A Disclaimer:

I want to keep my word with you. I know you understand that I receive interesting and timely news items from friends all over the world. Most of these items appear to have prophetic relevance. Others are of particular interest in the field of Science, Health & Nutrition, Devotional themes and some touches of Humor.

With a bit of hesitation, I am forwarding some of these items to friends like you via email. My concern is this: some persons who will receive or read the items I choose to forward will assume that I endorse, approve or believe every "iota," and that I am endorsing the author or source. This simply is not true! As you read, you must be discerning, choosey, discriminating and use common sense. If you are going to quote someone, quote the source -- I am not the source, I am the reporter . . . --CW

The Larger Game in the Middle East: Iran


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DEBKAfile.com / April 12, 2011

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**Give Me Something Nice!**  
Back to Mardi Gras in New Orleans
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The Larger Game in the Middle East: Iran

By DAVID E. SANGER

WASHINGTON  — On a Tuesday afternoon in mid-March in the White House Situation Room, as President Obama heard the arguments of his security advisers about the pros and cons of using military force in Libya, the conversation soon veered into the impact in a far more strategically vital place: Iran.

The mullahs in Tehran, noted Thomas E. Donilon, the national security adviser, were watching Mr. Obama’s every move in the Arab world. They would interpret a failure to back up his declaration that Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi had “lost the legitimacy to lead” as a sign of weakness — and perhaps as a signal that Mr. Obama was equally unwilling to back up his vow never to allow Iran to gain the ability to build a nuclear weapon.

“It shouldn’t be overstated that this was the deciding factor, or even a principal factor” in the decision to intervene in Libya, Benjamin J. Rhodes, a senior aide who joined in the meeting, said last week. But, he added, the effect on Iran was always included in the discussion. In this case, he said, “the ability to apply this kind of force in the region this quickly — even as we deal with other military deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan — combined with the nature of this broad coalition sends a very strong message to Iran about our capabilities, militarily and diplomatically.”

That afternoon in the Situation Room vividly demonstrates a rarely stated fact about the administration’s responses to the uprisings sweeping the region: The Obama team holds no illusions about Colonel Qaddafi’s long-term importance. Libya is a sideshow. Containing Iran’s power remains their central goal in the Middle East. Every decision — from Libya to Yemen to Bahrain to Syria — is being examined under the prism of how it will affect what was, until mid-January, the dominating calculus in the Obama administration’s regional strategy: how to slow Iran’s nuclear progress, and speed the arrival of opportunities for a successful uprising there.

In fact, the Iran debate makes every such chess move in the region more complicated. At the end of this era of upheaval, which the White House considers as sweeping as the changes that transformed Europe after the Berlin Wall fell, success or failure may well be judged by the question of whether Iran realizes its ambitions to become the region’s most powerful force.

Last week, the decisions being made at the White House were about how firmly to back the protesters being shot in the streets in Syria and Yemen, or being beaten in Bahrain. For each of
those, White House aides were performing a mostly silent calculation about whether the Iranians would benefit, or at least feel more breathing room.

Only two and a half months ago, things seemed very different. In January, American officials were fairly confident that they had cornered Iran: new sanctions were biting, the Russians were cutting off sophisticated weaponry that Iran wanted to ward off any Israeli or American attack, and a deviously complex computer worm, called Stuxnet, was wreaking havoc with the Iranian effort to enrich uranium.

But that changed with the arrival of the Arab Spring. Suddenly the Arab authoritarians who had spent the last two years plotting with Washington to squeeze the Iranians — “Cut off the head of the snake,” King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia was famously quoted as advising in the WikiLeaks cables — became more worried about their own streets than the Iranian centrifuges spinning out nuclear fuel at Natanz. And American and European citizens became distracted, even as oil at $108 a barrel undercut many of the sanctions that the White House had hoped would convince Iranian citizens that the nuclear program was not worth its rising cost.

So when the White House sees the region through a Persian lens, what does it look like?

