



Whither Iran

Yossef Bodansky

February 2014

Executive Summary

In early February, Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei decided on a major and profound change in Iran's national security policy. He resolved that alluring as Obama's quest for the grand rapprochement might be, Tehran must not believe Obama. Therefore, Tehran must focus on the furthering and consolidating of Iran's vital security and regional interests. Only then, Tehran should revisit the prospect of relations with Obama's Washington. Rapprochement might be possible only if it does not endanger the pursuit of Iran's vital interests. Simply put, Khamenei decreed that Iran will not compromise or moderate its ascent as a regional power in order to improve relations with the US or accommodate Obama's desires.

Tehran's new assertiveness is also manifested in the perception of the possibility of military clashes with the US. As the Obama White House is making strenuous efforts to convince Tehran of the US peaceful intentions – the Iranian High Command is raising anew the possibility of war. Iran's new doctrine is very clear. Iran is rising as the regional power. Tehran would rather have the Gulf States accept this ascent. However, Tehran would not tolerate any attempt to stand in Iran's ascent to new power and glory. On top, Tehran does not trust Washington and worries that such mistrust might lead to war.

The area where Khamenei's new doctrine is clearly manifested is the northern parts of al-Jazira. There, Iran is spearheading the joint effort of Syria, Iraq, several Shiite militias, and even Ayman al-Zawahiri's Jihadist High Command to defeat the Takfiri forces led by the DI'ISH (aka ISIS or ISIL) both militarily and theologically. With Assad's Damascus all but won the war in Syria – the ascent of the DI'ISH-dominated Jihadist Emirate along the Euphrates Valley is the sole impediment to the consolidation of Iranian hegemony all the way to the shores of the Mediterranean. Tehran is adamant on destroying the Takfiri forces.

The game is over. The crux of Khamenei's new doctrine is that the new era of consolidation and implementation of the ascending Shiite Iran has begun. The Islamic Republic has always been committed to asserting the preeminence of Shiite Islam despite their minority status and reversing their victimhood by taking revenge against their Sunni Arab oppressors. Iran is now a major regional hegemonic power shielded under, and projecting power via, its de-facto nuclear umbrella. Iran's relations with the rest of the greater Middle East are based on the presumption of de-facto nuclear capabilities. This was achieved by Iran's belligerence and steadfast unwillingness to compromise on any core issue.

There is still short time till gloom and doom settles upon the greater Middle East. The Iranian march and ascent have just begun and can still be contained and reversed. This can be achieved solely by emboldening and empowering the indigenous historical foci of power and the regional strategic dynamics they pursue and facilitate. However, all of the indigenous forces must be assured that their achievements and the new regional



order they will establish will be respected, legitimized and recognized by the international community. Alas, the only forces who can still win the greater Middle East are the very same forces the US-led West presently subjects to derision, hostility and suppression. Sacrificing them on the altar of rapprochement with Iran, as is Obama's wont, will only embolden and hasten the Iranian march westward.

About ISPSW

The Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy (ISPSW) is a private institute for research and consultancy. The ISPSW is objective and task oriented and is above party politics.

In an ever more complex international environment of globalized economic processes and worldwide political, ecological, social and cultural change, bringing major opportunities but also risks, decision-makers in enterprises and politics depend more than ever before on the advice of highly qualified experts.

ISPSW offers a range of services, including strategic analyses, security consultancy, executive coaching and intercultural competency. ISPSW publications examine a wide range of topics connected with politics, economy, international relations, and security/ defense. ISPSW network experts have worked – in some cases for decades – in executive positions and possess a wide range of experience in their respective specialist areas.

About the Author of this Issue

Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State. He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (*New York Times* No. 1 Bestseller & *Washington Post* No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (*New York Times* Bestseller & *Foreign Affairs Magazine* Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports. Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



Yossef Bodansky



ANALYSIS

Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei decided on a major and profound change in Iran's national security policy in a series of secret meetings on February 6th and 7th.

Khamenei resolved that alluring as Obama's quest for the grand rapprochement might be, Tehran must not believe Obama and his sincerity. Therefore, Tehran must focus first and foremost on the furthering and consolidating of Iran's vital security and regional interests. Only then, Tehran should revisit the prospect of relations with Obama's Washington. Rapprochement might be possible only if it does not endanger the pursuit of Iran's vital interests. Simply put, Khamenei decreed that Iran will not compromise or moderate its ascent as a regional power in order to improve relations with the US or accommodate Obama's desires. Significantly, Khamenei delved more on Iran regional security interests than the nuclear issue (which is taken as a given).

