

Moves Toward War with Iran: Part 1

By William R. Polk

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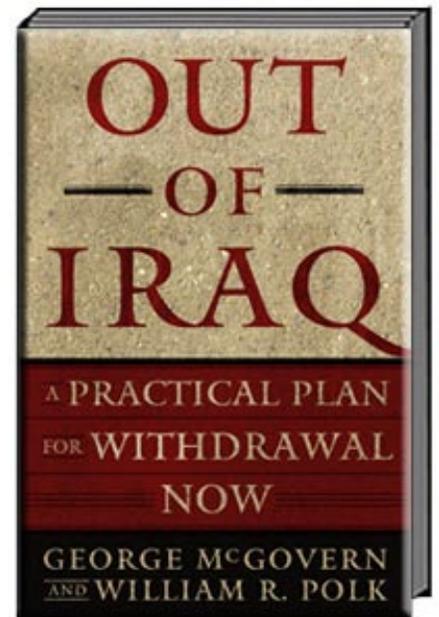
After careful study of recent moves and statements by the Bush Administration, I have concluded that there is at least a 10% chance of an American attack on Iran before the November 7 Congressional elections and about a 90% chance before the administration's end in 2008. In this and following articles I will explain that prediction, illustrate what moves are now being made to prepare for war, analyze what the results of such actions would be and, finally, discuss what alternatives America has to bring about what it wishes to achieve in Iran. I begin with the prediction.

Twelve years before he ran for the presidency, George W. Bush sought to rally the American religious fundamentalists to his father's election. He realized that about one in five Americans considered themselves part of this movement and so could be formed into a massive voting bloc. From this time also, Mr. Bush underwent a personal "rebirth" and emerged from what he described as a life-long alcoholic haze into the belief that he had a God-given role to fight off the forces of evil and prepare a new world order.

What that was to be, he only vaguely perceived, but in the following years he was guided by some of his father's old retainers including Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld to an already-formed group that came to be called the Neoconservatives. These men and women already had a plan and an objective. Young Bush eagerly adopted both and, when he was elected, appointed Cheney, Rumsfeld and Neoconservatives to key positions in his administration. These men have consistently favored military action against Middle Eastern regimes for the past seventeen years. They are still doing so.

As the heart of their doctrine, Neoconservatives took Leon Trotsky's concept of "permanent revolution" and adapted it to their own radical ideology in the guise of "permanent war." Just as Trotsky (and later Mao) saw permanent revolution, so the Neoconservatives saw what the US Defense Department now calls "the long war" as the means to destroy foreign opponents and silence domestic critics who would fear to be charged as unpatriotic. Their doctrine has been incorporated in the March 6, 2006 "National Security Strategy of the United States." Mr. Bush summarized its imperatives on March 16, 2006 thus: "We choose to deal with challenges now rather than leaving them for future generations. We fight our enemies abroad instead of waiting for them to arrive in our country. We seek to shape the world, not be merely be shaped by it; to influence events for the better instead of being at their mercy." Having identified Iran as part of "the Axis of Evil," he specified that "we may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran" because, he charged, it threatens Israel, sponsors terrorism, oppresses its people and, above all, is embarked on acquisition of nuclear weapons.

The nuclear weapons charge is the most critical. Iran (along with the US, France, Britain and other countries) had signed the 1968 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. The treaty obligated the signers who did not yet have nuclear



weapons to refrain from moves toward acquiring them and those that already had weapons to move toward giving them up. Neither Israel, Pakistan, India nor North Korea signed the treaty and the established nuclear powers have publicly acknowledged their violation of the treaty both by retaining their full stocks of weapons and by building more. What Iran is doing is uncertain. So far as is known, it has not violated the treaty, but intelligence specialists guess that it is determined to have nuclear weapons. A program to manufacture them was begun with American assistance under the regime of the Shah, then stopped and probably restarted. US intelligence consensus is that Iran is today five to ten years away from getting them.

The Neoconservatives also believe that Iran is a threat to Israel and quote President Mahmoud Ahmad-i Nejad's pronouncements as proof. He foolishly denied the reality of the holocaust and harshly criticized Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. Worse he described Zionism as a has-been and predicted that Israel would decline and fall. But he was misquoted as saying that Israel would be "wiped off the map." Even if he wished it would, his country is incapable of making it happen: Israel has the strongest army in Western Asia, the second most powerful air force in the world and a stockpile estimated to contain 400 or more nuclear weapons while Iran has a large but immobile army, a small but antiquated air force and no nuclear weapons. More important, Israel acts in close association with the United States while Iran has no effective allies. As a state it is no threat to anyone.

Mr. Bush also charged Iran with sponsoring terrorism. Yet, Iran helped the US to bring down the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and has consistently opposed al-Qaida. True, it has given money and weapons to the Lebanese Hizbullah against which Israel has been fighting. Moreover, it has, itself, been the target of terrorism for which it blames America.

Finally, while the Iranian fundamentalist regime is oppressive so are a number of other regimes that the Bush administration warmly approves. And, unlike Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Uzbekistan, its government is the product of what, by local standards, was a reasonably free election. In fact, most observers believe that if a new election were held today, it would be overwhelmingly returned to office. Thus, although President Bush is right that the government denies the right of its people to live as Americans think they should, it has done so with the consent of the governed.

So why do I predict an American attack on Iran?

The answer is composed of the same elements I have described: Mr. Bush's belief that he has a God-given task which he must accomplish before he leaves office – and perhaps even before the forthcoming Congressional elections might cripple his means of action. His belief that what his own intelligence experts tell him is wrong, that Iran actually is about to acquire the bomb, is stirring the pot of Middle Eastern terrorism and is a threat to the existence of Israel. Finally, he believes he has the authority, given by the American people in his two elections and through Congressional approval of his war with Afghanistan, to act. In the next article, I will discuss what he is doing to effect his policy.

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