
From: Trita Parsi [tparsi@jhu.edu]
Sent: Friday, January 13, 2006 3:56 AM
To: 'Siamak Namazi'; 'Ali Ghezelbash'; 'Neda Nazmi'
Cc: 'Karim Sadjadpour'; 'bijan@atiehbahar.com'
Subject: RE: Iran and the UNSC

Siamak – just wanted to add a point to your excellent observations: Though the risk for a military option is low at this point, we should keep in mind that that is a temporary circumstance. Most analysts that I have spoken to – including some very very cautious ones – put the risk of a strike in Q1:07 at above 50%.

Just as Washington is now saying that the referral to the SC is necessary since the threat has been made, and not acting on the threat will make the US look weak, after 12-18 months of unsuccessful SC deliberations and sanctions, the argument of the Bush WH will likely read that military strikes are necessary since the “US will look weak” if it doesn’t take action. (Similar to the Iraq situation) Also, right now, US intelligence puts the “Iranian bomb” at 3-10 years in the future. Imminence is not reached quite yet. In 18 months, the “imminence” argument will be more effective for those in DC who were set on a military confrontation from the very outset.

tp

From: Siamak Namazi [mailto:siamakn@ned.org]
Sent: Thursday, January 12, 2006 3:52 PM
To: Ali Ghezelbash; Neda Nazmi
Cc: tparsi@jhu.edu; Karim Sadjadpour; bijan@atiehbahar.com
Subject: Iran and the UNSC

Dear Neda and Ali,

You both asked me about the situation on this side. I'll keep you posted as I hear more, but let me start with some of the main points that might help for your coming write-ups. I'm copying Trita and Karim, both of whom are much more versed on the US/EU position than I am, to weigh in and correct me where I am wrong. I've also cc'ed Bijan so that he might chime in with his insight if he has the time to do so.

In the next few weeks, we will be bombarded by opinions and press analyses about this issue. Try to keep a clear head and not get too bogged down in all the spin. Keep in mind that the West will try to intimidate Iran, and what diplomats say to analysts and journalists is part of that package. So, your own logic would work better than what you hear, which can get confusing.

Let's get to the heart of the matter, how will the West react, assuming Iran doesn't do a U-turn, which I doubt it will? My best guess is that they will do their best to take this to the UNSC. The key here is Russia. If Russia is on board, China is most likely to follow suit. And, I think the US could get Russia to agree to a referral; Moscow is known to bow to the highest bidder and is just setting the price.

That said, a referral to the UNSC is a very different matter than what the UNSC resolution would be. My impression is that any resolution would have to be initially rather mild, b/c:

- 1- Despite all the ra-ra in the press, Iran really is sticking to activities that are legally permissible. The West's position is that Iran no longer enjoys the rights one has under the NPT b/c it was found in non-compliance by the IAEA. I'm not sure how legally solid an argument that is. The basis for which Iran was found in non-comp – essentially not declaring all activities – would apply to other nations too. My point is, it's still not easy to ask for all out sanctions based on what Iran has done so far.
- 2- The West, particularly Europe, can't afford to place serious sanctions on Iran; definitely not the oil sector. It would shoot up the price of oil beyond a tolerable threshold. The idea is to hurt Iran, not themselves!

- 3- They are worried about Iran's reaction. What if they drop out of the NPT altogether? Then the West is faced with a confrontation at a level it really doesn't want to deal with
- 4- The credibility issue after all the nonsense reported about Iraq's supposed WMD program, which proved false, makes it hard to use the same arguments to ask for hard action on Iran
- 5- Most importantly, China and Russia would not go along with something that is too harsh.

So, the US and EU's game right now is to get Iran to the UNSC. They feel that the Iranians are getting overconfident and so they have to reply somehow. Once Iran is at the UN, then, they figure, they can figure out how to keep the pressure on and make it tougher. Step one is to act and get to the UN. Now that they've declared that as an objective, they would look terrible if they can't get there.

