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Simone La Corbinière
Our World Our Say
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Dear Simone

Thank you for your letter concerning plans to attack Iran, which I read this morning. The letter raises so many points of similarity to what I was thinking in November of last year, when I resigned from the Labour Party, that I have thought it necessary to describe what I was thinking then, why I now think the situation has changed, additionally why I do not think a donation to your organisation is an optimal use of my cash and why, now having rejoined the Labour Party, I shall not be asking a question on Iran of Tony Blair when he comes to Brighton on Sunday 1st May, and also what I now believe ought to be actively pursued on this important issue.

As a member of the Labour Party of 17 years standing, ever since Bush's 'axis of evil' speech, I have been actively lobbying the Labour Party, firstly over the issue of North Korea, then in resolutions from our ward concerning the situation in Iraq (one of which asked Tony Blair to resign) and also in over 50 letters and e-mails on the same issue to Labour Party members and Brighton Pavilion MP David Lepper, a radio interview and a televised direct question to Tony Blair immediately before the 2004 Labour Party Conference concerning the impending attack on Falluja – where the PM claimed he had heard of 'no such plans', and that I finally documented the reasons for leaving the Labour Party to Labour Party chair Ian McCartney for two reasons – the British support for the attack on and trashing of the town of Falluja and a possible attack on Iran by either the Americans or, as their surrogate, Israel.

You correctly mention the report by Scott Ritter and the report by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker*, but do not mention the detailed earlier report in the *Atlantic Monthly* on a high-level Iran war game – I am sorry, I do not seem to be able to find the article, which considered many factors like the time frame in which Iran might develop a nuclear capability, the Iranian response to congressional approval of funding for airbase facilities in Azerbaijan necessary for an attack (incidentally, the procedure for congressional approval has since been changed to hide any such funding), the lack of any credible exit strategy in Pentagon plans for an invasion and the invalid assumption in Pentagon war games that Iran would not respond to such preparations – the conclusion was that an invasion of Iran by the Americans would be a disaster and an attack by the Israelis would be worse, and that the President should

not be notified of such a possibility. The only military option it left open was an attack on the Iranian Republican Guard.

Of course, the situation has developed since then. I am aware that Iranian experts employed by the Pentagon are involved in continuing military plans against Iran, which they believe will be activated. The Israeli converted aircraft carrier which was denied access through the Suez canal by the Egyptians is now travelling round the Horn of Africa and should be in range of Iran in two weeks.

Whilst such developments might be alarming, I consider there are other factors that make military action now much less likely. In a more recent letter to Ian McCartney detailing my reasons for rejoining the Labour Party, in the section on Iran I note that John Bolton, who I had feared would become Under Secretary of State under Condoleezza Rice, and whose appointment would have directly signalled the intention to attack Iran, had been outmanoeuvred by the American nomenclatura so that Robert Zoellick, a knowledgeable and pragmatic Republican career diplomat – a safe pair of hands – had been appointed instead. As a further positive reason, I noted that to judge by statistics, the neo-con (and neo-con promoting) U.S. Vice-President, who had a heart triple bypass operation in November 2004, was likely to die round about May or June 2006. I also expressed my surprise that John Bolton had been nominated as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, since he is not a diplomat (although I compared him to Ribbentrop), from where – if he is appointed – he will sabotage any U.N. progress on climate change and might be expected by his abrasive behaviour to cause considerable damage to U.S. diplomatic relations with other countries.

That Zoellick has been able to steer Rice and the U.S. President in a successful European tour, also (to judge from a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*) that the State Department has been reactivated to promote direct diplomatic solutions by selected intermediaries, as used to be the case in the past, and that the U.S. has joined with the Europeans in addressing its predispositions towards Iran, all indicate that negotiated solutions to sometimes intractable problems are now being actively pursued by the American administration – and I would strongly infer this also includes direct contact with Iran.

Let us explore tentatively and not in considerable detail what type of decisions might lead to a war against Iran. If the Israelis violated Iranian air space (perhaps to trigger Iranian air defences in order to monitor them, or otherwise as a direct act of war in order to destroy part of Iranian nuclear facilities) or even if the Iranians deemed a pre-emptive strike was necessary, this could lead to an Iranian decision to sink the Israeli aircraft carrier, by say torpedoes or silkworm missiles, whose position it is quite easy to monitor by satellite pictures available to Iran. Whether this was successful or unsuccessful this might be sufficient reason, were the political will present, for the Americans to declare war against Iran. For that reason I believe the Iranians would show restraint under provocation. Were such a war to take place, at least two reactions from the Iranians are probable. Firstly, with their considerable contacts and knowledge of the situation in Iraq, they would be able to make life very difficult for the Americans there (it is rational for them to adopt such a policy now irrespective of whether there is a war situation). Secondly, it is likely they would mine the Straits of Hormuz. There are clearly a large number of other reactions that would

take place under such a scenario, like an American draft and Iranian mobilisation, American bombing and cruise missile attacks against Iran, Iranian missile attacks against Israel, Iranian inspired attacks by Hamas against Israeli targets, the Gulf becoming a war zone, skyrocketing oil prices inducing probably a world depression and withdrawal of other states' funds from the United States leading to a collapse of the dollar, diplomatic fracture of the relationship between the Americans and other superstates such as the Europeans, Russians and Chinese, widespread instability and unrest in the Middle East, probably in Saudi Arabia and maybe in Egypt, and if the Americans invaded Iran, catastrophic damage to the Iranian economy and possible military defeat of the Americans in any drawn-out occupation of Iran.

