



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Iran and Nuclear Weapons

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Iran and Nuclear Weapons Report One: Introduction

November 20, 2013

Last night, I watched the nightly news and read the newspapers. Many of the items were about the Middle East. The focus was on Iran's nuclear enrichment program, the subject of this essay.

I wish otherwise, but it is impossible to do justice to this subject by discussing it as a single issue. It is influenced by the Syrian civil war, the Palestinian issue, Hezbollah, the Sunni/Shia conflict, and other issues.

If you are a newcomer to these topics, their relationships can be a challenge to unravel. However, their external complexities lie on top of simple foundations. With this last bit of encouragement, I hope you will stick with me. I will write a general piece, laying a few bricks to gain a grasp of the surreal political/religious landscape of the Middle East.

The best way to lay the first brick is to look at the religions practiced in the Middle East. I've drawn up a picture (Figure 1) that represents the major religions practiced in these countries.¹

The average Anglo-Saxon Protestant/Jew might be wondering why I have taken the time to make this map. From the standpoint of a U.S. citizen, who cares if more Baptists than Jews live in America? I start with the map because Baptists and Jews are not at war with each other in New Jersey. Catholics and Protestants in California are not beheading each other because of their religious beliefs. However, the people in the Middle East routinely kill one another because of their religions.

Take a look at parts of this map. For now, note that Iran is predominately Shia, and Saudi Arabia is predominately Sunni. As with Baptists and Methodists practicing the same religion, the faiths of Sunni and Shia are of the Muslim faith. We need not become involved about their differences in the main body of this essay. If you are interested, I have provided a brief explanation in Appendix One, but it need not be read to understand what follows.

For now, many scholars claim much of the current conflict about Iran's nuclear program started with the resurgence in religious fervor in Iran (during the latter part of the twentieth century) with Iran advancing Shia credos.²

Yet Sunnis dominate the Islamic populations around the world (about 75 to 90 percent of practicing Muslims are Sunnis).³ But two countries in the Middle East are predominately Shia: Iran and Iraq, as seen in Figure 1. Also, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, and Bahrain are partly Shia. As well, and a cornerstone to this essay, Syria's rulers are aligned with Iran. As explained in more detail shortly, the Syrian leader, Assad, is an Alawite, which is part of the Shia faith.

I somewhat apologize for going into this level of detail. But it is impossible to gain even a rudimentary understanding of what is going on in the Middle East if one does not have at least a general understanding of the players on the Muslim religious chess board.

¹ I drew this up from many sources. The one I relied on most is cited in the next footnote.

² "Sunnite." *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. 2010. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/574006/Sunnite>.

³ "Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population," *Pew Research Center*, October 7, 2009. <http://pewforum.org/Muslim/Mapping-the-Global-Muslim-Population%286%29.aspx>.

Iran's so-called Shia awakening---created by the country's religious leaders--- "led to a very violent Sunni reaction, starting first in Pakistan before spreading to "the rest of the Muslim world." According to scholars of this subject, "two events created a sea change in the balance of power between Shias and Sunnis: the Islamic revolution in Iran and the American military intervention in Iraq."⁴

This latter event placed Americans on Islamic holy ground. The Americans were considered by some Muslims to be "heathen" interlopers, including inadequately clothed female soldiers whose full faces, openly displayed in public, offended Islamic protocols. It did not matter that Sunni Saudi Arabia had invited the Americans to this land to possibly save the country from another Muslim country's invasion. (A Sunni cousin in Iraq: Hussein. Yes, Sunni.)

The Saudis are considered by the Shias to be sinful lackeys of the Americans. The action by the Saudis of allowing Christians onto sacred Muslim soil (for bases to attack Hussein) has further reinforced the Shia view.