On February 8, Khamenei articulated Tehran's new policy and doctrine in a speech to Air Force senior officers. The speech also marked the 35th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Khamenei stressed that the US remains an implacable nemesis of the Islamic Republic of Iran. "American officials, in negotiations with the country's [Iran's] officials, say 'we are not after regime change in Iran' but they are lying because if they had the ability to do this they would not hesitate one second." He explained that in all recent negotiations American diplomats attempted to interfere in Iran's domestic affairs and policies in an unacceptable manner. "Our [hostile] stance toward the United States is due to its controlling and meddling attitude," Khamenei asserted.

Khamenei gave an example. The Americans claim to be "friends of the Iranian people. They are lying. They are threatening Iran and expect that the Islamic Republic of Iran will reduce its defensive capabilities. Isn't that ridiculous? Isn't that amusing?" Khamenei declared that Iran has no intention whatsoever to limit any of its defensive and strategic capabilities and programs. "The Iranian people and leadership, with God's help, will increase their defensive capability each day." Khamenei elaborated that "seeking independence should not be translated into hostility with the rest of the world. Independence means resistance against the interventionist powers which do not respect the dignity of other nations for their personal interests."

Khamenei then addressed Iran's new moderation and on-going negotiations over nuclear and other issues. Such negotiations and seeming moderation are permissible only as instruments of furthering the vital interests of the Islamic Republic. "One can change the tactics, but principles must remain rock solid," Khamenei asserted. He quickly added that lifting the sanctions will not have much impact on Iran's economic well-being. "The solution to our economic problems is not looking out and having the sanctions lifted," he explained. "My advice to our officials, as ever, is to rely on [Iran's] infinite indigenous potentials." He stressed that the West is dangling sanctions' relief in order to compel Iran to give-up its own vital interests and not in order to help Iran improve its economy. Hence, Iran can trust nobody. "The only solution to the country's economic problems is to employ [Iran's] infinite domestic capacities, not to pin hopes on the lifting of sanctions. No expectations from the enemy," Khamenei concluded.

*

Khamenei's decision is the outcome of lengthy studies and deliberations at the highest echelons of the Islamic Republic and particularly Khamenei's own innermost circle.



In the last few months, Tehran has been grappling with Washington's pressure to embrace Obama's grand rapprochement and improve, even normalize, relations. The eagerness of the Obama White House was clearly manifested in the signing of the interim nuclear deal, the lifting of some sanctions, and the ensuing revitalization of economic relations with the West, mainly the EU. However, there rang alarm bells over the US handling of bilateral secret negotiations, and particularly the US interpretations of, and expectations from, contacts over regional issues in which the US had only negligible role.

The first major test case was the Oman-mediated negotiations over the islands Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs near the Strait of Hormuz. In mid-January, UAE and Omani senior officials disclosed that Oman mediated a multi-sided agreement with Iran on the three islands and Iran posture in the Gulf. "A deal has been reached and finalized on the Greater and Lesser Tunbs," the sources explained. "For now, two of the three islands are to return to the UAE while the final agreement for Abu Musa is being ironed out." For both strategic and economic reasons, the officials explained, "Iran will retain the sea bed rights around the three islands while the UAE will hold sovereignty over the land." The negotiations over Abu Musa focus on the complex issue of the legal status of Iran's vast strategic infrastructure under UAE sovereignty. Most important, though, is the improvement of Iran's strategic intelligence capabilities in return for vacating facilities on the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. "Oman will grant Iran a strategic location on Ras Musandam mountain, which is a very strategic point overlooking the whole Gulf region. In return for Ras Musandam, Oman will receive free gas and oil from Iran once a pipeline is constructed within the coming two years." The sources stressed that the agreements over the islands are the first step in a comprehensive agreement over the security posture in the Gulf to be mediated by Oman in the coming months. "Oman was given the green light from Iran and the US to reach deals that would decrease the threat levels in the region and offset the Saudi Arabian influence in the future by any means," the sources explained.

