



Of Real and Manufactured Crisis: Iran in the Eye of the Storm¹

by
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A popular joke in the United States of the late 1980s depicted Iran as a country that had for long generated substantial troubles for successive U.S. administrations. A U.S. President, so the joke went, had his State Department tasked with bringing him the U.S. government file on Iran. The Department was unable to find the Iran file under the letter “I.” The President asked that the search be conducted under the letter “P” for Persia, Iran’s pre-1933 name. As the second search also failed, confusion set in the White House whereupon an advisor suggested that perhaps Iran had been filed under the letter “U,” to which the President asked what it stood for. The reply: Ulcers.

Clearly many North Americans agree and consider the U.S. as the aggrieved party. If asked they would point to the year 1979 as when it all began. In 1979, the Iranian Revolution toppled a key U.S. ally, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran. Later in the same year, Iranian revolutionaries stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took 52 North Americans captive for 444 days.

Establishing time-lines that tell of origins is critical to historical storytelling. To Iranians their troubled history with the United States did not begin in 1979. For them 1953 is the key year. In that year, an Anglo-U.S. coup toppled the parliamentary government of Iran’s popular Prime

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Minister, Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq. The coup ended the only democratic experiment in government in modern Iranian history.

The 1979-Centered Version of History

To this day the U.S. continues to view its history with Iran by privileging the events of 1979 over any other historical account. The salient theme in their version of “1979” is that of modernization and its discontents. Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979) of Iran, so it goes, was eager to modernize his people, the majority of whom were governed by traditional Muslim ways. As he pushed modernization on them they began to view him as cruel. By 1978 bloody riots swept the country, forcing the Shah to leave the following year. Khomeini, a Muslim fundamentalist leader, replaced him and established an Islamic republic. The new regime was very anti-U.S. and keen on eradicating western cultural influences in Iran. When the U.S., in a humane act, allowed the Shah, who was ill with cancer, to come to the U.S. for medical treatment, the revolutionaries in Iran were angered and overtook the US Embassy and held its staff hostage. The fundamentalist Khomeini manipulated this rage to his advantage and further consolidated his power while fanning the flames of anti- North Americanism. The U.S. responded by freezing Iranian assets in the United States, placing a trade embargo on Iran, and taking the side of a lesser evil, Saddam Hussein, in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88. In the 1990s, Washington adopted the policy of containing Iran (and Iraq) while Iran secretly worked on its nuclear programs. Now in the aftermath of 9-11, the U.S. cannot sit idly by while Iran pursues its programs to acquire nuclear weapons.

In the 1980s, Iran was summed up in the minds of many North Americans with the oft repeated “The United States Held Hostage” headline. The U.S. public officials and media focused almost exclusively on the hostage-taking. North Americans were fed daily images of angry mobs burning the U.S. flag, and striking and burning the effigies of President Carter in front of the Embassy gates in Tehran. The display of mass rage was often staged just for the western news cameras. As a result, to most North Americans, the Iranian Revolution of 1978-9 became



practically indistinguishable from those images of visceral mob anger. And so many North Americans simply failed to comprehend what had been unfolding before their eyes. As a result, tensions began to grow between North Americans and Iranian-Americans in the U.S.

My brother and I had a firsthand experience of this growing tension. We were attending college in the United States at the time of the hostage-taking. One afternoon we found ourselves surrounded by two dozen angry fellow students. The incident had been triggered by a student from a dormitory where we also resided who had thrown a soda can at us and a visiting Iranian friend. Our visiting friend unwisely returned the favor by throwing the can back at the dorm floor and smashing a window. He then left the campus in a hurry, leaving us to deal with the angry crowd.

Facing grave danger, we asked if any of them knew of the real history behind the news headlines, and whether they were willing to let us tell that story before they would carry out the sordid business of injuring their fellow dorm-mates. Reluctantly, they agreed. So we began and when it was ended a good many of the students were still left standing and listening attentively, and some were visibly affected. When it was all over, no one had been hurt, and some even offered us protection from abuse in the future. That day we learned the following lesson. Sometimes history can help heal historical wounds suffered by contending communities, and that its misuse can do the exact opposite, replacing natural feelings of human empathy and solidarity with contrived animosity and aggression.

