

Moves toward War with Iran: Part 2

By William R. Polk

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In my first article, I set out why I think an American attack on Iran is likely. Now I will show what steps are being taken to prepare for that event.

The first step toward war is to prepare the public. That step was partly taken in the 2005 “National Defense Strategy” which proclaimed that “America is a nation at war” and warned that “At the direction of the President, we will defeat adversaries at the time, place, and in the manner of our choosing”

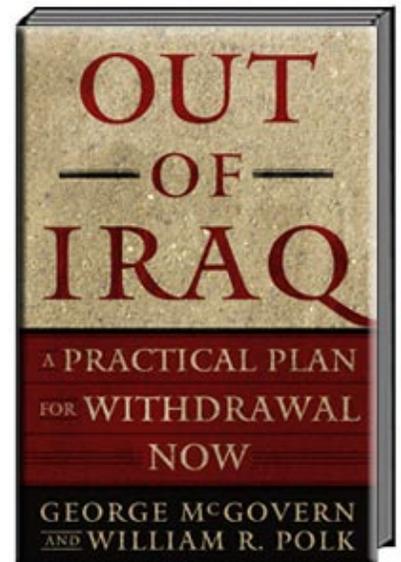
The second step is to show that alternative methods to cope with the proclaimed threat to the security of the United States have not worked. To this end, the United States has approached the UN Security Council as a whole and its members individually to discuss what they are willing to do. The response was lukewarm.

The Europeans have talked of sanctions, but they will be opposed by China and Russia which stand to lose crucial revenue and access to oil as Turkey and Jordan did in the 1990s. In any event, even draconian sanctions would be unlikely to deter the Iranian government from actions it believes necessary for its survival. So the Neoconservative advisers advocate military attack.

In recent days, world leaders have come out flatly against the idea of military action: German Prime Minister Merkel told the Bundestag on September 6 that “The military option isn’t an option.” While she was speaking, the Chinese foreign minister said, “China advocates that this issue be resolved through negotiation and dialog in a peaceful way and this position remains unchanged.” The French foreign minister proclaimed on September 5 that France does not support a military action and the Italian and Russian foreign ministers echoed the same sentiment. According to press reports, the British government has told the Bush administration that it will not take part in any armed action against Iran. Probably the sole advocate of military action is Israel.

Military action has been in planning since before the wars with Afghanistan and Iraq. This could come in any one of three forms or some combination of them: A US attack by air power alone, a ground invasion as in the 1991 and 2003 attacks on Iraq, or the encouragement of an Israeli attack.

The National Security Doctrine form of “Preventive Action” now under the most intense study is aerial bombardment. This is attractive because America does not have sufficient combat troops for a land invasion. Moreover, allegedly the U.S. Air Force generals have said that even alone air power could “take out” (destroy) all suspected Iranian nuclear installations and so devastate Iran that the regime would collapse.



What would aerial bombardment entail? What it involved in Iraq gives at least a starting point: in some 37,000 sorties the US Air Force dropped 13,000 “cluster munitions” that exploded into 2 million bombs, wiping out whole areas, and fired 23,000 missiles. Naval ships launched 750 Cruise missiles with another 1.5 million pounds of explosives. More powerful weapons are now available. Air Force General Thomas McInerney gave the Neoconservative Weekly Standard in April an inventory of “improved” weapons. They include vastly larger “bunker buster” bombs and greater targeting ability. McInerney pointed out that a B-2 bomber can drop 80 500 pound bombs independently targeted on 80 different aim points. In effect, this aerial bombardment would eclipse the “shock and awe” of 2003 and be far more destructive than the 1991 campaign or the devastating air war on Vietnam. But would it work?

The Israeli bombardment of Lebanon has been regarded as a test. Seymour Hersh reported in *The New Yorker* talks he had with current and retired American military and intelligence experts who told him that it was regarded as “a prelude to a potential American preemptive attack to destroy Iran’s nuclear installations.” They did terrible damage and killed many people, but they failed to accomplish their mission. As Bush’s former Deputy of State Richard Armitage said, “If the most dominant military force in the region – the Israel Defense Forces – can’t pacify a country like Lebanon, with a population of four million, you should think carefully about taking that template to Iran, with strategic depth and a population of seventy million...The only thing that the bombing has achieved so far is to unite the [Lebanese] population against the Israelis.”

The Air Force plans have been resisted by the senior generals of the Army, Navy and Marine corps. In rare public statements and frequently in private, they have said that the plans are fatally flawed and that even if an invasion begins with aerial attack it will soon require ground troops. Despite the misgivings of the military professionals, Joseph Cirincione wrote in the March issue of *Foreign Policy* that conversations with senior officials in the Pentagon and the White House had convinced him that the decision for war had already been made.

The *Washington Post* has reported that at least since March, large teams have been working on invasion plans in the Pentagon and the intelligence agencies, while the Iran “desk” at the State Department has been augmented to task force size. It reports to Elizabeth Cheney, daughter of the vice president, who is assistant secretary of state for the Near East. In the Pentagon, a similar organization has been established under Neoconservative Abram Shulsky. In addition a new outpost has been set up in Dubai to coordinate plans. On October 2, a powerful naval battle group around the giant aircraft carrier *Eisenhower* sailed for the Persian Gulf and is due to arrive a week before the November Congressional elections to join a similar battle group led by the aircraft carrier *Enterprise*. Meanwhile aircraft of the U.S. Air Force are being readied in bases surrounding Iran and in distant locations. These forces could deliver destructive power that would dwarf the aerial assaults on Iraq.

The Iranian leadership, I have been authoritatively told, believes all this is a bluff. In my next article, I will examine what will happen if they are wrong.

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