

The Problem of Iran

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By Hugh Fitzgerald (May 2006)

The problem of Iran cannot be dealt with as long as the Americans are tied down – tied down by their own inability to think through the whole menace of Islamic jihad, and to put aside memories of this or that charming and plausible Iraqi exile, or some touching individual they have run across in Iraq. Put that kind of thing out of your head. Think only about the welfare of Infidels. There are innocents in the Muslim world, but we are not in a position now to help them without further imperiling ourselves. Western civilization is menaced in a peculiarly complicated way, a way that involves the weakness of mind of Western man himself, who has forgotten what his own history and his own values are, or is willing, or many are willing, to toss that legacy, those values, aside.

It has to happen soon. The misallocation of resources – men, money matériel, attention – has been and remains just too great.

Bush may not be up to it. He is obstinate, and apparently unable to recognize that all of his assumptions about Iraq were based on ignorance of Islam and ignorance of Iraq.

Unlike what some in Washington seem to think, the very ones who meet those unrepresentative Iranians and are quick to believe all kinds of things that they wish to believe, the Iranian dictatorship is not on the verge of collapse. But it can be weakened, and weakened most effectively by exploiting the one main thing to know about Iran: ethnic Persians make up about 50% of the country; Azeris make up one-third (Azeris as in “Azerbaijan,” as in Soviet-occupied “northern Iran” after World War II), and Baluchis, Kurds, and ethnic Arabs (in the oil-bearing region) the rest. There is already low-level unrest here and there. Appeals to Muslim solidarity do not always work, and especially do not work where there is a long history of government from Tehran indifferent to the desires of non-Persians. This is what the rulers of the Islamic Republic fear most – and because they fear it, some of them have concluded that they now have a stake in dampening

unrest within Iraq, and a stake in preventing a free Kurdistan (which would inspire the Kurds in Iran – and do more than inspire them). In other words, what the Islamic Republic of Iran now fears is a “civil war” in Iraq, just the way, for different reasons, the Sunni Arabs outside Iraq fear such a “civil war.”

What maddens is that the “civil war” that could do such damage to the interests of the two main beneficiaries of the removal of Saddam Hussein, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the (Wahhabi) Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is being prevented or delayed almost entirely by the presence of American troops, and by naive American attempts at directing this or that while failing so completely to relate the fissures within Iraq to the larger picture of the menace presented by the Jihad.

Students of English literature will recall that Pope wrote *Peri Bathous*, or, *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*.

There is another art, not as high (or in Pope’s poem, as low), but even more necessary at this point in history if the poetry of Pope, and everything else that has been left as a legacy in the Western world, survives and continues to be added to. That is the art of how to deal with the many different levels and instruments of Jihad. It involves how to deal with the many different levels of ignorance or denial among Infidels, and how to inflict the most damage, of the right kind, the kind that will help to weaken Islam in the most effective, and likely least expensive way. That way would be to play upon the natural divisions and resentments and animosities within Dar al-Islam. This would allow intelligent people who through no fault of their own were born into Islam to ponder what it is about this belief-system, with its abhorrence of free and skeptical inquiry, its limits on artistic expression, its inshallah-fatalism, its support for The Ruler as long as the Ruler is considered to be a Muslim, that makes Islam itself the cause of the political, economic, social, intellectual, and moral failures of Muslim states and polities.

And there is one more audience. The spectacle of internecine strife among Muslims will be instructive for Infidels. It could take place in Iraq but will draw in men, money, and matériel from both Sunnis and Shi’a outside Iraq, and therefore have consequences (good for Infidels, bad for Muslims) in Lebanon, and Pakistan, in eastern Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and Yemen. It will hurry along the enlightenment of those who are taking their sweet time in discovering what the

Jihad is really all about. And who can blame them, given the way that an informal, but most effective withal, Islamintern (Islam International) has placed its members in the U.N. bureaucracy, its apologists in the E.U. bureaucracy, its willing collaborators in the press, radio, and television of much of Western Europe, in those areas that include coverage of Islam and the Middle East, and finally, have managed, as in this country with the members of MESA Nostra, to control the access to study of Islam to those who are apologists rather than students of the subject.

The Iran-Iraq War tied two ruthless regimes up for eight years. From the Infidel point of view, it should have gone on forever. There is another chance. The Bush Administration, having still failed to grasp the scope of the problem and the nature of the problem posed by the Jihad and its various instruments (hardly limited to terrorism), is obstinate in its titanic – in every sense – efforts. It needs to be forced, through political pressure, to withdraw from Iraq, to end the misallocation of resources, the colossal sums being spent that could so much better be applied to energy projects. It needs to be forced to give to small-scale efforts, as in Kurdistan, a little “equalizer” (as the Colt .45 was once known) to the side that we wish to prevail, but only from afar.