Meanwhile, in the secret bilateral negotiations, the US expected, and later demanded, compensations from Iran for facilitating the Omani mediation and the compromises made by the UAE. However, Tehran's reading of the situation profoundly disagrees. Iranian senior officials stressed to their Omani counterparts that the islands agreement was not the outcome of US facilitation, or even permission to Oman to mediate. Rather, the UAE's and Oman's concessions to Iran reflected their recognition of the ascent of Iran and the decline of the US, as well as their growing fears of Saudi Arabia becoming "irrational and aggressive". This has been Tehran's position since late 2013. "Having lost hope that the United States will carry out a military strike on Iran," Diaku Hoseyni, an Iranian expert, explained, "smaller countries would prefer to control the danger posed by a powerful and dissatisfied country in their neighborhood, by expanding their friendly relations with Iran."

Tehran attributes the profound change in Turkey's policy and Erdogan's visit to Tehran on 28-31 January to the irreversible regional ascent of Iran. Erdogan went to Tehran for several reasons – starting with the urgent imperative to save Turkey from economic collapse through highly subsidized oil and gas supplies, as well as the expansion of sanctions-busting commerce and technology transfers (despite Erdogan's purge of some of the gold traders in the recent anti-corruption campaign that was actually aimed at financiers of Erdogan's urban opposition leaders). The Mullahs rejoice that Erdogan not only defied Obama's Washington in coming to Tehran, but agreed to participate in direct actions against US interests in the entire region.

In Tehran, both leaders emphasized the new era in bilateral relations and strategic cooperation made possible by the new realities in the region. Both leaders agreed on the establishment of the Iran-Turkey High-level Cooperation Council that they will co-chair and that will implement their joint security strategy and develop-



ment policies. Khamenei assured Erdogan that “the existing opportunities must be properly used in Tehran-Ankara relations.” Khamenei defined “the current brotherly and friendly relations” between Turkey and Iran as “unparalleled in recent centuries.” “The extensive capacities of both sides are a suitable ground for the expansion and deepening of relations,” Khamenei told Erdogan. Erdogan’s response was effusive. “We consider Iran as our second home,” he told Khamenei. Erdogan expressed his confidence that “the relations between the two countries could expand and serve as an example for the region and the world.” Erdogan called the Iran-Turkey High-level Cooperation Council mechanism “most important,” and assured Khamenei that “continued bilateral meetings will be held in the near future to further expand relations.”

Tehran’s main conclusion from Erdogan’s visit is that the new Iranian-Turkish unity will enable both countries to prevent the US-led West from implementing their policies in the Middle East, and in Syria in particular. “The reinforcement of relations between Iran and Turkey sends a strong message to the West and will counter the US and West’s political mischief because the unity of two Muslim countries puts them back in their place,” Deputy Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Mansour Haqiqatpour said on February 1st. Erdogan’s “trip was of high political and economic significance and indicated a revision of the Turkish government’s core policy with respect to Syria.” According to Haqiqatpour, Erdogan acknowledged that “some differences still exist between Tehran and Ankara over the Syrian crisis” but guaranteed that “the Turkish Foreign Ministry and intelligence agency will keep in contact with their Iranian counterparts over the issue.” Haqiqatpour is confident that all outstanding issues will be resolved soon to Tehran’s satisfaction.

*

Meanwhile, Tehran’s new assertiveness is also manifested in the perception of the possibility of military clashes with the US. As the Obama White House is making strenuous efforts to convince Tehran (via Muscat, among a few key venues) of Washington’s peaceful intentions – the Iranian High Command is raising anew the possibility of war with the United States.

The first authoritative daring of the US was delivered on January 24, 2014, by the Commander in Chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Mohammad Jafari. He declared publicly that a direct conflict with the US is the “strongest dream of the faithful and revolutionary men around the world.” Jaafari then responded to Kerry’s warning that the US might renew the military option should Iran violate the nuclear deal. “Your threats to Revolutionary Islam are the best opportunity,” Jafari declared. “Muslim leaders for years have been preparing us for a decisive battle. ... Do you know how many thousands of Revolutionary Muslims at the heart of the Islamic revolutionary groups around the world are awaiting for you to take this [military] option from the table into action?”

Other senior commanders of the IRGC immediately began to elaborate on implementing Jaafari’s threats.

Most important was a closed speech delivered by the IRGC’s Deputy Commander (Jaafari’s second-in-command) Brigadier General Hossein Salami on February 1st. Salami presented a detailed analysis of Iran’s doctrine and capabilities. “Today, our military and defense might is much beyond the expectations of the big powers,” he stated. “America, with its strategic ignorance, does not have a full understanding of the power of the Islamic Republic.” In contrast, Iran has been preparing meticulously to face the US and its allies. “Our defense strategy has been formed against the most dangerous global power and alliance, and our structures are such that, in addition to protecting the country’s interests, they can jeopardize the enemy’s interests in the



region on every level.” Salami stressed that the Pasdaran “have recognized America’s military strategy, and have arranged our abilities, and have identified centers in America [for attack] that will create a shock.”

