

Nonetheless, Kadima's biggest political asset continues to be its founder, Ariel Sharon, who has been lying comatose in a Jerusalem hospital for the last two months. The Kadima's election TV ads are an ode to Sharon as one of the "founding fathers" of the nation who bears the wounds of its wars, and how Ehud Olmert is his anointed successor. In keeping with the macabre, an old recording of Sharon's voice attacking Netanyahu has been resurrected for the ads.

But Olmert is not a new Sharon. His military career never went beyond his three-year national service, and the only battles he fought were in court for his rich corporate clients. In some of those court battles, he served as a defendant facing corruption charges. Nonetheless, with open support from the three leading dailies, including the moderate *Ha'aretz*, the polls give Kadima enough votes to form a government.

Netanyahu: With Help From Friends and Enemies

In addition to behind-the-scenes help from his old patron, George Shultz, Netanyahu has benefited from an atmosphere of fear. The same polls indicate that his Likud party is gaining on Kadima. On March 8, Netanyahu got a boost from an unexpected source, Palestinian President Abu Mazen, who in a surprise statement gave his endorsement of Olmert.

"We'll respect the will of the Israeli people. I hope Olmert wins." Abu Mazen said in an interview to the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*. "I know him well. I believe that with him we could work in a productive way." He also called Shimon Peres, now in Kadima, an "old friend."

Intelligence sources attribute this unprecedented action to pressure from the United States, especially the threat to cut all \$500 million in U.S. aid because the Palestinian people exercised their democratic right, giving Hamas a majority in the January elections.

Abu Mazen's statement could draw pro-peace elements away from the Labor Party towards Kadima. Nonetheless, it was an unexpected gift to Netanyahu, since it gave "proof" to Bibi's rhetoric against Olmert as a sell-out.

Bibi said he was not surprised by Abu Mazen's endorsement of Olmert, because contrary to Olmert, Bibi said, "I am looking after Israeli interests."

These maneuvers are aimed at drawing more left-of-center pro-peace votes away from the Labor Party to the Kadima, under the illusion that it will finally lead to a withdrawal from the territories. At the same time it will bring more right-of-center votes back into the Likud, bolstering Netanyahu and the possibility for a Likud-Kadima government.

Many observers are saying that the opinion polls are misleading, and are unable to gauge the mood of the poor development towns where the Labor Party is reportedly gaining support. Nonetheless, as long as Cheney and Shultz are anywhere near the White House, the hope for a peaceful Middle East is grim, no matter who wins the Israeli elections.

Fact vs. Fiction in The 'Iran Crisis'

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

If the U.S. and U.K. neo-cons lied to get into the Iraq War, why shouldn't they lie to prepare a military strike against Iran?

On March 8, British and American war mongers went into overdrive in their rush to dupe public opinion that the issue of Iran's nuclear program is swiftly on its way to being declared a *casus belli* by the United Nations Security Council. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Consider the facts, and then the lies.

On March 7, the issue of Iran's nuclear program was on the agenda of the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors meeting in Vienna. IAEA Director General Mohammed ElBaradei presented his report, as had been requested by the body's meeting on Feb. 4. The report reviewed Iran's cooperation with the IAEA. It reported on the findings of IAEA delegations which visited Iran in January and February, regarding outstanding questions about traces of uranium contamination that had been found; Iran's acquisition of centrifuge technology; plutonium experiments; and other implementation issues. The report documented Iran's cooperation, at the same time noting that certain demands made by the IAEA, such as for personal interviews with scientists, or for copies of documents (which were shown to the IAEA), had not been granted. Iran's decision to resume uranium enrichment-related activities, under IAEA surveillance, was reported.

In its "Current Overall Assessment," the report noted that "Iran has made substantial efforts over the past two decades to master an independent nuclear fuel cycle, and, to that end, has conducted experiments to acquire the know-how for almost every aspect of the fuel cycle."

In its most important statement, the report said: "All the declared nuclear material in Iran has been accounted for. Although the Agency has not seen any diversion of nuclear material to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, the Agency is not at this point in time in a position to conclude that there are no undeclared nuclear materials or activities in Iran."

In remarks to the press following the Vienna meeting, ElBaradei stressed the need for Iran to "be transparent working with the Agency," adding, "Nobody will be happier than I when we are able to conclude that all the outstanding issues . . . are clarified. . . Everyone is looking for a political settlement."

He went on to say, “What we need at this stage is cool-headed approaches. We need people to lower the rhetoric. . . .” He said the UNSC would “lend its weight to the IAEA’s efforts so as to make sure Iran will work as closely as possible with us.”

