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What's the difference between Obama & Clinton on Iran?



Sen. Barack Obama says the main difference between him and Sen. Hillary Clinton is that she wishes to aggressively confront Iran inside Iraq while he doesn't. But Senator Clinton pointed to a statement by Obama months ago in which he said almost the same thing about confronting Iranians inside Iraq as Clinton. With the first state caucuses only seven weeks away and Obama trailing badly in the polls, Obama has been very vocally attacking Clinton and using Iran as his chief tool in those attacks. He is seeking to paint Clinton as too militant and likely to take America into a war with Iran if elected. On NBC's "Meet the Press", Obama pressed that point. "The primary difference between myself and Senator Clinton is that she believes that our force structure inside Iraq should, in part, depend on how we can prevent Iran from having influence inside of Iraq. And I think that is a mistake, particularly at a time when we know this administration has been itching to escalate the tensions between Iran and the United States." As evidence for his point, Obama quoted a statement Clinton made earlier this year: "We have a continuing vital national security interest in trying to prevent Iran from crossing the border and having too much influence inside of Iraq," Clinton said in a March interview with The New York Times. Obama said, "That then presents the possibility of a mission creep, an expansion that would involve more troops than I think is necessary." In a response posted on her website, Senator Clinton brushed aside Obama's criti-

cism, saying he had said "the exact same thing" a year ago about using U.S. forces to limit Iranian meddling in Iraq. She cited an Obama speech last November in which he said: "Make no mistake, if the Iranians and Syrians think they can use Iraq as another Afghanistan or a staging area from which to attack Israel or other countries, they are badly mistaken. It is in our national interests to prevent this from happening." One could argue that Obama's comments were not really "the exact same thing" as Clinton alleged. However, the two quotes at least show there is not the stark difference in views that Obama sought to portray. But lost in the haggling over words was the more basic question of the utility of American troops to counter Iranian influence in Iraq. Iran has no combat units inside Iraq. While some in the United States believe Iran desires to occupy Iraq, they usually come from the far right of the political spectrum and not from the Democratic Party. Oddly, the earlier remarks by both Obama and Clinton seem to assume an Iranian interest in positioning its military forces inside Iraq. Iranian "influence" in Iraq is partly a result of alleged Iranian military aid to militias seeking to kill Americans. But critics argue that if the Americans left, that aspect would end. The main Iranian "influence" stems from the Shia link and the aid that Iran gave major Shia groups opposing Saddam Hussein for decades. But American regiments and battalions do nothing to counter that kind of political and personal influence.

Iran tries but fails to draft Opec into attack on dollar

OPEC forgot to pull the plug last week and accidentally broadcast to reporters a meeting of foreign ministers in which Iran pushed hard to have OPEC attack the U.S. dollar and Saudi Arabia very politely but firmly told Iran OPEC would do no such thing. The opening ceremony of the meeting of OPEC ministers was broadcast by closed circuit to journalists in another room. Once the opening ceremony was concluded, someone was supposed to pull the plug. But for about 30 minutes the "closed" meeting was broadcast to journalists. Journalists saw Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki argue that the final declaration to be issued after the summit meeting of OPEC chiefs of state should express OPEC's concern over the fall in the value of the dollar and its impact on their oil revenues. Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal would have nothing to do with that. He said highlighting the issue "would have the opposite effect and the media would pick up on this point." Looking at Mottaki, he said, "Perhaps we would find that the dollar had collapsed, instead of

us having done something in the interest of our countries." Before the plug was pulled, only Venezuela supported Iran. The final summit statement contained no mention of the dollar at all. Saud was clearly very unhappy with Iran for even airing the issue. "This is a sensitive issue," Saud said. "It will cause the dollar to drop further, thus complicating the problems we are facing from the dollar's fall." At a news conference after the summit, President Ahmadi-nejad created his own version of reality. "All leaders taking part in the meeting were willing to convert the pricing of oil into a currency other than the dollar," he said. "Some said producing countries should designate a single hard currency aside from the U.S. dollar ... to form the basis of our oil trade." But no country advocated that, not even Iran; Ahmadi-nejad ignored the fact that his own foreign minister had proposed a shift from the dollar to a basket of currencies. Ahmadi-nejad dismissed the dollar as a "worthless piece of pa-

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Iran said to shop for Russian and Chinese fighters

While the Islamic Republic says it is now building its own fighter jets, the Russian media are reporting that Iran is talking to Russia and China about buying their modern fighter planes. Iran has been silent about the news reports. It has recently, however, been telling its public that it no longer needs to import weapons and is building everything it needs, including the Azarakhsh and Saeqeh fighter jets that were recently shown off to the media. But European analysts and Russian news reports say that is not true. They say Iran is negotiating to buy Sukhoi-30s from Russia and Chengdu J-10s from China. Those are the latest generation aircraft made by those countries. No other countries that make combat planes will sell arms to the Islamic Republic, so Iran must either make its own or buy Russian and Chinese planes. Iran's Air Force is still based largely on the American planes bought by the Shah before the revolution, planes that are now more than three decades old. The Iranian Air Force has about 200 American-made planes, 60 Soviet-made aircraft (of which about half are Iraqi planes flown to Iran in 1991 and expropriated) and 24 Chinese-made F-7 fighters. Flight International magazine said Iran was negotiating for 250 SU-30s and 40 J-10s. A purchase on that scale would double the size of Iran's Air

