

US pushes through tough IAEA resolution targeting Iran

By Peter Symonds
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After lengthy and bitter wrangling, the US administration last week forced its European counterparts to accept an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution on Iran's nuclear industry that provides the framework for tough punitive measures against Tehran.

During the week-long negotiations, Washington demanded that the UN Security Council be asked to consider action against Iran for its alleged breaches of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. US officials flatly rejected two European drafts of the IAEA resolution as being too soft and insisted that "a trigger" for further measures be included.

The final resolution stopped short of calling for immediate UN involvement and welcomed the steps taken by Iran, under pressure from the European powers, to suspend its uranium enrichment program and agree to unrestricted inspections of any facility without advance notice. However, these concessions to France and Germany do no more than institute a delay for several months.

The document provided the essential "trigger" that the Bush administration wanted. It "strongly deplored" Iran's alleged past breaches of obligations set down by the IAEA, imposed a "particularly robust verification system" (that is, unrestricted and intrusive inspections with no advance notice) and warned that the IAEA would consider "all options at disposal" if "further serious Iranian failures come to light".

IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei is due to produce another report on Iran's nuclear facilities by February. But the IAEA board could meet even earlier if "serious failures" are brought to light. As a result, the resolution provides ample scope for the Bush administration to discover or invent pretexts for the trigger clause to be applied. US officials told the media privately that they expected further disclosures of hidden nuclear activity in Iran.

As in the case of Iraq, the US is demanding that Iran prove the impossible: that nowhere in its extensive territory is it developing the capacity to produce nuclear weapons. Tehran's willingness to open up its acknowledged nuclear facilities is invariably followed by demands for further inspections at other sites. Every "breach" of the IAEA protocols is seized upon as "proof" that Iran is rapidly advancing towards building nuclear weapons.

Iran has consistently denied having any nuclear weapons program, insisting that its facilities are part of plans to construct a nuclear power reactor at the port city of Bushehr. ElBaradei produced a report in October outlining Iran's breaches of the Non-Proliferation Treaty but concluded that there was "no evidence" of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. Iran admitted to producing small quantities of enriched uranium and plutonium—far less than needed for the manufacture of nuclear bombs—maintaining that the materials were for peaceful purposes.

US officials angrily rejected the report's conclusion and demanded that the IAEA declare Tehran in "non-compliance"—a step that would allow the UN Security Council to authorise economic or military action against Iran. Again, as with Iraq, the US claims rest on unsupported supposition rather than evidence. Washington has refused to accept Iran's nuclear power program as legitimate, arguing that Iran does not need nuclear power when it has oil. One of the reasons for the secrecy surrounding Iran's nuclear facilities is that the US has for two decades tried to block any transfer of technology to Iran and is pressuring Russia to abandon its involvement in the construction of the Bushehr reactor.

The deliberations at the IAEA meeting were completely cynical on all sides. The major countries present, including Germany and France, were all complicit in the UN resolutions on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass

destruction that were the pretext for the illegal US-led invasion of that country. Nine months later, the US has failed to produce any evidence of biological, chemical or nuclear weapons capabilities in Iraq. Yet, Washington's previous lies about Iraq are politely ignored by the European powers and the international media, even as the Bush administration prepares new provocations against Iran.

Based on the fate of neighbouring Iraq, Tehran could justifiably conclude that it will confront US aggression, regardless of any steps to demonstrate it has no nuclear weapons program. Bush branded Iran last year as part of an "axis of evil" along with Iraq and North Korea. The *World Socialist Web Site* gives no political support whatsoever to the rightwing theocratic regime in Tehran. But Iran, an economically backward country of 65 million people, has every right to arm itself, by any available means, against the threat of military aggression by US imperialism or its surrogates.

Washington's denunciations of Iran for failing to abide by the Non-Proliferation Treaty are utterly hypocritical. Not only does the US retain the world's largest arsenal of nuclear weapons but its closest ally in the Middle East—Israel—has a substantial stockpile of nuclear arms, has refused to sign the treaty and has openly flouted UN and IAEA resolutions calling for its disarmament. Following the latest IAEA meeting, senior Israeli leaders hinted that Israel might consider taking preemptive military action against Iran in order to preserve its nuclear monopoly in the region.

Like Iraq, Washington's underlying motives for intensifying the pressure on Iran have nothing to do with its nuclear weapons potential. The US is targeting Iran as a means of asserting its dominance over a country that has extensive oil reserves and is strategically located at the juncture of the Middle East and Central Asia. The most rightwing sections of the Republican Party and the Bush administration have been pressing for "regime change" in Iran to become official US policy.

The US campaign is directed as much against its European rivals as it is against Iran. While the US has maintained economic sanctions against Iran for the past two decades, other countries including France, Germany and Britain have reached an accommodation with Tehran and secured a series of lucrative trade and investment deals. Washington is exploiting the threat of action over Iran's nuclear program as a means for cutting across these economic relations and asserting its own hegemony in the region.

A comment published last week by the Heritage Foundation, a rightwing US thinktank, points to the rancorous discussions taking place in American ruling circles. Commentator Peter Brooks began by accusing the European Union of putting \$8 billion a year in trade before "principle" and concluded by demanding that the EU fall into line behind the US. "If Iran has, indeed, decided to come clean on its 'peaceful' (ha!) nuclear program, sanctions and other confrontational moves may not be required—over this issue. But even so, Iran's trading partners should stop closing their eyes to the deeds that commerce with Iran is supporting, and adjust accordingly."

The comments underscore the fact that the latest IAEA resolution has resolved nothing. The most militarist sections of the US ruling class are intent on a confrontation with Iran—if not on the nuclear issue then on some other—as a means of forcing their major power rivals to accept US preeminence. There has been no let up in the stream of US accusations and warnings against Iran.

Just one week after the IAEA meeting, the international media was already highlighting comments from unnamed officials over Iran's "failure" to sign an additional protocol permitting intrusive inspections of its facilities. An Associated Press report relayed the remarks of "a Western diplomat" suggesting that Iran was stalling and that the US and other countries were "waiting impatiently" for Iran to sign.

In a speech on Tuesday, US Undersecretary of State John Bolton set the tone. Bolton, who is closely aligned to extreme rightwing civilian officials in the Pentagon, bluntly declared that Iran's nuclear capabilities "makes sense only as a part of a nuclear weapons program". The real issue, he said, was whether the IAEA Board of Governors was prepared to act against Iran. While declaring that the US was prepared to seek diplomatic solutions whenever possible, he warned that Washington was "also willing to deploy more robust techniques such as the interdiction and seizure of illicit goods".

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