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## US Attempts to Deploy BMD Systems in the Caucasus to Contain Iranian Missiles Highlight Delicacies and Inconsistencies

**Analysis. From GIS Station Baku.** The US Government is pushing the Government of Azerbaijan to accept deployments of radars and missiles linked to an umbrella ballistic missile defense (BMD) system. The BMD sites would be linked to the defense of Europe and North America against strategic ballistic missiles launched from Iran, and arguably a site in Azerbaijan — on Iran's Northern border — would substantially improve detection and response times. The matter of BMD defense of anticipated Iranian strategic weapons targets (initially Israel, and potentially European sites) has become more pronounced as Iran works toward putting multiple re-entry vehicles (warheads) (MRVs) and possibly independently-targetable MRVs (MIRVs) on its *Shahab-3/4* family of strategic missiles.

Logically, however, the Government of Azerbaijan is concerned that the deployment of US systems on its soil greatly antagonizes the Iranian Government, while at the same time offering little or no protection for Azerbaijani targets which Iran has indicated it could attack with non-ballistic weapons systems and conventional forces, which it possesses in greater numbers than Azerbaijan. Some US diplomats and politicians, however, have been angered by Azerbaijani caution on the BMD deployments, suggesting strongly that Azerbaijan should put its "loyalty to the US" ahead of its own security concerns.

The proposed Azerbaijani deployments considerably exceed in scope those being proposed for either Poland and/or the Czech Republic. The European and Caucasus BMD sites would complement two being built in the US: one in California, the other in Alaska.

The Iranian Government responded rapidly to the US pressures on Azerbaijan to accept the BMD deployment, privately saying that Tehran would "never let it [the BMD deployment] happen", hinting at strong consequences for Baku if it bent to US pressure. On the other hand, Tehran sources indicated that the growing US pressure to contain Iran may have been having an effect on confidence levels within the Iranian security system. Certainly, one response has been for Iran to bolster its relationship with Armenia, but another response has been to see concern being expressed by Iranian military officials, many of whom have felt that Pres. Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad had pushed Israel and the West too far with his nuclear threats.

There was some indication that the recent defection to the West in February 2007 of former Iranian Deputy Minister of Defense — and like "Supreme Leader" Ali Khamene'i and former President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, a former Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC: *Pasdaran*) Commander — Ali Reza Asqari (variously transliterated as Asgari and Asghari, etc.) was linked to growing disenchantment with the clerical Government of Iran among military and *Pasdaran*

officials. There was some suggestion that Asqari's defection was influenced by money: he had, like most *Pasdaran* and clerical officials, strong ties into business. Asgari, who, among other things, owned a company called Zaytun, was believed to have been paid a considerable amount of money to work, for some time, for an external intelligence agency. It is believed that Israel was linked — possibly along with Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS: Mi-6) and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) — to Asqari's defection.

But what has not been disclosed has been the apparent defection — or at least “disappearance” — of one Asqari's colleagues through or in Iraq.

It was likely that the defection of Asgari and his colleague, like the defection to the US some years earlier by a serving very senior official in the office of Iranian Minister of Intelligence and Security, *Hojjat-ol-Islam* Ali Falahian, who left Iran, via Turkey, in 1995 with his wife and family and two of his aides. This was exclusively reported in the July-August 2005 edition of *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*. [See full text of the report, below.] But Ali Reza Asgari reportedly left in Iran a wife and five children. Asqari has two wives — the second significantly younger than the first — and the younger wife and her children are apparently with him, while the older wife and her children remained in Iran.

But if there is growing fragmentation within the Iranian clerical leadership, the prospect of Iranian military action remained high against a variety of targets in Iraq (already ongoing, clandestinely), Israel, Azerbaijan, and elsewhere. Ironically, while the US itself was exerting continuing military pressure on Iran — with preparations up to and including readiness for direct military action — and pressuring states such as Azerbaijan to participate in the containment of Iran, there were also elements in the US State Dept. strenuously promoting a line of open dialog with the Iranian clerics, which would strengthen the clerics' ability to dominate the growing restiveness of the Iranian public moving up to the traditional (and banned) celebration in late March 2007 of the Persian New Year (*Nowruz*).

