



## Iran -- Apocalypse Now?

Posted by [Dave Cohen](#) on April 9, 2006 - 2:08pm

Topic: [Policy/Politics](#)

Tags: [china](#), [hamas](#), [hezbollah](#), [iran](#), [iraq](#), [nuclear weapons](#), [russia](#), [united states](#), [uranium enrichment](#), [world war iii](#) [[list all tags](#)]

**Update [2006-4-9 13:47:29 by Dave]:** I am aware that this has been discussed on TOD's most recent open threads. Still, I believe it deserves a more thorough analysis and thread unto itself.

This story is based on Seymour "Sy" Hersh's article about to be published in the New Yorker entitled [The Iran Plans](#).

When a child is finally able to read, write and understand some things, there are two lessons that should be taught first, and these are

1. The [The Golden Rule](#) which states in one formulation "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
2. Never, ever, engage in a land war in Asia, a remark attributed to General Douglas MacArthur who also said "Anyone who commits the American Army in the Asian mainland should have his head examined."

The Bush administration now appears poised to learn nothing from their first mistake, which violates precept #2 above, the invasion of Iraq. They now seem hell bent on repeating that mistake. Not since the [The Cuban Missile Crisis](#) in 1962, which followed the [Bay of Pigs](#) fiasco, has the world faced a crisis of this magnitude. Here we'll analyze the Hersh article, the geopolitics & oil issues involved and the possible fallout from a US or Israeli military engagement with Iran. This possibility can't be taken seriously enough--it is tantamount to World War III should it actually occur. If some of you TOD readers believe this is an *alarmist* post, rest assured, it is.

First, let's get the basic story from Hersh.

There is a growing conviction among members of the United States military, and in the international community, that President Bush's ultimate goal in the nuclear confrontation with Iran is regime change. Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has challenged the reality of the Holocaust and said that Israel must be "wiped off the map." Bush and others in the White House view him as a potential Adolf Hitler, a former senior intelligence official said. "That's the name they're using. They say, 'Will Iran get a strategic weapon and threaten another world war?'"

A government consultant with close ties to the civilian leadership in the Pentagon said that Bush was "absolutely convinced that Iran is going to get the bomb" if it is not stopped. He said that the President believes that he must do "what no Democrat or Republican, if elected in the future, would have the courage to do," and "**that saving**

## Iran is going to be his [Bush's] legacy.”

One former defense official, who still deals with sensitive issues for the Bush Administration, told me that the military planning was premised on a belief that “a sustained bombing campaign in Iran will humiliate the religious leadership and lead the public to rise up and overthrow the government.” He added, “I was shocked when I heard it, and asked myself, **‘What are they smoking?’** ”

For more background, look at this map. This is not a country map, it is an ethnic/sectarian view of the region.



*A real map of Iraq and Iran and surrounding regions -- Figure 1  
Click to Enlarge*

Here are the parties to the disaster that lays before us.

- Iran's president Ahmadinejad is a jihadist and he has [radicalized](#) Iran's government.

Since becoming Iran's president in August, Ahmadinejad, who served in the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards during the 1980-1988 war with Iraq, has appointed fellow Revolutionary Guards members to the most key positions in his cabinet and administration. For example, both Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar and Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki served in command positions in the

Revolutionary Guards. Ahmadinejad also purged several major ministries such as interior, national planning, finance, and, recently, foreign affairs, of appointees from the Hashemi Rafsanjani and Muhammad Khatami presidencies over the last sixteen years. To the great disgust of the powerful clergy who practically rule Iran, the new president does not believe that he owes anything to the traditional power centers, foremost the clergy and the conservative middle class who have benefited financially from their relations with the corrupt governments of his predecessors. Moreover, during his campaign for president, the extremely militant Ahmadinejad sought the support of Iran's poor and unemployed masses and vowed to revive Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary ideology.

This would seem to contradict Hersh's (and my own) assumption that it is really the [Supreme Leader](#) who is in charge.

Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, is considered by many experts to be in a stronger position than Ahmadinejad. "Ahmadinejad is not in control," one European diplomat told me. "Power is diffuse in Iran. The Revolutionary Guards are among the key backers of the nuclear program, but, ultimately, I don't think they are in charge of it. The Supreme Leader has the casting vote on the nuclear program, and the Guards will not take action without his approval."

In any case, these are *bad guys* and I'm not going to waste anytime debating the point. However, there does seem to be some question as to who is running things in Iran.

- The same bunch of [neocons](#) who got us into the Iraq mess seem determined to repeat the mistake in Iran. They are an isolated group of dangerous fanatics who seek only their own counsel. As for attacking Iran, toward that end they have packed the [Defense Science Board](#) with adherents to justify any military actions the US may carry out.

