



News and Analysis

Summary: The “News and Analysis” highlights developments and arguments relating to the recent military maneuvers in the Persian Gulf, the impending UN Security Council’s sanctions on Iran, US approval of sale of airplane parts to Iran; rewards given for Holocaust Cartoon Exhibition in Tehran; speculation about a possible Hezbollah coup in Lebanon, contradictory positions of former President Khatami regarding the US role in Iraq, security and intelligent cooperation between Iran and Iraq, and the upcoming elections in Iran.

Persian Gulf Military Maneuvers: On Monday, October 31st, a two-day Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) exercise known as Leading Edge, led by the United States, began in the waters of the Persian Gulf for the first time. Three regional countries - Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates - participated with Bahrain taking the most visible role. The naval training exercise is aimed at blocking smuggling of materials that could help in the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The military maneuver follows the North Korea's nuclear test and the renewed U.S. drive for “smart sanctions” against Iran.

The US called it “a political message” to Tehran, and Iran called it “adventurist.” But Iran’s Foreign Ministry said Tehran’s response would be “rational and wise.” “We are watching their movements very carefully,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini said, adding that the exercises would not improve security in the Persian Gulf, through which about 20 percent of the world’s oil transits. Iran called on its Arab neighbors to rely on regional sources of power for their security and not allow for external penetration of the area.

Iran also held its own 10-day long military maneuver days after, on November 3, test-firing three new long-range missiles, including the Shahab-3 (1,200 miles-range) which is believed to be based on a North Korean missile design. The cluster head of the missiles have “the capability to disperse 1,400 bomblets with great destructive power,” the Iranian Television boosted. The military maneuvers “aimed at putting a stop to the role of world powers in the Persian Gulf region,” the state TV said. However, the commanders of the Revolutionary Guard insisted that the exercises were no threat to any country.

“We want to show our deterrent and defensive power to trans-regional enemies, and we hope they will understand the message,” the head of the Revolutionary Guards, Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi, said in a clear reference to the United States, Britain and France, who were among the six countries that took part in the Gulf maneuvers earlier this week. Iranian state radio said: “The maneuver is aimed at providing security in the region without the intervention of trans-regional powers, which are trying to justify their presence by portraying the region as convulsive.”

Iran's test-firing of missiles was an attempt to demonstrate its strength to the world, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said on November 3rd. But, she also said, Iran is aware that the security



environment in the region is such that the country would pay a price “if they actually were to do something.” This was an apparent reference to the disadvantage Iran has as a predominantly Shiite country in a region with a Sunni majority. Meanwhile, Russians discounted certain speculations that Iran had the technology to develop intercontinental missiles (5000 miles range).

The gunboat diplomacy in the Persian Gulf has made a lot of people worried and has significantly increased tension between the two nations. Are the United States and its allies preparing themselves for military strike against Iran? As “surgical strikes” will not be a productive option for the US, will it launch a full scale military attack on Iran? We believe that given the state of the tension over the nuclear enrichment matter, there can be no place for complacency.

Iran’s Nuclear Dispute and the Impending Sanctions by the Security Council: The United States, Germany, Britain, France, Russia and China are locked on discussions over suitable sanctions against Iran which has not yielded to the UN Security Council’s demand to halt uranium enrichment. Russian and China have indicated that they will not support a draft U.N. resolution imposing tough sanctions on Iran for its refusal to halt its nuclear enrichment program. The comments by Russia’s foreign minister and China’s U.N. ambassador were the strongest reactions yet to the draft by the two key U.N. Security Council members, and signaled difficult negotiations ahead on the resolution drawn up by Britain, France and Germany.” The US is supporting the European formula and urges that “smart sanctions” be put in place as soon as possible.

“We cannot support measures that in essence are aimed at isolating Iran from the outside world, including isolating people who are called upon to conduct negotiations on the nuclear program,” the Interfax news agency quoted Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov as saying Wednesday, November 2nd. China’s U.N. Ambassador Wang Guangya said “there are still different views on what kind of actions the council needs to impose under the current circumstances. In our view, sanction of any type or intensity will not make Iran suspend uranium enrichment for peaceful purposes unless the deals offered, reward and punishment, are huge.

Hopes had earlier risen that while Iran was not ready to suspend enrichment as a precondition, it was open to negotiate enrichment suspension as part of a comprehensive negotiation to settle matters with the West, the US in particular. However, President Ahmadinejad has dashed all such hopes by declaring that enrichment was not an item for negotiation any more. Iran’s Student News Agency recently reported that the country has indeed begun a second 164-experimental cascade to enrich uranium. While President Bush warned Iran on the new development, Russians down played it saying that Iran is years away from enriching weapon-grade uranium.

