

British are the prime suspect in destabilization of Iran

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

On May 18, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook announced that Britain and the Islamic Republic of Iran had reestablished full diplomatic relations, and that the newly named ambassadors, Nicholas Browne and Gholamreza Ansari, would take up their posts in Tehran and London, respectively. Less than two months later, on July 8, student demonstrations erupted in Tehran University, opening a week of unrest, which was the most severe social confrontation in the country since the 1979 revolution.

To put it bluntly: That's what happens when you make friends with the British.

Although the causal relationship between the two developments is not linear, it is real, and it is efficient. Unless the role of the British in the current crisis in Iran is investigated, exposed, and thwarted, there is the danger that the recent social upheaval there could be the start of a destabilization wave sweeping the region.

The 'Great Game' revisited

To understand the nature of this relationship, it is necessary to step back from the immediate arena of events, and look at the broader picture.

As *EIR* has uniquely documented, the main thrust of British geopolitics, historically and in the recent period, has been to undermine the cooperation among a group of sovereign nations, capable of implementing the Eurasian Land-Bridge perspective. Specifically, it has been to sabotage cooperation among China, Russia, and India; and to break up the "strategic partnership" which the Clinton administration had established with China and Russia. The main purpose of the British-led NATO war against Yugoslavia, was to pursue this strategic aim.

Now that the Yugoslav war has officially ended, the British geopolitical elite has readjusted its sights, targetting the vast area comprising the Caucasus and Central Asia for destabilization. One aspect of this destabilization thrust, is the "debate"—or, more precisely, threat—around expansion of NATO eastward, into the Caucasus. The leading agent for this policy, is Azerbaijan President Heidar Aliyev, who has gone on record offering up territory for a NATO base in

his country. Similar proposals have been floated by Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze.

According to one British expert with experience in the region, there are contingencies being discussed, for NATO to intervene in the Caucasus, especially Azerbaijan, if the situation in the northern Caucasus—the areas of Chechnya and Dagestan inside Russia, for instance—were to further deteriorate. NATO would not intervene directly, given the Russian involvement, but, if unrest from Dagestan were to spill over into Azerbaijan, then Aliyev could call for "help." The same goes for Chechnya, which borders on Georgia.

As this source and other region specialists have stressed, the pretext used for such action would be the need to "protect" the oil in Azerbaijan. Given the massive, recent finds of gas in the Caspian Sea, off Baku, by BP-Amoco, such pretexts are bound to gain credibility.

According to *Limes* magazine editor Count Lucio Caracciolo, the situation in the Caucasus-Central Asia is being redefined by an array of "old-new alliances," prominent among them the "Turkish-Israeli axis" which enjoys backing from the Anglo-American geopolitical faction. It is, in fact, through the Turkic networks that destabilizations in the region are run. Turkey is functioning also as the NATO connection for most raw materials looting schemes involving pipelines for oil and gas out of the region.

Although control over massive amounts of oil and gas is at stake in the region, it is *not* merely a raw materials grab that is at the heart of this British operation. Rather, in the collapse of the world financial system, British geopolitical thinking is shaped by considerations of raw power: After the region has been turned upside-down by orchestrated "ethnic" strife, civil wars, and concomitant social disintegration, who will impose the military presence to exert power over the region?

Directly counterposed to this perspective and array of alliances, is Russia, which has established a strategic triangle with China and India. Increasingly, Iran has been drawn into this tripartite cooperation, as is appropriate to the position the country occupies along the historic Silk Road. Iran, is in fact, the "other pillar" to China, of the Eurasian Land-

Bridge. Since 1991, and increasingly over the past three years, Iran has defined its foreign policy from the standpoint of its crucial role in the Land-Bridge.

The Russians, fully cognizant of the dangerous contingency plans for some sort of NATO activity in the region, albeit under Turkish-Israeli disguise, have made known that any such intervention would cross a very well-defined red line. As one European strategist put it to *EIR*, "The Russians know how to play the Great Game in the Caucasus, too; they've been active there since 1737."

