

The Dialectics of Strangling Iran and Hormuz

Abdul Sattar kassem

Professor of political science

Najah National university

Palestine

Abstract

This paper looks into the possibilities of a military confrontation between the US and Iran. The US is tightening the measures on Iran, while Iran continues her nuclear program and threatening to close Hormuz strait. An historical brief assessment of the American Iranian relations precedes an overview of the chain of sanctions that the West and the Security Council have been imposing on Iran. A confrontation between the US and Iran is a possibility, but there are factors that push the two sides to cool down. The US has interests, and exposed to internal and external, regional and international pressures that accelerate deterioration, while Iran is an ambitious country that might find in war a breakthrough. Both countries have calculations that slow down escalation, but both of them aren't ready for bilateral talks and mutual understanding. The US might underestimate Iran's military power, and thus ignite a regional violent conflict. Iran will not give up her nuclear program, and the US will not accept an Iranian role in shaping the Gulf. The US has several choices to bring Iran to obedience, and Iran has the capability of hitting American targets in the Arab-Islamic region. Taking Israel into consideration and the American excessive self-esteem, the probability of a conflict is higher than that of a peaceful solution. If war is discarded, both sides might reckon to limited confrontation or skirmishes as a test of intentions and capabilities. But this might become out of control.

This paper deals with the dialectical relationships between strangling Iran by the Western countries, Particularly the US, through punishments and Iran's readiness to close the strait of Hormuz in view of the military capabilities of each side, and the ability of each to favorably influence the direct popular and international environments that are expected to be most affected by this relationship. Four interacting main factors make this relationship: the measures against Iran as a reaction to her nuclear program, the Iranian reaction to these measures particularly in Hormuz, the sources of power that each side has on the disposal in both the violent and nonviolent spheres, and the way proponents and opponents of each side are influenced. This dialectical relationship presumes that each factor has an impact on the other factors individually and collectively, and this impact is dynamic rather than static.

Discussing such a subject-matter draws importance from the high tension between the West, specifically between the US and Israel on one side, and Iran on the other. This tension has been accumulating since 1979, and showed no sign of easing or coming to a halt. By the end of 2011, tension flared to the point of strangling Iran through international oil embargo or acts of boycotting if an international decision is elusive, and of closing the Strait of Hormuz under the slogan: if Iran doesn't sell her oil, then other Gulf-states won't; and if Iran suffers from low income, then other states should suffer from high bills. Mutual threats continue to the extent of militarization. This endangers stability and puts the Arab Islamic region on the verge of a destructive war that will have a devastating impact on the economies and well being of peoples and states within and without the region.

Questions awaiting answers

The basic question that awaits an answer is: will war erupt if Iran shuts down Hormuz due to a tight oil embargo? Other questions follow: are the Western nations led by the US capable of mobilizing enough international support to impose international embargo on Iran's oil? How sagacious is it to strangle Iran oil-wise? Does the balance of power allow for a comprehensive oil embargo, and for Iran to retaliate by closing the strait? Upon what power factors each side relies? How the interests of other states in the region and without influence the decision of each side?

Topics to be discussed

This paper is divided into the following topics:

- 1- A background on the commercial importance of Hormuz strait, and the long-living tension and friction between Iran and the Western countries particularly the US;
- 2- The measures against Iran and the expected Iranian reaction;
- 3- The capabilities of each side and the ability to achieve objectives. This is divided into two parts:
 - a- The direct capability at hand;
 - b- The indirect capabilities that each side can use or benefit from. This includes the positions of countries and organizations that are concerned in a possible conflict such as Russia, China, the Arab states and Islamic organizations.

The paper ends with a general evaluation, and the writer's vision of the possibilities of war in view of the interacting pro and con factors. Pertinent factors are dialectically weaved to form a picture that might reflect reality.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this paper is that the Western countries will soften their rhetoric against Iran temporarily while continuing their measures to harm the Iranian regime, while Iran will proceed into her nuclear program without escalating her verbal threats to the West and Israel. This means that preparations for war by both sides will continue.

Methodology

Methodologically, the author depends mostly on content analysis of both verbal statements and policies in effect. Besides, descriptive and analytical approaches are helpful.

The author would like to mention for the sake of precision that what is meant by tension is the tension between Iran on one side, and Israel and the Western countries such as Britain, Germany, France and the US on the other. But the paper concentrates on the US as a leader and the most capable of carrying military action against the Iranian nuclear sites, and opening Hormuz if shut.

Hormuz and the Escalation of Tension

Tension has described the relations between the US and Iran since 1979, the ascent of Khomeini regime to power, and its marginality has been increasing. Attempts to lower the level of tension upon the basis of improving relations or reaching mutual understanding have been extremely scarce although periods of cooling it down have been witnessed. For more than thirty years, Iran has labeled the US as the Big Satan, while the US under Bush, je administration classified Iran as a member of the Axis of Evil. The continued frays have touched finally on Hormuz which is an essential water passage for international trade and wheels spinning. Tension isn't expected to freeze at the gates of Hormuz, but it might expand to include many states in the Gulf and the region in general, and the destruction of economic and military strategic installations for both sides.

