

The United States and Iran: A Tragic Friendship

By William R. Polk

The United States has assembled the most powerful military force ever known on the borders of Iran. That force is just a step – or a misstep – away from war. Each morning as I awake, I rush to the television to find out if it has been taken. How we have reached this shadow zone between reality and nightmare is the subject of this article. I will approach it as a historian, because I think that without understanding what has happened between America and Iran over the last century, it is impossible to understand the hatred and fear we see today.

Do we have the good sense to learn from this experience? Those who believe we must learn have to consider the sober words of the great German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Hegel, that “peoples and governments never have learned anything from history or acted on principles deduced from it” and compare them to the warning of the great Spanish philosopher, George Santayana, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

I will divide my account into six sections: first, the relationship between Iran (then usually known as Persia) and America before 1953; second, the overthrow by America of the first democratically elected Iranian government in that year; third, America’s role in the following quarter-century reign of Shah Mohammed Pahlavi; fourth, the revolution of 1978-1979 and the regime established by Ayatollah Asadollah Khomeini; fifth, the changes occasioned by the Iraq-Iran war (September 1980-July 1988) and the American attack on the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001; finally, sixth, the origins of the current crisis that have us poised on the brink of a catastrophic war.

I

Before the end of the Second World War, the United States government played no role in Iranian affairs. Russia and Britain dominated the country. As much opposed to one another as they were, they wanted to keep it for themselves, so they wanted it weak and divided. Consequently, when in 1911 the Iranian Parliament hired an American banker to help reorganize Iran’s chaotic finances, they were furious. The Russians actually bombarded the Parliament and, together with the British, forced the banker, Morgan Shuster, to leave. So horrified was he by Anglo-Russian imperialism that he wrote a book called *The Strangling of Persia*.

At the end of the First World War, Iran fell into a period of chaos from which the leader of a Russian-sponsored Cossack force emerged as the country’s strong man. It was his skill in handling the revolutionary weapon of the time, the Maxim machinegun, that gave him prominence within the military and he became known as “Reza Khan Maximi.” By 1915, he had risen to the rank of colonel. Steadily hoisted by his military reputation and by adroit marriages, he rose through the government until, in 1925, he ousted the previous dynasty and made himself shah.

Meanwhile, Iran had become one of the world’s greatest producer of petroleum. Oil had been discovered in 1907 and was developed by a company largely owned by the British government. Under that company, the oil-producing area in the southwest became virtually a separate state. Heavily dependent upon oil to power the Royal Navy and upon oil revenues to sustain its Empire, Britain carefully “guided” Iranian affairs. This was not difficult since, while

Iran received only a small portion of the profits of the company, what it got was the primary revenue of its government.

Always in desperate need of revenue, in 1922, the Iranians employed another American banker, Arthur Millspaugh, to do what Shuster had tried to do. When he arrived, he found virtually every department of the Iranian government under the control of one or other European power. Only the American government was conspicuously absent. The Persians, he found, believed that Americans were disinterestedly motivated by “a strong desire to insure in a practical way the independence and integrity of Persia.” That feeling was encouraged by the work of an American philanthropy, the Near East Foundation, which promoted rural education. Persians already had developed a love affair with the American cinema; it made America appear a dream land rather than a greedy nation-state like the Iranians saw the British and the (by-then Soviet) Russians.

Fearing and hating the European powers, Iran declared itself neutral in World War II, but the British and the Russians regarded this as virtually an act of war and invaded the country. The Iranian government surrendered and on September 16, 1941 its king, Reza Shah, abdicated. The next day his young son Mohammed became shah. Northern Iran was then occupied by the USSR and the south by the British. Iran became the highway along which American equipment and supplies were sent to keep the USSR from collapse. This program gave America new influence which President Roosevelt used to get its British and Russian allies to affirm Iranian sovereignty at the Tehran Conference in November 1943. That was the first positive action by the American government in Iranian affairs.

Under President Truman’s “Act for International Development,” better known as “Point Four,” the United States began an aid program designed to help Iran rise from poverty. This act of friendship encouraged Iranians to believe that they could be fully sovereign in their own country. The key, their leaders realized, was control of their single significant economic asset, oil. What turned that attitude into action was the announcement by the American oil company, ARAMCO, on January 2, 1951 that it had reached an agreement to split profits equally with Saudi Arabia.

