistance funds. These bombs are designed to penetrate up to seven feet of reinforced concrete and could destroy Iran’s hardened and underground nuclear power facilities.¹⁷

The analysts at the authoritative website GlobalSecurity.com, acknowledged that, “It would be difficult for Israel to strike at Iran without American knowledge, since the mission would have to be flown through American [formerly Iraqi] air space In the eyes of the world, it would generally appear to be a joint U.S.-Israeli enterprise, any denials notwithstanding.”¹⁸

Israel’s powerful lobbies in the United States have embraced Israel’s approach to Iran. Weeks after the release of the NIE the influential pro-Israeli think tank, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, had issued a report calling for an intensive U.S.-Israeli dialogue on how to respond to what they claim are Iran’s nuclear plans, including ways to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities.¹⁹ And the lobbies have continued to pressure Congress to ratchet up sanctions and to “keep all options on the table,” creating a serious stumbling block to congressional efforts to stop a U.S. attack on Iran.

5. IS IRAN FOMENTING A NUCLEAR ARMS RACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

Regional nuclear armament and nuclear proliferation remains a serious problem. While neither Iran nor Iraq possessed nuclear weapons or even active nuclear weapons programs there remains today a powerful, dangerous, unmonitored, and provocative operational nuclear arsenal at the very center of the Middle East. It belongs not to Iran, but to Israel.

Claims by the United States regarding the danger of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East ignore the provocative nature of Israel’s unacknowledged but widely known nuclear arsenal of 200-400 high-density nuclear bombs, produced at the Dimona nuclear center in the Negev desert. Israel’s nuclear weapon was first tested jointly with apartheid South Africa in 1979; it was made public by nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu in 1986. Israel, with U.S. support, maintains a policy of “strategic ambiguity,” neither confirming nor denying the existence of its nuclear weapons. But in December 2006, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert admitted that Israel in fact *did* belong on the list of nuclear weapons states—which he identified as “America, France, Israel, and Russia.” He made the statement just after Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said during his confirmation hearings that one of the possible motives for Iran’s nuclear program was the fact that Israel had nuclear weapons.²⁰

Egypt, which considered but ultimately abandoned its own nuclear weapons program, signed the non-proliferation treaty in 1980. Since then Cairo has attempted to win support for a nuclear weapons-free zone throughout the Middle East. Israel and the United States have opposed such

attempts every time. At an IAEA debate in February 2006 about sending the Iran issue to the Security Council for sanctions, Egypt and others pressed the United States to accept compromise language hinting at a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East, as the price for keeping the Europeans and most of the non-aligned developing countries on board. The resolution stated that solving the Iranian issue would contribute to “realizing the objective of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, including their means of delivery.”²¹

The United States resisted the language, claiming Iran might use it in propaganda against Israel. But the language was actually identical to that in a famous U.S.-drafted UN Security Council decision—resolution 687. This resolution which ended the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq said that disarming *Iraq* would be a step “towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery ...” (The U.S. had done nothing to implement that goal, of course; years later a State Department official involved in the original drafting said it was never meant to be taken seriously, that it was only included “as a sop to the other countries.”²²)

6. WHAT ABOUT INTERNATIONAL LAW? IS IRAN IN VIOLATION? IS THE UNITED STATES?

Under Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran as a “non-nuclear weapons state” signatory has the right to produce and use nuclear power for peaceful purposes, including for energy production. Signatories to the NPT that do not have nuclear weapons (all but the U.S., Britain, France, Russia, and China) agree not to build or obtain nuclear weapons; in return they are promised access to nuclear technology and the right to produce and use nuclear power. Indeed, throughout the 1970s the U.S. pushed the Shah of Iran to build nuclear power plants to enable Iran to use more of its abundant oil supplies for export. So Iran’s production of nuclear fuel and construction of nuclear power plants is well within its rights under the NPT. The U.S.-orchestrated decision of the UN Security Council to strip Iran of that right and impose sanctions if Iran continued to exercise its NPT rights, has no grounding in international law; it is based solely on the U.S. claim that it doesn’t trust Iran.

Article VI of the NPT also commits the five nuclear weapons powers to move towards complete nuclear disarmament—and the U.S. and the other four nuclear weapons states all remain in violation of Article VI. More

immediately, the United States is also in violation of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which ruled in 1996 that “*the threat* or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law.”²³

Beyond its specific nuclear violations, the United States is in violation of the UN Charter and all the principles of international law that prohibit preventive war. The 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) document reflected the neo-conservative goals of global domination and willingness to use preventive attacks to maintain power. “We must adapt the concept

The threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law.

of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today’s adversaries To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”²⁴ In fact, what the 2002 NSS called for was not preemptive at all, but rather the *preventive* use of military force, without even the claim of an imminent threat (generally understood to mean missiles being loaded onto a launch pad, or a similarly urgent and immediate danger).

The *Washington Post* reported this new military policy would go even further, in explicit violation of the NPT, allowing Washington to use nuclear weapons preventively against non-nuclear weapons states—like Iraq and Iran.²⁵

7. WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN THE DAY AFTER A U.S. MILITARY STRIKE ON IRAN?

In April 2006 a *New Yorker* article by renowned investigative journalist Seymour Hersh cited key military sources claim that the United States was already planning a military strike against Iran’s underground alleged nuclear sites—using nuclear weapons.²⁶ Washington officially denied the claim, but speculation remained that a preventive U.S. nuclear strike was in fact under serious consideration. Among members of Congress, even among some trying to end the Iraq War, there was relief that the Bush administration appeared to be considering “only surgical strikes” against Iran, rather than

a full-blown invasion. But those same members of Congress acknowledged they had no idea what level of U.S. escalation—even including calls for invasion—might follow Iran’s almost certain retaliation.