The current Defense Department line, exemplified by the US escalation of military deployments (carriers and BMD action) perceived by Iran to be aimed at it, is completely at odds with the State Dept. line promoting “normalization” of relations with Iran and its ally, the Democratic People's Republic of (North) Korea (DPRK). The result of the pressure is, on the one hand, a series of increased threats from Iran, such as those aimed at Azerbaijan, and on the other hand, concern within the military and intelligence communities of Iran as clerical leadership factions quarrel among themselves. The result of the State Dept. “normalization” line, advocated by former US Secretary of State James Baker and reiterated in his Iraq Study Group report of late 2006, has been for some of the clerical leadership to believe that they could “stay the course” in resisting domestic and international pressures.

Azerbaijan itself, a strongly committed ally of the US, and with a Government unhappy with Russia's ongoing defense supply relationship with Armenia and Iran, has taken increasing steps to improve its defense capabilities. Lt.-Gen. Rayil Rzayev, the Commander-in-Chief of the Azerbaijan Air Force and Aircraft Defense Force, reported in March 2006 that Azerbaijan had acquired a range of new combat aircraft to supplement the legacy force which the country retained after independence from the USSR. Lt.-Gen. Rzayev also said that the Azerbaijan Air Force was also developing new air base structures “to be opened soon”. The new Azerbaijani combat aircraft were obtained from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, although specifics of the deal were not yet known. It was, however, known that Azerbaijan had sought to acquire some MiG-29 combat aircraft to match the 18 recently sold to the Armenian Air Force (with other, Russian Air Force, MiG-29s available inside Armenia to assist in Armenian national objectives in the event of a regional conflict).

Lt.-Gen. Rzayev would not be drawn, however, on the BMD negotiations which the US had raised with Azerbaijan, other than to say that he was aware of “the deployment of the United States air defense force” in the Southern Caucasus. He said, however, the information on Russia's intension to deploy S-300 and S-400 missiles in the military units of the region should the United States make a move, was false.

Meanwhile, neighboring Armenia's Deputy Defense Minister and Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, Col.-Gen. Mikhail Harutiunian said on March 13, 2007, that Armenia had not received any proposals on installation of US BMD system elements on its territory, noting: "The US should decide where to mount the system but I do not see any sense in it." He noted that Russia and the US had better to reach an agreement on the joint use of the Russian radar station (the Daryal Radio Location Station in the mountainous region of Gabala) in Azerbaijan, saying: "Anyway, it's not our business. Our business is to strengthen our defense and to cooperate with our strategic partner, Russia, as well as with the United States and European countries."

The US, under the Caspian Guard Initiative (CGI), had already proposed that two US-supplied radar stations would be located in the northern and southern parts of Azerbaijan in the framework of CGI. One radar station was near the town of Khyzy in the mountainous northern part of Azerbaijan, approximately 50 km from the border with Russia. The other radar station was located near the town of Astara, located on Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea coastline in close proximity to the border with Iran.

Clearly, the US is looking at a wide range of options with regard to situating BMD sensors and missiles. Lt.-Gen. Henry Obering, Director of the US Missile Defense Agency, was in Kiev in the second week of March 2007 to discuss with Ukrainian officials the planned deployment of the BMD systems. Ukraine Pres. Viktor Yushchenko said in an interview with the Russian television channel *Vesti 24* on March 13, 2007, that the US missile defense system planned for deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic would shield the whole of Europe and "help create a multipolar world".

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#### July-August 1995 report

### Iran, Confronting Internal Chaos, Strengthens Defenses and Forges New Strategic Links

**Published originally in the *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy* edition, July-August 1995.** The situation in Iran at present is reminiscent of the cartoon which showed a scene in a corporate boardroom. The chairman, holding a coin, ready to toss, says: "Heads we go global; tails we liquidate [go into bankruptcy]." Iran is now on the brink of political, social and economic collapse, while at the same time it has reinvigorated its broad program of strategic power projection.

