



## The Coming Wars with Iran

Yossef Bodansky

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### Abstract

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- \* The new Lausanne framework, or agreement, is meaningless. Intentionally so.
- \* Iran is already a nuclear power that is relying on its nuclear umbrella in order to surge to become the leading regional power – eclipsing and replacing hated Israel. Iran has had nuclear weapons since 1992 and has been a nuclear power since 2004-5.
- \* Despite Khomeini's claim to have established a new form of government – the Islamic Republic of Iran could not obliterate the historic Persian imperial legacy.
- \* The current Iranian mega-surge is the key to the unfolding Khamenei succession process.
- \* The emerging Mackinderian old-new world order put strict limits on the power and influence of Persia. Iranian leaders remain committed to Iran's unrestricted hegemonic ascent – convinced that Obama recognizes this right. Hence, a fateful war between Iran and all regional powers is brewing. The quandary is just how far will Tehran go, and how many of its strategic instruments will Tehran use.

### About ISPSW

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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 impartial to party politics.

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## Analysis

The new Lausanne framework, or agreement, is meaningless. Intentionally so. In stark contradiction with the Obama White House announcement of a historic breakthrough agreement, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif insisted that the two sides only agreed on guidelines for the future negotiations that are scheduled to conclude before June 30. "There is no agreement, and so no commitments," Zarif stated. Tehran's official fact sheet asserts that the Lausanne framework "does not have legal binding" and only provides a "conceptual guide for calibrating and assessing the Comprehensive Plan. On these grounds the drafting of this plan will begin in the near future." Meanwhile, Tehran stresses, Iran can continue pursuing its nuclear program without international interference or constraints.

Iran is already a nuclear power that is relying on its nuclear umbrella in order to surge to become the leading regional power – eclipsing and replacing hated Israel. Iran has had nuclear weapons since 1992 (when the first warheads were purchased from the former Soviet Union) and has been a nuclear power since 2004-5 (when the national command and control system was activated). The current ascent and expansion of Iran are the greatest in more than two and a half millennia. Tehran has no intention of giving up on these achievements. However, the current surge has as much Sunni-vs-Shiite character as Persian-vs-Arab character. In both cases, deep seated and scathing enmities are being awoken – giving the current struggle for the future of the greater Middle East unprecedented virulence.

Despite Khomeini's claim to have established a new form of government – the Islamic Republic of Iran could not obliterate the historic Persian imperial legacy. The Persian geo-strategic imperatives pop-up whenever Islamic Iran is under pressure. One example is the revival of Persia's minority-periphery strategy at the height of the war with Iraq (the crux of the Iran-Contra affair). Another is Tehran's post-Cold War fixation on the access to the Mediterranean to the west and the Silk Road to the northeast – the keys to the global posture of historic Persia. However, the Islamic Republic also sustains the legacy of the Soviet-era alliance of the pariah states (especially with North Korea) – from terrorism sponsorship to criminality (US currency counterfeiting, drugs production and smuggling, etc.). Ultimately, Iran's grand strategy is the adaptation of the historic Persian grand strategy in accordance with Tehran's Mahdist Shiite convictions, the conditions of the contemporary greater Middle East and Asia, as well as the common interests of the alliance of the pariah states.

During the 1980's, Tehran resolved to become a dominant regional power so that the US could no longer exploit Arab states – Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States – in order to attack Iran and pummel its cities with near impunity. Tehran's decision to go nuclear at all cost (and acquire a few warheads from the former Soviet Union) was an ensuing development in the aftermath of the 1990-1 Gulf Crisis and the anti-US operations in the Persian Gulf during the 1980's. However, Tehran's main focus has remained the drive to consolidate regional hegemony on the ground as manifested in the repeated efforts during the 1990's to build a system of alliances with Iraq, Syria and Lebanon to help improve Iran's geo-strategic posture, military capabilities, economic posture (mainly exporting oil and importing forbidden technologies), and anti-US strike capabilities (via sponsored Jihadists).