The chairman of the Defense Science Board is William Schneider, Jr., an Under-Secretary of State in the Reagan Administration. In January, 2001, as President Bush prepared to take office, Schneider served on an ad-hoc panel on nuclear forces sponsored by the National Institute for Public Policy, a conservative think tank. The panel's report recommended treating tactical nuclear weapons as an essential part of the U.S. arsenal and noted their suitability "for those occasions when the certain and prompt destruction of high priority targets is essential and beyond the promise of conventional weapons." Several signers of the report are now prominent members of the Bush Administration, including Stephen Hadley, the national-security adviser; Stephen Cambone, the Under-Secretary of Defense for Intelligence; and Robert Joseph, the Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

At the highest level of the military, there is opposition to using tactical nuclear weapons. The rationale for using these armaments is that some of Iran's putative uranium enrichment facilities are deep enough underground to render conventional weapons useless. In this case the Joint Chiefs of Staff may be our best friend. Speaking of our beloved President, a House member said, "The most worrisome thing is that this guy has a **messianic vision**."

The bottom line is that the neocons are not content to merely conduct a bombing raid from the air (using *nuclear weapons*) to take out Iran's budding nuclear program. They want a *regime change*. That is Bush's messianic mission. As far as the radical Iranian government goes, there's no doubt they intend to become a nuclear power; it is a waste of time to debate the issue. As to *when* this might be successfully accomplished, there is room for the debate. If you ask the Israelis, they'll tell you Iran is only a couple years away. If you ask the the [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#), they'll tell you there is uncertainty and guess that Iran's Bomb is 5 years away.

Most of the relevant material can be found in Hersh's article and so I'll spare you the gruesome details. However, to state the obvious

“This is much more than a nuclear issue,” one high-ranking diplomat told me in Vienna. “That’s just a rallying point, and there is still time to fix it. But the Administration believes it cannot be fixed unless they control the hearts and minds of Iran. **The real issue is who is going to control the Middle East and its oil in the next ten years.**”

No kidding. Those of you old enough to remember the Vietnam War (which we *lost*) will remember with irony the phrase "hearts and minds". Let's examine the *consequences* of a US military strike on Iran.

At this point, predicting a post-US/Iranian war is guesswork but several plausible results can be put forward. Here's my list. Feel free to add your own.

- Iran will cut [Hezbollah](#) loose. Principally, they operate out of southern Lebanon but are capable of terrorist acts outside that area. This is noted in the Hersh article.
- Oil prices will spike rapidly. \$100/barrel is a reasonable baseline. The US would not, of course, bomb Iran's oil & natural gas fields. That is, afterall, the prize.
- Looking at *Figure 1*, we see that Iran is not simply a Persian nation. In particular, there are substantial Kurdish (Sunnis) and Azeri (Shia') minorities. In fact, the US military is even now operating in these areas. How would these groups react? I suspect the Kurds would line up around ethnic/sectarian lines and secede from Iran. This would have implications for Turkey, which has a sizeable Kurdish minority in the west of the country.
- It is impossible to imagine that the Russians and Chinese, who want this matter referred back to the IAEA and oppose tough sanctions from the UN Security Council, would just sit back and do nothing. Specifically, the Chinese are doing [business](#) with Iran. There is a geostrategic alliance among Iran, Russia and China as reported in one of my favorite sources, the Asian Times. See [The ties that bind China, Russia and Iran](#). It is hard to predict what Russia and China would do but the US would become even more isolated than they already are.
- Hugo Chavez is, generally speaking, a *wild* card. What a perfect excuse to justify his (apparently correct) perception of the US as an out of control aggressor and cut some part of oil exports.
- As Hersh reports, quoting a Pentagon advisor, "What will 1.2 billion Muslims think the day we attack Iran?"

- Unless the US could take out *all* of Iran's medium range missiles, retaliatory strikes against Sunni-held oil & natural gas facilities in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, et. al. are possible. The entire Middle East could be engulfed in a Sunni-Shia' civil war. This is noted by Hersh.
- Last but not least, the strong ties between Iraq's Shiites and Iran would become a bond like cement. At any time, Iran could make the situation in Iraq much worse and solidify the nascent [civil war](#) there. In particular, look at *Figure 1* again and consider this quote from Hersh

The adviser went on, "If we go, the southern half of Iraq will light up like a candle." The American, British, and other coalition forces in Iraq would be at greater risk of attack from Iranian troops or from Shiite militias operating on instructions from Iran. (Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, has close ties to the leading Shiite parties in Iraq.) A retired four-star general told me that, despite the eight thousand British troops in the region, **"the Iranians could take Basra with ten mullahs and one sound truck."**

This comprises my short list of possible consequences of the envisioned attack. Personally, I would prefer Stuart's long [Slow Squeeze](#) as predicted by Hubbert Linearizations. But it is worth bearing in mind what Kunstler recently [said](#).

Progressives have got to step up to leadership on these issues, because if we don't start making other arrangements for daily life - a different program than Dick Cheney's **non-negotiable easy motoring utopia of hamburgers** - then reality is going negotiate it for us. **We'll be dragged into more war, and we'll mount a foolish and futile defense of a way of life that has no future.**

We can not expect reasonable behaviour from *crack addicts*. Civilization is in peril and, frankly, I don't know what to do about it. As the Latin goes, *Ora Pro Nobis*--Pray for us.



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