Opposition to the rule of the clerics in Iran now comes as much from within the clergy as from outside. Two grand *ayatollahs* — the top rung of the Shi'a clergy — have been placed under house arrest: Grand *Ayatollah* Ghomi, in Mashad; and Grand *Ayatollah* Sadeq Ruhani, in Qom. This action generated even more dissent among the clergy. *Hojat-ol-Islam* Khosroshahi, who had been *Ayatollah* Khomeini's ambassador to the Vatican, took the clerical Government to task. So, too, did *Hojat-ol-Islam* Rahbar, who also took the Government to task for its failure in economics and for its abuse of human rights.

But the collapse of confidence has spread well into the intelligence community and the Armed Forces and *Pasdaran* (the IRGC: Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps). The intelligence community still has not recovered from the defection to the US of four senior officials of the Ministry of Intelligence and Information, including the defection of a very senior officer in the office of the Minister, *Hojat-ol-Islam* Ali Falahian, who left, via Turkey, several months ago with his wife and family and two of his key aides.

The Iranian Government still has not acknowledged the defection of Minister Falahian. Tehran knows, however, that the Minister left with both a personal knowledge of all of Iran's strategic plans — including its nuclear program and its foreign terrorist operations, as well as its military and logistical support of the Bosnian Izetbegovic Government's operations in the Balkans in violation of UN sanctions — and with vast quantities of documents and microfiche. A few months before that, the Minister's cousin, also a top intelligence official, defected to the US, with vast quantities of microfiche, through Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The US Central Intelligence Agency is still mining this harvest of data which surpasses anything which Iran won from US files seized when it took over the US Embassy in Tehran during the US Carter presidency.

The collapse of confidence is so profound in Iran at present that the only thing preventing the overthrow of the Government is the lack of unity among the opposition. Only one credible opposition leader has emerged: Assad Homayoun, Imperial Iran's last Minister to the US.

In an attempt to take some initiative to regroup, meanwhile, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, Iran's spiritual leader, recently ordered profound changes in, and restructuring of, the Iranian Armed Forces starting in early August. The recent nomination of a civilian lacking any military experience — Hassan Feroz Abadi, the former commander of the political police, the *Basseej* — as the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces was a political move. Tehran recognized the *Basseej*'s loyalty rather than Abadi's military skills.

The roots of the present military restructuring process can be traced to the military's refusal to crash by force the popular uprising in Qazvin in late 1994. At that time, the mullahs raised questions concerning the extent of the loyalty of the senior officers, particularly the professional commanders, despite their record during the revolution and the long war with Iraq. Moreover, some 3,000 officers are about to reach the mandatory retirement age, creating a void which must be filled.

Tehran will promote much younger officers to fill in these positions. The candidates preferred have grown virtually all their lives under the cleric's rule, so that (theoretically) there could be no doubt about their loyalty to the mullahs. However, most of the officer-caliber youth lack proper military education and professionalism to prepare them to assume the responsibilities which Tehran expects them to handle.

Moreover, the rapid absorption of Soviet-style military equipment (from Russia/CIS, Eastern Europe, the PRC and the DPRK) further complicates the conditions of the Iranian Armed Forces. Initially, during the 1980s, these weapons and related technologies were entrusted to militarized elements of the IRGC. Consequently, presently, there are not enough veteran IRGC professional commanders and officers to address the issues at higher ranks.

Tehran's initial step was to concentrate all the quality and high-performance assets in and around the 170,000-strong IRGC. And on August 5, Maj.-Gen. Mohsen Reza'i, Commander-in-Chief of the IRGC, announced that his "personnel are turning into rapid deployment forces".

This is a natural culmination of a clear trend. In the past 18 months, the IRGC has been the centre of a series of complex and large-scale military exercises in which Iran clearly demonstrated its preoccupation with long-range naval and heliborne landings as well as deep offensive operations.