As you might have guessed, I don't put a lot of credence on the military solution at this point. In fact, it is precisely the low likelihood of a military strike that has Iran being so defiant and bold. When evaluating the military option, consider the following:

- 1- The "physical" aspect of an attack on Iran. As you have heard, the US military is overstretched and they know it. No military commander is saying opening another front is a good idea. Particularly since they can't really tell how much harm Iran could do in Iraq in response.
- 2- The political aspect of it. Here, the US is worried on two levels.
 - a. The US is convinced the Iranian people are very pro-American, but also that the nuclear issue has become a nationalistic one. So, they fear that any attack would rally the population behind the regime and result in a surge of anti-Americanism
 - b. And this is very important, you need to think about the personality of the players here. We know in the second term of the Bush Admin, Condi is playing a very different role and State has a much louder voice than it did under Powell. Well, what would Condi be thinking right now? Bare in mind that she is young and being Sec of State at such an early stage in her career is unique in that it is by no means the peak of her career. Condi has a chance to someday run for the presidency or at least get on a VP ticket. Now, being responsible for dragging the US into a war with Iran is not a good way to secure that kind of a future and she knows it. So my best guess is that the Sec of State is against a military solution to this problem. I admit that the role of the VP's office is not clear to me. Cheney would definitely be much more hardliner on Iran. Would he be able to drive the agenda? My guess is that he is not as strong as the first term, given all the controversies.
- 3- Next, we need to think what the neighbors are saying. The key players here would be KSA and Turkey. I'd argue that both are benefiting from status quo and ultimately want Iran to remain where it is. Privately I am sure the Saudis keep telling the Americans about how the Iranians are crazy and that they must be contained or else they will spread their revolution everywhere. They are particularly worried about the rise of the Shiites in the region. H/w, they would be devastated by a war and they know it. The US would surely ask the Saudis and other GCC states to use their bases or to cross their airspace to attack Iran. That would mean that Iran would retaliate directly against them. Not to mention, if the Americans oust the IRI by military force, no matter who rules Iran next will have one hell of a vendetta against the Arabs for helping an attack on our country. Can't see that being wise. Same with Turkey.

As you can tell, the US/EU are in a bind. None of their options are intuitively good ones. But they cannot afford to allow Iran to keep defying them, plus A-N's commentaries don't help either. So, they will do their best to go to the UNSC and think of the next step once they are there. If they get there, the initial resolution would call for Iran to immediately cease Natanz and Esfahan and to also fill the info gaps it so far has failed to do. They might also call for immediate ceasing of IAEA tech cooperation with Iran (if I recall correctly, Iran is among the top countries getting this help presently). I can tell you other moves they are contemplating include travel bans for Iranian officials, ban on Iranian sports teams, etc. Not sure how far these would go, but such recommendations are being made, including by European diplomats who were once in Tehran and now have come to DC.

The other effect all this is having is that there is a growing voice that is arguing that Iran will get to this tech over time and the West has to accept that it will happen sooner or later. The solution, then, is not trying to bloc the inevitable, but rather working on replacing an unfriendly regime with access to such technology. Problem there – they have absolutely no idea how to go about doing so. I would say that actually striking a major deal with Iran with the statements coming out of the president's mouth would spell political suicide for the politicians trying it. So, I don't see anyone trying to go the Grand Bargain route – less the Iranians throw in their top executive in the pot. Rather, the medium-term effect of Iran's latest posturing is that the US and EU will seek regime change options much more seriously than they have in the past.

Either way, the next year will be a turbulent one for Iran's international relations. Keep in mind that sometimes to

get to a real solution, the problem has to become a lot worse. It's a delicate and extremely dangerous game to play, mind you, and small errors in judgment can end you up in a military confrontation. But, if you get the problem to a certain level, then it can't be ignored. Basically, if Iran has reached a deadlock in its multilateral talks, it stands a better chance of getting what it really needs by escalating things. There will be a price to pay at the UNSC, but the magic starts after that fails too. That's when you could see real bilateral efforts by the US. As I said, it's a risky game to play, but not one without logic. Remember, in game theory, the opponent that seems crazy could win. Think of a game of chicken. A sane driver fears an insane opponent much more than a sane one. And, that, my friends, is the logical utility of A-N and, in my opinion, one of the main reasons the IRI doesn't contain him as much as they could. This image that he is so ideological and crazy that he wants to drive Iran to a state of war to expedite the Mahdi's return has made a print in the US policy circles. It further confuses them in that they believe that A-N is not ultimately in charge of the IRI's foreign policy, but can't figure out why the system hasn't contained them to the degree that it could and is needed at such a sensitive time.

Iran's playing a risky game, but not one that is necessarily without strategy. To quote Bijan's favorite line from the movie *Enemy of the State*, these guys are "either a genius, or completely insane."

Best,
Siamak

PS - Ali, in regards to your earlier question, I have no idea where Leilaz got the notion that Iran has upped the anti to signal to the USA that they must get directly involved in the negotiations. I think he pulled this out of his hat and just said something to the press. That man comments on anything and everything under the sun. In any case, I can confirm that the Americans understood no such message.