While U.S. officials might call a military attack “only a surgical strike,” Iran would certainly call it an act of war—which would be the accurate term. The range of military options Iran has to respond to a U.S. strike is wide. Tehran could send troops across its borders to attack U.S. occupation troops in Iraq or shoot missiles into Baghdad’s U.S.-controlled Green Zone. Iranian troops could invade and occupy southern Iraq. Iran could attack U.S. troop concentrations in Kuwait, Oman, Qatar or elsewhere in the region, or go after U.S. ships in Bahrain, home of the Navy’s 5th Fleet. It could attack Israel. It could retaliate against U.S. or allied oil tankers in near-by shipping lanes, or sink a tanker. It could close the Strait of Hormuz, through which 45% of the world’s oil passes.

Despite years of sanctions and a military strategy focused primarily on training troops to defend the homeland against an invasion and foreign military occupation, those retaliatory options for Iran represent just the easy ones. Certainly Iran’s government might choose to respond by non-military means to an illegal U.S. or Israeli military strike. Tehran might decide to take the moral/political high ground, to respond by a legal challenge in the International Court of Justice or with a request for a special session of the UN Security Council. But a military response is equally likely.

Beyond the wide range of available choices and Iran’s capacity to carry them out, Iran would also have the legal right to retaliate. Under the terms of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, a preventive U.S. or Israeli attack on its nuclear facilities would give Iran “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.”

The U.S., not Iran, would stand in violation of international law and the UN Charter. Article 2, Sections 3 and 4 of the Charter require that “all Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered. All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”

Beyond the ability and legality of strikes, the effects of a U.S. strike would be devastating. First and most important, huge numbers of Iranians would die. Estimates vary; some of the alleged nuclear facilities are in the midst of cities, other locations are not even publicly known. According to the Pentagon-connected Rand Corporation, “While the U.S. could probably knock out many of the Iranian nuclear facilities using bunker-busting munitions, there would be heavy civilian casualties—probably in the thousands.²⁷ Another study conducted by Oxford Research Group researcher Paul Rogers compares likely civil deaths in Iran with those in Iraq:

“The civilian population in that country had three weeks to prepare for war in 2003, giving people the chance to flee potentially dangerous sites. But ... attacks on Iranian facilities, most of which are in densely populated areas, would be surprise ones, allowing no time for such evacuations or other precautions. Military deaths in this first wave of attacks would be expected to be in the thousands, Civilian deaths would be in the many hundreds at least, particularly with the requirement to target technical support for the nuclear and missile infrastructure, with many of the factories being located in urban areas. The death toll would eventually be much higher if Iran took retaliatory action and the United States responded, or if the U.S. took pre-emptive military action in addition to strikes on nuclear sites.”²⁸

Politically, there is little doubt that any U.S. or Israeli military strike on Iran would also consolidate broader public support for Iran’s nuclear program. While anti-nuclear opinions and small-scale opposition do exist in Iran, they have dwindled in the face of U.S. and Israeli threats against Iran’s NPT-guaranteed right to nuclear technology. The result of any attack would be to strengthen the most hard-line elements within Iran’s multi-faceted polity.

CHAPTER TWO:

A Short History of Recent U.S.–Iran Relations

8. WHAT HAS IRAN DONE TO THE UNITED STATES?

Over the years, the primary thing Iran has done to the United States has been to threaten its control of Iran’s oil and its strategic neighborhood. In 1951 the elected prime minister of then-democratic Iran, Mohammed Mossadegh, announced his intention to nationalize Iran’s oil, stripping the United States and Britain of their privileged access and control. A generation later, in 1979, mobilized Iranian civilians rose up and overthrew the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran, opening the way for the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Soon after, Iranian students outraged by the U.S. offer of refuge and protection for the much-hated shah, took over the U.S. embassy and held the embassy staff hostage for more than a year.

Beyond these actions, the rest of Iran’s threats have simply been rhetoric—and unlike U.S. rhetoric, it came primarily from people in the street, chanting “death to America,” not from Iranian officials who actually had military control and the capacity to do real harm. (Unlike U.S.-style Constitutional power sharing, under Iran’s Constitution the president is not the commander-in-chief of the military and does not control the nuclear power program. Power is far more diffuse.)

9. WHAT HAS THE UNITED STATES DONE TO IRAN?

The U.S. dealings with Iran have been far more active and dynamic. In 1953, in response to Iran’s nationalization efforts, the CIA orchestrated a coup that overthrew Prime Minister Mosaddegh. The United States installed Mohammed Reza Shah and backed his claim to absolute power. The Shah immediately set about consolidating a vast apparatus of repression, torture and control, centered in the SAVAK secret police, bolstered by uncritical U.S. military and police assistance. In return, the Shah reversed Mossadegh’s nationalization policies and put in place an arrangement in which Iran’s oil industry and its profits would be shared with a new consortium of U.S. and British oil companies. For the next 25 years, the Shah of Iran would serve

alongside Israel as one of the pillars of U.S. strategy in the Middle East. The people of Iran, who faced widespread assassination, arrest, torture, and denial of virtually all political rights, would pay the price.

