



Iran's nuclear weapons programme: seeking a pretext for the next big oil robbery.

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The release of a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Tuesday 23 August found no evidence that Iran has been working on a secret nuclear weapons programme. The report was commissioned after traces of enriched uranium were found in equipment at Iran's nuclear facilities two years ago. Iran's claim that the uranium samples came from contaminated equipment bought second-hand from Pakistan has been vindicated.

The US government was hoping for proof that the Iranians had already embarked upon a secret enrichment programme, thus enabling it to step up pressure on other Security Council members to impose UN sanctions, the first step towards a further military operation. Only ten days before the report's release Bush made it clear he had not ruled out the use of force against Iran if it was proved that it was pursuing a nuclear weapons programme.

It is therefore scarcely any surprise the US state department dismissed the IAEA report saying that it did nothing to reduce their concern at Iran's nuclear programme. In short it needs exactly the same sort of proof it had for Saddam's weapons of mass destruction? bogus proof that satisfies Bush himself and maybe his British poodle.

The US and Britain keep accusing Iran of violating the 1968 the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty ? signed between China, USA, USSR, Britain and France. Under the treaty the then nuclear powers were allowed to keep their nuclear weapons but were prevented from giving the technology to other countries.

The treaty also allowed other countries to develop nuclear power for 'peaceful purposes', i.e. power generation, as long as they agreed to be inspected by the IAEA. Israel, Pakistan and India who have all acquired nuclear weapons since, have refused to sign the treaty. North Korea has withdrawn from the treaty claiming that it now possesses nuclear weapons too. Naturally the USA has not suggested UN sanctions against Israel, Pakistan or India. And when North Korea made its announcement the US threats against it were toned down immediately. The lesson ? the possession of nuclear weapons is about the only guarantee there is of not being threatened with attack.

No wonder there is great temptations for a country? especially if it has huge oil reserves that Halliburton, or Exxon, or Texaco-Chevron have fixed their beady eyes on ? to get itself a nuclear deterrent.

Iran naturally maintains that it is only developing a nuclear power programme. Certainly Russian technicians are currently helping to build Iran's first nuclear reactor at Bushehr. At the centre of the dispute with the IAEA is a uranium enrichment plant near the city of Isfahan. The plant processes 'yellow cake', i.e. uranium ore, into fuel that can be used in nuclear power plants. All the western powers would like to see the plant shut, claiming it could also be used to enrich the uranium one stage further, making it usable in a nuclear bomb.

In September 2004 the IAEA passed a resolution setting a November deadline for Iran to suspend uranium enrichment. Iran rejected the call but later agreed to do so in exchange for trade concessions with the EU. Talks then began in January of this year between Iran and the EU (Britain, France and Germany) over the permanent suspension of Iran's enrichment. However the election of a 'hardliner', Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to the Iranian presidency on August 3, 2005, led to a speedy break down of talks and on the 8th of August Iran resumed work at its enrichment facility.

The EU leaders France and Germany had hoped for the election of a 'moderate' -Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani who

would agree to abandon the nuclear programme thus depriving Bush of any pretext for a grab at Iran's oil too, leaving the field open for 'peaceful' European exploitation of the country. In fact the terms the 'moderate' and 'hardliner' mean only more or less willing to do the imperialist powers' bidding. Keeping Iran weak and vulnerable is crucial to preserving control over the regions oil, since the arrival on the Middle Eastern scene of a Muslim nuclear power might encourage the other states to defy the orders emanating from Washington.

Whether or not the UN Security Council can be coerced into impose the threatened sanctions on Iran whilst the USA is bogged down in Iraq is still open to doubt. Russia, which is a key supplier of Iran nuclear programme, could veto any Security Council decision.

The imperialist role in Iran, like the rest of the Middle East continues a long record oppression and bloodshed. In 1953, US and British intelligence services helped Iranian military officers to depose the Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadeq, a leading exponent of nationalising the oil industry. They re-installed the hated Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who proceeded to torture and murder his own people over a quarter of a century until a mass popular insurrection drove him into exile in 1979.

A year later Saddam Hussein, encouraged, armed and backed by the US and Britain, launched an eight year war between Iran and Iraq from 1980-88 which claimed the lives of millions on both sides of the conflict. This terrible bloody conflict served a useful purpose for the western powers; to prevent the development of either Iran or Iraq as a strong and independent power. They feared that this would undermine their puppet regimes in the region ' Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt' or their gendarme (Israel) which acts as a wedge driven into the Arab and Muslim world, fracturing and weakening it.

The US has dubbed Iran as part of the famous 'axis of evil', accused of sponsoring terrorism. Recently the Pentagon is reported to be updating its battle plans for an invasion of Iran. Of course this would be sheer lunacy as long as its embroilment in Iraq continues but a preemptive bombing of Iran's nuclear research facilities is far from impossible.

Against this background, it would not come as a surprise if Iran were seeking to develop a nuclear bomb as quickly as possible. If the US were able to provide even minimally credible evidence of this the EU would undoubtedly cave in to US demands both to impose sanction and to tolerate US pre-emptive strikes.

Any intervention in Iran by the imperialists or via their local gendarme, Israel must be condemned and fought by all anti-imperialists. The right of Iran to defend itself, including by the possession of a nuclear bomb, must be defended. The possession of these weapons by the imperialists and their Israeli ally is infinitely more dangerous to humanity than their development by countries such as Iran.

After all, as the recent commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have just been reminded us, the USA is the only country to have used nuclear weapons, twice against a totally defenceless civilian population, an atrocity for which they never apologised or paid compensation to the victims.

However the best protection against the horror of a nuclear war is a powerful movement in the countries exploited by imperialism, and in the imperialist countries themselves, to end the occupation and plunder of the former and drive from power the Bushes and Blairs' in short the world socialist revolution.

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