Salami elaborated about the various contingencies and threats the IRGC is ready to defeat. Most likely are the different scenarios under which the US could attack Iran via a limited missile and air strikes, or even a ground attack. “All operational bases of the enemy in the region in whatever capacity and location are within our fire-power,” Salami warned. “The American military option does not make a difference for us, and they can use this option, but they will have to accept the responsibility of devastating consequences.” Salami wondered loudly whether the US could control the spread and escalation of any war with Iran. “Can they preserve their vital interest in the region in the face of endless attacks by Iran? Can they keep their naval assets and the Zionist regime secure?”

Salami reminded his audience that the US has been notorious with its strategic miscalculations. He singled out Iran’s unprecedented political and cultural influence in Iraq that was made possible by the US invasion of that country and the toppling of Saddam Hussein. “The current has changed for the Americans so much so that they invested [by invading Iraq] and others [Iran] benefitted.” The same logic applies to Syria, Salami noted. Threats and rhetoric notwithstanding, the US has no capability to intervene in Syria militarily. “The Americans cannot even conduct a military operation there,” Salami gloated. Hence, it is impossible for the Americans to challenge Iran’s preeminence in Syria and Iraq because “the conditions and the factors that facilitate the exercise of military power for them have for years been destroyed and today they [the Americans] are in an erosion of political, cultural and military power.”

In contrast, Salami stated, Iran can escalate the war with the US beyond the greater Middle East and West-Central Asia. He alluded to the use of HizbAllah terrorism and special operations at the heart of America. “We will conduct such a blow in which they [America] will be destroyed from within,” Salami stated.

Therefore, Salami belittled the US threats to renew the military option should Iran violate the nuclear deal with the P5+1. “It doesn’t make a difference to us that the US military option is on the table, but they should accept the consequences. Are the Americans in an economic position to manage a war with indefinite severity and unspecified length and extent?” Salami stressed that Tehran was therefore negotiating from a position of strength. “We turned to the negotiating table when we were assured of our military might, and the use of military options by the US is not a new issue to us.” Salami concluded by declaring that there are thousands of brigades ready to confront America both within the Islamic Republic and outside the country. He reminded Iran’s politicians that they must therefore remain steadfast during the negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program and must not give in to US demands or threats.

Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan followed with stern warnings to Iran’s friends and foes. He made several speeches in early February in which he warned that “the Islamic Republic will give a crushing response” to any aggression or military attack against Iran. On February 4, Dehqan addressed a meeting with religious leaders in the holy city of Qom. He dismissed recent US military threats against Iran as “very meaningless” to Iranians, and reminded that “Americans have hatched plots against Iran since the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.” Dehqan stressed that this national defense doctrine is still in effect despite ongoing negotiations. “The Iranian nation has always been resisting against Western arrogant powers, and has never compromised with Imperialism,” he said. “Iranians are always prepared to confront arrogant powers.” He warned Washington against “the catastrophe” that a US military strike against Iran would entail. “Islamic Iran has taught all Muslims and world’s freedom-seeking people that the sole option against the caprice and



the bullying of Western arrogant powers is resistance and steadfastness, and [proved that] true independence and freedom can be achieved only through this way," Dehqan pointed out. "The Iranian nation has always proved through history that it is fully ready to defend the principles of the sacred Islamic establishment and will severely punish aggressors."

On February 9, Dehqan reiterated the Iranian military's ability to respond to an American attack at the behest of Khamenei. "The Iranian Armed Forces are an intertwined and coherent complex that can give a decisive response to any threat at any level and any place under the command of the Commander-in-Chief," Dehqan declared in the national ceremony marking the 35th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. "The enemy can never assess and think of the range of the response given by the powerful and mighty Armed Forces of the Islamic Iran."

On February 10, the two air power commanders of Iran further clarified Tehran's perception of the likelihood of clash with the US. Both addressed the special gathering of Air Force senior officers in Tehran to whom Khamenei had articulated Tehran's new policy and doctrine that stress regional ascent back on February 8.

