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GAMING AN IRAN WAR: How Washington Plans For Aggression as Part of a Reelection Campaign

Pentagon Official Joins President's Reelection Campaign

By Danny Schechter

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When we hear that the United States government is announcing a new policy, it is usually the result of a detailed process, a calculated weighing of options and scenarios in which planners seek to calculate the likely impact and reaction to policies they are advocating.

The stepped-up anti-Iranian sanctions strategy now underway was not an off the top of the head impulsive decision, but one reached through a process of careful strategizing ---as in, if we do this, what are they likely to do?

It's just one step of an ongoing process with many stages that usually leads to armed conflict even if it is always presented as a way to reduce conflict.

Sometimes strategists seek to provoke the very responses they decry. Sometimes, they calibrate policies with allies; sometimes they undertake initiatives that are suggested or planned by allies, especially Tel-Aviv which has been promoting the crusade, at first loudly, threatening unilateral

action, but then, quietly, maneuvering Washington publicly into the lead.

And all the time, the likely human consequences, the their real goals, are obscured and concealed. (As the old saying goes: “what a web we weave when first we practice to deceive.”)

Even Nicholas Kristof, one of the most progressive columnists on the New York Times, buys Washington’s rationale/cover story at face value, without questions, backing tough sanctions as if they are not tied to a broader regime change strategy. He even admits ordinary Iranians are hurting but justifies it as part of an attempt to curb nuclear weapons development.

"I regret this suffering," Kristof writes, "and let's be clear that sanctions are hurting ordinary Iranians more than senior officials.

Yet, with apologies to the many wonderful Iranians who showered me with hospitality, I favor sanctions because I don't see any other way to pressure the regime on the nuclear issue or ease its grip on power. My takeaway is that sanctions are working pretty well.”

If they were working so well, they wouldn’t have been escalated. Kristof, like many western journalists, has had an outbreak of amnesia, if not callous blindness, forgetting how Washington often says one thing, and then does another, invoking, for example, selective concerns about human rights violations. That has been used to justify recent armed interventions in Libya and, years ago, in Iraq, where the official propaganda stressed how that war would be a “cakewalk” and bring democracy to that country. Apparently, he does not read his own newspaper.

He apparently doesn’t recall either this exchange in 2001 on CBS News with Secretary of State Madeline Albright on the impact of sanctions on Iraq. Those sanctions imposed by the Clinton Administration were justified as an “alternative” to war, not a build-up.

Journalist Lesley Stahl asked: “We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright responded: “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price--we think the price is worth it.”

In 2002, with the invasion of Baghdad still a year off, US agencies and departments were already planning the future of a post war-Iraq, to build on the sanctions they imposed there which experts concluded led to the deaths of as many as a million children. (Remember then US Secretary of State Madeline Albright telling CBS News, that that was too bad, but worth it!)

Even if their expectations and hopes were not realized—and most were not, thanks to an imperial arrogance and frequent stupidity--- it is still instructive to look back at the well-calculated process led by self-styled “defense” (sic) intellectuals.

The covert dimensions of all this scheming is still not fully understood twelve years later, but the US began by forging an integrated inter-agency strategy. They invested hundreds of hours and millions of dollars in planning an aggressive war and occupation. And then, schemed by

pretending their policy was backed by the world by building a farcical “coalition of the willing” that was their for show, not as allies with genuine input.

The best way to understand the way this strategizing operates today is to appreciate how they play these war games.

Here’s part of what a Defense Department document put forth, with great confidence,--or ‘chutzpah’, depending on your culture, of course, about what they hoped would happen then as they detailed all of their “contingencies” and “outcomes.”

“Planning in the U.S. Government for post-war Iraq was an interagency process involving officials from the Departments of Defense, State, Justice, Treasury, Energy, and Commerce; the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Central Intelligence Agency, as well as from the staffs of the National Security Council and the Office of Management and Budget.