In 1979, after the Shah was overthrown and students occupied the U.S. embassy in Tehran, both diplomacy and a botched military attack failed to win release of the embassy staff. The United States responded by cutting ties with Iran and imposed severe unilateral sanctions which continue to create economic problems for Iranians today. Further, Iran emerged as a key target of the new “Carter Doctrine,” which took shape following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that same year. In his 1980 State of the Union address, President Carter made clear that he deemed Middle East—including Iranian—oil as part of “the vital interests of the United States of America” and that an attack on that oil “will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” In that same speech Carter announced creation

of a Rapid Deployment Force, opening of new military bases in the Persian Gulf area, and reinstatement of mandatory military draft registration for 18-year-old men.¹



When Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, to start the Iran-Iraq War, the United States pressured

the UN Security Council to issue its first call for a ceasefire while Iraqi troops still occupied huge swathes of Iranian territory.² Later Iraq (which was backed by the United States and its allies) tried to expand the conflict, including attacking Iranian ships. In response, Iran’s navy began to threaten oil tankers of Iraq’s backers traveling in the Gulf. When Kuwaiti oil tankers were targeted, President Reagan ordered that the tankers be re-flagged as American ships, and sent U.S. navy ships out to protect them from any potential Iranian attack. In July 1988, the U.S. warship *Vincennes* on patrol in the Persian Gulf (having skirmished with Iranian gunboats inside Iran’s territorial waters earlier that day) shot down an Iranian Airbus passenger plane, killing all 290 people, including 66 children, on board.

In 1996, without providing any evidence, the United States blamed Iran for involvement in the bombing of the U.S. Khobar Tower military barracks in Saudi Arabia. A month after the bombing, Congress extended

the economic sanctions against Iran for an additional five years. Not surprisingly, as the sanctions hit the civilian population, they had the effect of strengthening public opposition to U.S. policies and the U.S. government even among those Iraqis who might favor cultural ties and international openness. (It should be noted that the U.S. sanctions' restrictions were not uniformly implemented. Vice-President and former Halliburton CEO Dick Cheney acknowledged during the 2000 election campaign that Halliburton had continued to do "business with Libya and Iran through foreign subsidiaries."³)

After September 11, 2001, Iran became a major partner in Washington's invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. That cooperation, however, was apparently not enough to satisfy the Bush administration. Just a few weeks after the inauguration of the U.S.-backed Hamid Karzai as president of occupied Afghanistan, something Iran had helped make possible, Bush's 2002 State of the Union address targeted Iran as part of the so-called "axis of evil." Less than a year later, Bush suspended all bilateral contacts with Iran.

In February 2006, after two years of lobbying against Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency the United States succeeded in convincing its allies to send the issue of Iran's nuclear power program to the Security Council, with the goal of imposing harsh new international sanctions. In response, Iran announced it was ending its voluntary special cooperation with the IAEA, a program of extra-rigorous intrusive inspections Tehran had agreed to for several years in hope of easing U.S. pressure.⁴

Once the issue of Iran's nuclear program shifted to the Security Council, the United States, backed by Britain, France, and Germany and with reluctant acquiescence from Russia and China, imposed new demands on Iran, insisting that it stop enriching uranium altogether, despite its right to do so under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.⁵ When Iran refused to abandon its right to nuclear power, the United States and its allies orchestrated two sets of economic sanctions against Iran. While the specific measures were directed towards individuals and institutions allegedly tied to Iran's nuclear enrichment efforts, the real goal was less about stopping individuals than it was about provoking and ratcheting up overall pressure on Iran.

In January 2006, in what the *New York Times* called "a show of force against Iran" and "U.S. muscle-flexing," the United States sent a second aircraft carrier group to the Persian Gulf, and launched two major exercises off Iran's coast.⁶ A few weeks later, Iranian sailors captured a British Navy ship in the Persian Gulf, holding 15 British sailors for almost two weeks before releasing them unharmed. Threats of a U.S. military attack rose from

the vice-president's office and from other U.S. power centers. Israel joined the fray, raising its own threats to attack Iran if the United States didn't do it.

Provocations continued. The Navy increased the number of U.S. aircraft carrier groups and destroyers in the Persian Gulf. U.S. minesweepers were sent to the Strait of Hormuz. In January 2007, U.S. troops in northern Iraq kidnapped five Iranian diplomats working at the request of the U.S.-backed Iraqi government, holding them in violation of their diplomatic immunity. Bush gave his Iraq commanders explicit orders to kill or capture Iranians in Iraq.⁷ The Navy increased the number of U.S. aircraft carrier groups and destroyers in the Persian Gulf. U.S. minesweepers were sent to the Strait of Hormuz.⁸

In January 2007, Bush gave his Iraq commanders explicit orders to kill or capture Iranians in Iraq.⁹ In August, U.S. troops arrested seven more Iranian civilians, this time in Baghdad (though that group was released the next morning with an "apology" from U.S. General Petraeus). Construction began on a large new U.S. military base in Iraq less than five miles from the Iranian border.¹⁰

On the international front, U.S. pressure on its allies began to pay off. In August 2007, the newly elected president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, joined Bush in calling the Iranian nuclear issue the worst crisis in the world, and calling for more pressure on Iran to "enable us to escape an alternative that I say is catastrophic: the Iranian bomb or the bombing of Iran."¹¹

By August 2007, Bush was claiming that Iran's "pursuit of technology *that could lead to nuclear weapons* threatens to put [the Middle East] *under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust.*" The United States would, Bush threatened, "confront this danger before it is too late."¹² The rhetoric was particularly dangerous because it was chillingly reminiscent of the orchestrated public statements in 2002, in which the President, Vice-President, and Secretary of State all invoked the false threat of an Iraqi nuclear attack—the infamous "we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud" remark¹³ threatening war against a nation that, like Iran, had no nuclear weapons program. That time the United States had made good on their threat—against Iraq. The question hovered whether they would do it again. And then, *after* the White House had received the basic outline of the NIE in the summer of 2007, Bush made perhaps his most incendiary accusation against Iran: "if you're interested in avoiding World War III," he said, "it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon."¹⁴

10. WHY IS THE UNITED STATES SO CONCERNED ABOUT IRAN?

U.S. concerns about Iran—and resulting efforts to either buy its allegiance, insure its weakness, or destroy its capacity—did not begin with the unilateralist, militarist extremism of the George W. Bush administration. Certainly Iran’s massive oil reserves make it a country of interest to all wealthy and powerful countries dependent on imports of foreign oil to maintain advanced industrial societies. But there are other reasons too, for Iran’s centrality in U.S. strategic planning.