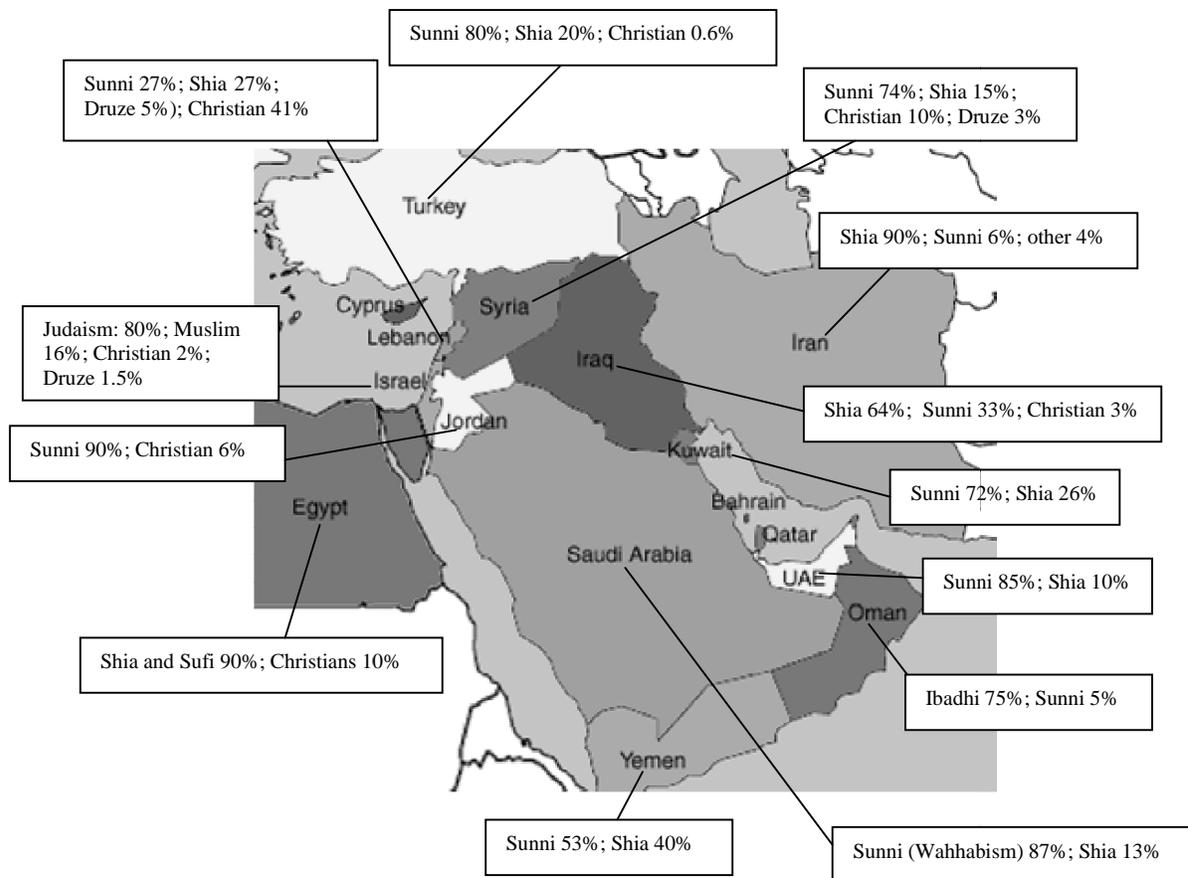


Figure 1. Religious Alignments in the Middle East

⁴ "Balance of Power Changed between Shia and Sunnis," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-20447422>. Assessment by Roy Sutton, a specialist on the Middle East.

We bring in two more players who are not highlighted in Figure 1. Hezbollah and Hamas. Hezbollah is a paramilitary organization, partially based in Lebanon. Its military strength is stronger than the Lebanese army, so it cannot be evicted. It is Shia-based and closely aligned with Shia Iran. Hezbollah is playing a key role in the Syrian conflict and logically enough, is a supporter of the Assad (Alawite/Shia) regime. Hamas is a Sunni-based organization located (mostly) in Gaza. It is not playing a big role in the Iranian nuclear weapons debate or the Syrian civil war. So, we've enough players on the board and will ignore them for the time being.

The following sections provide summaries of the views of several key players in the Iranian nuclear weapons issue. Some of these views are not stated publically. I've gleaned them from my studies of what I believe to be reliable sources.

Reasons Saudi Arabia is Upset with the United States

America was too accommodating to the elected regime in Egypt (which has since been deposed by a military coup). America's frosty relationship with the current military regime is unacceptable. Indeed, the Obama administration has cut aid to Egypt because of the military coup.

America should have attacked Syria when it was discovered Syria had used chemical weapons in its civil war. In addition, the U.S. should have sided immediately with the rebels who sought to overthrow the Assad regime. This hesitancy only encouraged Islamic militants and showed political cowardice on the part of America.

America's entering into discussions with Iran about Iran's nuclear program is dangerous and counter-productive to America's relationship with the Saudis. As well, the ongoing negotiations are giving away too much to Iran.

America's possible normalization of relations with Iran will destabilize the Middle East.

America's inability to resolve the Palestinian issue shows weakness, spinelessness, and proof that Israel has America in its pocket.

Reasons Israel is Upset with the United States

As with the Saudis, America's entering into discussions with Iran about Iran's nuclear program is dangerous and counter-productive to America's relationship with the Israelis. Again, the ongoing negotiations are giving away too much to Iran.

America's possible normalization of relations with Iran will destabilize the Middle East.

The acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran is unacceptable and will not be allowed. America's even talking with Iran about the subject is not in the spirit of the Israeli/American relationship.

Reasons Egypt (the military) is Upset with the United States

America should never have backed the elected Muslim Brotherhood-supported president (Morsi). After all, the military has long held the power in this country and held it together. A successful Morsi regime would surely have led to the stripping of the military's hold on politics (and the economic gains that go-along with political power).

Reasons the United States is Doing what it is Doing

In Egypt: The U.S. supports elected governments and not military dictatorships. [Hmm. See several South American countries whose leaders were overthrown via CIA, as well as Iran (in 1953).]

- In Syria: (a) Bombing Syria would have done little to persuade Syria to stop gassing its citizens. (b) Boots on the ground is not an option. America is still recovering from too many boots on the ground in Iraq in the first place. (c) Russia's hand in persuading Syria to dismantle its chemical weapons is proof that the U.S. strategy is working. (d) Arming the rebels? Which ones, the secular moderates, the nameless jihadists, or the al Qaeda folks? How do you tell them apart? America's weapons would likely fall into the hands of anti-American militants.
- In Iran: The United States primary goal is to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The recent about-face of Iran and its stated willingness not to acquire these weapons means the correct road is negotiations, not dropping bombs.
- In Palestine: It is impossible to remove hundreds of thousands of Israelis who have (illegally) built homes in Palestinian territories. It is political suicide to go against Israel in almost anything, especially if an action is seen as undermining Jews vis-à-vis Muslims: "Percentage of U.S. Jews who believe that God gave Israel to the Jewish people: 40. Percentage of white U.S. evangelicals who do: 82."⁵

Points of Clarification

Before discussing these subjects in more detail, let me make clear: If, say, Canada was in the process of making nuclear weapons and its leaders vowed the destruction of the United States, the U.S. would be stupid not to take actions---whatever is necessary---to prevent Canada from carrying out its threat. The actions would entail removing---by any means (bombs, invasion) ---the capacity of Canada to make nuclear weapons.

