

Neo-Cons Throw New Provocations at Iran

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Sensitive talks are going on between Iran and the European Union troika—the “EU-3” of Great Britain, France, and Germany—regarding Iran’s nuclear energy program. Iranian negotiator Hassan Rowhani, head of the Supreme National Security Council and a Presidential candidate in the upcoming elections, said on April 21, that the Geneva talks were proceeding well, and Iran was confident that an agreement could be reached over the crucial issue of Iran’s uranium enrichment program. Iran, which insists its program is designed solely for civilian energy production, demands that it be allowed to maintain the technological capabilities to enrich uranium, in accordance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the additional protocols it signed with the International Atomic Energy Agency. The Europeans insist on guarantees that the enrichment capacities will not be used to produce weapons-grade uranium. Higher level talks are scheduled for April 29, and a final outcome is expected by June.

The apparent general consensus among the Bush-Cheney-Rice junta, is that the Europeans should be given until June, to continue their negotiations—essentially, as one strategic institute specialist told *EIR*, give the Europeans time to fail. Once their failure has been registered, other options can be brought into play. The neo-cons are committed to take Iran off the map, as a “rogue state,” member of the “axis of evil,” or “outpost of tyranny.”

Both Condoleezza Rice and President Bush have been evasive regarding specific options, saying that they would let the negotiations proceed, and then make crucial decisions. When Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, a foremost Iran-basher, met with Vice President Cheney in Washington in mid-April, Iran was at the top of their agenda. Informed Israeli sources told *EIR* that Cheney and Sharon discussed when to strike Iran, and that Cheney told Sharon that the United States would wait until the Europeans had failed in their negotiations. At that point, the U.S. would decide to act itself against Iran, or allow Israel to strike Iran.

Other Israeli sources have stressed that Sharon’s procrastination on a withdrawal from Gaza has to be seen in this context: He is postponing any serious withdrawal moves, waiting for his new Chief of Staff, Dan Halutz, to assume office—someone who would be key to an anti-Iran move.

Sharon himself has been issuing ambiguous statements

about the matter. In a CNN interview April 13, he said he believed that Iran was working on a nuclear weapon, but that it has “technical issues” to solve, before it could move forward. He refused to give any estimated time frame for when he thought Iran would have the weapon. Asked whether Israel would bomb Iran’s plant, as it had bombed Iraq’s in 1981, he said: “The problem is different and much wider. And I think that here it should be a coalition of democracies who believe in the danger, led by United States, in order to put pressure upon Iran.” Sharon stated outright, “It’s not that we are planning any military attack on Iran.” And he repeated on April 21, that he thought the “stage” was not right for a military attack, at the moment.

The Neo-Con Options

There are several options being considered by the neo-con nuts in Washington. The most aggressive is the bombing of Iran’s nuclear energy plant at Bushehr, which could be carried out by Israel. Because such an attack would not go over well in Moscow, as Russia is Iran’s partner in this reactor and several more plants that are planned, a second option is regime change.

To this end, U.S. neo-cons have been nurturing the idea that they can buy up political assets inside Iran, and manipulate them to organize a “revolution” inside the country against the regime. Their plans are undoubtedly based on the unfortunately successful CIA covert operation in 1953 in Iran, which led to the overthrow of the nationalist government of Mohammad Mossadegh—who had fought to defend Iran’s national control over its oil resources—and the installation of the U.S.-controlled regime of Shah Reza Pahlavi.

The news that the U.S. government has officially decided to fund opposition groups inside Iran should be taken seriously. For the first time in 25 years, the U.S. State Department announced that it was allocating \$3 million, to support opposition groups inside Iran—the first time that funds will be going directly into Iranian hands. This is in addition to funding for “private” radio and television stations, to the tune of \$15 million a year, for Farsi broadcasts into Iran. According to a note on the website of the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, the Department is soliciting proposals from “educational institutions, humanitarian groups, non-governmental organizations, and individuals inside Iran to support the advancement of democracy and human rights.”

There are significant overlaps between this operation, and U.S. support for the Iraq-based Iranian terrorist group, the Mujahadin e Khalq (MEK/MKO), which has planned and carried out assassinations of Iranian officials. Iran plans to take legal action against this funding, because it directly violates the U.S. agreement signed with Iran in 1981, known as the “Algeria accords,” which ended the hostage crisis that began in 1979. On April 12, the Iranian news service IRNA reported that an Iranian government spokesman said, without

specifying any details, that the “foreign ministry will take necessary legal action” against Washington.

On April 10, Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations, described the U.S. plan as “a clear violation of the Algiers accords,” noting that the U.S. had agreed “not to intervene directly or indirectly, politically or militarily, in Iran’s internal affairs.”

