



# An attack on Iran before Bush leaves office?

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Whilst it was Hillary Clinton who set the war drums beating harder once again by saying that she would eliminate Iran in the case of a military attack on Israel, no sooner had she withdrawn from the race to be Democratic candidate for the presidency than Barack Obama adopted her aggressive rhetoric.

At his speech before the influential American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) he emphasised his determination to provide all necessary means to ensure the security of Israel. He delivered a ringing pledge of loyalty to the Zionist state. "The bond between the United States and Israel is unbreakable today, tomorrow, and forever. We know that the establishment of Israel was just and necessary, rooted in centuries of struggle, and decades of patient work. But 60 years later, we know that we cannot relent, we cannot yield, and as President I will never compromise when it comes to Israel's security. Our alliance is based on shared interests and shared values. Those who threaten Israel threaten us. Israel has always faced these threats on the front lines. And I will bring to the White House an unshakeable commitment to Israel's security." He promised to ensure "Israel's qualitative military advantage." He continued to endorse Bush's policy towards the Palestinians - relations only with those that renounced resistance to Israel's remorseless ethnic cleansing of the indigenous people of the country:

"...any agreement with the Palestinian people must preserve Israel's identity as a Jewish state, with secure, recognized and defensible borders. Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided." This speech clearly shows that it would be foolish to have any illusions about the role Obama will play either in the Middle east or elsewhere. He is the representative of US imperialist interests. The working class and the semi-colonial world have to see him as just as big a danger as his predecessor and prepare for struggle against him.

Also if Obama still blames the Bush-administration for a serious mistake in invading Iraq, he agrees on the general strategy of the US bourgeoisie and made clear that he will provide all the resources needed to fulfil these strategic goals. Be it the question of the Middle-East, the position of Syria or the developments in Lebanon. Obama declared that he supports the line of the American ruling class. Consequently he emphasised the need to isolate Hamas and refused to negotiate with "a terrorist organisation."

"We must isolate Hamas unless and until they renounce terrorism, recognize Israel's right to exist, and abide by past agreements." He went on to insist that most of Israel's ill-gotten gains, including the Palestinian capital Jerusalem must be preserved in any creation of a disarmed and fragmented statelet. Obama also made clear that the UN-resolution 1701 that puts troops on the ground in Lebanon will be strengthened and also said that Israel's threats against Syria in autumn 2007 were legitimate. Even though it would be wrong to deny some differences between the Democratic and the Republican camps, the Obama's speech to AIPAC made clear, these were not differences over goals but rather how to reach them. Obama has sowed enormous illusions not only in the USA but worldwide - where opinion polls show him to be by far the most popular presidential candidate amongst non-Americans. Here too he has aroused hope in millions of a fundamental change in US policy - an end to unilateralism and bullying. His promises to negotiate with Iran and Cuba "without preconditions" set these illusions flying around the world. Yet in his most recent statements on Iran he fully endorses the US imperialists' claim to absolute hegemony over the Middle-East. He frankly said "There is no greater threat to Israel or to the peace and stability of the region than Iran". He then continued: "The danger from Iran is grave, it is real, and my goal will be to eliminate this threat". Nor will he rule out military action. Taken together such statements reveal the class character of Obama. There should be no illusions that, in international affairs, he will be a "candidate for change", rather he will resolutely defend the main interests of the US bourgeoisie.

## Sanctions and the military threat

It's nothing very new that Iran plays an important role for US-interests in the Middle East. Iran still possesses the largest reserves of natural gas in the region, having the second-largest reserves of natural gas on a world scale. Another given the jittery oil-markets and the recession beginning in the US are Iran's oil reserves, some 150 billions barrels, much as yet untapped. Also Iran's key geostrategic position is a major factor for the US-bourgeoisie, given that 30 per cent of the world's oil supplies passes through the Strait of Hormuz. If Iran were to block it this would pose a serious threat not only to the US economy but to that of European Union, Japan and China too. In addition whilst Iran continues to defy its plans the United States' entire strategic project for the Middle East is called into question. Iran has long played an important role for the US ruling class. In 1953, the US and Britain overthrew the nationalist regime of regime of Mohammad Mosaddeq replacing him with the brutal police dictatorship of the Shah Reza Pahlavi. After his overthrow in the Iranian revolution, the humiliation of the US Embassy occupation, the failed hostage rescue mission, the Americans set out to destabilise the Islamic Republic by encouraging Saddam Hussein's Iraq to attack Iran. Since George Bush's 2002 State of Union address, Iran has figured high on the list of states composing the "Axis of Evil." The Neocons repeatedly demanded a much more aggressive approach. Yet for all the rhetoric Iran failed to act scared. Why? The director of the Jewish Policy Center, Jonathan Schanzer, answered:

"America's consistently weak responses over nearly three decades have created an emboldened Iran. Nearly every instance in which Iran provoked America, Washington responded weakly." The Bush Administration set out to implement this more aggressive approach. Under US prodding the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) started to take a closer look on the Iranian nuclear program. In addition, in 2006, measures were taken to economically isolate Iran. In December 2006 the UN Security Council imposed trade sanctions on materials that could be used for the enrichment of Uranium, or for developing projects using heavy water. In March 2007 these sanctions were broadened with the resolution 1747. Now there were sanctions on every kind of military material (tanks, ships, rockets, etc.). In addition the resolution called on all member-states to refrain from financial and other economic deals that would strengthen Iran. This meant sanctions being extended to threaten the means of subsistence for the Iranian civilian population.

Two months after this resolution was adopted, the situation intensified again after two US aircraft carriers entered the Persian gulf and joined together with other military ships the biggest "training manoeuvres" in that region since the attack on Iraq in 2003. The military threats reached a qualitatively higher level. The League for the Fifth International and many other anti-war campaigners last summer warned of a possible attack against Iran and called for taking massive working class action in event of such an attack. It has now been confirmed by representatives of the "Washington Institute for Near East Policy" that concrete plans for such an attack were on the table but that the Pentagon top brass vetoed military action against Iran, thinking that this would undermine their strategy in the region, especially in Iraq.

So we can clearly observe an intensification of the threats against Iran from December 2006 till August 2007, resulting in two resolutions of the UN Security Council and several threats of military action. Since the Pentagon's refusal to go to war there is a certain shift of strategy. Instead of implementing Vice president Dick Cheney's proposal to launch air strike attacks on the bases of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) the IRGC was declared a terrorist organisation. This enabled the US-government to freeze various bank accounts of the IRGC. This course of taking steps of economic isolation found its peak with the resolution 1803 of the UN Security Council that put sanctions on 12 Iranian companies and 13 individuals in March 2008. Both the companies and the individuals were accused of connections with Iranian military programmes.

It would be a naive position to think that sanctions were a "peaceful alternative" to armed conflict with Iran. In fact they serve the purpose of increasing the stranglehold of the imperialist powers over a semi-colony. Let us just remember that the sanctions against Iraq after the Gulf war 1991 left over 1.5 million people dead by the time open war was declared. But even if there were no cases of people dying because of sanctions we reject any kind of imperialist hegemony imposed on the country. In the end all these sanctions aim to increase the power of international capital,

helping it bring yet more areas of the world under direct control. It is therefore our task to unmask the arguments that sanctions will be able to solve the conflict and emphasise that they only represent the false smiling face of imperialism.

## **Demands to attack Iran**

After this period where the Bush-Administration concentrated on the economic isolation of Iran, reports of a possible attack again became louder in the middle of May this year. According to two US-senators there were concrete plans to launch an air strike against strongholds of the IRGC or to be more correctly to start actively implementing already existing plans that all go in this direction.

Also Israel began to use much more aggressive rhetoric against Iran. Minister of Transport Shaul Mofaz made the international finance markets even more volatile by saying, "if Iran presses ahead with its plan to develop nuclear weapons, we will attack it". Shortly after this statement the oil price rocketed by 11 dollars, which was the highest one day jump for years.

The oil-markets calmed down a little, after Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, distanced himself from Mofaz's statement. But he too then stepped up the threats, saying the "Iranian threat must be stopped by all necessary means" and that the "window of opportunity" to prevent Iran getting a nuclear bomb will not exist for a long. It was clear that this last statement was a reply to the US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) that Iran had in fact stopped developing a nuclear programme for military use in 2003. In addition Olmert demanded that the US should allow the export of F-22 military planes that are especially used for air strikes targeting bunkers. They could therefore be well used for attacking underground Uranium Enrichment Facilities like Natanz or Uranium Processing Facilities like Isfahan. The US-military gave the first positive signals to loosen the reins in that question mainly arguing that equipping Israel with F-22 bombers could be an important step to increase the pressure against Iran.