However, if Canada had no nuclear weapons and continued to threaten the United States, the U.S. could maintain an armed force that would prevent Canada from carrying out this threat with conventional weapons.

This is the view of those countries in the Middle East who are adversaries of Iran. They contend: Once Iran has possession of nuclear weapons, Iran can blackmail others with the threat of using these weapons. This view is not universally embraced. For example, during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union both had the capacity to deploy nukes, but usually kept their saber rattling confined to non-nuclear threats. Nonetheless, this view is prevalent enough to be a factor in this debate.

Walking in the Saudis' shoes

In Egypt, Saudi Arabia backed the July military coup of the elected government. This government was fast becoming dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood. Because the election was a democratic process, Obama believed he had no choice but to support whomever was elected. The Saudis do not see it that way. (Morsi began dismantling the courts. His embracing the Brotherhood displeased the vast majority of Egyptian citizens. The military coup against Morsi was supported by this majority.)

The Saudis are very sensitive about Arab Springs that demand the end to dictatorships. Small wonder, as they are a dictatorship. The removal of the Egypt dictator (Mubarak), largely by Arab Spring initiatives, and the subsequent election of a supposed democracy, has rattled the Saudis.

Saudi Arabia is predominately a Sunni nation. Muslim "friendly botherhoods" aside, Sunnis and Shias do not get along. In a nutshell, they are enemies. Shia Iran is viewed by Sunni

⁵ *Harper's Magazine*, December, 2013, 17.

Saudi Arabia as a major threat to its position in the Middle East. As mentioned above, the current leader in Syria, Assad, is an Alawite (a branch of the Shia faith). This does not sit well with the Saudis, because Assad is being backed by Iran. That is one reason the Saudis are disturbed that America has not become involved in the Syrian civil war against Assad and his Iranian-backed regime.

To gain a sense of the impact the Arab Springs and the Iranian Shias have on the Saudi leaders, the Saudi King told his Sunni brothers, “You all know we are the [sic] targeted in our safety and security.” He added that whoever did not join in an alliance, “will find himself at the back of the caravan trail and be lost.”⁶

Walking in Israel’s shoes

Israel believes Iran will (one way or another) build nuclear weapons. Israel fears America and the other Western powers will make too weak a deal with Iran on freezing or dismantling Iran’s advanced nuclear weapons development.

Israel has no intention of giving the land in Palestine back to its former inhabitants (gained after the Six-Day War), nor the land it has taken since the war. (Perhaps some of it.)

Walking in Iran’s shoes

Iran’s religious leaders do not trust the United States. America betrayed Iran when it supported a 1953 coup that overthrew a legitimate government (Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh) and then installed a secular dictator (Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi). America was not happy that Iran had nationalized the oil industry and installed the Shah to fix the problem.

Iran believes America’s long-term goal is to overthrow Iran’s theocratic system and replace it with an American model. This accusation was documented by the reporter Seymour Hersh.⁷

Iran believes the United States is politically helpless to do much of anything in the Middle East but support the Jewish state of Israel, Iran’s enemy and nemesis.

Iran believes the United States is a hypocritical nation. Why can Israel be the only country in the Middle East to possess nuclear weapons? [Writer: It might have something to do with Iran’s vows to destroy Israel.]

Iran chafes at the notion of their nuclear program being considered illegitimate by the Western powers and Israel. They say it is Israel’s program that is illegitimate. [See Appendix Two for more information on this issue.] Beyond the political and religious leaders, the citizens of Iran believe they have as much right to have nuclear weapons as any other country.

My Take

- ◆ If the Saudis are so concerned about Syria’s regime, it has an air force. King Abdullah, launch your jets and bomb those chemical sites. Why should America become involved with Saudi Arabia’s religious feud with the Iranians and the Iranian-backed Syrian regime? Our boots on the ground in the first Iraqi war may have saved the Kingdom’s kingdom. Look where it got America and Saudi Arabia. There is a Shia government in Iraq, one with natural (religious) ties to Iran and Syria. The first war in Iraq saved Kuwait,

⁶ Ellen Kinckmeyer and Alex Delmar-Morgan, *The Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 2012, A10.

⁷ Seymour Hersh, “Preparing the Battlefield: The Bush Administration steps up its secret moves against Iran,” *The New Yorker*, July 7, 2008, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/07/07/080707fa_fact_hersh.

possibly the Saudis, but further destabilized the region with the removal of the Sunni Hussein.

