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USADI Commentary

Appeasement of Iran and Fantasy of "Engagement"

The sham parliamentary election in Iran last February turned a new page in the country's political developments as the theocratic regime was working to cope with growing domestic and external challenges.

Before the election, the watchdog Guardian Council undertook a major political house-cleaning and disqualified the candidates from the pro-Khatami camp. The move was prompted by the clerics realizing that the old good cop-bad cop game was no longer tenable. The benefits of having a unipolar make-up in the ruling establishment far outweighed the political and diplomatic advantages of having a "reformist" wing.

The presence of former and current commanders of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps in the new parliament has become highly visible. This, however, is not confined to the parliament or the state broadcasting. The GC commanders have also been playing a greater role in domestic suppression of political dissent as well as in advancing the mullahs' sinister designs to undermine Iraq's nascent democratization process. In addition, Supreme leader Ali Khamenei has put the GC in complete control of Tehran's secret nuclear weapons program.

At first look, this may seem as a sign of increased confidence of the Iran rulers. In reality, however, it reflects desperate actions by a regime finding itself increasingly confronted by its citizens and the international community.

Domestically, anti-government protests, and strikes have spread beyond university campuses to many cities. Frightened by the specter of major anti-regime demonstrations on the anniversary of the July 1999 student-led uprising, the regime flooded the main streets of Tehran and other major cities with anti-riot security forces under the pretext of traffic control. It also arrested many student activists in the weeks prior to the anniversary. More recently, officials have unleashed a new campaign against women on the pretext of combating vice and "improper veiling".

Irate because its allies in the Iraqi Governing Council were left out of the Iraqi Interim Government, Tehran has become more brazen in its meddling in Iraq. Iraqi Foreign Minister's warning to the clerics to stay out of Iraq's underscored this point.

The mullahs' buy-time-and-dodge-the-bullet tactic in dealing with the IAEA is now fully exposed as even their EU backers are realizing what a big lie this so-called cooperation was. Result: a growing— albeit inadequate - determination to stop Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program.

Recruiting suicide bombers for dispatch to Iraq, providing ideological fuel for terrorist attacks against the West, seizing British navy personnel and boats, and reneging on last autumn's agreement with the IAEA to stop enriching uranium, are just a few examples of the increasing role played by Revolutionary Guards.

This new intransigence at home and abroad is dictated by the regime's survival instincts. The reformist vs. hardliner trickery has run its course.

The world community has also arrived at a historic crossroad: to continue to appease the mullahs or to side with Iranian people and their struggle to establish an Iran free of torture, terror, fundamentalism and weapons of mass destruction.

As the voices of appeasement – disguised under "engagement" or a "grand bargain" - are trying to revive this dead horse, they must remember that the Iran under the mullahs is where it is today not because no one has tried mollifying it. This policy has never worked in dealing with ideologically-driven totalitarian regimes, more so in the case of a religious fascism such as the one ruling Iran.

The advocates of "engagement" have been sounding the drumbeats of creating an "opening" with Tehran's tyrants for more than two decades. Of course, so far, they have nothing to show for, except for humiliation of successive U.S. administrations and bolstering a loathed and isolated regime in Iran.

The choice made at this crucial juncture, no doubt, will have strategic reverberations in Iran, the Middle East and the Western world for decades to come. We have a chance to be on the right side of history by supporting Iran's anti-fundamentalist, democratic opposition movement, which is the only viable vehicle for change in that country.

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

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Christian Science Monitor

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Sadr's militia regrouping, rearming

Iranian agents are working to train forces loyal to the firebrand cleric Moqtada al-Sadr in the holy city of Najaf

NAJAF - Hundreds of militiamen loyal to rebel cleric Moqtada al-Sadr are rearming in their sanctuary in the Shiite holy city of Najaf in possible preparation for a new offensive, say US and Iraqi officials here.

As many as 80 Iranian agents are working with an estimated 500 Sadr militiamen, known as the Mahdi Army, providing training and nine 57-mm Russian antiaircraft guns to add to stocks of mortars, antitank weapons, and other armaments, according to Iraqi and US intelligence reports.

"They are preparing for something, gathering weapons; people are coming in buses from other parts of Iraq," says Michael al-Zurufi, the Iraqi security adviser of Najaf Province. "The most important are the Iranians. The Iranian people are trying to reorganize Sadr's militia so they can fight again."

At the same time, heavily armed Sadr militiamen are waging fear tactics, kidnapping local Iraqi police and family members, occupying buildings, and arresting Iraqis deemed critical of Sadr or in violation of Islamic law, residents and officials say... Both Iraqi and US officials are concerned about signs of significant Iranian influence with Sadr's forces...

The fighting in Najaf has caused an economic downturn. Pilgrims who were flooding in illegally at the rate of 10,000 a day have been turned away because they lack visas - also because the governor is concerned about the influence in Najaf of Iranians, some of whom have been captured among the Mahdi Army. "Security is more important" than the lost revenues from pilgrims, he says. "I believe the tourist companies were the face of Iranian intelligence."

In The National Interest

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The Real Reasons Why An Iranian Bomb Matters

As the mullahs press ahead with the construction of a new heavy water reactor at Arak and resume the production of centrifuges, the prospect of an Iranian nuclear bomb looms increasingly large. Why, though, would such a development be a cause of serious concern for the watching world?...

The most convincing reasons to be deeply concerned about an Iranian bomb are in fact the least mentioned. The first is that the development of a warhead would be seen by ordinary Iranians as a huge national achievement and thereby enormously boost the prestige of the current regime. If this helps to sustain the rule of the mullahs, then the cause of democracy and human rights inside Iran would be dealt a very hard blow.

Viewed in these terms, stopping the development of an Iranian bomb is one of the very few things the outside world can constructively do to assist the humanitarian cause. The decade-long efforts of the European Union to promote human rights inside Iran has achieved nothing, not least because anything that smacks of foreign interference immediately raises hackles and so becomes counter-productive. "The truth is that European Critical Dialogue has failed to deliver," as a senior Western diplomat told me in Tehran last autumn... But we are not powerless to prevent the mullahs reaping a political harvest of nationalism when they successfully test-fire a nuclear device.

An Iranian bomb also matters because the possibility of serious political unrest inside Iran over the next few years cannot easily be discounted. It is of course possible that the mullahs will cling to power in the same way as the Chinese communists have clung to their own, buying off their enemies and introducing populist measures as well as ruthlessly suppressing disorder. But should the regime crumble before violent street protests, then the ensuing anarchy could easily allow nuclear materials to be spirited away by anyone who can bribe or steal their way into nuclear installations. And just as former Soviet and Iraqi scientists were headhunted when their own masters fell from power, so could destitute Iranian scientists one day also prove easy targets for foreign governments wanting their expertise.

Finally, the development of an Iranian nuclear bomb would reveal an alarming truth that bodes ill for the future: for all the formidable powers of intelligence gathering that lie at their disposal, and for all the immense weight of diplomatic and economic pressure that they can muster, the Western powers are ultimately unable to prevent a government from developing a nuclear warhead if it has sufficient determination and resources...

There are, then, very good reasons to fear an Iranian bomb and hope that it does not become a reality.

Excerpts from an article by Roger Howard, a British defense journalist and author of Iran in Crisis