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Will Iran Be Next

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Those who have hoped that a U.S. military victory in Iraq would somehow bring about a more peaceful world are in for a rude awakening. The final resolution of this war and the U.S. occupation of Iraq will likely not be the end, rather, only the prelude to a succession of future crises: in Kashmir, Syria, North Korea, and Iran. This article will focus primarily on the latter case.

In the coming months the United States and its ally Israel will either accede to the existence of an Iranian nuclear power program, or take steps to prevent it. At the eye of the storm is Iran's nuclear power plant at Bushehr, on the Gulf coast, currently under construction. The reactor is scheduled for completion later this year. Its nuclear fuel rods will then be delivered. By June 2004 it should be fully operational. The controversial project has been in the works for more than a quarter century. As it nears completion, tensions between Iran and the U.S./Israel are sure to rise. Iran is a signatory of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which affirms the right of states in good standing to develop nuclear power for peaceful use. Although there is no evidence Iran has yet violated the NPT, the U.S. and Israel believe that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons. This is the crux of the problem. And two recently discovered Iranian nuclear sites, at Arak and at Natanz, have only heightened suspicions.

It is very possible--some would say probable--that the U.S., possibly in conjunction with Israel, will launch a "preventive" raid and destroy the Bushehr reactor before it goes on line. Such a raid would be fateful for the region and the world. It would trigger another Mideast war, and possibly a confrontation with Russia, with effects that are difficult to predict. A war with Iran might bring about the collapse of the NPT, lead to a new arms race, and plunge the world into nuclear chaos. Such a crisis holds the potential to bring the world to the nuclear brink. This article will review the background, and provide an analysis. I will discuss the reactor at Bushehr first, then the other suspect sites.

The Reactor at Bushehr

The Bushehr nuclear plant has a long history. Launched in 1974, the project was the showcase of the late Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. The original plan called for the construction of two 1200-1300 megawatt reactors on the southern Iran coast, side by side. The contractor was the Siemens company, a well-known German firm. The project was 85% finished at the time of the 1979 Iranian revolution, when work was halted. During Iran's subsequent war with Iraq the unfinished reactors were bombed repeatedly, and severely damaged. After the war Iran attempted to persuade Siemens to finish the project, without success, due to increased proliferation concerns and heavy U.S. pressure on Germany.

U.S. support for the Shah's dictatorial regime undoubtedly set the stage for the 1979 Islamic revolution, when radical students, backed by the Ayatollah Khomeini, seized the U.S. embassy and held American diplomats hostage for 444 days. The resulting break in U.S.-Iran relations has never healed. During the 1981-1988 Iran-Iraq

war the U.S. supported Saddam Hussein, who was perceived as a bulwark against revolutionary Shi'ism, just as Hitler, many years before, was mistakenly perceived by some in the West as a bulwark against Soviet communism. Nevertheless, the U.S. supplied both sides with arms. During the war, the U.S. policy was: let them destroy each other--a policy that was unworthy of a Christian nation.

At the start of the Bush Presidency there were signs that relations with Tehran might improve. Positive statements by Secretary of State Colin Powell were reciprocated by Iran's foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi. Then came Bush's "axis of evil" speech, which dashed hopes of a thaw. The current U.S. policy of vilification has been attributed to Pentagon hawks and to Israeli PM Ariel Sharon's supporters in the Bush administration. Last November, Sharon called upon the U.S. to bring about regime change in Tehran, after first dealing with Iraq. (Mansour Farhang, "A Triangle of Realpolitik" The Nation, March 17, 2003) And similar statements have been made by rightist commentators in the U.S. press.

