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FRONTLINE INVESTIGATES MOUNTING TENSION FOR THE U.S. IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASKS: IS IRAN NEXT?

**FRONTLINE presents
SHOWDOWN WITH IRAN
Tuesday, October 23, 2007, at 9 P.M. ET on PBS**

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As the United States and Iran are locked in a battle for power and influence across the Middle East—with the fear of an Iranian nuclear weapon looming in the background—FRONTLINE gains unprecedented access to the Iranian hard-liners shaping government policy. In *Showdown with Iran*, airing Tuesday, October 23, 2007, at 9 P.M. ET on PBS (check local listings), FRONTLINE examines how U.S. efforts to install democracy in Iraq have served to strengthen Iran's position as an emerging power in the Middle East.

"You will not find a single instance in which a country has inflicted harm on us and we have left it without a response. So if the United States makes such a mistake, they should know that we will definitely respond. And we don't make threats," deputy head of Iran's National Security Council Mohammad Jafari tells FRONTLINE in his first television interview.

There are increasing signs that the Bush administration is seriously considering military action before it leaves office if Tehran continues to defy U.N. demands that it cease enriching uranium for its nuclear program—a program the Iranians insist is for peaceful purposes. "The president has said repeatedly that it is unacceptable for Iran to have nuclear weapons," former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton tells FRONTLINE. "If action is not taken in terms of regime change or, if need be, the use of military force, the question of when Iran achieves nuclear weapons is entirely in Iran's own hands. And that is extraordinarily undesirable."

But Richard Armitage, President Bush's former deputy secretary of state, warns, "It would be the worst of worlds for an outgoing administration to start a conflict."

After 9/11, the Bush administration hoped to drive a wedge between Iran's people and their Islamic rulers by installing democracies on two of Iran's borders. "If things had gone better in Iraq," says Hillary

Mann, the Iran expert on the National Security Council during the run-up to the war, “then yeah, I think Iran was next.”

“I think Iran is more secure now, courtesy of the United States,” Bolton says. “We have removed the Taliban regime from Afghanistan, which they viewed as a mortal threat. We have removed Saddam Hussein in Iraq, which they viewed as a mortal threat.”

Before invading Iraq, the Bush administration rebuffed a series of overtures from Iran’s reformist government—among them offers to help the U.S. stabilize Iraq after the invasion—which culminated in a secret proposal for a grand bargain resolving all outstanding issues between the U.S. and Iran, including Iran’s support for terrorism and its nuclear program. The U.S., which had branded Iran part of the “axis of evil,” decided on a confrontational approach.

Vali Nasr, author of *The Shia Revival*, believes the Bush administration’s confrontational approach discredited Iran’s reformists and inadvertently helped bring the new hard-line government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power. “The wars of 2001 and 2003 have fundamentally changed the Middle East to Iran’s advantage,” he says. “The dam that was containing Iran has been broken.”

Showdown with Iran is a FRONTLINE co-production with Silverbridge Productions Limited. The writer, producer and director is Greg Barker. FRONTLINE is produced by WGBH Boston and is broadcast nationwide on PBS. Funding for FRONTLINE is provided through the support of PBS viewers. Major funding for FRONTLINE is provided by The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Additional funding is provided by the Park Foundation. FRONTLINE is closed-captioned for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers and described for people who are blind or visually impaired by the Media Access Group at WGBH. FRONTLINE is a registered trademark of WGBH Educational Foundation. The executive producer for FRONTLINE is David Fanning.

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