Top Iranian leaders are divided on how to proceed, with moderates and pragmatists arguing for a more conciliatory approach. They are afraid that when sanctions pass the UN Security Council, they will not be stoppable and that could lead to further tension and eventually military conflict.



The balance of power over the nuclear matter can change against the conservatives if they lose in the upcoming elections for the Assembly of Experts and Local Councils. The Assembly decides on the fate of the Leader of the Republic who for the time being is in the side of the hardliner President on the nuclear matter.

While Iran is itself suspected of developing nuclear weapons, it condemned North Korea, without naming it, for its nuclear test. “Iran is against the use and production of nuclear weapons. No country is competent to use nuclear weapons,” government spokesman Gholamhossein Elham told a weekly news conference, when asked about North Korea’s nuclear test. In another development, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has agreed to urge that Iran's nuclear file be settled through diplomatic means, said Oman's Minister of Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah.

The expected multilateral sanctions against Iran will be mild in the beginning, most likely to include world-wide restriction on transfer of nuclear and dual-use technologies to Iran, with the exception of what Russia is obliged to provide that country for the Bushehr plant. The sanctions are also expected to restrict movement of certain Iranian officials related to the nuclear programs as well as nuclear scientists, even calling for the freeze of their assets in the West. Another item of the sanction regime being discussed is to prevent Iranian students, faculty and scientists from gaining any access to the universities or institutions throughout the world that offer programs and expertise in nuclear and related “sensitive” technologies. Food, agriculture, medical and humanitarian items and assistance will be excluded from the expected sanctions.

The US has already major sanctions in place against Iran. It is expected that the US will use the UN–sponsored sanctions to gradually widen its control over Iran’s international economic dealings and, at a future point, ask the Security Council for a more expanded multilateral sanction regime. The US is currently working hard, and often successfully, to prevent many large international banks from dealing with the Iranian banks. As we have previously noted, UN-sponsored sanctions could in due time lead to military conflict because such sanctions have proven to be ineffective. The Iraqi experience is a case in point.

US Approves Sale of Airplane Parts to Iran: While the US has been pushing hard for sanctions against Iran, it is allowing for the sale of airplane parts to that country. The State Department announced the policy on October 11, following recommendation from the US Federal Aviation Administration, which has increasingly grown concerned about the safety of Iranian civilian passengers. The international agreement on civil aviation mandates that nations work to protect the safety of passengers. The American Iranian Council welcomes this development and has in the past called for such policy.

<http://www.american-iranian.org/pubs/articles/Iranian%20Lives%20and%20American%20Spare%20Parts-12-15-05.pdf>

The policy only allows for the immediate overhaul of US-made engines on certain Airbus planes, some of which are used by Iran Air. The US Department of Treasury license would also allow a



US company to export parts and technical data for US-built aero-turbine engines. However, all repairs must be performed in third countries and no exports will go directly to Iran. Unfortunately, the policy does not allow for the sale of spare parts to Iran for overhauling its Boeing Jets that are even more in need of repair and have been crashing more often than the Iranian Airbuses.

This half-hearted positive development is part of a double-edged US policy toward Iran: to pressure the regime for concession or toward regime change while making sure that the Iranian people are positively affected. In the words of the State Department, "despite our grave concerns regarding the Iranian regime's activities, we believe this decision is consistent with our commitment to support the Iranian people and to use US sanctions to target the regime, not the Iranian people." The policy is also consistent with the US' other dual approach to Iran: calling for sanctions and pressure while offering "incentives" for possible negotiation.

Holocaust Cartoon Exhibition: Ignoring widespread condemnation, on Wednesday, November 2nd, Iran awarded a Moroccan artist the top prize in an exhibition of cartoons on the Holocaust. The action was designed as a response to the Danish cartoons of Islam's Prophet Mohammad that sparked rage among Muslims around the world. We believe that such reactive actions on both sides are counterproductive and condemnable.

Abdollah Derkaoui received \$12,000 for his work depicting an Israeli crane piling large cement blocks on Israel's security wall and gradually obscuring Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. A picture of Nazi Germany's Auschwitz concentration camp appears on the wall. The display, comprising 204 entries from Iran and abroad, opened in August. Entries from Brazil, France and Iran also won prizes. We sincerely suggest that the Iranian Government invest such moneys in the Iranian people instead.

A Hezbollah Coup in the Making: The White House said on Tuesday, November 1st, that it was concerned by "mounting evidence" that Syria, Iran and Hezbollah, with Syria in the lead, were planning to topple the government of Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora. White House press secretary Toby Snow warned that such attempts would be viewed as a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and UN Security Council Resolutions 1559, 1680 and 1701. Iran denied the charge as baseless and said it was designed to create tension among the Lebanese.