The U.S. blocked several attempts by Iran to enlist a contractor to complete the Bushehr reactor; until, finally, in 1995, after ten years of shopping, Iran signed a $800 million deal with Victor Mikhailov, chief of Minatom, the Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy. The Russians agreed to finish reactor-1, and have been on site ever since. The project has been plagued by technical problems and repeated delays. The Russian engineers were compelled to modify the original German design. But, apparently, all of the problems have now been overcome, and reactor-1, slightly downsized to 1000 Megawatts, is finally nearing completion. It will go on line as early as December 2003. But reactor-1 is only the beginning. Iran envisions as many as five additional 1000

megawatt reactors. Iran has received nuclear technology from China, Russia, and several other nations. But Russia has been the principal supplier since the mid-90s .

The Russians have stubbornly resisted U.S. pressure to cancel the project. Russia, perennially strapped for cash, desperately needs the foreign exchange. One Minatom official claimed that the project had already generated 20,000 Russian jobs, with the promise of more to come. The Russians foresee an expanding nuclear relationship, and have rejected U.S. enticements. Moscow clearly regards its commerce with Iran as a matter of national pride/prestige.

Russia has also refused the U.S. demand for special inspections. The Russians point out that the reactor will be subject to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) oversight. The IAEA visited Bushehr and other suspect sites after the first Gulf War, and as recently as February 2003, with no violations reported. Washington remains unconvinced, however. While all of Iran's nuclear facilities are subject to IAEA oversight, Iran has refused, thus far, to accept the new safeguards introduced in 1993 to overcome past failings. The strengthened protocols are "capable of detecting future Iraqs," according to Khidhir Hamza, a former Iraqi nuclear scientist. Iran's refusal has undermined confidence. (Khidhir Hamza, "Inside Saddam's secret nuclear program," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, September/October 1998)

Russia did agree to drop the most objectionable part of the deal, the transfer of gas centrifuge technology. The light water reactor will be fueled with low enriched uranium (LEU) supplied by Russia. LEU fuel is not suitable for bombs. Moscow also made another concession: it agreed to return the reactor's spent fuel to Russia for storage. This will greatly reduce the risk of a diversion of plutonium. To allow for this the Russian

government had to modify existing Russian law. (Christine Kucia, "Russia, Iran Finalize Spent Fuel Agreement," Arms Control Today, January/February 2003)

After failing to block the deal outright, President Clinton imposed sweeping sanctions on Iran to prevent the sale of dual-use technologies. Some of Iran's procurement activities had raised eyebrows in Washington. The U.S. also lobbied others to join in the embargo, with only limited success. Germany and France took umbrage at the policy.

The Iranian government has flatly denied the charges of proliferation. The Iranians have also protested the punitive U.S. treatment, which they regard as a violation of their right under article IV of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) to develop nuclear power for peaceful use. In May 1995 Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani told ABC News that Iran was not seeking nuclear weapons. Rafsanjani challenged the critics to produce evidence of a secret bomb program. As recently as December 2002 the current Iranian president Mohammad Khatami stated that his country's willingness to return the spent fuel to Russia shows good faith, and demonstrates that his country has no intention of developing nuclear weapons. Iranian officials have stressed that the Bushehr reactor is urgently needed to fill a shortfall of electric-generating capacity. Iran, like other countries, needs electricity for development.

Israel and the U.S. have not been mollified. Israeli officials questioned why Iran, blessed with an abundance of oil, needs reactors for electrical generation. And recent statements by Secretary of State Colin Powell echoed this theme. The point is well taken. Iran's leaders are badly informed if they believe nuclear power is the long-term solution to their energy needs. Nuclear power is inappropriate for Iran for the same reasons that it

is inappropriate for any state, including the U.S. The reasons include the grave risks of nuclear accidents and terrorism, as well as the unresolved waste disposal problem—not to mention the diabolical possibility, however remote, that spent fuel might be diverted for reprocessing and bombmaking. The Iranians need to understand that such a diversion would ultimately threaten them.

