

Opinion
New American Show

By Hamid Esmaceli-IRNA

A new scenario written and filmed by the White House scriptwriters claiming that Iran provided weapons used against US troops in Iraq has caught the attention of impartial political and media circles across the world.

The reason these baseless claims received so much attention is that those behind it are the same people that alleged Iraq had weapons of mass destruction more than three years ago.

Does this mean that no new player wants to play in such a poorly written movie or is it because those who played in the previous one did a great job and now they have been asked to repeat the act?

Other pressing questions: Is it true that only the Shiite militias—as alleged by the US—are behind the ongoing instability in Iraq? What about the Al-Qaeda or the Salafis which, as reported by the Western intelligence services, continue to be in touch with certain regional Arab monarchs? Which countries are supporting members of the Baathist group that are determined to take revenge for Saddam's hanging by killing innocent civilians?

Reporters at the Baghdad press conference were shown a number of Iran-made cylinder-shaped bombs known as explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), which can destroy Abrams tanks, along with a number of 81 mm mortar rocket launchers and other weapons. The reporters were not allowed to take with them camera, mobile phone or tape recorder.

The reporters were not allowed to mention the names or the ranks of army personnel during the show.

The interesting part was stickers with serial numbers on the alleged Iran-made weapons which, as admitted by the American military men, were never used.

It is wise to remember that those who can get their hands on sophisticated weapons with the help of petrodollars given to the Al-Qaeda can also easily purchase such weapons.

Experts have noted that the date written on the weapons starts with month and day, whereas in other countries, apart from the US, the date usually starts with day, month and year.

Having said that, how come the Pentagon has once again appointed Abram Shulsky to be in charge of collecting documents and data on Iran when his previous information on Iraq and its alleged WMDs was completely wrong. It is because of Shulsky that none of the warmongering neocons now want to believe in the new accusations about Iran's meddling in Iraq.

It seems rather odd for the Bushies, who have always tried to link any small incident to Iran, to wait almost three years to make these claims.

After the US claims against Iran, a new round of objections emerged from within the American soil. Top US General Peter Pace, for instance, said the discovery of such weapons did not prove that Tehran has been arming insurgents fighting coalition forces, contradicting claims by the US government.

Troubled by such comments made by top military commanders, the White House Spokesman Tony Snow played down the general's view and maintained that "there are no differences between top US generals and government on Tehran's meddling in Iraq".

Recently, Jane's Defense Weekly magazine quoted a number of top Pentagon officers as saying that Iran does not manufacture 81 mm mortars, which were displayed by the US Army in Iraq, adding that, for instance, Pakistan produces such weapons.

The US accusations against Iran come at a time when members of the so-called Jundollah, who were behind the fatal bombing in Zahedan last Wednesday, had American-made weapons at the time of their arrest. They confessed during the investigations that the American forces based to the east of Iran trained and equipped them with weapons.

President Bush is using political and economic sanctions plus military threats to pressure Iran. He is trying to exacerbate tensions to divert attention from the current Iraqi quagmire.

The anti-Iran allegations made by the Neocons have also come at a time when the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larjani, and the EU foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, have had constructive talks to break the impasse over Iran's civilian nuclear program.

Indeed, any success in resolving the nuclear impasse is not welcomed by the White House. Therefore, the US will use accusations such as Iran-made weapons in Iraq in a desperate effort to create more tensions and unite the international community against Tehran for blocking diplomatic efforts to find a logical solution to the current nuclear dispute.

In summation, a stable region will question the US presence in the Persian Gulf simply because it has no justification after an elected government has come to power in Iraq.

US Religious Delegation Welcome

By Sadeq Dehqan

TEHRAN, Feb. 21—An American religious delegation invited by Iranian officials met with cultural and scientific personalities and university professors in the Islamic Culture and Communications Organization.

The American delegation, comprising 17 representatives from important US religious institutes and churches, was received by head of ICCO, Mahmoud Mohammadi-Araqi, on Wednesday.

"I welcome you to Iran on behalf of the peace, justice- and dialogue-seeking nation of Iran," Mohammadi-Araqi said in a meeting with the American delegation on Wednesday.

Referring to the anti-oppression nature of the Iranian nation, he added that Iranians have never attacked or interfered in the affairs of any other nation and will not let other nations meddle in its own affairs.

