

# The Cassandra Industry

By Alexander Cockburn

Many on the left spent a good deal of 2007 predicting that a U.S. attack on Iran was imminent. Their confidence in this prophecy was absolute. They used the word “will,” as opposed to the mealy-mouthed, timorous “might”. Some of them confidently asserted that the Bush administration would accompany this onslaught with the imposition of martial law in the United States and the suspension of elections in 2008.

The anticipatory fever was fanned by bulletins from Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker*, disclosing supposed plans for shock-and-awe bombings of Iranian nuclear labs and test facilities, along with assertions that U.S. special forces were already active inside Iran’s borders. The London *Sunday Times* told its readers that the Israelis were poised to drop nukes.

Such alarums have been a staple of the Internet over two years. Here’s a fairly typical report from December 2005, from a seasoned doomsayer, Michael Chossudovsky, on the Global Research site:

“The launching of an outright war using nuclear warheads against Iran is now in the final planning stages.

“Coalition partners, which include the U.S., Israel and Turkey are in ‘an advanced stage of readiness’. Various military exercises have been conducted, starting in early 2005. In turn, the Iranian Armed Forces have also conducted large-scale military maneuvers in the Persian Gulf in December in anticipation of a U.S. sponsored attack.

“Since early 2005, there has been intense shuttle diplomacy between Washington, Tel Aviv, Ankara and NATO headquarters in Brussels... Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has given the green light to the Israeli Armed Forces to launch the attacks by the end of March... The U.S.-sponsored military plan has been endorsed by NATO, although it is unclear, at this stage, as to the nature of NATO’s involvement in the planned aerial attacks.”

Then, at the start of December 2007, came disclosure of the long-heralded coup, but it was of an unheralded nature.

Sixteen U.S. intelligence agencies contributed to a National Intelligence Estimate [NIE], asserting that Iran stopped trying to build a nuclear weapon in 2003, thus flatly contradicting Bush and Cheney’s clamorous invocation of the Iranian nuclear threat.

One could draw some immediate conclusions. The NIE represented a carefully crafted onslaught on Bush, Cheney and the war party by the intelligence bureaucracies, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other institutional opponents of an attack on Iran. For those reluctant to discard long-held confidence in the malign omniscience of the Bush administration, there was the optional theory that Bush and Cheney had decided to ratchet down any war plans and cleared the NIE as a way of getting the administration off the hook. Against this theory one could point to

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the anger of the White House at the CIA, visible in the White House’s fanning of the uproar over the Agency’s destruction of its tapes of CIA torturers in action.

But whatever way one looked at it, the war party and the Israel lobby had clearly sustained a humiliating reversal. Read as a judicious assessment of the balance of forces in the region, rather than as concrete “intelligence” of overheard conversations, the NIE was an acknowledgment of imperial weakness.

Oddly enough, the left doesn’t care for good news – i.e., manifestations of imperial weakness. It prefers the somber monochrome of imperial invincibility. It’s the mindset that fuels the conviction that only the American government could have engineered the successful 9/11/2001 attacks. After brief inspection of news stories about the NIE, the doomsayers sped back to their laptops to reiterate their predictions of an imminent attack on Iran. Remember those dogs in Konrad

Lorenz’s *Man Meets Dog*, who run up and down, day after day, barking at each other through the fence. Finally the fence is removed. After a moment’s hesitation, the dogs continue their drill, patrolling the imaginary fence.

Back on September 9, 2007, Michael Neumann, valued CounterPuncher and author of *The Case Against Israel*, published by CounterPunch Books, dropped me a note at a moment when predictions of a U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran were particularly strident. Michael wrote thus:

“Purely for fun, I want to go on record here and say what I’ve said for a couple of years now. The U.S. will never, ever, ever, mount any serious attack on Iran. More than that, I doubt they will mount a single air strike.

“Why? The U.S. is much too weak. This is what the whole West just can’t get into its head. Iran understands this, and it understands that, push come to shove, American policymakers know it too, brave words to the contrary. These days, the U.S. speaks loudly and carries a little stick. That’s why Iran treats the West with contempt.

“The U.S. can no longer even contemplate incurring the causalities that result from fighting an enemy, neither microscopic nor crippled by years of sanctions. America would be utterly unequipped to deal with anything Iran cared to dish out by land, and utterly incapable of protecting oil supplies in all sorts of places Iran could reach. True, much of Iran’s threat advantage has to do with irregular warfare, but only a frat-boy analysis of military capacities would lead anyone to claim that irregular warfare ‘doesn’t count’. Lebanon provided an oblique glimpse of Iranian capacities in this area.

“The hysteria about Iran is the best, most current indication of how left-wing thought is crippled by the same delusions of American power that affect other Americans.”