The British were horrified by ARAMCO’s action and made clear their absolute refusal to share their profits equally with Iran. Consequently, two months later, the Iranian Parliament voted to nationalize oil. It was this issue that made Mohammed Mossadeq, who had led the fight for nationalization, Iran’s first elected prime minister.

II

Reacting to Mossadeq’s nationalization of what was virtually a British state inside Iran, the British sent their fleet into the Persian Gulf, threatening to bombard or invade Iran, and instituted a drastic program of sanctions which prevented Iran from selling its oil abroad or importing goods. These actions resulted in massive unemployment and severe privation. This was truly what Shuster had written about thirty years before, “the strangling of Persia.”

The American government made a rather feeble effort to broker a settlement but neither side was prepared to compromise. Iranian patriotism was bolstered by the desperate need for revenue and the British were determined to force Iran to back down. But, exhausted by the War, the British empire was breaking up and England was virtually bankrupt. So the British moved to motivate the Americans, as one of their officials said, “to pull British chestnuts [the oil] out of the [Iranian] fire.”

The way to get America to take over Britain's imperial role, in the then prevalent atmosphere of the Cold War, was to raise the specter of Communism. That was what the senior British Secret Intelligence (MI6) officer for the Middle East, C.M. Woodhouse, did. He flew to Washington and convinced the new elected president, Dwight Eisenhower and his about-to-be Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, that Iran was a "domino," about to fall into the Soviet Union.

Dulles needed little convincing; he saw the Soviet hand in every corner of the earth. So he arranged that his brother, Alan Dulles, then head of the CIA appoint the grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, Kermit Roosevelt, to overthrow Mossadeq. On behalf of the CIA and MI6, Roosevelt began a program of "black" propaganda in which he spread counterfeit materials purporting to show that Mossadeq and his newly elected National Front were communist agents intent on attacking Islam. As this propaganda assault gained momentum, Roosevelt sneaked into Iran and made contact with army and security officers and with the shah. When the shah then panicked and fled the country in August 1953, Roosevelt was undeterred. He was determined to "win" with or without the Shah. Handing out large amounts of cash, he bribed, cajoled and threatened his way into a military *putsch* in which Mossadeq was overthrown and arrested while the Shah was returned to Iran and reinstalled in power.

As one of the most able American officials specializing on Iran, Gary Sick, later wrote, the *coup* "abruptly and permanently ended America's political innocence with respect to Iran...the belief that the United States had single-handedly imposed a harsh tyrant on a reluctant populace became one of the central myths of the [Iranian-American] relationship..."¹

III

Having put the Shah back in power, America was committed to him. As a later American ambassador wrote, "Our destiny is to work with the shah." For America during the next 26 years, Iran became the shah and the shah became Iran.

Consequently, the Shah's character is as important as American interests and policies in understanding the Iranian-American relationship. From my meetings with him and the observations of others, I came to see his personality outlined by three experiences. Growing up under the shadow of his forceful and violent father, of whom he was terrified, he became indecisive and furtive. Installed on the throne by the British and Russians the day after they forced his father, Reza, into exile, he was forced to participate in what was essentially the political "murder" of his father in order to possess what had been virtually his father's "bride," Iran. Thus, he suffered what could be described as an Oedipus complex. And having panicked and fled the country when confronted by the Mossadeq crisis, he struggled to overcome his image of personal cowardice. The effects were visible throughout his reign: he would alternate weakness with cruelty, secretiveness with grandiose display, contempt with fear. In one of my meetings with him, I saw him treat even his closest supporters with such contempt that there could not have been any sense of loyalty to him. Events proved that there was not. When he finally fled Iran, there was a spontaneous outburst of joy in the streets of Tehran.

Persians of all classes regarded him as a puppet of America. The shah struggled against that image. While projecting an image of imperial majesty, he put his hand into America's pocket. In the first decade after the 1953 coup, he took nearly \$1 billion in aid from America. Even more than money he wanted military equipment. He thought it would give him real power, but also, like a small boy with toys, he delighted in warplanes, tanks and warships and paraded

¹ *All Fall Down* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1985), 7.

before me and other visitors his detailed knowledge of their speed, performance and power. And, stimulated by representatives of what President Eisenhower had called “the military-industrial complex,” he embarked on a twenty-year shopping binge.

