

A quest for peace or preparation for a new war?

By Oraib Rantawi

In an attempt to justify her country's determination to tighten international sanctions against Iran, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has constructed a scenario wild enough to make reasonable people question her grasp of reality. A nuclear Iran, she claims, would launch a nuclear arms race in the Middle East; this will increase the threat to Israel, which may in turn conduct a military strike against Iran, and the region will plunge into insecurity and instability.

Clearly, Mrs. Clinton has overlooked the fact that Israel is already a nuclear power (although not the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East; that was the USA, in Saudi Arabia as long ago as the late forties/early fifties); and that Israel is one of a small number of states that have refused to sign the Non-Nuclear Proliferation Treaty; and that Israel - like its sponsor the United States - refuses to open its nuclear facilities to international inspectors; and, most importantly, perhaps, that Israel seeks to make sure that it remains the only state in the Middle East in control of its own nuclear weapons by threatening to attack any state that comes anywhere near achieving nuclear status. Israel has also rejected all calls to make the Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction.

The Secretary of State has also forgotten that US intelligence reports on the nature of Iran's nuclear programme are contradictory and clearly inaccurate. They even dispute the continued existence of a nuclear programme for military purposes, which was actually discontinued in 2003. The rhetoric surrounding this issue is nothing but speculation and "Israeli leaks" designed to provoke an attack on Iran, thus maintaining Israel's nuclear hegemony in the Middle East. Such speculation is less convincing than that which was used to justify the invasion of Iraq.

However, the most frustrating thing about Clinton's remarks is that they coincided with two important developments. Threats against Iran are increasing in number and ferocity, building up the "war scenario" as happened pre-invasion of Iraq. The United States and its allies, and the US President and his generals, are all warning Iran of the possibility of being attacked by Israel, rather than warning Israel of the

consequences of such a violation of international law and taking action to stop it going down that route. The US has deployed missile-defence systems in four Gulf States opposite Iran's Persian/Arabian Gulf coastline. These systems supplement those already in place in Israel, which has, apparently, pre-emptive strike plans already in place.

Hillary Clinton's remarks also coincided with the ongoing Chilcot Inquiry into the Iraq War, in which senior British politicians, civil servants and military officers have been giving evidence, and during which ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair, for example, managed to mention the "threat from Iran" numerous times in his testimony. Her remarks regarding "leaks" about the nature of Iran's nuclear programme and the "torrent of lies" in the inquiry have dented whatever remained of the public's confidence in the credibility of the United States and Britain to be honest on these matters.

Put another way, it is increasingly obvious that the so-called leaders of the free world are lying about this, as they have lied on many other issues. They are driven by opportunistic agendas which have little to do with the well-being of the people of the Middle East. They manipulate facts, evidence and witness testimonies. They ignore the disastrous consequences of their wars across the region, even while Iraq stands as living evidence of their style of intervention.

There are signs of an escalation of military activity in the Middle East, with strong hints about an Israeli strike on Iran, the neighbourhood bully planted in the region by Western powers to carry out their dirty work. And the same powers are ready to blame Iran for the coming Israeli assault - again - on Lebanon or - again on Gaza. James Jones's speech that Iran may resort to Hamas or Hezbollah to ease the pressure and get out of the bottleneck can be read as another green light from the US for Israel to resume the war against Lebanon and pour more cast lead over Gaza, all under the cover of US Envoy George Mitchell's pursuit of a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. Who are they trying to fool?