Telemachy – fighting from afar. And Telemachus was the son of Odysseus. Wily Odysseus. All this nonsense, this hallucinatory nonsense, about how “everyone loves freedom” and how we “are going to win the war on terror” through “our success in Iraq” which will take care of the “terrorists” forever (there is no “forever” that will end Jihad – containment, and reduction in the size of the threat, is another matter) – this has to stop. Events will cause it to stop, because in the next presidential election only someone who promises to remove our troops, right away, from Iraq, can conceivably win. But the American government should not wait that long. The silence of the Democratic lambs, who are capable, apparently, of breaking that silence only in order to bleat all the wrong kinds of criticism of Bush, rather than the unanswerable, and therefore deadly, kind that is offered here – needs to change.

Many seem to think that with troops in Iran and Afghanistan, and with our “ally” Pakistan next door, the Americans “have Iran surrounded.” Not at all. A land invasion of Iran would not make sense. Where would the American troops come from? Would they be dropped from planes? Would they be taken from the forces already

pinned down by IEDs in Iraq? Would they come from Iraq, where American troops are threatened by any number of possible enemies every time they take a drive in a Humvee? But from where else can they come? How is Iran threatened by the handful of American troops in Pakistan? The 15,000 or so American troops in Afghanistan? And how many thousands of miles are those troops from Iran's nuclear facilities? And how many missiles and planes are available?

In Iran, even those who do not wish the regime well are, by and large, opposed to any tampering with the nuclear project – nationalist pride trumps common sense. American equipment could not overnight be moved in, and the equipment in Iraq has been dangerously degraded by desert conditions. American forces in Iraq are now training the very Iraqis, especially the Shi'a, who could and would turn on the Americans in a New York minute if they were whipped up by Iran to avenge an attack on fellow Shi'a. Just a half-year ago, Jaafari was in Washington, oozing the most Uriah-Heepish at-your-feet sentiments about a new "Marshall Plan for Iraq" – "let's call it the Bush Plan" – that he thought he could squeeze out of the American taxpayers. However, he dared to denounce Zalmay Khalilzad for suggesting that Americans would be disinclined to pour more billions into an Iraqi government that was "sectarian."

How much do you trust Jaafari? Moqtada al-Sadr? The SCIRI Party? You don't trust them at all, do you? National Review's Nobel candidate Sistani is already funneling money to Iran. And the Sunnis are already enemies, even if we were to suddenly turn our attention to suppressing Shi'a enemies in Iran or Iraq.

The Iraq fiasco makes it much harder to attack Iran, because the troops are now already in place in a different country, assigned different tasks, and surrounded by a population that could turn on a dime and start to attack them (or at least the Arabs would, though not the Kurds).

Iran has 70 million people. For eight years, despite internal disarray, Iran continued to fight Iraq to a standstill, despite the fact that Iraq received American intelligence information, and Saudi tanks, and tens of billions of dollars from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the U.A.E. Its Basiji displayed the fearlessness of the primitive fanatics they are. Why would such fighters not suddenly spring up in Iraq today, determined to wreak vengeance on the Americans, some of whom already isolated in "Iraqi" units to which they have been assigned,

in order to help form a more perfect Iraqi union, and where they are now sitting ducks.

In Afghanistan the American troops are far from the border with Iran and even farther from Tehran. The terrain is impossible. This is not a case of Panzer divisions rolling through Belgium. Mountain passes, nonexistent roads and bridges, a hostile population everywhere – not easy.

What are missiles and planes for? Simply to store up, and count, rubbing our hands in Uncle-Scrooge glee? Or is the Air Force and all of its powerful armory to be put to use? And what are those bombs and missiles for, if not to protect us from an enemy that is determined to acquire weaponry that it will use on Infidels, here and there and everywhere. Any assumptions made about rational behavior, the kind exhibited by the Soviet rulers, need to be reexamined in the light of observable Muslim behavior – including the willingness to engage in individual, and possibly collective, suicide bombing. The impulse remains the same.

I think some simply feel they cannot quite believe that Iraq has been such a gigantic mistake (after the initial search-and-destroy mission for weapons). They cannot quite face it or admit it. So they continue to believe that it has led to a brilliantly effective pre-positioning of troops to invade Iran. .Or that somehow “winning” this war in Iraq - a “winning” that has never clearly been defined, never defined at all, but that apparently has something to do with the idea of “Iraq the Model” or “Iraq the Light Unto the Muslim Nations,” by which is meant that Sunni Arab states are going to delightedly observe, and emulate, the now Shi’a-ruled state of Iraq, as the Shi’a (and the Kurds) enjoy their new power and wealth at the expense of Sunni Arabs. Nonsense.

And even more nonsensical is the unwillingness to recognize that the sectarian and ethnic fissures within Iraq are not to be healed, but to be helped along, so that they flourish into still-greater hostility and, one hopes, hostilities.

Divide et impera, divide and conquer, is the oldest rule of warfare. Why do we not merely ignore it, but try to do everything we can to prevent it? Sentimentalism about how everyone in the end, or almost everyone, must really want the same things, has no place. It is killing us. It is wasting lives and money. Stop it.