THE LIBYA LESSON

Mr. Obama argued, in his speech on Monday night, that Libya presented a special case — an urgent moral responsibility to protect Libyans being hunted down by the Qaddafi forces and a moment of opportunity to make a difference with what the president called “unique” American capabilities. (Translation: a multitude of technologies, like Tomahawk missiles, reconnaissance and electronic jamming.) Those are the same capabilities that would be critical in any attack on Iranian nuclear sites. The administration’s top officials knew that a demonstration of that ability would not be lost on Iran. But it is anyone’s guess how Iran would react.

“You could argue it either way,” said one official who was involved in the Libya debate and spoke on the condition of anonymity. “Maybe it would encourage them to do what they have failed to do for years: come to the negotiating table. But you could also argue that it would play to the hard-liners, who say the only real protection against America and Israel is getting a bomb, and getting it fast.”

But at least in public, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates told members of Congress not to expect that Iran’s nuclear program would accelerate much because of the attack on Libya — or that Iran’s security forces would crack down even more vigorously on the protest movements they have all but strangled. “My view is that, in terms of what they want to try and achieve in their nuclear program, they’re going about as fast as they can,” he said on Thursday. “And it’s hard for me to imagine that regime being much harder than it already is.”
THE ARAB ALLY CARD

The problem gets more complex when dealing with Arab allies who have little compunction about shooting protesters in the streets, even as they seek to undermine Iran. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are the prime examples. The Saudis see Iran as the biggest threat to their own regional ambitions, and have cooperated in many American-led efforts to hem in Tehran. Yet relations between Washington and Riyadh have rarely been as strained: To King Abdullah, President Obama’s decision to abandon President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt was a sign of weakness, and a warning that he might throw the Saudi leadership under the bus if democracy demonstrations took root there.

Perhaps that explains why there was barely a peep from the White House when the Saudis rolled troops into neighboring Bahrain to help put down the Shiite-majority protests there. Much as Mr. Obama wants to see the aspirations of democracy protesters fulfilled, and urged steps toward reform in Bahrain, he has no desire to see the toppling of the government that hosts the Fifth Fleet, right across the Persian Gulf from Iran.

THE SYRIAN PUZZLE

For years the United States has tried in vain to peel Syria’s president, Bashar al-Assad, away from Iran and to reconcile with Israel. It fears that if his government collapses, chaos will reign, making Syria unpredictable as well as dangerous. It’s a reasonable fear. But in recent weeks the White House has concluded that it has much less to lose than the Iranians do if Mr. Assad is swept away. And, as some in Mr. Obama’s war council have noted, if protesters succeed in Syria, Iran could be next.

ISRAEL’S OPTIONS

All the Arab turmoil has left many Israelis convinced that America and its Arab allies are too distracted to credibly threaten that they will stop the Iranian nuclear ambitions at all costs, even though Mr. Donilon has pledged that “we will not take our eye off the ball.” Inside Israel, a debate has resumed about how long the Israelis can afford to put off dealing with the problem themselves, fed by fears that Iran’s reaction to the region’s turmoil might be a race for the bomb. That could lead to the worst outcome for Mr. Obama — a war between Iran and Israel — and that consideration alone makes the case for the administration to see little room for error in handling the main act.
Saudi Arabia: Second Fukushima if Iranian Bushehr activated in May

DEBKAfile Exclusive Report April 12, 2011, 12:50 PM (GMT+02:00)
Tags:  Saudi king Abdullah  Obama  Bushehr  Fukushima  Stuxnet

Saudi and Kuwait officials have warned the US that if Iran activates its first nuclear reactor at Bushehr in May as planned, there is a good chance it will blow up and the entire Gulf region suffer a nuclear disaster on the scale of the misfortune at Japan's Fukushima and expose millions to radiation contamination.

This issue was urgently raised in recent Saudi-US talks - first on April 4 with US Defense Secretary Robert Gates and again Monday, April 11, with the National Security Adviser to the US President Tom Donilon.

The two high-level US official visits to Riyadh in six days attest to the fierce discord between Saudi King Abdullah and the administration - not just over Iran and its nuclear activity but the entire gamut of US Middle East policy.

When he met the defense secretary, the king took Gates to task, charging that the White House ignored Saudi intelligence evidence passed to the CIA that Tehran and Hizballah were actively fomenting the unrest in Bahrain with a view to igniting parallel disturbances in the eastern Saudi oil regions among the two million Shiites living there. Abdullah complained bluntly that President Obama refuses to budge from his course of engagement with Iran no matter what evidence is put before him.