- ◆ Shia Iraq is slowly deteriorating. Sunnis are gradually gaining control of some urban areas. The failure/reluctance of the Iraqi regime to bring Sunnis into the inner circles of governance is not working. But how can two religious enemies run one government?
- ◆ Israel states *any* nuclear presence---besides itself---in the Middle East is unacceptable. Furthermore, Israel is taking the (opaque) stand that its settlements on Palestinian turf are permanent. How did these two stances come to be? How did this one nation come to be in this position of such influence and power? How is it that, say, Jordan or Kuwait cannot have the same nuclear capability as Israel? How can a country (Israel) disregard a UN resolution with impunity, while another “disobedient” (Serbia) is bombed for its transgressions. In a nutshell, it is the result of years of deceit and lying by Israel to its clueless ally, America...an ally whose power inoculated Israel from its illegal and irresponsible actions. I refer you to Appendix Two of this report, words I write with sadness and distaste.
- ◆ If the negotiations with Iran can result in the freezing or dismantling of Iran’s nuclear weapons program, America should not be overly concerned if Saudi Arabia or Israel is upset. The notion that America cannot sit down with an adversary to work out a deal that can lessen the danger to the Middle East (including Saudi Arabia and Israel) is beyond absurdity. That said, Israel and Saudi Arabia raised legitimate concerns last week that America was giving away too much to begin with. France came to wobbly America’s rescue at the negotiations.
- ◆ Several years ago, Saudi Arabia proposed a plan to address the Palestinian problem. In 2002, King Abdullah scolded George Bush for not taking on this issue. I remain disappointed why America did not pick up this support from such an influential nation and person and tackle the problem. I say “disappointed” but not “mystified.” To tackle this problem head-on is political suicide. And of course, 9/11 had come along by then.
- ◆ According to *The New York Times*, Israel has demanded that Iran completely dismantle its nuclear program.⁸ Otherwise, Iran can later assemble a bomb in short order and destroy Israel. I think about this stance, and it floors me. Israel already has the capacity to destroy Iran. And Iran is not allowed to have a like deterrence? No. Only those who have nuclear weapons can have them. Others cannot. As a non-nation, an individual who does not want Islamic militants to bomb Hayden, Idaho, I applaud this stand. But if I put myself in the shoes of sovereign and legitimate nations that do not have nuclear weapons, this stand can only be characterized as offensive...and in the long run unacceptable. For more information on this topic, see Appendix Three.

⁸ “Nuclear Talks Unfinished, but Alive,” <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/12/opinion/iran-nuclear-talks-unfinished-but-alive.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

What to Do?

Here is a proposal that is fair to all: **Both Israel and Iran agree to dismantle their nuclear weapons systems.**

I am sure this proposal surprises some of my readers. It would make the Middle East safer for all. Israel would continue to be protected by the United States. Even more, Israel has the most powerful military in the region and can pretty much protect itself.

But this proposal has not been on the table. Why? Because it is too practical. Because it goes to the root of the problem. *Because it would lessen the dangers to all who live in the Middle East, including the Saudis, the Israelis...everyone.* Because it would solve the problem. Because it would expose decades of duplicity on the part of Israel.

I hope this proposal and your possible reaction to it, is: Of course! I hope it will lead us to realize how much of Middle East politics is unbalanced and asymmetrical, and that the discussion is one-sided.

Will it happen? Will hell freeze over? Israel will not even admit it has nuclear weapons (again, see Appendix Three).

So, back to earth. Here are some ideas (assume Israel will not sign on to the NPT):⁹

- Iran stops any program to separate Uranium-235 (needed for weapons) from U-238 (nature's material).
- Iran cuts back on the operation of its centrifuges to the point that U-235 cannot be created. Ideally, they are destroyed.
- The new reactor at Arak is dismantled.
- As these events take place, sanctions are lifted.

What are the alternatives? One: a continued stalemate. Two: military force.

⁹ Michael O'Hanlon, "Keys to Good Iran Nuclear Accord?" *USA TODAY*, November 15, 2013, 12A.

Appendix One A Religious Stalemate

The conflict began many years ago. The Sunnis believed the founder of Islam, Muhammad, wished the Islamic leader to be chosen from the Muslim community. In contrast, the Shias believed Muhammad had chosen his son-in-law, Ali, to be his successor and only Ali's descendents were worthy to rule the Muslim world. These debates, which began as far back as 633, masked the facts that (a) Muhammad's initial successor was not Ali, but Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, and (b) an ancient Shia leader, from a branch of Muhammad's family known as the Abbasids, upon taking over the Muslim reins, declared he was actually a Shia.¹⁰ These events created confusion and resentment among the Muslims.

Thereafter, the Sunnis and Shias fought with each other on the issue of which tribe was best suited to control their religious turf. The Sunni "Arabs fear[ed] the rise of a 'Shiite crescent' from Iran through Iraq and on to Bekka." Whereas, the Shias were determined to vanquish the Sunnis.¹¹ Often, the fights became personal. If an "Ali" happened to drive into a security checkpoint operated by a "non-Ali" guard, Ali was often killed on the spot. The man was murdered because he pronounced a word incorrectly.

More often than not, the worshippers left each other alone to practice their beliefs. But on those exceptional occasions when one or the other did not, mayhem often followed.

¹⁰ William R. Polk, *Understanding Iraq* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 39-49.

¹¹ David Remnick, "Danger Levels," *The New Yorker*, July 31, 2006, 22.

Appendix Two

Deceiving an Ally

For over two decades, Israel covered up its development of nuclear weapons (at a remote site in the Negev desert near Dimona). It even deceived its mentor, the United States, by lying to a succession of American Presidents. The former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, in his final days in office, was fearful his pledge to the American President John F. Kennedy would be “unmasked as false.” He had told Kennedy that Israel “would not be the first country in the Middle East to introduce nuclear weapons.”¹²

In a self-denying and patently counterfeit proclamation, Peres said, “What is wrong with the Iranians in addition to the nuclear bomb? This is the only country on Earth in the 21st century that has renewed imperialistic ambitions. They really want to become the hegemon of the Middle East in an age that gave up imperialism.”¹³ (Meanwhile, Israel continues to build more illegal settlements in the West Bank.)

