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Introduction

Although Iran's nuclear program still remains one of the most vexing foreign policy challenges confronting the international community, scholars and political commentators still holds the opinion that this issue could fundamentally reshape the strategic landscape of the Middle East in general and Israel in particular (Grotto, 2009). In the meantime, this debate is increasingly typified both by mounting pessimism about whether the diplomatic efforts and economic sanctions spearheaded by Western countries can indeed prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear arsenal, and by fortified optimism that the ramifications of a nuclear-armed Iran are controllable (Edelman et al, 2011).

As has been demonstrated in the article " Nuclear Iran, Anxious Israel", the conflict exemplified by Iran's nuclear ambitions is assuming new trajectories, but no viable solution to the impasse seems in sight (The Economist, 2011). It is the purpose of this paper to analyze the above named article with a view to present a well-argued and informative opinion on the Israel-Iran conflict and its implications for the Middle East.

Summary of the Article

The article, " Nuclear Iran, Anxious Israel", demonstrates compelling evidence that Iran is still actively involved in developing nuclear weapons and this Islamic nation could indeed have at least one workable weapon within a year's time from now if it opts out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). As noted by intelligence sources, "...Iran has already begun moving part of its uranium-enrichment capacity to Fordow, a facility buried

deep within a mountain in Qom” (The Economist, 2011, para. 2). The article is also clear that while Iran employs ambiguous tirades in its talk of nuclear weapons development, the top brass in Israel knows pretty well that the realization of a nuclear-armed Iran will never be in the best interests of Israel though opinion is still divided on whether and how to rope in Iran with the intention of stopping its nuclear ambitions. The article also brings into the picture the international community, particularly the United States, and attempts to describe how different scenarios may play out in the future should Iran go ahead to develop nuclear arsenal or in the eventuality that Israel launches preemptive strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities in an attempt to discourage further nuclear development. Either way, the article is categorical that there is need to approach the Israel-Iran conflict soberly and exercise restraint if a viable solution to the conflict is to be found (The Economist, 2011).

Analysis of the Main Points

Perhaps one of the main points that come out clearly from the article is that politics, more than Iran’s technical and industrial capabilities, may determine whether the country and its political class will choose to develop nuclear weapons (The Economist, 2011). Here, we need to evaluate the origins and implications of the conflict to understand why politics rather than capabilities inform the probable trajectories of the conflict. In evaluating the origins of the Israel-Iran conflict, particularly in terms of historical, religious, political and cultural facets of the issue, debate has been ranging that Iran is predominantly controlled by religious hardliners afflicted with a messianic

passion whose major objective is not to uphold their earthly domination over the Iranian state, but to accelerate the return of the Mahdi (Bon-Meir, 2010).

This, according to Grotto (2009), can only be "...accomplished by annihilating Israel, waging war against infidels, and sowing chaos" (p. 47). This particular author further posits that it is this religious convictions that have propelled the current Iranian leaders, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, toward an end-of-days scenario where they firmly believe that the price for Iran may be national martyrdom, for which its casualties will be overwhelmingly rewarded in the afterlife, while survivors will forever enjoy the favor and goodwill of the returned Mahdi. This evaluation is perhaps most concisely articulated "...by Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, in a March 2009 interview for The Atlantic, where he warns that Iran is poised to become a messianic apocalyptic cult controlling atomic bombs" (Grotto, 2009, p. 47).

This may precisely be the reason why, according to the article, the prime minister is fronting for Israel to undertake preemptive attacks on Iran nuclear facilities to decisively deal with the fear of a theocratic political regime that embraces the Shia religious tradition of martyrdom (The Economist, 2011; Silverstein, 2010). In evaluating the geographical ramifications, Grotto (2009) notes that "...a nuclear arsenal would enable Iran's leadership to deter conventional military threats, thereby reducing the ability of its main military rivals, Israel and the United States, to project conventional military power over it" (p. 45). Political analysts are of the opinion that such an arrangement would definitely work to the advantage of Iran since it is bound to give the country some leverage to initiate and prosecute limited regional

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conflicts against the Jewish state of Israel, other countries in the Middle East, and the United States forces deployed in the region (Grotto, 2009). This point of view has been well elaborated by the authors of the article, who suggest that due to the small geographical size of Israel, even a minor nuclear attack could prove disastrous to its own existence (The Economist, 2011).