The first speech was delivered by Brigadier General Hassan Shah-Safi, the Commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF). His key point was that "Iran's military might has already removed the option of military action against the country from enemies' consideration." The rhetoric and threats about strikes no longer represent viable threats. "We are certain that the military might of the Iranian Armed Forces prevents them [Iran's enemies] from even thinking of such things," Shah-Safi said. The primary challenge facing the IRIAF is fighting "future wars [that] will be obviously fought in the sky with massive presence of fighter jets and rockets" and for which the IRIAF is developing both indigenous weapon systems and doctrine. "Proper understanding of the status quo together with movement towards self-sufficiency in military hardware and personnel has evolved us to the level of preparedness that we are fully ready for any aerial confrontation," Shah-Safi stated.

The second speech was delivered by IRGC Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the Commander of the Aerospace Division of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. He dismissed the "US military threats against the Islamic Republic" and stressed that "the US has never had the courage to launch an attack against Iran." Nevertheless, should the need arise, the Iranian air forces are ready to confront and defeat any US threat. "The Iranian nation and Armed Forces are ready to take actions against the United States and enemies that have a greedy eye on the country," Hajizadeh stated. The real threat, Hajizadeh explained, is that the US cannot be trusted because the US "has displayed aggression every time Iran has relied on it." Hajizadeh added that "the Iranian government and nation have no faith in the United States and its allies" because as a rule the US "has not honored its commitments to Iran and many world countries." This legacy of US-Iranian relations dominates Tehran's current expectations from Obama's initiative. "The US has an aggressive nature, which it has expressed several times in its behavior towards Iran. Every time we wanted to come close to them [the Americans], they assailed us with an action," Hajizadeh concluded.

Iran's Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Hassan Firouzabadi delivered an address to senior officers and defense officials gathered in Tehran on February 12 in which he summed up neatly the tenets of Iran's regional defense doctrine. Firouzabadi made two key points. First, the regional strategic ascent of Iran has markedly reduced the likelihood of US-Israeli strike on Iran. Second, Iran would rather have the Gulf States as friends but would not hesitate to strike should they provide the US with bases for anti-Iran aggression.



Firouzabadi stated that although the recent threats of military action against Iran made by US officials should be considered as “political bluff” – Iran is ready to meet these challenges. “We are ready for the decisive war with the US and the Zionist regime,” he stated. However, Firouzabadi did not see any such threat materializing anytime soon. “Over the past decade, they [the US and its allies] brought their forces but came to the conclusion that they can’t attack us and left.” Should the US or Israel nevertheless decide to strike Iran, Firouzabadi had a clear warning. “I say explicitly, if some have delusions of having any threats against Iran on their tables, they need to wear new glasses. There is no military option against Iran on any table in the world.”

Firouzabadi focused on Iran’s relations with regional states, mainly across the Persian Gulf, in this context. Iran seeks peace and friendship, he emphasized, and the only threat might come in the context of these states’ participation in US-Israeli aggression against Iran. “We warn that if our forces come under attack from any territory, we will hit all the positions which belong to that [territory],” Firouzabadi said. He reiterated that Iran harbors no hostility towards any of the countries in the region, but warned repeatedly against their participation in US-led anti-Iran contingencies and conspiracies. “We do not have any hostility towards regional states, but if we are ever attacked from the American bases in the region we will strike that area back,” Firouzabadi stated.

Iran’s new doctrine is becoming very clear. Iran is rising as the regional power. Tehran would rather have the Gulf States accept this ascent. However, Tehran would not tolerate any attempt to stand in Iran’s ascent to new power and glory.

*

The area where Khamenei’s new doctrine is clearly manifested is the northern parts of al-Jazira (central-eastern Syria and western Iraq). There, Iran is spearheading the joint effort of Syria, Iraq, several Shiite militias (including the HizbAllah), and even Ayman al-Zawahiri’s Jihadist High Command to defeat the Takfiri forces led by the DI’ISH (aka ISIS or ISIL in the Western media) both militarily and theologically. With the Assad administration and their allies having all but won the war in Syria – the ascent of the DI’ISH-dominated Jihadist Emirate along the Euphrates Valley from southeast of Aleppo to east of Falujjah and in adjacent desert areas is the sole impediment to the consolidation of Iranian hegemony over Iraq, Syria and Lebanon – that is, all the way to the shores of the Mediterranean.

