

Iran Nuclear Crisis Must Not Lead To War

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Events unfolding in Berlin and Washington on Jan. 12, around what was dubbed the Iranian nuclear crisis, had the undeniable smack of *dejà vu*, as accusations and counter-accusations thrown back and forth in a climate of brinkmanship, conjured up the specter of another Iraq-style crisis, which threatened to lead to military action. However, contrary to appearances, there *need not* be any mechanical repetition of the process that led to the United States' illegal war against Iraq in 2003: if rationality prevails, and the approach outlined by Lyndon LaRouche in his Jan. 11 webcast is adopted, the current flare-up over Iran's nuclear program could be extinguished without engaging in military conflict. Above all, Vice-President Dick Cheney, who desperately wants a war, has to be removed.

The new phase of the crisis was opened when the Iranian government restarted nuclear fuel research activities at Natanz. Under the supervision of inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the seals on the facilities were broken on Jan. 10. That act triggered bellicose statements by the war lobby's leading protagonists, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Vice President Dick Cheney, and disappointment from others, including the Russians.

Blair, speaking to Parliament, said the Iranian move would probably mean the issue would be referred to the UN Security Council. The British Prime Minister described the situation as "very serious indeed," adding, "I don't think there is any point in us hiding our deep dismay at what Iran has decided to do." In an interview with Fox Radio, Cheney said that "I think the next step will be probably to go before the UN Security Council, and probably the number one item on the agenda, would be the resolution that could be enforced by sanctions, were they to fail to comply with it."

The Sanctions Question

A hastily convened meeting on Jan. 12 of the foreign ministers of the EU-3 (Great Britain, France, and Germany) reviewed the Iranian move, and concluded that talks with Iran that had been proceeding for two years, had now reached an "impasse." Accordingly, in their final statement, the EU-3 announced, "We believe the time has now come for the Security Council to become involved to reinforce the authority of IAEA Resolutions." The EU-3 stated that they would "be calling for an Extraordinary IAEA Board meeting with a view for it to take the necessary action to that end."

What this means concretely is that the IAEA should convene a meeting in Vienna, within the next weeks, according to one official privy to the talks, and should issue a letter to the UN Security Council, proposing that it be "seized" of the matter, as they say in diplomatic jargon. The UNSC, if it so agreed, would meet, and options would be discussed as to how to respond to the Iranian moves. From there, a wide range of options would be on the agenda: the UNSC could pass a resolution declaring Iran in "non-compliance" with former agreements with the IAEA and/or with UNSC resolutions, and could impose sanctions. These could be essentially symbolic sanctions, for example, reducing the number of diplomats in embassies, restricting travel of Iranian government representatives, or they could be substantial, that is, limiting trade with Iran.

The sanctions *per se*, whether nominal or substantial, would not have much of an effect on Iran. But, as German Deputy Foreign Minister Gernot Erler said on Jan. 11, any referral to the UNSC could trigger a process of escalation of tensions, in an almost automatic fashion. Erler said that referral to the UNSC should be prevented, because experience shows that "it is hard to calculate which way the development will go, then. Usually, there are demands implying sanctions, and that can lead to an escalation which runs out of control. That is the risk involved, as it was the case in the preparation of and the way toward the Iraq war, and that were, in addition to all other problems that we face in the extended region of the Middle East, not at all satisfying if the case developed this way." What Erler is pointing to, is the fact that once the Iraq issue had been taken to the UNSC, and relevant resolutions had been forced through, the US government used this to declare Iraq in violation of the same, and unilaterally, went to war.

Desperate Negotiations

Although the EU-3 foreign ministers signed on to initiating the process leading to the UNSC, they are not all committed to sanctions.

A statement made by the chairman of the European Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee, Elmar Brok, is representative of the best European thinking on the issue. Brok, a Christian Democrat from Germany, said in an interview with German national radio on Jan. 13, that although this round of EU-Iranian talks had failed, there is no alternative to talks. Any escalation, for example, through UNSC sanctions against Iran, could lead to an explosion of crude oil prices, and sanctions would not be effective because Iran has the second-largest energy reserves of the world on its own territory, Brok warned. "Sanctions against Iran could well be sanctions against ourselves, then," Brok said, adding that since China just recently signed a 100-billion-dollar oil deal with Iran, this could also complicate the ongoing discussion about potential sanctions.

