

Unknown

From: Javad Zarif [Zarif@141.com]
Sent: Friday, December 22, 2006 1:10 PM
To: 'Trita Parsi'
Subject: RE: Blair's Mideast Message Echoes Past Failure
Importance: High

Excellent.

Best Regards,
M. Javad Zarif
Zarif@141.com
+1 (212)687-2020
+1 (212)867-5662

From: Trita Parsi [mailto:tp@tritaparsi.com]
Sent: Friday, December 22, 2006 3:57 PM
To: 'Trita Parsi'
Subject: Blair's Mideast Message Echoes Past Failure

Tony Blair has toured the Middle East and called for an "alliance of moderation" against Iran, in an effort to restart the Middle East peace process and reduce Tehran's influence in the region. But the idea that the problems of the region can be resolved by isolating Iran has been tried before – under much more favorable circumstances – and failed. Now when Washington and London's credibility is at an all time low in the region, can this failed strategy suddenly succeed?

The analysis below, published by IPS today, discusses this in detail.

Sincerely,
Trita Parsi, PhD
www.tritaparsi.com

<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=35946>

POLITICS:
Blair's Mideast Message Echoes Past Failure
Analysis by Trita Parsi*

WASHINGTON, Dec 22 (IPS) - British Prime Minister Tony Blair has been touring the Middle East with one clear message -- to make peace in the Middle East, Iran must be isolated.

The war of words between the West and Iran was heated by Blair's call for an "alliance of moderation" consisting of Arab dictatorships to quell the challenge posed by "extremists" supported by Tehran.

There is little new about Blair's strategy. Though it contradicts his initial support for the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group to open talks with Syria and Iran -- a position he quickly withdrew from after having been corrected by U.S. President George W. Bush -- it fits well with the approach of his predecessors when it comes to creating momentum for

peacemaking between Israelis and Palestinians.

In late 1991, a flood of articles surfaced in Israeli media depicting Iran as Israel's greatest strategic threat. The new Israeli perspective stood in stark contrast to Israel's traditional view of Iran as a strategic non-Arab ally -- a view that had survived both the Islamic Revolution and the end of the Iraq-Iran war.

Months before the ongoing discussions between Israeli and Palestinian on Oslo were revealed to the public in 1993, the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin began arguing that Iran's fundamentalist ideology had replaced communism as an ideological threat to the West. Iran was "fanning all the flames in the Middle East" and Israel's "struggle against murderous Islamic terror" was "meant to awaken the world which is lying in slumber" of the dangers of Shiite fundamentalism.

Like Tony Blair, then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher adopted this rhetoric in Washington's efforts to advance the Oslo process. "Wherever you look," he told reporters in March 1995, "you find the evil hand of Iran in this region."

The emphasis on Iran's Shiite ideology served, among other things, to convince Sunni Arab monarchies that they faced a greater threat from Iran's political revisionism than from Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. Consequently, the Arabs should opt for peace with Israel in order to combine their strength to push back Iran, the argument read.

Blair seems to follow the same blueprint today. In the mid-1990s, many were receptive to this message due to Iran's extensive support for Palestinian rejectionist groups using violence and terror against Israel (which incidentally began after the Oslo process.)

Today, President Ahmadinejad's excessive rhetoric, Iran's enrichment programme and the recent historical revisionism at Tehran's Holocaust conference is making the region more receptive to Blair's repeat of Rabin and Christopher's message.

But promoting Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking by building alliances to isolate Iran failed in the 1990s and is likely to fail again. Back then, Washington stood at the apex of its power. The Soviet Union had collapsed and in the "New World Order" that was forming, the U.S. was the world's sole superpower.

Diplomatically, Washington's stocks were equally high. Then-Secretary of State James Baker had compiled a broad coalition -- including numerous Arab states -- to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait and he had kept its word that Arab cooperation against Iraq would lead to a push for Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.

Iran, on the other hand, was weak. It was still recuperating from the Iraq-Iran war and its relations with the Arab states and Europe remained frosty. Still, isolating Iran proved far more difficult than Washington had envisioned. Despite its extensive efforts, the policy of containing Iran proved a huge failure.

Today, the tables have turned. Washington and London's credibility is at an all time low. The U.S. military is overextended in Iraq and the raging civil war there has removed any doubt that the neo-conservative experiment in the Middle East has been anything but an utter failure. Israel's war with Lebanon this past summer has done little to buy it new friends in the Arab world and the pro-Western Arab governments' impotence in influencing Washington has increased the rift between these regimes and their peoples.

Iran, on the other hand, is ascending. Forces allied with it are winning elections throughout the region, it

has so far successfully defied U.S. and EU pressure to halt its enrichment programme, and the strength of its deterrent forces in Lebanon during the war with Israel surprised even the leadership in Tehran. In addition, the clerics in Tehran are swimming in record-high oil revenues.

Clearly, Iran may sooner or later overplay its hand. Its excessive rhetoric against Israel and the U.S. has already backfired to a certain extent. While it may have contributed to Iran's deterrence against the U.S. -- by signaling that the cost of any military intervention against Iran would be devastating and have major regional repercussions -- it has also served to increase anxiety among Iran's Arab neighbours and make them more inclined to seek Iran's isolation and containment.

Still, a strategy that failed under far more favourable circumstances is unlikely to succeed under the current more challenging conditions. Instead, rather than increasing stability in the region, many believe that pursuing this course risks bringing the confrontation between the West and Iran to a climax, with a regional war as its ultimate outcome. Disturbingly, some elements in Saudi Arabia seem to prefer such a confrontation to the acceptance of an Iraqi democracy with Shiites at its helm.

So far, President Bush and Prime Minister Blair have resisted the one policy that could both avoid regional war and help stabilise Iraq -- a holistic approach that would give all regional states a stake in the region's future and stability. Confrontation and balance of power politics still seems to be preferred over consensus building.

But it remains to be seen who will lose the most -- and who can afford to lose the most -- in the lose-lose situation that the continuation of this policy would likely lead to. Though no side is immune to miscalculation, some would argue that so far, Bush and Blair far outdo their competitors in this field.

*Dr. Trita Parsi is the author of "Traacherous Triangle -- The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the United States" (Yale University Press, 2007). (END/2006)

Recent updates:

- [Iran Is Key to Course Change on Iraq, IPS, November 9, 2006.](#)
- [To the Point with Warren Olney, NPR, October 31, 2006. \(Audio\)](#)
- [Italy boosts talks on Iran but real test lies ahead, Sep 21, 2006.](#)
- [EU and Iran Find Their Roles Reversed, IPS, Sep 7, 2006.](#)
- [Washington's Enrichment Fetish, TomPaine.com, August 28, 2006.](#)
- [Europe Has Six Days to Resolve Suspension Dilemma, IPS, August 25, 2006.](#)
- [Appearance on Newshour with Jim Lehrer, PBS, August 22, 2006. \(Video and text\)](#)
- [Appearance on Talk of the nation, NPR, August 21, 2006. \(Audio\)](#)

PS2. If you wish to be taken off this mailing-list, please reply to this email with the subject line "Unsubscribe"