The 1953-Centered Version of History

Iranians emphasize the themes of national sovereignty and democracy, or constitutional government, in their national historical narrative. From their perspective, the years 1951-3 represent an exceptional period in which the nation came closest to achieving political independence and establishing a lasting constitutional monarchy. In 1951, the popular Mossadeq had put an end to British colonialism by nationalizing Iran's oil industry, which had been under



British control since the 1910s. Naturally, nationalization angered Britain. But what surprised most Iranians was that in the end the U.S. sided with Britain. To many Iranians, the U.S. enjoyed an exalted moral status. The United States had sympathized with the Iranian constitutionalists during the constitutional revolution of 1905-11, and many Iranians tended to view the United States as an anti-imperialist great power.

In the aftermath of the nationalization act, Iran faced an embargo and a blockade from the west. Just when its oil revenues were dramatically reduced, the U.S. withheld aid and denied loans to Iran, despite Mossadeq's pleas. As this created a climate for disaffection and subversion among the people, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) sponsored a royalist coup (Operation AJAX) that put a halt to the only experiment with democracy and independence in Iran. Mossadeq himself was tried in a military court and convicted on charges of treason, sent to prison for three years and subsequently banned to his remote home village under house arrest until his death in 1967.

In the three years that followed the coup, total U.S. economic and military aid to the Shah increased by nine fold. In 1954, the oil industry was in fact (not on paper) denationalized, with the rights to, and management of, Iranian oil transferred to a western oil consortium. In 1957, the CIA, according to William Colby, its former Director, "created SAVAK," a repressive national secret police agency, "and taught it proper methods of intelligence."² The veteran investigative reporter, Seymour M. Hersh, reported that, according to Jesse Leaf, the chief CIA analyst on Iran in the period 1968-73, the CIA had instructed the SAVAK on torture techniques, which "were based on German torture techniques from World War II."³ In later years, as the Shah became an absolutist monarch the U.S. continued to back his rule.

By the early 1970s, as the price of oil quadrupled, and Iran's state revenues expanded dramatically, the U.S. assigned a regional mini-hegemonic role to the Shah, a role which

² *Herald Journal*, November 10, 1978.

³ "Ex-Analyst Says C.I.A. Rejected Warning on Shah," *New York Times*, January 7, 1979.



required transferring vast amounts of U.S.-made armaments to Iran. A 1977 report by a Senate committee explained: Iran’s role is to block any “threat to the continuous flow of oil through the Gulf,” which “would so endanger the Western and Japanese economies as to be grounds for general war.” It continued, “...the most serious threats may emanate from internal changes in Gulf states ... If Iran is called upon to intervene in the internal affairs of any Gulf state it must be recognized in advance by the United States that this is the role for which Iran is being primed and blame cannot be assigned for Iran’s carrying out an implied assignment.”⁴ The report concluded that “a strong and stable Iran,” serves “as a deterrent against Soviet adventurism in the region,” and “against radical groups in the Gulf.”⁵

In sum, the Shah was a modernizing dictator who pushed economic modernization initiatives, as did his father (Reza Shah, 1925-1941) before him, but who forfeited any chance of gaining legitimacy for his rule when he went along with the Anglo-U.S. coup against nationalist democratic aspirations of his nation, became dependent on foreign (U.S.) tutelage, and relied increasingly on state terror to rule. And it was the fact that the U.S. backed his rule despite the gross violations of the human rights of ordinary Iranians that alienated many of them from the United States.

The Present Confrontation

In the aftermath of September the 11th, the paths of these two nations seem once more to be set on a collision course with ruinous consequences for both peoples. And once again history is being misused, manipulated, and ignored. One senses in the air the forming of that mindset of havoc and destruction that necessarily feeds on fear and ignorance. And again we are called upon to halt the death train set in motion towards greater ruins ahead. Let’s begin by outlining what each side says the confrontation is about before lifting their rhetorical veils to see what lurks underneath.

⁴ “Access to Oil – The United States relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran,” Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, (chaired by Henry M. Jackson), 1977, p. 84.

⁵ Ibid., p. 111.



An Issue of Security: The Bush administration presents the conflict in terms of global security. It claims Iran has a secret nuclear weapons program. And given the radical Islamist nature of its clerical regime the world cannot permit this destabilizing outcome. Iran's pledges that it will abide by its legal obligations to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is no consolation to Washington. Bush administration argues that after two decades of deception, recent outrageous threats against Israel, and the backing of Hizbullah in the recent Israeli war in Lebanon, Iran cannot be trusted.