Even during the early days of the Israeli nation, America was kept in the dark. Ben-Gurion was worried: “His worst nightmare would be that one of the superpowers [would discover] it [the illegal activities in the Negev desert], then confronted Israel and, with a show of force, demanded that it be dismantled or put under international supervision.”¹⁴

Duplicitous Diplomacy

Israel’s protector and sponsor, the United States, was deceived countless times by Israel. America projected its idealistic naiveté onto a hardened Zionist movement that was dedicated to not only creating a home for Jews, but expanding the turf of that home well beyond the UN mandate.

The humanist aspects of the original Zionist movement were subsumed by an ever increasing militaristic and imperialistic Zionism. As examples:

“Ben-Gurion, though he would be the last to admit it, was aligning himself with the nationalistic forces on the right, who called for seizing more land even if that meant war with the Arabs.”¹⁵

A former president and prime minister of Israel, Shimon Peres, stated, “We have to aspire to alter the state of Israel’s borders,” he told a closed meeting of senior government officials in 1957.”¹⁶ [In a touch of irony, Peres won the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize (with two others) for formulating and participating in peace talks.]

After invading Lebanon, another future prime minister, Ariel Sharon, informed Israel’s enemy (Yasser Arafat) his army could move from Lebanon to Jordan, (another exodus), “...it would take only a word from Sharon to force [Jordanian] King Hussein to abdicate his throne. ‘ One speech by me will make King Hussein realize that the time has come to pack his bags,’ ” Sharon said.¹⁷

¹² Ibid., 321.

¹³ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/s/shimonpere463605.html#sDX6OS3G6HVfR67k.99>.

¹⁴ Tyler, *Fortress Israel*, 101.

¹⁵ Tyler, *Fortress Israel*, 61.

¹⁶ Ibid., 103.

¹⁷ Ibid., 306.

Another Israeli leader had this to say about the matter, "...all of the peace proposals he had floated as prime minister were fraudulent. His 'moderation' as prime minister was merely tactical. The goal had always been, and still was, the seizure of the lands that had been designated for a Palestinian homeland... . 'It pains me greatly that...I will not be able to expand the settlements in Judea and Samaria [West Bank and part of the UN designated Arab state] to complete the demographic revolution in the land of Israel. I would have carried on autonomy talks for ten years, and meanwhile we would have reached half a million people in Judea and Samaria.' ”¹⁸

Thus, time and again the doctrinaire military-imperialists of the Jewish tribe have clashed with the doctrinaire religionists of the Muslim tribe. Supposedly, the clashes occur in the names of noble causes: maintaining cultures, reverence for religions, honoring ancient legacies. All are guises in the never-ending quests to acquire and control turf.

In what could only be characterized as an apartheid practice, Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu stated the goal of dealing with the displaced Palestinians was to create a Palestinian "Bantustan."---referring to South Africa's practice of setting aside territories for black people only. Netanyahu and his minions planned to take over 70 percent (not counting Jordan) of historic Palestine and force the former inhabitants to seek refuge elsewhere.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., 351.

¹⁹ Ibid., 406.

Appendix Three The Nuclear Club

For a half century, the human race has managed to keep its nuclear arsenal leashed and stored in containers, silos, and secure military installations. Even though the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons has increased (see Table 1), the fear of mutual attack has kept the weapons sheathed. If a nation uses these weapons on another nation, it knows that it will, in turn, be attacked as well.

Table 1. Official Members of the Nuclear Club²⁰

Country	Year Acquired	Number of Weapons ²¹
United States (NPT)	1945 (“Triad”)	10,640
Russia (NPT)	1949 (“RDS-1”)	8,600
Britain (NPT)	1952 (“Hurricane”)	200
France (NPT)	1960 (“Gerboise Bleue”)	350
China (NPT)	1964 (“596”)	400
India (non-signatory)	1974 (“Smiling Buddha”)	30-35
Pakistan (non-signatory)	1998 (“Chagai-I”)	24-48
North Korea (non-signatory)	2006	At least 2, likely 10
Israel (undeclared nuclear power)	Unknown (possibly 1979)	100-200

Where NPT: Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty “group of five.”

Non-signatory: did not participate in initial signing of NPT.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is designed to limit nuclear weapon development, facilitate availability of nuclear energy, and lead to global nuclear disarmament. The treaty allows any country to develop nuclear material for energy, receive the assistance of the nuclear countries to do so (US, UK, France, Russia, and China), and then be inspected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to verify they do not refine fissionable material beyond energy-grade (3-5%) to weapons-grade (over 85%). To date, no NPT country with a nuclear-energy program has developed nuclear weapons. Iran and the US are signatories of NPT. *Therefore, the legal and Constitutional US response is to help Iran develop nuclear energy [my italics].*²²

Israel has not signed this treaty and does not publically admit to having nuclear weapons. This “ambiguity” (as it is called) means the Middle East cannot migrate to a WMD-free zone. If Israel comes clean, it will reveal its duplicity over the past few decades.

A.Q. Khan, a Pakistani scientist, has asked why Britain and America [and other members of the NPT signatory] have appointed themselves with a “God-given authority” to explode bombs

²⁰ Data reflects estimates as of 2003 from the Natural Resources Defense Council, *USA Today*, February 26, 2004, 12A.

²¹ The estimates of the number of nuclear weapons held by these countries vary greatly. For a similar table and slightly different estimates, see: Federation of American Scientists: “Status of World Nuclear Forces,” <http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/nuclearweapons/nukestatus.html>.

