



The US Could Fall in the Trap It Has Set for Iran!

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Since September 11, 2001, the US has consistently outmaneuvered Iran on the nuclear issue, incrementally making it an international issue that could soon involve the United Nations. Yet, it is not clear if the US would ultimately benefit from its “success,” unless it stops at an advantageous point. The logical progression of the US advances against Iran would lead to a disastrous conflict that would be antithetical to its interests and prestige.

In recent history, the US has “won” battles that have not produced positive results for the Americans because it was not able to locate the right stop-point: The Cold War and the war against Saddam Hussein. In the former case, the US lost control over its Western “allies;” in the latter case, the conqueror was wounded and plundered! The Iranian case could prove even more damaging to American interests and prestige.

The turning point in the American advances against Iran came with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that followed September 11. The initial American victories became a source of serious concern for the Islamic Republic who has, from its inception in 1979, suspected an American design to destroy the Islamic system. “Iran is next” had become the universal call of the neoconservatives in the first few months after Baghdad fell.

Tehran trembled and in a rush, it agreed to intrusive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of its nuclear sites. Iran also began negotiations with the EU trio (Britain, France, and Germany) even if most leaders in Tehran were aware that the EU was largely irrelevant to the US-Iran nuclear dispute. Tehran was seeking a wall to hide behind, and it thought the IAEA/EU deals would provide the protection.

The deals surely delayed an American war against Iran. However, what has thus far saved Iran is the fact that a series of misfortunes has plagued the Bush Administration at home and abroad, including the problems in Iraq. Notwithstanding these bad lucks, as I have argued in my previous articles in the [AIC Update](#), the US and Iran might still clash if current trends continue while we remain complacent.

Here lay the danger facing the current American successful diplomatic games against the Islamic Republic. It is very possible that the US would again fail to locate the correct stop-point, and would continue its advances against Iran beyond diplomacy in search of an illusive total victory over Tehran that could include war and regime change. If that were to happen, Iran would be destroyed but the US would also end up losing the battle that it had won to that point.



The logical progression of US steps to trap Iran into a self-isolating situation suggests that the American endgame could well go beyond diplomacy. The US has changed Iran's nuclear programs from a bilateral issue to an international crisis. The subsequent steps could include reporting Iran to the UN for multilateral sanctions, to follow with "surgical strikes," ending up in an uncontrollable full-scale war. These steps are as follows.

Step One. In the years prior to September 11, the best the US could do was to criticize Iran's nuclear programs in a bilateral framework. At this time, Europeans were involved in "constructive engagement" with Iran, focusing on human rights, while Chinese, Russians, Pakistanis and North Koreans were selling Iran certain nuclear technologies. The US had failed to internationalize the concern over the Iranian nuclear programs.

Step Two. September 11 and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq drastically changed the situation. The US quickly went to work to internationalize its bilateral problem with Iran over its nuclear project. Two factors worked in American favor: Iran's fear of an imminent US attack, and Europe's fear that the division over Iraq with the US could produce dangerous conflicts within the Western alliance.

Step Three. Building on these fears, the American diplomats developed a strategic plan to trap Iran. The centerpiece of that strategy was the European Union leading the struggle against Tehran. The US then turned to the three EU giants, the so-called EU trio, to assume the responsibility. The EU was more than happy to accept the offer thinking that they would remove Iran from the "American radar screen." They misunderstood the US.

The US would hit two targets with one bullet! It would reduce tension with the EU, and it would soon make EU an enemy of Iran! The US knew that the EU-Iran negotiations would fail because it would make them fail! The Iranians fell into the trap for two reasons: fearing a US invasion, and believing that they could create a wedge between the US and the EU. They did not anticipate the problems in Iraq and the hard EU position.

Step Four. After the EU trio began negotiations with Iran, the US went behind the scene to provide them with poisonous information about Iran's nuclear programs. Meanwhile, the US argued that Iran's intentions are at issue not just its real programs, and it made every effort to convince the EU that the negotiations with Iran were a waste of time and that the country must be reported to the UN Security Council as soon as possible.

