

Washington continues propaganda barrage against Iran

By Peter Symonds
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As it prepares for a diplomatic offensive against Iran at the UN next month, the Bush administration is maintaining a steady barrage of threats and propaganda—in particular, over so-called Iranian “interference” in US-occupied Iraq and Tehran’s alleged nuclear weapons programs.

Last week, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* reported that the White House intends to announce to the UN General Assembly its decision to brand the entire Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRG) as a “specially designated global terrorist” organisation. Criminalising the IRG, a major component of Iran’s armed forces, would not only intensify diplomatic pressure on Tehran, but provide a convenient pretext for military strikes against Iran.

Since the beginning of the year, the US military has steadily escalated its allegations of Iranian “meddling” in Iraq, variously accusing Tehran of supplying arms, training and even directing Shiite militia in attacks on American troops. Last week, Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, the no 2 commander in Iraq, claimed that Iranian-backed Shiite groups were now responsible for half the attacks in Iraq, compared to 30 percent in January.

Such accusations rely on bald assertion, rather than evidence. The only “proof” made public by the US military has consisted of displays of Iranian-made weapons. Of course, the staggering hypocrisy involved in accusing Iran of “interfering” while the US military has laid waste to much of Iraq in the course of its criminal four-year occupation of the country is passed over without comment in the American and international media.

Last Sunday, Major General Rick Lynch, who commands US operations south of Baghdad, added a further allegation to the list—not only were Iraqi militiamen receiving instruction inside Iran, but 50 IRG members were training Shiite militias inside Iraq itself. “They are facilitating training of Shiite extremists. We know they’re here and we target them as well,” he said.

In a performance that would be laughable if the implications were not so serious, Lynch offered no evidence. Despite the fact that his troops were targeting these 50

Iranians, the general admitted to reporters in Baghdad that no Iranians had been captured in his area of command nor any illegal weapons found in two months of patrolling 125 miles of the Iran-Iraq border. But he knew the IRG members were present by the increasing accuracy of insurgent mortars and the growing number of sophisticated roadside bombs.

The *Washington Post* seized on Lynch’s comments in an editorial on Tuesday entitled “Tougher on Iran: The Revolutionary Guard is at war with the United States. Why not fight back”. Far from urging caution, the newspaper was critical of the Bush administration for not contemplating tougher measures than branding the IRG a terrorist organisation. “This seems to be the least the United States should be doing, given the soaring number of Iranian-sponsored bomb attacks in Iraq,” the editorial declared.

Dismissing critics who warn that such a designation contradicted tentative Iranian-US talks in Baghdad, the editorial continued: “Yet that contradiction, if it exists, seems puny compared with that of a regime that participates in those discussions while escalating its surrogate war against American troops. If Iran chooses to fight as well as talk, the United States should not shrink from fighting back with all the economic weapons it can muster.” While the *Washington Post* hesitated to spell it out, the same logic would justify a US military attack on IRG bases inside Iran.

The propaganda build-up for a potential assault on Iran is unmistakable. The method recalls the lies about weapons of mass destruction used to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Unsubstantiated claims about “Iranian-backed militias killing US troops” are repeated, recycled, distorted and embellished by the media to the point where they are simply declared to be fact. Given the tempo of developments, it would be hardly surprising if the Bush administration presented an Iraq-style “dossier” on Iran to the UN next month as the basis for a new round of US demands and threats.

The White House has clearly ruled out any negotiated end to the confrontation with Tehran. The three rounds of the

talks held between the US and Iranian ambassadors in Baghdad have produced no easing of tensions. Iranian offers to assist the US occupation of Iraq have been answered by ultimatums and condemnations of Tehran's "failure to modify its behaviour".

On Monday, Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns told the media, "We are going to judge the Iranians based on whether or not they do the right thing, which will be to fight against the terrorist groups that are in Iraq, including the Shiite terrorist groups that are attacking both the Iraqi Army as well as American soldiers and others." What he meant by "fight against", Burns did not bother to explain, but the comment is revealing. The US is not simply seeking an end to alleged IRG arms supplies and training, but demanding Tehran's active involvement in suppressing the legitimate opposition of the Shiite masses to the US occupation.

In a comment in last week's *Time* magazine, former CIA field officer Robert Baer bluntly warned: "Reports that the Bush administration will put Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on the terrorism list can be read in one of two ways: it's either more bluster or, ominously, a wind-up for a strike on Iran. Officials I talk to in Washington vote for a hit on the IRGC, maybe within six months. And they think that as long as we have bombers and missiles in the air, we will hit Iran's nuclear facilities. An awe and shock campaign, lite, if you will."

Baer's remarks point to the second front of Washington's propaganda war: Iran's nuclear programs. Without offering conclusive evidence, US continues to insist that Tehran is seeking to build nuclear weapons and demands that Iran shut down its uranium enrichment facilities and cease construction of a heavy water research reactor. Iran insists its programs are for peaceful purposes and that it is within its rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to develop all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle.

In an effort to deal with outstanding issues, Iran met with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials this week. An accord was announced on Tuesday that IAEA deputy director Olli Heinonen hailed as "a milestone" in clarifying aspects of Iran's nuclear programs. The agreement included putting further UN penalties on hold. US officials immediately criticised the deal as limited and effectively scuttled its implementation by insisting that Washington would continue to demand a new round of tougher sanctions in the UN Security Council next month.

In his comments on Monday, Burns derided the IAEA's efforts, declaring: "I think it is obvious what the Iranians are up to. It's totally transparent. They have this dalliance with the IAEA right now... So now you have the Iranians, and even some other people in the IAEA system saying, well as long as the IAEA is talking to Iran about questions they

haven't answered for the last couple of years, we shouldn't sanction [them] in the United National Security Council. That is absolutely unacceptable logic."

What is perfectly plain is that there is absolutely nothing that the Iranian regime can do—short of complete capitulation to a never-ending stream of US demands—that would end the confrontation over its nuclear programs and its alleged "meddling" in Iraq. The Bush administration's so-called diplomacy consists of pressuring the other major powers into backing an escalating campaign of punitive measures aimed at crippling the Iranian economy and paving the way for war.

Burns foreshadowed that the Bush administration would adopt "harder-edged, tougher diplomacy" in the UN in dealing with what he described as "the most radical and dangerous government in the Middle East". Referring to Iran's nuclear programs, he said: "This is going to be a major issue in the month of September at the UN Security Council. We intend to push it very, very hard."

Burns also spelled out that such "diplomacy" would not go on forever. "We still have some time to make diplomacy successful," he declared. "But President Bush has been very clear, and many senior members of both parties of the Congress have also been clear: the United States ultimately has a variety of options... we've never taken the military option off the table."

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