²² <http://www.examiner.com/article/iran-s-nuclear-program-iran-truthful-treaty-compliance-us-israel-lying-treaty-violation-1>.

every month, yet if another country begins a small program, they are labeled as dangerous. Kahn's complaints are widely held. The NPT is clearly discriminatory by stipulating five countries should have nuclear weapons only in their corner of the international boxing ring.

With one exception: Israel. A special exception is made for this country, the archenemy of the Middle Eastern countries. This brazen action further alienates and enrages the have-not nations, many who see the non-proliferation treaty as *disarming those who were already disarmed*.

I emphasize once again: As a private citizen of a country that has nuclear weapons, I do not want anyone else to possess them. But other countries that do not have nuclear weapons don't see it my way.

Iran and Nuclear Weapons Report Two: Deal or No Deal?

December 8, 2013

Recently, several Western powers (United States, Russia, Britain, France, China, and Germany) reached a six-month agreement with Iran about Iran's nuclear program. Immediately, those who were predisposed to approve or disapprove any agreement between the West and Iran disapproved or approved the agreement respectively. Each side offered opinions on the deal based on their vested interests. Their stand was in alignment with the discussions in the first report of this series.

The list below is a summary of the major points of the agreement. I have read several reports on this agreement. For now, I will rely on *The Economist* for the facts about the deal.¹ Also, you will find Figure 1 useful while reading this list.²

If you are not familiar with the implications of some of these terms and "percentages," take a look at the section below titled "**Uranium Enrichment.**"

- Iran's nuclear program is placed in a temporary freeze.
- "All uranium enriched above 5 percent [is] to be diluted back to 5 percent or converted to oxide." [A compound that cannot be used to create nuclear material.]
- There will no increase in 3.5 percent enriched stock.
- Iran's nuclear facilities are not dismantled; centrifuges, for example. But no new centrifuges will be installed.
- Iran will not operate its (planned) plutonium reactor during this freeze. [A plutonium reactor can be used to produce a nuclear weapon.]
- UN inspectors will be given more leeway in their inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities.
- Some economic sanctions will be lifted.
- No new enrichment facilities will open.
- No fuel for the Arak reactor will be "produced, tested, or transferred to this site."
- Work on this reactor stops and its design details are to be shared.

The influential factions who are against this agreement are Israel, Saudi Arabia, many conservative members of Congress, and most of the Muslims who practice the Sunni creed. Those in favor are most of the Muslims who practice the Shia creed, the Western powers who negotiated the treaty, and members of Congress who are not dependent on Israeli funds or Jewish votes. Report one provides background information on why these camps have aligned as they have.

In addition, Iran's Revolutionary Guard, a powerful military unit with substantial influence in Iran's nuclear programs, "...is so dismayed by the talks and the overtures to Washington that they erected banners in Tehran earlier this month depicting U.S. envoys as holding position papers in one hand and attack dogs in another."³

¹ "Unlocking the Middle East," 11; "Well Begun, not Nearly Done, 23-24. *The Economist*, November 30, 2013.

² "Iran: Foreign Policy Challenges and Choices," November 2006, <http://www.david-kilgour.com/2008/pdf/iran/Iran%20Report.pdf>. A report sponsored by DLA Piper US LLP.2.

³ Brian Murphy and Matthew Lee, "Iran Nuclear Deal: Here's A Rundown of Everything You Need To Know," Associated Press (AP), Nov. 24, 2013.



Figure 1. Iran's major nuclear facilities.

Reactions

The Associated Press reports:⁴

The deal is a tentative first step easily presented as a win-win: Iran gives a little on nuclear enrichment and gets some economic-sanctions relief in return, as its amiable president waxes diplomatically about continued trust-building with Washington. But America's closest Mideast ally, Israel, called it a "historic" mistake, fearing that by not insisting on an actual rollback, the world has effectively accepted Iran as a threshold-nuclear-weapons state. Saudi Arabia and several other Gulf Arab states close to the U.S. hold similar views, and many in Congress are dead set against a deal that allows Iran to continue to enrich uranium.

In the same column, the AP also reports:

In Jerusalem, Netanyahu called the agreement a blunder of "historic" proportions that leaves Iran as a perpetual nuclear threat. "Today the world became a much more dangerous place," Netanyahu said, reiterating a long-standing threat to use military action against Iran if needed, declaring that Israel "has the right and the duty to defend itself by itself."

⁴ Brian Murphy and Matthew Lee, *ibid.*

Sen. Chuck Schumer, (D-NY), said he was "disappointed" by the deal, which he called disproportional. He said sanctions forced Iran to negotiate in the first place. "This agreement makes it more likely that Democrats and Republicans will join together and pass additional sanctions when we return in December," Schumer said.

Sen. Marco Rubio, (R-FL), agreed. "There is now an even more urgent need for Congress to increase sanctions until Iran completely abandons its enrichment and reprocessing capabilities," he said.

Rep. Mike Rogers, the Michigan Republican who chairs the House intelligence panel, was more critical of a deal. He said it aids "the leading nation state of terror."

"We have just rewarded very bad and dangerous behavior," he said.