Hormuz connects the Gulf which embraces important and gigantic oil and gas installations and ports with the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. It is surrounded by Iran and Oman, and divided into water navigation lanes: two entrances on the Iranian side, and two exits on the Omani side. Its narrowest width is around 54 km. Around 35% of maritime international oil trade passes through, and 20% of the total international oil trade. The world pumps 88 million barrels of oil a day, 17 million are pumped from the Gulf area.¹ This forms a significant percentage of international oil production that could harm the international economies if oil tankers are denied passage. In Addition, the Gulf hides two thirds of the discovered oil reserves.

Tension Background

Delving into the details of the tension between the US and Iran isn't the aim of this paper, but making a quick survey sheds some light on the present squabble.

¹ US Energy Information "World Oil Transit Chokepoints", Dec 30, 2011¹

It is well-known that Iran was a close ally of the US, and the toppled Shah was described as the American policeman in the Gulf, but the Iranian opposition always expressed dismay with American policy because it is thought to be American domination over Tehran. That was evident in Khomeini's speeches and writings that used to describe the US as a big evil, and he closest ally of Israel as an artificial state that should be removed.² The Iranians wasted no time after toppling the Shah. They immediately took over the Israeli embassy in Tehran, and handed it to the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) to become the first Palestinian embassy in the world; and Iranian students assaulted the American embassy on Nov. 4, 1979, and held American hostages for more than a year.

On the other side, the US stood by the Shah at the time of the Iranian revolution, gave him advice, and mobilized Arab governments in his support although he was ruthless in facing the demonstrations. She escalated tension by imposing an embargo on war and civil planes spare-parts, and financial measures against Tehran in 1979. The US has been intensifying economic, financial and technological measures since then. Besides, the US sided with Iraq in her war against Iran in 1982, and deliberately started passing support to both sides in an exhausting process. Militarily, the US destroyed several Iranian war boats in the Gulf in 1988, and pointed in years 2007/2008 that the Iranian military boats were cruising close to American war-ships. In 2009, the leader of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard threatened that Iran will close Hormuz if Iran is attacked by either Israel or the US. The American Fifth Fleet commander responded that the US won't allow Iran control one third of the world's oil.

Beneath the surface, it is thought that the two countries have been engaged in clandestine attacks. According to American ABC network, the Iranian Al-Quds Army (means Jerusalem Army) got involved in some explosions against the American forces in Afghanistan. The US, on her part, defrauded some material necessary for missile production imported by Iran from different countries, and recruited hackers to ruin the Iranian nuclear and military-sites computers. The US continues her drone espionage activities over Iran, and Iran could down a couple of the planes and electronically control a third.³

Since the rise of the Moslems to power, Iran has been threatening Israel and promising to erase her from the map of the Arab-Islamic region. Iran labels Israel as the spoilt baby of the West that has been established upon the miseries and the pains of the Palestinians, and always calls upon the Moslems and the Arabs to liberate Palestine and send the Jews back to Europe. To show seriousness, Iran has established Al-Quds Army, invented an annual day called Al-Quds where intellectuals and experts of different fields of study gather in Tehran to discuss mainly topics related to the liberation of Palestine.⁴ Also, Tehran has been sporadically holding anti-Zionism conferences that raise doubts on the Holocaust. These activities aren't pleasant occasions for the West in general, and the US in particular, and add to the Western and Israeli concerns about the Iranian nuclear program, and promote the insistence on curbing the program or imposing close and transparent supervision.

In thirty three years, American threats to Iran have been a constant phenomenon as well as the Iranian threats to Israel. Iran doesn't threaten the US militarily, but she threatens her domination over the Gulf, and continues inciting the Gulf Arab states to adopt a policy of self defense and security building. But the US is worried about the Iranian nuclear program which means the possibility of developing arms of deterrence that will limit the American influence on the oil producing countries. The US argument that Iran violates the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is undermined by two major realities: one is that Iran isn't on the verge of manufacturing the nuclear bomb; the second is that Israel owns the bomb.

Measures against Iran

The US has been escalating her measures against Iran since 1979, and intensifying her international efforts to mobilize international participation in besieging Iran. These efforts more than doubled in the last decade due to the development of the Iranian nuclear program. Other Western countries joined the US and tightened the rope around the Iranian neck on the hope that Iran would choose reconciliatory negotiations. The UN Security Council came to the fore and decided to impose international measures against Iran in accordance with the Seventh Chapter of the UN Charter.

² Ruhollah Khomeini on America, "A Documentary on the Viewpoints of Ayatollah Khomeini during and prior to Iran's Islamic Revolution", YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zkptu7RdZtY>

³ Richard Clarke, "Signs of a Covert War between the US and Iran", ABC News, Dec 17, 2011.

⁴ Yitzhak Benhorin. "Israel Complains to UN of Iranian Incitement", Hadashot News, Nov 12, 2008.

