

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

In the less emotional environment of day-to-day tactical anti-terrorist warfare, the U.S. response is likely to revolve around highly aggressive covert actions against the military, economic, social and political infrastructures of nations that are known, from intelligence gathering efforts, to be supporting, either directly or indirectly, anti-American terrorism.

These will include such things as crippling attacks of sabotage on critical infrastructures, such as water supply; electrical grids; communication networks, including telephone, radio and television services; all manner and sorts of computer networks; industrial production facilities, particularly oil and gas drilling operations; and critically needed imports, particularly those related to oil and gas operations, and agricultural production.

The severity of damage could range from a total breakdown of electrical power to the incapacitation of a nation's commercial airline by a computer "failure" that destroyed all reservations. Various other types of economic warfare will also be employed, including counterfeiting; constant transactional disruptions, which make routine international trade difficult or impossible; and the spreading of rumors that cause massive swings in the value of a nation's currency.

In addition, actions aimed at discrediting the influence of political leaders will be employed, such as the counterfeiting of "confidential" documents linking them to salacious or illegal acts, and support for insurgency operations both at home and abroad.

Melcher and Soukup, "Some Thoughts On Terrorism," Prudential Securities, *Strategy Weekly*, August 19, 1998.

GO TIME IN IRAN?

About two weeks ago, the opinion page of *The New York Times* published an article by renowned Israeli historian Benny Morris. In that piece, Morris detailed the strong likelihood that Israel will be compelled in the next few months to use "bombs to stave off war," meaning that it will have no choice but to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities in order to prevent the Mullahs from obtaining nuclear weapons and thereby precipitating a larger, immeasurably more destructive war that would undoubtedly feature the annihilation of Israel and, with it, half of the world's remaining Jews. Morris put it this way:

In this Issue

Go Time In Iran?

Subscriptions are available by contacting:

The Political Forum LLC 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842
Phone 540.477.9762 Fax 540.477.3359 melcher@thepoliticalforum.com www.thepoliticalforum.com

Israel will almost surely attack Iran's nuclear sites in the next four to seven months — and the leaders in Washington and even Tehran should hope that the attack will be successful enough to cause at least a significant delay in the Iranian production schedule, if not complete destruction, of that country's nuclear program. Because if the attack fails, the Middle East will almost certainly face a nuclear war — either through a subsequent pre-emptive Israeli nuclear strike or a nuclear exchange shortly after Iran gets the bomb....

... should Israel's conventional assault fail to significantly harm or stall the Iranian program, a ratcheting up of the Iranian-Israeli conflict to a nuclear level will most likely follow. Every intelligence agency in the world believes the Iranian program is geared toward making weapons, not to the peaceful applications of nuclear power. And, despite the current talk of additional economic sanctions, everyone knows that such measures have so far led nowhere and are unlikely to be applied with sufficient scope to cause Iran real pain, given Russia's and China's continued recalcitrance and Western Europe's (and America's) ambivalence in behavior, if not in rhetoric. Western intelligence agencies agree that Iran will reach the "point of no return" in acquiring the capacity to produce nuclear weapons in one to four years.

Which leaves the world with only one option if it wishes to halt Iran's march toward nuclear weaponry: the military option, meaning an aerial assault by either the United States or Israel. Clearly, America has the conventional military capacity to do the job, which would involve a protracted air assault against

Iran's air defenses followed by strikes on the nuclear sites themselves. But, as a result of the Iraq imbroglio, and what is rapidly turning into the Afghan imbroglio, the American public has little enthusiasm for wars in the Islamic lands. This curtails the White House's ability to begin yet another major military campaign in pursuit of a goal that is not seen as a vital national interest by many Americans.

Which leaves only Israel — the country threatened almost daily with destruction by Iran's leaders. Thus the recent reports about Israeli plans and preparations to attack Iran (the period from Nov. 5 to Jan. 19 seems the best bet, as it gives the West half a year to try the diplomatic route but ensures that Israel will have support from a lame-duck White House).

Reading such a piece from such a man as Morris is, to put it mildly, disconcerting. Morris makes a compelling case; a deeply disturbing, wearily pessimistic, extraordinarily compelling case. But is it an accurate one?

In answering that question, we must first ask a couple of others. For starters, does Morris know what he's talking about [sic]? Do we have reason to believe that he understands the capabilities and the motives of the relevant parties?

