# Iran in US cross-hairs?

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**By Karamatullah K. Ghori**

THAT the current political turmoil in Iran has come quick on the heels of US 'triumph' in Iraq is not surprising at all. Iran, after all, is lumped with Iraq on George W. Bush's list of "evil states".

To the war lobby holding Washington in its thrall the blitz against Iraq was never meant to be an end in itself but rather the means to an end. 'The end' swaying the heads of the hawks and neo-cons is total subjugation of the region around Israel, for that alone would guarantee Israeli regional hegemony as the principal satrap of *Pax Americana* in the world's richest oil producing area. A US umbrella over the region would shelter myriad interests — those of Israel, Pentagon and the military-industrial complex, and, not least, the core oil cartel with a near-chokehold over the Bush administration.

The proponents of the 'American century' occupying key positions in Washington believe that they have every right to contrive a 'situation', where none may exist, in a target country if that is warranted by US or Israeli concerns and interests, in order to pave the way for military action. In the first of the Bush wars — in Afghanistan — there arose no need to contrive because 9/11 served that country on a platter to Pentagon. In the second such war — against Iraq — it was more a case of doctoring and tailoring shady evidence because the presence of Saddam at the head of Iraq was in itself the biggest 'legitimacy' for unilateral action, besides the much-touted WMDs. It is a different matter though that both have remained elusive and hard to pin down since the fall of Baghdad three months ago.

But in the case of Iran, even that basic task of contriving a situation of convenience is proving daunting for the Washington warmongers.

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Unlike Iraq's Saddam there is no hated bogey man in Iran to be exploited by American propaganda and psy-war experts. Likewise, the effort to paint Iran as another nerve centre for WMDs threatening neighbours and US clients has so far proved to be a damp squib.

In the glow of victory in Iraq, the American propaganda machinery, ably abetted by a cowed American mass media, tried to make a lot of noise about Iran's alleged nuclear 'ambitions' but the clamour did not pass the muster.

For one, IAEA — the Vienna-based UN nuclear watch-dog-has no smoking gun against Tehran and is not inclined to be dictated by Washington on the issue. The Bush administration's 'pox-on-your house' attitude vis-a-vis UN and its agencies has created a credibility gulf which will be hard to fill for perhaps years to come. The scorn and contempt unabashedly heaped on august bodies like UNMOVIC has left no trust in UN agencies about the Bush administration's policies. Matters are not being helped one bit by continued hostility from Washington to UN agencies in their desire to lend a helping hand in Iraq's rebuilding. Even badly needed humanitarian assistance is being shunned by Iraq's occupiers only because of their allergy to UN.

For another, the occupiers' dismal failure to find any shred of evidence that Saddam was engaged in a programme of WMDs — their development or production — is causing so much embarrassment to Washington as to steal all thunder from its anti-Iranian propaganda tirade. Instead, there is by now a mountain of evidence to prove the allegation that Bush and Blair cooked their own 'intelligence' — a real witches' broth at that — to have an alibi for their war against Iraq. Now that the chickens are coming home to roost, their spurious intelligence is posing a serious threat to the political viability of both Bush and Blair on either side of the Atlantic.

Realising that their vicious effort to paint Iran culpable on WMDs may not stick, the Bush hawks have tried to shift gears and focus, instead, on the student agitations in Tehran. Vociferous expectations have been articulated in the establishment media that the Iranian regime may implode under the weight of its youths' unrest, thus relieving Washington of any need to mount an Iraq-like operation for regime change. But there too, Washington's ambitions are obviously unwarranted and grossly inflated.

There is no denying that the Iranian youths are greatly frustrated. They have no memory of the Shah's oppressive rule — 70 % of the Iranians are under 30 and half were born after the 1979 Islamic revolution — and want freedoms denied to them by unelected mullahs. Their political agenda was tied with the reformist President Khatemi — a populist leader and a hero to the Iranian youths — whose own freedom to act has been stymied and circumscribed by a trenchant orthodox clergy backlash. Khatemi's liberalism is anathema to them. But even the disgruntled Iranian youth is not ready to swallow the American bait — hook, line and sinker. Washington might think that the world's memory is short but the Iranians, even those with no direct memory of it, have not forgotten the 1953 CIA conspiracy which subverted the populist Mossadeq government and brought the discredited Shah back from his Roman exile to unleash another quarter century of terror on his people. They have no stomach for another stab in their back by the Americans.

Washington warmongers might think that the iron is hot in Iran to strike a mortal blow at the regime of the mullahs. So CIA generously doled out funds to the Iranian Royalists ensconced in Los Angeles to launch a satellite-based TV propaganda channel beamed at Iran.

However, these crude tactics to meddle in the Iranian affairs have already backfired. The insipid Royalist propaganda has been a kiss of death for the student protests in Tehran. July 9 was expected by Iran-watchers in America to be a D-Day for massive student protests in Tehran. The day was expected to mark the 4th anniversary of student protests triggered by the closure of a reformist newspaper in Tehran. But it passed off without much murmur or a major incident. No Iranian youth movement would like to be identified with the Royalists or their pay-masters in Washington and act on their bidding.

Unwittingly, Washington's lack of understanding of the Iranian domestic situation may have already given a further lease of life to the clerical rule in Iran. The warmongers baying for Iranian blood — Israel's Ariel Sharon wanted Bush to rush his tanks toward Tehran the moment he was done with Iraq — have done a service to the stalwarts of status quo in Iran by exposing their incompetence and lack of vision so thoroughly in their occupied Iraq.

History, in fact, may be repeating itself in relation to Iran and Iraq in a very short span of two decades.

In 1980, the Iranian revolution in its infancy was given a hefty boost by Saddam Hussain's unprovoked aggression against Iran that triggered the wasteful 8-year war between them. That war was a product of Washington's fertile imagination which prodded Saddam to strike at an Iran in the teething throes of its revolution. It only ended making the revolution impregnable.

Twenty-three years later, Washington finds itself bogged down up to its chin in the quagmire of occupied Iraq. With his back to the wall, Bush does no longer have the freedom to act against Iran as recklessly as he did in Iraq. His standing with the American people, who earlier gave him a free hand, is on a slippery slope. He could well end up the way Bush the Elder did after his own 'victory' in the Gulf War. All it needs is a determined backlash from the Democrats to turn the screws on Bush in the impending 2004 race for his debacle in Iraq. Ranking Senator Edward Kennedy has already fired the first salvo by calling Bush's Iraq policy " bankrupt."

But the neo-cons advising Bush have no election to face, and they are a dangerously Quixotic bunch of people with their imperialistic agenda still simmering on the front burner. They might still succeed in impelling Bush to stir the pot and have a go at Iran's alleged nuclear weapons programme the way Israel did against Saddam's in 1981 in a lightning aerial strike. They think their beach-head in Iraq can still be put to good use against Iran. They have already amply manifested their contempt for international law, UN and international public opinion. In George W. Bush they have a trump card which they would be anxious to use before their time is up at Washington's poker table.

The best hope the Iranians have is that Washington's mis-adventure in Iraq becomes so cost-exacting for Bush that he would take fright at any reprise of it in Iran or elsewhere in the region. Bush's increasing vulnerability at home is Iran's best insurance against another Bush war. ■

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