An Issue of Sovereignty & Rights: Iran presents the conflict as primarily a rights issue. Iran is a sovereign nation and has the right to pursue a national nuclear development policy that includes producing nuclear fuel domestically. Furthermore, such an activity is a permitted activity according to Article IV of the NPT, to which Iran is a signatory. The problem, they argue, stems from the U.S. opposition to this right to development.

What Is the Quarrel Not About?

The available evidence belies stated U.S. concerns about a nuclear weapon Iran. The issue seems more of a device of obfuscation than indication of a real concern. The evidence in fact shows that the issue of nuclear non-proliferation has not been a top priority for Washington. Let's review part of this record.

Washington has to date refused to endorse the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) 2003 proposal to place all production and processing of weaponized materials under international control. In 2004, the Bush administration cast the lone "no" vote (147-1) in the UN committee on disarmament against a verifiable fissile material ban. In 2005, Washington again cast a "no" vote (179-2) on the same issue in the General Assembly of the UN. The U.S. has also been pushing to develop new generations of tactical nuclear weapons, and threatening to use them, including against Iran, in violation of Article VI of the NPT, which obliges all nuclear-weapons states to



“pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.” Furthermore, the application of Bush’s Doctrine of preemptive war, and regime change, has prompted proliferation efforts by targeted states and others.

Of more significance is the relevant U.S. record with Iran on this issue. On three known occasions since 9-11 the U.S. either failed to take advantage of a strategic opening with Iran or indeed rejected them out of hand. The first opportunity occurred after Tehran cooperated with Washington in toppling the Taliban regime and helped in establishing a new political order in Afghanistan. President Bush returned the favor by initiating the campaign of vilification against Iran in his 2002 state of the union address when he included Iran in the infamous “axis of evil” list and thereby squandered any chance of leveraging tactical cooperation over Afghanistan into a strategic opening.

The second opportunity was consciously rejected when, immediately after the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, the Bush administration rebuked the Swedish ambassador for delivering a letter from Iran’s Foreign Ministry. The letter had contained a detailed proposal by the moderate President Khatami’s government for comprehensive negotiations to resolve all bilateral differences including full cooperation on Iran’s nuclear programs, acceptance of Israel, and the ending of support for Palestinian militant groups. According to a National Security Council official at the time “the administration’s response was to complain that the Swiss diplomats who passed the document from Tehran to Washington were out of line.”⁶

The third opportunity was squandered when in 2004 the U.S. refused to join the ongoing European negotiations with Iran and crucially refused to offer a security guarantee (that it, or Israel, will not attack Iran) and thus guaranteed instead the failure of the negotiations. Iran had

⁶ *The New York Times*, January 24, 2006.



voluntarily agreed to suspend its enrichment program and accepted the IAEA’s intrusive inspections at any recognized site and without any prior notification (the Additional Protocol).

Iran, in its turn, has not been entirely forthcoming with its real concerns either. She presents the confrontation in terms of a conflict between her sovereign rights and an international bully (the U.S.) bent on opposing them. Although Iran is within its rights, as guaranteed by NPT, to own its own nuclear fuel cycle, it was only a short while ago (2004) that Iran voluntarily suspended its uranium enrichment without arguing that doing so violated its sovereign rights.

Iran may have hardened its position on this issue for the following reasons. First, it did try the soft approach, under the soft-spoken former President Khatami, in the aftermath of the quick fall of Baghdad, when the new-conservative ideologues seemed emboldened and ready to extend their muscular regime change policy to Tehran. Second, it had become increasingly clear that the neo-con planners in Washington had shifted the U.S. Iran policy from what it was under the Clinton presidency, namely a cold war policy of containment and behavior change, to one of regime change, as signaled by President Bush’s famous “axis of evil” speech of 2002. Iran may have concluded from this that it not only needed a new strategy but also a new president that would not hesitate to stand up to Washington’s new belligerency. Third, as the situation in Iraq dramatically deteriorated for the U.S., Iran benefited enormously as its Shiite allies came to power there. This could not but embolden Iran’s leaders.

What Does Washington Want?

The evidence suggests that Washington is driven by other motivations, for it seems keen on never missing an opportunity to miss opportunities to enter into strategic dialogue with Iran and resolve the issues between them. Below I suggest three factors behind the persistent U.S. hostility to Iran.