The institutional confrontation in Iran

It is in this context, that the recent upheavals in Iran are to be viewed. And the question must be posed: From a global strategic perspective, who stands to gain from a destabilization of the current government of Iran? Most obviously, those geopolitical interests in the British-American-Commonwealth faction, who have been openly debating their new "Great Game" strategy, in the pages of publications such as *Foreign Affairs*, organ of the New York Council on Foreign Relations, which is the daughter think-tank to the Royal Institute for International Affairs.

What happened inside Iran in the week of July 8-15, has an internal dynamic, which is also important to understand, in order to grasp how external forces can manipulate the situation.

On July 8, students from Tehran University launched demonstrations, to protest the closing of the liberal newspaper *Salaam*. The paper had been closed by the judiciary, on charges that it had published documents which were false. Whether the specific charges against the paper and its editor were justified, is difficult to determine, and, in a certain sense, beside the point. At issue is the freedom of the press, which has been one of the cardinal points of the political program of reform pursued by Iranian President Seyyed Mohamad Khatami.

Khatami was elected in May 1997 by an overwhelming majority of 69%, in an election with an extremely high turnout, against a conservative candidate, Nateq Nouri, who is the speaker of the Majlis (Parliament). Since his inauguration in August 1997, Khatami has pushed forward consistently, but also cautiously, toward liberalizing social life inside the country, while reestablishing working relations with countries throughout the world, which in many cases had been suspended or had stagnated since the Iranian revolution of 1979. In this process, Khatami has come up against staunch opposition, from the conservative faction, which still controls crucial institutions in the country, including the judiciary, and the Parliament, where it represents a majority.

The judiciary, for instance, dealt a blow to Khatami in 1998, when it arrested and prosecuted the popular mayor of Tehran, Gholamhossein Karbaschi, a close associate of Khatami's. At the same time, the Parliament succeeded in

impeaching Abdollah Nouri, another Khatami associate, from the post of interior minister, for having defended the mayor. At that time, too, students had mobilized in Karbaschi's favor.

The thrust of the student demonstrations which broke out on July 8, was initially in favor of the Khatami government and its liberalization policies. Students marched through the streets of the capital with large pictures of the President. That night, elements of the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) entered the university grounds, in violation of the sanctity of that institution, and violently attacked students, injuring many and killing an as-yet-undetermined number. Hundreds were arrested.

Predictably, the violent police action provoked an escalation of protest, which rapidly turned violent. Provocation and counter-provocation continued, culminating in the July 14 showdown in the streets of the capital: On that day, the conservatives mobilized a massive show of force, with thousands of demonstrators—not students—sporting large placards with the pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini, and his successor, the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei.

Police intervention condemned by all sides

Significantly, after the first police intervention took place, it was condemned by all sides. Not only the university board, a group in the Parliament and the entire cabinet, but also Khamenei spoke out against the violation of the university's immunity. The Culture and Higher Education Commission of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis) issued a denunciation of the incident on July 11, and demanded that those responsible be identified and prosecuted. The government, meeting on July 11, deplored the incidents and expressed hopes that "pressure groups" and advocates of violent acts—i.e., conservative political factions behind the violence—would be identified and punished. The cabinet condemned "the breaking of the sanctity of learning and of the university."

Ayatollah Khamenei stated that the tragic events were "unacceptable in the Islamic Republic of Iran." He said that the "bitter incident" had "hurt his heart." He went on: "I have a lot to say, but the most important thing that has preoccupied my mind is the attack on the dormitories of the youth and students. In the Islamic system, it is not acceptable at all to attack the house and shelter of a group, particularly overnight or at the time of congregation prayers."

His statements rang out as if in explicit support of the students: "The youth of this country, whether students or not, are my children," he said, "and it is very difficult for me to see them embarrassed and upset." He promised that violence would be dealt with "no matter in the garb of law enforcement forces or else." He said, "Violators in the Islamic system must be dealt with, but it is very wrong

and unjust to encounter someone who has not committed a violation, someone who is resting at home, and that too in a youth and student environment.”

According to a paraphrase of his remarks, the Iranian news service IRNA reported that he said, “The fact that 100 or 200 people take into the streets from the university campus to utter some words cannot provide an excuse and authorization for others in whatever garb or under whatever name, to enter their place.”