The answer to this question is an unconditional yes. To say that Benny Morris is an expert on Israeli military and intelligence matters is to devalue the term "expert." It is distinctly possible that no other civilian in the world — certainly no other academic or journalist — knows as much about Israel's military and intelligence capabilities as Morris. He wrote the book on Israel's "secret wars," literally (*Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services*, coauthored with Ian Black). In short then, if Morris says that Israel is completely out of options, excepting, of course, the

overt military one, then one would do well to believe him, or at least to believe that he knows whereof he speaks.

But, does this necessarily mean he's right? Is he, in other words, being completely frank with his readers? Here our answer is a little less clear.

Certainly, we wouldn't want to suggest that Morris is stretching the truth. After all, he is merely offering his opinion as to what might happen. And one can hardly lie when giving an opinion. Still, we can't help but wonder if Morris is engaging in a bit of misdirection.

Benny Morris is one of those rare political creatures, nearly universally respected for his scholarship while being nearly universally despised for his politics. At one time, he was a darling of the political left, the biggest and most important of the "New Historians," the historical revisionists who described Israel's founding and early years harshly and reprovably, unafraid to puncture the myths about its military and intelligence apparatuses and to describe their operations, warts and all.

But Morris is also the very personification of Irving Kristol's definition of a neoconservative, that is "a liberal who was mugged by reality." Since the onset of the second *Intifada*, he has grown disillusioned with the peace process and with the idea that Israel can negotiate rationally or peacefully with its enemies. He has spent the last several years wondering openly why his former friends on the left can't understand that they and their fellow countrymen are the good guys in this struggle, that Israel is fighting for its survival, while its enemies are waging a political and religious war of extermination against them.

In actuality then, Morris is probably naïve enough to believe that there is still a chance that Iran's leaders will, in his words, "rethink their gamble and suspend their nuclear program." At the same time, he may be trying to stave off that which he suggests is inevitable by sowing fear that all alternative courses are unlikely.

What alternatives, you ask? Well, of course, there is the fatally naïve hope that the right combination of carrots and sticks may dissuade the Iranians from pursuing their self-destructive ends. But more realistically, there is the hope that either Israel or the United States will bring this confrontation to a suitable end without having to resort to overt and public acts of aggression.

Now we have been predicting this "soft" course of action for several years. But we must admit that our confidence in being able to read President Bush's forthcoming actions in Iran has not been high ever since we made the erroneous prediction just before Bush's reelection that he would move quickly and decisively against Iran after the election, employing military force if necessary. Nevertheless, we believe there is some evidence that our fall back position might be right. Consider, for example, the following, written by Con Coughlin and published last week by *The Telegraph* of London.

For an organisation that prides itself on being a well-run administrative machine, the leadership of Iran's Revolutionary Guards is having a rather testing time. It's not just last Saturday's mysterious explosion in a suburb of Tehran that killed 15 people that is causing the leadership sleepless nights, although the nationwide news black-out imposed immediately afterwards does suggest the Revolutionary Guards, the storm troops of Iran's Islamic Revolution, are rattled.

Details are only now starting to reach the outside world, and it looks increasingly like sabotage was responsible for devastating a military convoy as it traveled through Khavarshahar. The company responsible for moving the equipment, LTK, is owned by the Revolutionary Guards and is suspected of being involved in shipping arms to Lebanon's Hizbollah Shia Muslim militia, which is trained and funded by Tehran....

What really concerns Iran's leadership is that the incident is the latest in a long line of unexplained explosions.

In May, officials blamed British and American agents for an explosion at a mosque in Shiraz that had just finished staging an exhibition of Iran's latest military hardware. Last year more than a dozen Iranian engineers were killed while trying to fit a chemical warhead to a missile in Syria.

A few months earlier, a train reported to be carrying military supplies to Syria was derailed by another mysterious explosion in northern Turkey. It is highly unlikely that these incidents are unrelated, which has only served to deepen the mood of fear and suspicion gripping the Revolutionary Guards' leadership.

Coughlin continues by noting that Seymour Hersh, the unreconstructed-leftist national security reporter for *The New Yorker* recently wrote about the possible source of these explosions. To wit:

Late last year, Congress agreed to a request from President Bush to fund a major escalation of covert operations against Iran, according to current and former military, intelligence, and congressional sources. These operations, for which the President sought up to four hundred million dollars, were described in a Presidential Finding signed by Bush, and are designed to destabilize the country's religious leadership. The covert activities involve support of the minority Ahwazi Arab and Baluchi groups and other dissident organizations. They also include gathering intelligence about Iran's suspected nuclear-weapons program.

Clandestine operations against Iran are not new. United States Special Operations Forces have been conducting cross-border operations from southern Iraq, with Presidential authorization, since last year. These have included seizing members of Al Quds, the commando arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, and taking them to Iraq for interrogation, and the pursuit of "high-value targets" in the President's war on terror, who may be captured or killed. But the scale and the scope of the operations in Iran, which involve the Central Intelligence Agency and the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), have now been significantly expanded, according to the current and former officials.