The Council unanimously decided on Dec. 13, 2006 to prohibit providing Iran with technology and instruments that might help Iran in enriching uranium or producing heavy water or developing launchers and missiles, and decided to impose sanctions on persons and parties who extend help to the Iranians in this regard.⁵ The failure of Iran to abide by the UN resolution concerning the free and unobstructed access privileged to the inspectors of the International Nuclear Agency inspectors to her nuclear installations, the Security Council decided on June 9, 2010 with a majority of 12 votes to upgrade the measures concerning commercial and financial deals related to the Iranian nuclear program and all provisions attached to them.⁶

The punitive measures against Iran have proved to be harmful but not crippling, and Iran continued to enrich uranium up to 20%, according to official Iranian announcements. The Iranian language and activities showed challenge and determination. The Western countries led by the US decided to go for tougher measures that would include the isolation of the Iranian Central Bank and refraining from importing Iranian oil. As they were disappointed by the Russians and the Chinese in the Security Council consultations, they averted to their international influence to curb imports from Iran. The European Union decided on Jan 18, 2012 to freeze the financial reserves of the Iranian Central Bank, and ban oil imports from Iran without specifying a deadline of implementation.⁷ Again, the European Union decided on March 15, 2012 to ban international SWIFT bank financial transfers to Iranian banks. What is noticeable in the Western steps toward strangling Iran economically is that they tighten the embargo to the extent that choices before Iran are limited to two: either surrender or escalation. Historically, cautious warriors usually leave space for the surrounded enemies to flee the battlefield or avoid confrontation. Tightening the siege is adventurous and might push the enemy toward fighting to death and imposing real dangers of excessive fighting. The Western countries aren't sensitive to this uncalculated policy, but apparently they are having difficulties in mobilizing enough nations to push Iran into a desperate corner.

Europe responded positively to US measures and decided on Jan 23, 2012 to seek alternatives to the Iranian oil by July, 2012 as a deadline. The European countries particularly Italy, Spain and Greece import around 20% Of the Iranian oil exports that amount to 2,600,000 barrels a day, and can do harm to the Iranian economy without avoiding harming their troubled economies. The US didn't need much effort to convince South Korea and Japan to cooperate, but both countries are suffering economically and they need to make the necessary calculations to avoid higher expenditures. Both countries have sought exemptions.⁸ Japan is still thinking of alternative energy sources in the aftermath of Fukushima and would be happy if Iran offers oil at favorable prices. India hasn't been very responsive because she imports around 16% of the Iranian oil, and looks toward increasing her investments in the Iranian oil fields. Anyhow, she decided to cut imports by 11%.⁹ China which imports around 20% of the Iranian oil is investing in Iran and unwilling to sacrifice for the convenience of the US, and decided lately to buy Iran's oil with Yuan.¹⁰

The mounting American pressure is guided by a traditional policy of pushing the enemy to a situation of starvation or total military destruction.¹¹ Starvation leads to chaos that endangers the political regime, while military destruction breeds a new political system favorable to the victorious. The experience of strangling Gaza in 2008 doesn't support the absolute validity of this policy. Hamas government faced a tight siege to the extent of zero access to the outside world. Instead of bringing Hamas to her knees, Hamas stormed the arbitrary Palestinian-Egyptian borders and pushed her besiegers to astonishment and bewilderment. The then Egyptian president, Mubarak, couldn't but succumb to reality and the besiegers decided not to test total closure on Gaza again. This means that the besieged doesn't necessarily kneel, and punishments might backfire. Elevating sanctions on Iran to the extent of choking off require re-thinking particularly the Western countries need to concentrate on their financial crisis. Some people believe that capitalist countries believe that business booms with wars and crisis, and escalating tension with Iran might ease the financial and the economic crisis in the West.¹²

⁵ Security Council Resolution 1737.

⁶ Security Council Resolution 1929.

⁷ Aljazeera International, Jan 18, 2012.

⁸ Reuters, "Japan Diplomat says to keep buying Iran Oil", Mar 11, 2012.

⁹ The Telegraph, "India to Cut Oil Purchases...", May 15, 2012.

¹⁰ BBC News, "China buying Oil from Iran with Yuan", May 8, 2012.

¹¹ Patrick Clawson, "US Sanction". The US Institute of Peace: The Iran Primer.

¹² Muneer Shafeek, "the US Put Iran in Face of the War," Al-Jazeera Net, Jan. 19, 2012.