One could argue that the main purpose of the Bush administration’s thundering about bombing Iran was to indicate to its leaders that the cost of continued arms supplies by Iran to the Shi’ite forces in Iraq would be billions in damage to Iran’s infrastructure by high explosive from US planes and missiles. It’s obvious that those supplies have been curtailed. But beyond that, the weakness is profound. These recent years have been a disaster for the U.S. strategically. CP

# What It's Like To Be Waterboarded By "Scylla"

**S**o much talk of waterboarding, so much controversy. But what is it really? How bad?

To determine the answer, I knew I had to try it.

I figure I would be a good test subject. I am incredibly fit and am training for a 100-mile endurance run. The main thing about such an event is ability to tolerate pain. I am good at this. I am trained.

I also have experience with free-diving from my college days. I once held my breath for four minutes and two seconds. Once, while training as a lifeguard, I swam laps without breathing until I passed out, so that I could know my limits.

So, here's what I would do. First, I would google "waterboarding" to understand the basic concepts, than I would try it on myself. First, self-inflicted and then, if necessary, inflicted by my wife. (She has no problem torturing me. We've been married almost 15 years.)

These are the results of my research and experience:

The goal of waterboarding is to simulate drowning without the actual drowning or inhalation into the lungs. In order to accomplish this, the subject is forced to lie on an inclined plane with his head lower than his lungs, and then water is dumped onto his/her face (always keeping the lungs above the "water line"). This simulates drowning and causes a panic.

There are some advanced techniques that make this more extreme, but that's the basic concept.

Easy enough to duplicate. I have an inclined weight bench and a watering can. No problem. I lie on this and tilt the water can to pour water on my mouth and nose. Water goes up my nose causing me to gag and choke and splutter, but after a try or two I'm able to suppress my reflex, relax, breathe in shallowly, and then expel rapidly (shooting out the water) and maintain my composure. This is not too bad. With my diving experience, you would never break me this way.

Back to researching the advanced techniques:

The first of these is wet rag in mouth. I try it. Ok, I can handle this too. It makes it a little bit more difficult to maintain control. I didn't realize it, but the first

time around I was selectively breathing through either mouth or nose, to help maintain control. The wet rag eliminates the mouth as an option. You have to really concentrate to maintain control, breathing very shallowly on the inhale and not allowing yourself to exhale until you have a good lungful with which to expel the water in your nose, throat and sinuses. Then, you have to inhale slowly but fast enough to pull in a lungful of air before your nose, throat and sinuses fill up. Difficult, but doable with some self-control. I can see where this would get very unpleasant if you lost control, but still, not terrible, not torture per se in my book.

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Next up is saran wrap. The idea is that you wrap saran wrap around the mouth in several layers, and poke a hole in the mouth area, and then waterboard away. I didn't really see how this was an improvement on the rag technique, and so far I would categorize waterboarding as simply unpleasant rather than torture, but I've come this far so I might as well go on.

It took me ten minutes to recover my senses once I tried this. I was shuddering in a corner, convinced I narrowly escaped killing myself.

Here's what happened:

The water fills the hole in the saran wrap so that there is either water or vacuum in your mouth. The water pours into your sinuses and throat. You struggle to expel water periodically by building enough pressure in your lungs. But with the saran wrap, each time I expelled water, I was able to draw in less air. Finally, the lungs can no longer expel water, and you begin to draw it up into

your respiratory tract.

It seems that there is a point that is hardwired in us. When we draw water into our respiratory tract to this point, we are no longer in control. All hell breaks loose. Instinct tells us we are dying.

I have never been more panicked in my whole life. Once your lungs are empty and collapsed and they start to draw fluid, it is simply all over. You *know* you are dead and it's too late. Total panic.

There is absolutely nothing you can do about it. It would be like telling you not to blink while I stuck a hot needle in your eye.

At the time my lungs emptied and I began to draw water, I would have sold my children to escape. There was no choice, or chance, and willpower was not involved.

I never felt anything like it, and this was self-inflicted with a watering can, where I was in total control and never in any danger.

And I understood.

Waterboarding gets you to the point where you draw water up your respiratory tract, triggering the drowning reflex. Once that happens, it's all over. No question.

Some may go easy without a rag, some may need a rag, some may need saran wrap.

I didn't allow anybody else to try it on me. Inconceivable. I know I only got the barest taste of what it's about since I was in control, and not restrained and controlling the flow of water.

So, is it torture?

I'll put it this way. If I had the choice of being waterboarded by a third party or having my fingers smashed one at a time by a sledgehammer, I'd take the fingers, no question.

It's horrible, terrible, inhuman torture. I can hardly imagine worse. I'd prefer permanent damage and disability to experiencing it again. I'd give up anything, say anything, do anything.

The Spanish Inquisition knew this. It was one of their favorite methods.

It's torture. No question. Terrible, terrible torture. To experience it and understand it and then do it to another human being is to leave the realm of sanity and humanity forever. **CP**

This account was posted by "Scylla" on "The Straight Dope" website on December 21, 2007.