Uranium Enrichment

In order to follow the general ideas of the deal and these criticisms, a pause might be needed to do "Nuclear Weapons 101." *USA Today* provides an excellent graphic, shown in Figure 2, that will get us started.⁵

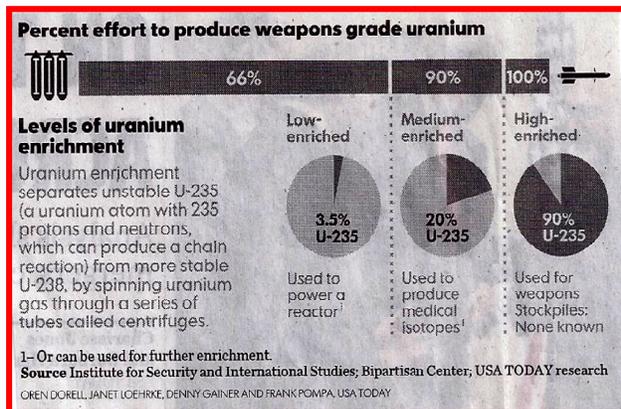


Figure 2. Enrichment levels.

Producing a nuclear weapon requires separating the uranium isotopes in U-235 and U-238 from each other. This process is called enrichment. Uranium-235 is an isotope of uranium, which can sustain a fission chain reaction. Uranium-238 cannot sustain a chain reaction. By using many centrifuges (thousands of them), the heavier U-238 is spun and concentrated on the the walls of the centrifuge. U-235 is extracted from the centrifuge by a scoop.

As Figure 2 shows, a total effort (100%) results in 90 percent U-235 stock (high-enriched) which can be used to produce nuclear weapons. It takes about 66 percent of this total effort to achieve 3.5 percent enrichment and 90 percent of the effort to produce a 20% grade of U-235. *But here is the hitch: It takes only an additional 10 percent of the effort to upgrade the uranium from 20 percent to 90 percent. According to the sources quoted in the footnotes of this report, this 10 percent translates into a few months (not years) of effort.*

⁵ *USA Today*, Nov 25, 2013, 2A

The deal is good and bad for each camp. Both sides recognized they had to compromise, which they did. But make no mistake, the outcome of these negotiations will determine if the Middle East does or does not become a war zone. The dice that count have not yet been rolled. The pedal hits the metal six months from now...Or sooner, if Israel decides that the resultant bar has been set too low for its security needs.

The decision of the United States to even begin discussions with Iran has the potential to disrupt decades of alliances between America, Saudi Arabia, Israel as well as other Sunni nations and factions within nations.

The situation is one that warrants pursuing in subsequent blog postings. As a preview: Saudi Arabia, America's supposed ally, yet one who supports terrorists who routinely kill Americans, is upset with America for even talking with Iran.

Next week, we raise the level of potential overt conflict.

Iran and Nuclear Weapons¹ **Report Three: Clarification of the Agreement**

December 15, 2013

As covered in previous reports, several Western powers (United States, Russia, Britain, France, China, and Germany) have reached a six-month agreement with Iran about Iran's nuclear program. As expected, the proponents and opponents of the treaty came out of the woodwork, each side pursuing their own self-interests.

Before you read this report, please keep in mind that I first examined this agreement with no opinion, one way or the other. My mind was a blank (neutral) slate.

What the Agreement States

In order to clear the underbrush, and to deal with the conflicting claims of opposing factions, let's do some homework and actually *read* the agreement! Here are the first statements of the agreement. The underlines are mine to emphasize some key points to the agreement.²

The goal for these negotiations is to reach a mutually-agreed long-term comprehensive solution that would ensure Iran's nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful. Iran reaffirms that under no circumstances will Iran ever seek or develop any nuclear weapons. This comprehensive solution would build on these initial measures and result in a final step for a period to be agreed upon and the resolution of concerns. This comprehensive solution would enable Iran to fully enjoy its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under the relevant articles of the NPT [Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons] in conformity with its obligations therein. This comprehensive solution would involve a mutually defined enrichment program with practical limits and transparency measures to ensure the peaceful nature of the program. This comprehensive solution would constitute an integrated whole where nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. This comprehensive solution would involve a reciprocal, step-by step process, and would produce the comprehensive lifting of all UN Security Council sanctions, as well as multilateral and national sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program.

The next section of the agreement establishes the specific obligations of Iran and the Western powers during the six-month period. Previous reports describe these details, so they are not repeated here. Following this six-month time, Iran and the West are to (we should hope) conclude a permanent agreement based on (a) no sanctions and (b) to adhere to the first sentence in the quote above: "...Iran's nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful. Iran reaffirms that under no circumstances will Iran ever seek or develop any nuclear weapons."

After these specifics, the agreement specifies (some of these points are included in Report Two):

¹ Cartoon on cover, thanks to Google.

² <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/24/world/meast/iran-deal-text/>.

The final step of a comprehensive solution, which the parties aim to conclude negotiating and commence implementing no more than one year after the adoption of this document, would:

- Have a specified long-term duration to be agreed upon.
- Reflect the rights and obligations of parties to the NPT and IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] Safeguards Agreements.
- Comprehensively lift UN Security Council, multilateral and national nuclear-related sanctions, including steps on access in areas of trade, technology, finance, and energy, on a schedule to be agreed upon.
- Involve a mutually defined enrichment program with mutually agreed parameters consistent with practical needs, with agreed limits on scope and level of enrichment activities, capacity, where it is carried out, and stocks of enriched uranium, for a period to be agreed upon.
- Fully resolve concerns related to the reactor at Arak, designated by the IAEA as the IR-40. No reprocessing or construction of a facility capable of reprocessing.
- Fully implement the agreed transparency measures and enhanced monitoring. Ratify and implement the Additional Protocol, consistent with the respective roles of the President and the Majlis (Iranian parliament).
- Include international civil nuclear cooperation, including among others, on acquiring modern light-water power and research reactors and associated equipment, and the supply of modern nuclear fuel as well as agreed R&D practices.

