

Bush, please take attack on Iran off table

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It feels like every few months there is a need for an outcry against a possible U.S. or Israeli attack on Iran. For a few moments, the drumbeat of war recedes only to emerge again with the same rationale: Iran is allegedly a threat to the USA and to world peace.

I thought that the matter was settled — at least for a while — when this past fall, U.S. intelligence agencies revealed that Iran had no nuclear weapons program and had, in fact, abandoned such plans several years ago.

This seemed to take the wind out of the sails of the Bush administration for a few weeks until they decided to change their tune and focus on alleged Iranian involvement in the Iraq war. Specifically, it was claimed that the Iranians were arming Shiite groups in Iraq.

The situation became downright silly when Republican presidential candidate John McCain visited Iraq and kept alleging that Al Qaeda-linked groups were based in Iran.

For someone who supposedly knows so much about world affairs this error either betrayed the early onset of dementia or it was a calculated political manipulation.

Al Qaeda, and its allies, are Sunni-based and have a mutual hostility with the Iranian

Shiite regime. In any case, not to let the facts get in the way of provoking a war, McCain eventually corrected himself but continued to blame the Iranians for all sorts of alleged evils.

It is most interesting, though, to listen to the arguments that are raised against Iran. Whether the Iranians are arming the Iraqi Shiites is actually secondary to something more important: the USA illegally invaded and occupied a sovereign country, plunging that country into chaos.

The bottom line is that it is the USA, before ANYONE else, that should not be in Iraq. Focusing on Iran misses the point entirely, something that is clearly intentional.

The renewed focus on Iran and nuclear power remains very curious. Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It possesses no documented weapons. Israel is not a signatory to the agreement. It possesses, according to former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, 150 such weapons.

Iran has not invaded another country during the 20th (or now 21st century). Iran possesses limited technology for a delivery sys-



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tem. No one has been able to document any effort to develop nuclear weapons. And, even if it is in the minds of some of the Iranian leaders, the construction of such weapons is years off. So, what is going on?

In case you missed it, the Bush administration lied its way into an invasion of Iraq, suggesting that the Hussein regime had all sorts of dastardly intents. Nothing was ever proven, and, in fact, it appears that some of Saddam Hussein's reluctance to discuss his military capabilities derived, quite ironically, from a fear of revealing Iraqi weaknesses to Iran!

So, with the USA and Israel suggesting that an attack on Iran is inevitable we, the people of the USA, have to ask ourselves two questions:

- (1) What will we do to prevent an attack, and
- (2) What should we do if there is an attack?

Preventing an attack necessitates making our elected officials aware that we oppose such a move, and we wish them to draw the line. As Congressman Conyers has pointed

out, an attack on Iran without the approval of Congress would be an illegal act. Congress needs to be prepared to make that point clear.

Yet, Israel may become the 'sub-contractor' for the USA in attacking Iran. Israel can and has been restrained by the USA in the past.

Israel must understand that should it attack Iran that the current global discussions already underway concerning a boycott and divestment movement against Israel (due to its occupation of Palestinian territories) would go into overdrive. There would probably be no way of stopping such a movement even if one wanted to.

So, in that sense, what to do to stop an attack is linked to what to do if an attack takes place. Our elected leaders must understand that we will not sit back.

Oh, one more thing, in case you think that this is something that you can ignore: If you are currently concerned about the price of gas, you had better be petrified thinking about what will happen should there be another war and should the Iranians decide to block oil exports from the Persian/Arabian Gulf. Just a friendly reminder.

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Children of incarcerated mothers silent victims

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Many mothers who experience childbirth are coached through labor in a hospital maternity ward with supportive doctors and nurses. Their husbands may capture the birth with a video camera. After the baby's bawling, first breaths, mother and child bond in a joyous embrace.

Childbirth is not so joyous for the growing number of women who give birth behind bars. It is a time of humiliation, sadness and separation. Before, during, and after delivery, prison mothers are commonly shackled. No one is there to take those first baby pictures. And the infant may be whisked away by a social worker to be given to a family member to raise, or if they are less fortunate, the child goes to foster care. The mother returns to an eight foot by 12 foot prison cell to grieve. The bond between mother and child is broken at the moment of delivery.

