

Nuclear J...

US nuclear h



By Frida Berrigan

The Bush administration's increased military spending and plans to modernise its nuclear arsenal reflect nuclear hypocrisy and make any resolution of the conflict with Iran all the more difficult

THE Bush administration is very focused these days on Iran's nuclear programme. This focus has only sharpened in the aftermath of the International Atomic Energy Agency's recent report that Iran continues to enrich uranium in defiance of a UN Security Council demand.

"A nuclear-armed Iran is not a very pleasant prospect for anybody to think about," Vice President Dick Cheney told ABC News' Jonathan Karl in Australia. "It clearly could do significant damage. And so I think we need to continue to do everything we can to make certain they don't achieve

that objective." Asked if the administration would continue to pursue diplomacy, the vice president responded that while "we've been working with the EU and going through the United Nations with sanctions the President has also made it clear that we haven't taken any options off the table."

In the White House, "options on the table" is code for military action. There have been many media reports of US preparations to attack Iran. But the primary rationale for such an attack - to prevent Iran from going nuclear - is deeply problematic. Not only is the United States beefing up its military in general, it is even planning a modernisation of its nuclear arsenal. The nuclear hypocrisy of the Bush administration makes any resolution of the conflict with Iran all the more difficult.

US military spending: The new round of hand-wringing and sabre-rattling about Iran's nascent but worrisome nuclear programme comes just a few weeks after the Bush administration announced its new budget, which included billions for nuclear weapons development. The Department of Energy's "weapons activities" budget request totals \$6.4 billion, a drop in the bucket compared to the Pentagon's \$481.4 billion proposed budget. But the budget for new nukes is large and growing - even in comparison to Cold

War figures.

During the Cold War, spending on nuclear weapons averaged \$4.2 billion a year (in current dollars). Almost two decades after the nuclear animosity between the two great superpowers ended, the United States is spending one-and-a-half times the Cold War average on nuclear weapons.

In 2001, the weapons-activities budget of the Department of Energy

The US' 'Complex 2030' programme, development, and production of underground nuclear testing facilities, hundreds of new plutonium production reactors. These plans directly contribute towards generating

(DOE), which oversees the nuclear weapons complex through the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), totaled \$5.19 billion. Since President Bush's January 2002 "Nuclear Posture Review" asserted the urgent need for a "revitalised nuclear weapons complex" - "to design, develop, manufacture, and certify new warheads in response to new national requirements; and maintain

n
tes
a
sp
lic
"d
nu
cia
ma
ba
sh

Str
ba

da
nu
NN
nar
abl
cer
gen
the
wh

Hypocrisy and Iran

readiness to resume underground testing" - there has been more than a billion-dollar jump in nuclear spending. Included in the \$6.4 billion 2008 request is money for "design concept testing" of two new nuclear warhead designs that officials hope will be deployed on submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles - even as US warships set their helms towards the

and disassembled.

How costly? The DOE estimates that Complex 2030 would require a capital investment of \$150 billion. But the Government Accountability Office says that is way too low to fund even the basic maintenance of the eight nuclear facilities currently operational throughout the country.

Why illegal? Complex 2030 promises a return to the Cold War

international consensus on the illegality and immorality of nuclear weapons is a new incentive and justification for other nations to pursue and brandish nuclear weapons. In a 2006 report, the independent "Weapons of Mass Destruction" Commission estimated the dark likelihood of ten new nuclear powers within a decade. At the end of January, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists advanced the hand of its Doomsday clock to five minutes to nuclear midnight, in part as a result of "renewed US emphasis on the military utility of nuclear weapons."

As the United States surges forward in its nuclear renaissance, the threat of nuclear terrorism and accidental nuclear strikes remains a grave yet under-funded priority. The administration occasionally raises the spectre of nuclear-armed terrorists. In February 2004, for example, President Bush warned, "In the hands of terrorists, weapons of mass destruction would be a first resort." Despite its rhetoric, however, the administration has done nothing to accelerate efforts to destroy and safeguard loose nuclear weapons and bomb-making materials, allocating about \$1 billion a year to these crucial non-proliferation efforts (roughly the same amount that the Bush administration has been burning

0' promises a return to the Cold War cycle of design, production of nuclear weapons, runs the risk of a return to testing, and could require the annual manufacture of plutonium pits - the fissile 'heart' of a nuclear weapon. contradict US treaty promises in 1968 'to negotiate general and complete disarmament'

Strait of Hormuz to menace Iran back from the nuclear brink.

Costly, illegal, and dangerous: Key to revitalising nuclear weapons is Complex 2030, the NNSA's "infrastructure planning scenario for a nuclear weapons complex able to meet the threats of the 21st century." It is a costly, illegal, and dangerous programme aimed at rebuilding the 50-year-old nuclear facilities where the weapons are both assembled

cycle of design, development, and production of nuclear weapons, runs the risk of a return to underground nuclear testing, and could require the annual manufacture of hundreds of new plutonium pits - the fissile "heart" of a nuclear weapon. These plans directly contradict US treaty promises in 1968 "to negotiate towards general and complete disarmament."

How dangerous? Every step the United States takes away from the

through each day in Iraq). At this rate, it will be 13 years before Russian nuclear material is secured.

The contradictions between what the administration is demanding of Tehran and other powers, and the capabilities it is pursuing for its own arsenal, are provocative and dangerous - a pernicious form of nuclear hypocrisy.

Dick Cheney is right - a nuclear-armed Iran is not a pleasant prospect, and we have to do something. But the most effective option is the hardest to swallow. Under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the United States agreed to an "unequivocal undertaking" to "eliminate" its nuclear weapons arsenal. Honouring that commitment - and encouraging other declared and undeclared nuclear states to do the same - would undercut Tehran's arguments about why nuclear firepower is necessary. Oh, and by the way, it would also make the world feel a whole lot safer. COURTESY COUNTER PUNCH

The writer is a columnist for Foreign Policy in Focus and Senior Research Associate at the World Policy Institute's Arms Trade Resource Centre. She is the author of a number of Institute reports, most recently Weapons at War 2005: Promoting Freedom or Fuelling Conflict