

## Moves toward War with Iran: In the Event of War ... Part 3

By William R. Polk

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Editor: This the third in a series: Part 1. Part 2.

The Iranians believe that American threats and moves are a bluff. That is what I have been told authoritatively by a senior official of their government. But, if they are wrong, something like the following will probably happen.

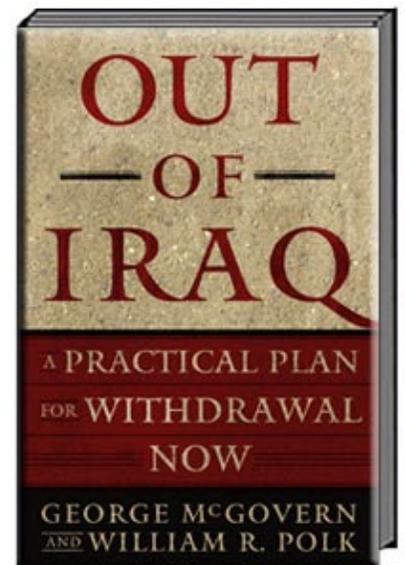
The first step, in fact, has already happened. Unmanned drones and probably some manned aircraft have been identifying targets in Iran for at least the last year. Allegedly also, reconnaissance teams have been operating on the ground. While the information they have assembled, indeed even their existence, is secret, leaks to the press suggest that they have found upwards of 1,000 sites that have been selected for attack.

As in Iraq, an attack would begin with a massive aerial bombardment. In my previous article, I described the scale of such an attack. B2 and B52 bombers would converge on Iran from bases in America and the Indian Ocean. Other aircraft would deploy from Central Asia, the Persian Gulf and Iraq. Both planes and cruise missiles would be launched from the armadas built around the giant aircraft carriers Eisenhower and Enterprise. Thousands of missiles and millions of kilograms of high explosives would rain down on the country. Since many of the suspected nuclear sites are in urban areas, there would be considerable “collateral damage” in Tehran, Isfahan, and other cities. But, probably not all the suspected sites would be destroyed since at least some are underground and others cannot be located.

Consequently, either during or immediately after bombardment, special forces teams would be inserted into Iran. Their task would be to go down into the underground nuclear installations to destroy what the aerial attack missed. They are bound to meet some resistance even though the “shock and awe” of the bombardment would have at least disorganized Iran’s 850,000-man army. Predictably, at least some of the special forces would be caught. Others would fail to reach their objectives. Thus, although use of ground troops was not planned, some would have to be drawn from Iraq or Afghanistan to go in and try to rescue them. That would begin the guerrilla warfare phase of the operation.

Iran has a 150,000-man national guard. During the 1980s war with Iraq, these forces showed their fanatical devotion to their country and almost certainly would do so again. Iran is a large country and has several times the population of Iraq; so it could, and almost certainly would, fight a protracted guerrilla war. Preparing for it, Iran has for several years been building a stockpile of suitable equipment from armor-piercing rifles to night-vision goggles.

Scattered across the country’s cities, deserts and mountains, guerrillas would be an elusive target. And, as in Iraq, they would be supported by the general population. Although outside observers believe that the governing religious establishment is not popular, everyone agrees that the Iranians are firm nationalists. No more than the Iraqis in 2003 or the Cubans in the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 would Iranians be out in the streets with flowers in their hands



welcoming foreign troops. As in Iraq, they would be planting bombs and firing shots.

Once begun, the guerrilla war would spread beyond Iran. From scores of bases along the shore of the Persian Gulf and elsewhere, the Iranians would certainly fire their large arsenal of Russian, Chinese and Iranian-made missiles on American bases in Qatar and Iraq and probably Afghanistan. They would also launch attacks by speedboats on the American navy

At the same time, with or without Iranian help or guidance, it is almost certain that fellow members of their religious sect, the Shiis, would undertake violent actions in their support. Iraq is now ruled by an American-sponsored Shia government and its 15 million Shiis have a special relationship Iran. Attacks on American troops and installations could be expected to multiply. Lebanon's one million Shiis, led by the Hizbullah, would attack the only nearby target, Israel. And, in Saudi Arabia, the 2 million Shiis who man the oil installations would, at least, disrupt the flow of oil.

Iranian oil production would stop. That would take about 5% of the world's oil off the market. Disruption of Saudi production would have a far more drastic impact. And interdiction of tanker passage down the Gulf would affect something like 40% of the world's oil flow. The effects would be multiple. The simplest would be a huge rise in the price of oil. It went from about \$11 a barrel in 1990 to a high of \$80 this year and is now about \$60. Nobel prize economist Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard University Professor Linda Bilmes have calculated that each dollar increase in the price of oil diminishes US national income by somewhat over \$3 billion. Thus, if oil rises from \$60 to \$120 a barrel, the cost to America would be about \$210 billion. And most oil experts believe it would rise far higher. Some even talk about \$300 a barrel. Such a rise would plunge the world into depression.

Oil is not, of course, the only cost. While the congressionally-allocated outlays for the Iraq war are not complete, they are expected to be as much as \$500 billion. This is only part of the cost. Economists Stiglitz and Bilmes have estimated the over-all costs at between \$1 and \$2 trillion, depending on how fast America gets out of Iraq. With a population three times as large and a far more complex terrain, Iran would probably cost three or four times as much as Iraq. To shield the public from the enormous cost of the Iraq war, the Bush administration borrowed the staggering sum of \$540 billion during fiscal year 2004. Since much of borrowed money came from China, which opposes the attack on Iran and would suffer from it, that financial "cushion" may not be available in fiscal year 2007. Investment banker Felix Rohatyn predicted that such a course of action would be financially "unbearable."

Nor is money the only cost. Even if initially successful, the attack would surely result in far higher casualties. So far at least 2,600 soldiers have been killed in Iraq and about 20,000 wounded. Half are permanently disabled. About 50,000 more suffer severe or multiple concussions that will result in memory loss, fuzzy thinking and severe headaches all of their lives. About the same number will require extensive psychiatric treatment. And an unknown number are likely to develop cancer from exposure to depleted uranium bombs.

Finally, the war would be both unwinnable and unstoppable. It would plunge the world into a maelstrom. The "long war" that the Neoconservatives have advocated has been estimated to cost about \$15 trillion. But this is only the easy part of the cost: the real cost would be the destruction of the world in which we live and the replacement of our civic, cultural and material "good life" with something like the nightmare George Orwell predicted in his novel 1984.

In my next article, I will lay out a plan to avoid this nightmare.

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