

Iran's Social Gains Arouse Washington's Hostility

Why is Iran increasingly a target of U.S. threats? Who in Iran will be affected if the Pentagon implements plans, already drawn up, to strike more than 10,000 targets in the first hours of a U.S. air barrage on Iran?

What changes in policy is Washington demanding of the Iranian government?

In the face of the debacle U.S. imperialism is facing in Iraq, U.S. threats against Iran are discussed daily. This is not a secret operation. They can't be considered idle threats.

Two aircraft carriers — USS Eisenhower and USS Stennis — are still off the coast of Iran, each one accompanied by a carrier strike group containing Hornet and Superhornet fighter-bombers, electronic warfare aircraft, anti-submarine and refueler planes, and airborne command-and-control planes. Six guided-missile destroyers are also part of the armada.

Besides this vast array of firepower, the Pentagon has bases throughout the Middle East able to attack Iran with cruise missiles and hundreds of warplanes.

In fact, the U.S. is already engaged in a war on Iran. Ever-tightening sanctions, from both the U.S. and U.N., restrict trade and the ordering of equipment, spare parts and supplies.

Seymour Hersh reported in the New Yorker magazine a year ago that U.S. special operations forces were already operating inside Iran in preparation for a possible attack. U.S.-backed covert operatives had entered Iran to organize sabotage, car bombings,

kidnappings and attacks on civilians, to collect targeting data and to foment anti-government ethnic-minority groups.

News articles have reported in recent months that the Pentagon has drawn up plans for a military blitz that would strike 10,000 targets in the first day of attacks.

The aim is to destroy not just military targets but also airports, rail lines, highways, bridges, ports, communication centers, power grids, industrial centers, hospitals and public buildings.

It is important to understand internal developments in Iran today in order to understand why this country is the focus of such continued hatred by U.S. corporate power.

Every leading U.S. political figure has weighed in on the issue, from George W. Bush, who in 2007 has the power to order strikes, to Hillary Clinton, who has made her support for an attack on Iran clear, to John McCain, who answered a reporter's question on policy toward Iran by chanting "Bomb, bomb, bomb Iran" to the tune of the Beach Boys' song, "Barbara Ann." The media — from the New York Times to the Washington Post to banner headlines in the tabloid press to right-wing radio talk shows — are playing a role in preparing the public for an attack.

The significance of oil production and oil reserves in Iran is well known. Every news article, analysis or politician's threat makes mention of Iran's oil. But the impact of Iran's nationalization of its oil resources is not well known.

The corporate owners in the U.S. want to keep it a secret from the people here. They use all the power of their media to demonize the Iranian leadership and caricature and ridicule the entire population, their culture and religion.

What's been achieved?

The focus of media coverage here is to describe Iran as medieval, backward and feudal while somehow becoming a nuclear power.

It is never mentioned that more than half the university students in Iran are women, or that more than a third of the doctors, 60 percent of civil servants and 80 percent of all teachers in Iran are women. At the time of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, 90 percent of rural women were illiterate; in towns the figure was over 45 percent.

Also ignored is the stunning achievement of full literacy for Iranian youth.

Even the World Bank, now headed by Bush's neocon appointee Paul Wolfowitz, in its development report on countries admits that Iran has exceeded the social gains of other countries in the Middle East.

According to that report, Iran has made the most progress in eliminating gender disparities in education. Large numbers of increasingly well-educated women have entered the work force.

Iran's comprehensive social protection system includes the highest level of pensions, disability insurance, job training programs, unemployment insurance and disaster-relief programs. National subsidies make basic food, housing and energy affordable to all.

An extensive national network going from primary health and preventive care to sophisticated hospital care covers the entire population, both urban and rural. More than 16,000 "health houses" are the cornerstone of the health care system. Using simple technology, they provide vaccines, preventive care, care for respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases, family planning and contraceptive information, and pre-natal care. And they monitor children's nutrition and general health.

Since 1990, Iran nearly halved the infant mortality rate and increased life expectancy by 10 years.

Iran sets record in family planning

A national family planning program, delivered through the

primary health care facilities and accompanied by a dramatic increase in contraceptive use, which is approved by Islamic law, has led to a world record demographic change in family size and maternal and child health. All forms of contraception are now available for free.

In addition, promoting women's education and employment while extending social security and retirement benefits has alleviated the pressure to have many children to protect security as parents grow older. The fertility rate between 1976 and 2000 declined from 8.1 births per woman to 2.4 births in rural areas and 1.8 births in urban areas.

These social programs, which cover the entire population of almost 70 million people, should be compared to conditions in countries in the region that remain under U.S. military and economic domination.

In Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, only a tiny part of the population has benefited from the vast profits generated by oil and gas resources. In each of these countries the bulk of the people are not even considered citizens. Millions are immigrant workers, usually the overwhelming majority of the population, who have no rights to any representation, participation or any social, health or educational programs or union protection.