Tehran’s focus on the Takfiri challenge as part of a US-led global conspiracy reflects the regional strategic ramifications of the ascent of the Takfiris and not just in al-Jazira. The DI’ISH is indeed a huge and explosive wild card in the region. They are real Takfiris – that is, virulently anti-Shiite and not just neo-Salafi Jihadists. The DI’ISH calls for the restoration of a pious Caliphate like in the immediate post-Muhammad days. This means that their ultimate and sacred objective is not only the liberation of Jerusalem, Mecca and Medina – but also the eradication of the sinful and ensinining regimes ruling them (a goal the House of al-Saud dreads). Because of their Takfiri ideology, the DI’ISH refuses all contacts with Iranian intelligence (via the IRGC’s Quds Force) and instead fights all pro-Iranian and Iranian proxy forces (both Sunni and Shiite) in both Syria and Iraq. Hence, unlike other Jihadist entities (like Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham or Zawahiri’s al-Qaida) – the DI’ISH cannot be negotiated with or even pressured via Iran’s Quds Force (the best back door channel to the Jihadist camp in the Arab World). Little wonder Tehran, more than anybody else in the greater Middle East, cannot tolerate the continued existence of DI’ISH.



Indeed, Khamenei's new doctrine considers the gravity of the Takfiri threat as far greater than before. This new perception of the Takfiri threat was raised by numerous senior officials since early February. Most authoritative articulation of the Takfiri threat was delivered by Gholamali Haddad-Adel, Tehran's representative to the Majlis and a former Majlis Speaker, on February 9 in the same Qom event that Dehqan also addressed. The threat goes way beyond the "appalling crimes committed by foreign-backed Takfiri elements in the region" and particularly Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Haddad-Adel explained that the "deviant Takfiri trend" aims to "instigate war between Shia and Sunni" followers of Islam in an effort "to obstruct the Islamic awakening and to prevent unity among Muslims." Moreover, many of the Takfiri forces operating against Iran, he stressed, are components "of plots hatched by the US and the Israeli regime." Other Iranian and Syrian officials concur that "the Western powers and their regional allies – especially Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey – are supporting the militants operating inside Syria."

Concurrently, on February 9, Khamenei personally instructed Major General Qassem Soleimani, one of his closest confidants and the Commander of the IRGC's Quds Force, that Tehran will deepen and escalate the active intervention of both Iranian and other Shiite forces in the fighting against the Takfiris in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, as well as their sponsoring states. The marked escalation in the fighting is to take place, Khamenei instructed, irrespective of the progress in the P5+1 nuclear negotiation or the Geneva II negotiations, and at the expense of the HizbAllah's ability to deploy elite forces on the Israeli-Lebanon border. As well, Soleimani is to expand the Iranian support for all the Palestinians – from the HAMAS and Islamic Jihad to the PLO and their al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades – in preparation for a direct confrontation with Israel and Jordan that might escalate as a result of the struggle with the Takfiris. Soleimani was nominated to be personally responsible for the execution and success of Khamenei's policy of expanded and intensified regional intervention. He was promised virtually unlimited resources – both Iranian and allies' – for the pursuit of Iran's "sacred war fronts" throughout the greater Middle East.

Soleimani immediately started to notify the leaders of Iran's main Shiite militia allies. On the morning of February 10, the first leaders and commanders already announced mobilization against the Takfiris.

The Deputy Secretary General of the HizbAllah, Sheikh Naim Qassem, announced that the HizbAllah will escalate its struggle against "the Takfiri plot" until its total defeat no matter how long it takes. "We will continue our work and remain in the field committed to our political stances. We will remain fighting where we are fighting. We are a resistance wherever we are: a resistance against Israel and its agents and a resistance fighting in Syria in defense of the resistance," he told a commanders rally in Beirut's suburb of Ouzai. "Do not panic or be frightened of them or they will win," Sheikh Qassam told them. "Our heads will remain high, as we combat the Takfiris and those behind them. We will be victorious in the end, wait and see."

In Iraq, members of Asaib Ahl al-Haq and other resistance forces were ordered "to begin to remobilize against Takfiris." The Asaib Ahl al-Haq is one of the Shiite main resistance forces in Iraq that reduced operations as Iran-sponsored forces consolidated control over the country's Shiite heartland. Now, they were instructed to join the anti-Takfiri fight. "We've had to be much more active," announced commander Abu-Sajad of the Asaib Ahl al-Haq. "Those who are trying to incite sectarianism, we have to deal with them."