Opinion

The authors of this article, in my view, assume a middle ground that provides no foreseeable solution to the conflict at hand. This is understandable considering the magnitude of the issues at hand and the complexity of the foreign relations between the countries that have already been sucked into the quagmire. As has been noted by Edelman et al (2011), it is the opinion of many scholars and political commentators that attacking Iran may not be the best solution for Israel considering the religious fundamentalism and political indoctrination already discussed in this paper.

But a conflict of this nature needs to have tangible solutions, which are elaborated below. The authors of the article rightly argue that “ the arguments against an attack [against Iran] are still overwhelming, even for Israel” (The Economist, 2011, para. 5). The reasons given for taking this viewpoint are varied, including the fact that a targeted preemptive attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities would still only delay the Islamic State, not stop it. It is also true that the economic ramifications for taking such an action could be catastrophic.

However, a careful analysis of literature dealing with the conflict demonstrates that it is unwise to insinuate that the Obama administration

should continue taking a laid back approach on the issues as suggested by the authors of the article. Indeed, the United States must maintain their active role in the conflict by expressly stating that they are ready to assist Israel to "...contain Iran even if it developed a nuclear arsenal by establishing clear redlines that Tehran would not be allowed to cross without risking some type of retaliation" (Edelman, 2011, p. 45). For instance, the United States should make it clear that it will be compelled to respond if Iran uses its nuclear arsenal for reasons other than power generation, transfers them to a third party, invades Israel, or increases its support for terrorist networks such as Hamas, Al Qaeda, and Hezbollah. The authors of the article suggest that the international community should pursue a multi-thronged course of action in dealing with the Israel-Iran conflict, namely: "...pushing sanctions, on the one hand, and preparing for a nuclear-armed Iran on the other" (The Economist, 2011, para.

6). But as suggested by Grotto (2006), economic and political sanctions on Iran seems not to have achieved much and it seems they never will, partly due to the economic muscle of the country due to its petroleum resources and partly due to countries such as Russia and China, who have refused to support the UN Security council in imposing tougher sanctions on Iran. Yet, the authors of the article fail to provide a roadmap of how Israel and the West can live with a nuclear-armed Iran in the event that Tehran fails to curve in to sustained sanctions. Indeed, the perspective that Tehran will give in to sustained sanctions, in my view, is far too sanguine by virtue of the fact that it rests on the questionable suppositions that economic sanctions will

inarguably elicit or induce caution and restraint on the part of Iranian political and religious leaders.

The best bet in the current conditions, it seems, is to prepare living with a nuclear-armed Iran. The authors of the article are of the opinion that Iran should be viewed as an international pariah should it fail to halt its uranium enrichment programme. In addition, the authors argue that the international community should not only push for tougher sanctions, but they should also step up the clandestine operation to disrupt Iran's nuclear facilities (The Economist, 2011). This arrangement, in my view, constitutes a valid plan of action not only because of the religious fundamentalism embraced by Iranian leaders and their indoctrination with annihilating Israel and issues of national martyrdom (Grotto, 2009), but other nations in the Middle East will acquire incentives to start their own nuclear programs to hedge against Iranian weapons capability if Tehran is allowed to continue with uranium enrichment (Bon-Meir, 2010). Indeed, Grotto (2009) argues that Iran must never be allowed to go ahead with its plans because "...the emergence of additional nuclear-capable states in the Middle East presents more possibilities for miscalculation and mistake, which raises the chances of a nuclear conflagration" (p.

45). If this view is reinforced, the authors of the analyzed article are therefore right to suggest that the United States should in fact be in the forefront in providing countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia with advanced ballistic missile defenses to guard against Iran's threats.

Conclusion

The prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran, which seems to be the conclusion of the authors of the analyzed article, raises the fundamental question of whether the international community can develop effective policies to deter Tehran from using its nuclear weapons (Grotto, 2009). The proposition that the International community can deter Iran from developing or using nuclear arsenal against its perceived enemies, particularly Israel, rests on a series of judgments about the goals and behaviors of the country's political and religious leaders. To date, the behaviors and actions of these leaders remain questionable since all efforts to request Tehran to accept reassuring constraints on its nuclear program have gone unheeded, thus the need for the international community to do whatever it is within their reach to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities for the main purpose of the realization of a peaceful world.

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