According to this argument, wars raise the level of governmental expenditures, raise the level of employment, and provide an opportunity to sell the Gulf regimes that are dependent in their security on the US more weaponry. The validity of the reasoning above is doubtful, but capitalist interests remain in sight. The West and the US in particular don't want partners in dominating over the Gulf States and energy resources. Iran has the ambition to loosen or end American hegemony in the area, an ambition that might not be out of the Chinese and Russian thinking. If such an ambition is realized partially or totally, the US ability to decide the level of oil production and prices will diminish. Partnership means future troubles, and strict measures against Tehran will be well heralded in Beijing and Moscow. The US doesn't simply look at oil as a commercial commodity, but to keep her statue looming over the big industrial nations.¹³

Closing Hormuz

Iran might show diplomatic flexibility in her negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the P5+1 (US, Russia, France, Britain, China and Germany), but she will neither abandon her nuclear program nor totally open her nuclear installations to the IAEA watchdog. This is why:

- 1- Iran has been following a policy of self-dependency in most aspects of life since 1979 upon the pretext that a country cannot preserve her independence and right to self determination if depending on others. In the war against Iraq in early 1980's, Iran found her-self almost armless while Iraq was receiving financial and military aid from so many Arab and Western countries, and concluded that she should produce her own military machines. She launched a program of manufacturing armaments that is still advancing and improving technologically.
- 2- The Iranian leadership is proud of Iranian civilization, and believes that old glory could be retrieved.
- 3- The Iranian leadership is Islamic, and her hand, according to Sharia (Islamic Law) should be the upper hand; i.e. the Moslem should be strong enough to defend him/herself and deter others, and should be able to feed him/herself. Deterrence is a target the Moslem should realize according to the Koran.¹⁴
- 4- Iran has made big scientific and technological achievements and is moving fast toward industrialization and electronization,¹⁵ and unwilling to sacrifice this source of strategic power for selling oil;
- 5- Due to expectations of American reactions toward her technological advancement, the Iranian leadership concentrated on agriculture and food industry to achieve self-satisfaction;¹⁶
- 6- The Iranian leadership is persistent, and has enough popular support to withstand extremely harmful sanctions. This leadership believes that hardships are divine tests of man's true faith, and thinks that absorbing harm and fighting back is a kind of worship.¹⁷

Iran has been building influence in the Arab-Islamic Region, and cooperating with several countries and organizations in order to build a new Area different from the New Middle East that the US has been talking about. Now Iran has gained allies from Afghanistan through Iraq¹⁸ to Lebanon including Hezbollah and Hamas, and it is doubted if she would let her efforts over the years to be aborted by sanctions. If she does, she will do heavy damage to her credibility and integrity as a state seeking prominent international role,¹⁹ and will become a target of ridiculousness particularly from the side of western oriented Arab regimes.

Iran has shown excellent political maneuvering and could gain so much time through her ability to conduct prolonged negotiations. All through the negotiations, the US and the Western countries in general have shown hesitation and lack of resolve. Iran has all the time to negotiate as long as she is able to achieve progress in her nuclear program, and able to cope up with the imposed sanctions.

¹³ Michael Rozeff, The World-American Style, LewRockWell.com. March 26,2011.

¹⁴ The Koran, Surat Al-Anfal, Verse 60.

¹⁵ Mahmoud Zada, "Iran reaced Self Sufficiency in Manufacturing Satellites", Fares Agency, Feb. 27, 2012.

¹⁶ Wafeeq As-Samerrai, "she is Nuclear", Ash-sharq Al-Awsat, Feb 5, 2012, No 12122..

¹⁷ Ahmed Wahidi, "Our Steadfastness is divinely ordained," Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat Newspaper, Dec. 18, 2011, No 12073.

¹⁸ Jawdat Hoshyar, the Secrets of the Iranian Iraqi Alliance", May 4, 2012.

<http://aljadidah.com/2012/05/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%8C-%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%B4%D9%81-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81/>

¹⁹ Siyasat Rose News paper, Iran's International Status, Oct. 7, 2001.

<http://www.albainah.net/index.aspx?function=Item&id=1389&lang=>

With this kind of negotiations, Iran's Supreme Leader has asserted several times that the West doesn't dare to attack Iran militarily because the price they will pay is high.²⁰ Iran has been gaining time, while the western countries haven't developed a vision of what should be done.

On the other hand, Iran tried to show military might through conducting sea military exercises on Jan 19, 2012 with the participation of her air-force and medium and long range missile weaponry. Barvaize Zaravari, a member of the security committee in the Iranian Parliament said that the maneuvers are a message so all countries will understand that insecurity will spread if the Gulf is insecure.²¹ In a comment on the exercises, general Sayyari, the Iranian admiral said that closing Hormuz is an easy task, it is easier than drinking a glass of water.²² The Americans reacted and ascertained that the US won't let Iran close the strait, and the American military is ready to do the job. The American Secretary of Defense said that there is no need to mobilize more military power in the Gulf because the US has taken before-hand precautions.²³ This is aside from an undisclosed letter sent to Iran's Supreme leader which warned, according to New York Times of Jan 13, 2012, that closing Hormuz will entail sever consequences.

