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## Iran on the Precipice



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There's never been a full-scale war between two nuclear-armed states. If Iran one day did cross the nuclear threshold the same deterrence will apply. No one rational would want to provoke their own incineration.

Columbia University professor, Kenneth Waltz, the distinguished theorist on the conduct of war, wrote in Foreign Affairs that with Israel possessing over 200 nuclear weapons (which the US refuses to publically admit) Iran having a bomb would bring stability.

I would never go as far as Waltz on that last point. The launch of nuclear weapons can always be done by accident or by the rogue action of one or two of the members of the launch team in the silo.

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It has nearly happened in the US a number of times, and probably in the Soviet Union too. Moreover, if Iran got really close to building a bomb, Saudi Arabia would follow in short order, and perhaps Egypt too somewhat later. That would really be Iran cutting off its nose to spite its face.

The arguments between Iran, the US and Europe over the supposed bomb question are becoming confused. To be frightened or not to be? If clear thinking is not quickly restored everyone will lose out.

When President Barack Obama and his team successfully negotiated a long-term freeze in Iran's nuclear research a milestone in international cooperation on nuclear proliferation was passed.

Russia and China joined the EU and the US as negotiating partners and made a unanimous front when presenting the agreement to the UN Security Council for approval. Donald Trump unilaterally upended this soon after taking office. In breaking apart a deal approved by the Security Council he broke international law.

The recent UK ambassador to the US, Kim Darroch, reckoned Trump's primary motivation was not US security or anything of that ilk but was purely motivated by a gut hatred of Obama.

Now the old untruths that were churned out by the Republicans and the Israelis during the Obama-era negotiations are being recycled.

They predicted during the 1990s that Iran would have nuclear weapons by 2000. Then the estimated date was bumped up to 2005. Then to 2015. Now some are saying next year.

The CIA, for its part, has never put its name to these Iranian estimates. Apparently it still thinks that the probability is that Iran was never building a bomb.

They would have been better to focus on Brazil, now led by the extreme right wing nationalist, Jair Bolsonaro, who has close ties with the military, which is now engaged in enriching uranium to 90%, suitable for nuclear bombs, as against Iran's just announced 5%, suitable for its Bushehr civilian power reactor and a long way from what is necessary to build a bomb.

Brazil needs this high degree of enrichment to fuel its new nuclear submarine, but it could easily be diverted to build a bomb.

There's a danger, once removed but now back in circulation, that this negative attitude towards Iran could result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, especially if it leads to a military attack.

As two former US National Security Advisors to the president, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, have written, "a military attack by Israel or the US "would significantly increase Iran's motivation to build a bomb."

An attack "would also increase the recruiting ability of radical Islamist groups, including Al Qaeda and ISIS."

Does Trump want to attack Iran or not? Last month US planes were within ten minutes of bombing Iran before he had a last minute change of mind and called off the raid.

The last few days some smoke has been thrown into the air with the somewhat autonomous Iranian Revolutionary Guards seizing a British-owned ship steaming through the Persian Gulf.

Wisely, on the eve of a change in its leadership, the UK is not upping the ante with threats of retaliation. Trump has been careful not to get out in front of the British.

Nevertheless, these incidents go to show how a gunpowder trail can easily be laid. Meanwhile, the American sanctions that were supposed to be lifted because of the Obama agreement are being tightened.

Iran is suffering, especially the poor. Similar sanctions when used against the Iraq of Saddam Hussein resulted in over 30,000 children dying, according to UNICEF.

There are some hints that Trump wants to act as he has with North Korea- jump straight to the top of Iran's decision making tree and make his own deal.

Never mind that a new deal might only have cosmetic changes, it would enable him to claim he had got a better deal than Obama. He did this with the North American Free Trade Area agreement.

Is it all a fuss about nothing? Only those who live inside Trump's head know the answer. In this case he is truly master of the universe.

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