The U.S. Record

Nevertheless, the critics, especially those in the U.S., have conveniently forgotten the central role the U.S. played over many years in touting the "many peaceful applications of nuclear energy." The critics need to be reminded that it was the U.S., no one else, who, beginning in the 1950s, aggressively promoted the miracle of cheap and inexhaustible nuclear energy for world economic development. That "vision" was conceived in Washington, not Tehran. Are we now to hold the Iranians responsible because the failed U.S. policy succeeded too well? Are the Iranians to blame because they internalized the false values that Washington strove mightily to inculcate worldwide? The Iranians are not alone. In recent years China and India have also purchased reactors from Russia. And China has even begun exporting reactor technology. China and Russia are both driven by the need for foreign exchange. In this they mirror past policy decisions born in the U.S.A.

We must be honest about this. Despite the optimistic forecasts of the early years, and the promises of an end to world poverty, the U.S. Atoms for Peace program was not motivated by altruism. From the outset, Washington's atomic program was driven by self-interest. The U.S. nuclear industry figured to cash in on the "vision." The export of safe and clean nuclear technology was to become a major growth industry. Little or no

thought, until much later, was given to the dark underside, the grave risks and many hidden costs. No one thought to ask whether the nuclear path itself might be the problem. In the words of Amory Lovins, "Atoms for Peace was one of the stupidest ideas of our time, conceived in a spirit of political daydreaming, commercial euphoria, and scientific amnesia." In our enthusiasm to promote nuclear we happily supplied know-how, including research reactors, all with indirect military utility, to just about anyone, including Israel, the Shah, and many others. If the "hard path" still radiates prestige in world capitols, we in the U.S. have only ourselves to blame. The heady promises of cheap, clean and unlimited electricity for economic development have become sand in an hourglass that is about to run out.

Had we in the U.S. wisely acknowledged that our commitment to nuclear was a mistake, had we renounced the nuclear path, had we launched a Manhattan Project, urgently needed, to convert the U.S. economy to run on clean hydrogen fuel and other renewables, we would now be in a position of world leadership. Unfortunately, it never happened. One searches the U.S. record in vain for moral high ground. The half-life of President Clinton's 1994 decision to supply North Korea with two light-water reactors will haunt Washington for years to come. Clinton's reactor deal with Pyongyang made a mockery of his opposition to Russia's similar assistance to Iran. Clinton's policy position that Russian light-water reactors are dangerous, while ours are safe, was laid to rest by a 1999 Congressional study which revealed that the spent fuel from the reactors planned for North Korea would not be as "proliferation resistant" as claimed. Sufficient plutonium for as much as fifty bombs/year could be extracted from the waste. Despite the

report, construction of the North Korean reactors started last year, and continues, though it is a safe bet they will never be completed.

The Bush-Cheney White House likes to blame Clinton. But the Bush-Cheney record is no better. During the run-up to the last presidential election V.P. candidate Dick Cheney vigorously touted the benefits of nuclear power. As late as May 2001 Cheney was promoting the next generation of nuclear reactors as safe, and also good for the environment, since they emit few greenhouse gases. I should add: the V.P. made a point of explicitly rejecting conservation and renewable alternatives. Then came 911, and the slow dawning realization of the true risks of nuclear terrorism. As my friend Harvey Wasserman at Greenpeace likes to point out, had the two planes hit the Indian Point nuclear reactor located just a few miles north of Manhattan instead of the World Trade Towers, most of New England today would be a toxic wasteland, rendered uninhabitable for thousands of years. This is the plain truth, no exaggeration. Unfortunately, reality is in short supply at the White House. The facts have not yet penetrated what Seymour Hersh calls the advisory "cocoon" around the president. The Bush policy is: never speak ill of industry. Despite 911, there has been no retreat from nuclear by the U.S., here where it counts most, however well-advised such a retreat might be.

