

## Blowback in the Gulf

Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) | May 8, 2006

*“The vice president of the United States gives a major speech focused on the threat from an oil-rich nation in the Middle East. The U.S. secretary of state tells Congress that the same nation is our most serious global challenge. The secretary of defense calls that nation the leading supporter of global terrorism. The president blames it for attacks on U.S. troops. The intelligence agencies say the nuclear threat from this nation is 10 years away, but the director of intelligence paints a more ominous picture. A new U.S. national security strategy trumpets preemptive attacks and highlights the country as a major threat.”*

That statement by Joe Cirincione, the long-time director of non-proliferation at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace and currently the senior vice president for national security and international affairs at the Center for American Progress, is but one example of what a growing number of analysts see as a repetition of pre-war rhetoric and reports about Iraq now being applied to Iran. The only difference today is that the new director of national intelligence, John Negroponte, agrees with the analytical assessment that Iran is 10 years from a bomb provided they do not buy one from another country such as North Korea.

Although the Bush administration and its “coalition of the willing” ignored those opposed to war, both in the United States and in other countries, the anti-war movement succeeded in slowing the rush to war in 2002. With regard to Iran, because of the public record on Iraq, one has a better idea of the Bush administration’s tactics and can key actions that impede the rush to armed conflict with Iran.

For many in the current administration, the fact that clerics in 1979 overturned a ruler installed 23 years earlier by the CIA, seized the U.S. embassy,

and held embassy personnel for 444 days marks the start of what is now a 27-year state of animosity if not war. Considering that the United States aided Iraq in its eight-year (1980- 1988) war against Iran, Tehran’s reciprocal hostility is understandable—as is their drive to establish the ability to enrich uranium to weapons-grade levels should they decide to “go nuclear.”

Two events in April suggest it is now time for Congress to step forward and stop the administration’s drive toward war. Columnist Seymour Hersh of *The New Yorker* magazine wrote that the Pentagon has started work on detailed planning for air strikes—including nuclear “bunker busters”—against Iran’s known nuclear-related sites. He also claims that U.S. military personnel are already operating in Iran—regular troops, not Special Forces. Asked about Hersh’s claim, Colonel Sam Gardiner, now retired but still one of the army’s premier war-game planners, remarked: “The issue is not whether the military option would be used but who approved the start of operations already.”

If U.S. troops have gone into Iran, expect that the Pentagon’s justification will be the need to conduct covert reconnaissance on routes of ingress into Iraq



---

and to pinpoint Iranian troop concentrations and forward assembly areas—collectively “military preparation of the battlefield.” (Such activity by Pentagon assets would put the military on par with the CIA in conducting covert operations, something Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wants.) What the Pentagon planners are anticipating is air strikes against the most important sites for Iraq’s nuclear effort followed by a few covert small-unit insertions for high-risk, high-payoff missions. Coalition troops in Iraq would defend the Iraq-Iran border with Iraqi troops along side. This scenario, plus others, will be war-gamed in July at the National Defense University in Washington, DC. This reportedly will be the first such exercise involving members of Congress. They may get an eye-ful.

And they will if the game’s underlying assumptions are not so rosy as to virtually predispose the outcome. On May 2, the director for planning for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lieutenant General Victor Renuart said, “Any action by any country will have second-order effects, and that is a strong case to continue the diplomatic process and make it work.” (*London Daily Telegraph*)

Military operations cost money, and when the operations don’t go according to the plan, they cost even more. Congress controls the government’s purse-strings in the U.S. system. Congress works for and is accountable to the people (as is the president)—if the people make their concerns known both through the ballot box and by direct contact between elections.

With spending close to \$10 billion per month in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States cannot afford the second-order effects that would come with attacking Iran. It’s time for the administration to sit down with the Iranians, within the context of the European Union-Iranian negotiations, and resolve the differences without threats of armed conflict.

---

*Dan Smith is a military affairs analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus (online at [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)), a retired U.S. Army colonel, and a senior fellow on military affairs at the Friends Committee on National Legislation.*

---

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF), a joint project of the International Relations Center (IRC, online at [www.irc-online.org](http://www.irc-online.org)) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at [www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org)). ©Creative Commons - some rights reserved.

## Foreign Policy In Focus

“A Think Tank Without Walls”

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to “making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner.” For more information, visit [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org).

### Recommended citation:

Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.), “Blowback in the Gulf” (Silver City, NM and Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, May 8, 2006).

### Web location:

<http://www.fpif.org/fpifxtxt/3262>

### Production Information:

Writer: Col. Daniel Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.)

Editor: John Gershman, IRC

Layout: Chellee Chase-Saiz, IRC

