

Iran and US Interests in the Middle East

An address by
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You all, this past month, heard Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad speak in New York. You implicitly understood from his speeches that he and his clerical colleagues — who now so tenuously control Iran — are the enemy of the West, and that they are also the enemy of the Iranian people. The war which they have begun against the West is designed, first and foremost, to consolidate their illicit control over Iran itself.

The clerics do not represent the Iranian people or the historical Persian nation. And my task here today is to ensure that the United States does not commit either of the two great strategic mistakes which are currently being promoted in Washington, DC.

Those mistaken paths are, firstly, the desire of one part of Washington to “normalize” relations with Iran by treating the clerical administration as though it were legitimate. This would consolidate the clerics’ power over the people of Iran, who overwhelmingly despise clerical rule, and who overwhelmingly see the United States and the West as their allies. The second mistaken path being advocated by part of the Washington, DC, establishment is that the US should take military action against “Iran”.

The clerics in Iran — who, by the way, are not legitimate Shi’a clerics; they are largely self-appointed in their clerical titles — would be happy with either US strategy. Both serve their purposes of legitimizing and strengthening their control over Iran, and allowing them to extend their strategic hegemony over the Middle East and into Central Asia and the Indian Ocean regions.

But let me go further in discussing my concerns about the US pursuit of a military solution to the challenge being thrown down by the clerics. And later I will discuss

with you the “third path”: one which would greatly enhance US prestige, security, and influence, without the dangers attendant to military operations or legitimizing the clerics through the Baker Plan’s proposed “normalization” of relations.

Bombing Iran would be militarily ineffective, and would lead to enormous, and protracted difficulties for the US, including possible loss of any substantial US influence in the region. It would almost certainly lead to a much more virulent conflict in Iraq, and a full-scale war against Israel. Moreover, a major series of attacks by the US, or the West, or Israel against Iran opens the potential for damage to the Iranian people, who are not the enemies of the West or of Israel. Also bombing Iran could disturb unity of the country which will certainly contribute to balkanization of the Greater Middle East that is already volcanic.

Ruhollah Khomeini — I will not call him an Ayatollah, because, in truth, he was only called an Ayatollah to avoid being prosecuted for treason in the time of the Shah — when he was the self-styled “Supreme Leader” of Iran, in 1982, was about to be removed from office by the groundswell of public outrage against the clerics. Khomeini embraced war with Iraq — a war which could have easily been avoided — so that the Iranian people would be distracted, and would be forced, as patriots, to rally around the government of the day.

The clerics in Tehran and Qom once again seek to force the Iranian public to put aside their political hatred of them to fight a foreign aggressor. Thus, by taking the bait, the West saves them. Khomeini did not care if the war cost a million Iranian lives; the dead of Iran were a small price to pay for his, and his colleagues’, survival in power. Ahmadi-Nejad and the other clerics — who are by no means unified, except in the need to survive in office — are trying the same trick.

Do we once again save the clerics, at the cost of God knows how many Iranian, Israeli, and American lives?

You will recall that Ahmadi-Nejad said, when he opened his remarks at Columbia University in New York in September. He said: “Oh, God, hasten the arrival of Imam al-Mahdi and grant him good health and victory and make us his followers and those to attest to his rightfulness ...” This call for the arrival of the 12th Imam was a call for Armageddon, because that is what the arrival of the 12th Imam is supposed to mean.

We should make no mistake: the clerics are hoping by their direct challenges to the US to force a national security crisis, which they hope to survive, even if it means presiding over an Iran reduced to rubble. Did we not see the same messianic selfishness in Hitler?

You do not need me to remind you that the Middle East — or the Greater Middle East — is the center of an array of different religions: Zoroastrian, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is the original cradle of civilizations and the deep-seated origin of much within the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman cultures which in turn gave us the modern world. You have witnessed that the region is also a center of clashes between East and West.

History is geography in motion, and the geography of the Middle East, not only in ancient times but in the present, is becoming more and more important politically and economically. Nor is it all about oil and gas, although this will remain important for the next few decades. The geography of the region shows it as the crossroads of trade, communications, and cultural exchange between East and West, and North and South. The sea lanes across the Mediterranean and through the Suez/Red Sea lines of communication are one thing; the opening of the revived Great Silk Route across the Caucasus, and possibly through Iran, is another part of the equation and one which could be the economic driver of the 21st Century. And there is also the growing network of oil and gas pipelines, and much more.

Much of the world's progress has been jeopardized by conflicts which have suspended this strategic nexus in the past. The Great Silk Route was buried for more than two centuries of Russian and then Soviet rubble, inaccessible to the trade which had once begun to energize both Europe and Asia.

All this is once again jeopardized because of an essentially delusional group which seized power in Iran, and which are literally holding up the traders along the path, like gatekeepers and highwaymen of old, blocking a vital pass through the mountains. The blackmail they hold against us all today, including the people of Iran, is their ability to cause a great war, most probably nuclear one.

The United States has legitimate vital interests in the Greater Middle East. And there is no question that Iran — even though the clerics have robbed it of its position as a great regional power — is the center of gravity or lynchpin state of

the region. To me, it is clear that none of the current problems in the Middle East and Islamic world can be solved unless there is change in Iran.

And this change is not best achieved either by bowing to the clerics' demand that the US and the West kowtow to them and legitimize them and their greatness, or by bombing Iran.

Before we move on, let me say that the Iranian command and control system, and the missiles and strategic warheads available to the clerics, are exceptionally sophisticated, and there exists a clear capability in Iran and its surrogate, Syria, to withstand a major incoming strike, and to retaliate with strategic weapons and major attacks on Israeli and Western targets. We know that there exist, ready, within the *HizbAllah*, Syrian, and Iranian arsenals may tens of thousands of tactical, battlefield, theater, and strategic missiles already in place to overwhelm Israeli ballistic missile defenses.