U.S. Support for Terrorists

The MKO/MEK is an anti-Iranian terrorist organization, identified as such on the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations and also so designated by the European Union. For years, the group has been engaged in sabotage operations, including assassinations of Iranian government officials. It had its base in Iraq, under the protection of Saddam Hussein; and since the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of that country, the MKO/MEK has become an asset of the United States, enjoying its protection in northern Iraq. Were the U.S. neo-cons so stupid as to attempt an insurrection inside Iran against the government, they would try to use the MKO/MEK as their battering ram.

In this light, recent campaigns in Europe and in the United States to legitimize the MKO/MEK, take on significance. On April 14, Congress passed a new sanctions bill against Iran, and on the same day, the MEK/MKO held a “convention” in Washington, D.C.

The Middle East Subcommittee, chaired by “Clash of Civilizations” promoter Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), passed the Iran Freedom Support Act; which codifies sanctions against Iran under a previous bill, and targets investments in Iran, by requiring investigations of these projects. The bill also threatens to withhold foreign assistance from countries that invest in Iran’s energy sector “by defining this as direct support for Iran’s regime.” Ros-Lehtinen, who also sponsored the Syria Accountability Act, is a long-time supporter of the MEK.

The same day, at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., 300 members and supporters of the MEK, and its “legal” front group met to pressure the Bush Administration to take it off the “terrorist list.” Advertisements were taken out in major newspapers appearing in Europe, like the *International Herald Tribune*, calling for the group to be removed from lists of terrorist organizations in the EU. One such ad reported that a group of 500 parliamentarians had convened in London on March 22, to forward this demand.

Informed sources stress that the MKO/MEK has absolutely no following inside Iran. However, the idea that one should shrug off the danger represented by this group—and the U.S. neo-cons’ mobilization of it—would be a fatal flaw. One should recall the role of one Ahmed Chalabi in Iraq: He and his Iraqi National Congress, which were outfitted and financed by the United States as a subversive operation against Saddam Hussein, had (and still have) no following inside the country. Nonetheless, it was Chalabi’s faked intelli-

gence about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, provided by Chalabi’s associates (dubbed as “defectors and dissidents”), which provided the basis for the intelligence fraud that led to the war and invasion. The MKO/MEK have also been functioning as “intelligence sources” for information regarding alleged Iranian nuclear weapons programs.

The Ethnic Card

On April 16, al-Jazeera television reported that clashes had broken out between Iranian military forces and ethnic Arab Iranians, who were calling for an independent state in southern Iran, in Khuzestan province. Not surprisingly, there was a British hand in this new conflict. The demonstrations were organized by the London-based Popular Democratic Front of Ahwazi Arabs in Iran. A representative of the group, speaking to al-Jazeera from London, said there were movements within and outside Iran pressing for independence of the region, which is home to at least 3 million Iranians of Arab descent. “The demonstrations to mark 80 years of Iranian occupation were peaceful, but the Iranian authorities confronted the people with violent means and military force,” he said. Iranian military units had besieged several ethnically Arab villages after the demonstration, the spokesman said. The demonstrators are reported to have rioted, set cars on fire, vandalized shops, and so forth, and more than 250 arrests were made.

The London-based group claimed that there was an Iranian government plan for “ethnic cleansing,” to forcibly relocate about 3 million Arab Iranians from the Ahwaz region to other areas inside the Islamic republic. The group circulated a copy of a letter, allegedly signed by former Iranian Vice President Muhammad Ali Abtahi, which outlined a plan to change the composition of the population in Ahwaz by relocating non-Arabs to the city to make them the majority. The letter, widely circulated in Ahwaz and other cities in Khuzestan, has since been denounced as a forgery. Who organized the forged letter and the subsequent riots, is unclear, although the London-based group acknowledged its role.

Khuzestan is an oil-rich province that borders Iraq, on the Persian Gulf. If one wanted to destabilize the current Iranian government, one way to do so, would be through such ostensibly “ethnic” uprisings. Given the ongoing U.S. occupation of neighboring Iraq, one can pose the question of whether forces inside Iraq are involved in this operation.

A parallel operation was launched, as reported by *Gulf News* on April 14, involving Kurdish guerrillas. *Gulf News* claimed to have an exclusive story, which *EIR* has not yet been able to confirm, regarding militiamen who are training for a full-scale war, to overthrow the regime in Iran. The group is called Komala, and is reportedly training hundreds of men and women, with AK47s and machine guns in northern Iraq—the same region where the MKO/MEK guerrillas are protected.