Women in these countries face much more than religious restrictions on clothing. They are barred from jobs, equal education and the right to control their own bodies or their own funds. They cannot vote or even drive a car.

In Iraq, which before U.S. attacks began in 1991 had some of the best conditions in the region for women, plus a high level of education, health, nutrition and social services, the conditions of life have now deteriorated to the level of the very poorest countries in the world. Legislation passed by the U.S.-installed puppet government has stripped women of rights that were guaranteed earlier.

Revolution made it all possible

The social gains of millions of Iranians are based on the upsurge of the Iranian masses in the 1979 revolution. The overthrow of the U.S.-backed Shah and the Pahlavi dynasty broke the hold of U.S. corporate power in Iran.

The Iranian Revolution was not a socialist revolution. Bourgeois rights to own businesses, land, wealth and inheritance are still protected by law and by the state apparatus.

But the greatest source of wealth — Iran's oil and gas — was nationalized. Nationalization means the transfer of privately owned assets and operations into public ownership. The exploration, drilling, maintenance, transport, refining and shipping of oil and gas became the national property of the Iranian people. Formerly this entire process was controlled at every step by Western imperialists, particularly U.S. and British corporations.

Most of the administrators, executives, technicians and engineers who controlled the process used to be from the West. Through hundreds of thousands of contracts and sub-contracts, U.S. and British firms extracted a profit not just through the sale of oil on the world markets but at every step of its extraction and refining. The small portion of profit the Shah's government received, as in the Gulf States today, was spent on luxury items imported from Western corporations for the small ruling elite and on infrastructure and weapons systems purchased from U.S. military corporations, again at an enormous profit.

The 1979 Iranian revolution, even though it brought a religious group to power, was a profoundly radical and anti-imperialist revolution. Demonstrations of millions openly confronted the brutally repressive police apparatus called the Savak, who protected the small handful of corrupt U.S. collaborators. Religious fervor, demands for social justice and militant anti-imperialism were bound together in opposition to the U.S.-imposed Shah and the Pahlavi royal family, which was hated for its program

of a glitzy modernization of the urban infrastructure alongside the growing impoverishment of both urban and rural workers, farmers and much of the middle class.

All classes of society were profoundly shaken as millions of revolutionary workers took to the streets. This was reflected not only in laws passed in Parliament but in the Iranian constitution itself. The constitution states that the government is required to provide every citizen with access to social security for retirement, unemployment, old age, disability, accidents, health and medical treatment — out of public revenue.

Prior to the revolution Iran had a shortage of medical staff and of trained personnel of every kind. During the upheaval of the revolution and the years of the Iran-Iraq war, many physicians, scientific and skilled personnel emigrated.

Having broken free of U.S. corporate domination and control of its resources, Iran was able to develop education, industry and infrastructure with unprecedented speed. By 2004 the number of university students had increased by six times over 1979. There are currently 2.2 million college students. The largest and most prestigious programs encompass 54 state universities and 42 state medical schools where tuition, room and board are totally free. In addition, 289 major private universities also receive substantial funding.

Millions of scientists, engineers, technicians, administrators, military officers, teachers, civil servants and doctors have been trained.

Today Iran boasts modern cities, a large auto industry, and miles of new roads, railroads and subways. Currently 55 Iranian pharmaceutical companies produce 96 percent of the medicines on the market in Iran. This allows a national insurance system to reimburse drug expenses.

Soon to become operational is the largest pharmaceutical complex in southwest Asia, which will produce compound drugs, making Iran a pioneer in biotechnology.

Years of U.S. sanctions and pressure on international financial institutions have had an unexpected result: Iran is free of the crippling debt that has strangled so many developing countries. According to World Bank figures, Iran's external debt is one of the lowest for its size: \$11.9 billion, or 8.8 percent of the GDP. From the point of view of the imperialist world bankers, this means the loss of many billions each year in interest payments to them.

Different approaches

Since 1979 there have been deep struggles inside Iran over how to deal with the unrelenting pressure of the imperialist powers. There are differing approaches on development plans and who is favored or benefits most from these plans. But all of the present forces are committed to maintaining Iran's control of its resources.

Iran is not a monolithic state. No state is or could be. There are contending groups even within the Muslim clergy that reflect different economic interests and class forces. This is true also in the Iranian Parliament and among various political parties and leaders.

Under President Mohammed Khatami, from 1997 to 2005, a "Reform Movement" eased religious and social restrictions. But it also allowed the introduction of neo-liberal economic policies, structural reforms and the de-nationalizing or privatizing of some social programs along with the cutting of subsidies. More joint ventures were initiated with European and Japanese capital. Programs that benefited the "private sector" or the wealthy and the middle class grew. This was the core of Khatami's base.

The current leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's first non-clerical president in 24 years, was elected in 2005 in a landslide victory after promising to extend social security and pensions, improve the subsidies for food and housing, deal with rising unemployment and guarantee a monthly stipend.