Following successful implementation of the final step of the comprehensive solution for its full duration, the Iranian nuclear program will be treated in the same manner as that of any non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT.

Reds, Blues, Tea Party members, Israelis, Saudis, middle-of-the-road belligerents, and others can attack or defend this treaty. They can have opinions, but let's shed some light on three patently false claims:

Falsehoods and Facts

First falsehood: As established in Report Two, Israel states the agreement is a blunder of "historic" proportions that leaves Iran as a perpetual nuclear threat.

Fact: The agreement does just the opposite. The text above clearly states that: "...under no circumstances will Iran ever seek or develop any nuclear weapons." And, "...[the] Iranian nuclear program will be treated in the same manner as that of any non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT."

Second falsehood: Secretary of State John Kerry states there is nothing in the agreement that gives Iran the right to enrich uranium.

Fact: Of course it does. If Iran complies with this agreement, "...[the] Iranian nuclear program will be treated in the same manner as that of any non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT." An NPT country is allowed to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. (Again, see Report Two).

Third falsehood: Once certain sanctions are lifted, they will be difficult or impossible to re-impose.

Fact: What is so difficult in re-establishing sanctions on the following (on which restrictions are being lifted)? After all, they were established in the first place. [Comments in brackets are mine.]

- Petrochemical exports.
- Gold and precious metals.
- Iran's auto industry.
- Spare parts for safety of flight for Iranian civil aviation and associated services, and related inspections and repairs in Iran as well as associated services. [This sanction is beyond belief. America is denying perhaps life-saving services to civilian airlines.]
- Nuclear-related UN Security Council sanctions.
- The U.S. Administration's nuclear-related sanctions.
- A financial channel to facilitate humanitarian trade for Iran's domestic needs using Iranian oil revenues held abroad. [Paraphrasing the agreement, as examples: food and agricultural products, medicine, medical devices, and medical expenses incurred abroad. This writer can see nothing damaging about another country pitching-in and helping-out.]
- Direct tuition payments to universities and colleges for Iranian students studying abroad, up to an agreed amount for the six-month period. [Assuming America allows Iranians to study at its schools.]

Even if it is difficult to re-impose these sanctions, the importance of stemming nuclear weapons proliferation anywhere is worth this effort.

Counter Argument

Opponents of this agreement say it has opened the floodgates for other Middle Eastern countries to develop their own nuclear weapons program; that a nuclear arms race will be the result of this agreement. This claim may be true. However, if the agreement holds, it *can* lead to an expansion of NPT-compliant programs. If there is no agreement, it *will* lead to an expansion of non-compliant programs.

If There is no Agreement, America's Perpetual Warm War Will Heat up Again

What will happen if there is no agreement? The answer seems easy to come by: (a) Sanctions will continue. (b) Iran will continue expanding its nuclear program. (c) Israel will attack Iran's nuclear facilities. (d) America, joined at the hip to Israel, will be required to enter the fray.

Israel has stated time and again, as stated in Report Two, that it will not allow any country in the Middle East, besides itself, to have nuclear weapons. However, the vast majority of Iranian citizens are in favor of their country having nuclear power in consonance with the rules of the NPT. It is a source of national pride. Sooner or later, Israeli bombs or not, Iran is going nuclear. It is far better to do it under the NPT.

I first viewed the agreement with skepticism. After reading it, and after having done homework on Israel's stand on the issue, I favor this agreement. If something is not done and done soon, Israel will attack Iran. This six-month agreement buys time on both sides. If six months pass, and Iran has not met its end of the bargain, stricter sanctions can be applied or even military force.

Playing with Fire

I trust that Iran's leaders, those highly ranked religious folks, know they are playing with fire if they do not submit to being part of the NPT community. It is difficult to imagine they do not understand that they will be bombed, sanctions will be increased, and if they continue their program, they will be bombed again.

I trust that Israel also knows it is playing with fire. I trust the country knows it cannot continue to behave as a nuclear hegemony in the Middle East indefinitely. If it strikes Iran, it will have to deal with a Shia-based terrorism war. Furthermore, it makes no sense and is insulting to the world that *any* country cannot develop legal nuclear systems in consonance with the NPT. What is so obnoxious about this situation is that Israel's system was developed in secret, outside the NPT, while deceiving its ally America.

As mentioned, Israel states (logically) that it will not allow a country near its borders (Iran) to have nuclear weapons, if that country has vowed to destroy Israel. I agree with Israel's position. But if Iran's nuclear program has no nuclear weapons, if it operates under the NPT and IAEA, Israel has no leg to stand on in regards to nuclear attacks.

Of course, the critics state that even if Iran agrees to a long-term agreement, it cannot be trusted. I side with this stand as well. If Iran does indeed impose such inspection restrictions then the IAEA cannot keep a proper watch on Iran's program. But this supposition should not deter the parties from carrying out an agreement. That would be akin to the tail wagging the dog.

Make no mistake. Israel, Iran, and the other players in the Middle East can continue their deadly intramural chessboard game of provocation to keep the game going for only so long. Eventually, the black swan will swim by, and the game will escalate to more than capturing a pawn here and there. When that happens (and it will happen if these countries cannot settle their differences without religious incantations to kill one another), every single one of those countries will wish they had placed the words "compromise" and "tolerance" into their vocabularies.

As an aside, and to conclude, I have long since grown weary of America continually forsaking its own self-interests to those of Saudi Arabia and Israel.