

'Mossadegh Reflex' in Iranian Nuclear Policy

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The regular sessions of the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA's) Board of Directors have become such ritual confrontations with the Iranian government, over the issue of its nuclear energy program, that one must ask: What is it really all about? Iran insists that it has the right to develop nuclear technology, for peaceful purposes, and, having signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and related protocols, demands the right to master the entire nuclear fuel cycle. The U.S. neo-conservatives, led by Undersecretary of State John Bolton, aver that Tehran seeks a nuclear weapon capability, and demand that the government relinquish its uranium enrichment program altogether, and forever. The Europeans, shuffling somewhere in between, say, on the one hand, that Iran has a right to the technology, but, on the other, there are non-proliferation concerns to be taken into consideration. And IAEA Director General Mohammed ElBaradei, trying to be an honest broker, strikes a "yes, but" posture. "Have we seen any proof of a weapons program?" he asked rhetorically on Sept. 15. "Obviously until today there is none of that," he answered. Then: "Are we in a position to say that everything now is peaceful? Obviously we are not at that stage." ElBaradei has also resisted attempts by the United States to set a deadline, or "trigger mechanism" in any resolution, whereby, in the event of non-compliance, the issue could be taken to the UN Security Council, where sanctions could be an option.

So much for the ritual aspect of the recurring showdowns; the real issue is another. Last year, Libya announced it would give up all its pretensions to a nuclear weapons program. The move, which surprised many, was the result of a long process of negotiations with the United States and United Kingdom. Why did the Libyans do it? As one diplomat told this author: "Before, we were the bad guys. Now we are the good guys. It's in our interest."

Libya may be a large nation, geographically, and rich in oil resources, but it is not a strategic factor in international politics; but Iran is. As Lyndon LaRouche put it in his "LaRouche Doctrine" of April 17 (see *EIR*, April 30), Iran is one of the four keystone nations in Southwest Asia, the others being Egypt, Syria, and Turkey, whose collaboration could lead to regional stability and security, including for Afghanistan, Iraq, and Israel-Palestine. Iran is a large nation, whose geostrategic location defines it as a bridge between Europe and Asia. In addition to massive oil and gas resources, it has

a young and growing population of over 70 million, as well as rapidly developing infrastructure, especially in transportation. Its concentration, since 1991, has been on developing transportation and pipeline links with the newly independent Central Asian Republics, such that it serves them as a bridge to the sea.

Why Nuclear Energy?

With all these resources, why should the country need nuclear energy? This is the question repeatedly asked in neo-con circles, as if the answer were self-evident. Ignoring the fact that many oil-producing countries—including the United States!—do have nuclear energy, the question implies that the only reason Iran might want the technology, were for military use. Hussein Mousavian, a former Iranian ambassador to Germany and currently chairman of the foreign policy commission in Iran's National Security Council, answered this question in a Sept. 13 interview with the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Mousavian, who is deputy head of the Iranian delegation at the Vienna IAEA talks, had the following to say: "Iran needs more than half its oil production [for its own consumption], and domestic oil demand grows further with the implementation of the development programs. According to the current rate of growth, Iran needs an additional electricity production capacity of 2,000 megawatts. If we were to have no other energy sources to tap, we would use up the entire oil production domestically, within a few years. The income from oil exports is, however, the most important foreign-exchange revenue."

Asked then whether the real reason for the country's nuclear program were not the feeling of threats, from nuclear powers Pakistan, India, and Israel, as well as the U.S. military presence in the region, he answered: "That's wrong. India and Pakistan do not represent any threat to Iran, neither nuclear or otherwise. But we are worried about Israel's nuclear arsenal, and also worried about the American military presence in our region. The concerns we have regarding these two themes, however, are not such that, had we nuclear weapons, they would become lighter. An atomic weapon would not increase Iran's security, nor would it increase the perception of security in the eyes of men."

Such concerns about security, can be readily grasped by a quick glance at the map: U.S. military are present in neighboring Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, as well as in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Small forces are located in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Then, there is Israel.