The king declared angrily that the lax American attitude toward the Islamic Republic's nuclear aspirations places the very existence of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf nations in peril.

Washington had twisted Saudi arms to refrain from challenging the Bushehr nuclear plant when preparations for its activation were completed last year, despite its harmful potential for the region. (debkafile reported last August that similar pressure was applied to Israel.) Even the Iranians, Abdullah told Gates, were scared to switch it on out of concern for their own people.

It was the first time the Saudi monarch linked the Iranian plant with the Japanese nuclear calamity. Tuesday, April 12, Japan raised its severity to maximum seven the same as Chernobyl.

Four months ago, on Jan. 26, Moscow acted outside the rules of conventional diplomacy when the Russian ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin publicly demanded a NATO investigation into the effects of the Stuxnet malware on the Bushehr reactor. He repeated a previous warning to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that, "The virus attack on a Russian-built nuclear reactor in Iran could trigger a nuclear disaster on the scale of Chernobyl."

debkafile's intelligence and Russian sources report that Moscow's concerns focused on the discovery of the unexplained entry of small pieces of metal into the cooling system. This told them that the Iranians had not managed to stop Stuxnet or its impact on the reactor's control systems and there was no guarantee that more malfunctions capable of causing the plant to blow up were not in store.

These warnings were initially heeded: Russian-Iranian preparations to active the reactor were suspended and it was emptied of nuclear fuel.

But then Friday, April 8, the fuel was reloaded. The next day, the head of Iran's Nuclear Energy Commission Fereydoun Abbasi said: "Even before the earthquake and nuclear contamination
crisis in Japan, Iran had accepted the Russian experts' proposal to reconsider the plan to load fuel into the core of the Bushehr power plant's reactor."
Iran had never before referred to the Fukushima in relation to Bushehr.
Our sources add that the Abbasi statement clearly held Moscow responsible for any potential nuclear disaster that beset the Iranian facility. It also confirmed the Saudi claim. Riyadh has accordingly demanded that Washington act without delay and by all means possible to prevent Bushehr from going on line next month..
Such US action would be diametrically opposed to the Obama administration's Iran policy at present. However, failure to meet the Saudi demand would deepen the acute crisis in Saudi-US relations and mistrust sparked by the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak - with effect on other related issues such as Yemen and even Pakistan.

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Give Me Something Nice!
Back to Mardi Gras in New Orleans

If there were no other evidence to tell us how close we are to the end of all things, it would be the rate at which time is hurtling into the past. It does not seem like a year since we were in New Orleans giving away books at Mardi Gras. But there again came the call, “Are you going to give away books during the parades?” And our response, once again: “Absolutely!”

The rolling and packaging of the books commenced. We planned to take thousands of books to an event which realistically could have accommodated hundreds of thousands more; but you do what you can as God makes provision for your efforts—right?

This year we decided to try a new tactic: we packaged a couple of boxes of books, then stood a bagful at bus stops along the parade route of the satellite community of Metairie. Once the parade began, we began our distribution to the crowds; once our supply ran out, we exited the parade and grabbed another bagful at the next bus stop, then went right back into the crowd. Within a couple of hours we had given away thousands of books to the crowds pleading, “Me! Me! Me! Give me something nice.”

A long-time veteran of book distribution, Emile Spalitta, made the suggestion that we try something similar the next day in New Orleans. So we devised a plan to place similar bags of books along the Saint Charles Avenue parade route once the cleaning regiment had gone through. At midnight that night we stood a bag at the corner of each block for almost a mile (the parade was scheduled to travel seven miles, with an estimated attendance of a million people). By 2 A.M. we were ready for bed.

The next day we parked in New Orleans and walked through the teeming crowds to where our first stack of books was waiting for us. The method again worked perfectly. The books were protected inside the big plastic bags, and simply blended in with the paraphernalia that campers and attendees of the parade had left overnight. As the floats started their procession, we began our distribution as the night before. Again, within a few hours we had successfully given away thousands more publications.

Our thanks are due to you, without whom our work would not be possible—thank you!

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~William Hazlitt.
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