Also Bush himself made clear that "all options are on the table" when meeting with the German chancellor Angela Merkel as part of a trip to different European countries. The European Union then also put the threat to freeze different Iranian bank accounts in case of not fulfilling the different UN-resolutions to stop their nuclear program.

## **Two strategies of the US-bourgeoisie**

If one wants to draw a balance sheet of the discussions between ideological representatives of the ruling class in the USA it is quite clear that they are split into two camps. While the first camp emphasises the need for a military attack, the second one bases itself upon the possibilities of "aggressive, principled diplomacy without self-defeating preconditions, but with a clear-eyed understanding of our interests", as Barack Obama put it in his AIPAC speech. This so-called diplomacy should of course be led by the US. Saying that, "It is time for the United States to lead," Obama was clearly referring to the ongoing struggle between the imperialist blocs the USA and the EU, for the lion's share of world profits and strategic raw materials and fuel sources.

Of course both of these camps express the need for a stronger grab at the Middle-East and Central Asian regions in particular and the semi-colonial world in general. They are just different estimations as to what kind of strategy is most useful, to reach this goal. In addition to that it is also quite clear that the "diplomatic camp" also expresses a certain defensive approach in the light of the present economic and political crisis. The neoconservative think tanks are, as usual, pushing for a military attack. In particular Norman Podhoretz, writing for the magazine Commentary, a former adviser for Rudy Giuliani when the latter was standing for the Republican presidential nomination, aggressively demands an attack on Iran. "The upshot is that if Iran is to be prevented from becoming a nuclear power, it is the United States that will have to do the preventing, to do it by means of a bombing campaign, and to do it soon."

Also different members of the Cheney family are trying to mobilise public opinion for waging an attack against Iran. Not only the Vice President, whose strategists are thinking about letting Israel launch an air strike to enable the US to go to war, is arguing for military actions. Also his daughter Elizabeth was emphasising at the AIPAC conference that "they (Iran) will face military action". This statement resulted in thunderous applause from the audience. Also McCain's

supposed gaffe, singing a song with the refrain "Bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb Iran" during his election campaign, is quite open towards a military attack on Iran. However at the moment he is emphasising more aggressive sanctions, imposed not only by the UN but by the private capital market: "We should privatize the sanctions against Iran by launching a worldwide divestment campaign. As more people, businesses, pension funds, and financial institutions across the world divest from companies doing business with Iran, the radical elite who run that country will become even more unpopular than they are already." He added that he, unlike Obama, won't negotiate with the Iranian regime but will try to increase pressure on it:

"Rather than sitting down unconditionally with the Iranian president or supreme leader in the hope that we can talk sense into them, we must create the real-world pressures that will peacefully but decisively change the path they are on". It is clear that this strategy is mainly based upon the tactical considerations of the upcoming election. After all an open declaration of for yet another war again is not that popular at the moment and could spoil his chances of becoming president.

The representatives of the "diplomatic camp" are arguing that the strategic interests of the USA can be achieved better this way. The "New Republican Magazine", representing a more "liberal" wing of the US-bourgeoisie, compared the Bay of Pigs intervention in 1961 with nuclear threat-based negotiations during the Missile Crisis of the following year, to argue that it were the negotiations that could force the Soviet Union to remove their rockets from Cuba. They are arguing that the US should see such negotiations as a sign of power rather than a weakness.

Altogether the working class should not be fooled by such "peaceful" phrases. In fact they also express the attempt to put across the imperialist interests that express the needs of the capitalist system itself. Every reinforcement of the US ruling class means not only a growing threat for the semi-colonial world but also to the working class and the racially oppressed communities of the USA. Especially given the economic crisis and the attempts of the bourgeoisie to make the working class pay for its losses, it is key to weaken them with proletarian mass struggle rather than to side with their world plundering missions, whether "peaceful" or warlike. This means that the working class and the US antiwar-movement have to unconditionally support resistance to imperialist interventions in the Middle East, working for the military defeat of the imperialist forces. Of course that doesn't mean siding with different nationalist and petty-bourgeois forces against their own working classes but helping the latter to come to the head of the anti-imperialist resistance struggle.

### **So how likely is an attack against Iran?**

It is quite clear that the United States - if they want to keep their role of an imperialist hegemon in the Gulf region - will have to extend the areas under their direct control or install vassal regimes that will do the bidding of the imperialists.

