

Dangerous Liaisons: RAND Corporation and the Herzl Institute

by G. Murphy Donovan (July 2015)



“We can be the vanguard of culture against barbarianism.” – Theodor Herzl

Some say that bad news comes in threes. If that folklore is true, Israel just hit a disaster trifecta: an impending bilateral agreement on the Persian atomic bomb program that excludes Israel, a malicious leak of classified data on Israel’s nuclear capabilities, and the announcement of a RAND Corporation/Herzl Institute [collaboration](#) to “rethink long-term strategy for Israel.”

The Shia Bomb

Other than the Israeli Prime Minister’s candor before the American Congress, the omens about the impending bilateral nuclear “agreement” with Tehran are not good. Clearly, whatever the document looks like, it will be a reflection of principals not principle. John Kerry and Wendy Sherman are on point for the American side.

Secretary of State Kerry is the former poster boy for the anti-war Left in America with a lineage that goes back to the Nixon era. And today Ms. Sherman, Foggy Bottom negotiator, is to the Iran nuclear deal what Victoria Nuland was to the Benghazi fiasco and the Kiev coup. If Wendy Sherman’s efforts with the ayatollahs are anything like the results with the totalitarian North Koreans, then a second Islam bomb, this time in Shia hands, might be a sure thing.

Sherman is a former social worker with impeccable Emily List progressive credentials. She has been, variously, a lobbyist and a Democrat Party fundraising maven. Like Ms. Nuland, Wendy has the diplomatic sensitivities of a PETA pit bull. Recall that Nuland chortled a celebrated “f—k the EU” when Europeans were slow to endorse Ukraine coup shenanigans. Likewise, Sherman [insulted](#) democratic South Korea recently by trivializing imperial Japanese sex slavery during WWII. Withal, both women are echoes of their mentor, Hillary Rodham, who wrote Libya’s epitaph

with an [epithet](#), “What difference does it make?”

Clearly, with team Obama, appeasement of Islamic jihadists or alienation of allies doesn’t register – or matter.

Evidence that team Obama is now [pandering](#) to Shia priests is more than suggestive. Israel has been kept in the dark, the Israeli Prime Minister has been snubbed and vilified. Benjamin Netanyahu has been characterized also, *vis-à-vis* Iran, as a “chicken shit” by a senior Obama spokesman. Indeed, Democrat Party officials financed an “anybody but Bibi” campaign in Israel in the run-up to recent Israeli elections. Fortunately, the regime change strategy backfired. Back home, adding insult to injury, the US Director of National Intelligence, without public discussion or debate, removed theocratic Iran and terror surrogate *Hesb’allah* from the *Annual Threat Assessment for Congress*.

Disarming Israel

All the while, numerous unilateral sanction and proliferation concessions have already been made to Iran. And now, the Pentagon releases an Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA) [report](#), circa 1987, on Israeli nuclear capability. Unmasking the useful ambiguity of Israel’s nuclear secrets is designed to argue that the Islam bomb is the moral equivalent of any other bomb in a free world arsenal. In short, exposing the military capabilities of the one democracy in the Levant is spiteful payback for an Israel that refuses to cut its own throat.

Clearly, the next edition of US policy for the Mideast is a “what’s good for the goose is good for the gander,” a rationale for imperial Islam and the bomb. Alas, a Shia weapon on top of existing Sunni nuclear weapons is Israel’s worst nightmare.

Lowering the nuclear threshold between warring Muslim apocalyptic sectarians is one thing, but both Shia and Sunni theocrats share common enemies: Israel, Europe, and America. When the chant of “[Death](#) to America” is raised in Iran, we are led to believe such sentiments are just local politics.

Indeed, Shia priests have also vowed to “wipe Israel off the face of the earth.” Should we not take the ayatollahs at their word? When Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” goes nuclear, surely Israel will be the first casualty – and the first to be blamed. Anti-Semitism is ever the canary in the privy of political obscenities.

Cavalier would be a charitable characterization of team Obama’s attitude towards Israel, Jews, and the next Holocaust.

The RAND/Herzl Mosaic

Once upon a time, when America believed in totalitarian threats, RAND Corporation might have been the go-to venue to game or explore kinetic solutions to problems like Pakistan, North Korea, and now Iran. Those days are long gone. Unfortunately, old school RAND was at one time a strategic critical mass, host to the likes Herman Kahn, Bernard Brodie, Albert Wohlstetter, and John Von Neumann. RAND's Pentagon focus, unfortunately, was undone by antics on the Left in the person of Daniel Ellsberg.



New RAND world HQ in Santa Monica

After Ellsberg leaked the so-called *Pentagon Papers*, Strangelovean RAND retreated and tacked towards social studies, health care for example, and threw national security baby out with the integrity bathwater. In the beginning, RAND was situated on the Left Coast to be as far from politics as possible. Today, RAND is quite comfortable midst [Hollywood](#) hype in Santa Monica.

Indeed, the RAND endowment, and political footprint, now includes a presence in California, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Louisiana, Mississippi, the UK, Belgium, the United Emirates, and Qatar. Following fonts of funding, RAND today probably has one of the largest “non-profit” nest eggs outside of Harvard yard. RAND is a public service “charity” in the same sense that the NCAA is a branch of higher education.

