

TO BOMB OR NOT TO BOMB? MAYBE LATER...

Iran has been a major American concern since the end of World War II. In 1946, Truman threatened military action and successfully blocked Stalin's move to partition Iran into Soviet and Western zones of influence.

Thirty years later, in 1978, U.S. was ready to risk American lives again in a major intervention. The Soviet Union appeared to be ready to thrust into Iran and advance to the Persian Gulf and seize ports and oil wells. Sizeable U.S. forces were readied to oppose the Soviets in conjunction with American trained and equipped Iranian troops. U.S. intelligence was faulty – Afghanistan, not Iran, turned out to be the Soviets' target.

Iran was important to America because it is adjacent to most important oil producing areas in the Persian Gulf. Conversely, the strategic reach of the United States enabled Iran to be protected from possibly hostile neighbors.

I recall the jubilation of thousands of Iranian students – and their American sympathizers - on our college campuses, in 1979, when the Shah was overthrown. Many of them returned to Iran hoping for a life in a liberal democracy, free from what they saw as the Shah's oppressive dictatorial regime. Most of them were disappointed when the victorious clerics declared America to be "The Great Satan" and rejected cooperation. After Islamic Puritanism was imposed by the mullahs, many of the U.S.-educated disillusioned returnees managed to emigrate again and join other émigrés in forming large and viable Iranian communities abroad – the largest of them in Southern California- that are united in their opposition to the current regime.

Initially, the Khomeini regime had the support of just about all of the segments of the Iranian society. As time went on, however, all of the members of the coalition, except for the more extreme clerics, were excluded from power. In the words of Iranian scholar, Edward Luttwak, “All the members of the broad coalition of the deluded, except for the radical clerics, were one by one excluded from any share of power, and then, variously outlawed, imprisoned, executed, marginalized, or simply ignored, leaving extremist clerics in full control. Initially, they still used Khomeini’s authority to justify their power, and still enjoyed the traditional respect that many Iranians used to feel for the clerics of Shiite Islam. But this is entirely gone now, replaced by resentment and contempt.”

It was widely believed that under the Shah government corruption added about 15% to the cost of everything that was bought. Now the graft is more like 30% and the Shah and his minions appear to be shining examples of rectitude compared to the greedy clerics. The most notorious of them is Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani who is believed to be Iran’s wealthiest man. Rafsanjani is a low ranking cleric who from 1989 to 1997 was twice president of the Islamic republic, chairman of the powerful “Expediency Discernment Council”, and top adviser to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The regime has lost all moral authority and survives by using brutal force. It uses the part-time Basij militia of poor illiterates and the Revolutionary Guards – *Pasdarān Inqilāb* – who are structured as ground, air and naval combat units but are often used as enforcement forces against civilians. The Pasdaran are well paid but implement their income by legal and illegal business, that range from manufacturing enterprises to using their naval units to smuggle products from the

Persian Gulf neighborhood, including both embargoed items and luxury products for private profit.

Ahmadinejad's declarations that Iran already possesses all the required processes and techniques ring somewhat hollow when his qualifications are examined: he does have a Ph.D. in engineering which he won in a special program for Pasdaran veterans - it is in urban traffic management, not nuclear engineering. His announcement that the centrifuge technology is "the proud achievement of the Iranian people" ignores the fact that 99.9% of it was purchased from A.Q.Khan.

Organization is Iran's weakest point – after a century of oil drilling the state still cannot drill for oil without foreign assistance. 25 years after the U.S. embargo Iran still cannot copy spare parts for U.S.-made aircraft and the planes remain grounded or crash. Neither can Iran build oil refineries without foreign help – it must import one third of the gasoline it consumes because it cannot be refined at home.

Compared to the North Korean facilities, the West knows a great deal about the locations and capabilities of Iran's efforts. Just as an example, the huge and most important Natanz centrifuge complex is located at 33°, 43', 24.43" North x 51° ,43', 37.55" South, just in case a friendly pilot should ask.

We might wonder about the information that flows from the supposedly secret enterprises. It is very likely that it comes from some of the many scientists, engineers and managers in the program who have the same low opinion of their rulers, as do most educated Iranians. Iran's extremist but not totalitarian regime

cannot control the movement of people and communications in and out of the country to the same extent as North Korea or Saddam's Iraq.

To sum up, a premature attack on Iran might serve to unite the people behind the regime that is despised by most of the public. Incidents of disobedience and opposition appear to come more and more often and it is conceivable that the shaky regime might collapse – with some input from abroad – obviating the need for bombs.