Regarding nuclear weapons, the U.S. record is just as bleak. In February 2003 there was a White House leak--probably intended--that next summer President Bush will convene a conference of experts to discuss the next generation of U.S. nuclear weapons. (Julian Borger, "U.S. Plan For New Nuclear Arsenal: Secret Talks May Lead to Breaking Treaties," The Guardian UK, February 19, 2003) The leak was no surprise, given the change in U.S. military doctrine announced last September to a policy of preemptive

attack. That change paved the way for the "preventive" invasion of Iraq, which has effectively frozen further U.S.-Russian nuclear arms reductions. The shift in military doctrine was unprecedented, yet stirred hardly a ripple in the U.S. media. Most Americans probably do not even know that it happened, or do not understand the significance. The fact that the U.S. government has embraced a first-strike nuclear posture is America's best-kept open secret. No doubt, the next generation of U.S. nukes will be smarter and leaner, designed not for deterrence but for actual use. And, no doubt, we will be told that their purpose is defensive, i.e., to save the lives of U.S. servicemen and women. Tell a small lie and you only make people suspicious. Tell a whopper and they fall at your feet.

Arak and Natanz

Events took a dangerous turn in August 2002 when an Iranian opposition group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), staged a press conference in Washington DC and reported the existence of two previously unknown nuclear facilities in Iran. The first, located at Arak, 150 kilometers south of Tehran, is believed to be a plant for manufacturing heavy-water. The other, at Natanz, about 100 kilometers north of Esfahan, is probably a uranium-enrichment facility. Neither is operational yet--both are under construction. Satellite photoanalysis of the Natanz site shows that part of the facility is being constructed below ground, and hardened with thick concrete walls. (for photos and commentary go to www.isis-online.org/publications/iran/crossroads.html)

Days later, Iranian officials acknowledged the sites. They also announced long-range plans for a complete nuclear fuel cycle. The Iranians, in other words, intend to develop their own fuel processing capability. The country has an abundance of uranium

ore. In March 2003 Iranian officials announced the completion of a fuel fabrication plant near Esfahan that will soon start production. (Paul Kerr, "IAEA 'Taken Aback' By Speed Of Iran's Nuclear Program," Arms Control Today April 2003)

All of this raises troubling questions about Iran's nuclear intentions. Heavy-water is used as a moderator in some reactors. The problem is that this type of reactor lends itself to the production of plutonium for bombs. Israel is known to have made the plutonium for its nuclear arsenal in a reactor of this kind. The reactor at Bushehr was specifically designed to use light-water to make recovery of plutonium more difficult. Why, then, do the Iranians need heavy-water, when light-water reactors could supply the needed electricity with greater transparency? A heavy-water plant implies a heavy-water reactor. As of yet, however, its location remains unknown.

Also: Why does Iran need a uranium-enrichment plant, given that Russia will provide LEU fuel for the Bushehr reactor, and could do the same for future reactors? Why are buildings at Natanz being constructed underground? Why are they being hardened? The fact that Iran is building a uranium-enrichment facility means that Iran already has gas centrifuge technology. Who supplied it?

While there is no evidence that Iran has violated the NPT--yet--the facts are alarming. The NPT stipulates that each signatory must work out a safeguards arrangement with the IAEA. Both of the recently disclosed nuclear sites will be subject to IAEA inspections. However, Iran's agreement does not require inspections of a new facility until six months prior to the first arrival of nuclear material. The facilities at Arak and Natanz appear to be considerably more than six months from completion; hence, no violation. Still, questions remain. Why did Iran inform the IAEA about these plants only

after the NCRI forced the issue? The fact that Iran intends to make its own LEU will make transparency more problematic. Even if Natanz is inspected regularly, what would stop Iran from enriching uranium to weapons-grade, i.e., 90%+, at a hidden facility? Clearly, Iran's leaders are playing a dangerous game, staying within the letter of the NPT, yet building up a nuclear infrastructure that could be used to make bombs in the future.

