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International Security and the Iranian Nuclear Program

ABSTRACT

Iran's ongoing nuclear development program continues to represent a source of tensions with the international community, despite public pledges that the program is peaceful and would never be used for military purposes. While the media attention focuses on the possible conventional intervention, the Western response, when it comes, might take on the form of special war or subversion within Iran. Yet any form of intervention could have far-reaching consequences, for both the region and the world.

Key words: Iran, international security, nuclear program, conflict, special war.

Introduction

Thirty-three years after the 1979 revolution, Iran remains a hotspot on the world stage, and is even looking like a serious candidate for a global role in the new, multipolar world order. It was Iran that presented the principal obstacle to liberal democratic ambitions after 1989, having developed a specific ideology and political system founded on theocracy, in which the leader of the Islamic Republic occupies a similar position to that of the Ottoman sultans.²

It may have suited the interests of the West at the end of the Cold War to have Iran as the hostile Other, but Iran refused to accept such a limited role. Instead, it became a key promoter of conservative Islam. During the 1990s, it

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² Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors: Iran Under His Successors*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009. p. 41.

entered Europe through Bosnia-Herzegovina, enabled by the regime of Alija Izetbegović, and soon thereafter into Croatia. There are even social scientists in Croatia advocating the theory that Croats are of Iranian origin, or indeed one of the Iranian tribes.³

America's failed war in Iraq (2003-present) presented opportunities for Iran to have a direct presence in Shi'ite-majority parts of that country, (e.g. Basra) and forge new ties to Russia, China, Venezuela and "Old Europe" countries such as Germany and France. In the Middle East, Iran is a regional superpower. It is also the focus of anti-American interests in the Persian Gulf, with considerable Russian and Chinese influences. Unlike Eastern Europe, Iran did not have to liberalize at the end of the Cold War.

The current confrontation between Iran and the U.S. is framed by Iran's nuclear ambitions on one side, and the United States' intent to prevent them with all available means on the other. The causes of the conflict, however, are wider in scope, and touch upon American interests in the Arab world in general, as well as NATO-assisted "regime change" and overthrow of secular governments in North Africa. A nuclear-armed Iran would directly lead to a nuclear Middle East, as Saudi Arabia would immediately embark on a nuclear program in response. It is the dynamic between the Shia Iran and the Sunni Saudi Arabia that dominates the Middle East. Israel, while widely assumed to possess nuclear weapons, is mostly regarded as an outpost of the United States.

Sunni states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey are extensively involved in seeking the overthrow of the Alawite regime in Syria, which is backed by Iran. Previously, the Saudis and the Qataris also played a significant role in overthrowing the anti-Saudi secular government of Libya (Col. Qadhafi), which was then replaced by a pro-Saudi, salafi and jihadist leadership.⁴

The Iranian Revolution

The Islamic Republic of Iran recently marked the 33rd anniversary of the revolution that brought it into being in February 1979, under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. For the better part of those three decades, Iran has staid in the spotlight of international politics. In November 1979, Iranian revolutionaries seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, which they held for 444 days, until January 1981.⁵ The embassy takeover and the failure of the

³ See: Mijo N. Ćurić: *Staroiransko podrijetlo Hrvata*, Zagreb 1991, or Mirko Vidović: *Hrvatski iranski korijeni*, Grgur Ninski, Zagreb 1991.

⁴ Gregory R. Copley, *Israel and Iran: Still No War in Sight, But the Mosaic of Great Eurasian and Mediterranean Strategic Change Becomes More Clear*, Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis, ISSA, Alexandria, US, April 5, 2012.

hostage rescue mission (April 24, 1980) significantly influenced the U.S. presidential election in November 1980. Thus began the eight-year term of Ronald Reagan, coinciding with the Margaret Thatcher premiership in the UK, leading to the eventual end of the Cold War.

