

The Passy Press[®]

Letters to the Editor

From: Stefano Starace Janfolla <stestar14@undisclosed.com>
To: Nick Gardiner <enpg@thepassypress.com>
Sent: January 6, 2017 at 3:36 PM GMT+1
Subject: Robert Hardy's Essay, December 2016

Dear Sir,

Hardy's perception that Sunni states (Saudi Arabia, but also Turkey) are using ISIS as a spearhead against Iran is correct, but if ISIS is the West's sworn enemy and incumbent danger why should we antagonize our *de facto* ally on the ground (Iran) and continue to side with the Saudis? The US and Europe should really decide how to deal with the country, Saudi Arabia, which is ultimately responsible for the surge of radical Islamism in modern times, starting with 9/11 and ending with ISIS, with in between consistent support for the spread of radical, jihadist ideologies the world over.

To be sure, Iran is no friend of the West (the Great Satan), but we must recognize that so far it has at least refrained from supporting terrorist attacks in European cities. No small favor these days. The fact that Iran aspires to a regional role is not to be condemned *per se* and, in the general picture, is probably the least of the many evils besetting the Middle East: the Persians have certainly their own agenda, but may in the end bring some order to the Middle East while the Arabs strive to herd their cats.

President Obama's attempt to bring Iran back into the fold of the international community and act as a responsible country is (was?) an enlightened one. I know that American conservatives do not forgive Iran's consistent hostility to America and many seem committed to undoing the nuclear agreement. For my part, I remain of the view that as long as the direct and immediate threat to the West comes from the ISIS our priority should be its destruction. Given the West's reluctance to put boots on the ground that requires allies and Iran seems to offer the only practicable possibility. The Russians have understood this: their involvement in Syria and the triangle Russia-Turkey-Iran recently launched in Moscow point to the wider picture, where the fight against ISIS almost looks like a pretext. This of course calls for some American *realpolitik* and, in my view, should prompt the American administration to persist on the path opened by President Obama: turn the page on Iran and do not backtrack.

While I invoke that courage on the part of America I am aware that the chances of seeing that happen are slim. The reason being, as always, Israel and its security. Up to a few years ago Iran has been stupidly vocal in its commitment to destroy Israel whereas Saudi Arabia floated a general plan for peace in the Middle East that culminated in the acceptance of the existence (not recognition) of Israel. The plan had no follow up and was most likely proposed

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for the sole purpose of currying favor with the Americans after 9/11...But there you are: Iran is perceived as a mortal danger by Israel whereas Saudi Arabia is not.

Where does all this leave President Trump and us? My guess is that America, constrained by its historical commitment to Israel, allegiance to many Sunni parties in the area and enmity for Iran, will continue on its present course, making eyes at the Saudis in the hope that they will somehow moderate their support for ISIS and, residually (?), that oil and capitals will continue to flow. Meanwhile, always with an eye to Israel, relations with Iran will be returned to the deep freezer. At that moment nobody should be surprised if Iran resumes development of its nuclear weapons and thus introduces in the area an element of instability much greater than the one connected to its present ambitions.

Sincerely,

Stefano Starace Janfolla

Ambassador Stefano Starace Janfolla, a graduate of Rome University, has served 42 years in the Italian Foreign Service. His postings have brought him to five continents. Long stints at the United Nations in New York and at NATO in Bruxelles have gained him excellent experience in multilateral diplomacy.