



## ***US-Iran Dispute over the Nuclear Issue Heats up and Israel Gets Itself in the Middle***

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In the wake of the IAEA's Iran Resolution (see last week's issue of the *AIC Update*), US-Iran relations are heating up despite the fact that both sides are speaking softly and are avoiding inflammatory rhetoric. The US is now pursuing a policy of isolating Iran and winning the public opinion in its favor. According to Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, the US is following "a patient long-term strategy. It's to isolate Iran on this question; it's to ratchet up the international pressure on Iran; and assemble the kind of global coalition against Iran." The main targets of the US strategy are the Russian Federation and China. This week the Bush Administration asked the Russians to stop their nuclear cooperation with Iran, including the work on the Bushehr Nuclear Plant.

Iran is also trying hard to win international support but is not putting all its eggs in the European or the Eastern basket. Iran originally counted on the European Union for support, and then on China, Russia and India, in its struggle against the US. Tehran now understands that it must rely on its national power and finds ways of directly engaging with its main nemesis, the US. Accordingly, Tehran is enticing its public opinion in support of its nuclear technology while keeping its options open for direct talk with the US, whenever that becomes necessary or possible. Meanwhile, Tehran has maintained its voluntary suspension of enrichment facilities, and officials are downplaying the significance of Iran's enrichment activities, saying that they never existed to the extent that its opponents have claimed.

While the Bush and Ahmadinejad Administrations are pursuing diplomatic routes and are giving time and mediations a chance, certain neoconservative circles in Washington, and Israelis are calling for immediate military actions against Iran's nuclear sites. The most notable is the report early this week in *Al Watan*, a Saudi newspaper, claiming that during a recent visit to the US, members of Knesset Defense and Foreign Policy Committee attempted to "market one agenda: Launching a war on Iran." Knesset Member Arie Eldadm was quoted by *Al Watan* as saying that "nothing will restrain Iran aside from the use of force," adding that Theran's nuclear project will not end "unless it is convinced it will be destroyed through military force." A second Knesset member, Yosef Lapid, was even more direct: "we don't see any solution except for acting on our own."

The rush to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities makes no sense given that recent intelligent reports from the US and elsewhere indicate that Iran is years away from developing a nuclear device, if it ever decides to take that route. While Iran has said that it is not concerned about such threats, it is not taking them lightly either. For example, in response to the recent Israeli threats, Iran's Parliament Speaker, Dr. Haddad Adel, during a visit this week to Damascus, said that "if Israel ventured to attack Iran's nuclear

facilities it would incur severe retaliation.” He then reiterated his thoughts: “If Israel takes such crazy actions as attacking our nuclear facilities, we will give it an unforgettable lesson.” Talks aside, Iran has taken practical steps to defend its nuclear facilities and borders by troop and equipment movements and by deep security-administrative rearrangements in the civilian and military bureaucracies.

Certain neoconservative elements in the Bush Administration and beyond are also calling for military actions against Iran. Their power and influence in the Administration cannot be underestimated despite setbacks in Iraq and the fact that a number of them have left the Administration or are reassigned to non-policy positions. Luckily, there are also voices of reason in Washington and elsewhere calling for diplomacy and patience, and wish to return to the former policy of containment and engagement, as opposed to the tendency for regime change and military confrontation. They might be even more influential now that several scandals have marred the Conservative Party, and the Administration’s popularity has plunged in the wake of its belated response to the hurricane disasters and the lack of attention to domestic problems.

Yet, it is certain that the conflict between Iran, the US, and Israel over the nuclear issue will heat up in the coming weeks. In the absence of any peacemaking or mediation attempts in the part of the United Nations and other major players, the growing tension between the US and Iran, with Israel playing the role of a catalizer, could lead to military disasters in the near future. The next issue of the *AIC Update* will offer detail analyses of what is at stake, the dangers that await the parties if the nuclear crisis were not managed properly, and what should be done to resolve the matter peacefully. For background readings, the following articles offer information and insights on recent developments concerning Iran’s nuclear dispute. Please note that the American Iranian Council offers this material for information purpose and is not responsible for their contents.

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