The Iranian revolution also marked the rise of *political Islam*, which went on to become a serious threat to liberal democracy not only in the U.S., but elsewhere in the West, especially in the late 1990s and culminating with September 2001. Political Islam had some successes before the Iranian revolution, but only afterwards did it become a regional and potentially a global force. The Iranian revolution was followed by the Afghan crisis and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. As current analysis indicts, that intervention significantly depleted the military capacities as well as the international credibility of the USSR, contributing to its eventual collapse. Afghanistan was the Soviet Union's last war.⁶

Embarking on the policy of “exporting revolution,” Iran actively aided the formation of radical organizations that embraced violence, such as Hamas and Hizbullah. The Iranian revolution thus heralded the possibility of a later wave of *Islamic* revolutions, and certainly acted as a bulwark against the embrace of liberal democracy in Muslim nations. This has fundamentally defined the character of the conflict (political and sometimes military) between liberal democracy — which after 1989 attempted to expand globally — and the traditionalist theocracy resisting that expansion, seeking to maintain supremacy in national or regional terms. Rather than a “clash of civilizations”, or a struggle over energy, power and national interests (as the RealPolitik school of international relations tends to see it), this may well be the central episode in the broader ideological and political clash between liberal democracy's universalist ambitions and the significant local resistance mounted by traditionalist forces. In that sense, one could legitimately ask whether the 1979 Iranian revolution could represent for the Muslim world what 1789 in France represented for the West, and 1917 for what became the Communist bloc. And does the Iranian revolution have the potential to organize, incite and direct the ambitions of political Islam in the world today?

⁵ David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam (Politics and Society in Twentieth Century America)*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, US, 2004, pp. 73-191.

⁶ See: Galeotti Mark, *Afghanistan: the Soviet Union's last war*, Frank Cass, London, 1995.

Iran's Policy

Iranian policy is to a great extent defined by the country's relations with the United States, which have been conflicted for over three decades now. Today, Iran is the greatest challenge of U.S. foreign policy.⁷

Secondly, in analyzing Iran one needs to bear in mind that it has an alternate political system, based on dualism and a combination of republican and theocratic political models, within which limited democracy is both practiced and tolerated. Democracy is not entirely excluded from the system, but it is subordinated to the theocratic component. In that regard, Iran has established itself as an ideological and institutional alternative to liberal democracy.

Furthermore, Iran has imposed itself as an Islamic standard of a moderate power that has influence in other Muslim countries, and can be a stabilizer or a destabilizer at will. This can be seen in Iraq, which has a numerous Shia population, and where Iran is acting moderately and in increments, knowing the obligations of this community and the authorities towards the U.S. presence and interests. Iran also maintains influence with Hamas and Hizbullah, through which it can influence not just the Middle East, but potentially all Muslim countries, even those with Sunni majority. Hence it is important to understand the direction of Iran's policies.

Iran is often a "hard power" and an aggressive player on the international stage, in particular due to its potential for regional projection of military power and for developing nuclear weapons. The implications of this go beyond regional stability; a potential conflict between Iran and Israel, for example, could have major negative consequences in global terms.

Through joining "alternate networks" of influence, such as BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Iran aims to become a respectable power in global terms, especially within the context of the developing multipolar world.

This is the wider context within which modern Iranian policy needs to be considered. Purely viewing it from the local, inter-Iranian perspective is not sufficient, because Iran today is one of the principal security threats to both the region and Western civilization, as well as the key actor in the global resistance to the spread of liberal democracy, especially in areas dominated by Islam.

Iran has been the biggest obstacle to the doctrine and practice of liberal interventionism, and the ambitions to use the end of the Cold War and the recent

⁷ See: Ilan Berman, *Tehran Rising: Iran's Challenge to the United States*, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, US, 2005.

“Arab spring” victories to establish the absolute and irreversible global hegemony of liberal democracy. Ideologically, Iran today plays the same role the Soviet Union had in the Cold War, establishing itself as the principal ideological counterpoint to liberal democracy’s global ambitions, especially since 2001.