The National Debate

To understand why Iran so stubbornly insists on maintaining its nuclear technology, one has to address cultural and historical factors. The idea of having been a "bad guy," and wanting to become a "good guy," is somewhat foreign to the Iranian way of thinking. What is primary is the conviction, that the nation has a sovereign right to this and other advanced

technologies, for its own development.

There are three factions inside Iran which line up on the nuclear issue. As noted in the German daily *Frankfurter Rundschau* by German analyst Volker Perthes on Sept. 8, there certainly does exist a grouping which wants to abandon the NPT, and go its own way, perhaps to be better equipped than Iraq or North Korea, in the event of a U.S. attack. As one Iranian intellectual told this author during a visit to Tehran, he was concerned that Iran was *not* developing weapons of mass destruction, for its defense. Spokesmen of this faction, which overlaps in part with the new conservative majority in Parliament, have urged the government to tear up the existing treaties.

A second faction sees nuclear technology as indispensable for economic development. Proponents of this group point out that under the Shah, Iran was encouraged to develop an ambitious nuclear program, but after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the program was taken off the drawing boards.

Finally, there are the political representatives who insist on the country's right to atomic energy, but might be induced to relinquish certain "dual use" aspects, if given adequate incentives. This is indeed the position reflected in the agreements reached between the European Union trio (Great Britain, France, and Germany), and Iran last October, whereby the uranium enrichment program would be suspended, in exchange for access to other aspects of the technology.

Such factional distinctions aside, it can be said without qualification that the entire Iranian population supports nuclear technology. There are no freakish "Greenies" campaigning against it. The reason is simple: sovereignty and national independence.

The Legacy of Mossadegh

The most recent historical reference point for any Iranian, is the fight for nationalization of oil. In 1949, Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, who had founded the Iranian National Front, along with spiritual leader Ayatollah Abol Ghasem Kashani, were elected to Parliament. They had campaigned for renegotiating the Anglo-Iranian agreements on oil, whereby the British were robbing Iran blind. The treaty gave Iran the equivalent of about 8% of the British profits, in royalties. Talks had begun on changing the terms of agreement, and Mossadegh was named to head up a Parliamentary Commission on the matter. The British refused to consider giving Iran a 50-50 share, and, after a series of government crises, Mossadegh was elected Prime Minister in 1951. The Parliament approved Mossadegh's proposal to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Co., and give it compensation. With the overwhelming support of the population, he thus cancelled the rights of the British, as well as the Soviets, and declared the oil to be the property of the state.

Mossadegh travelled to the UN as well as to The Hague, to argue the case for nationalization before the international community. The British response was first, to threaten mili-



Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, whose nationalization of Iran's oil in the 1950s remains today a symbol of the nation's fight for sovereignty.

tary action, by sending the Royal Navy to the coast of Abadan, where the world's largest oil refinery was located. They then opted for the political overthrow of the government. Using the argument that Mossadegh would become a Communist puppet, the British succeeded in enlisting U.S. assistance, through Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA director Allen Dulles.

To run a coup against the immensely popular Mossadegh, the British had to adopt a divide-and-conquer approach. They pushed through economic sanctions, which weakened the country. Through intelligence operations, and massive propaganda in British-controlled press, they sought to drive a wedge between Kashani and Mossadegh, between Mossadegh and the Parliament, and to split the National Front. Then, mass protests were organized by *agents provocateurs*, to create social upheaval, which was then played against Mossadegh, who was accused of losing control of the situation. The propaganda campaign charged that Mossadegh was a Soviet puppet. On Aug. 19, 1953, the Anglo-American operation, backed by royalists and military forces loyal to Reza Shah Pahlevi, pulled a coup against Mossadegh, who was jailed. The Shah was put on the throne, and Iran's oil was controlled by foreign interests until the 1979 Revolution.

It is this "Mossadegh reflex" which is at work today in Iran. Regardless of one's political leanings, the Iranian population is united around the issue of the right to nuclear technology, as it was united then around Mossadegh for sovereign control over oil resources. The memory of that fight, which is still fresh in the minds of today's Iranians, carries a lesson with it: If you do not succeed in consolidating your sovereign right to development, then those who are trying to deny it, will move in with military-political operations, to overthrow your government.