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Special Report

Iran and Nuclear Weapons: A Review of Imperatives and Options

*By Dr Assad Homayoun**

Iran 's Place in the Global Chessboard

Only a small number of 200 or so nations and entities in the world are of major importance geopolitically, and their geographic size or location on the globe is usually a key factor. They are all equal in term of law, but not in terms of power and geopolitical values. Whether by accident or not, the distribution of territory among nations is uneven.

Large territories, with big population, and vast natural resources are important. Historical background and cultural and economic importance will give more opportunity for wise leadership to play a significant rôle in international politics and better fulfill their states' potentials and shape their destinies.

The surface of the earth is approximately 197-million square miles, 70 percent of which is covered by water, and 5.5-million square miles are in icebound Antarctica . There remains 52-million square miles of land surface for nearly 200 nations with a total population in excess over six billions.¹

There are 18 geographically large countries, with Iran ranking 17th among them with 636,000 square miles of territory, and a unique geo-strategic situation. It has a population of 70-million, with a long history, strong intellectual and cultural tradition, and nationalism, and bountiful natural resources, especially vast reserves of oil and natural gas. It has 12 percent of world's proven reserves of petroleum and also possesses the world's second largest reserves of natural gas.

It is located in a critical area, between two zones of energy, the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea , which contains 70 percent of the world's known oil reserve and 60 percent

of its natural gas. It has a 1,570-mile coastline on the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman , with command of the strategic Strait of Hormuz . It rightly sees itself as a regional power.

Iran has borders with 15 countries, with no single strategic friend on its entire long borders. It has been subjected many times to invasions Russia and Great Britain were big threats to independence of Iran in the 19th Century and dismembered the country; Russia annexed considerable Iranian territory in the Caucasus and Central Asia . In World War I and especially World War II , Iran was occupied, and the Soviet Union in 1945 openly and directly instigated separatist movements in Iran . The Red Army supported Azeri and Kurdish republics in Iran , but Soviet activities were frustrated by US Pres. Harry Truman in 1946. Iraq invaded Iran in the 1990s, and used chemical and biological weapons, killing tens of thousands of Iranians. Iran has been also subjected to more missile attacks than any country in past 50 years.

Iran already has one nuclear power on its border: Pakistan , which has half of Iran 's territory and twice its population. Pakistan could pose a grave danger to Iran if, for example, Pakistan Pres. Gen. Pervez Musharraf was removed from power and Islamists gained control of the nuclear installations. Also Israel , India , Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the vicinity of Iran possess nuclear capabilities.

Iran is indeed an important force that can contribute immensely, for peace or for the destabilization of the region. Unfortunately the present Administration in Iran has chosen the latter.

Iran , therefore, in both Eurasia and the global chessboard, is a very important piece, and its defense and national security are critical in a global context.

Iran , in the center of the most economic, political and strategic area of the world, with the great ethnic and cultural and religious conflicts, has to play its rôle in a way which will secure its integrity and national defense. Iran has many reasons to develop its defense capability.

Since the nuclear policy of Iran is becoming a significant international issue, an important question arises as to whether or not Iran should acquire military nuclear capabilities. Given the fact that Iran is located in pivotal strategic area with five nuclear powers in the immediate vicinity, we must understand Iran's defense deeds and consider what kind of defense policy Iran should adopt.

The Political Options for Iran .

Iran can choose four roads for its national security and defense:

- **1. It can do nothing.** This is not going to be an option. No government in Iran could agree to leave the country defenseless in light of the many historical invasions. As US Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet stated in his recent testimony to the US Congress, no Iranian Government,

regardless of its ideological leanings, was likely to abandon a program to develop weapons of mass destruction.²

- **2. Follow a nuclear-free zone policy.** Several countries in the Middle East in the past several decades proposed regional non-proliferation agreements or a “nuclear weapons-free zone”. This notion has been discussed and was proposed and followed in the United Nations many times by Iran and Egypt in 1974, and in 1981, and by Egypt again in 1990, but did not go anywhere.³

A weapons of mass destruction-free zone (WMFZ) initiative is not possible in the region, and therefore it is not going to be an option. Israel will never give up its nuclear ambition, because it thinks it serves as deterrence for its survival against its hostile neighbors. Pakistan will not give up because of India, nor India because of the PRC, and so on.