The US also successfully pressured the IAEA into making Tehran to accept intrusive inspections. Yet the more Iran became open about its nuclear programs, and the more it allowed inspections, the more it invited suspicion and demand for more inspections and information. Iran also accepted and implemented the Additional Protocol, which allowed inspections on short notice, but that did not change the situation for better either.



Step Five. After making sure that the EU-Iran gap had become insurmountable, the US changed strategy from one of creating obstacles for the negotiations to one of facilitating them by joining the EU in offering meaningless economic “incentive” packages to Iran. This American public diplomacy campaign was aimed at shifting the blame to Iran for an eventual failure of the negotiations. The US was now looking beyond the EU.

Step Six. The EU-Iran negotiations collapsed and the American public diplomacy machinery put the blame on Iran for the failure. Europe followed with its own anti-Iran campaign. The US had achieved a major victory over Iran: it had turned Europe, Britain in particular, against Iran and had internationalized the concern over Iran’s nuclear programs – it was no more only an Israeli/American issue.

Step Seven. The US then moved to solidify this victory by lobbying the members of the Board of Directors of the IAEA for a no-confidence vote against Iran. That vote was won this past September though not unanimously. The Agency’s Board found Iran in “non-compliance” with its safeguard obligations and threatened to report Iran to the Security Council unless a set of tough conditions were met in a short time frame.

Step Eight. The road was prepared for taking Iran to the UN. The IAEA resolution placed Iran into a position in which Tehran could not extract itself easily. Significantly, the conditions would make sure that Iran is increasingly isolated as time goes by. Thus, the US sees no need to hurry as time is on its side. With this understanding, and as I wrote in a previous [AIC Update](#) article, it adopted a quite patient diplomacy to further isolate Iran.

Step Nine. The US then complemented its patient diplomacy with a parallel move: asking Britain to lead an anti-Iran crusade and Israel to trumpet the “immediate use of force” demand. They accepted the tasks as I wrote in my [AIC Update](#) articles. The Bush Administration, which is not at this time ready to directly confront Iran, would move in to “help a friend” in case of a conflict between Iran and Britain or Iran and Israel.

Step Ten. The US now has its eyes on reporting Iran to the UN, and for this it needs more votes than it had gathered for the IAEA’s Iran resolution. Successful lobbying of Russia, China, India and other undecided states is the key to this US plan. Thus, the patient diplomacy is given yet another leg: fooling the undecided by offering Iran unspecified deals through newspapers and then to play a game of denial-agreement by officials!

The New York Times reported one such game last week, to be denied the next day by Secretary Rice. The paper reported on a joint US-EU offer for Iran, which would allow Iran to convert uranium into yellow cakes at home but would move the actual enrichment operations to Russia, in plants shared by Tehran that would provide fuel for Iranian nuclear reactors. The EU meanwhile has remained silent on the deal as have Russia and the IAEA.



The US is too cheerful about its successes against Iran and too optimistic about its possible future advances to stop at this point. It would move forward with its designs to report Iran to the UN Security Council, to impose multilateral sanctions on Iran, and to include a “use of force” language in any anti-Iran UN resolution if “diplomacy” failed. It would be an uphill battle but one that is winnable, and the US has decided to win.

However, when Iran becomes entangled in the UN web, it can hardly escape from becoming another Iraq at a much larger scale. Consider the possibility that UN sanctions would not work and diplomacy collapses. What would be the next logical US step? To use force! Iran would respond, and before the conflict can be managed, it would spread in a region filled with oilfields, terrorists, Islamic radicals, and unstable regimes.

There is of course an alternative to the US engulfing itself in another quagmire in the region: To stop at the UN door steps for the time being, and offer Iran an honorable deal it cannot refuse. Unless the US is for regime change and or war, options that would not serve its security and national interests, the Bush Administration must, out of necessity, work toward a compromise solution that serves the interests of all parties involved.

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