

## The Islamic Republic invites the United States to a mad tea-party

By Solmaz Copeland

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"You take the blue pill and the story ends. You wake in your bed and you believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton swallowed the red pill on February 15, and asserted that Iran is sliding into a military dictatorship. Secretary Clinton was the first high-level Obama administration official to make such an accusation. She spoke of the dimming hope surrounding negotiations with Iran to limit its

nuclear program.

In rejecting the blue pill, Iran's insistence that its nuclear program is intended only for peaceful purposes, Clinton was joined by two other Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to which she paid a visit on February 14 and 15.

The two countries share the belief that Iran is headed for a nuclear bomb capability. Only a week earlier on February 9, Iran's state television announced the country had started enriching its uranium to a higher level of 20 percent, over the objections of the international community. The report said enrichment began after Iranian scientists injected 25 kilograms of 3.5 percent enriched uranium gas into a cascade of centrifuges in a laboratory in Natanz, south of Tehran. It says inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency were present during the process.

Deeper into the rabbit-hole we go, further into the rather deep pockets of the fretted Revolutionary Guard the US digs. Last week the US Treasury Department announced its freezing of the assets in US jurisdictions of a Revolutionary Guard general and four subsidiaries of a construction company he runs due to their alleged involvement in the production and dispensing of weapons of mass destruction.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC or Pasdaran) stands to secure the revolutionary regime. The formation of the IRGC succeeded the Islamic Revolution of 1979 as an effort to consolidate several paramilitary forces into a single force loyal to the new regime and to function as a counterweight to the influence and power of the regular military, initially seen as a potential source of opposition and loyalty to the Shah. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic essentially gave the Pasdaran the responsibility of preserving the Revolution itself. The IRGC consists of ground, naval, and aviation troops, which parallel the structure of the regular military. Unique to the Pasdaran, however, has been control of Iran's strategic missile and rocket force.

Private US experts on the Iranian regime were also extended an invitation to this ever popular mad tea-party. For example Iranian-born Fariborz Ghadar, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said: "When you rely on the power of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to remain in power it is only a matter of time before the regime becomes a paramilitary dictatorship – and it is about time we realize this." Ghadar added that the current regime was " beholden to the Revolutionary Guard for its survival."

The guest of honor, Clinton, with tea-sandwich in hand, told reporters that it appears the Revolutionary Guard is in charge of Iran's controversial nuclear program. She went on to say:

"I'm not predicting what will happen but I think the trend with this greater and greater military lock on leadership decisions should be disturbing to Iranians as well as those of us on the outside." Yes, dear Secretary Clinton, you think correctly. Bravo, bravo. The trend is as disturbing as the host of this soiree, the very Iranian government whom you now propose to have more power in their hands placed. From the Shah you took it away, into the palms of Khomeini you placed, and now you say, after he shares it with his quasi-military friends, "shame on you, didn't your mother tell you not to play. Only for yourself your power you are to retain."

This wonderland is mad with characters! From the "insiders" to the "outsiders", they've all a role to play. Prince Saud al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia trotted his ideas around proposing that he thinks the imposition of sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program is an ineffective solution. What does the prince propose for a short-term resolution? Well, he has to think about it some more. Perhaps at a future meeting in a longer while he'll posture an immediate short-term solution.

Chit chatting away at this lively occasion were Clinton and Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad ibn Jasim al-Thani. Thani expressed a desire to have direct communications with the Iranians rather than sending messengers to do kings' work. Clinton stood nodding and nibbling and sipping at her tea.

A few party-goers flung cake at Clinton's face. She took it with grace. In the face of complaints from audience members, she also asked for patience by residents of Arab states targeted for tougher screening for US air travel following the abortive effort to blow up a plane near Detroit on December 25. Patience she pleads, respect the Arab states decree!

How deep the rabbit-hole goes, only Iran knows. Wherever the US is invited, Secretary Clinton will follow. Whenever Prince Saud al-Faisal comes up with a solution, the cake may have grown mold. Only one truth holds, Iran will lead the US as far as Iran is willing to go.

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