At the same time, Iran came to occupy the place of the necessary evil in international relations, the Other in relation to which liberal democracy defines itself. Following the Cold War and the disappearance of Communism, the West lost a known and visible enemy. Terrorism and the clear global threat of Islamic fundamentalism filled that void. Iran and the West needed each other, in a way, because they made ideal enemies, justifying their existence by the threat of the other.

While tensions between the West and Iran have risen, both parties have felt an increasing need to justify their existence and actions through the escalation of conflict with the other. In the United States, the Iranian nuclear program and power aspirations strengthened the forces of interventionist neo-conservatism. Direct interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan (i.e. the Bin Laden raid), Libya and Bahrain generated a pressure wave that led to the overthrow of governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. Yet the growing influence of America’s regional allies — Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE — has strengthened the conservative forces within Iran.

The West and Iran have needed each other, in order to consolidate their own political systems and identities after the chaos and wars within the Arab world, and the instability such wars have produced on three continents.

From that perspective, then, it becomes easier to understand why there has been no rapprochement over the past three decades between the West and Iran. Namely, reconciliation has been neither side’s interest, since both have used the Other to bolster their own social, political, legal and economic structures. The United States needed Iran to convincingly demonstrate that the new world order still faced genuine threats and dangers. Meanwhile, the shapers of Iran’s Islamic revolutionary identity benefited from a Western threat in the project of homogenizing the country and strengthening its ideological, military and political cohesion.

Indications of Iran’s ambitions to extend its power beyond the region are its repeated requests to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,⁸ and its nuclear program, though it remains unclear whether its primary purpose is energy or military. At the same time, Iran is developing direct cooperation with BRIC nations — Brazil, Russia, India and China — which don’t bother

⁸ “Iranian leader: wipe out Israel”, CNN, 10. 27. 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/ WORLD/meast/10/26/ahmadinejad/index.html>.

hiding their displeasure with the role and policies of the United States, and offer a potential new world order.⁹

Cooperation between Russia and Iran involves assistance with nuclear energy projects, and American policymakers are particularly perturbed by the possibilities of aspects of that cooperation that may not be publicly known. In addition to political and military aspects, the Russo-Iranian cooperation has its energy and economic sides, in particular regarding the possible alternate routes of energy transportation in the region. The north-south “axis” Moscow-Erivan-Tehran, if established, could rival the West’s Washington-Ankara-Baku-Tashkent axis, in the region where both Iran, Russia and the United States have considerable interests.

Sino-Iranian relations are based on common energy policy interests. Iran is a significant exporter of natural gas to China: 14% of China’s imports come from Iran. Another country Iran enjoys good relations with is Venezuela, whose president Hugo Chavez is a prominent symbol of the “alternative” to liberal democracy and American global hegemony. Iran’s military buildup can only be understood as a function of that country’s strategic interest to become a global player.

Nuclear aspirations

If Iran achieves nuclear capability, this could endanger the security of Israel. Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is on the record calling for “wiping Israel off the map”.¹⁰ Becoming a nuclear power would further strengthen Iran’s position within the Muslim and Arab world, weaken U.S. partners such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and require stronger U.S. efforts to maintain the balance of power in the region. However, the situation is somewhat complicated and difficult to understand due to the existence of a *fatwa* — a binding religious directive — issued by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme religious leader of Iran, which explicitly forbids the development, production, storage and use of nuclear weapons.¹¹

⁹ Arunoday Bajpai, *World Panorama – BRIC Summit Vision for New Global Order*, Pratiyogita Darpan, New Delhi, India, 2009, p. 248.

¹⁰ “Ahmadinejad: Israel must be wiped off the map”, IRIB News, 26 October 2005. Internet: http://web.archive.org/web/20070927213903/http://www.iribnews.ir/Full_en.asp?news_id=200247

¹¹ Collier, Robert, “*Nuclear weapons unholy, Iran says. Islam forbids use, clerics proclaim.*”. *The San Francisco Chronicle*. October 31, 2003, <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Nuclear-weapons-unholy-Iran-says-Islam-forbids-2580018.php>.