We should note here that Seymour Hersh is the one person in the world who has been wrong about the Bush administration's plans for Iran more often and more consistently than we have. He and his dependably "unnamed" sources have been trying to pre-empt "the warmonger Bush" for so long now that it's hard to know if he is merely crying wolf again or if he has actually found some news worth reporting. But even a blind squirrel will, as they say, occasionally find an acorn. And we can't help but think that this time, against all odds, Hersh has finally found his nuts, so to speak.

Both President Bush and Vice President Cheney have repeatedly insisted that they will not leave office without doing something to prevent the Mad Mullahs from obtaining the nukes they need both to become the regional hegemon and to initiate their eschatological fantasies. And though we and others have wondered openly why they would make such promises and then do nothing to keep them, the fact is that we are privileged neither to the precise nature and scope of constraints on their action nor the precise nature and scope of that action. All of which is to say that past performance is not an indicator of future

results. Or to put it another way: that Bush and Cheney have not yet dealt with the Mullahs, doesn't necessarily mean they won't.

What we know for sure is that a low-intensity conflict of sabotage and subterfuge requires the full participation of both the Special Forces and the intelligence community. And up until recently, both entities were preoccupied in Iraq. And therein lies the bottom line. We've been wrong before. Hersh has been monumentally wrong before. Bush and Cheney have appeared feckless before. And so on. But on all such previous occasions, the forces necessary to wage a low-intensity war against Iran were engaged elsewhere. Today, by contrast, the war in Iraq is essentially won. Moreover, scads of Iranian Revolutionary Guards have been captured in Iraq or elsewhere and thoroughly interrogated, chief among them being Ali Rez Asgari, the former head of the Revolutionary Guards (and one of the founding fathers of Hezbollah), who either defected or was captured in Turkey and has been in U.S. custody for just over a year now.

As almost anyone who has discussed this matter (including Morris, Coughlin, and Hersh) will concede, the American public is in no mood for outright and open conflict with Iran or anyone else right now. There is undoubtedly great relief and pride in the state of affairs in Iraq, but there are growing concerns about Afghanistan and, regardless, the American public is war-weary.

Additionally, the idea of pushing sanctions and utilizing international diplomacy has been almost thoroughly discredited. Not only have the Europeans been unable to muster international condemnation of the nuclear-obsessed Mullahs, but they have even been unable to persuade the Chinese and Russians to cooperate on such mundane and uncomplicated matters as the mass-slaughter that is taking place in Zimbabwe. The "international community," such as it is, is incapable of concerted action, not that such action, even if it were possible, would have much effect in the case of Iran.

Copyright 2008. The Political Forum. 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842, tel. 540-477-9762, fax 540-477-3359. All rights reserved.

Information contained herein is based on data obtained from recognized services, issuer reports or communications, or other sources believed to be reliable. However, such information has not been verified by us, and we do not make any representations as to its accuracy or completeness, and we are not responsible for typographical errors. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute only current opinions which are subject to change without notice.

All of which is to say that there are precious few options still available to those who wish to prevent the crypto-Millenarian Iranian Mullahs from obtaining nuclear weapons. And that brings us back to Benny Morris. Morris too argues that there are few options left, or rather that there is but one option left. We think that he is wrong and, given his knowledge of the subject matter, we suspect that he probably knows he is wrong and that there is still the possibility of achieving a peaceful end to this conflict by achieving regime change in Iran by means of low-intensity war against the Mullahs.

That said, predicting a covert war is difficult and foolhardy business (not that that's going to stop us). For one thing, it's almost impossible for the forecaster to prove that he or she is right. Such is the nature of "covert" action. Moreover, drawing attention to covert action would tend to mitigate its effectiveness – which we suppose explains both why Morris is *unwilling* to do so and why Hersh is *willing* to. It would be ludicrous even to think that Morris is part of an active conspiracy to hide covert action against the Iranian regime. But we think it's more than believable that his ultimate motives are similar to the motives of those who are, in fact, directing such a conspiracy (assuming one exists). And good for him.

Nobody wants the United States or Israel to have to take overt military action against Iran. But in the absence of some other developments, one or the other will all but certainly have to do so. For now, though, Benny Morris holds out the slim hope that the Iranians will come to their senses, or at least he does so publicly. And we hold out hope that the signs of low-intensity action against the Iranian regime are the real deal this time.

Put the bombers on stand-by. And put the Special Forces on alert. It's go time.