

A military attack on Iran is a real possibility. George Bush, in the waning days of his Administration, may launch an attack on Iran, or Israel, with the US blessing, may launch such an attack on its own. Another scenario is that this administration may ratchet up the pressures on Iran, leaving it to the next administration, either Obama or McCain, to initiate a military attack and occupation. In any case, the Socialist Party opposes the use of military force or economic sanctions to deal with the problems involving Iran.

From a socialist point of view, Iran represents a profound tragedy. Iran (known as Persia until 1935) is home to what an historian has termed "one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements dating back to 4000 BC". US involvement with Iran begins in a serious way in 1951, after the elected Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, nationalized Iran's oil reserves. (This was an enormously popular move with the Iranian public). Britain then invited the US to join it in overthrowing the elected government of Mossadegh and installing Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. And this happened in 1953, one of the "successes" of which the CIA has been so proud. (Mossadegh was arrested and held in house arrest until his death some years later).

The reign of the Shah was brutal, his secret police, SAVAK, trained with the aid of the CIA, crushed dissent. The Ayatollah Khomeini, supreme religious leader in Iran, was sent into exile. With the British/CIA plot that overthrew the elected government, there was an end of any hope for a secular and democratic movement. The Iranian Revolution, also known as the Islamic Revolution, began in 1978, with demonstrations that increased in fury until the Shah fled in January of 1979. With the return of the Ayatollah from exile, Iran became, by an overwhelming popular vote, an "Islamic Republic" in December of that year, with Khomeini the Supreme Leader of the country.

This is a very short, condensed history of an extremely turbulent period, brought on by the US/British effort to control the oil reserves of Iran. There was a deep hatred of the US, and a fervent desire to "export" the Islamic revolution to other countries. It was during this period, compounding the dismal history of US foreign policy, that Iraq, with the blessing of the US, attacked Iran. (Donald Rumsfeld met with Saddam in Baghdad in December of 1983, shaking hands, and confirming US support for Iraq and its military attack. This was more than verbal support. The U.S. navy shelled Iran from the Strait of Hormuz and shot down an Iranian passenger plane, killing more than 200 civilians.) It is reliably estimated that at least a half million Iraqi and a half million Iranian youths lost their lives during this eight year war.

The Ayatollah crushed the left opposition in Iran, which had actively participated in the coalition that overthrew the shah. Iran remains an Islamic Republic, with final political power resting in the hands of the Shia Clergy. The Iranian regime has consistently pursued reactionary policies that have sought to silence every form of popular protest, while instituting policies that confine women to a subservient status.

President Ahmadinejad, who acts as a spokesperson for this theocratic regime, has made several statements that alarmed Israel and offended public opinion in the West. He has questioned the Holocaust and referred to the State of Israel as "a stinking corpse". Nevertheless, he has not, at any time, said Iran would attack Israel. (Israel and US neo-conservatives have relied on inaccurate translations of Ahmadinejad's statements - what Ahmadinejad has said is that the present State of Israel will collapse, not so different from US hopes that the Soviet Union would collapse. Certainly Iran is deeply hostile to Israel, but it has never threatened a military attack on it).

Iranian statements need to be seen within the

context of the history of the past fifty years. Iran was not involved in World War II, and it has suffered deeply from Western interventions after that war. However, this in no way excuses these comments and the Socialist Party condemns them.

However what has alarmed the West has not been the insensitive and offensive language of Ahmadinejad, but the fear the Iran might gain nuclear weapons. And this question needs to be looked at quite soberly, since no rational person wants to see more nuclear powers. Iran has said it is not seeking nuclear weapons, but only nuclear power (something which we deplore but which it has every international right to develop).

But assuming that Iran does secretly plan to develop nuclear weapons some time in the future, why is this more disturbing than the fact that Israel has an estimated 150 nuclear weapons? Iran would not be the first nuclear power in the Middle East, but the second. Under what logic is the US willing to go to war to prevent Iran from gaining such weapons, but not prepared to act against Israel? The record of the two countries is significant - Israel has launched pre-emptive air strikes in the past on Iraq and Syria, and (depending on whose version of the history you accept) launched at least one major war (the 1956 attack on Egypt, in alliance with Great Britain and France). Iran, on the contrary, has not attacked any of its neighbors within living memory.

While the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran is one factor driving U.S. policy, it is far from the only one. Islamic fundamentalism represents an ideological threat to U.S. control of the Middle East. Furthermore, U.S. based oil corporations, in particular Exxon-Mobil, covet Iran's huge oil reserves. The United States is seeking to control a key strategic and financial asset, Middle Eastern oil reserves, and an attack on, followed by the occupation of, Iran would be one further step in making this extension of the empire a reality.

The Socialist Party believes in the need to create a nuclear free Middle East, with serious, thorough international inspections of every country in the area. If Israel would agree to this, it would be a major step toward ending the rush of the Arab and Islamic states to secure weapons of mass destruction. The race to gain such weapons was an inevitable effort by other powers in the Middle East to feel more secure against Israel.

An attack on Iran by either the US or Israel would have extremely serious consequences, including a sharp increase in the price of oil. (In fact, it is that economic reality that provides some hope that the US or Israeli will not attack.) Iran possesses a fairly advanced military machine, and would be able to strike deep within Israel, and also to intervene more directly in Iraq.

One of the ironies of the Bush policy of invading Iraq was that it created a vast political vacuum into which Iranian influence has moved. The Iraq War weakened Iraq, and left Iran as the strongest single influence in Iraq (many of the current Iraqi political leaders were in exile in Iran during Saddam's regime).

As democratic socialists, hope to see a secular, progressive and democratic government in Iran, and support all such movements within Iran and elsewhere in the region. At the same time, the U.S. government and its allies need to accept the fact that Iran is emerging as a major power in the area, and diplomatic rather than military approaches must be supported. The Socialist Party absolutely opposes every effort to build up a war hysteria against Iran, as we opposed the attack on Iraq. If the criminal actions of the US invasion of Iraq prove nothing else, it is that the military approach to Middle Eastern conflicts must be resisted.

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Socialist Statement on Iran



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