With a population of 80 million and neighbors such as Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is clear at a glance that it very much matters whether Iran is a stabilizing or a destabilizing factor in the region. Even without nuclear capability, a potential Iranian intervention in any crisis situation in the region — e.g. the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute, Turkish-Armenian relations, internal Afghan divisions or Pakistani politics — could have a significant impact not just on the countries involved, but on global security. From the standpoint of “hard power,” Iran plays a significant role in arming, funding and politically supporting organizations such as Hamas and Hizbullah. Both have played a significant role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in wider Middle East politics. Iranian influence in these two organizations was the primary reason the United States termed Iran a part of the “*axis of evil*”.¹² In the context of “war on terror”, the Iranian funding and aid to organizations considered by the U.S. to be terrorists exposes Iran to the possibility of being declared a legitimate target. Therefore, even without nuclear potential, Iran has a significant role in matters of regional and global security.¹³

On the other hand, over the past 33 years Iran has been in a state of constant struggle between the reformers (e.g. former President Mohammed Khatami), conservatives (Supreme ayatollah Ali Khamenei and to some extent current President Ahmadinejad) and centrists (e.g. former president Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani).

Alaysts well acquainted with Iran point out that Tehran is “Islamic by day, and liberal by night”. Life in Iran is a strange dichotomy of publicly being openly Islamic, while in private enjoying relatively substantial autonomy. This dichotomy actually makes Iran far more “Western” than suits the radical Islamists. However, it is difficult to eliminate, partly because it has deep roots in the political and social past of the country. Even the 1979 revolution was a pluralist endeavor of Communists, nationalists and theocrats.

However, all other analysis — alternative politics, global power balance, ideology — pale in comparison to the defining fact of Iran’s position towards the international community: its sponsorship of terrorism, terrorist organizations and individuals, and active involvement in theaters of war. This role is destabilizing and entirely negative. During the wars in the former Yugoslavia in particular, Iran exported radical Islamic ideology, intelligence operatives and murderers, along with substantial quantities of arms that, with U.S. government’s knowledge, reached Bosnia-Herzegovina via Croatia.

¹² See: *Shaul Shay, The Axis of Evil: Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, Transaction Publishers, ICT, Tel Aviv. 2005.

¹³ Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2011 July 31, 2012, Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism, United States-Department of State: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195547.htm>.

Iran's military capabilities

That Iran is willing and able to retaliate against an armed attack has been long established. The exact nature of such response, and the length to which it is prepared to go, however, still remain subject to conjecture. Where does Southeastern Europe fit into this equation, and how much force, actual and potential, can Iran project in this region? Is Iran capable of asymmetric warfare, initiating conflict at flashpoints around the world — the Middle East, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Southeastern Europe — in retaliation for being attacked?

Recent clashes between Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza have served Iran to distract the international community from its nuclear program. It is reasonable to fear that Iran incited the Palestinians — it would not be the first time — and supplied them with missiles for targeting Israel.¹⁴ For example, leaders of the terrorist organization “Palestinian Islamic Jihad” thanked Iran for its support of the Palestinian cause.¹⁵

In the wake of the Gulf Crisis of 1990-91, Tehran concluded that only nuclear weapons and strategic strike capabilities could deter the US from intervening militarily to contain the ascent of the Iran-led Islamist-jihadist trend. Shortly afterwards, in late 1991, Iran purchased its first operational nuclear weapons from ex-Soviet Central Asia. The deal included the following nuclear weapons:

- (1) Two 40kt warheads for a SCUD-type ballistic missile that should fit on any SSM that was a derivative of the basic SCUD, and was in operational status;
- (2) One aerial bomb of the type carried by a MiG-27 that was in operational status; and
- (3) One 152mm nuclear artillery shell that was at an unclear operational status and was later transferred to the PRC.¹⁶

These weapons reached initial operational status in late January 1992, and a full status by April. In October 1992, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made an

¹⁴ Lappin, Yaakov, Omer-Man, Michael, *Iron Dome intercepts 2 Fajr-5 missiles aimed at Tel Aviv*, *Jerusalem Post*, Jerusalem, Isreol, 17 November 2012: <http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=292277>.