"The Iranian nation has been the victim of terrorism and from this perspective, we have a great deal of commonalities,"

he said, adding that the American nation is one of the determined western nations in terms of belief in religion and God.

The Iranian official also said that despite many "bitter memories" from past events masterminded

by US statesmen against Iran, such as the 1953 coup against the elected government of Mossaddeq, "we greatly respect the American peo-

ple and acknowledge US religious, cultural and scientific elites". He hoped that this trip would pave the way for better understanding among the two nations. Referring to differences among religions,

Holy Qur'an, to live in peace with people from other nations.

Ronald Fleming, director of the central committee of Mennonite group, said tensions between the United States and Iran can be resolved through religion. Fleming noted that his



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Rafsanjani Meets Experts Assembly Members

TEHRAN, Feb. 21—Members of Experts Assembly late on Tuesday met with State Expediency Council Chairman Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Referring to the functions and responsibilities of the Experts Assembly, particularly in supervising sectors stipulated in the constitution, Rafsanjani said this round of Experts Assembly can act more actively in its supervisory duties according to the intellectual approaches of

the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, IRNA reported.

Rafsanjani pointed to the intensification of US animosity toward Iran, particularly after September 11, and said, "The major aim of the US is to solve Israel's problems in the region, gain access to its valuable energy resources and hinder development of the Islamic community."

"But [the US] failed to achieve its aims and

became weaker and encountered many problems in military terms," he said, adding that it will be very difficult for Americans to get out of this vortex.

He further rejected unilateralism by saying that new world powers, including the Muslim world, have emerged.

"The US is seeking to settle its political issues with Iran under the pretext of Iran's nuclear case while it definitely cannot deprive us of our inalien-

able right [to access nuclear energy]," he said. Rafsanjani called for uniting against US adventurism and destructive policies which, he said, have targeted Shiites and Sunnis.

"The new US policy is to foment differences and tensions among Sunnis and Shiites. However, this plot will be foiled with the vigilance of nation, particularly under the wise directives of Ayatollah Khamenei," he said.

Teachers Protest

TEHRAN, Feb. 21—Hundreds of teachers gathered in front of Majlis on Wednesday, protesting against the rejection of the State Services Management Bill.

The teachers opposed the Guardians Council's rejection and chanted, "President's promises, Nothing but propaganda", "Salaries in Riads, Expenses in Dollars", "Guardians Council, We want justice" and "Teachers with multiple jobs, Because of discrimination", ISNA reported.

Previously, Majlis Speaker Gholamali Haddad Adel had told IRNA that the parliament is seriously pursuing the removal of problems of government employees by ratifying this important bill.

He noted that Majlis and government have no differences over the bill, but added that the government is concerned about its financial burden.

The State Services Management Bill, also known as "Coordinated Payment System Bill", is aimed at removing discriminations that have plagued the payment system, by bringing the payments and revenues closer.

The social gap is likely to be narrowed, when the bill becomes law.

Russia Urged to Deliver

TEHRAN, Feb. 21—Majlis Speaker Gholamali Haddad Adel said on Wednesday Russia should finalize the construction of Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant and deliver in due time.

Speaking to reporters at a press conference, Haddad was responding to recent reports that the plant's construction could be delayed because of delayed Iranian payment, IRNA reported.

"In a recent meeting with Russia's National Security Council Secretary Igor Ivanov, I told him that Iran regards Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant as a symbol of cooperation between Iran and Russia," he said.

The speaker pointed out that delaying the completion of Bushehr power plant will have adverse effects on the Iranian people.

"Iranian officials have made a commitment to honor their financial undertakings in the project but Russia is the one facing financial problems," he said. Haddad hoped Iran's nuclear case "will not cause a crisis in the region".

"We have urged the US not to use Iran's nuclear case as a pretext to put Tehran under pressure. Iran has said it is committed to talks if (the opposite side) will not prevent the country from exercising its rights," he said.

Lebanon's Hoss to Visit

BEIRUT, Lebanon, Feb. 21—Former Lebanese Premier Salim Hoss is due to visit Iran next week to seek help in resolving his country's acute political crisis.

The February 26 visit by the Sunni ex-premier follows on the heels of trips this week to Syria for talks with President Bashar Al-Assad and to Riyadh where he met

with Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, AFP reported.