(I) Punishing Defiance: In 1954, after the dusts had settled and the passage of time permitted a retrospective look at what the sordid events of 1953 had signified, the *New York Times* editorialists mused thusly: “Costly as the dispute over Iranian oil has been to all concerned, the affair may yet be proved worthwhile if lessons are learned from it. Underdeveloped countries with rich resources now have an object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their number which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism. It is perhaps too much to hope that Iran’s experience will prevent the rise of Mossadeghs in other countries, but that experience may at least strengthen the hands of more reasonable and more far-reaching leaders.”⁷ The powerful rarely abandon the task of teaching harsh lessons to those who defy them. We cannot underestimate the strong desire of Washington to continue to teach the defiant ruling clerics in Iran the same “object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid.” The U.S. has imposed a unilateral trade embargo on Iran, threatened sanctions on companies seeking to invest more than \$20 million in Iran’s oil and gas industry (thus ensuring that Iran’s energy industry remains underdeveloped and continues to perform below capacity), backed Iraq in the devastating Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88 (with 300,000 Iranian deaths alone), not to mention several unsuccessful coup attempts in the 1980s.

(2) The Neo-Conservative Hegemonic Plans: The Bush White House has announced that it will not tolerate any “peer competitors” in any region of the globe, particularly in the oil-rich Middle East. Iran has been a rising regional power for some time but one whose power had been balanced by its regional rivals, namely the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Ba’thist Hussein in Iraq. The removal of both regimes since 9-11 by Washington has led, predictably, to a rapid ascendancy of Iran’s power in the region. In particular, Iran’s power in the region has received a dramatic boost as a result of the coming to power of its Shiite allies in the post-invasion Iraq. Even so, Iran is still acting with some restraint in Iraq due to the presence in Iraq of the U.S. forces. If and when the latter are withdrawn or their influence reduced, Iran will surely step up its activities to fill the vacuum. In that case, Washington’s nightmare scenario of a radical Shiite

⁷ “THE IRANIAN ACCORD,” *New York Times*, 6 Aug 1954, p. 16.



alliance in control of vast reserves of that greatest of all material prize in history, namely oil, may come to pass.

Of course, the state planners in Washington, and Tel Aviv, have not sat idly by. Their ongoing plan seems to consist of encircling Iran and amputating or severely weakening its regional deterrent arms before carrying out a military strike against it or entering the open and active phase of the regime change operations. It is likely that Washington had originally expected the rapid fall of Baghdad to be a prelude to the start of its campaign against Tehran. But as post-invasion Iraq quickly descended into unparalleled chaos and Iraq began to resemble an earthly inferno, Bush was likely forced to revise his administration's Iran plan. The key obstacle to the plan to attack Iran has always been Iran's regional deterrent power. Iran has strategic assets in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Israeli occupied territories of Palestine, and southern Lebanon, which it can unleash against U.S.-Israeli targets and interests if attacked. There is evidence that Iran may back Turkish nationalists against Iraqi Kurdish aspirations as well as encourage Turkish authorities to invade northern Iraq in order to deprive the Turkish Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) of their sanctuaries there. Some observers innocently assume that the new and emerging troubling circumstances, such as the increasing unpopularity of the Iraq war in the US, are sufficient to dissuade even the Bush administration hawks from carrying through their Iran plans. They mistakenly assume that the Bush administration's turn to diplomacy on Iran nuclear issue is indicative of the constraints imposed on the hawks in Washington by the new realities in the region and at home. They mistake diplomacy for war with diplomacy for peace.

Alas, a revision is not the same thing as abandonment, as policy animosity towards Iran remains strong and the risk of war cannot be dismissed. Planners have been in active pursuit of implementing their revised Iran plan. This has entailed pursuing policies of utter decimation and destruction of the Palestinians in Gaza and their democratically elected Hamas government (an ally of Iran), and recently a savage military invasion against Hizbullah-Lebanon. The recent Lebanon war was a "dual purpose" military adventure, in which Israel, with clear U.S. backing,