Iran is one of only two countries in the Middle East with all the prerequisites to become an indigenous regional power: water, oil, and size. Only Iran and Iraq have all three. Water makes them self-sufficient, oil provides wealth, and size of land and population guarantees the possibility of power. It is also not coincidental that Iran and Iraq are two of only three Middle Eastern countries (the other being Egypt) with long histories as independent nation-states. With a few border adjustments (Kuwait was once part of Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan a more recent inclusion) the modern nations—and peoples—of Iraq and Iran ground their histories and identities in those ancient countries of Mesopotamia and Persia. For that reason the United States viewed the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war as a boon, seriously weakening both potential regional challengers. And when, after the 1991 Gulf War, 12 years of crippling sanctions and the 2002 U.S. invasion and occupation, Iraq collapsed as an independent country, Iran reemerged as the only potential regional challenge to Washington’s domination.

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But on the immediate level, if fear of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program was not the real reason for the rising U.S. threats against Iran, what *was* motivating U.S. policy? Part of the answer was the weakening U.S. economy, dependent as ever on the preeminence of the dollar as the global currency of choice, which Iran would challenge.

In August, 2005, oil economist William Clark wrote:

While the official rationale for any U.S. attack on Iran “will be premised as a consequence of Iran’s nuclear ambitions, there are again unspoken macroeconomic drivers underlying the second stage of petrodollar warfare—Iran’s upcoming oil bourse [T]he Tehran

government has plans to begin competing with New York's NYMEX and London's IPE with respect to international oil trades—using a euro-based international oil-trading mechanism. The proposed Iranian Petroleum Exchange (or Iranian Oil Bourse) signifies that without some sort of U.S. intervention, the euro is going to establish a firm foothold in the international oil trade. Given U.S. debt levels and the stated neoconservative project of U.S. global domination, Tehran's objective constitutes an obvious encroachment on dollar supremacy in the crucial international oil market."¹⁵

Although the launch of the Iran Petroleum Exchange, originally scheduled to open in 2006, has been delayed several times, Iran did succeed in eliminating reliance on the dollar for its oil sales. In March 2007, Japan agreed to purchase Iranian oil with yen, and by September China accepted Iran's request to purchase its crude with euros. By December 2007, as reported by the Russian press agency RIA Novosti:

“Iran has stopped selling its oil for U.S. dollars, the Iranian ISNA news agency said on Saturday, citing the country's oil minister. ‘In line with a policy of selling crude oil in currencies other than the U.S. dollar, the sale of our country's oil in U.S. dollars has been completely eliminated,’ ISNA reported Oil Minister Gholamhossein Nozari as saying. He also said ‘the dollar is no longer a reliable currency.’”¹⁶

Even on the military front, by 2006 the Bush administration was no longer relying solely on claims that Iran was building a nuclear weapon. The 2006 edition of the National Security Strategy document, after repeating the 2002 version's aggressive language in support of preventive war, focused more directly on Iran, “The Iranian regime sponsors terrorism; threatens Israel; seeks to thwart Middle East peace; disrupts democracy in Iraq; and denies the aspirations of its people for freedom We will continue to take *all necessary measures* to protect our national and economic security against the adverse effects of their bad conduct.”¹⁷

11. WHAT DOES IRAN HAVE TO DO WITH THE U.S. WAR AND OCCUPATION OF IRAQ?

The September 11, 2007 report on Iraq from General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker had two goals.¹⁸ One was to shore up public support for the “surge,” the 30,000 additional troops that had brought the U.S. occupation force up to 165,000 (plus about 100,000 U.S.-paid

mercenaries). That was what was presented as “good news,” the claim that the “surge” was working. But beyond the “good” news, Petraeus described the counterbalancing “troubling” news: the claim that Iran was more involved in Iraq than the United States had anticipated. Iran is responsible for the deaths of U.S. service-members, he said. Petraeus denied a reporter’s query whether his speech was designed to ratchet up pressure against Iran. But there was no question that demonizing Iran was at the center of the main text. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice joined the campaign, calling Iran “a very troublesome neighbor,” and her deputy, John Negroponte weighed in with allegations of Iranian arms being provided to the resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan.

Petraeus’ hearing was designed to fit carefully into the Administration’s existing anti-Iran crusade. Vice-President Cheney was reported to have already proposed launching air strikes at suspected training camps in Iraq supposedly run by Iran. In the months leading up to Petraeus’ appearance in Congress, a series of Iraq-based military reports blamed Iran for a variety of consequences of the illegal U.S. occupation. In July 2007, Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner, a spokesman for the U.S. occupation troops in Iraq, said members of Iran’s Quds force had helped plan a January attack in the holy Shiite city of Karbala, in which five U.S. troops died.¹⁹ But the specificity of his allegations did not match any specificity of evidence.

Certainly many Iranians—businesspeople, diplomats, aid workers, and others—are operating in Iraq; the countries share a long border and a longer history. But the United States has provided only assertions, no direct evidence, that the Iranian government has provided Iraqi militias with “explosively formed penetrators” (EFPs) or any other weapons. Andrew Cockburn, in the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote:

“President Bush has now definitively stated that bombs known as explosively formed penetrators—EFPs, which have proved especially deadly for U.S. troops in Iraq—are made in Iran and exported to Iraq. But in November, U.S. troops raiding a Baghdad machine shop came across a pile of copper disks, five inches in diameter, stamped out as part of what was clearly an ongoing order. This ominous discovery, unreported until now, makes it clear that Iraqi insurgents have no need to rely on Iran as the source of EFPs. The truth is that EFPs are simple to make for anyone who knows how to do it.”²⁰