On February 11, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian stated that Iran was at the forefront of fighting Takfiri terrorism. He contrasted Iran's principled policy with the US sponsorship of Takfiri terrorism in Syria and elsewhere in the greater Middle East. "The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a victim of terrorism, is a forerunner of the real fight against this ominous phenomenon," Abdollahian said.



“This is while the US, following a double-standard policy, uses terrorism as an instrument to further its interests in the region.” Abdollahian then singled out the HizbAllah’s contribution to the struggle against Takfiri terrorism as a regional stabilizing force. “The Lebanese HizbAllah is strongly fighting terrorism in support of the country’s security and stability,” Abdollahian stated.

Most important, however, is the concurrent mobilization of Iran’s Shiite allies in the eastern parts of Saudi Arabia. Back on February 7, Sheikh Hassan Saffar of Qatif delivered a unique Friday Sermon in which he discussed the ramifications of Saudi Arabia’s support for the Sunni Jihadist groups in Syria. He accused the Saudi-sponsored groups of conducting “radical and terrorist acts” against innocent civilians. His harshest criticism was of the Saudi Imams and authorities who glorify these attacks and thus are deceiving Saudi youth to change their ways “toward havoc”.

Sheikh Hassan Saffar emphasized that “Takfiri way of thinking which is clearly observed in education methods, religious orders, religious sermons and public media is providing the base for this radical and terrorist approach for Saudi youths.” He lamented that there are many Sunni clerics in Saudi Arabia who encourage youth to go fight as a “religious duty” in Syria even though the war there is not a Jihad on account of the terrorism against civilians. “Nobody is allowed to be violent toward someone who has different religious or political views. This is terrorism, destruction and aberration,” Sheikh Saffar explained. Riyadh, he added, is permitting “certain regional and international intelligence bodies” to recruit Saudi youth to conduct a “wave of terrorist acts” on their behalf. He reiterated that “these intelligence centers are entering our youths in destructive and terroristic wars” and are using their young minds as “firewoods” to be expended once their tasks are completed.

Sheikh Hassan Saffar blamed the overall socio-political situation in Saudi Arabia for the radicalization of the youth. Fearing opposition, Riyadh has “blocked [the] political scene,” and consequently, “the lack of alternative options” caused widespread disappointment among Saudi youths. This despair makes these youth easily susceptible for recruitment by “ill-minded people who depict a false image of religion for them.” Sheikh Saffar urged the entire Saudi society to mobilize to stop the Takfiri radicalization and those responsible for sponsoring the Takfiris – that is, Riyadh. “Everybody is responsible for these deceived youths; young people whose acts has brought nothing but destruction of their country, tarnishing our religion, violating security and stability and bringing fear anywhere they go,” Sheikh Hassan Saffar concluded.

On February 10, the Friday Sermon of Sheikh Hassan Saffar was broadcasted all over the Iran-sponsored Shiite media worldwide. The House of al-Saud has been put on notice they can’t escape Khamenei’s new doctrine.

*

The game is over. The crux of Khamenei’s new doctrine is that the new era of consolidation and implementation of the ascending Shiite Iran has begun.

Iran is a major regional hegemonic power shielded under, and projecting power via, its de-facto nuclear umbrella. Tehran is cognizant that the international community has accepted a nuclear Iran as demonstrated in the real P5+1 negotiations and not the Western political rhetoric. Iran’s relations with the rest of the greater Middle East are based on the presumption of de-facto nuclear capabilities. This was achieved by Iran’s bellicosity and steadfast unwillingness to compromise on any core issue.

Tehran’s sophisticated, wily and ruthless Bazaar negotiations style overwhelmed an Obama White House already committed to deal-making at all cost and at the expense of the vital interests of America’s closest allies.



The only thing more important for Tehran than Iran's ascent is the mere survival of the Islamic Republic with the Mullahs in power. The moment the Obama White House reached out to the Mullahs and effectively removed the military option – the US became irrelevant to Iran for it no longer constitutes a viable threat to the Mullahs.

The Islamic Republic has always been dominated by the quest to assert the preeminence of Shiite Islam despite their minority status (15% of all Muslims) and reverse their victimhood by taking revenge against their Sunni Arab oppressors. The dramatic transformation of the greater Middle East as the aggregate outcome of the Intifada's makes the attainment of these goals closer than ever. Tehran is seriously contemplating the revival of a Shiite Persian empire – and the on-land corridor to the shores of the Mediterranean via Iraq, Syria and Lebanon is but the first step. The ultimate goal of Tehran is attaining custodianship of the three holiest shrines of Islam in Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem even if by the sword. Nuclear and other long-range strategic weaponry are major instruments toward this end. Hence, there will be no giving up on nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles – and there is nothing foreign powers can do other than topple the Mullahs' regime by force.