- **3. US or NATO Agreement/Protection.** There could be some agreement with the United States or NATO for Iran to come under some sort of defensive umbrella to guarantee its security in case of a possible threat. This option is neither possible nor practical, especially with a clerical Administration in power which has committed itself to support of international terrorism and the promotion of radical Islam. If Iran was controlled by a moderate democratic government, then it could be a possibility, but never with the present Administration.
- **4. The last option is that Iran becomes a military nuclear state.** Presently, it seems that this is the policy of the Administration of Tehran, and it is a policy which may be now coming close to reality. Iran has invested too much money, scientific, technological talent and pride in building its nuclear infrastructure, and it is unlikely to abandon completely its desire of acquiring nuclear technology.

For Iran to become a military nuclear state is a violation of its obligations to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which it signed in 1970, and the world cannot tolerate a government which supports international terrorism, provides financial, ideological, political and logistical support to terrorist groups worldwide, should have access to nuclear weapons. Iran may have valid reasons for wanting a military nuclear capability, but here arises the issue of responsibility and intention of the Administration. Among the leaders of the Tehran Administration, I believe the most likely promoter of nuclear policy is the head of Expediency Council and political architecture of the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Hojjat ol-Eslam* Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former President, who is, more than anybody else, behind the broad spectrum of international terrorism. On several occasions in the past, he openly pronounced and spoke on nuclear weapon-related issues. Mr Rafsanjani, Supreme Leader *Ayatollah* Ali Khamene'i, and other top leaders of the Islamic republic see nuclear weapons as a source of national power.

Significantly, however, they primarily think of nuclear weapons as an instrument to advance their radical fundamentalist and terrorist cause rather than for the national security and defense of Iran.

The clerical Administration also wants nuclear weapons to consolidate its shaky and illegitimate power, and to be able to continue to undermine the West and its other opponents, and to support the radical groups which destabilize the region. I do not believe that the world and specially the US Administration and Europe could — with any strategic justification — tolerate the clerical Administration of Tehran, with its dismal record of terrorism and human rights abuse, developing a nuclear arsenal.

The problem is that, on one hand Iran needs to secure its defense in this pivotal strategic region which is volatile with many ethnic cultural and religious rivalries; while on the other hand neither the people of Iran nor the world could tolerate a nuclear theocracy which was the fountainhead of international terrorism and has based its rule on force, repression and the terror of its people.

Now, What Should Be Done?

Iran is close to the point of no return. Diplomatic and economic pressure, banning export of nuclear technology, freezing economic agreements of Europe and Japan , who are trying to prevent transfer of Russian, PRC or North Korean technology to Iran will not be effective. Even the UN Security Council's resolution or military action will not change the decision of the clerical leadership of Iran to become nuclear. Those measures by the international community will bring harm to the Administration, could weaken its shaky foundation, and may postpone Iran 's nuclear program, but they would not change the situation. And even maybe it is too late for taking preventive actions.

As Gregory Copley, Editor-in-Chief of *Defense & Foreign Affairs*, wrote in a recent analysis, the involvement of US in war with Iraq gave the opportunity to North Korea and the Islamic Republic of Iran to become essentially *de facto* nuclear powers.⁴

It is possible that the clerical Administration may have already secured or created some dirty bombs for terrorist purposes and secured a few existing nuclear warheads from the former Soviet Union, to be mounted at the top of *Shahab-3*.

To me, a nuclear theocratic Administration of Tehran would be much more dangerous than the North Korean Administration of Kim Jong-Il. A nuclear theocracy in Iran not only would change the balance of power in the region in favor of anti-civilizational forces, but would encourage the ruling clerics to more vigorously support international terrorism and disturb the world's peace and equilibrium. This would be detrimental to the stability of the region and also to the interest of Iran and Iranian people who are struggling for democratic change in the country, to replace the present unrepresentative and repressive Administration with a secular, responsible and democratic one.