But the rising U.S. focus on Iran—particularly on escalating allegations of Iran’s supposed involvement in Iraq—was becoming a serious concern for the U.S. occupation-backed government in Iraq. Aside from broad ties between the two countries, many Iraqi Shi’a, particularly in the southern

part of the country, hold longstanding and deep political as well as personal ties to Iran. Many, now top officials in Iraq's parliament and government, spent their years of exile in Iran during Saddam Hussein's regime, and many married Iranians. And the respected Iraqi cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who was actually born in Iran, remains perhaps the most influential voice among Iraqi Shi'a while maintaining close ties to Tehran throughout the years of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. His significance within the Iraqi Shi'a community, particularly in southern Iraq, is unsurpassed. In mid-2007, in a move widely seen as moving away from an Iranian orientation to a more overtly Iraqi identity, the political party with which Sistani was most closely identified, SCIRI (Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq), changed its name to the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, dropping the "Revolution" reference. But the party remains simultaneously closely allied with Iran and influential within the Iraqi government, and Sistani remains widely respected throughout Iraq.

In August 2007, a senior Iraqi official in Baghdad reported that his government received regular U.S. intelligence briefings about suspected Iranian activities. He worried that the United States was "becoming more focused on Iranian influence inside Iraq," he said. "And we don't want Iraq to become a zone of conflict between Iran and the United States."²¹

While U.S. officials often claim, without evidence, that Iran is leading a rising "Shi'a crescent" threatening the stability of Arab regimes across the Middle East, there is no doubt that it is actually Iran that is very concerned about the violence and instability in Iraq, and the permanent U.S. military presence on its western border. In fact with the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the U.S.-NATO occupation of Afghanistan, as well as a massive U.S. troop deployment in Turkey and U.S. special forces not-so-secretly operating in Pakistan, Iran remains largely surrounded by U.S. and allied military troops.

Alternatives to War—What Do We Do?

12. WHO SAYS “DON’T ATTACK IRAN?”

Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian lawyer, feminist and former judge, and winner of the 2003 Nobel Prize for Peace wrote in a 2005 *New York Times* op-ed that, “for human rights defenders in Iran, the possibility of a foreign military attack on their country represents an utter disaster for their cause.” Describing Iran’s vibrant though pressured human rights movements, Ebadi went on, “Independent organizations are essential for fostering the culture of human rights in Iran. But the threat of foreign military intervention will provide a powerful excuse for authoritarian elements to uproot these groups and put an end to their growth In 1980, after Saddam Hussein invaded Iran and inflamed nationalist passions, Iranian authorities used such arguments to suppress dissidents.” She recognized that, “Given the longstanding willingness of the American government to overlook abuses of human rights, particularly women’s rights, by close allies in the Middle East like Saudi Arabia, it is hard not to see the Bush administration’s focus on human rights violations in Iran as a cloak for its larger strategic interests.” And finally, Ebadi was very clear, “Getting the Iranian government to abide by these international standards is the human rights movement’s highest goal; foreign military intervention in Iran is the surest way to harm us and keep that goal out of reach.”¹

Mohammed ElBaradei stated that a U.S. military attack on Iran would be catastrophic, and that “the only solution to the Iranian issue ... is dialogue, is negotiation.”² ElBaradei’s colleague Hans Blix, who headed the UN’s search for WMDs in Iraq before the U.S. invasion and now chairs the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission in Sweden, took a similar position, saying Iran is not a threat and that Bush was over-reacting. “There’s time to negotiate with Iran and to carry out those negotiations in a sensible manner. I think they use too much sticks and they should use more carrots, just as they’ve done in the case of North Korea where they are making some headway.”³

Numerous military figures have warned against the danger of a U.S. attack on Iran. Those willing to go public include Secretary of State Colin Powell’s former chief-of-staff at the State Department, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson and Lt. General Robert Gard, former President of the National Defense University. There are more. But almost all are retired from active-

duty service; while there are indications of wide opposition to a strike on Iran across the top ranks of the military, few active-duty generals are willing to take the political or career risk of criticizing potential U.S. strategy while still in the service.

Virtually all Iranians oppose a U.S. military strike on Iran. According to a January 16, 2007 poll of the Iranian public conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes, 93% hold unfavorable views of the Bush administration, particularly regarding its policies in the Middle East.⁴ The poll also revealed that an overwhelming majority of Iranians—91%—believe it is important for Iran to have a full fuel-cycle nuclear program, mainly to “secure the country’s energy needs” and “enhance its national technical competence.”

And in the United States, despite belligerent claims by political leaders in both parties, including most candidates for the 2008 presidential elections, that a military option against Iran must “remain on the table,” a November 2007 poll indicated that 73% of Americans said the United States should rely on economic and diplomatic efforts “to get Iran to shut down its nuclear program.”⁵

Unlike the invasion of Iraq, when dozens of countries were pressured and threatened into joining Bush’s coalition of the coerced, on Iran virtually no government but that of Israel is prepared to unequivocally back the White House. Some, including France and Britain, refused to absolutely reject a U.S. military attack, but public opinion in both those countries remains even more strongly against support for U.S. unilateral militarism against Iran than it was in the run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. And of course the failure of the Iraq War itself provides ever more grist for the mill of public opposition to a similar—or much worse—debacle in Iran.

13. DO U.S. SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN WORK? WHAT ARE THE COSTS?

Sanctions and isolation of Iran were Washington’s strategy throughout the 1990s. When Bill Clinton took office in 1993 he quickly announced a strategy of “dual containment,” aimed at suppressing the reconstitution of power in either Iran or Iraq. In 1995, Clinton imposed harsh unilateral trade sanctions against Iran linked to White House pressures to prevent U.S. trade partners from engaging with Iran either. In 1996, Congress passed the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, prohibiting significant investments in oil or gas projects in Iran or Libya.