Israel's Record

The Israelis have charged that Russia's nuclear commerce with Iran is politically motivated: aimed at the U.S. presence in the Gulf. While there is probably some truth to this, the same criticism could be leveled at Israel. During the Apartheid years Israel engaged in massive nuclear commerce with Pretoria, with effects that were felt throughout southern Africa. The alliance included trade in uranium, transfers of weapons technology, and cooperation in staging at least one joint nuclear test--for which Israel has never been held accountable. (See my book Dimona the Third Temple, 1989, chapters four and five) The relationship flourished for more than a decade. And though it did not survive the dissolution of Apartheid, the Israeli government simply shifted venues. India became the latest partner of convenience. By the year 2000 Israel's nuclear commerce with India reportedly reached $500 million per year. (Yossi Melman, "India's Visiting strongman Wants to Expand Nuclear Cooperation with Israel," Ha'aretz, June 16, 2000)

The relationship with India has continued to expand, and is surely causing grave concerns in Islamabad. If the recent reports are correct that Pakistan supplied gas centrifuge technology to North Korea in exchange for missiles, this means an arms race is currently raging out of control in southern Asia. ("U.S. Says Pakistan Gave Technology to North Korea," The New York Times, Oct. 18, 2002) Such a move by Pakistan smacks

of desperation. The prospect of future transfers of Pakistani gas centrifuge technology is frightening. But Israel's role in all of this, making a bad situation worse, has never been discussed, or even mentioned, in American discourse, insofar as I know. It is simply assumed that Israel can do as it pleases. Israel's nuclear trade with India raises serious questions, not the least of which is whether Israel could be destabilizing the Indian sub-continent.

I should add: the U.S. record in South Asia is no better. U.S. nonproliferation policy vis-a-vis Pakistan over many years has been a model of inconsistency and short-term expedience. The facts are disgraceful, and reveal Washington's total lack of seriousness about limiting the spread of nuclear weapons.

U.S. policy *has* been more consistent in the case of Iran, probably because there is no official relationship. Under U.S. pressure, Russia agreed to drop several missile technology deals with Tehran in the late 1990s, a positive move. (Scott Peterson**,** **"**Russian nuclear know-how pours into Iran," Christian Science Monitor, June 21, 2002) Still, the Israelis complain that Russian assistance, including missile guidance technology, has continued. Especially troubling is the specter of "loose" Russian scientists, which prompted the Clinton administration to slap sanctions on several Russian scientific institutions/companies. (Aluf Benn, "The Russian–Iranian Connection," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, January/February 2001) While the slow and halting development of an Iranian intermediate range missile is cause for concern, given Israel's tiny size, hence its unique vulnerability, similar charges, again, could be leveled at Israel, which acquired French missile technology as early as 1963. Israel's

Jericho missile makes Iran's efforts look primitive. Israel even has a space program, and has been launching satellites since 1988.

The U.S. has sought to thwart the transfer of Russian missile technology to Iran. But did the U.S. similarly try to block Israel's acquisition from Germany a few years ago of three Dolphin-class submarines capable of launching conventional and nuclear-tipped cruise missiles? Did the U.S. even complain? Of course not. As I've observed, it is assumed that Israel can do as it pleases. The 1,720-ton diesel-electric submarines are among the most technically advanced subs of their kind in the world. Each can be equipped with four cruise missiles, which Israel reportedly tested in the Indian Ocean in 1999. (Uzi Mahnaimi and Matthew Campbell, "Israel Makes Nuclear Waves with Submarine Missile Test," London Sunday Times, June 18, 2000) The subs will cruise the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and, ominously, the Persian Gulf--which tends to confirm the views of the late Israeli scholar, Israel Shahak, a leading dissident, who argued that Israel's strategic goal is hegemony from Morocco to Pakistan. (See Israel Shahak, Open Secrets, 1997, chapters four and eight)