Khamenei was emphatic in saying that the violent attack had been launched by “some people,” and that this had tarnished the “sacred name of the law enforcement forces,” whose work had been characterized by a spirit of self-sacrifice. Consequently, the head of Khamenei’s office, Hojatoleslam Qomi, announced on July 12 that Khamenei had issued orders for a speedy investigation by relevant organs, including the Supreme National Security Council. In comments to IRNA, he said that the LEF’s entry into the university had been “neither acceptable nor tolerable,” and added that their mere entry was “an illegal act.” He also noted that among those attacked were children of martyrs, volunteer forces, etc. Both he and Khamenei hinted at “suspicious agents” who might have been involved.

The fact that Khamenei made such statements bears witness to the extraordinary popularity and support enjoyed by President Khatami, and by the students demonstrating in his favor. At this point, the official line was that rogue elements had been responsible for the violent entry into the university. According to a statement issued on July 11 by the deputy commander of the law and order force, Brig. Gen. Mohssen Anssari, a group of officers raided the university dormitory without the order of their superior officers. He said that those who had been guilty of not controlling their sub-commanders had been reported to the secretariat of the Supreme Security Council.

By Sunday, July 11, demonstrations by university students had spread out to other major cities, including Tabriz, Shiraz, Mashhad, Esfahan, and Hamadan. The students in Tehran University continued a sit-in on July 12, together with faculty members. They agreed not to demonstrate without authorization, and received the explicit gratitude of the Supreme National Security Council for their cooperation in maintaining calm. A press strike which had been planned for July 13, was also called off, after the government urged journalists to continue their work, saying that in times of domestic crisis, the population needs accurate, thorough reporting more than ever.

Then, on July 13, contrary to earlier indications, students and others demonstrated, without authorization, and the situation rapidly degenerated into confrontation. There can be no doubt, that *agents provocateurs* were deployed, most probably on both sides, to escalate tensions into violence. President Khatami addressed the nation on television, and

said that the protests, which had started peacefully, had degenerated into rioting. He characterized those leading the plundering and rioting as people with “evil aims” who were threatening national security. He said that further lawlessness would be “repressed with force and determination.”

There are conflicting reports as to what happened in the streets. Iranian press outlets reported that students chanted slogans like, “We don’t want a violent government, we don’t want a mercenary police.” They said that other layers of the population expressed support for the students and addressed the police with slogans from the 1979 revolution, like “Army brothers, why are you killing brothers?” Other slogans directed against the conservative clergy were also reported.

At this point, when the demonstrations shifted tone, with explicit attacks against the law enforcement forces, the movement was perceived as constituting a threat to the entire existing order. Thus, on the night of July 13, Khamenei delivered a speech in which he said, “It [has been] two days that a group of vicious people, supported by certain bankrupt political groups and encouraged by foreign enemies, have been engaged in corruption and destruction of people’s properties, creating an atmosphere of terror and intimidation, etc. Officials in the government, especially those in charge of public security, have been emphatically instructed to put down the corrupt and warring elements with insight and power.”

The following day, a massive rally took place in Tehran, “in support of the remarks of the Supreme Leader” and, officially, also in support of “President Mohamad Khatami’s government and in condemnation of the recent violence by a group of rioters.” The group, which Iranian press claimed was a million strong, included people carrying posters with slogans like “Down with the U.S.A.,” “Death to Israel.” The pictures carried by the crowd were those of Khomeini and Khamenei, while those of Khatami were conspicuously absent. Among the prominent personalities taking part in the rally, was Parliament Speaker Nateq Nouri. The conservative Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Rowhani, reportedly stated that the rioters had been guilty of crimes which carried the death penalty, and so forth. A resolution from the rally was issued, which expressed total support for Khamenei and for the Khatami government. The resolution condemned the violence as the work of outside forces.

President Khatami had also dramatically shifted his tone, to one of outright condemnation of the rioters.

By July 15, the streets of Tehran were calm again, and order had been restored.

Who are the outside forces?