We also know that Iran has acquired a dozen or more nuclear warheads since 1993, and that, in all probability, North Korea attempted to deliver and mount at least one nuclear weapon on a Syrian missile just recently. We can also expect that, when the time comes — and it may come very, very soon — North Korea, as a major treaty ally of Tehran and Damascus, will begin major strategic moves to cause the US to be militarily distracted in the Pacific as Iran, Syria, and *HizbAllah* begin their escalation in the Middle East.

This is a global war, and Tehran and Pyongyang have rehearsed it for many years. Moreover, Iran's conventional warfare capability, with cruise missiles and very, very quiet *Kilo*-class submarines operating in the Arabian Sea, pose a danger to the three US Carrier Battle groups there. If this war does erupt, do not expect the US to have the same low losses of human life which we have seen in the Iraq War.

The question now may not, in fact, be whether the US should attack Iran militarily, but whether Iran will give it no choice but to respond militarily to an attack by Iranian forces against Israeli or US targets.

The reality is that the US should already have been following the "third path" toward victory over the clerics, which would immediately stabilize the region. The third path, the option which I have always advocated, is a comprehensive

psychological strategy which would empower the Iranian people to seize the situation. The clerics know how vulnerable they are to their own people, which is why they have always taken the offensive, to create a sense of siege within Iran, and to keep the US at bay.

When the Reagan White House wanted to end the Cold War, the National Security Council mounted an intense psyops (Psychological operation) campaign which derailed Soviet decision making, and paralyzed it, often sending it off on false trails. It was the Reagan campaign which, without a shot being fired, caused the Soviet Union to collapse. And yet no such campaign has, in any realistic sense, been mounted against Iran. We should ask why not?

Part of the answer lies in the fact that, historically, the State Department has been charged with seeking diplomatic solutions, opening legitimate lines of communications with foreign powers. Hence, they favor the Baker Plan. The Defense Department is charged with finding military solutions, and they plan accordingly. But, outside of the White House, no-one is charged with thinking outside the box, and with developing truly strategic maneuver, which is what psychological strategy entails.

It is not too late to begin this process. But what is critical is that we cannot allow the clerics to dictate the rules of engagement, or the field of battle. The first rule of strategy, whether you read Clausewitz or Sun-tsu, is that you must command the field, and determine the time and method of battle. And all agree that to win without firing a shot is the acme of strategic skill.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower was quoted as saying in 1951 that there was no region in the world which was geopolitically more important than the Middle East. It was true in 1951 and is even more truly profound today. The outcome of the war on terrorism and the efforts at preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction — particularly nuclear weapons — are key elements which will determine the success or failure of the US policy in the Middle East. The future security of the region is dependent on its successful outcome, and the stability of the region and international order is crucial to the flow of energy which is vital not only for the US but for Europe and Japan as well.

The region was dominated by Great Britain for nearly three centuries, and challenged constantly by Russia and later the Soviet Union. The core of British policy was to keep other foreign powers as well as local forces from changing the balance of power or sharing in the domination. This lasted until World War II when the US gradually and steadily replaced Great Britain as the dominant force in the Middle East, and continued essentially the same policy, with Great Britain as a complementary player.

Let's face it: no-one was prepared for Germany to rise so quickly from the ashes of World War I to challenge the entire world in 1939. And no-one in the West has been prepared to understand that Iran — forgotten for centuries — could rise so quickly to provide a challenge to the US and the West. We forget, too, that Iran has a number of key allies on the Eurasian landmass, helping the clerics in varying degrees for their own purposes. Iran has some very sophisticated weaponry from Russia and North Korea, including nuclear weapons. It has some support from China. These countries cannot, for their own geopolitical reasons, ignore Iran.

Thus the Great Game for the region has begun again. It is not just about Shi'ism and mainstream Sunni Islam. It is very much about geopolitics, about groups seeking to grasp or retain power, and about how people respond to threats and other stimuli. We have to be careful that the West is not going to let itself be managed by the Iranian clerics. For the sake of the Iranian people and the entire Western world, we need to start understanding, and controlling, the strategic agenda.

The Azadegan Foundation — my organization — is in a unique position to provide a sound ground for the concerted and unified psycho-political effort which is necessary for the emergence of leadership needed to transform Iran. It is respected and accepted by many. It has the vision, background, experience, knowledge, with untainted record and also contacts — both inside and outside Iran — which will enable it to play a decisive role.

From Washington we ask for clear-cut, unequivocal, and vocal support for the Iranian people. The Iranian people must know that the US Government and the American people stand with them in their quest for freedom. When the President of the United States — the leader of the Free World — speaks to the Iranian people,

and demands they be treated with respect and dignity; when he demands that they be granted the freedom that only God can give and the false “men of God” have stolen: then the Iranians know that when they stand for their freedom, they will not stand alone. America and the free world must shout loud and clear. I am certain that Iranians will rise, since they vowed to fulfill the task of cleansing Iran from the pestilence, and saving the land of Cyrus the Great — and the world — from the new Dark Ages.

If we do not take this path, then a major war will disrupt the Middle East very soon, and we will all lose what we hold dear: the Iranian people will lose their lives, their land and their history; the West will lose its energy and the vital trade links with all the promise they hold for the future; and the world will see the final great end to the 3,000 years of cultural partnership between Persian culture and Western civilization.

And, as with any great nuclear outcome, all that will survive will be the cockroaches.