Significantly, he specified continuing work with Iran: “The IAEA will continue to do inspections in Iran. . . . We will continue to do the verification, while the Security Council debates on the global picture.” And, he explicitly endorsed the country’s right to nuclear technology: “We need a settlement that assures Iran its peaceful right to nuclear energy; but at the same time assures the international community that Iran’s program is exclusively for peaceful purposes.” EIBaradei concluded, “I am still optimistic. I think sooner or later the parties will decide there are no other options than negotiations.”

The report was then forwarded, as per IAEA procedures, to the UNSC for its consideration. As of this writing, there are reports that the UNSC will take up the issue.

The Lies and Spin

So much for the facts. Now, to the lies and spin. The forwarding of EIBaradei’s report to the UNSC was immediately trumpeted by the press as a “referral” of the Iran dossier to the UNSC, implying condemnation by the IAEA, and relevant declarations and actions, which have, in fact, not taken place.

For example, U.S. delegate to the IAEA, Gregory Schulte, a rabid neo-con, said: “The time has come now for the Security Council to act.” He went through a litany of complaints against Iran, mainly focussed on its uranium enrichment activities, saying this contributed to “mounting international concerns” about the country’s intentions. “Iran has still not come clean,” he ranted, and proceeded to lie: “IAEA inspectors have no doubt this information [regarding alleged plans for weapons production] was expressly intended for the fabrication of nuclear weapons components—” a statement in blatant contradiction to EIBaradei’s report. Schulte, in his cheerful disregard for facts, went on to charge that Iran had 85 tons of uranium hexafluoride (UF6) gas, sufficient to make ten atom bombs.

Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns, who has become a point man in the witchhunt against Iran, was as vocal. “Iran has not met the conditions at the IAEA,” he lied. “We will therefore start a new phase of diplomacy—action by the UN Security Council starting next week.”

Burns went on to issue threats. If Iran doesn’t respond to words, we believe the world community should entertain the possibility of sanctions,” he told a Congressional committee. “It’s going to be incumbent upon our allies around the world to show that they are willing to act.” Burns testified that Iran “directly threatens vital American interests,” and announced that in the UNSC “we plan a concerted approach . . . that gradually escalates pressure on Iran”—a statement nowhere

backed up by facts. He went on to predict that the UNSC, the “right place to intensify the international debate on Iran’s nuclear ambitions,” would soon begin “very active debate” on the issue.

Vice President Dick Cheney issued threats to Iran even before the IAEA discussion had concluded. Speaking to a friendly audience at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in Washington, Cheney snarled: “The Iranian regime needs to know that if it stays on its present course, the international community is prepared to impose meaningful consequences.” He reiterated that the United States was keeping “all options on the table,” and reiterated that Washington would “not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapons.”

Contrary to such outright lying and bravado, the Iran issue is *not* an explosive crisis at the UNSC. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who has issued foreign policy statements of fundamental importance in the current juncture (see *Feature*, p.18), deflated the neo-cons’ belligerent rhetoric, by simply stating what the facts of the matter are.

Lavrov, who has had years of experience as Russian ambassador to the UN, artfully identified the sophistry being used by the neo-cons. “This play with the terms—notify or refer—has only one goal: to claim that the IAEA’s Board of Governors has opened its hands in a helpless gesture, given up, and told the UN Security Council, ‘You know we admit our inability to influence Iran any further. You are serious guys; your charter allows for many things, so, please, take the matter into your own hands.’ ” This, Lavrov went on, “is a flawed policy, which will not solve the problem. We do not remember who was right and who was wrong on Iraq,” he quipped, “although the answer is obvious.”

Lavrov made perfectly clear that the Russian stance this time around would be tough. “It looks so *déjà vu*, you know,” he said March 8. “I have been answering these questions [regarding WMD, etc.] regarding Iraq; and I don’t believe we should engage in something which might become a self-fulfilling prophecy.” Referring to Cheney’s threatening statements, Lavrov stated: “We are convinced there is no military solution to this crisis.” As for sanctions: “I don’t think sanctions as a means to solve a crisis have ever achieved a goal in recent history.”

As Lavrov’s stance has shown, the world has changed since the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Lyndon LaRouche emphasized, during discussions on Iran in Germany, there is a Eurasian bloc which has come into being, with Russia, China and others, which is moving to oppose any escalation against Iran, and is moving politically to defuse other crisis fronts, for example, regarding the victory of Hamas in Palestine. Russia’s policy is that which is outlined in the various articles and speeches by Lavrov, coincident with his early-March visit to the United States. Negotiations between Russia and Iran will continue, with the implicit participation of China.