The scenarios of these exercises leave no doubt that the actual targets of these forces were across the Persian Gulf: Saudi Arabia and the emirates. Saudi leaders had, in recent months, felt that they had "bought off" some of the Iranian threat by agreeing to fund and politically support Iranian-backed international Islamist radical groups. Iran, however, was not deterred from its strategic objectives by this sop to its international causes.

With the key missile units (ballistic and anti-ship cruise missiles) and air force assets in the Strait of Hormuz area also under the command of the IRGC, the Revolutionary Guards Corps has thus become the primary strategic arm of the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly in the crucially important Persian Gulf theater.

On August 8, 1995, Tehran announced that Iranian military experts had developed an aerial refueling system to enhance its MiG-29 fighter aircraft. Tehran left no doubt about the strategic significance of this newly acquired capability. The acquiring of aerial refueling capabilities would "turn [the] MiG-29 into a warplane able to carry out multi-purpose and offensive strategic missions". "The new refueling system will operate automatically in the air and . . . increase the duration of reconnaissance flights." Tehran also announced that Iran was prepared to "transfer this new technology to the friendly countries possessing MiG-29 aircraft". Iran has at least 35 to

40 MiG-29s remaining from its first deal with the USSR, with a second deal for additional 50 MiG-29s being implemented [it is not clear how many aircraft have already been delivered, assembled, and readied].

One ally which might be interested in the aerial refueling technology is India, with which Iran has enthusiastically begun reinstating ties initiated by the Shah two decades ago. The Iranian initiative to re-open ties with India is of potentially profound economic importance. But the new ties with India, the principal threat to Pakistan, have shattered Iran's relations with Pakistan. Iran and Pakistan are already backing different sides in the Afghan civil war, which is likely to see Afghanistan divided into independent northern and southern states, ironically fulfilling the original strategic goal of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The new northern Afghan state would fall under Iranian influence; the southern state under Pakistan's.

This change in the Pakistan-Iran relationship is in itself a significant strategic factor, weakening to some extent the North Korea-China (PRC)-Pakistan-Iran-Sudan axis which had been building. But for Iran, the relationship with India may be the only hope for a viable economic (trading) relationship. Certainly, also, the PRC must look slightly askance at the Iran-India *rapprochement*; Beijing views New Delhi as its ultimate regional rival.

The diplomatic initiative to India is not Iran's only move: it has, over the past year or more, entertained numerous contacts with Iraqi Government officials. The continued refusal by the United States Government to permit the United Nations to remove economic sanctions on Iraq, four years after the end of the Gulf War, has forced Baghdad to contemplate a strategic alliance with its old foe, Iran. What may emerge from this, should the two governments survive their present crises, is a strategic confederation; perhaps even a political one.

Such an eventuality would pose vastly greater problems for other regional states, such as Saudi Arabia (in particular), but it would also create a geopolitical entity of potentially enormous significance. The joint control of energy resources by such an Iran-Iraq combine would, on its own, be of world significance. And within some 15 years such an entity would be home to about 135-million people, and much of the Shi'a community of Islam would be united.

The prospect of such a strategic development rests solely on the ability of the two governments — those of Iran and Iraq — to survive the next year or two. The apparent but unusual defection of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's two sons-in-law to Jordan, and their subsequent announcement of an anti-Saddam movement, in August creates the first significant catalyst for internal opposition to President Saddam. The move also says much about the transformation in Iraqi-Jordanian relations, although road access from Jordan into Iraq is still the only real trading option open to Iraq.

As far as Iran is concerned, the creation of an opposition movement unified around a single leader has been long in coming. Most of Iran's educated people have been in a diaspora of exile since the Shah's departure from the country in February 1979. And while this community took with it large amounts of money, little of it has found its way into the creation of a viable opposition to reclaim their homeland. That is changing.

Even so, the Iranian opposition still has some problems to sort out. One former cabinet minister from the Shah's days, Manoucher Gandji, living in Paris, met in Washington DC on July 27, 1995, for two hours with the heir to the Iranian throne, Reza Pahlavi. Gandji, who has been financially supported on a quite lavish scale for sometime by the US Government, said that he and Reza Pahlavi were ready to work with other Iranian opposition leaders. But Gandji daimed that both leaders also agreed on the provision of local autonomy "within a united Iran" for the Kurds, following the end of the clerical revolutionary Government now in power.