Brok also argued against a military response. Continuing talks is in the interest of Europe, Brok said, "because we have

to see the dangerous implications that military options would have. You have the problems in Iraq, which are there. In Iran, it would be much more difficult, and it isn't that easy, either, to launch a pre-emptive strike, like the one launched by the Israelis against Iraq at the beginning of the 1980s, when they smashed Saddam's nuclear plans with one single strike against a nuclear power plant. Iran has many different facilities—about 40, as is said—a large part of which lies underground, so that this is much more complicated. And the psychological ramifications in view of the Iran-Iraq situation, the situation in the Middle East because of Sharon's being incapacitated, and because of the elections among the Palestinians. All this naturally has to be seen in one and the same context. Because of that, it is such a complicated situation as you can hardly imagine."

UN General Secretary Kofi Annan entered the fray, seeking to prevent an escalation through the UNSC. Annan spoke for 40 minutes by phone with Ali Larijani, head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, responsible for negotiations in the nuclear issue. Annan reported that he had advised Larijani that his government should "avoid any escalation, to exercise restraint, go back and give the negotiations a chance, and that the only viable solution is a negotiated one." Annan said that the Iranians were eager to pursue "serious and constructive negotiation, but within a time frame." He expressed his hope that the entire affair could be solved within the IAEA.

Iran's Defense

Larijani also gave an interview to CNN on Jan. 12, in which he confirmed Iran's willingness to continue negotiations. He also referred to the Russian proposal for a joint enrichment facility on Russian territory, as worthy of consideration. Larijani's interview, which was curiously not transcribed, was a forceful defense of Iran's right to nuclear technology. Specifying that the decision to restart work at Natanz related solely to research, not to production, Iran's chief negotiator cited Article 3 of the IAEA charter and Article 4 of the NPT, which guarantee every country the right to the full nuclear cycle, and the duty of other countries to provide help. Larijani stated also that if a country were intent on producing nuclear weapons, it would not agree to IAEA surveillance, as Iran has.

As for the perspective for negotiations, he said that talks with Europe, which aim at guaranteeing that there is no diversion of enrichment, could reach an agreement, if the talks are "genuine," and spoke out in favor of continuing them. He insisted, however, that research was non-negotiable.

Asked about the Russian proposal for a joint enrichment facility on Russian soil, he answered that this proposal by Russia, "our neighbor and friend," was a good basis for negotiation, which would continue next month in Moscow. He stressed that Iran and Russia agreed that Iran had the right to enrichment. Thus, the idea of a joint plant is negotiable. By saying such a proposal could provide a solution "for a while," he seemed to indicate that Iran viewed it as a transitional

solution. He characterized it as a situation in which both sides could win.

A day after Larijani's interview, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said that his "government will be obliged to end all of its voluntary measures if sent to the UN Security Council." This would not mean cutting off all cooperation, but rather "working to rule"—going through all the bureaucratic route for each inspection with the IAEA, instead of allowing spot checks, as has been the case under the "voluntary" cooperation regime.


Complications

As LaRouche indicated again in his Jan. 11 webcast (See transcript, page 4), the potential for reaching even an interim solution between Iran and the rest of the international community is complicated primarily by the fact that there is a powerful international grouping, centered around the Cheney-Bush Administration and Blair, which is a *bona fide* threat to the security of Iran. This Anglo-American faction's commitment to further imperial wars feeds the desire of that faction in Iran that does want to get nuclear weapons. Add to this the provocative, irrational behavior of the "fly in the ointment," President Ahmedinejad, and controls on the situation are problematic indeed.

The solution thus lies in removing the threat of the use of nuclear weapons, and pre-emptive war, from the Anglo-American side. That will happen in Washington, or not at all.

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