During the Eisenhower administration, America turned a blind eye to his violations of human rights, but when John F. Kennedy became president, he sought to put Iranian-American relations on a more democratic – and sustainable -- basis. As a member of the Policy Planning Council, I played a role in that effort. My colleagues and I encouraged the Shah to spread the benefits of Iran’s growing revenues more equitably among the people, to curtail the rush toward militarization and to open the government to a political process. The Shah was furious. In one meeting, he told me that he had identified me as the principal enemy of his regime. And he set out to do precisely the opposite of what my colleagues and I had recommended.

Particularly after President Nixon and Henry Kissinger visited him in 1972, his passion for armaments became a frenzy. Within less than five years, he had placed orders for about \$10 billion worth of the most sophisticated equipment America was then producing. Ironically, it was due to Mossadeq’s nationalization of oil that the Shah had the means to engage in this massive military program. But, instead of urging him to spend less on guns and more on the real needs of his people, as I had done in the Kennedy administration, Kissinger issued instructions that the Shah was to be given anything he wanted. Ultimately, this would also include even nuclear technology and equipment – thus setting the stage for today’s crisis.

Once put forward, this military buildup was almost impossible to stop as Jimmy Carter was to find when he became president in 1977. Carter had campaigned for a reduction of American arms sales abroad but was almost immediately hit with demands by the Shah for a whole fleet, some 300, of the latest American jet fighters together with supporting aerial control systems and sophisticated ships, radar and other forms of weapons. Reluctantly, Carter agreed to most of what the Shah demanded.

Less dramatic than the military build-up but ultimately far more important was that the Shah was unable or unwilling to see that his programs were leading him away from the real needs of Iranian society. Most Iranians were little touched by his grandiose military ambitions or by the program of economic development. This program was planned, organized and run by Americans and American-trained Iranians. So massive was its impact that, as Millspaugh had observed in 1922, virtually every department of government was influenced or even dominated by foreigners; then the foreigners were European but in the 1960s and 1970s they were mainly Americans or American-trained Iranians.

The development program pushed Iran into one of the world’s fastest rates of growth. Judged by this, it was a spectacular success. But the impact was uneven. Those who most benefited *economically* felt increasingly *politically* deprived. As the new American-educated elite – some 60,000 Iranian students were in America at any one time -- realized their value to Iran, the Shah refused to allow them to participate in running their country. In their growing anger, they increasingly listened to the leaders of the opposition. Their choice was the secular Left. Meanwhile, most Iranians remained poor, frustrated and illiterate. Many were unemployed and some even hungry. For them neither armaments nor grandiose projects mattered. They followed the one major national institution the Shah had not coöpted, the religious establishment.

The religious establishment was, for Americans, the least understood part of Iran. When, in 1964, a young officer at the American embassy in Tehran wrote an analysis of it, he was reprimanded by the ambassador for wasting his time. Only one book by an American scholar, published well after the Revolution, made a serious attempt to understand the culture of the religious community from which Ayatollah Asadollah Khomeini came,² and probably less than a dozen Americans had read Khomeini's plan for the government he wanted to install – and did install -- in Iran.³ As the Iran specialist on the National Security Council commented,⁴ “Americans approached Iran from a position of almost unrelieved ignorance.”

It wasn't only Americans who were ignorant. The Shah made no attempt to understand them or their appeal to Iranians. He openly despised his people and particularly the *mullahs* – the clerical establishment -- whom he called “a bunch of dirty old men.” Regarding them as weak, backward and contemptible, he had the government-controlled press ridicule them and imprisoned or exiled many their leaders. When Iranians used the only means they had to express their feelings, religious demonstrations, the Shah ordered his troops to fire on them. The clash that would lead to the revolution took place in the holy city of Qom in January 1978; Ayatollah Khomeini was then in exile but the senior religious leader then in Iran, Ayatollah Shariatmadari, denounced the government as anti-Muslim. Undeterred, the Shah ordered the army to continue. In one particularly tragic event, the army fired into a crowd which was demonstrating on the occasion of the end of the month of religious fasting and killed hundreds.

American officials did not understand the sequence of popular protest, army massacre and religious denunciation that was turning opposition into revolution. The sequence was unlike other revolutions and was distinctively Iranian. Forty days after each clash with the army and police, friends and relatives of those killed held ceremonies of mourning. Some turned violent; they, in turn, were fired upon. Each new incident produced more “martyrs” whose deaths occasioned further “Forty Day” mournings in what became a nation-wide cascade of growing sadness and anger. Soldiers began to refuse to fire on demonstrators who were their neighbors, friends and relatives. Some joined the demonstrators. With remarkable rapidity, the institutions of the state began to collapse.