There are about 1.2 million parents incarcerated in federal or state prisons or local jails in the United States. The number of mothers in prison grew 88 percent from 1991 to 2002. While relatively few women who are incarcerated give birth behind bars, about two-

thirds of female inmates are mothers of minor children. Most women are in prison for non-violent offenses, many of them drug-related.

Almost 60 percent of mothers in state prisons lived with their children at the time they entered prison. With few procedures or policies that require or facilitate maintaining relationships between mothers and their children, the criminal justice system often breaks families apart.

The majority of incarcerated parents reside more than 100 miles from their homes. While in prison, many mothers only rarely see their children and are not involved in decisions about their welfare, nor do they get any help with parenting. Some lose track of their children altogether.

Almost 80 percent of the children with a mother in prison live with a grandparent or other relative who generally receives little public support. About 10 percent of children with incarcerated mothers are in foster care, and in some cases they have entered care before the parent was locked up. But foster



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care can result in a parent losing the rights to their children permanently, because federal law requires, with limited exceptions, that a state file a petition to terminate parental rights when a child has been in foster care for 15 out of 22 months. The timetable is especially problematic, given that the average time a mother in state prison is expected to

serve is 49 months.

Children can be deeply traumatized by the incarceration of their mothers. They may feel abandoned or blame themselves for their parent being taken away. Even young children may feel the stigma and shame of having a parent behind bars.

Studies have documented that children of incarcerated parents are prone to emotional and behavioral difficulties, poor academic performance, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse and are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system themselves. The majority of the 1.5 million children of incarcerated parents are Black or Latino.

The bond between a mother behind bars and her children does not have to be severed. The Federal Bureau of Prisons is in the process of revising its policy on restraining mothers during labor, delivery and post-delivery. California, Illinois and Vermont are the only states that currently regulate the use of restraints on pregnant women. Other state prisons and jails need to follow suit.

Some states have taken other steps to revamp their approaches to dealing with female offenders. For example, California is moving women from large remote prisons to smaller, community-based centers allowing more frequent mother-child visits. California, Indiana, Nebraska, New York, Ohio and

Washington are among the states that have established prison nurseries.

Girl Scouts Beyond Bars is another attempt to keep prison mothers connected to their children and involved in their development. The program, currently operating in 17 states, brings mothers and daughters together weekly to monthly for troop meetings. Other programs provide opportunities for parent-child classes, as well as overnight and weekend visits. There are models of virtual visitation through the use of tape recorders, video cameras and computers.

Some state legislatures also are working to get a better grip on the numbers and demographic characteristics of these children to design appropriate recommendations for better meeting their needs. Other states are developing protocols for reunifying children in foster care with their parents and engaging parents in decision-making about their children.

Particularly important are efforts to encourage the diversion of more parents from prison into family- and community-based alternatives to incarceration. Some involve diverting non-violent offenders to treatment programs for mental health or substance abuse problems. Alternative sentences include halfway houses and home detention with ankle bracelet monitors to help mothers remain in their children's lives.

Steps to institute alternatives to incarcerating mothers will go a long way toward staunching the flow of future generations of young people into the pipeline to prison. Each step we take in that direction will not only be beneficial tomorrow, it will begin to change our society for the better today. Learn about CDF's Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign at: www.childrensdefense.org/cradletoprison

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more than mean; this is pure hate. You have to be pretty sick to think this stuff up.

It gets worse. Bill O'Reilly has stated on his nightly show on Fox News that he wants to organize a "lynching party to go after Michelle Obama." This is 2008 and we are on the verge of breaking a long cycle of exclusivity. However, there is a news medium that is hell bent on preventing that. Issuing a statement like this is truly indicative that something very wrong is still amiss amongst us. We need to call it out.

I gave up watching Fox News long ago. I just could no longer stomach the mess that was being presented before me. No African-American or any human being with racial tolerance can watch this program on a consistent basis. Bad taste is one thing, but racial animus becomes something more sinister.

It is time for us to start officially complaining to the Federal Communications Commission about the antics this channel is perpetrating. Let's stop this monster.

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