Although U.S. sanctions against Iran were not nearly as extreme as those Washington imposed on Iraq in the name of the United Nations, the Iranian people still have paid a steep price. Much of Iran's infrastructure—particularly its oil infrastructure and civilian airlines—was created during the Shah's regime, so most spare parts required are of U.S. make, and thus unavailable because of the sanctions. In June 2005, a report prepared for the International Civil Air Aviation Organization "warned that U.S. sanctions against Iran were placing civilian lives in danger by denying Iranian aviation necessary spare parts and aircraft repair It said that the U.S. government and major U.S. companies were ignoring international treaties and taking actions that put passengers on Iranian commercial airlines at risk, including thousands of people from other countries traveling to and from Iran." The report pointed to U.S. companies refusing to provide spare parts, seizing engines sent to other countries for repair, and even threatening to hold necessary parts for European airlines hostage if those airlines did maintenance work for Iran. The report went on, "The lack of concern for aviation safety is surprising in intensity and vigor." Six months later, a U.S.-made Iranian military transport plane crashed, killing 108 people.⁶

According to the *Los Angeles Times*:

"Economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the Security Council and countries such as the United States so far have had few concrete restrictions but have created an atmosphere that makes investors fearful, observers said. 'Sanctions are like icebergs,' said Saeed Leylaz, an Iranian economist and journalist. 'Only 10% of the effect is directly attributable to the Security Council. Ninety percent is fear of the U.S.' Some officials dread a repeat in Iran of the events in Iraq after the 1991 Persian Gulf War, when sanctions discouraged companies from doing business with Iraqis, whittling at livelihoods of the people while strengthening the hand of Hussein and his inner circle. 'Even if something is not on a list, a lot of companies will say, "Dealing with Iran—oh, I'd better not do it," said a European diplomat in Tehran. 'It's becoming like 1990s Iraq, when companies used to refuse to sell papers and pencil to Iraq.'"⁷

"Unilateral" sanctions, when imposed by the biggest economy in the world, invariably take a multilateral toll since other countries and financial institutions are eager to stay on Washington's good side. Even so-called "smart" sanctions, designed only to target those tied directly to Iran's nuclear industry, end up impacting large numbers of people. Designating Iran's entire Revolutionary Guard Corps as a "terrorist entity," as the Bush administration did in late 2007, imposes sanctions on tens or perhaps

hundreds of thousands of Iranians whose family members have ties to that huge bureaucracy within Iran's official military.

Ironically, the oil sanctions have the effect of encouraging greater public support in Iran for nuclear power. Oil sanctions reduce Iran's ability to rebuild and improve its seriously eroded oil refining capacity, reducing the amount of oil available for domestic use. The end result is that more Iranians believe that their country needs nuclear power despite its massive oil reserves.

U.S. pressure continued to mount on European allies as well as Russia and China. By the end of July 2006, Washington's coercion was sufficient to force the Security Council to pass Resolution 1696, which ignored Iran's rights guaranteed under the NPT and demanded that it "suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development." The vote was 14 in favor and one against—Qatar, the sole Middle Eastern country on the Council. (In a non-public report a month

Ironically, the oil sanctions have the effect of encouraging greater public support in Iran for nuclear power.

later, IAEA Director-General and the prior year's Nobel peace laureate Mohammed ElBaradei made clear that Iran was *not* reprocessing uranium.⁸)

Immediately after the vote the United States began its pressure campaign to convince and coerce other Council members that new sanctions should be imposed on Iran if it continued to reject the Council's demand to stop its enrichment activities. The Bush administration succeeded on December

23, 2006. The Council imposed sanctions prohibiting the import to Iran of any nuclear material for its power reactors, and froze the assets outside the country for a number of people and institutions allegedly involved in proliferation activities.

In 2007, ElBaradei called for a "time-out" on Iran's nuclear program, proposing that the UN Security Council should suspend sanctions if Iran froze its nuclear program. He also called for direct negotiations, telling CNN, "the key to the Iranian issue is a direct engagement between Iran and the U.S."⁹ Instead, the White House kept up the pressure. In March 2007, the Security Council imposed another set of sanctions. This time they froze the assets of a much larger group of Iranian individuals and institutions, and banned the sales of all Iranian weapons to any other countries. And by February 2008, a third U.S.-driven sanctions resolution was under discussion by the key Security Council members.

But despite those efforts, and despite the potential cost to civilians, a December 2007 report of the General Accounting Office, entitled “Iran Sanctions: Impact in Furthering U.S. Objectives Is Unclear and Should Be Reviewed,” found that, “Iran’s global trade ties and leading role in energy production make it difficult for the United States to isolate Iran and pressure it to reduce proliferation and support for terrorism. For example, Iran’s overall trade with the world has grown since the U.S. imposed sanctions.”¹⁰

14. WHY IS THERE STILL A DANGER OF THE U.S. ATTACKING IRAN?

When the December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate was released, finding that Iran did not have a nuclear weapons program, many in the United States breathed a sigh of relief. Bush’s rationale for attacking Iran looked like it had disappeared.

But in the days and weeks after the release of the NIE, the Administration and its allies have attacked the findings of the NIE. Sen. John Ensign (R-NV) plans to introduce legislation that would create a commission to get a “fresh set of eyes” on the NIE’s findings. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said, “In our opinion [Iran] has apparently continued that program.” And *Newsweek* reported that during Bush’s meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in January 2008 that he, “told the Israelis that he can’t control what the intelligence community says, but that [the NIE’s] conclusions don’t reflect his own views” about Iran’s nuclear-weapons program.¹¹

And as Bush started his final year in office, he outlined a continuation of his policies and rhetoric toward Iran in his State of the Union speech, despite the findings of the NIE:

“We’re also standing against the forces of extremism embodied by the regime in Tehran. Iran’s rulers oppress a good and talented people. And wherever freedom advances in the Middle East, it seems the Iranian regime is there to oppose it. Iran is funding and training militia groups in Iraq, supporting Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon, and backing Hamas’ efforts to undermine peace in the Holy Land. Tehran is also developing ballistic missiles of increasing range, and continues to develop its capability to enrich uranium, which could be used to create a nuclear weapon.”