The prospect of nuclear-armed Israeli subs patrolling the coasts of Iran and Pakistan is disturbing. The forward deployment of Israeli nukes is unprecedented, and dangerous. It can only inflame tensions in the region. As early as 1983 a U.S. Naval commander, E.V. Ortlieb, warned against the forward deployment of nukes, which can put a naval officer in the unenviable position of having to use his weapons, or face losing them. (E.V. Ortlieb, "Forward Deployments: Deterrent, or Temptation?", Proceedings, U.S. Naval Institute, December, 1983)

Even if Israel makes a determined effort to avoid a confrontation on the high seas, the Israeli patrols could still trigger a crisis. Accidents do happen, as we know from two recent incidents: the unfortunate collision near Pearl Harbor of a U.S. Navy submarine with a Japanese fishing boat, and the mid-air encounter of a U.S. spy plane with a Chinese fighter while on patrol off the coast of China. If such snafus can happen to the U.S., they can certainly happen to Israel, and in circumstances that are far from congenial. Has the U.S. protested Israel's forward deployment of nukes on the high seas? Of course not. Washington does not protest weapons that (officially) do not exist. The U.S. government has never acknowledged that Israel possesses nuclear weapons, even though the world knows otherwise, thanks to the whistleblower, Mordechai Vanunu. (London Sunday Times, Oct. 5, 1986) The continuing policy of denial can only hinder efforts to "rein in" Israel in the event of a nuclear crisis. One could hardly imagine a more explosive mix.

Israel's decision to patrol Persian Gulf waters with nuclear-armed subs seems perversely calculated to strengthen Iranian fundamentalists while undermining moderates who would prefer to denuclearize the Middle East and pursue a less costly and much less risky path of negotiations and military disengagement. Of course, President Bush's decision to invade neighboring Iraq, and the continuing presence of the nuclear-armed U.S. fleet in the Gulf have, no doubt, produced the same effect, probably magnified several times.

Current U.S/Israeli policies have all the earmarks of a self-fulfilling prophecy. President Bush lied to Congress when he presented forged documents about Iraq's alleged nuclear weapons program. (Seymour Hersh, "Who Lied to Whom?", The New

Yorker, March 20, 2003) The documents were phony. But that didn't matter. The president got his sanction for war. Bush went on to invade a nation that did NOT have nukes (Iraq), while studiously ignoring the provocations of North Korea, which included nuclear taunts. The men around Bush were determined to follow their Iraqi playbook. North Korean leader Kim Jong-il spoiled everything by inconveniently rearing his ugly head out of turn. Consider the resounding signal that Bush's war sent like a shot 'round the world. We were told that the war's purpose was to roll back Iraqi WMD (none of which have so far been found). But the actual message was different. Indeed, as the U.N. chief inspector Hans Blix pointed out, Bush sent precisely the *wrong* signal. The actual message is that the U.S. only attacks countries that cannot defend themselves. Under the circumstances, who could blame Iran's leaders if they should take the actual message to heart, and decide tomorrow to withdraw from the NPT, as North Korea has done, and openly develop nuclear weapons? Who could blame them for concluding that their best chance to avert U.S. aggression is to arm themselves with nukes as soon as possible?

At this juncture it seems unlikely that Iran can allay the current high level of distrust and avoid a confrontation simply by agreeing to the strengthened IAEA protocols. Inspections anywhere, anytime are certainly needed, and a step in the right direction. But this will probably not be enough. What would stop Iran in the future from bolting the NPT, and building bombs?

