

attack Iran's nuclear facilities.' Interviewed by Robert Naiman of the Huffington Post website, Gardiner pointed to a 2006 MIT paper by Whitney Raas and Austin Long, assessing Israeli military planners' thinking. Raas and Long believe Israel would want to attack the uranium enrichment facility at Natanz, the uranium conversion facility at Esfahan and the heavy water plant at Arak—with a combined total of 36 aircraft. (With supporting aircraft, this would match up with the reports of a 100-aircraft exercise in June.)

'An Israeli strike would not be much of a strike,' Gardiner says. The US would probably think in terms of about 10 times more aim points for a similar strike, he observes. (Robert Naiman, 'Is Israel Really Preparing to Attack Iran? Col. Gardiner Says No', 20 June <tinyurl.com/4r5y43>)

On this analysis, an Israeli strike could not destroy even the three best-known Iranian nuclear facilities, never mind facilities which might be hidden. The strike could not meet the minimum required by the US, which would want the assault to 'set back the Iranians by at least five years for an attack to be considered a success', according to the Pentagon source consulted by the *Sunday Times*. It appears, therefore, that there will never be a 'solid' Israeli plan to strike Iran's nuclear facilities, and so, if it acts rationally, the White House will never green light such an attack.

OBAMA MANIA

The danger, of course, is that the White House will not act rationally, particularly if it sees the Bush 'legacy' being lost to an incoming Obama administration. Hence, perhaps, the startling decision to mimic the Democratic presidential candidate in his popular decision to offer unconditional talks with official enemies. In Nov. 2007, before the publication of the NIE that Iran had no nuclear weapons programme, a poll found 73% of people in the US favouring nonviolent options in dealing with Iran; 45% opposed violence even if diplomacy and sanctions failed (only 46% favoured force in those circumstances). <tinyurl.com/5no6ox>

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ISRAEL'S AMBER LIGHT

ISRAELI STRIKE ON IRAN NOT IMMEDIATE: BUSH TRIES DIPLOMACY HALF-HEARTEDLY

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BUSH SENDS DIPLOMAT TO MEET IRANIAN

On 16 July, US President George W. Bush stunned observers by agreeing to send a high-level US diplomat to Geneva to meet Iranian negotiators face-to-face as part of the EU-led talks to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis. As the *Independent* pointed out, State Dept. spokesperson Sean McCormack had said just the month before that the US would boycott such meetings unless 'Iran suddenly has a change of tune'. (17 July, p.23 <<http://tinyurl.com/633cn3>>)

In the event, it was the US that 'changed its tune'. Analyst Steve Clemons of the New America Foundation said: 'I think it's clear that Bush has pushed Cheney back twice now' (referring to the recent decision to remove North Korea from the US 'terrorist' list). (FT, 17 July, p.5 <tinyurl.com/6jwgmj>)

The Bush U-turn on Iraq had two features. First, he dropped the demand that Iran suspend uranium enrichment before being allowed face-to-face meetings on the subject (US officials have met Iranian diplomats, but only to discuss security in Iraq). Secondly, he accepted the EU 'freeze-for-freeze' proposal, whereby the West holds off on further sanctions for a set period while Iran holds off on escalating uranium enrichment. 'Previously, Washington had stated that if Iran continued enriching uranium, the international pressure would only increase.' (*Telegraph*, 17 July, p.15 <<http://tinyurl.com/5emvj>>)

The Bush diplomatic opening is very limited, however. William Burns, the third most senior State



Department official, an undersecretary of state, is indeed being sent to Geneva to sit in the same room as Iranian negotiators, but his role is officially to do no more than reiterate the US line - on this one occasion.

THE OTHER PROPOSALS

The coverage of these recent developments has conformed to the Chomsky-Herman propaganda model of the mass media, demonstrating once again the key role of media self-censorship in maintaining what they call 'brainwashing under freedom'.

In the current reporting, the starting point of discussion is invariably the EU-led proposals put to Iran on 14 June, and the question is whether Tehran will accept this framework for negotiations. What is almost totally absent is any awareness that Iran had made its own highly significant proposals on 13 May this year.

One rare recognition of this simple reality came in an important commentary by Sir John Thomson. Thomson, a former UK Permanent Representative at the UN, was told by Iranian Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, in early July that EU negotiator Javier Solana 'had assured him the Iranian package could be part of the agenda for substantive negotiations between Iran and the 5-plus-1' (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany). (*Independent on Sunday*, 13 July, p.56 <tinyurl.com/59jch3>)

So the negotiations are proceeding because Iran's negotiating proposals (which have been almost entirely erased from history by the Western media) have been admitted to the negotiating chamber.

RED LINES

Alli-Akbar Velayati, a former foreign minister who advises Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, on foreign affairs, made a critical point on 1 July. Apart from saying it was 'expedient' for Iran to resume nuclear negotiations on the 5-plus-1 offer, Velayati said: 'They say Iran should not make an atomic bomb and we say Iran needs nuclear energy. These two principles are your and our red lines which should be the basis for negotiations and [can be] agreed on'. (*FT*, 2 July, <tinyurl.com/5ejukq>)

But how can these two 'red lines' both be agreed as a basis for negotiation? By going back to Iran's 13 May proposal for uranium enrichment to continue on Iranian soil—but under international control.

On the basis of his discussions with Foreign Minister Mottaki, Thomson believes that Iran is 'ready to make some compromise agreements (as yet unspecified) on Middle Eastern issues that worry the west'. And on the nuclear issue 'it is ready to compromise to the extent of putting its enrichment-related facilities under the control of an international consortium—including, for example, France, Germany and the UK—which would then operate a modern, commercially oriented business producing nuclear fuel in Iran for sale globally. This is not what the 5-plus-1 are asking for, but in my view it is the best that is obtainable, and so long as it remains in force it precludes Iran from making a nuclear weapon.' (*IOS*, 13 July, as above. See also <mit.edu/stgs/iran-crisis.html>.)

WHAT OF THE ISRAELI THREATS?

So while Ayatollah Khamenei gives the 'green light' for negotiations on the basis of rather vague 5-plus-1 proposals, President Bush is reported to have given the 'amber light' for an Israeli airstrike on Iran. Despite this, an Israeli strike looks unlikely, for the next few months at least.

The *Sunday Times* reported: '“Amber means get on with your preparations, stand by for immediate attack and tell us when you're ready,” the official said. But the Israelis have also been told that they can expect no help from American forces and will not be able to use US military bases in Iraq for logistical support.'

This is not a formality: 'Nor is it certain that Bush's amber light would ever turn to green without **irrefutable evidence of lethal Iranian hostility**. Tehran's test launches of medium-range ballistic missiles last week were seen in Washington as provocative and poorly judged, but both the Pentagon and the CIA concluded that they did not represent an immediate threat of attack against Israeli or US targets. "It's really all down to the Israelis," the Pentagon official added. "**This administration will not attack Iran. This has already been decided**. But the president is really preoccupied with the nuclear threat against Israel and I know he doesn't believe that anything but force will deter Iran." The official added that Israel had not so far presented Bush with a convincing military proposal. "If there is no solid plan, the amber will never turn to green," he said.' (*Sunday Times*, 13 July <<http://tinyurl.com/6gppuc>>)

Retired US Air Force Colonel Sam Gardiner, concluded from the Israeli aerial exercises in June that 'Israel does not have the capability to effectively