¹⁵ *Palestinian Islamic Jihad praises Iran's support for Palestinians*, IRNA-Islamic Republic News Agency, Tehran, Nov 16, 2012: http://old.irma.ir/News/Politic/Palestinian-Islamic-Jihad-praises-Iran_s-support-for-Palestinians/80418039.

¹⁶ Yossef Bodansky, *US Confirms Consistent Defense & Foreign Affairs Reporting Since 1992: DNI Noted He “Cannot Rule Out” That Iran May Have Already Acquired Nuclear Weapons*, Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis, ISSA, Alexandria, US, Volume XXVII, No. 10, Wednesday, March 11, 2009.

inspection tour of the key military facilities in Isfahan and ascertained the country's nuclear operational capabilities.

In the fall of 1992, Iran signed a new deal with officials in Kazakhstan for the purchase four 50kt nuclear warheads, upgraded and already adapted for installation on top the SSMs purchased from the DPRK. These warheads were eventually shipped to North Korea where they were upgraded and optimized for the soon-to-be delivered No-dong-1 SSMs.

Iran wanted the North Korean experts to have the opportunity to ensure that these warheads would effectively fit on top the long-range delivery platform. These warheads and the new SSMs were delivered to Iran in Spring 1993 and entered operational service soon afterwards. Concurrent to the acquisition of initial strategic nuclear capabilities through the import of missiles and warheads, Tehran committed to the development and production of strategic weapons in Iran reflecting Tehran's anticipation of a growing rift with the rest of the world as a result of the ascent of the Islamist-jihadist trend.

Starting mid-1999, and more so since Spring 2001 — the same period of time bin Laden was preparing for, and then carrying out, the terrorist “spectaculars” against the heart of the United States — the Iranian military build-up centered on the acquisition of strategic military capabilities for the conduct of a regional war involving the US and Israel.

Most significant was the acquisition in Ukraine in 2001 of a total of 12 Kh-55 (ground-launched from trucks) and Kh-55M (air-launched from Iran's Su-24s) supersonic cruise missiles (which, with a 1,870 mile-range are optimized for challenging US carrier task forces) and four or six 200kt nuclear warheads for them.

In a deal bankrolled by Iran and organized by Sarfraz Haider, an Iranian-Afghan Australian-resident arms dealer who was mysteriously murdered in Cyprus in 2004, Ukraine sold a total of six nuclear warheads and 18 cruise missiles. The PRC received six of these missiles and Iran twelve. According to some reports all six nuclear warheads went to Iran, while according to others, two of the warheads went to the PRC and the remaining four went to Iran. Significantly, the PRC embarked on a crash program to reverse-engineer and produce a nuclear-armed Kh-55 follow-up which Beijing has already promised to supply to Iran. Shortly before his death, Sarfraz Haider confirmed that the missile deal with Ukraine included six nuclear warheads. “What's the use of the missiles without them?” he asked rhetorically.¹⁷

The US Director of National Intelligence, Adm. (rtd.) Dennis Blair, said in testimony before the US Senate Armed Services Committee on March 11, 2009,

¹⁷ Sean Osborne, *Smoking Gun: Iran Already Nuclear Armed*, Northeast Intelligence Network, 19 March 2005, Internet: <http://www.homelandsecurityus.com/archives/53>.

that United States could not “rule out that Iran has acquired from abroad or will acquire in the future a nuclear weapon or enough fissile material for a weapon”. This was the closest the US Government has come to confirming that Iran had, indeed, acquired nuclear weapons from external suppliers.¹⁸