At the moment - even if the war drums start to beat louder again and analysts speak of an air strike before Bush leaves office - there are several indicators speaking against an attack in the immediate period ahead .

The argument having the most weight are the "collateral damage" such an attack on places like Natanz, Isfahan or on bases of the IRGC would have on US forces in Iraq, Saudi Arabi and other parts of the Gulf. It would inflame feeling in the Arab world, already smarting under the blows of imperialist and Zionist aggression. Iran has made it very clear that he is ready to strike back at US forces and their allies, including the Israelis, if such an attack should take place. The "Center for Strategic and International Studies" (CSIS) made an analysis of possible war scenarios and estimated that Iran has 25-100 missiles with a payload of approximately 1.100 kilos that can cover a distance of up to 1.500 kilometres in about 12 minutes and could reach Israel. In fact it will be very hard for the USA or Israel to limit an attack on Iran to air strikes. It's much more likely that this will result in another war that will last for at least several months. An attack on Iran would probably also cause serious problems for the troops of the US and their allies in Iraq. The commander of the US forces in Iraq, general David Petraeus, appointed because of his loyalty to the Bush White House, despite claiming several times that Iran is responsible for attacks in Iraq, argues against a military option, though he says, that this should stay on the table as the final option. Rather than hitting Iran with air strikes Petraeus says that the US "should make every effort to engage by use of the whole of government, developing further leverage

rather than simply targeting discrete threats." For the military this is understandable as an attack on Iran will alienate Shiite forces in the southern regions of Iraq and strengthen the resistance. The liberal magazine "The Nation", who has strong ties to the Democratic Party, writes on that question frankly and rightly: "Iraq, as bad as it looks now, will become a death pit for US troops."

Furthermore the grounds for the legitimizing a war against Iran have been undermined by the NIE's report on the development of Iran's nuclear program saying that they stopped trying to develop nuclear weapons in 2003 and that the US-Intelligence-Services don't have a clear insight into today's situation and can't confirm that Iran would have started again. One doesn't have to be a genius to see the parallels between undiscovered weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the admission today that Iran isn't even trying to develop nuclear weapons. The anti-war mood in the US is likely to be further boosted by any attack on Iran by arguing that it is important to stop their nuclear weapons program when it is not sure if it even exists, will obviously provoke massive class struggles that have the potential to intensify capitalism's economic crisis through strikes and other measures. It is this economic crisis, tied to the antiwar feeling, that massively reduces the ability of the US to launch a new war at the moment. As a result of the upcoming recession, a deep crisis of the productive forces that found its first expression with the bursting of the housing bubble, a war will exacerbate these tendencies of the US-economy and cause a much harder recession than many even bourgeois analysts see as not avertable anymore. Inflationary measures will massively increase due to the necessary financial costs for another war. Because of this the working class of the USA has to start a serious struggle against the upcoming war plans and connect it with a general struggle against price rises, rising unemployment and the threat of thousands of people being made homeless through losing their house and in the end combining these partial struggles with the struggle against capitalism as a whole. But inflation will not only result in huge dangers for the US economy: the rapid rise of oil-prices after the statements of Mofaz demonstrated how a strike against Iran could send them spiralling yet higher. If we take in account that Iran could easily block the Strait of Hormuz, this would result in oil prices cannot imagine. It is clear that this is not only a problem for the US economy but for the world economy that could face a serious crisis. The ongoing protests of road hauliers against rising fuel prices demonstrate what kind of potential this sector of the working class have to shut down the economy and pose the question of who has the power in society.

### **Organise the struggle against sanctions, war and occupation NOW!**

All these scenarios show that powerful explosive charges are buried in the foundations of today's economic, political and social order. This is one of the reasons that we characterise today's world as passing through a pre-revolutionary period. The fundamental contradiction of imperialism a global system of production with a highly developed division of labour but clashing with the limitations of the private appropriation of profit and the nation state necessarily has to provoke major crises. In the end we can observe that although the means of production are permanently being revolutionised, rather than increasing the well-being and quality of life of the great majority of humanity, they rather undermine it. The productive forces therefore ultimately turn into destructive forces. This can be seen in the growing social inequality, the recent worldwide hunger riots, caused not by an actual shortage of foodstuffs but by an inability to buy them, and by the crisis of climate change. As a result the capitalist system is a barrier for the development of humanity and has therefore be overthrown by a socialist revolution.