The Iranian people are determined to protect the substantial gains they have made since the revolution. They are not interested in any effort that turns the clock back.

A Wall Street Journal Commentary by Francis Fukuyama on Feb. 1, 2007, was unusually frank in explaining the growing problem faced by U.S. corporate power on a global scale:

“What is it that leaders like Iran’s Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hezbollah’s Hassan Nasrallah and Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez have in common that vastly increases their local appeal? A foreign policy built around anti-Americanism is, of course, a core component. But what has allowed them to win elections and build support in their societies is less their foreign-policy stances than their ability to promise, and to a certain extent deliver on, social policy — things like education, health and other social services, particularly for the poor. ...

“The U.S. and the political groups that it tends to support around the world, by contrast, have relatively little to offer in this regard.”

Past and new threats

Iran’s program for nuclear power was actually initiated by the U.S. when the Shah held dictatorial power. Nuclear energy is an important part of modern industrial development. It is important in science, medicine and research. Only after the overthrow of the Shah was Iran’s continued development of the same program branded a threat by Washington.

The U.S. government has made every effort to sabotage all Iranian infrastructure and industrial development, not only nuclear energy. Modern technology — from elevators to cars, ships, jet aircraft and oil refineries — needs constant upkeep. Parts for the resupply and maintenance of equipment the Iranians had purchased over decades from U.S. corporations were halted.

The most onerous sanctions were imposed in 1995 during the Clinton administration.

The Iranian people, despite many different political currents, are united in their determination not to lose their national sovereignty again. Washington's past use of sanctions, economic sabotage, political destabilization and regime change is well remembered in Iran today.

Sanctions, the freezing of assets and an embargo on the export of Iranian oil and all trade with Iran were first imposed in March 1951, after Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Co. Iran was the first country in the Middle East to take the bold step of reclaiming its national wealth in the post-colonial era.

In 1953 using internal destabilization and massive external pressure, the CIA orchestrated the overthrow of Mossadegh's popularly elected government and placed the Shah on the Peacock Throne. Oil was back under the control of the U.S. and Britain, and 26 years of brutal repression followed.

Ever since the 1979 revolution and the decisive overthrow of the U.S.-supported pro-imperialist dictatorship, Iran has had not a moment of peace from the Pentagon or Wall Street.

As Iran continues to grow and develop, U.S. imperialism is becoming increasingly desperate to reverse this revolutionary process, whether through sanctions, sabotage or bombing. But today it faces a population that is stronger, more conscious and more skilled. On a world scale U.S. imperialism is more isolated. Its hated occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan has left it overextended.

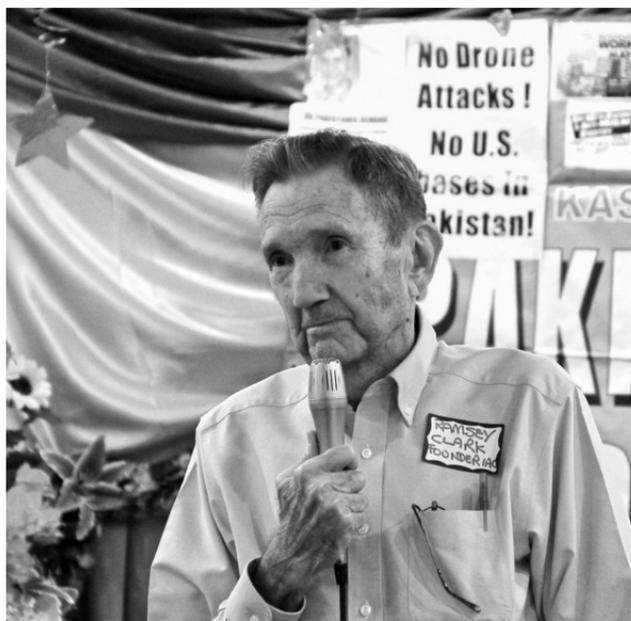
But the Pentagon is still capable of massive destruction. Its bases surround Iran and it has sent an armada of ships to the Gulf. U.S. government threats against Iran today must be taken as seriously as their devastating occupation of Iraq.

The forces opposing Washington's policy of endless war — whether waged through sanctions, coups, invasions, bombings

or sabotage — should stand with Iran, recognize its accomplishments, defend its gains and oppose imperialism's efforts to recolonize the country.

Sources of information about Iran's social development include: "Iran's Family Planning Program: Responding to a Nation's Needs," by Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi, Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C., June 2002; "Tehran University Official Describes Iran Health Care System to Harvard School of Public Health," HSPH NOW, Jan. 24, 2003; worldbank.org, Iran Country Brief; UNICEF, Info by Country; Food & Agriculture Organization of U.N., Nutrition: Country Profiles; "Biggest Pharmaceutical Plant to Open Soon," Iran Daily, Feb. 4, 2007.

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