Iran and the “Arab Spring”

Events of what the media have dubbed the “Arab Spring” — though “American Spring” would fit just as well — have resulted in a new balance of power in the Arab world, dramatically increasing the risk of American intervention. The overture to the “Arab Spring” was the Israeli-Lebanese war. For years, members of Hizbullah fired missiles into Israel from Lebanese territory. Hizbullah itself has become a parliamentary party with several ministers in the Lebanese cabinet. In 2006, however, Hizbullah abducted two Israeli soldiers. The seizure, in addition to missile and artillery attacks, served as the trigger for Israeli military intervention. Bombing of one country from the territory of another is recognized in international law as an act of aggression. Lebanon once again paid the price of conflicting interests of regional powers, and international politics; Israel would have never received the green light to intervene, had Hizbullah not been part of the Lebanese government at the time. The intervention also tested the possibilities of U.S. attack on Iran. Though Israeli warships had “stealth” technology, making them less detectable by radar, Hizbullah missile crews managed to hit one Israeli vessel about 10km off the shore of Beirut.¹⁹

Hizbullah leader, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, addressed the citizens of Beirut via Al-Manar television, asking them to look out their windows. Within moments, they saw an explosion of the Israeli stealth vessel.²⁰ To the American administration, the successful use of Iranian missiles by Hizbullah meant that Iran was in possession of anti-stealth technology. Direct intervention plans had to be put on hold. Instead, Iran was targeted by subversive and psychological warfare, aiming for internal political destabilization. The so-called “color revolutions” are more effective and far less expensive than direct action. Such a scenario played out in 2009.

¹⁸ Dennis C. Blair, *Senate Select Committee On Intelligence*, February 2009, Intelligence Community Annual Threat Assessment, Internet: <http://intelligence.senate.gov/090212/blair.pdf>.

¹⁹ *Israeli Military Says Missile Struck Warship Instead of Drone*, Associated Press, July 16, 2006: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,203453,00.html>.

²⁰ *Unmanned Hezbollah Aircraft Attacks Israeli Warship Off Beirut*, FoxNews.com, July 15, 2006: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,203453,00.html>.

After the presidential election in June 2009, mass protests broke out against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Opposition leader Mir-Hossein Moussavi claimed the vote had been fraudulent and riddled with irregularities. From the posters to the chanting to the media coverage (“Green Revolution”, the “Persian Awakening”), everything was reminiscent of the “color revolution” template first tested in Serbia, then in Ukraine (“Orange revolution), Lebanon (“Cedar Revolution”) and Georgia (“Rose Revolution”).

In all those cases, U.S. institutions such as the National Endowment for Democracy were directly involved, as were some officially retired intelligence operatives. Though the U.S. government cannot be directly linked to the aforementioned “social upheavals”, a simple cause-and-consequence analysis, along with a simple “*cui bono?*” clearly indicate an American hand behind them. A similar pattern emerges in the so-called Arab Spring, which resulted in a new political alignment in the Mediterranean, Middle East and Central Asia. Powers like China and Russia are justified in fearing that such subversive scenarios may eventually be deployed against them.

Recent NATO and U.S. experiences in fighting terrorism have demonstrated that the American-led alliance cannot achieve military success in battling Al-Qaeda or rebel guerrillas, as demonstrated in Iraq and Afghanistan. Overwhelming superiority in aircraft carriers, submarines, fighter jets, tanks and other armament does little when faced with the most powerful weapon of today: the suicide bomber. It is the one weapon the West does not have, but rather those the West has branded terrorists.

Like other conventional military forces, the U.S. armed forces are designed to fight conventional armies and state structures. There have been some cases in which conventional forces have enjoyed limited success against terrorists. However, experience has shown (eg. the British in Northern Ireland, the Spanish in Baque, and the Americans in Afghanistan) that regular forces cannot defeat terrorist employing guerrilla tactics even on their own home turf, let alone in distant occupied territories.

