

Iran

The Challenge

Following the catastrophic war against Iraq, it seemed improbable that less than 10 years after its commencement, we would be on the threshold of an identical situation with another Muslim nation, Iran. However this is exactly what has transpired, as the government and the media beat the war drum, enthusiastically telling the public that Iran is developing weapons of mass destruction, that their leader is the greatest threat to world peace, and that an attack may be necessary to protect humanity from this dire threat.

The playbook is nearly indistinguishable from what we heard in 2002 and 2003, and the consequences of that war are unforgivable. Up to 1 million deaths, around 4 million refugees, and trillions of dollars later, most (though not all) US troops have been withdrawn from Iraq, and the President has declared the war over (although unmanned drones are still in Iraqi airspace). But we may be on the verge of a new war, except this time against a far larger and more powerful country. The ramifications for U.S. hostility and violence will be even far more destructive to our interests.

The administration is doubtless being cajoled into this war by the wild rhetoric coming out of Tel Aviv, with both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Shimon Peres comparing Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Adlof Hitler.^{1 2} “Pro-Israel” officials in the US have followed this line, pressuring the Obama administration to bomb Iran, as witnessed by the Republican Primary debates, where almost all candidates have enthusiastically lined up in support of this notion.

It is clearly highly undesirable for Iran to have a nuclear weapon. That being said, it is highly undesirable that any country should have a nuclear weapon, including Israel. Though the Iranian theocracy is vile and repressive, Iran has not invaded another country in its modern history, having only been invaded by a US-backed Saddam Hussein in the 1980’s. Ahmadinejad has not launched any attacks of any significance against any foreign entities, making the comparison with Hitler nonsense. Israel, on the other hand, has invaded Lebanon – to take just one country as an example – 6 times in the last 60 years! It has invaded and occupied almost every one of its neighbors, and has launched wars that have killed on aggregate tens of thousands of people.

There are means to deter countries from obtaining nuclear weapons which do not involve launching wars likely to kill tens of thousands of people. If we value our position as a moral leader, then we should strive to enact these means. We should ignore the warmongering coming from Tel Aviv, safe in the knowledge that the Israeli people view us as being more sane and reliable on this matter than their own government.³

¹ <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/features/letters-from/letter-from-tel-aviv-netanyahu%C3%A2%E2%82%AC%E2%84%A2s-iranian-dilemma>

² <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=41512>

³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-naiman/on-iran-strike-israelis-t_b_1313229.html?ref=fb&src=sp&comm_ref=false#sb=659034,b=facebook

The Record of the Democratic and Republican Parties

For most Americans, U.S.-Iranian history begins in 1979, when, following the Islamic Revolution, Iranians kidnapped US citizens and held them hostage at our embassy in Tehran. For Iranians, however, the history – and the cause for the kidnappings – begins in 1953, when the CIA overthrew Mohammed Mossadegh, the democratically elected leader of the country. The reason was that he had started to nationalize the oil industry, which threatened the profits of multinationals. Hence the U.S. got rid of him, and installed the Shah, whose 26 year rule of terror was characterised by Amnesty International as presenting “the worst human rights record” of any regime in the world.⁴

A fact that is ignored in this debate is that Iran’s nuclear program was started under the Shah – a voracious torturer and key U.S. ally – with the help of Henry Kissinger and the Republicans.⁵ Following the Islamic Revolution, it was Ayatollah Khomeini who actually decided to eliminate the U.S. sponsored program, calling it “the work of the devil.” The program was reopened during the US-backed Iraqi invasion, since Khomeini was looking for ways to defend his country against Saddam’s U.S.-backed invasion.⁶

According to the National Intelligence Estimate from 2007, Iran stopped its nuclear program in 2003.⁷ However, the ensuing “War on Terror” was a key lesson to countries such as Iran. As leading Israeli military historian Martin von Crevelde stated, they would be “crazy” not to develop nuclear weapons, since it was clear that the U.S. was going to commit unrestrained aggression against any defenseless country that had already been labelled part of the “Axis of Evil.”⁸

Although there is evidence that Iran is enriching uranium, there is no evidence that it is developing nuclear weapons. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has said that “Are they [the Iranians] trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No.”⁹ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey concurred publicly on this point, emphasizing that the Iranians are “rational actors,” not willing to see their country vaporised in a counter strike.¹⁰

Nonetheless, both sides are unwilling to drop the bellicose rhetoric. Air Force Chief of Staff Norton Schwartz recently stated that the U.S. has been preparing for a strike, and with a Bush-like swagger, that “What we can do, you wouldn’t want to be in the area.” President Obama has repeatedly intoned ominously, that “no options are off the table,” thus dangling the threat of an all-out invasion over the Iranians’ heads.