But all this potential that lies in today's struggles can only be realised if the working class has an instrument that does not only lead a struggle for specific reforms but that questions the capitalist system in its totality. This instrument has to be a world party of the socialist revolution, one that can ensure an independent organisation of the working class and can lead it to power on the basis of a revolutionary programme.

Such a party does not exist today nor will it come into existence spontaneously. It has to be built as a serious priority. It's the task of revolutionaries today to try to organise the vanguard sectors of the working class into such parties around concrete campaigns and around concrete struggles.

In the light of existing and growing imperialist aggressions the questions of how to resist the war brought millions of peoples on the street. That shows that the question of how to fight against imperialist aggression is one of the most important issues in today'. It is a key task for the working class and the semi-colonial world to organise a struggle

against imperialism which is nothing more than capitalism at its highest stage. That's why the question how likely an attack against Iran will occur is just a secondary question. Revolutionary organisations have to arm the working class and the semi-colonial world resisting imperialism with an ideology and an organisation that is capable of organise a fight back against the threats of imperialism today, tomorrow and in the future and independent of the question whether Iran is attacked in five weeks, five months or five years.

Nevertheless it is very important to increase the propaganda and the concrete actions against the threat of another war in the Gulf region. The working class movements of all countries have to take steps to establish international structures that can organise a massive fight-back in the case of an attack and therefore take the threats of Israel and the US seriously. Also if no attack it is essential to organise resistance against the threat of imposing another round of stricter sanctions.

For being able to fulfil these tasks three things will be essential:

Firstly the anti-war-movement has to draw the lessons from the errors it made during the protests against the war in Iraq in 2002-03. Then it would have been possible to thwart the plans of US-imperialism, thus making a qualitative breakthrough in the struggle against the rule of international capital. The most important of these lessons can be summed up in a short formula: Without a revolutionary leadership, that is ready to look beyond the limits of a capitalist logic, is willing to undermine the economic basis for leading such a war via mass-demonstrations, general strikes and actual sabotage-actions, it will not be able to defeat wars or imperialist aggressions in general. Or to put it in other words: Without a programme, that combines the different concrete struggles with a struggle for overthrowing capitalism through a socialist revolution such movements won't win long lasting victories. It is vital to equip the working class with this weapon be it during struggles in the workplaces, be it the struggle for democratic rights or be it the struggle against imperialist war and occupation. Secondly revolutionaries have to wage an ideological struggle against pacifist forces in the anti-war-movement, which just serve imperialist interests also if their demands against aggression in general seem to take a neutral standpoint. In fact they pave the way for imperialism by denying the right of resistance-movements to fight back "by any means necessary." This also means that the anti-war-movement has to support the resistance of semi-colonial countries even if we don't support the political line of different petty-bourgeois forces but will argue strongly against their political leadership and will ensure an independent organisation of the working class forces.

Thirdly there have to be discussions between different progressive forces inside the movement around concrete demands against the results of capitalism like war, mass poverty and racism and combine this with a concrete practical perspective. Especially in Europe we can observe that the questions after the right strategy for how to overcome capitalism are posed. New parties and initiatives, to the left of the traditional social-democratic parties, came into existence and gave this search for new alternatives a concrete expression. Leaving aside the fact, that most of these parties like Rifondazione Comunista in Italy or Die Linke in Germany proved only too willing to implement the neoliberal agenda when they come to power, these projects stood for a development of the consciousness of large parts of working class to the left. Revolutionaries mustn't ignore such developments, but rather try to win these initiatives to a revolutionary programme. But not only in Europe things are developing in an interesting way. In the semi-colonial world massive struggles erupted as a result of the huge increase of food prices, or around democratic demands.

All these things culminate in the question how the concept of permanent revolution 60 years after the foundation of the Fourth International and its degeneration at the beginning of the 1950s can be implemented today. Questions like what kind of relationship the working class should have towards struggles based on petty-bourgeois forces, how an international perspective for the class struggle should look like and what elements a transitional program should contain in today's situation are key to develop a strategy for the poor and oppressed. The League for the Fifth International participated in various struggles against war, racism, social cuts or the capitalist system as a whole and generalised it's experience in the program From Protest to Power. We call on all forces that take an active part in today's struggle from a working class perspective to join us in fighting to build a new world party of socialist revolution on the basis of this program that actively engages in the struggles with the aim of overthrowing capitalism and building an international

socialist system.

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