Azadegan Foundation leader Dr Assad Homayoun, who has refused to accept any financial help from outside the Iranian community, cautioned that Gandji's concept of autonomy within Iran for various ethnic groups might precipitate the break-up of Iran into separate states. Although known for his support for all Iranian ethnic minorities — and particularly for his support for an ongoing role for all of the Iranian armed forces except the *Basseej* — Dr Homayoun said that he felt the discussion by Reza Pahlavi and Gandji had not been thought through sufficiently.

Similarly, he severely criticised an article, published in *The Washington Post* and *International Herald Tribune* (July 11, 1995) by former Iranian Minister of Finance and Economics under the Shah, Hushang Ansary. Basically, Ansary called for a *rapprochement* with the existing revolutionary Government of Iran, enabling it to bring Iran, in a modified form of its present shape, back into the community of nations.

Dr Homayoun responded: "The present leaders of Iran, who seized power through a revolution, may pay lip service to change in order to save their Government, but they will never fundamentally change their approach. They will never embrace the concept of democracy in any form, nor will they abide by fundamental human rights. Moreover, they will continue to pose a threat to their neighbors in the region and, indeed, to international stability."

"The clerical leaders of Iran have no legitimacy of rule other than to claim that they must proselytize their radical and politicized view of Islam around the world, and claim that the message of their 'Islamism' is the destruction of all other forms of government, both Islamic and non-Islamic."

Homayoun went on to say that Hushang Ansary's suggestion of compromise was, at this stage, outrageous and only gave hope to the mullahs to hang onto power inside Iran. Dr Homayoun's views, broadcast widely by Farsi-language media in the US (notably *Radio Sedaye Iran*) and Middle East, attracted immediate support from the Iranian community inside Iran as well as outside the country.

There has been an immediate upsurge in support for Azadegan since Dr Homayoun's strenuous support for the retention of the unity of Iran and a rejection of compromise with the existing clerical leaders. Dr Homayoun, who served for many years in a diplomatic capacity in the United States and who, in later exile, worked in the United States as a Senior Fellow studying grand strategy issues at the International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA), has strong personal friendships with many of the new Republican leaders in Congress, who know of his moderate political views and support for free market economics. Many in Congress receive Azadegan's *Focus on Iran* monthly, which may have contributed to US House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich's call for the ouster of the clerical Government in Iran. But Homayoun has also attracted support lately because he is seen as the only charismatic leadership option open to the Iranian opposition at this pivotal time in Iranian politics.

And he is the only opposition leader not to have taken funds from either the US CIA or the Iraqis. And that, at this time when Iranians see the chance for change, may be a crucial factor in Homayoun's favor.

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## **Berisha Shuffles Albanian Cabinet in Wake of February Local Elections**

Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha (Democratic Party) on March 12, 2007, announced a major reshuffle of his Government, changing six portfolios.

Gazmend Oketa was named Deputy Prime Minister, and outgoing Deputy Prime Minister Ilir Rusmajli was named Minister of Justice. Bujar Nishani was named Interior Minister. The changes followed a poor showing in local elections in February 2007 by Prime Minister Berisha's Democratic Party, with its main rival, the Socialists, gaining control of many of the country's major urban centers. Berisha indicated in late February 2007 that he would make changes, and Rusmajli's demotion was not unexpected.

The choice of Nishani as Interior Minister was also widely expected after his prominent rôle in the Government's investigation and subsequent dismissal of Prosecutor-General Theodhori Sollaku. The Health portfolio was given to the leader of a coalition party in the Government, Nard Ndoka, of the Christian Democrats. Bamir Topi, the leader of the Democrats' parliamentary faction, who had been thought of as a potential cabinet minister, was instead nominated as the party's candidate in Presidential elections to be held in mid-2007.

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