Iran might not blockade Hormuz, and might destroy some oil installations and refineries on the other side of the Gulf in an endeavor to have oil prices flare internationally. Iran wants to make advantage of the already troubled economies of the West, and the choices to achieve that are present. However, Iran is expected to soften her diplomatic language, and to express readiness and desire to resume talks with all parties interested in the issue of her nuclear program.²⁴ On Jan 29, 2012 she agreed to allow more time for the IAEA inspectors to pursue more visits to her nuclear sites, and lately, on May 21, 2012, she received Mr. Amano, the director general of the IAEA, and held talks with P5+1 in Baghdad on May 24, 2012. The Americans, on the other hand, have been pressing for more Israeli patience.²⁵

On the other hand, the Western countries continue talking about elevating sanctions, a thing that might not harm the regime, but for sure it will hurt the people. The sanctions, as said earlier, aren't crippling so far, and they might backfire in a way that will unite the Iranians behind the leadership. The Western countries don't realize that Iran isn't Iraq of Saddam Hussein, and that she doesn't go for any kind of confrontation before she is ready to absorb the consequences.

The Balance of Power

In view of the long-lasting, probably unfixable, tense relations between the US and Iran, the balance of power ultimately determines the outcome of the nuclear-Hormuz feud. If this tension to ease, so much ethical and rational evaluations need to be considered, and since the pending issues are strategic for both sides and detrimental, the whole thing is left to how each side views the balance of power. A researcher needs to dig into these views and seek scientific evaluation for each view in order to draw relevant conclusions. In the case of Saddam Hussein, it didn't need so much intelligence to make conclusions, but the task is completely different in the case of Iran. As time passes, it is becoming more evident that the feud won't be settled without twisting arms either in the battlefield or in shows that might convince the other side to avoid armed conflict.

The following is an assessment of strength or weakness sources that each side possesses or suffers from. The mentioned sources are neither exclusive nor exhaustive because the sources of power are almost limitless. Major sources are arraigned:

- 1- Military power:** the US is the most powerful country militarily on earth, and far exceeds Iran in arms sophistication, range, precision, fire-power, destructive capability and fire intensity. The US is capable of mobilizing hundreds of war-planes at one time in an attack mission, rallying destructive war-ships, opening thousands of fire nozzles and hitting targets thousands of kilometers away. Besides, the US owns nukes that she once used.

²⁰ Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Friday speech, Feb 2, 2012.

²¹ **Durden**, Tyler. "Iran Military Practicing Hormuz Closure", Dec. 12, 2011.

²² **Russian TV, Dec. 29, 2011**

²³ **Reuters, Jan 19, 2012**

²⁴ Liwa' Newspaper, "Iran Eases her Rhetoric", Jan 21, 2012, No 13371.

²⁵ **Haaretz**, "General: US and Israel Share Understanding", **Jan 21, 2012.**

Iran's military is inferior to that of the US, but still she has few sources of power through which she can hurt the US, bearing in mind that Iran's military capabilities and the effectiveness of her arsenal aren't well known. They could be summed in the following:

- a- Iran is capable of hitting American military bases in Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Afghanistan. These bases are within the range of the Iranian missiles.²⁶
- b- American ships are in the Gulf, and this might be hazardous in view of advancing Iranian military technologies.²⁷ The Iranians have been talking about new anti submarine and war-ship missiles, but testing their effectiveness is adventurous.
- c- Iran is capable of inflicting damage to oil installations on the gulf, and causing disastrous repercussions to the economies of industrial nations.
- d- Iran is capable of carrying out clandestine military actions in Afghanistan against the US troops, and probably she has dormant underground military groups in the Western countries that might cause bloodshed.²⁸
- e- Iran's tactical military strategy is built partly on neutralizing the enemy's superior military machines. Aside from their extensive concentration on building highly technological infrastructure, the Iranians dig deep into the mountains and underneath the desert to doom air and missile strikes a failure. This was asserted by the IAEA.²⁹ Hizbollah who is trained and mostly equipped by Iran, used the tactic of digging and building decoy targets. The Israeli air strikes failed to a great extent to reach the right targets in 2006 war. The US is more powerful strategically, but Iran can win the tactical shrewdness.

Compared to US military power, these sources of Iranian strength don't seem strategic. However, the US is suffering from several weaknesses which are summed in the following:

- I- The Americans suffer from arrogance or superiority complex a thing that puts rationalization aside. It appears at certain times that the Americans think with their mussels or horns rather than with their brains. They are too proud and too arrogant to the extent of losing sagacious thinking.³⁰ This was evident in their wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq which they lost or about to lose. The writer has a couple of experiences with this arrogance: on April 24, 2003, the writer of this research paper wrote that America will be a loser in Iraq, and Iran will be the big winner. He was mocked by American writers. The writer also wrote at the outset of the Israeli war against Hezbollah in 2006 that Israel will not win the war. Again he was mocked. Kondo, the then secretary of state visited Beirut and announced in an optimistic expectation that the conclusion of the war will be the birth of the new Middle East. It was so difficult for the American writers and politicians to believe an Arab writer and falsify a secretary of state. This point needs to be extensively studied.
- II- It is highly possible that the American administration will face public pressure if war losses are high. Public pressure in the US proved to be crippling for the American administration, and the public sensitivity for life losses has curbed American desire to wage or proceed in military confrontations. This sensitivity isn't comparable to Iranian recruits' spirit of sacrificing for a better life hereafter.
- III- It is hard for the American people and Western peoples in general to accept military confrontations with higher energy bills particularly at times of vulnerable economies.³¹ But the Iranian people are ready to survive without electricity and use traditional means of transportation. The public mood and readiness to endure have an impact on political decisions, and this works, generally, in favor of the Iranian government.