Under pressure, the Shah's latent indecisiveness paralyzed him. One day he proclaimed his determination to suppress the rebellion and the next day, that he would never use his army against his people; one day he appointed a new and presumably resolute army commander and the next deprived him of authority; one day he talked of creating a new government and the next of leaving the country; one day he even talked of inviting Khomeini into the government and the next of having him assassinated. Repeatedly, he turned to the Americans not so much for advice as for the decision he could not make. But Americans could not make it for him. The closest they came was when the American ambassador, on his own authority and without the approval of President Carter, urged the Shah to appoint a group of secular politicians who, as events soon made clear, had little political power.

Events then followed in such quick succession that no one, the Shah, the army, the *mullahs* or the secular government, could control them. In a last ditch effort to avoid what was

² Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1986).

³ *Velayat-i Faqih* or *The Rule of the Religious Jurist*. On the manifestation of Khomeini's early thinking see Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1985).

⁴ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Fateful Encounter with Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1985).

predicted to be a bloodbath, the American government asked the French government to broker an accommodation with Ayotallah Khomeini who was then living in exile near Paris. Khomeini was not interested in accommodation. He was certain that his God-ordained mission would succeed. All he had to do was to wait.

He did not have to wait long. On January 16, 1979, for the second time in his reign, the Shah went into exile and two weeks later, at the invitation of the Shah's last government, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran. He was greeted by delirious throngs of millions. The vaunted imperial army, on which the Shah had lavished so much money and favor, simply faded away. Khomeini had triumphed.

America, at least in the eyes of Khomeini, had hit bottom. He referred to President Jimmy Carter as "the vilest man on Earth." Obviously, there was nothing America could do in Iran, but what to do with the Shah became a pressing problem.

As much as it had disagreed with the Shah's policies, the Carter administration felt honor-bound to offer him asylum. The Shah accepted. However, perhaps remembering his early flight and return to power in 1953, he decided to stop in a nearby country. He did not believe that the *mullahs* could retain power. Egypt was to be the first stage of a series of moves that would take him through Morocco to the Bahamas, Mexico and Panama. By then the new government of Iran was demanding he be returned to face trial for treason. The Carter administration would not acquiesce in that but, trying to reestablish a relationship with Iran, did not want him to settle in America. It allowed him entry only for emergency medical treatment. He finally returned to Egypt where he was to die of cancer in July 1980.

Meanwhile, Iranian hostility to the Shah was redirected to America. On November 4, 1979, furious that the Shah had been admitted to America where they proclaimed that he had hidden billions of dollars of money stolen from Iran, a group of radical youths attacked the American embassy and took its remaining staff hostage.

Seizure of the diplomatic personnel as hostages was unprecedented and various parties attempted to negotiate their release. Even the newly appointed Iranian foreign minister, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, tried but for his efforts Khomeini speedily dismissed him. The Palestine Liberation Organization, PLO, while no friend of America, sent a delegation to Tehran and managed to get 13 hostages released. But 53 remained. Iranian officials, constantly overruled by Khomeini, could do nothing to protect or even observe them. No one was empowered to negotiate their release.

Over the hostage issue, the Carter administration came under severe pressure. But it was not the only problem America was having. Crises seldom occur in isolation and this one seemed part of a larger breakdown. Viewed from Washington, the whole Middle East appeared to be teetering on the brink of catastrophe. On November 20, 1979, presumably because Saudi Arabia was an American ally, Iranian pilgrims attacked the great mosque in Mecca; the next day, a mob tried to burn down the American embassy in Pakistan and the following week there was an attack on the American embassy in Libya. Three weeks later, just after Christmas, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. To Americans, it seemed as though Khomeini had pulled the cotter pin out of American foreign policy.

Why, the public demanded, had the American position in the world fallen apart? Initially, all eyes focused on the hostages, How to get them released engaged Carter and all his advisers for months. His adversaries, led by Henry Kissinger, organized a campaign to charge

Carter with “losing” Iran as Right Wing Americans had charged Truman thirty years before with losing China.