The negotiations with the US and the West, and the talks about rapprochement and moderation, are but instruments for calming and cajoling the West. Iran would love to see the sanctions lifted and the economy improving. As well, Iran could use Western technology for overall scientific-technological modernization. But these are secondary objectives that pale by comparison to the strategic ascent. The economic plight of the Iranian downtrodden hasn't reached the point of combustion and social eruption, and Iran can still afford the strategic-military, including nuclear, build-up. Hence, there is no existential economic problem for Tehran – only inconveniences. Thus, Khamenei can talk about economic recovery irrespective of the state of the sanctions.

Meanwhile, Iran has begun implementing the drive on Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. The return of the historic greater Middle East – dominated by traditional grassroots power plays and not constrained by modern states – makes it easier for Iran to pursue its objectives. The first major strategic surge that is virtually attained is the on-land corridor to the shores of the Mediterranean via Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. In the process, Iran has harnessed some of the key minorities that are the key to the region – the Ahwazi Arabs, Alawites, Druze, Maronites, and even the Kurds. The second major step is establishing cooperation with Turkey – the other Muslim non-Arab major power with imperial aspirations. With Erdogan's neo-Ottoman grand designs faltering due to military setbacks in Syria and economic near-collapse – Iran is offering economic survival in return for Erdogan pursuing his neo-Ottoman dreams in the context of the Persian preeminence.

In the east, Iran is exacerbating and radicalizing the Shiites and other non-Sunni Muslims of the Arabian Peninsula in the context of the Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia. The Iran-sponsored Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia was originally declared in May 2009, claims the entire eastern Arabian Peninsula and stretches all the way to Yemen's coasts of the Red Sea. To-date, the subversive, militant and terrorist operations in the Shiite Arab areas and in Yemen have been conducted under the auspices of the Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia. Iran is now markedly increasing the flow of expert operatives, weapons and funds into the areas claimed by the Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia in order to escalate insurrection and subversion. Significantly, all the oil and gas of Arabia is under the areas claimed by the Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia.

Iran's rejuvenated relations with, and all-out support for, virtually all Palestinian and Jordanian Islamist-Jihadist groups, as well as Ayman al-Zawahiri's al-Qaida and other Jihadists, help Iran close in on the ultimate prize – Israel and Saudi Arabia where Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem are located.



Meanwhile, a Jihadist Sinai aflame serves a buffer between historic Egypt on the Nile Valley and the Mashriq. As well, the growing Iranian support for the Jihadist insurrection inside Egypt, as well as the militancy of Sudan and Eritrea, diverts Cairo's attention inward and southwards.

The Takfiris are the only uncontrollable wild card. They are loosely organized in DI'ISH and operate mainly at the heart of Syria and Iraq. The Takfiris cannot and would not deal with the Shiites. The Takfiris are eager to "slaughter the Jews" – as manifested in their rallying cry. The Takfiris hate and despise even more the House of al-Saud which they consider a corrupt apostate entity. Hence, the DI'ISH cannot be relied upon by a desperate and panicky Riyadh to counter Iran. On the contrary, the Takfiris make Tehran look the least of evils.

There is still short time till gloom and doom settles upon the greater Middle East. The Iranian march and ascent have just begun and can still be contained and reversed. This can be achieved solely by emboldening and empowering the indigenous historical foci of power and the regional strategic dynamics they pursue and facilitate. It is still possible to strengthen and empower the Fertile Crescent of Minorities with Israel as the dominant power. The traditional tapestry of Sunni Arab tribes of al-Jazira is still eager to, and capable of, saving itself from both the Shiite and Takfiri onslaughts. These tribes are the natural buffer shielding Saudi Arabia. There are numerous Turks who have not given up on Ataturk's reforms and westernization and would gladly reverse Erdogan's neo-Ottomanism.

However, all of these indigenous forces need help, or at least the ability to act. Most important, these forces must be assured that their achievements and the new regional order they seek to establish will be respected, legitimized and recognized by the international community. Alas, the only forces who can still win the greater Middle East are the very same forces the US-led West presently subjects to derision, hostility and suppression. Sacrificing them on the altar of rapprochement with Iran, as is Obama's wont, will only embolden and hasten the Iranian march westward.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.