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Is U.S. laying new threat or saying same old thing?



IranTimes: President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney both spoke about Iran and the news media coverage made it sound as if they were plotting to slam the Islamic Republic to the mat any day now—but their full remarks taken in context amounted to considerably less. Each man spoke one phrase of “red meat” for their conservative base—but just one phrase. Bush said a nuclear Iran could mean “World War III.” Cheney said: “We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon.” The media coverage focused on those brief phrases. But the thrust of what Bush said was that an Iran armed with nuclear weapons could start World War III, not that he was prepared to start it to stop Iran. The list he gave of the American tools being used to pressure the Islamic Republic never cited the military tool. The main theme of Cheney’s remarks—after a laundry list of offenses committed by the Islamic Republic—was American respect for Iranian civilization and support for the Iranian people’s desire to be free. The Islamic Republic turned Bush’s World War III reference around and said Bush was threatening Iran, whereas Bush said repeatedly that Iran was threatening the world. It sounded a bit like a schoolyard brawl with each party telling the teacher the other started the fight. While the American news coverage also spoke as if Bush were threatening World War III, the White House spoke back. Spokeswoman Dana Perino said, “The president was not making any war plans and he wasn’t making any declarations. He was using that as

a rhetorical point. What the president said wasn’t about what we would do. It was about them.... The president also said that we are going to continue to work this issue diplomatically.” National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe said some people were reading too much into the president’s words. “There’s been no change in the policy. That’s just another way of saying we don’t want them to develop nuclear weapons.” Still, the White House was again accused of “laying the groundwork for military action” by a reporter. Spokesman Tony Fratto said, “Look, the president, the vice president, Secretary [Condoleezza] Rice, Secretary [Robert] Gates have all been incredibly clear and consistent in our message on Iran. And that is that we first seek a diplomatic solution and we are committed to a diplomatic solution and we’re committed to working with our international partners to pressure Iran to stop this activity.” The reporter persisted, saying Bush and Cheney had stepped up their rhetoric. “I wouldn’t call it stepping up rhetoric,” Fratto responded. “In fact, what the vice president said I thought was a very clear review of the situation in the Middle East. And, by the way, it’s not at all different from what he has said before and what the president has said before and what Secretary Rice has said before.” But Reuters still wrote that Bush and Cheney were “ratcheting up” U.S. rhetoric.

And a New York Times reporter said

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Is Putin pulling Iran’s leg?

by Warren L. Nelson

As soon as Russian President Vladimir Putin was back in Moscow from Iran, he closeted himself for three hours with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Olmert emerged smiling. Putin said all sorts of nasty things about the United States and all sorts of nice things about the Islamic Republic during the dozen hours he was in Tehran last month. That prompted much analysis in the media saying Putin was moving Russia closer to Iran. But political leaders in the United States and Israel didn’t act at all concerned. In fact, they seemed to have concluded that Putin was just buttering up President Ahmadinejad. While media analysts were saying Putin’s nice words for Tehran suggested Russia was breaking with the West over Iran’s nuclear program, President Bush told a news conference, the day after Putin was in Tehran, that Putin and he “don’t agree on a lot of issues. We do agree on some. Iran is one. Nuclear proliferation is another.” Bush said, “When we were in Australia [together in September], he reconfirmed to me that he recognizes it’s not in the world’s interest for Iran to have the capacity to make a nuclear weapon.” As soon as Putin returned to Moscow, Olmert flew from Israel to Moscow on an invitation from Putin. Putin received Olmert in public and was heard to say, “We know how the situation surrounding the Iranian nuclear program worries you. I am ready to share the results of my visit to Tehran with you.” The men spent three hours together. Olmert’s spokeswoman said Olmert found Putin still staunchly opposed to an Iranian nuclear arsenal. She said, “The prime minister was encouraged by his visit with the impression that Russia and Israel



