



US increases the pressure on Iran as a prelude to war

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A US Senate resolution designating Iran's Revolutionary Guard a 'terrorist organisation' and imposing sanctions on companies that do business with it underlines the White House's drive to a military strike on Iran. This measure will affect European companies doing business in Iran, and so puts pressure on France, Germany and Russia to choose sides in George W Bush's latest adventure in the 'War on Terror'.

The pretext for a strike, as with Iraq, will be 'weapons of mass destruction', meaning Iran's controversial nuclear energy programme. Despite the efforts of the European imperialist powers to resolve this diplomatically, and the dismissal of Iran's nuclear weapons capacity by international observers, Iran has been targeted with sanctions and military threats. While Bush has avoided advocating 'regime change', Tony Blair's recent US speech comparing Iran's regime, with its sponsorship of 'terrorism', to the threat posed to Europe by Hitler's Germany, demonstrates the thinking of one of his key allies.

In fact, a strike on Iran has become a strategic necessity for US imperialism, something that unites 'neo-con' hawks with more 'pragmatic' voices like Democrat presidential hopefuls Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. The only debate now is over how to deal with Iran. Vice President Dick Cheney favours a military strike before the end of the Bush administration, while State Secretary Condoleezza Rice prefers the semblance of a multilateral approach.

The context is the failure of the occupation of Iraq to create a stable pro-US regime. This goes alongside the likely withdrawal or redeployment of US forces, and growing problems for the US-British occupation of Afghanistan. With oil around \$93 per barrel, the pressure on the world economy, and US imperialism's consequent dependence on its Arab allies, is becoming intolerable.

This alarm has spread across the Middle East, with Bush's Jordanian, Egyptian and Saudi allies panicking over the threat posed by a 'Shia Crescent', constituting the Iranian regime, the Shia insurgency in Iraq, and Iran's regional allies Syria and the Lebanese Hizballah. Iran is also blamed for supporting the Hamas administration in Gaza.

President Bush needs to cut Iran down to size before any major change of US policy in Iraq, to prevent Iran benefiting from a situation, which has seen it emerge as the strongest regional power after Israel. This began with the removal of Saddam Hussein, whose 'containment' of Iranian power was behind US support for him in the 1980s and US toleration of his regime's existence in the 1990s.

The failure of Israel's 33 day bombardment of Lebanon last summer damaged Israel's regional prestige. It also strengthened Hizballah, reversing the hopes expressed by Bush and Blair that Lebanon's 'Cedar Revolution', which led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops after a 30-year presence, would allow for Lebanon's evolution into a pro-Western 'democracy', able to act as a buffer state between Israel and a recalcitrant Syria, and capable of signing a separate peace with the Zionist state.

Naturally, the drive to war against Iran therefore has regional symptoms. In Iraq, this has taken the form of the much-vaunted 'surge', directed mainly at Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr's 'Mehdi Army', coupled with attempts at reconciliation with former Sunni insurgents, and US pressure on Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki to reduce his government's dependence on pro-Iranian factions.

Lebanon has seen a crisis over the successor to pro-Syrian president Emile Lahoud, with rival factions arming in

preparation, and supporters of pro-US prime minister Fouad Siniora accusing Syria and Hizballah of being behind the assassination of pro-government political figures.

Israel's recent air strike on a 'suspected nuclear site' in the north of Syria near the Turkish border signals Israel's preparedness to use its military strength against Iran's allies in the event of US action against Iran. The peace talks with the corrupt Fatah leaders in the West Bank are of crucial importance to Israel now; they must tame the Palestinians there in order to concentrate again on Hizballah and Iran later.

Bush's willingness to alienate Turkey, a key regional ally, to preserve support for the US occupation of Iraq by the Kurdish nationalist parties, shows how serious the situation is. The US's refusal to support Turkish attempts to suppress Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) separatists operating near the Iraqi-Turkish border is pushing Turkey and Iran closer together.

Repercussions

US policy is therefore in a bind. Striking Iran could destabilise Iraq and the whole region. On the other hand, not striking could lead to a slow and painful defeat for the neo-conservative project of re-dividing and dominating the Middle East. While it is easy to pin the blame for this on the unhinged views of 'hawks' within the Bush administration, it is driven by the objective interests of US capitalism and its multinational corporations. Pacifist appeals to logic and reason will not prevent war any more than they did with Iraq. Only a class-based struggle against capitalism at home and imperialism abroad will do that.

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