The most troubling institutional links are with Arab autocrats. How does RAND square Sunni sponsored terror and Islamism with democracy and freedom, in particular the survival of an Israeli democracy? Clearly, Arabia is the wellspring of Sunni Islamic supremacist ideology and *ji*had [funding](#) on a global scale. And how now will RAND square a nuclear Shia theocracy in Teheran with the prospects of Armageddon? If recent research, or spin, at RAND provides any clues, the news on any of these fronts is not good.

RAND studies fly under four flags, “non-profit, independent, objective, and non-partisan.” You will see the same adjectives, ironically, at IDA. None of these assertions are true anymore, if they were ever believable. No institution goes from one plant to ten without being very profitable. And it is the rare think tank that succeeds by telling clients what they do not want to hear. In short, the most useful tool for American contract analysis, as with US Intelligence [assessments](#) these days, is a wet finger in the political winds.

Research titles alone are probative. Recent RAND examples include: *The Days after a Nuclear Deal with IRAN*, a series of six [reports](#), all of which assume an agreement yet to be made or

published. Such analysis might be characterized as policy “front running.” Then there is *Grounds for Cautious Optimism on an Iran Nuclear Deal*, another piece of front running. A recent Foggy Bottom apologetic favorite might be *Relax, Iran is not taking over the Middle East* (sic). This flippant RAND gem trivializes Shia militancy in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Gaza, Bahrain, and now Yemen.

The king of Jordan might be vexed by the prospect of a “Shia [Crescent](#)” in the Mideast, but apparently sectarian imperialism is no big “deal” on the beach at Santa Monica. These are but a few examples. What they have in common is pandering, appeasement, and apologetic wishful thinking, the kind that characterizes Obama era policy towards the apocalyptic sects of Islam.

All of this is underwritten by parallel and blatant political hostility towards Israel. Hostility, we might add, that is enabled by both major American political parties. As Pakistan and Korea did before, Iran is playing for time, while America is again playing the fool.

RAND thinking on the Sunni (or Saudi) side of the threat equation is a non-performing asset too. Most pernicious is the notion that *jihad* and terror are isolated crimes with local motives, not acts of war. This has been the team Obama party line since John Brennan, now CIA director, was an advisor at the American president’s elbow. The “criminal” twaddle was underwritten by RAND political “[science](#)” in the interests of denying a global phenomenon, war with two shades of Islam. Indeed, consider the new ISIS, *Boko Haram*, and Yemini battle fronts as the stepchildren of naiveté.

How in any context do you pacify jihadists with an American notion of justice that has no relevance to a warring theocrat? Those on either side of the Shia/Sunni divide who seek martyrdom might more appropriately have their wishes expedited not prolonged.

America is now confronted with the hideous spectacle of rendition, prison, and jurisprudence where jihadists have the same rights that shoplifters enjoy. Such folly will only provide very expensive circus trials, propaganda martyrs, and recruitment incentives.

Some 90 or more nations now provide recruits to the Islamic Caliphate. Yet, RAND is still cooking the strategic books for profit and America still pretends that it is not at war. The latest RAND report on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a blatant [endorsement](#) of the two-state solution on economic grounds, a slight of hand that, not coincidentally, should provide more fuel to the BDS movement should Israel fail to knuckle under.

RAND might be a “premier” research institution on some subjects. Religious politics, terror, sectarian war, imperialism, fascism, irredentism, and the Islam bomb are not part of that mix.

If RAND Corporation were capable of “rethinking a long-term strategy” for Israel, they would have sold a similar scheme to a much [needier](#) American administration by now.

Why Herzl?

Contrast Israel’s Herzl Institute with the RAND Corporation. Herzl is what RAND used to be: small, focused, candid, and uncorrupted by political correctness, multiculturalism, or the avarice that now passes for research diversity. Any institution that pretends to be [all things](#) to all clients probably isn’t much use to any.

Indeed, Herzl is different to the extent that their scholars bring a critical moral dimension to analysis, a quality sadly lacking in the quantitative sterility of most science today, at places like RAND Corporation in particular. The great questions of 21st Century security require [moral](#) not scientific solutions. Moral clarity is not the strong suite of California corporate weathervanes that turn with the politics of the moment.

In Washington, think tanks are known as “Beltway Bandits.” RAND is known as the mother of think tanks for good reason. Fiscal success today may be more a function of rationalizing policy rather than assessing failures and designing futures. Surely, the politically correct convergence of Obama administration and RAND perspectives on Muslim kinetics and Islamic imperialism is no accident.

A policy of “Mowing the [Grass](#)” may be an expedient for Israel now and in the near future. However, if the alternative is appeasement, surrender, or annihilation; then tactical yard work looks pretty good. Israel needs to remember that large social democracies and their defense intellectuals can afford to be wrong and still survive a decade of strategic incompetence. Israel has no such luxury – and no future that can be predicated on wishful thinking.

American politics is likely to be more about personal legacy than national prudence for the next couple of years. Israel doesn’t need to go along to get along, especially in times when tepid allies are [hostile](#) – and “partners” like RAND are working both sides of the street. The eye of the hurricane is not necessarily the worst place to be when the winds of war are wreaking havoc elsewhere.

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