Tehran was compelled to reassess its grand strategy in the early 21st Century in the aftermath of 9/11. The shock was prompted by the new US-led encirclement of Iran – in Iraq, Turkey, Central Asia, Afghanistan-Pakistan, the Arabian Sea, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Tehran dreaded America's penchant to intervene or invade unilaterally – all the more so given Iran's active support for Osama bin Laden's spectacular strikes



(including the planning of 9/11). Rather than succumb, Tehran resolved to defeat America through a series of regional wars-by-proxy under an umbrella of credible strategic nuclear strike capabilities. Iran went on the still escalating offensive after the August 2004 Iranian victory in Iraq (when Tehran took over the Iraqi Shiite establishment). Tehran's new strategic audacity was manifested in the 2005-6 planning for a global "war on oil". Concurrently, Iran focused on the building and deployment in Iran of ballistic missiles and operational nuclear capabilities (made possible by the strategic cooperation with North Korea and others). By the late-2000's, Tehran started building regional pressure on everybody – nemeses to friends – in order to prevent the consolidation of alliances with the US and the marginalization of Iran.

Tehran committed to and launched the decisive strategic surge in the late-2000's the moment Tehran sensed Washington's hesitation. Tehran's resolve was further heightened after Obama's election and his reaching out to Tehran in pursuit of the Grand Rapprochement. Iran went on the offensive in Central Asia and Afghanistan-Pakistan in cooperation with Turkey. Iran expanded the cooperation with Sudan in surging into Africa. There followed Iran's return to Latin America. Still unfolding is the Iranian exploiting and manipulation of the Arab Awakening in order to control the Arab World and the Greater Middle East.

The current Iranian mega-surge is the key to the unfolding Khamenei succession process. The concurrent strategic and nuclear build-up aims to free Iran from dependence on importation of key components from ally-and-partner North Korea and not in order to acquire new capabilities. Meanwhile, Iran is playing greater roles in the spreading of fratricidal fighting in Syria-Lebanon, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, Sudan, Libya, Egypt, Gaza, Afghanistan-Pakistan, Central Asia, the Caucasus, etc. Concurrently, the ascent of both Russia and China into Central Asia and the greater Middle East has followed their historic-traditional quests for spheres of influence – thus awakening anticipated geo-strategic and geo-economic roles for Persia. Consequently, the Persian legacy element of Iran's ascent has become more pronounced at the expense of the Islamist-Jihadist character in other areas as well. This, in turn, led to the further complication of the love-hate relations with Erdogan's Turkey. More recently, Tehran's implementation of the Iranian ascent has been influenced by Obama's secret negotiations with Tehran in quest for his own legacy and the Grand Rapprochement. Tehran's participation in the nuclear negotiations is a reaction to Obama's cajoling and enticement.

However, there emerges a major impediment to the ascent of Iran – namely, the reawakening of the historic Mackinderian world order (named after Halford Mackinder who best described it at the turn of the 20th Century) and the abandonment of the US-imposed Cold War era world order. The dominant quintessence of this transformation is the adoption by all great powers (mainly Russia, China, India, Germany-led Europe), lesser powers (Israel, Iran, Turkey, Egypt in the Middle East) and regional sub-powers (minorities, tribes, nationalities, urban clans) of respective quests for power posture and influence on the basis of their pertinent geo-strategic and geo-economic legacy aspirations. This development already dominates both the tapestry of powers in the post-Awakening Middle East and the Eurasian Great Powers' maneuvering in Central Asia, the greater Middle East, and the greater Black Sea Basin - to name but a couple of examples.

This emerging old-new world order has put strict limits on the power and influence of Persia. Alas, the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran still refuse to accept this reality and remain committed to the unrestricted hegemonic ascent of Islamist Mahdist Iran (albeit with some Persian characteristics). They are convinced that Obama's Grand Rapprochement initiative recognizes Tehran's right to unconstrained ascent. Unless Khamenei and his successors quickly transform and adapt to the regional constraints of the Mackinderian world order – there emerge and evolve the root causes for a fateful war between a Mahdist Iran determined to realize



Khomeini's aspirations at all cost, and both the powers of the greater Middle East and the Great Powers of Eurasia that are determined to consolidate the new-old Mackinderian world order and won't let Tehran defy the historic posture of Persia as accorded to modern Iran. The quandary is just how far will Tehran go, and how many of its strategic instruments will Tehran use, in this desperate and defiant struggle for the soul of Iran.

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

### About the Author of this Issue

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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