The intended effect of the “Arab Spring” may well be to flush the Islamists of all sorts into the open — bring them into actual government positions, so they can no longer hide behind “friendly regimes”. That way, the actual countries can be held liable for the actions of terrorists and their sympathizers, and targeted for military action unless they act to prevent them.

The best example might be Egypt. Its “Muslim Brotherhood” belongs to the category of radical Islamic movements, with members also belonging or sympathizing with Al-Qaeda.²¹ Almost every Al-Qaeda leader belonged to the

²¹ El-Awaisi, Abd Al-Fattah M. “Jihadia Education and the Society of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers: 1928-49”. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2000): 213–225.

Brotherhood, including Osama bin Laden himself, Saif al-Adel and Ayman al-Zawahiri.²² Today, Brotherhood members occupy high government offices in Egypt, up to and including President Mohammed Morsi.

From the standpoint of the world's sole remaining superpower, the "Arab Spring" looks like a great American victory. However, it is difficult to foresee the long-term consequences of these events. It is well worth remembering that the U.S. has blundered previously — for example, by agreeing with the ouster of Reza Shah Pahlavi in favor of radical imams and their Islamic Marxism. Or, for that matter, by establishing Al-Qaeda in the first place, which was publicly acknowledged.²³ The consequences of these blunders are then felt by the entire international community.

Another thing the subversion campaign known as the "Arab Spring" has done was to alter the dynamic of the relationship between the United States and the Al-Qaeda terrorists. Thus NATO troops collaborated with Al-Qaeda fighters in the overthrow of Colonel Qadhafi in Libya. Indeed, some of the very same jihadists who had fought NATO troops in Afghanistan and U.S. troops in Iraq, became NATO and U.S. allies in Libya. A similar scenario is now unfolding in Syria.

The relationship can thus be expressed in three phases:

1. Creation of, and close cooperation with, Islamic jihadist organizations (mujahedin, Al-Qaeda) by the United States, against the common enemy (USSR);
2. Diverging agendas produce conflict (in particular after September 11, 2001);
3. Realignment against new common enemies (following the deaths of Bin Laden and Qadhafi): Iran, China, Russia;

Keeping in mind this new reality of U.S. cooperation with, or at the very least tolerance towards, Islamic fundamentalists, an increasingly Islamic Turkey, radically Islamic Saudi Arabia and various other Islamic militant movements in the Middle East and Central Asia, the following questions arise:

1. What after Syria?
2. Who is next? Iran, Russia, China, or...?

²² Daniel Greenfield, *Every Al Qaeda Leader was a Member of the Muslim Brotherhood*, Frontpagemag.com, October 2, 2012 : <http://frontpagemag.com/2012/dgreenfield/every-al-qaeda-leader-was-a-member-of-the-muslim-brotherhood/> .

²³ Cook, Robin (2005-07-08). "The struggle against terrorism cannot be won by military means". London: Guardian Unlimited. Retrieved 2005-07-08. See: "Forgotten Coverage of Afghan 'Freedom Fighters', The villains of today's news were heroes in the '80s", January/February 2002, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting: <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=1094>.

Conclusion

Though there is a religiously binding *fatwah* against the production, storage and use of nuclear weapons, Iran is in possession of nuclear weapons of foreign origin, and is finalizing the build-up of domestic capabilities to produce nuclear weaponry. Iran is already a regional power with well-developed capabilities of waging asymmetric warfare and provoking crises elsewhere in case it comes under attack. Given the recent rapprochement between the United States and the Sunni Islamist groups, it is reasonable to speculate whom that alliance might be targeting. Given the history between the U.S. and Iran, Tehran has reasons to believe the greatest threat to its interests and even survival comes from the U.S. Yet any military intervention against Iran would have wide-ranging consequences not only in the military and security spheres, but in the world economy, from spiking the price of fuel to increasing the likelihood of a global crisis.

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