

what ends up as a headline on CBS News (or NPR for that matter) is *“Iranians protesting show their opposition to the repressive Islamic regime”* through “creative” editing. The media will minimize the opposition to intervention and play up the repressive nature of the regime. As evidence they will use Iranians opposed to the regime to justify an attack-even if they may be opposed to an attack. Our actions will be distorted, manipulated and used by the media and this administration to sell intervention.

The U.S. used the Iraqi Communist Party, Kurdish leaders and anybody else they could get who opposed Saddam Hussein to sell an attack on Iraq. They don't care if you are nationalist, leftist, or somebody they'd toss aside tomorrow. We shouldn't make ourselves unwittingly or unwillingly available to them when the propaganda kicks up against Iran.

NT: *So you mean that the media will use Iranians critical of their country to justify an attack against it?*

Sepehri: My point is that there are two issues: 1) opposition to U.S. intervention and 2) opposition to the Iranian regime- The importance is the tension between the two and getting the balance right. The media will minimize the *opposition to intervention* component or accentuate the *opposition to regime* component. This is extremely important- It is a current debate with Iranians.

Now In Iran, most Iranians are not happy with this regime. They don't need the presumptuous, paternalistic Bush administration to tell them about whether their life is good or bad, or if they lack freedom. They know exactly how much freedom they have, and are actually much more creative about pushing its limits than people here.

The affluent and upper classes welcome access to the “wonderful wealth of the west,” from Gucci glasses to fancy cars. The other classes hope for change. But propaganda is not the issue. It is the context in which this propaganda is functioning that is important. Let me explain:

3-4 years ago, when talking to people who were not tied to the regime- not only the affluent but taxi-drivers, poorer workers, or students, there was an illusion that U.S. going into Iraq was not such a bad thing. Some would go so far as to say that if the U.S. would save them and rid them of this government they would welcome it.

That is no longer there the case- Abu-Ghraib changed that. The reality of a U.S. occupation changed that. So today U.S. propaganda has a very different effect. Today people are scared of the very real possibility of a U.S. attack. They may be angry about the way Ahmadinejad may be endangering them-like people here not quite believing how the Bush administration keeps plowing forward no matter what.

But there is no illusion about the peace and prosperity which the U.S. will bring- the blood and violence of Iraq are hard to miss. Iranians wouldn't wish that on their enemies, let alone themselves.

NT: *Do you think Iran will or should develop nuclear weapons in the face of U.S. threats?*

Sepehri: No. But there are two issues here: 1) Iran's right to develop nuclear technology (not arms) and 2) whether I think Iran should exercise it.

Under the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty], Iran has a right to develop nuclear technology. Nuclear capable countries are even supposed to assist them under the supervision of IAEA. So one has to ask why it's OK for India and Israel, who have *not* signed the NPT and have nuclear *weapons*, to receive assistance from the U.S., Britain, and France, but not Iran? I am personally against all use of nuclear energy. But Iran's *right* has to be defended.

There are forces that are pushing Iran to develop nuclear capability. Here are a few:

1) Israel, hostile to Iran, with an arsenal of over 200 nuclear weapons. It is threatening to attack Iran if the U.S. doesn't.

2) The United States, the only country which has ever used nuclear weapons (against Hiroshima and Nagasaki). It says the Iranian regime has to be overthrown, and it currently has 2 aircraft carrier groups in the Persian Gulf, with enough fire power to bomb Iran 24/7 for a full month. It has also threatened to use small “tactical” nukes.

3) Pakistan & India, both nuclear states and regional competitors of Iran.

However, to be nuclear-capable is very different from having nuclear arms. Every IAEA report has said that, despite Iran's treaty violations, there is no evidence that they are pursuing a weapons program. Every report from the CIA and the Pentagon says Iran is years away from producing even *one* nuclear weapon. The real issue is the balance of power-if you are not nuclear capable (technology not arms), you are not a player.

Even if Iran had nuclear arms, that may deter Israel or Pakistan, but not the U.S. It would be lunacy for Iran to ever use nuclear weapons against the U.S., with its vast arsenal. But the U.S. is talking about using small tactical nuclear weapons, even against Iran - *right now*.

Look at Japan. It is supposedly peaceful, but has all the materials ready to assemble nuclear weapons- In a matter of months it could have a nuclear arsenal bigger than China's.

In even a decade Iran would not be able to be a nuclear threshold state like Japan

This is not just about Iran. Other states are pursuing this nuclear militarization. Brazil is also just starting. This is a byproduct of the neocons' Project for a new American Century.

Nor is it simply that the U.S. has decided to use its military advantage over its rivals to secure an uncontested economic