A Sane Solution to the Current Crisis

The cases of Iran and North Korea reveal the fundamental weakness of the NPT. If the nonproliferation regime is to survive, sweeping reforms must be introduced. The sane path would be for the U.S. to immediately convene an international conference, at

which all of the signatories would sit down (in concert with the U.N.) and hammer out a resolution of the impasse. This might be achieved by: 1. Revoking the withdrawal clause (under article X); and 2. Providing a robust mechanism for common security. Drastic action would be needed, because the only effective way to provide for common security would be to replace the U.N. Security Council veto with a simple 2/3 majority vote in the event of an overt nuclear threat/attack. This would enable the Security Council to swiftly come to the assistance of a member state. The absence of such a provision has long plagued the U.N., and probably explains why India and Israel refused to sign the NPT in 1968. In the absence of credible security guarantees, both opted to provide for their own security needs. And Pakistan was compelled to follow suit simply to match rival India. The key to a new global security framework would depend upon success in persuading the current non-signatories to realize the many benefits of common security at a tiny fraction of the immense costs and risks of building and maintaining a nuclear deterrent. (Avner Cohen, Israel and the Bomb, 1998, pp. 123-7, 287-9; also see William Epstein, The Last Chance, 1976, p. 222)

The two reforms would work together in synergy. The revocation of the withdrawal clause is also essential, because the commitment to non-proliferation must be made irreversible. Locking states into the NPT would create strong incentives to remain honest. The threat of U.N. sanctions would be a powerful deterrent. Of course, to win the support of member states like Iran for such reform, Israel, Pakistan and India would have to enter into the discussions, agree to sign a strengthened treaty, open their nuclear sites to inspection, and begin to deconstruct their nuclear arsenals. If this sounds like fantasy, the alternative future, i.e., nuclear terrorism, is positively surreal.

The above proposal--I recognize--is no substitute for global conversion to clean hydrogen fuel and renewable wind and solar. But it would have the salutary effect of buying time for the NPT: it would create a breathing space in which a transition to clean energy might proceed. Such a proposal is reasonable. Yes, and for this reason it probably has no chance of gaining serious consideration in the Bush White House. The men around the president have already demonstrated their contempt for international treaties and for the hard work of negotiations. Diplomacy? That's for wimps and hand wringers. The administration has already rejected out of hand the Kyoto protocols for climate change, and has refused to participate in the International War Crimes Tribunal. It has scrapped its own ABM treaty, and shredded the U.N. Charter. So it is probably too much to expect that Bush would attempt, at this date, to strengthen the NPT through existing legal frameworks. Nor is it likely, in any event, that the U.S. would voluntarily surrender its U.N. veto, even to prevent nuclear war. The U.S.--recall--has itself refused to rule out nuclear first use. How ironic that the Bush administration would view a robust mechanism for global security as a hindrance to unilateralism! The only remaining question is: what treaty will Bush trash next? The NPT?

Tensions in the Gulf will mount in the coming months. The reactor at Bushehr could be the flash-point. Israeli officials have warned that they will not tolerate their enemies to develop nuclear power, even for peaceful use. The shock waves of a raid on Bushehr would be felt far beyond the Mideast.

Ramifications

The precedent for such a raid occurred on June 7, 1981, when Israeli PM Menachem Begin ordered an attack on the Osirak nuclear plant near Baghdad. Within

hours a squadron of Israeli F-15s and F-16s reduced Osirak to smoking rubble. The reactor was scheduled to go on line within days or weeks. Much of the world responded by condemning Israel. The reactor had been under French contract, and, like Bushehr, was also subject to IAEA inspections. Most believed, at the time, that Iraq was in full compliance with the NPT. While there is no evidence Iraq planned to secretly divert plutonium from the reactor for reprocessing and weapons, after the 1991 Gulf War U.N. Special Committee (UNSCOM) inspectors discovered massive evidence of a clandestine Iraqi uranium-enrichment program, involving calutrons (cyclotrons). At which point, many observers dropped their former criticism and began to praise the Israeli logic of preemption. Today, those "lessons" have become official U.S. military doctrine.