Mr. Snow said one motive behind Syria's actions was to prevent the Lebanese government from cooperating with the decision of an international tribunal to try those accused of assassinating former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005. Syria is suspected of involvement in the killing. "Any such effort to sideline the tribunal will fail, however, for the international community can proceed with establishing it, no matter what happens internally in Lebanon," Snow said. Why is then Iran named in the story? It is for propaganda purpose, one might suggest!



Former President Khatami Contradicts Himself: Former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami said on Wednesday, November 2nd, that American policies in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to an upsurge in terrorism and called for a quick withdrawal of foreign forces from those countries. Yet, during his tour of the US in September, the former President had expressed the opinion that the US' presence in Iraq was critical for the survival of the Iraqi Government and defeat of the radical /nationalist insurgency.

Why would President Khatami change his mind in a month time? It was now on the British soil! He made the comments during a speech in London, billed as a keynote speech on the importance of tolerance, dialogue and moderation. During his address at London's Chatham House research center, Mr. Khatami was soon asked about other issues, including Iraq and Afghanistan. He said Iran was delighted to see Saddam Hussein toppled in Baghdad and the Taliban removed from power in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, American actions in both those countries have been major mistakes, said Mr. Khatami. Instead of stopping terrorism, he said, they created more terrorism and extremism throughout the region. President Khatami sounds as if he was in favor of the two wars but wanted the US leave the scene after it had won them. Winning the peace, in his view, should have been left to the people of these countries. Mr. Khatami fails to acknowledge that the wars themselves are the sources of the trouble.

Iran and Iraq Consolidate Bilateral Relations: Because what is happening in Iraq hugely concerns Iran, on November 2nd, the two countries stressed the importance of consolidating their bilateral relations in all fields. They formed a “working group” to build closer security and intelligent ties. Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Hassan Kazemi Qomi met with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, according to Iranian First Deputy Ambassador Hossein Zolanvari. He said during the meeting the two sides discussed avenues for bolstering bilateral relations. Zebari and Kazemi Qomi also stressed the importance of exchange visits between the two countries' officials.

The US, which maintains 142,000 troops in Iraq, reacted positively and cautiously, saying that the US has ever wanted Iran to take a positive role in stabilizing the Iraqi situation. However, Washington also accused Iran of fomenting trouble in Iraq and helping with the smuggling of weapons to that country, and warned that such Iranian actions could further deteriorate US-Iran relations. In response, Iran's Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamanei, accused the US of fomenting sectarian strife in Iraq, particularly between the Sunnis and Shias.

Months ago, the US and Iran had agreed to negotiate over the Iraqi crisis hoping to coordinate a possible solution to the stalemate there. That agreement never materialized because right-wings on both sides sabotaged it. We believe that a strategic imperative exists for a fruitful US-Iran cooperation on Iraq. Further deterioration of the situation there does not serve Iran, the US and Iraq. While the US will have a hard time staying in Iraq for a long time, its pull out will lead to



Iraq's territorial disintegration. That eventually can have a ripple affect on the political geography of the region surrounding Iraq, engulfing Iran in significant ways.

The Upcoming Elections in Iran: Two elections are underway in Iran, the important elections of the Assembly of Experts and the Local Council elections. The Assembly has 86 seats for grab and the Council over 100,000. Members of the Assembly are elected every seven years and those of the Council every four years in all rural and urban areas. The Assembly decides on the fate of the country's religious/political Leader and members have to be well educated, "experts," in Islamic teachings. Local Council members can come from ordinary people. The Council in Tehran is most important because it appoints the mayor who controls huge funds. President Ahmadinejad was Tehran's mayor before becoming president.

More than 247,000 people have registered to stand in the December 15 municipal polls, a 13 percent increase over the 2002 figure. Hundreds have also registered to run for elections of the Assembly on that same date. Among them are a few key members of the Khatami administration. The moderates and pragmatists are trying to stay united in the face of this "destiny-making" election. So far the disunity has not been fully overcome but attempts continue. All candidates for the Assembly have to be approved by the 12-member Guardian Council, a powerful conservative religious institution. The Parliament, also controlled by the conservatives, approves the candidates for the Council. The final list of the candidates eligible to stand in the municipal elections will be announced on December 4.

These elections are seen as the first major test for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's popularity. Conservative did well in the last Council elections in 2002 and that success became the starting point for their subsequent victories in the parliamentary and presidential elections. In contrast, the 2002 elections spelled disaster for the reformers as many people did not participate and those who did voted for the conservative. In 2002 in Tehran, only 12 percent cast their ballots. The figure was as low as 12 percent in Isfahan and 15 percent in Mashhad, two major cities. People in other large urban centers also stayed away. That election set a negative political ripple that the moderates and pragmatists continue to suffer from.