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Iran, USA, UK

April 6, 2007 : How the worst was perhaps averted

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Nuclear weapons must not appear in Iran, and they must disappear from France as from China and the USA, from Russia as from North Korea, from Israel as from Pakistan, from India as from the UK, before they drag us into a war which will cause our own disappearance one after another. Humanity has just once more survived a hot alert, a grave warning that nobody (or scarcely anyone) seems to have heard in France.

In a message issued in English on April 6 soon after midnight, with the title "Bravo Iran!", Pyotr Goncharov, the Moscow commentator of the RIA-Novosti agency, let it be known that the plan to bomb Iranian military installations, named "Operation Bite", had indeed been scheduled by the USA for April 6, as "important foreign media sources had announced (including his agency RIA-Novosti, reporting on the basis of Russian military sources). But he congratulated Iran for not "swallowing the bait", for acting as if nothing was happening and thus depriving the USA of the pretext they sought for going on the offensive.

According to Goncharov, Iran deliberately ignored the threat and resisted both the temptation to make a pre-emptive strike against the US armada in the Gulf (the aircraft-carriers Dwight D. Eisenhower and Stennis and their support vessels) and the temptation to use the Royal Navy prisoners as human shields. Iran, he writes "deserves a round of applause for not making the apparently obvious move of keeping the British sailors as hostages, in the event of an attack. But letting them return home, Tehran showed a clear willingness for constructive dialogue once Iranian positions were taken into consideration".

We may now think that after raising the stakes for a fortnight the Iranian authorities were clever enough to free their prisoners just in time to deprive Britain's allies of any justification for attacking. In this sense, Tony Blair may be telling the truth when he declares that their release was not the result of a negotiated deal: there was no need to negotiate the renunciation of a surprise attack that had become an open secret (except in France, where it was scarcely mentioned). Both parties knew what the risk was, and so the "tit-for-tat" may have been unspoken.

If we suppose that the interception of the British sailors occurred by chance, the way Iran exploited it was far too felicitous to result from chance. Their liberation may not have resolved the Iran nuclear crisis, far from it, nor eliminated all risk of a military adventure. But at least it has the merit of having delayed it, if not suspended it indefinitely.

If one accepts that an offensive against Iran would have catastrophic consequences in the region and globally, one would not be surprised to learn one day, from curious journalists and historians, that the "thirteen days" of the Iran crisis in March-April 2007 placed humanity on the brink of an abyss comparable to the "thirteen days" of the Cuba Missile Crisis of 1962.

Back then, French public opinion was largely unaware of the danger: it was immersed in a electoral period, for the referendum which would establish the election of the President by universal suffrage. This seems to have been, by coincidence as by result, the best way of distracting the people from world affairs, especially then these have a nuclear dimension and are presumed to belong in the president's "reserved hunting-ground". And now, if the USA had made an airstrike against Iran, what would France have done, with her aircraft-carrier "Charles de Gaulle", present in the zone? The French people will never know. Just as they will never know what really occurred on 10 October 2006 in Baghdad, since they have never heard of the Forward Base Falcon disaster, and even the IAEA refuses to investigate it.

The RIA-Novosti commentator concludes his article thus: "Perhaps the European negotiators ought to meet Tehran halfway and sit at the negotiating table without making it a precondition of talks that Iran should first stop uranium-enrichment? Too many things are at stake, and April 6 may come again."

The French presidential candidates are doing all they can to avoid the subject and to keep international affairs away from the hustings. But a hurricane that has not stopped blowing can return to where it's been. George W. Bush has not said his last word, and Iran does not fail to provoke him and the other western leaders by celebrating noisily, right after the alert has passed, its mastery of the enrichment process and its claim that it will soon have 50000 centrifuges.

If the French are not the best informed, at least they have a proverb which could inspire the Iranians : "If you keep taking the jug to the well, it will surely end up breaking". The terrible thing is that hundreds of thousands of people (or millions) then risk paying for the broken pottery, in Iran and elsewhere.

But it's always the right moment for the French to wake up with a hangover. Today, Monsieur, you're not looking beyond your borders, only inside. You're polling your own uncertainties and speculating on the poll results. Today, Monsieur, you're not thinking, you're voting.

You are preparing to elect the man with the fist, the man who tomorrow will settle the world's affairs and protect us from the evildoers by brandishing his thunderbolt and (why not?) by using it. Long Live the Republic, Long Live France and democracy and the atom bomb!

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