Any American administration that would like to encourage such a possibility would be crazy, and they are not crazy.

As far as our present government is concerned, I have this to say. It is now increasingly evident that the behaviour of Tony Blair in his support for the neo-con inspired attack on Iraq, which at one stage I thought to be inexplicable, was both manipulative and rational. Concerning Iran, I was indeed worried by his response to a parliamentary question from Michael Meacher asking whether the British government would lend military support to the Americans if they decided to invade Iran, in which outrageously he claimed not to know of any plans by the Americans to invade it – which seems by the PM to be a standard way of lying. However, following the leak of the Attorney General's advice to the PM on the legality of the war against Iraq, the Labour Party is sufficiently informed so that any direct military support for such an action against Iran would not be endorsed by the party and could not be enacted in parliament. Further, it is clear in international law there is no corresponding pretext as existed in the case of Iraq, to twist an interpretation of a Security Council resolution so as to enable correspondingly a war against Iran, nor is any new such resolution in the offing. Since the legal British situation is that we are subject to international law, we cannot go to war against Iran. This is different to the US position, where war is enabled by Congress. I would say in mitigation of the British position, that Jack Straw has made considerable diplomatic efforts in going at least five times to Tehran to negotiate on behalf of and with the Europeans on Iranian nuclear intentions and to try and improve relations with Iran, as well as promoting the Americans to join with the Europeans on the issue.

As far as using the Iran problem in the election campaign is concerned, that is up to you, but my position is as follows.

In terms of Tony Blair's personality, I have now come to the conclusion that lying by a politician (or more generally misrepresentation, in order to manipulate opinion – in Blair's case because I think he likes to be liked and fears to be rejected, although there may be other reasons) is not an unusual circumstance – you could put Harold Wilson and many other Prime Ministers in the same category – and if lying were a criminal offence a very large part of the population would be in jail. So it might be regrettable that a person lies, and I do not trust people who say they never lie, and if you think it through there are (very exceptional) circumstances where it is moral and ethical to lie, but that is not for me the deciding factor in my opinion of Tony Blair. Nor am I opposed to the hyperactivity by the government and the Prime Minister in particular on media presentation – that is just being professional. For me

what are important are two related factors: judgement, and the determination (by analysis) of what constitutes fact. In my opinion Blair has made some misjudgements because he is not overly concerned in the process of analysing what constitutes fact. He thinks, like many politicians, if he has the will and the power he can make what he wants happen. I would describe this as being the philosophy of fascism, and it is up to the many people in the Labour Party by experience of events, of their own lives and by debate on ideas and circumstances to determine the best way of how a democratic decision structure is to be enforced, and that is an important debate that I very much hope will take place and to which I hope I can contribute.

The reason I shall not be asking a question to Tony Blair on Iran tomorrow, is that we are in an election campaign, and I feel it necessary to show solidarity. The reasons for my support are many-fold. In the first place, it is not inconceivable that the Conservative targeting of marginal constituencies might be successful where letters evoking emotional hate and fear responses are elicited by cross-reference from an extensive database of political 'stress' issues against market research on consumer preferences – an imaginary example might be the Conservatives sending a letter on abortion to a reader of the Catholic Herald. This strategy was successful in the Republican campaign to re-elect Bush, and in the Australian election. Secondly, since 1997 we have had a Labour government with an incomparably better record of economic management than I have ever experienced before in either Labour or Conservative governments (I am 55 years old), where economic incompetence used to be the norm. Thirdly there has been a quiet revolution in social provision: in terms of the New Deal which has reduced unemployment, the minimum wage, extensive investment in infrastructure and personnel in education and the NHS and the Sure Start scheme for nursery provision. I can mention many other examples, like our fantastic new library in Brighton (a PFI scheme). Fourthly, I completely reject the Conservative scheme on Asylum Seekers, which seeks to abrogate our responsibilities under the Geneva Convention for refugees, and send them to an offshore island (Diego Garcia?) where they are to be interned, to use a term invented by the British in the Boer War, in *concentration camps* far away from legal representation. The depiction of asylum seekers not as human beings with human feelings and emotions and human needs, but as *objects*, as *things* is precisely the same as the depiction by the Nazis of the Jews as sub-human, or of sub-human Slavs or gypsies – it is identical in conception to that racism. How easy it is for politicians to create a sense of identity with themselves by denying the humanity of others. Fifthly, I support what the government has done on climate change, and will maintain support for its energy strategy. Sixthly I support what the government has done in overseas development, and expect to continue to do so. There are a number of features of Labour's programme with which I do not agree – ID cards, and what has previously happened with our own gulag at Belmarsh. But I must make a choice. I *have* made a choice – I support Labour.

Back to Iran, I think that the strategy that needs to be pursued is, firstly, that the British government and the British people are made aware that it is illegal to lend even support to any American attack against Iran, and that secondly, the prime function of the British government is to develop a *rapprochement* between the Iranians and the American administration, which have for understandable reasons for many years been at an appalling level – and this includes the strong promotion of

pressure against Israel not to wage war against Iran – and to promote the idea that it is absolutely evident that a war with Iran is neither in the interests of Iran nor of the US.

Yours fraternally

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