²⁶ See Michel Chossudovsky, "Iran's Power of Deterrence", *Global Research*, Nov 5, 2006.

²⁷ Medlebanon, *Iran's Military Capability*, Nov 10, 2011.

²⁸ *Ibid*, Nov 10, 2011.

²⁹ David Sanger and William Broad. "Atomic agency Says Iran is making Fuel at Protected Sites." *New York Times*, Feb 24, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/atomic-agency-says-iran-is-making-fuel-at-protected-site.html>
<http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/columns/03-Apr-2012/display-of-american-arrogance>

³⁰ Mohammad Jamil, "Display of American Arrogance," April 3, 2012. <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/columns/03-Apr-2012/display-of-american-arrogance> Obama expressed that also in his trip to Europe in 2009. See the text: <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090423063654AAfu4Zx> see also Stephen Walt, *Foreign Policy: America's Superiority Complex*, May 26, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126827639>

³¹ Augustino Fontevicchia, "Attacking Iran Would Push US Back into Recession," *Forbes*, Feb 24, 2012.

- IV- The US gambles on the general feelings of the peoples of the Arab-Islamic region because the peoples generally side against the US in its policies toward the issues of the area. Probably the US has popularity in the Arab Gulf states, but her image isn't quite good in other countries. This might endanger the status of governments allying with or friendly to the US if they choose to support an American military attack against Iran. A deep rift between the peoples and many of the regimes in the region is expected particularly the Arab Spring is still in action, a matter that might harm the interests of the US.³² The US already has the image of a greedy capitalist dominating state, and it isn't that wise to seek more image distortions.
- V- An attack on Iran might damage the efforts of enhancing tension between the Sunnis and the Shiites. Although the maestro of these efforts isn't figured, but the writer of this paper envisaged in 1979, in his book entitled the **Fall of the King of Kings**, that Arab Regimes will create strife between religious factions because of the dangers the Iranian revolution might impose on their stability. Some analysts accuse the US of enhancing this strife particularly in Iraq.³³
- VI- America is facing credibility test because she failed to stand up to her undisciplined statements about crushing her enemies. She displayed muskets but couldn't conclude the wars she started in Afghanistan and Iraq the way she promised, and thus lost so much of her international stature. Will America wage a war against Iran and get stuck together with her image as a world leader? There is so much risk because it is hard to predict how Iran will react.

According to the Iranians, America is besieged by her statements and promises.³⁴ America will lose credibility if she doesn't attack and Iran proceeds in her nuclear program, and doesn't guarantee the outcome if war erupts. Iran will gain if attacks are ruled out, and the chances of gaining for both sides aren't certain if attacks are carried out. The situation doesn't seem perplexing for Iran, but it is for the US.

The US was in a highly favorable tactical military situation in 2003 when the American warplanes infiltrated the Iranian air-space without being intercepted. Iran could make big technological achievements in the last few years, and it is thought that she has developed a system of air defense that is still ambiguous in terms of effectiveness.³⁵

2- America Can Choose

Aside from military attacks, the US has several choices to compel Iran to abide to what is described the will of the international community; that is, to abandon her nuclear program. These choices are:

- a- **Land invasion.** This choice is ruled out due to Iran's vast geography, grand population, military power and readiness to fight. The US isn't interested in more military involvements.
- b- **Air strikes.** Conducting air and long range missile strikes is a possibility against selected targets which are mainly nuclear. But this isn't an easy task because the strikes have to cover an area of 1,600,000 km², and hit tightly shielded sites, and might face effective air and anti aircraft defenses which are still ambiguous for the US.³⁶ Probably so many of the selected sites are decoy, and so many of the strikes will be a waste of effort and money. Besides, the US has to take into consideration the Iranian reaction which might include: hitting the American ground and sea military bases in the neighboring countries, closing Hormuz, destroying oil installations on the Gulf and striking Israel with the possible assistance of Hezbollah and Syria. Also the US has to consider the reaction of the American people if the strikes last longer than the promised deadline.
- c- **Clandestine operations.** Together with Israel, America can conduct clandestine actions inside Iran such as assassinating physicists, blasting military and nuclear installations and damaging computer networks. Apparently, the US and Israel have enough agents inside and outside Iran, and they proved to be capable of conducting underground work.

³² In an opinion briefing, only 15% of the interviewed in the Middle East and North Africa approved the policies of the US. July Ray, "Opinion Briefing: The US image in the Middle East and North Africa", Jan 27, 2009.

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/114007/opinion-briefing-image-middle-east-north-africa.aspx>

³³ Omayya Abdul-Latif, "The Shia-Sunni Divide, Myth and Reality," Al-Ahram Weekly, March 1-7, 2007.

³⁴ News Agencies. "Iranian Commander: US Carriers target if Attacked," July 8, 2011.