"I believe Saudi Arabia will launch an initiative to resolve the Lebanese crisis, just as it did when it gathered Lebanese feuding parties in Taef in 1989 when it stopped the civil war," he said, referring to an accord named after the Saudi city that ended the 15-year war in Lebanon in 1990. Hoss is regarded as

even-handed in the dispute between the opposition led by the Iranian and Syrian-backed Hezbollah and the Western-backed government of Prime Minister Fuad Siniora.

He held talks on Tuesday with Siniora as well as the Damascus-backed President Emile Lahoud and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

Lebanon has been paralyzed since six pro-Syrian government ministers resigned in November, followed by the launch in December of an open-ended sit-in around Siniora's office in Beirut.

Hoss warned that "threats to resort to civil disobedience are very serious...and we should try to find a solution in order not to reach such extremes".

Persian Press Watch

Neocon Failures

JOMHOURI-E ESLAMI: America's neocons are registering one failure after another and that too in quick succession. What is worse is that they have no way out of their mounting problems. Nowhere is their decadence clearly evident than in ravaged Iraq and Afghanistan. This is despite the fact that the un-linked neoconservatives are holding key posts in the Bush regime. A brief look at Bush's long-list of failures exposes the truth of the neocon camp. First, the big battle over and growing opposition to White House plans to send 22,000 more American troops to Iraq. Second, a proposal by senator and presidential aspirant Hillary Clinton to start withdraw US troops from the Arab country within a three-month period. Third, reports that the Brits are also ready to terminate their failed and highly controversial military presence in southern Iraq sooner rather than later. Fourth, a systematic increase in protests against Bush's warmongering policies and a threat by the Democrat-led US Congress to impeach him.

Steadfast

IRAN: The government and other executive bodies have so far resisted mounting pressure to suspend our nuclear program. They have obviously done so with steadfastness and wisdom, and needless to mention in the framework of international law. This is the path we have followed in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Having chosen the diplomatic path to resolve the nuclear issue and defend the nation's inalienable rights, the government has complimented the task with closer interaction with a long list of countries from the Far East to Latin America. The policy has borne results despite the criticisms tainted with exaggerations both at home and abroad. During the past three years and in opposition to the unreasonable demands for suspending the nuclear program, the logic of the government and related bodies was simple: Why should we comply? The question that came up again and again was: What is the reason behind the West's call for suspension? For almost two years Iran's nuclear program was on hold and that was more than enough time for the West to see reason and recognize our right to civilian nuclear technology and enrich uranium for our growing energy needs in line with the NPT to which we are a signatory. But such valid expectations were thrust aside. Now, as is evident from the conditions of the so-called international community and the dynamics of power, rights are not bestowed. They must be taken...

Some Hope

HAMSHAHR: Although the deadline set by UNSC Resolution 1737 on suspending Iran's nuclear activities is here, contents of the document show that it is unrealistic and simply cannot be implemented. The most important problem of the resolution is that it lacks the necessary instruments for facilitating diplomacy to help the nuclear standoff. The latest round of negotiations held by chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larjani on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference should be seen as a turning point in the country's civilian nuclear program. Analysts opine that the talks in Germany helped to remove the sting out of the crisis and created some hope of resolving the nuclear issue through diplomatic channels. There is reason to believe that almost all sides involved in Iran's nuclear issue are able and willing to put in extra effort and help promote some moderation towards the unwanted problem.

More Active

DONYA-YE EQTESAD: Although elections for the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mines scheduled for Wednesday may not be important for the masses, businesses and industrialists consider it as significant. Fortunately, unlike previous votes, representatives from the private sector took part with extra motivation. One advantage of this round of elections is that the private institutions played the role of a sort of quasi-party. This year's vote can and should pave the way for similar events in a more regulated manner in the future. The satisfactory turnout of businessmen in the elections is yet another indication that they are no more reluctant to do their share in promoting their legitimate corporate interest. One thing that remains to be seen is to what degree are the new group of elected representatives really familiar with the needs and priorities of the private sector. It is hoped that those who have taken over the commercially influential organization rise to the occasion and help facilitate the needs of their colleagues and compatriots across the country. One thing that needs to be done on the basis of priority is for the newcomers to write the charter of the private sector. After all it is private enterprise that in almost all countries big and small is actually setting the stage for progress and prosperity in more ways than one.