The problem is that the evidence does not support the conclusion. The discovery by UNSCOM of the secret Iraqi bomb program showed the efficacy NOT of preemption but of inspections. Although U.S. intelligence agencies may have been aware that the Saudis were secretly funding an Iraqi bomb program, the calutrons appear to have escaped detection by U.S. surveillance. Saddam's uranium-enrichment program was completely untouched during the war, despite massive U.S. bombing. The calutrons were found and destroyed because the international community, i.e., the U.N., made a firm commitment to inspections. And this success story, which remains untold and largely unknown in the U.S., happened *despite* the Clinton policy of regime change, which often conflicted with the U.N.'s stated mission of disarming Iraq. (Milan Rai,War Plan Iraq, 2002) Israel's 1981 raid may even have prodded Saddam Hussein to launch (or accelerate) his clandestine bomb program. Certainly the raid did not prevent an Iraqi

bomb. For similar reasons, a solo raid on Bushehr would not block Iran from developing nukes, and might even provoke a decision in Tehran to do so.

A raid on Bushehr would likely be the opening salvo in another "preventive" war: a series of air attacks aimed at Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Israel could not mount such a campaign by itself, for geographic and logistical reasons. It would require full U.S. involvement. Not surprisingly, Israel's hard-line supporters have sought for many years to persuade Washington of the need for just such a military solution to the Iranian "problem." No sooner did the dust settle following the first Gulf War than the lobbying began in earnest. And many of those who led the charge currently hold high positions in the Bush government. Need I mention that such a war would only confirm to the world what many in the region have long believed: that U.S. Mideast policy is not only about oil. It is also about serving the narrow interests of a recalcitrant Israel. (Israel Shahak, Open Secrets, 1997, chapters four and eight)

Such an air war would be launched from bases in neighboring Iraq, and from carriers in the Gulf. Israel might join in the attacks. U.S-Israeli military cooperation increased after 911. Since 1997 the Israeli Air Force has conducted annual training exercises in Turkey, presumably to prepare for just such a war. Turkey has rugged terrain similar to Iran's. According to Noam Chomsky, before the current conflict some 10% of the Israeli Air Force was permanently based in Turkey. (personal communication, April 16, 2003)

Would such an air war succeed? Yes, perhaps, then again, maybe not. In their current state of hubris the men around the president obviously believe they can accomplish anything with U.S. military power, now supreme on the planet. However, our

leaders are not infallible. For every action there is a reaction, and, all too often, unintended consequences. Such a war would undoubtedly be perceived by the world as a serious escalation, and would likely produce a new anti-U.S coalition. Various states, in defiance of U.S. threats, might even come to Iran's assistance. The common border shared by Russia and Iran raises the stakes. To understand why, we need only consider how the U.S. would respond to a foreign attack on, say, Mexico. The Russians might supply Iran with advanced military arms, ground-to-air missiles, etc.

Pakistani strong-man Pervez Musharraf would face growing pressure at home to assist a fellow Islamic state. With assistance from Russia and/or Pakistan, the Iranians might reconstitute their nuclear program in deep tunnels carved out of the country's rugged mountains, impervious to bombardment. To insure military success, the U.S. might be compelled to launch commando assaults with special forces, or even invade and occupy the country. Notice, this implies regime change, precisely what Ariel Sharon has advocated. Such a path--I hasten to add--would be insane, for reasons that should be apparent to anyone who can find Iran on a map. Iran is not Iraq! Iran is five times larger, a rugged mountainous country of sixty-five million people.

What if invading U.S. forces should meet return fire, in kind? One shudders at the reaction in Washington should the Iranians turn on U.S. troops the same depleted uranium weapons that the U.S. has been using with such horrible effect on others. That would bring George W. Bush eyeball-to-eyeball with Vladimir Putin, the obvious supplier, and who knows, possibly with Pervez Musharraf. Lest we forget, both are nuclear-armed (unlike Saddam Hussein) and capable of defending themselves. The assumption that Putin will back down in a crisis on his own border could be a serious

miscalculation. If U.S. hawks insist on victory, and escalate, events could spin out of control. To prevent such a catastrophe we must all work together. We must stop Bush's next war BEFORE it starts.

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