³⁵ Russian Television, "Iran Boasts of Air Defense System", Sep 21, 2011. And Los Angeles Times, "Iran Unveils Air Defense System as US Defends Policy", April 19, 2010.

³⁶ **Rand: Project Air Force, Iran's Nuclear Future, 2011.**

George Friedman of Stratfor says that the US is involved in such actions.³⁷ Several Iranian nuclear scientists have been assassinated, missile factory blown up and computer systems hacked by a malware virus called stuxnet. In May 2012, Iran discovered a virus called flame in her computer systems, and described it as data robber. This virus is thought to be the strongest of all cyber-espionage.³⁸ Iran accused the West and Israel.³⁹ But would this lead to the favorable conclusion of bringing the Iranian nuclear program to a halt? No, it will not although it might slow down the pace.

- d- **Generating popular uprising against the regime.** The US has been inciting against the Iranian regime since 1979, but hasn't achieved success so far in toppling the regime through the Iranian street. The US favored the Iranian uprising of 2009, but invested little effort in accelerating the waves of protests against the outcome of the Iranian presidential elections, and hoped for an Iranian copy of the Arab Spring, but apparently the US doesn't have enough agents inside Iran to push the regime into a corner. The US is probably considering the support the regime receives from wide segments of the population. There are millions who hate the regime, but there are also millions who are ready to die in defense of the government and the political system.

As related to the public level, the Iranian regime shouldn't be compared with Arab regimes. It is noticeable in Western mass media that the same terminology of corruption and dictatorship is used to apply to all regimes. This is fallacious, creates confusion and might lead to wrong policies. The Iranian regime is of a scientific mentality and methodological, and its administrative approach is far different from what the Arab regimes adopt. The leaders are dedicated to achieve certain common goals, and don't spend so much time thinking of their voluptuousness. The evidence is clear in how regimes spend public wealth.

- 3- **The International Financial and Economic Crisis.** The Western countries have been suffering the financial and economic crisis that started in 2008, and Iran isn't sorry for that. Western economies are facing the problem of high expenditures, and a diminishing luxurious life for the people, and if governments want to survive, they have to follow policies that cut spending and preserve the level of consumption. Any tension in the Gulf, or rumors concerning an armed conflict or a cut in oil production will send oil prices high,⁴⁰ and western governments will come under public pressure. Iran understands that, and won't hesitate in playing a price game to keep western governments on public wheels. In other words, the crisis in favor of Iran, and limits US choices.

On the other hand, it might be argued that the sanctions work against Iran. That is true, but Iran, to a great extent, is outside the international financial and economic system, and the damage that her economy might suffer is far below the damage that industrial economies might face. Besides, the US might lose more of her image in the world including Europe, and Israel might be blamed for the Western policies against Iran. If the US to be blamed for any further plunge in world' economies, Israel will also be if she carries an attack. Then a big question might rise: Is Israel a burden?

- 4- **International Unity.** The World Major Powers aren't united against the Iranian Nuclear program. All countries, including the major powers say that Iran shouldn't develop nuclear weapons, and Iran herself says that she isn't intending to develop such arms, and developing them is unacceptable in Islam. However, the Western countries have big doubts about Iran's intentions, while other countries such as China, Russia and Brazil don't see that Iran is heading toward building a nuclear arsenal. The Security Council, as mentioned earlier, has imposed sanctions against Iran, but Russia and China don't see that more sanctions would do any good in reaching an understanding with Iran. Both countries see that the solution with Iran should be diplomatic.

³⁷ Friedman, "Iran and the US and the Strait of Hormuz crisis", Jan 17, 2012.

http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2012/01/17/iran_the_us_and_the_strait_of_hormuz_crisis_99847.html

³⁸ Eugene Kaspersky, The Founder of Kaspersky Lab, News Agencies, May 29, 2012.

³⁹ Damien McElroy, Christopher Williams, "Flame: World's Most Complex Computer Virus Exposed", The Telegraph, May 28, 2012.

⁴⁰ Oil prices went up as talks went on between Iran and P5+1 in Baghdad on May 25, 2012. The Sydney Morning Herald, "Iran's Jitters Lift Oil Prices", Business day, May 26, 2012.

Some Western countries expressed readiness to boycott Iranian oil, but other countries such as India and China aren't ready to do so. Turkey which imports 30% of her oil from Iran might not be willing to stop buying Iranian oil⁴¹ for a couple of reasons: first, transportation expenses are low; second, she doesn't want to thwart her efforts for closer political and economic ties with Iran. States such as South Korea and Japan haven't been decisive.

Iran might try to increase her oil sales by lowering prices through bilateral agreements. So many countries are eager to pay less for energy, and might turn their backs to the US if they can get away without US punishments. But she might face a higher level of production in the Arab Gulf states. Saudi Arabia might show solidarity with the US by compensating for the non-bought oil, and for the purpose of lowering oil prices on the international level. Anyhow, the US cannot be sure that Iran will be tightly besieged oil-wise, and Iran cannot be sure that she won't be harmed by the Western measures.

