
Iran : a stand-off between a regional power and a superpower.

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MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti political commentator Pyotr Romanov) - If we call a spade a spade, all the efforts to settle the Iranian problem over many months have been reminiscent of a counterproductive confrontation between irrational individualism and just-as-irrational collectivism.

On the one hand, two individuals - Iran and the United States - were doing all they could to rule out any solutions but a military one. On the other hand, the "collective wisdom" of the mediators in the conflict was locked in the maze of its own contradictions, and did not even remotely call to mind a think tank resolving a serious problem.

By and large, the alternating threats and evasive peace-loving protocol statements of Tehran and Washington may be ignored altogether. This was a clash of two mutually excluding egoistic interests, and the much-discussed nuclear predicament was not even the main issue.

The truth is that Tehran wants international recognition of its status as a regional power playing first fiddle in the Greater Middle East. Nuclear weapons are merely the general's insignia on the new uniform and additional trump cards in any political game. Tehran's ambitions are not unfounded - Iran feels that it is ready to play a new role, and renunciation of the current course would mean a serious setback. This is why it is so adamant in pursuing its interests.

In turn, although the United States is unhappy about the prospect of Iranian nuclear weapons, they are far from being the main issue. After all, Washington does not mind a nuclear Pakistan. The main point is that Iran's desire to become a regional power runs counter to American interests in the Middle East. As a superpower, America does not want to share any of its influence with Iran.

Finally, the United States is bound to consider the fact that Iran's turning into a regional power has not been accompanied by fundamental domestic changes. Nobody has abolished the regime of ayatollahs in Iran. In this context, the U.S. views Iran as a potential enemy and does not want to let it build up its strength. The Americans want to resolve the inevitable problem as soon and with as few losses as possible because any delay would make this task much more difficult.

In a way, Tehran and Washington look like two mad drivers in a game of chicken. A collision is inevitable if one of them does not make a turn. But he who makes it will lose in the end. Needless to say, both will lose if they crash.

A war would prevent Iran from dominating the region for a long time and make nuclear weapons development totally unrealistic. For the United States its consequences would not be so tragic but would still be painful, especially considering the current unsolvable problems in Iraq.

It is clear why this war has not started already. The bitter reaction

of the world community to the Iraq war has taught the U.S. to feign that it has been doing all it can to resolve the problem peacefully through the UN and mediators. But the deadline of this demonstration of respect for international law is about to expire.

Tehran is involved in a charade as well. It has been changing its position three times per day, but it will not be able to maneuver endlessly. Some analysts think that Tehran wants to stall for time until the presidential elections in the United States. I don't believe so. The Iranians are bound to attribute Washington's current pacifist slogans to pre-election rhetoric. There will be some post-election changes in foreign policy but regardless of party affiliation, the U.S. elite has a uniform understanding of American interests in the Middle East. Iran will face problems regardless of who replaces Bush.

Besides, he is not going to retire tomorrow.

I do not want to claim simply that war is bad and peace is good. But I'd like to say that talk about peace does not guarantee it. Irrational attitudes are current not only among individualists. A group of mediators has to find a common language themselves before persuading a potential fighter to be quiet.

They don't always succeed. The group of six countries negotiating with Iran on its nuclear program have managed to formulate only one sensible proposal, when Russia offered Tehran to enrich uranium for it under IAEA supervision. But Iran turned down even this rational suggestion.

The very attempt to reconcile the United States and Iran over a secondary nuclear issue is irrational. This is primarily a clash between an emergent regional power and an old superpower. Likewise, it is absurd that being a participant in the conflict, the U.S. is also an interested party and a go-between all in one. It is no surprise that the group of six cannot come to terms with itself.

Understandably, a potential U.S.-Iranian confrontation will not benefit the Middle East, the UN, or ordinary people. But has this realization ever averted a war?

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