

Iranian Intransigence and Iranian Vulnerability

Comment in newspapers and on the Internet shows no agreement on how the threat Iran's nuclear ambitions pose may be countered. Despite the failure of all diplomatic efforts, there is still a strong lobby against military action, owing perhaps principally to the fear it would not be successful. At the other extreme there are those who, recognising the inability to destroy the research facilities with conventional weapons, insist that small nuclear weapons should be employed. However, Iran could be coerced without the use of nuclear bombs, without committing ground forces, and without western casualties, if Iran's known economic vulnerabilities were exploited.



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That the United States has the ability to terminate Iran's nuclear programme immediately is undeniable. Deep penetration bombs were successfully developed in the nineteen-forties, so although underground, and protected by thick layers of reinforced concrete, the equipment and scientists would be pulverised in the earthquakes these ancient weapons would create if they were armed with the small tactical nuclear weapons that now fit so neatly into them.

It is not difficult to list those governments in the Middle East that would be delighted to see the Iranian nuclear threat eliminated, but elimination with the use of nuclear bombs is unlikely to earn delirious praise even from those who have most to fear from Iran's fanatical leaders. But what is the alternative? The underground facilities are beyond the reach of all conventional air-dropped weapons and high-explosive missile warheads, and many months of detailed analysis have demonstrated that suicidal troops delivered by parachute and helicopter to all known development sites simultaneously would inflict only minor damage on the most important constituents of the programme. Does that then rule out military action?

The Security Council will insist this be answered in the affirmative, while being aware that at some stage, perhaps quite soon, the United States and/or Israel will decide action can be delayed no longer. Sanctions have been tried, and more sanctions will be tried, but sanctions alone, unless they are applied to the critically important economic factors, unless every relevant country trading with Iran observes them, and unless they are fully supported by

selective military action, will not succeed in the short time left before Iran manufactures its first nuclear bomb.

Selective military action? Yes!



Iran has the second largest known oil reserves in the world but has so few refineries (only the ten marked on this map) that it has to import 60 per cent of its petrol. Accordingly, **selective military action** should concentrate on the Iranian refineries as soon as the

blockade on petrol imports begins to bite. The message will be — “The sanctions are in effect, no foreign petrol will arrive until they are lifted, you will immediately stop all your nuclear research programmes and allow the Inspectors unfettered access to whatever they wish to see, and if you do not agree to this, then one refinery will be destroyed each week, starting seven days from now.”

During World War II the theories of “panacea targets” were popular politically, but not among aviators. Politicians viewed them as offering short cuts to end the war, whereas the aircrews believed their importance was recognised by very heavy defensive systems and were thus to be avoided. The ball bearings factories at Schweinfurt were a classic example in which one heavy attack destroyed nearly forty per cent of Germany’s ball bearing manufacturing ability, but about twenty per cent of the bombers and their crews were lost, a heavy price. Post-war comment did little to counter the emotional criticism of “panacea targets”, and the emotions tended to hide the validity of such policies as according with a major principle of war — concentration of effort against key focal points to achieve the destruction of targets that have leverage, that affect over a much wider area the enemy’s will and/or capacity to fight.

The threat of the destruction of ten refineries together with the rigid enforcement of the sanctions preventing the importation of petrol, if the threat of destruction was believed by the Iranians, would halt the Iranian nuclear programme immediately. It might be necessary to demonstrate willingness by destroying one installation, but that should be sufficient. Russia has recently supplied Teheran with a sophisticated anti-aircraft missile defence system, and the country has adequate supplies of shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles, but these would not prevent the refineries’ total

destruction by cruise missiles. The petrol supplies, in the scenario of Iran’s intransigence over its nuclear programme, are a “panacea target” that is valid.

Once our politicians recognised Iran’s weakness in this matter, the threat, if formulated credibly, would contribute to the solution of a much wider range of problems, the persistent interference by Iran in Iraqi affairs being the most obvious, and the capture of the British sailors and Royal Marines the most recent. There would be no need to make a drama of the threat we pose to Iran’s economic life, for the Iranian President is as capable of understanding quietly delivered messages as the Iranian people are of understanding the responsibility for the destruction of their commerce and industry.

All that is necessary is to send again for the Ambassador and to say: “Your Excellency, your country currently imports sixty per cent of its petrol. If all our personnel are not here in London two days from now, you will need to import sixty-four per cent; four days from now you will need to import sixty-eight per cent; six days from now you will need to import seventy-two per cent. However, six days from now the blockade will be in place, and those remaining six refineries will have to supply all your needs. Eight days from now, with only five refineries left, your country will be attempting to run on only one quarter of yesterday’s flow of petrol. That is quite an extraordinary situation for a country that owns the second largest oil reserves in the world, don’t you think? You do understand what I am saying, don’t you? Oh, yes, the Prime Minister has asked me to inform you that if anything unpleasant should happen to our Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel, all your refineries will be destroyed immediately, as indeed they will be if you continue with your nuclear programme. Thank you, Your Excellency, for your kind attention.”