5- The Arab situation. America doesn't need more restlessness in the Arab countries because mostly her clients such as the ex-presidents of Tunisia and Egypt are falling, and thus she needs to cautiously select policies. An Attack on Iran will find immediate reaction in the Arab world on both popular and official levels. The following points might sum up the expected:

- a- The Arab Gulf states will back the US on both the governmental and the popular levels,⁴² and will furnish logistic facilities for the American military forces in all of its branches: land, air and sea. There is a possibility that these states which are armed by the US will participate in the war and dedicate their air forces to the will of the US. They might hesitate to do so because of the expected Iranian retaliation,⁴³ but they know that a victorious Iran means more trouble for them. That is, participating in bombing Iran is less risky than watching.
- b- The governments of both Syria and Iraq will back Iran. On the popular level, the Shiites on both countries will back Iran, but the Sunnis aren't expected to back the US. The Iraqi Sunnis hold the US responsible for depriving them from power, while the Syrian Sunnis hate to be accused of treason by the surrounding Arab environment.
- c- It is highly possible that the new Arab regimes in Tunisia and Egypt will back Iran because they are the outcome of uprisings that hold the US responsible for backing Arab dictators.
- d- The majority of the Arabs in Jordan, Palestine, Algeria, Mauritania, etc. will back Iran. Any war against Iran would reassure Arab conviction that the US is always seeking domination rather than democracy and justice.
- e- Iran has the leverage to ignite Arab uprisings against regimes allying with the US such as Bahrain and Yemen.
- f- Arab governments that are allying with the US will find themselves on the defensive if Israel participates in any attack against Iran. However, the US, Arab regimes and Israel learned how to keep the Israeli role away from the mass media.

6- Israel. Israel is pushing the US toward a military confrontation with Iran, and has relentlessly been talking about nuclear Iran that threatens her existence and stability in the region. The Israeli Prime Minister and his Defense Minister tried hard to convince the American Administration to take action.⁴⁴ Israel has been practicing for waging air strikes on Iran, but she cannot do that without US endorsement, and it is doubtful if she can do the job alone. For the US two questions are looming: Is Iran on the verge of becoming nuclear? Will air strikes stop Iran's nuclear program?⁴⁵ The two questions are awaiting answers. In addition, intelligence agencies aren't sure yet of the real and unreal sites of Iran's nuclear sites.⁴⁶

Israel is pressing hard to strike Iran, and it happened at certain times that Israel had her hand above the hand of the American administration due to the influence of the Jewish lobbies in Washington, and to the obsession of winning the presidential and congressional elections.

⁴¹ Shaher Al-Ahmad, "The European Embargo and Iran's Alternatives", Jan 23, 2012.

⁴² Associated Press, "Gulf Nations Show Growing Confidence to Stand with US against Iran", Jan 17, 2012.

⁴³ Parisa Hafezi, "Iran threatens to Hit any Country Used to Attacks her Soil," Reuters, Feb 5, 2012.

⁴⁴ Amos Harel, "US concerned that Barak is Pushing for Israeli Attack on Iran", Haaretz, Feb 20, 2012.

⁴⁵ David Sanger, "On Iran: Questions of Detection and Response Divide US and Israel," The New York Times, March 6, 2012.

⁴⁶ Viola Gienger & Jonathan Ferziger, "Israel May Lack Capability for Effective Iran Military Strike", Nov 10, 2011.

Israel has so much influence in the US in regard of the Arab-Islamic region, and the US is ready to sacrifice for the sake of Israel. Will the US listen this time to the Israelis, and bring the region to a destructive confrontation? The possibility is there.

Conclusion

The factors and variables that affect and shape the tension between the US and Iran are multiple and dialectically inter-related. Some variables play the devil's role, and some others push the two sides toward tranquility. In principle, both countries realize the repercussions and the ramifications of an armed conflict, but there are compelling factors that create calculations regardless of the desires. Interests have priority over wishes, and the objective world has its thrust on the subjective.

On her side, the US is surrounded with three odds that make war a high possibility: the US isn't ready to share influence with Iran in the Gulf, or to see a competing power emerging in a sensitive area; the spirit of arrogance and the behavior shaped by physical power; complementing Israel and internal partisan rivalry. There are three main factors that ease the drive toward war: the lack of solid data about Iran's military power; the expected international reaction concerning the rising prices of oil; and the possibility of a regional war. On the Iranian side, Iran is compelled by her strategy to become, at least, an influential regional power; and by her desire to pursue change on the regional level. But this compulsion is eased by her limited military power compared with the US.

There are other factors of medium and marginal effect, and all of them should be dynamically weighed so as to come out with a certain prediction. Taking into consideration that both sides are unwilling to hold bilateral talks, and don't seek mutual understanding, animosity mistrust continue to label the expected actions of both sides. The US wants the status quo to prevail, while Iran is ambitious and sees herself through radical political change in the area, both of them play the rhetoric game with its ups and downs, but both of them prepare for war. If both sides don't fight each other, they will at least make a limited pilot or test skirmishes.

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