Something had to be done. The administration’s first steps were conventional: banning Iranian oil imports and freezing Iranian assets. An American aircraft carrier battle group was sent to the area. But these moves were as ineffectual when used by the Americans in 1979-1980 as they had been when used by the British in 1952-1953. Unofficial French emissaries and neutral governments, including Algeria, were engaged without success. American emissaries, including Ramsey Clark, a former attorney general, and William Miller, a highly respected Senate aide and diplomat, were sent to discuss an accommodation, but Khomeini ordered that they not be received. Even accepting Iranian government demands produced no movement because Khomeini vetoed each agreement. So the Carter administration, divided as it was between the “dovish” Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, and the “hawkish” director of the National Security Council, Zbigniew Brzezinski, was driven to consider military action. In April 1980 Carter ordered a small military force to rescue the hostages.

The mission failed long before it got near Tehran. That failure drove the Americans back to negotiations and the precipitous decline of the Iranian economy in the chaos of the revolution drove the Persians back to diplomacy. Through the German government, members of Khomeini’s circle agreed to swap the hostages for blocked Iranian funds if the U.S. government promised not to intervene in Iranian affairs. The hostage crisis was about to be resolved, but the long and disorderly process resulted in the defeat of Jimmy Carter in the 1980 presidential election. The hostages were finally released in the incoming Reagan administration in January 1981. The episode would color American attitudes toward Iran to the present day.

V

During the last months of the hostage crisis, Iran became involved in a war with Iraq. For years, the two states had squabbled over their frontier. That issue was settled in Iran’s favor in the time of the Shah. But other issues remained. Because Iraq’s population was largely of the same sect as Iran’s, Shia Islam, and because Shiis were disadvantaged in Iraq, the Iranians urged them to revolt and overthrow the Iraqi government. Fearing that they would, Saddam Hussain began, arresting, imprisoning and even executing their leaders, closing their religious schools and banning their preaching. Maintaining that they were not really Iraqis but Persians, Saddam drove about 20,000 across the frontier. Finally in September 1980, this mutual suspicion, anger and violence erupted in a full-scale war.

Fought along a 1,169 kilometer front, the conflict resembled the ruthless, static trench warfare of the First World War. As casualties mounted into the hundreds of thousands, the smaller Iraqi population began to falter.

Iraq was in danger of being overrun by human waves of Iranian soldiers, Revolutionary Guardsmen of the *Pasdaran-i Inqilab* and even unarmed young “willing martyrs” of the *Saziman-i Basij*. An Iranian conquest of Iraq was an outcome that the Reagan administration could not countenance, so it began to aid Iraq. Provision of satellite images of the battlefields enabled the Iraqi army to anticipate and defeat Iranian maneuvers, costing the Persians tens of thousands of casualties. America also gave Saddam arms, money and diplomatic support and encouraged its allies to cut off Iran’s sources of arms supply. Fearing Iranian attempts to interdict oil tanker passage down the Gulf, the US sank most of the Iranian navy and even shot down a civilian passenger plane. Ultimately, in July 1988 Iraq and Iran realized that they had both lost the war -- both were exhausted -- so they accepted a UN sponsored cease fire.

At the same time, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was winding down. The last Russian troops would leave in February 1989. They would be replaced by Afghan “warlords” who engaged in the drug trade and then by Sunni Muslim fundamentalists of the *Taliban*. For different reasons, the Iranian policy toward them paralleled the American; so after years of hostility, the two governments moved in unspoken accord.

Against the druglords, Iran engaged in a virtual war in which it suffered about the same casualties as America would suffer occupying Iraq, 3,500 killed and 15,000 wounded, and built huge barriers and dug hundreds of kilometers of trenches along its frontier with Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁵ When America attacked Afghanistan in October 2001, the Iranians provided major assistance against the Taliban.⁶ But these shared interests did not result in better relations between America and Iran.

VI

Part of the reason why was that a new ideological force arose in America. Led by a group known as the Neoconservatives, it tapped into an American religious fundamentalism that, *mutatis mutandis*, resembled Iranian Shia fundamentalism. Both the Iranians and the Americans were motivated by an intense new form of national, cultural and religious assertiveness. The Neoconservatives believed that since America was the “sole surviving superpower,” it should remake the world in its image, using its overwhelming military power preemptively to force other nations to do its bidding.⁷ They profited from the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in 2001 to become the ideologues of the Bush administration. They hated Iran as a Muslim country and regarded it as an enemy of the country with which they emotionally identified, Israel. Under their guidance, President Bush designated Iran as one of the three partners in the “Axis of Evil.”