One lesson to be drawn from the tumultuous week in Iran, is that any force attempting to tip the delicate balance which exists among the institutions, will reach a result contrary to its aims. The Iranian political institutions, established

by the Islamic revolution, are controlled by opposing forces, and they will not be easily changed.

Those among the movement of intellectuals and students desirous of a quicker pace of reform, who believed they could use the power of the street to effect a shift in the correlation of power, were mistaken: Despite the overwhelming popularity Khatami enjoys, there is no way within the present system that he could prevail over the institutional arrangement, particularly over the office of the Leader of the Revolution. Any attempt to force through such a process, would inevitably destabilize the entire system, creating the preconditions for civil war. At the same time, regardless of the institutional power still wielded by the conservatives, in the judiciary, the Parliament, and the bazaar, there is no way they could eliminate the President, without unleashing a similar process of civil war.

Significantly, following the degeneration into violence, all sides spoke of outside elements being involved, manipulating events. Although the accusations against the “Zionists” and the “arrogant power” come from a stock vocabulary, there is, ironically, some truth to the charges. The question is: Who is the “arrogant power”?

Khamenei had pointed to the United States, and asked whether the \$20 million allocated by the U.S. Congress for actions against Iran, had been deployed in this protest action. No doubt, there are fools in the Congress who will cheer on any destabilization of Iran. But that is not the direction of the Clinton administration policy; on the contrary, careful, cautious moves have been perceived, indicating some progress in the painstakingly slow process of reconciliation.

More to the point would be to ask: What have the British deployed, in terms of finances and personnel, into Iran, since their celebrated reestablishment of diplomatic ties? For a time, it was known in Iran what the real face of British policy was. Salman Rushdie, after all, had been deployed by British intelligence, to orchestrate a conflict leading to a *fatwa* (religious decree) against him, and subsequent ostracism of Iran. It was Britain which, in the wake of the Mykonos murder trial in Berlin, had whipped up a frenzy in Europe, demanding that the “state terrorists” be isolated forever. Then, it was Britain, which took the first, energetic steps to reestablish diplomatic ties with Iran, naming an ambassador, and setting up a full presence in the capital. It was Britain which organized conference after conference in London, on the topic of investment in Iran; and Britain, which sent a high-level delegation just recently to the country, in the spirit of reconciliation. And so forth.

Most important, it is the British oligarchy which is pulling the strings of detabilization in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and which sees such demonstrations in Tehran as one big string to pull. The Iranian leadership is right to suspect outside interference and malicious conspiracies. One should remember, however, that the most vicious wolves often appear in sheep’s clothing.

Military diplomacy expands among China, Russia, India

by Mary Burdman

The “Moscow-Beijing-New Delhi triangle,” which was proposed by former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov in New Delhi in December 1998, while it remains “a geopolitical reference point for diplomats, it is already a quite tangible reality for the participants of military-technical cooperation,” political columnist Vsevolod Ovchinnikov wrote in the official Russian government newspaper, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, on June 16. “The expansion of NATO to the east, the formation of a Far Eastern analogue to this alliance, self-willed use of force bypassing the UN Security Council—all this is prompting the largest countries such as Russia, China, and India to think in concert about strengthening their defense and security and, in particular, to develop military-technical cooperation.”

It is essential to understand that these three nations are *not* in the process of building any kind of military or political “alliance,” along the lines of the West’s NATO, or the U.S.-Japanese alliance—far from it. The foreign and national policies of each of these nations, is independently formulated and carried out.

However, the NATO war against Yugoslavia, which was only the most destructive among several massive Anglo-American assaults, using most-advanced technologies against small, isolated nations, sent shock waves through China, Russia, and India, among many other nations.

China’s entire foreign policy has, for decades, been to foster a peaceful international environment, in which China would have the extended period of stability it so urgently requires, to be able to overcome the problems of its underdeveloped economy.

Already in February 1998, Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian called for a new security concept “to win a lasting peace.” In a speech in Australia, Chi called for nation-to-nation relations on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence—mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. He called for mutually beneficial economic cooperation, as the foundation for global and regional security and peaceful resolution of conflicts. “It has been