Some observers believe that it would be height of folly if the Iranian clerical Administration did not sign and ratify the New Safeguards Measures known as “program 93 + 2”. I believe that if the clerical Government, even under political, economic and technical pressures, decided to sign the New Safeguards Measures of IAEA, it would not ratify it. There would be many ways and means to escape from the watching eyes of

IAEA, and the clerical Government will never abandon its drive to acquire the atomic bomb.

Moreover, the new Protocols System is not foolproof, and even by signing the Safeguard Measures, the clerical Administration could avoid ratification. On September 12, 2003 , the Board of Governors of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued a strongly-worded resolution which gave the clerics a deadline of October 31, 2003 , to dispel all doubt about their nuclear ambition. We have to wait to see the reaction of the clerics. Knowing the nature of the theocratic rulers, they may resort to dissimulation, which is allowed in Shi'a religious philosophy as a "pious fraud" to deceive and mislead, in order to buy time to reach a goal.

Change of the Administration Is the Only Way

The best and most practical solution to the Iranian dilemma is to change the Government of Iran by helping the people. I have discussed in my article *Strategy For Change and My Vision for a New Iran*, HOW and WHY it is time for change in Iran . This paper was published in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Daily* and *Strategic Policy* monthly, and republished in "worldtribune.com".⁵

The clerical Administration of Iran has no answer to the increasing social, economic and political problems which are, in any event, of its own creation. It has totally lost its national base. It has no legitimacy politically, morally and even religiously. The great majority of Iranian people are against the dictatorial rôle of the clerics and several times proved to be ready to rise against the clerics. Over 270,000 non-ruling clerics, most of the military and a great number of *Pasdaran* (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps) are keeping their distance from the ruling clerics.

The people know well that nuclear weapons in control of radical clerics would bring more harm to Iran than good.

The best and most feasible way to solve the problems of WMD, terrorism and anti-peace activities of the Iranian clerical leadership is to support, openly and enthusiastically, the people of Iran who are ready resolved to change the national leadership of Iran . I believe that the policies of US Pres. George W. Bush are in the right direction, but those policies should be implemented and followed in unified way, openly and without wavering. This is the safest and the best option for the US and Europe to achieve peace in the region and to help the Iranian people. I am sure after the downfall of the clerical Administration, a responsible Government could come to some sort of arrangement with US and NATO to guarantee security of Iran and help remove the reasons for Iran's drive to become nuclear. This would prevent the volatile region from entering into an era of nuclear arms race and disturbance to the world's equilibrium.

I firmly believe that it is time, and indeed the acme of patriotism, for the Iranian Armed Forces and the Revolutionary Guards, who are guarantors of integrity of Iran, to discontinue their support of the clerical Government. They must help the people to

establish a representative democratic government. They must come to their senses and prevent conflict with US and possible attacks on Iranian military, technological and economic, installations.

Iran must be a perpetrator of peace, not terrorism.

Footnotes:

1. See also Ray S. Cline: *Metastrategy*. Chapter 4, *Games Nations Play*. Crane Russak & Co., New York, 1988.
2. Elaine Sciolino: *Nuclear Ambitions Aren't New For Iran*. *The New York Times*, June 22, 2003. See also Akbar Etemad (first president of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran): *Iran's Atomic Energy Program*. Foundation for Iranian Studies, Farsi text, Iranbooks, Inc. Bethesda MD, 1997.
3. See Chen Zak: *Iran's Nuclear Policy and the IAEA*. The Washington Institute For Near East Policy, 2002. pp.62-63.
4. *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 2, 2003: Iran's Clerics. and Unholy Alliance
5. *Defense & Foreign Affairs Daily*, April 29, 2003, and *Strategic Policy* 4, 2003.

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