To justify this revolutionary policy, the Bush administration brought to the fore the charge that first Iraq and subsequently Iran were engaged in programs to counter American power by producing nuclear weapons. This was the justification for the attack on Iraq. No nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq, but this did not save it from attack. North Korea, which did acquire them was not attacked. Iran presumably has concluded that safety lies in having weapons, but Western intelligence experts and the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) believe that Iran is years away from being able to make them. So key members of the Bush administration and the Israeli government says Iran will certainly soon get them.⁸ President Bush has repeatedly said that he will destroy the Iranian capacity before leaving office.⁹

A second issue that has motivated the anti-Iranian hostility of the Bush administration is Iran’s alleged support for terrorism. Even before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, President Bush vowed to “seek out and destroy” Iranian (and Syrian) organizations that he said were arming and training anti-American forces. Today, American officials have repeatedly charged Iran with

⁵ Antonio Maria Costa, “The New Golden Triangle,” *International Herald Tribune*, December 1, 2006,

⁶ Fred Hill, “How Tehran got the upper hand,” *International Herald Tribune*, February 3-4, 2007.

⁷ 2005 U.S. National Defense Strategy.

⁸ “U.S. report on Iran called ‘dishonest’,” *International Herald Tribune*, September 15, 2006.

⁹ The US position exactly parallels the Israeli pronouncement that it “will not tolerate Iran going nuclear.” *The Sunday Times*, January 7, 2007.

encouraging and equipping the guerrillas fighting the American occupation of Iraq¹⁰ and of arming and training Hizbullah in its struggle against the Israeli attack on Lebanon.

The United States has mobilized the United Nations to decree sanctions against Iran while, at the same time, both Israel and the United States (and Israel) have prepared to bomb or invade Iran. The Israelis, who have one of the world's largest nuclear arsenals, have placed nuclear-armed submarines off the Iranian coast and have trained special air force units for long-range bombing missions. Meanwhile, the United States has assembled a vast armada in the Gulf and prepared long-range B-52 and B-1 bombers, tanker aircraft and cruise missiles within range of Iran. Both countries have inserted commando teams into Iran (probably from bases in Iraq) to help identify targets and to encourage opposition to the Iranian government. They have also overflown Iranian airspace with drone aircraft. Since the United States does not believe that it can be certain of destroying all nuclear-related sites by bombing alone, it also has assembled a large "insertion" force of Marines on amphibious assault ships with helicopters, hovercraft and jump-jets.

The results of this massive build-up were recently analyzed by one of the foremost American strategists.¹¹ He concluded that since even the most optimistic believe an attack would only delay acquisition of a nuclear weapon by three or four years, the real purpose of an attack would be to destroy the Iranian regime. To do this, the invaders would have to assassinate members of the government, destroy both the Iranian army and the Revolutionary Guards and cripple the national economy. Realizing this, Iran is preparing for a long guerrilla war internally and counterattacks abroad.

With all the pieces in place for war, all that is lacking is a "trigger." Many feared that the raid by American troops on the Iranian mission in Iraq in which men who had been invited to Iraq by its president were arrested and the later Iranian arrest of British soldiers and marines in disputed waters at the head of the Gulf might have been such a trigger. The Bush administration did, in fact, offer the British American military action to free its soldiers.¹² Those two episodes seem to have been partially resolved, but others will undoubtedly occur. The pattern of allegation, threat, intransigence, overflight, espionage and even of hostage taking reminiscent of the build-up to the war over Iraq in 2002-2003 is being repeated. Can we be far from war?

Hegel and Santayana would have thought it unlikely.

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¹⁰ For example, General Peter Pace, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, blamed Iran for supplying insurgents with improved and deadly "improvised explosive devices." *International Herald Tribune*, February 8, 2007.

¹¹ Col. Sam Gardiner (USAF, rtd.), "Pieces in Place for Escalation Against Iran," The Century Foundation, Jan. 14, 2007.

¹² Ewen MacAskill, Bulian Borger, Michael Howard and John Hooper, "Americans offered 'aggressive patrols' in Iranian airspace, *The Guardian*, April 7, 2007.