

Admiral did his duty

By Dr. Gary Schaub Jr.

Admiral William "Fox" Fallon moved from commanding U.S. forces in the Pacific to commanding those in the Middle East, central Asia, and eastern Africa last January. A second aircraft carrier battle group accompanied the admiral to his position as head of Central Command. The appointment of a maritime commander to a theater characterized by deserts and in which two low intensity ground conflicts were being waged suggested that these moves were designed to deal with other problems in the region.

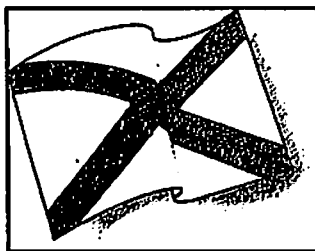
At the time, there was much informed speculation that these moves were meant to dissuade Iran from continuing with its nuclear program. Admiral Fallon, a naval aviator, was praised by Secretary of Defense Gates for his knowledge of military strategy and airpower in particular. On May 12, Vice President Cheney stood in front of five F/A-18 fighter-bombers aboard the USS John C. Stennis — just 160 miles off of Iran's coast — and said, "With 2 carrier strike groups in the Gulf, we're sending clear messages. We'll stand with others to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons and dominating the region."

He seemed to confirm the speculation that Fallon's brief was to give intense scrutiny to using maritime airpower to deny Iran a nuclear weapon.

Iran's nuclear program certainly preoccupied Washington's policy makers and with good reason. Iran made significant progress in its efforts to master the uranium enrichment cycle last year in defiance of U.N. Security Council demands that it suspend such activities.

On May 15, just three days after Cheney's remarks, *The New York Times* reported that Iran had apparently solved many of the technical difficulties associated with the uranium enrichment process. International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors were surprised to discover 1,300 working centrifuges on a short notice inspection of the Natanz enrichment facility the previous week.

The head of the IAEA, Dr. Mohamed El Baradei, said "We believe they pretty much have



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the knowledge about how to enrich. From now on, it is simply a question of perfecting that knowledge."

Knowledge, not simply facilities, was the problem. President Bush acknowledged this on Oct. 17: "If you're interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be in-

terested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon."

The next day, Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said there was "more than enough reserve" to strike Iran's nuclear program "if that, in fact, is what the national leadership wanted to do." And on Oct. 21, Cheney reiterated, "We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon."

But how can the use of military power deny a nation knowledge? Airpower can surely destroy the industrial infrastructure that Iran has spent billions of dollars building in order to mine, refine, enrich, and reprocess uranium. It can also destroy the facilities of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard

Corps who control the military aspects of the program.

But it is quite a different proposition to destroy knowledge. Some might suggest Iran's nuclear scientists be hunted down and executed by special operations forces or their computers and electronic files be destroyed en masse by an electromagnetic pulse such as that produced by a nuclear weapon. But such a campaign would tax American intelligence, special operations forces, and severely harm our image abroad.

This is the dilemma that Admiral Fallon faced. Designing and planning such a campaign while overseeing two hot wars in his area of responsibility surely gave this noted military strategist pause. The Admiral commented to *USA Today* last year, "We have to figure out a way to come to an arrangement with them [Iran]." He also told *Al-Jazeera*, "This constant drum beat of conflict is what strikes me, which is not helpful and not useful. . . . I expect that there will be no war and that is what we ought to be working for."

Such comments apparently led Secretary Gates and President Bush to lose confidence in him.

Did the admiral overstep the boundaries of proper civil-military relations by suggesting that war might not be the best policy? No. It is his responsibility to salute smartly and execute his commander-in-chief's policy when so ordered. But it is also his responsibility to provide his unvarnished judgment with regard to how best to achieve the nation's objectives.

If his analysis was that military force could not solve the problem of Iran's nuclear program and he made that case forcefully to Secretary Gates and to the president, he fulfilled his responsibilities. It is important that other commanders follow his example and fulfill their responsibilities despite the risks to their career. Disaster can occur if they do not.

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