Force. Claude Moniquet, president of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, a Brussels-based think-tank, said, "It is clear that Iran has been trying for some time to buy the latest generation of jet fighters." He pointed out they cannot buy from any manufacturers other than Chinese and Russian. No contracts have yet been reported. It is possible that Iran does not intend to buy such aircraft, but is just expressing interest in hopes that the huge funds from such a sale would induce Russia and China to oppose further UN sanctions on Iran. Russia has only been able to sell a relative handful of SU-30s; an Iranian purchase of 250 planes would keep the production line going for years. In 2000, Russia said it was rescinding its pledge to Vice President Al Gore not to sell any more weapons to Iran.

Russian officials said then that Iran was salivating to buy about \$7 billion in weapons from Russia. Apart from \$700 million of air defense missiles bought last year apparently to protect nuclear sites from an American attack, Iran has bought next to nothing from Russia, however. The rescinding of the promise to Gore was announced shortly before the U.S. presidential elections and was used by Republicans to attack Gore, who lost the election by a hair's breadth.

Shahi gets lead female role on TV

Iran Times: Sarah Shahi, great-great-granddaughter of Fath Ali Shah, is now playing the lead female role in the new NBC series "Life." Shahi, 27, was born in Euless, Texas, to an Iranian father and a Spanish mother. She speaks Farsi, English and a little Spanish. Shahi first made a name for herself as a Dallas Cowboys football cheerleader. Shahi said, "The cheerleaders, for me, strictly were a stepping stone. I'd heard they had been on Saturday Night Live [television show] back in 1995. I was a cheerleader in the 1999-2000 season, and I thought I was going to get on SNL and [producer] Lorne Michaels was going to meet me and fall in love with me and I would hang up my boots forever. It didn't quite happen that way." Shahi was attending Southern Methodist University in Texas and cheerleading for the Dallas Cowboys, when she up and moved to Los Angeles to pursue her childhood dreams of acting.

"Cheerleading was great—trust me, it was awesome. But when I saw an opportunity to go to L.A., become an actor and do the thing I'd been dreaming of since I was a little girl, I took it. "In Texas it's not feasible. Going to the moon makes more sense than becoming an actor. So when I saw that chance, I quit the cheerleaders, I quit school.... I was ambitious and studious—my mom loved it. But I just jumped right out to California and did it, you know? "I didn't know anybody. I had a red pickup truck, we drove into town on a Sunday night, and by Tuesday I was in an acting class. By the end of the week I had a manager and, knock on wood, some good luck." Shahi is widely known not only for her acting skills, but also for her beauty, which placed her Number 66 in Maxim magazine's "Hot 100 of 2006" list.

Shahi's new television role has her playing the part of Police Officer Dani Reese, partner of Charlie Crews, in the new series "Life," which airs Wednesdays on NBC at 10/9 Central. In the show, which premiered in September, Crews spent more than five years in prison after being wrongly convicted for a triple murder charge. After DNA was presented exonerating him from all charges, Crews was released from prison and reinstated by the Los Angeles Police Department. Crews, having spent so much time behind bars, is totally out of touch with cultural trends and modern technologies. As a result, Reese has been assigned to look after Crews partly as punishment for her own past drug problems.

In preparation for her role as Dani Reese, Shahi said, "I did go to some Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. It does seem to be the trendy subject in Hollywood. But other than that, I did a lot of research and talked to a lot of people, and then it's all my imagination." Shahi has appeared or starred in several TV series including "Dawson's Creek," "Teachers," "The Sopranos," "Frasier," "ER," "Reba," "Alias," and "The L Word."



Shahi has acted in two major featurefilms: "Old School" and "For Your Consideration." Shahi has had a very eclectic performing career, from acting as a lesbian vixen on the popular TV series "The L Word," to her conventional role as Tina Torres, a high school teacher in New Jersey on the show "Teachers." "Teachers," loosely based on a UK series, ran for six episodes before its cancellation in 2006. "The L Word," a very racy Showtime series about lesbians in Los Angeles, is scheduled to air a fifth season, premiering in January 2008.

Shahi says that although she herself is straight, she has "dabbled" with female lovers in real life, but she told an interviewer she thinks guys make better lovers. "But, really, the thing that makes anybody a great lover is chemistry. Sometimes you feel really great with another person—male or female—and sometimes you just don't mix well at all." Shahi said she loaded up on garlic and curry before filming sexy scenes for "The L Word." She said, "I liked to give Kate [Moening,

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