DoD mid and senior-level planners and officials engaged in multiple planning initiatives for post-war contingencies. DoD staff in the theater and in Washington evaluated a wide-range of possible outcomes, led efforts to merge and synchronize planning from various government agencies, and shaped planning for the major combat phase of the operation to allow for the best possible post-war conditions.

Key to DoD planning for this operation was the assumption that liberating Iraq from 35 years of tyrannical rule and severe social and economic underdevelopment would be a challenging prospect.“

However “challenging,” this “prospect” clearly screwed up in the end at the cost of as many as a million Iraqi lives and trillions of dollars. A real democracy was not seeded; one authoritarian government displaced another. The country was plundered.

There is no guarantee that having failed once in Iraq, the bureaucracies that planned the pillage, won’t try again in Iran, utilizing these same templates.

We can reasonably infer that a similar coordinated task force approach is being taken in connection with war planning against Iran, which may have a similar outcome, given how little Washington seems to have learned in the interim.

In June 2012, Defense News reported,

TEL AVIV — U.S. war planners have developed “a viable contingency” for Iran that U.S. President Barack Obama will not hesitate to authorize if the military option is the only way to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons, according to a former senior Pentagon official.

In two separate addresses at a prestigious policy conference here, Michèle Flournoy, former U.S. undersecretary of defense for policy, publicly cautioned Israel against the destabilizing and

delegitimizing effects of a premature, unilateral strike on Iran.

‘Having sat in the Pentagon, I can assure you of the quality of the work that has been done. ... The military option for the president is real,’” said Flournoy, *who left the Pentagon in February and continues to advise the Obama re-election campaign.*” (emphasis mine!)

This is telling because it suggests that an attack on Iran is being gamed out as part of a re-election campaign by advisor who works in both the political and military worlds.

A President under pressure at home by adversaries and a collapsing economy seems to have become convinced that he can best run on his credentials as a unifying Commander In Chief, not a partisan politician, out to protect America against escalating rhetoric and possible attacks from Iran. (Evidence is not important; it’s the perception that matters!)

Pumping up a crisis fraught with dangers could convince even estranged supporters that it’s best to keep Obama in charge.

What this also demonstrates is how closely The US is coordinating with Israel and already assumomhg operational control of all the war planning scenarios which includes this latest wave of strengthened sanctions.

This seems to show also how all the hawkish threats of unilateral action by Israel pressured the White House to get in front of any possible confrontation. They are also threatening every nation to cut back on Iranian Oil imports or else. (e.g. Stories like this: “Wary of sanctions, Kenya cancels Iran oil deal underscore the covert pressure underway.”)

Published reports indicate that the Pentagon now has 40,000 U.S. troops positioned in the region, with two carrier strike groups deployed in the Arabian Gulf or as Iran would have it, The Persian Gulf.

Defense News explains: “Such military presence is part of a carefully timed strategy that, through the coming months, will continue to focus on a combination of increasingly crippling sanctions and diplomacy.”

So there you have it--- the admission that sanctions are being sold as just one more step in a chain that includes public diplomacy and a related orchestrated media campaign, all “carefully timed” to have a cumulative impact. “Diplomacy” in this context does not mean dialogue or negotiations. It means lining up support and building global consensus for intervention.

Iran is increasingly being put in a no-win position in the propaganda war. Every public pronouncement Tehran makes about defending itself is being characterized in the world media as aggressive in intent, arousing fears of attacks on shipping routes while justifying a US military presence that is invariably represented as there only to protect global economic interests.

Behind all the feigned benevolence is a clear threat. “Barack Obama is a president that says what he means and does what he says. ... I can assure you we do not have a policy of containment,”

says former Pentagon warrior turned campaign advisor Michèle Flournoy.

Sanctions are only a first blow a global strategy--a prelude to a stronger fistful of options that are being readied.

How will Tehran respond? Does it understand the need for a less bellicose and more savvy media counter strategy? And in the USA, are the forces opposed to another war—this time for an obvious domestic political objective---aware enough and prepared enough to try to stop it?