The main counterbalance to the President, Congress, so far remains unwilling or afraid to preemptively challenge the very real possibility of a U.S. military strike. While some members of Congress have introduced resolutions aimed at insuring that no military strike could take place without

congressional approval, in the case of either a real or false provocation Congress would most likely back a military response.

Israel's consistent drumbeat demanding military force against Iran and the cheerleading for that position from Israel's powerful U.S. lobbies, make it very difficult for senators and representatives to even consider rejecting a U.S. military strike against Iran.

Few in Congress, the media, and other policymakers understand the danger of large-scale escalation, up to and including the possibility of ground troop involvement, in response to a likely Iranian retaliation after a U.S. "surgical strike."

While there are differences between the two parties and most of the likely Democratic contenders for president might be somewhat less likely to launch attacks against Iran, few of them would be willing to reverse an existing military assault that was already underway when they took office.

Many European governments, including some strongly opposed to using military force against Iran, believe that after the Iraq debacle, a military strike on Iran is virtually impossible. They appear convinced that "even the Bush administration isn't that stupid," and so are not pressuring or mobilizing against such a policy, not realizing that while the Bush administration may not be stupid, they are driven by an extremist ideology of unilateralism and militarism that renders irrelevant all other strategic consequences.

Public opposition to a U.S. strike on Iran is fairly wide but very thin; it is uneven, and likely to be qualitatively reduced in the face of even a thinly-disguised "Tonkin Gulf-style" incident of provocation. Mobilizing actively against Iran is crucially necessary, but difficult because of the years of lack of responsiveness in Washington to much wider and deeper anti-war sentiment regarding Iraq.

15. IS DIPLOMACY POSSIBLE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND IRAN?

Like virtually every government in the world, Iran's leaders condemned the September 11 terror attacks in the United States. In his first interview with a U.S. newspaper after the attacks, President Khatami called al-Qaeda's version of Islam extremist and said, "The horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States were perpetrated by [a] cult of fanatics who had self-mutilated their ears and tongues, and could only communicate with perceived opponents through carnage and devastation."¹² Two days later he called the attacks "the ugliest form of terrorism ever seen."¹³

Despite the ongoing U.S. sanctions still in place against Iran, Khatami's government offered to assist the United States and other western countries in stabilizing Afghanistan. The offer reflected longstanding Iranian opposition to the Taliban, but also a remarkable openness to cooperation with the United States. Some in Washington seemed to find it difficult to take Iran's offer seriously but on the ground it worked. According to James Dobbins, Bush's first post-September 11 envoy to Afghanistan, "perhaps the most constructive period of U.S.-Iranian diplomacy since the fall of the Shah of Iran took place in the months after the 2001 terrorist attacks."¹⁴ Describing the UN conference in Germany in 2002 where the new post-invasion government for Afghanistan was created, Dobbins noted that, "I worked closely with the Iranian delegation and others. Iranian representatives were particularly helpful. It was, for instance, the Iranian delegate who first insisted that the agreement include a commitment to hold democratic elections in Afghanistan. This same Iranian persuaded the Northern Alliance to make the essential concession that allowed the meeting to conclude successfully."

Even for those who do not believe that the U.S. attack on Afghanistan was legal, let alone just, it is revealing to see how those in power inside the Administration at the time, who *did* endorse that illegal war, viewed Iran's role as helpful to Washington's strategic goals.

In 2003, just a few weeks after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iran had offered to negotiate a comprehensive solution with the United States. According to then Middle East senior director of the National Security Council, Flynt Leverett, Iran acknowledged the need to address Washington's concerns regarding Iran's nuclear program and raised specific concessions it might be willing to make. They included the possibility of ending support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Israeli-occupied Gaza, and ending the arming of Hezbollah in Lebanon. What Iran wanted in return from the United States, beyond some specifics regarding lifting economic sanctions and ending Washington's ban on Iran's entry to the World Trade Organization, was a security guarantee. It was an offer of normalized relations between the United States and Iran, something that had not existed since 1979 when the U.S.-backed Shah was overthrown. In return Iran wanted a guarantee that the United States would not attack, or invade, or attempt "regime change" in Iran. A grand bargain indeed.

But the possibility of such an agreement was rejected. The "realists," including then Secretary of State Colin Powell were reportedly interested. But within a few days, the entire proposal was rejected and the State Department rebuked the Swiss ambassador for even having passed it along.

Assessing responsibility for the lost potential, Powell's former assistant, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson said, "as with many of these issues of national security decision-making, there are no fingerprints. But I would guess Dick Cheney with the blessing of George W. Bush."¹⁵

16. WHAT SHOULD—AND WHAT COULD—U.S. RELATIONS WITH IRAN LOOK LIKE?

Any serious effort to minimize tensions and normalize relations between the United States and Iran must recognize that negotiations and diplomacy, not crippling sanctions, military threats, or military attacks, must be the basis of the U.S. posture towards Iran. The United States should also recognize that the United Nations, through the International Atomic Energy Agency, should be the central actor in orchestrating international negotiations with Iran, not the United States. The United States should agree to be bound by international legal prohibitions as well as the global consensus against any military strike against Iran.

A serious effort to ease nuclear disputes should begin with the U.S. recognizing and implementing its own obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, particularly its obligations under Article VI to move with all other nuclear weapons states towards nuclear disarmament and full and complete general disarmament. As long as the U.S. remains in violation of its own NPT obligations, it will continue to fail in convincing other countries to take their rights and obligations seriously.