attempted to remake Lebanon both for reasons of Israeli interests vis-à-vis Lebanon and for hemming in, if not destroying, the long deterrent arm of Iran in Lebanon as a prelude to a future attack on Iran. The war failed in its maximalist aim as the hoped-for military destruction of Hezbollah did not materialize. Hezbollah was not disarmed, nor was it pushed to the north of the Litani River. In fact, astonishingly, Israel failed to even protect its people from rocket attacks to the last hours of the conflict short of accepting a “ceasefire.” Syria returned the favor for being pushed out of Lebanon in the previous year by backing Hezbollah in the war. And Iran sent a message of how tough it can be if attacked. Iran has also emerged as the primary re-builder of Lebanon’s extensive ruins through the cash it sends to Hezbollah, and thus may be in the position to gain greater strategic depth in Lebanon. The U.S.-Israel may be trying to use the UN “ceasefire” Resolution 1701 in Lebanon to restrain any organized Hezbollah response to a “preventive” attack on Iran. Similar policies will likely be pursued on the ground in Iraq to weaken Iran’s allies there.

In sum, the neo-conservative planners have for long harbored grand ideological dreams (nightmares) about the kind of world they prefer everyone to live in. They are “revolutionaries” of a strange kind. Readers may remember the famous statement by Karl Marx that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it.”⁸ The neo-conservatives have their own version of a “revolutionary” dictum to which they adhere to, namely, that the U.S. military has only responded to the world in various ways; the point however is to change it (militarily). As pro-active radical statist with dreams of global dominance, the neoconservatives aim to extend the so-called “unilateral moment” in world history (the present unchallenged U.S. global predominance) to a sustained unilateral *epoch*. They will not easily be persuaded to abandon their grand ideological dream.

As a recent statement by the U.S. National Intelligence Director Negroponte illustrates, Bush views Iran as a serious regional deterrent power for its targeted transformational policies in the

⁸ *Theses on Feuerbach*, No. XI, as an appendix to *The German Ideology*, (Moscow/London, 1964), p.647.



Middle East. “Iran is enhancing its ability to project its military power in order to threaten to disrupt the operations and reinforcement of U.S. forces based in the region, potentially intimidating regional allies into withholding support for U.S. policy towards Iran, and *raising the costs of our regional presence.*”⁹ Hence, for Washington it is imperative that Iran’s power be either reduced or removed from the region.

(3) Oil: Not surprisingly oil plays a crucial role in the U.S. planning as well. Whereas Iran is keen on lifting the unilateral US sanctions on its energy sector in order to modernize and increase its production capacity, the U.S. has shown little inclination to let the clerical rulers of Iran preside over this lucrative and empowering process. This point is best understood in the context of the needs of the global energy sector. It is acknowledged that the latter is facing a shortage of pumping capacity that requires an estimated \$3.5 trillion worth of new investment to meet global demand by 2020. Certainly the Middle Eastern oil states shall play a central role in this oil drama. And just as certain, this oil factor generates thorny issues of democracy, nationalism and sovereignty for these states. And particularly for Iran, like Hussein’s Iraq before it, the US seems determined not to let the Mullah’s benefit from a lion share of this fresh investment. Thus it seems very unlikely that Washington would reverse its sanctions policies towards Iran and permit billions of dollars worth of new investment capital to flow to Iran’s energy sector. Such an outcome would vastly enrich the clerical rulers – whom the U.S. has long sought to punish, if not to remove from power – and risk a future use of an enhanced Iranian oil sector by its rulers as a strategic sword against the U.S.-Israeli plans for the region.

It is interesting to note in passing the authoritarian implications of implementing the required increases in the pumping capacity of oil for the Middle Eastern oil states. A firm principle of national sovereignty precludes sovereign states from waiving control over their rate of depletion of critical natural resources. Whereas both Iran and Iraq favor modernizing their energy sectors, it is not at all clear that this would increase the pumping capacity in each state to a level that

⁹ Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 2, 2006.



meets the future global energy security needs. Only pliant and authoritarian states, like Saudi Arabia, may engage in rapid depletion of their critical natural resources beyond their domestic needs. Any democratic or accountable state must accommodate its public's wishes in this regard. The obvious conclusion is that to the extent Washington is motivated at all by this longer-term oil factor it will not look favorably upon genuine or serious democratization in the region, its rhetoric notwithstanding.

What Does Tehran Want?