Chief among the propaganda tools being used by the Bush and Obama administrations has been repeated invocation of Ahmadinejad’s threat to “wipe Israel off the map.” That threat was never made. Ahmadinejad’s actual statement was “the Zionist regime must be eliminated from the pages of time” – a call for regime change, as with the

⁴ <http://blogcritics.org/politics/article/could-the-iranian-revolution-have-been/>

⁵ <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb268/index.htm>

⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-weve-been-here-before--and-it-suits-israel-that-we-never-forget-nuclear-iran-6294111.html?printService=print>

⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/04/world/middleeast/04intel.html?pagewanted=all>

⁸ <http://www.chomsky.info/interviews/200606--.htm>

⁹ http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-3460_162-57354645/panetta-iran-cannot-develop-nukes-block-strait/

¹⁰ <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1202/19/fzgps.01.html>

prior changes of regimes in Iran, the Soviet Union, and Iraq,¹¹ not the physical destruction of a nation.¹² Hence the case for war is being built on two false notions: that the evidence demonstrates that Iran plans to develop, or is developing, a nuclear weapon; and that it is doing this in order to drop such a weapon on Israel (and, consequently, destroy itself). Both Democratic and Republican parties, and the Bush and Obama administrations, have repeated such intimations, but they are both flatly false, and could have severe human and economic ramifications.

Rocky Anderson's Approach Toward a Solution

Though the evidence does not establish that Iran is developing, or planning to develop, a nuclear weapon, as von Crevelde stated, it would be perfectly rational for it to do so, given that countries that err from the U.S. line are threatened, so long as they are defenseless. The historical record in this regard is overwhelming, and was as true for the Iranians in 1953 when we overthrew their government as it is today. Countries run major risks when developing nuclear weapons programs – not just of military attack, but also of international diplomatic and economic isolation – and so there must be a major incentive for them to do so. The constant belligerent rhetoric and actions of the U.S. and Israel is such a motivation, and, thus, if we want to eliminate any desire for a country such as Iran to develop such capabilities, we should start off by looking at ourselves and how we can establish more constructive relations.

In addition to this just-and-peace oriented foreign policy, an Anderson administration would work towards:

- A nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East. This is something that is supported by both the Iranian government, and the Israeli public.^{13 14} It would be consistent with the goal that the international community as a whole should be pursuing: de-escalating nuclear proliferation, which is a huge threat to human survival – and, ultimately, eliminating nuclear weapons altogether. Anderson would lead diplomatic efforts with partners in the Middle East to eliminate all nuclear arsenals and ensure that nobody has to live under the threat of nuclear attack.
- A reduction of nuclear arsenals from all UN Security Council members, as well as other nuclear-weaponized states, such as India and Pakistan. Not only do we need to lead by example when calling for non-proliferation, but, very simply, the threat of nuclear weapons means the threat of a nuclear weapon being used, either by a state or a rogue actor, either of which would be catastrophic.
- A cessation of the five-year UN program of sanctions against Iran. Given that Iran's nuclear program is in line with international law, implementing sanctions against them is wrong – and primarily harmful to the innocent people of Iran. If Iran has, or is pursuing, a nuclear weapons program, then such actions should be considered, but given that there is no evidence for this, then there is no justification for the sanctions. Further, sanctions merely harden the resolve and truculence of the regime in Tehran, who would not want to be seen buckling under Western pressure. Thus, the only people to feel the effects of the sanctions are the suffering Iranian people, many of whom stood in candlelight vigils

¹¹ See, e.g., <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=4527>.

¹² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/jun/14/post155>

¹³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8676207.stm>

¹⁴ <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafricara/695.php>

following the 9/11 attacks on the U.S., in solidarity and sympathy with the American people.