have the same sense of the Iranian nuclear threat.” U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with Putin the week before he went to Tehran and said, “I saw no evidence that Russia intends to do anything but stay on that path we laid out.” Russia’s policy for more than two years has been to demand that Iran permanently halt all nuclear enrichment. It has said that Iran can own part of an enrichment plant in Russia that would supply it with reactor fuel, but without Iran having access to the technology. Russia has not deviated from that policy path, although it has often lavished rhetoric on the Islamic Republic and condemned Washington for confrontational words. While most journalists took the coziness between Putin and Ahmadinejad at face value, a few expressed doubts and pointed out the strong opposition in Russia to any other countries going nuclear. David Blair of the Daily Telegraph of London wrote: “Russia views a nucleararmed Iran as a strategic threat. Despite the handshakes, Putin and Ahmadinejad do not trust one another an inch.” But Parviz Davudi, Iran’s first vice president, took the opposite view,

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Larijani out of nuke job

IranTimes: Ali Larijani abruptly quit his post as Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, setting off a flurry of speculation that the resignation might lead to a harder Iranian line and more power for President Ahmadinejad. Larijani quit his post as secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). He will remain a member of the SNSC, where he sits as the representative of the Supreme Leader. Larijani was replaced as secretary by Saeed Jalili, currently a deputy foreign minister in charge of European and American affairs. Jalili was only 14 at the time of the revolution. He is thus the first man to reach a high post in the realm who did not play any role in the revolution itself. Jalili was, however, a soldier during the Iran-Iraq War and was wounded. He still walks with a limp from that injury. Larijani had come to be described as a moderate in an extremely conservative administration. But before becoming SNSC secretary in 2005, Larijani was for 10 years the head of state broadcasting where he earned a reputation as an extreme conservative and the bane of reformers. Some analysts said Larijani left because he couldn’t tolerate Ahmadinejad’s confrontational policies. Others said there was no difference in policy, but a major difference in tactics, with Larijani pursuing a courteous and kindly approach to the world, and feeling that Ahmadinejad’s in-your-face rhetoric was a tactic that might benefit Ahmadinejad domestically but was undermining Larijani’s efforts internationally and risking Iran’s national interests. For example, Gerald Steinberg of Bar-Ilan



University in Israel saw the resignation as a vote of no-confidence in Ahmadinejad’s Administration, saying Larijani was “someone who knows how the real world works.” Many described Jalili as Ahmadinejad’s man in the Foreign Ministry and saw his elevation to secretary of the SNSC as a consolidation of power by the president. But others noted that Jalili worked in the office of the Supreme Leader for four years before Ahmadinejad was elected president and suggested Jalili was really Khamenehi’s man in the Foreign Ministry. Others did not think Jalili was experienced or seasoned enough for the high post he now holds at age 42. Ahmad Tavakkoli, a senior conservative Majlis deputy, publicly dismissed Jalili as coming to his new post “with little experience.” A European diplomat who has dealt with Jalili also showed a lack of enthusiasm for his professional skills, saying meetings with Jalili produced monologue, not dialogue. Larijani’s resignation and Jalili’s appointment by the president were announced Saturday. In making the announcements, government spokesman Gholam-Hossain Elham said Larijani had submitted his resignation repeatedly, but

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Clinton on Iran

IranTimes: Iran has suddenly become the central focus of the Democratic presidential competition, with the second-rung candidates ganging up on front-runner Hillary Clinton to accuse her of being too hard-line. Much of the argument among the candidates was hair-splitting and invented controversy, as is typical in campaigns, and did little to illuminate policy differences. But Senator Clinton did write an article about her Iran policy—and in that she said: “All options must remain on the table.” The New York Times quoted Clinton campaign backers as saying Clinton’s words on Iran were indeed changing because she now sees herself as the Democratic nominee and is shifting gears from combating fellow Democrats—where she must appeal to peaceniks on the left—to combating the Republican nominee—where she must appeal to centrists by dispelling notions that Democrats are too soft on the use of military power. The campaign spats of recent days have focused on two actions by Clinton. First, in answering a question last month Clinton said her administration would talk to Iran, unlike the Bush Administration. Sen. Barack Obama



quickly pounced on that remark, accusing Clinton of changing positions. Several weeks ago, Obama had said he would personally be willing to talk as president to Iran’s President Ahmadinejad and other foreign figures viewed

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