Iran wants a “grand bargain” that includes first, a security guarantee from Washington (and by extension Tel Aviv) that it will abandon its regime change policy and will not attack Iran. Second, it wants Washington to lift its unilateral sanctions on its energy sector. President Ahmadinejad's 2005 campaign platform included extensive economic promises to the poor in Iran. He cannot deliver on these if the sanctions remain. Third, Iran wants Washington to acknowledge that it is a regional power and to stop blocking it from playing what it considers to be its natural, even hegemonic, regional role, just as, for example, Russia insists on seeing itself in this privileged light vis-à-vis the former Soviet republics. Iranian rulers consider the enrichment of uranium program as their best bargaining chip in this regard. But they also have come to realize that the nature of their problem with Washington is not legal but political. That is, even if they had responded positively to the August 31 UN ultimatum regarding suspension of their uranium enrichment, the U.S. would have searched for another excuse or pretext to carry on with the neo-con's targeted transformational policies for the region.

In the meantime, Iran stresses the right-to-development aspect of the conflict. The discourse of rights and sovereignty permits President Ahmadinejad to remake himself as an Islamic Mossadeq defending Iran's sovereignty against western imperialism. This will-to-development adds an element of popularity to his presidency and further shifts the predominant public discourse in Iran from one of democracy, reform, political rights, civil society, etc. to one of mainly security and national rights. What's more, Ahmadinejad's rhetoric also emphasizes the international



aspects of Iran's developmental dilemma. He frequently decries the privileging of power over justice and rights in the international arena and points to the misuse of multilateral institutions by the powerful nation-states. As a result, just as Mossadeq had won great respect from the secular nationalists and liberal anti-imperialists of the region, today Ahmadinejad is gaining in stature among the region's varied Muslim populations. In this regard we should note that Ahmadinejad's reckless comments about the Holocaust can be read as attempts to further endear him to segments of the region's Sunni Arab population as well as to defy the labeling of Iran as a strictly Shi'a power. The increasing sectarianism in the region could mean that Iran will likely overemphasize both the Arab-Israeli issue and its Islamic character, when appropriate, over its Shi'a identity.

Conclusion

The **real** Iran crisis has involved the struggle to achieve national political independence and to defeat despotism and arbitrary rule at home. In fact the hundredth anniversary of Iran's constitutional revolution just passed in August of this year. Iranians achieved political independence when they replaced the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979 with a republic. But their struggle for a democratic republic continues.

Many observers of Iran's internal politics concur with the assessment that the social conditions for democracy are ripe inside the country but that there is as yet no strong pro-democracy movement to carry through its agenda. The present confrontation between Iran and the U.S. ill serves this struggle for dignity, liberty, and rights. In fact, many have argued that the present rulers in Iran live on crisis. They have for more than a quarter century used the often brutal actions of the U.S. and Israel in the region to maintain a discourse of anti-North Americanism. The ruling clerics have learned to transform this discourse into a tool, or a mechanism, used by the state to mobilize segments of the population in favor of their policies and to silence dissenting voices and groups.



Naturally the more Washington heats up the war of words with Iran, the more dangerous the work of human rights workers, democracy activists, etc. becomes inside of Iran. Even a limited military strike would likely consolidate the rulers' position in Iran, for Iranians are quite nationalistic and will rally behind their government, as indeed North Americans had in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. The likely longer term prospect of such an attack would be an even harsher state treatment of dissent in Iran and the introduction of further national security state measures to the detriment of all concerned. A greater Washington adventurism involving a wider use of force, perhaps occupation of southwestern Iran (where Iran's oil fields are located), resort to stirring up ethnic minorities, a strategic shock-and-awe bombing campaign, etc., will likely make the future Iran look like the present Iraq only on steroids.

No rational person can desire a hyper-security-state Iran or an Iraq-on-steroids model of Iran. But tragically, we cannot assume that key individuals in the inner circle of the warrior faction in Washington are similarly motivated by strong aversion to such future likelihoods. The sheer magnitude of their recklessness in so short a period of history has been astonishing and belies making any optimistic assumptions about their future actions. I like to believe that we can pressure the Washington warriors to abandon their coming wars, and when it comes to Iran choose normalization of relations over dangerous saber-rattling and clandestine war planning. Normalization of relations with the U.S. deprives the ruling clerics in Iran of one of their most potent tools in their state arsenal for mobilizing and silencing the public. Without the latter the course of Iran's internal politics will likely resume its natural evolutionary course and democracy and rights advocates will have a greater and calmer social space to pursue their objectives. Otherwise, the resolution of the manufactured Iran crisis through the favored neo-conservative muscular policy tools will only gravely exacerbate the real Iran crisis for a very long time to come.

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