Any negotiations between the United States and Iran must recognize what Iran actually wants: a security guarantee (guaranteeing no invasion, no attack on nuclear facilities, and no efforts at "regime change"), recognition of Iran's role as an indigenous regional power, and reaffirmation of Iran's rights under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. (Once those rights are internationally affirmed, it will be up to Iran itself to determine whether they will negotiate on how those rights are to be implemented.)

The consequences of the United States having severed all diplomatic ties with Iran since 1979 should be recognized and Washington should move urgently to reestablish full diplomatic relations with Tehran.

Washington should stop using the Israeli-Palestinian "peace process" as an instrument to gain regional support for its position in the U.S.-Iran crisis, as it did at the Annapolis conference in December 2007. Instead, it should change its Middle East policy from its current uncritical political, military, economic, and diplomatic support for Israeli occupation and discriminatory

policies, to a policy aimed at establishing a just and comprehensive peace based on human rights, international law, equality, and UN resolutions.

17. WHAT ROLE DOES CONGRESS HAVE IN STOPPING OR APPROVING ANY MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAN?

By 2003 anti-Iranian fever had spread far beyond the White House thanks to pressure from Bush and his allies. Resolutions were introduced in the House and Senate to provide \$50 million to Iranian opposition groups including those dedicated to “regime change.” The House version also called for escalating sanctions and a “total embargo” designed “to encourage the people of Iran to bring about a more peaceful and democratic government.” Further congressional escalation came in May 2004, when the House passed a resolution calling for the United States to use “all appropriate means to deter, dissuade, and prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons” and demanded that other governments impose similarly harsh sanctions against Iran.¹⁶

Congress bears the ultimate power—the ability to approve or deny the use of funds to pay for any escalation against Iran. One model for how that power could be used is from the period of the illegal U.S. war against Nicaragua in the 1980s. In 1982, angered by a White House secretly escalating the unpopular war in Central America, the House passed the Boland Amendment, a rider to the Defense Appropriations Act of 1983. It was designed to cut off funds the CIA and other intelligence agencies were using to carry out sabotage attacks in Nicaragua and to support the anti-government *contra* guerrillas. The Amendment was neither unequivocal nor absolute. It prohibited the U.S. government from providing military support only “for the purpose of overthrowing the Government of Nicaragua.” But it became the symbol of public anger and the public demand to end U.S. support for the *contras* and their brutal war. The amendment thus imposed an even more powerful check on the White House’s war-making capacity than the resolution’s actual language might have mandated.

Congress bears the ultimate power—the ability to approve or deny the use of funds to pay for any escalation against Iran.

If, despite the NIE’s determination that Iran is *not* building a nuclear weapon, and despite Iran’s NPT-guaranteed right to enrich uranium for peaceful nuclear power uses, anyone in Congress or the White House still

intends to try to persuade Iran to end that enrichment, they must recognize that there can be no hope for negotiations limited by pre-conditions.

18. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT A WAR WITH IRAN?

The political cost of even considering or threatening the use of a military strike against Iran must be ratcheted up. Centers of power beyond Congress and the White House must be organized to significantly broaden the range of visible and mobilized political opposition to raise that political price. Mobilizing points from the Iraq anti-war movement—Cities for Peace city council resolutions, mayors and governors concerned about the costs of war, military families and veterans, active duty military personnel, and 9/11 families—all must be pulled into even broader motion.

The peace movement should join the large and influential Iranian communities across the United States, Europe, and elsewhere already mobilized against a potential U.S. attack, to develop joint campaigns aimed at staving off any possibility of a military assault on Iran.

There should be a fight for Congressional hearings, both official and unofficial public briefings, as well as informal and off-the-record meetings with members of Congress. Congress should examine issues including the consequences of U.S. military strikes in Iran, consequences in global opinion of the U.S., the range of possible/likely retaliation, the inherent violations of international law and possibility of prosecution of those participating in funding or approving such strikes. Particular attention should be paid to the danger of Tonkin Gulf-style “provocations” by the Administration.

The peace movement should continue campaigns for Congress to pass a “Boland Amendment” on Iran aimed at cutting off all spending for military force against Iran.

There should be broadened participation in people-to-people delegations to Iran, and a call for congressional delegations, possibly in the context of building parliament-to-congress relationships.

Early coordination and calls for U.S. and global protests following any specific threat of U.S. attack or major escalation of rhetoric should begin now.

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ORGANIZATIONS

UNITED STATES

- American Friends Service Committee (www.afsc.org)
- Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran (www.campaigniran.org/casmii/)
- Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation (www.armscontrolcenter.org)
- Cities for Progress (www.citiesforprogress.org)
- Code Pink (www.codepink4peace.org)
- Faithful Security (www.faithfulsecurity.org)
- Fellowship of Reconciliation (www.forusa.org)
- Hague Appeal for Peace (www.haguepeace.org)
- Just Foreign Policy (www.justforeignpolicy.org/iran)
- Middle East Research and Education Project (www.merip.org)
- National Iranian-American Council (www.niacouncil.org)
- Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (www.wagingpeace.org)
- Peace Action (www.peace-action.org)
- StopWarOnIran.org
- United for Peace and Justice (www.unitedforpeace.org)

CANADA

- Alternatives (www.alternatives.ca)
- Canadians Against War (www.canadiansagainstwar.org)
- Canadian Council for International Cooperation (www.ccic.ca/e/home/index.shtml)
- Canadian Peace Alliance (www.acp-cpa.ca/en/index.html)
- Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (<http://home.ca.inter.net/~vow/>)
- Inter Pares (www.interpares.ca)

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- Network for Peace (www.networkforpeace.org.uk)
- Stop the War Coalition (www.stopwar.org.uk)

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