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When the July/August 1995 issue was published, the Doomsday Clock remained at 17 minutes to midnight, where it had been since December 01, 1991 when the United States and the Soviet Union signed the long-stalled Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and announce further unilateral cuts in tactical and strategic nuclear weapons.

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Iran in the cross-hairs

Soon enough, even more countries will join the target list.

By WILLIAM M. ARKIN

It is the year 2002. Saddam Hussein has been assassinated and Islamic elements in Basra have declared their independence from Baghdad. Iran is now the dominant regional power after a large-scale military buildup. It invades Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to finance its armaments and ameliorate its social problems. Armed with nuclear weapons, it threatens escalation if the United States intervenes. A terrorist attack with a nuclear device occurs in Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia. Iran also covertly introduces nuclear devices into the United States and threatens to use them.

When nearly a thousand war gamers gathered at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, three years ago to play "Global 92," the theme was "regionalization of influence" and the above scenario was the hot new centerpiece.

According to the "read ahead" package, "the Iranian leadership in these [nuclear] scenarios would be strongly motivated by religious and nationalist sentiments that might override rational calculations."

Let there be no doubt that in war rooms in Washington, Tampa, and Omaha, Iran has become Enemy Number One for the United States. An Iranian invasion of Kuwait "in its quest to become a dominant regional power in Southwest Asia" is identified in Secretary of Defense William Perry's classified *Defense Planning Guidance* as the first of seven priorities that guide military planning.

The United States and the international community may be mobilizing to stop Iran from becoming a nuclear power. But behind the U.S. planning veil, far more effort has gone into fighting Iran than into forestalling conflict. In fact, Iran has been formally added to the SIOP—the Single Integrated Operational Plan—Amer-

ica's military nuclear war plan.

Whatever one thinks of Iran as a nation, whatever one believes about its nuclear "ambitions," one has to ask whether our own addictive Cold War-era sentiments regarding Iran are rational.

Iran does not yet have nuclear weapons. Of that, the U.S. intelligence community is certain. But in the new rituals of nuclear planning, its capacity has passed into the world of virtual reality. In response to the current proliferation mania, compulsive nuclear targeters have schemed to develop post-Soviet scenarios for the use of their weapons, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is in the bull's-eye.

Although Iran has been a U.S. adversary since 1979, it wasn't until the end of the Bush administration that it was elevated to its current status as a nuclear threat. In 1992, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed in their biennial "Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan"—the top-secret contingency master plan called JSCP ("jay-scrap")—that nuclear forces should re-focus on weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical, or biological.

The JSCP, the sole military document that translates presidential and civilian guidance on the use of nuclear weapons into actual war plans, said: "The threat posed by the increasing number of potentially hostile states developing weapons of mass destruction requires the maintenance of a modern, fully capable, and reliable strategic deterrent."

The nuclear section of the JSCP ("Annex C") gave preliminary generalizations about targeting. The U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) was assigned to assist regional commands (Central Command, in the case of Iran) in identifying nuclear adversaries. In contrast with old SIOP planning for the Soviet Union,

which entailed detailed and scripted options for thousands of nuclear weapons, STRATCOM put together a generic template for small-scale attacks on adversaries such as Iran. According to internal documents, its intent was to combine "SIOP-like rigor" with "tactical flexibility" to create an "adaptive" plan applicable to individual countries.

"Negative security guarantees," deterring potential "undeterrables," presidential options—that's the stuff of public discussion regarding nuclear strategy. For planners on the joint-staffs, the bread and butter is targeting. What is the laydown for facilities X, Y, and Z, and in what sequence and with how much redundancy?

While the Clinton administration developed a counter-proliferation strategy emphasizing conventional weapons to destroy nuclear capabilities, a behind-the-scenes nuclear mafia quietly selected targets suitable for nuclear attack. A small proliferation cell was created in the J-2 (intelligence directorate) of STRATCOM, and nuclear, chemical, biological, and command-and-control facilities were identified.

The whole mindless process probably would have continued uninterrupted had not regional commanders in Europe and the Pacific complained that STRATCOM was muscling in on their territory. That slowed the targeting work for a time.

But now, STRATCOM is preparing a set of "Silver Books" for the president and secretary of defense containing specific targets, the weapons assigned against them, timelines for attack (hours, days, weeks), rules of engagement, expected collateral damage, and associated risks.

Iran is the first priority in this target-the-Third World emphasis. Its Silver Book will be the first produced. With Iranian targets chosen, the planners can then move on to Syria and Libya, nations that were identified at a May 1993 targeting symposium at Central Command.

STRATCOM recognizes that the number of targets in any one country is limited. But the list of countries is not. ■

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