

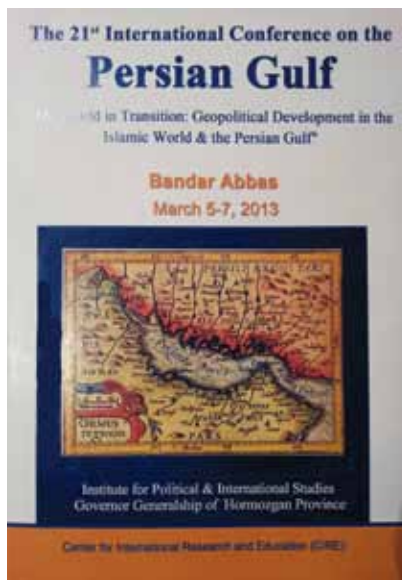
EIR Attends 21st International Conference on the Persian Gulf

by Hussein Askary

March 28—The 21st International Conference on the Persian Gulf, titled “The World in Transition: Geopolitical Development in the Islamic World & the Persian Gulf,” held on March 5-7, was organized by the Iranian Foreign Ministry’s Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), and sponsored by the Hormozgan Province’s Governor Generalship.

This conference had been held previously in Tehran, but this one was held in Bandar Abbas, a glance away from the Hormuz Strait, to underscore the strategic and economic importance of the Gulf and this province for world peace and economic cooperation. Bandar Abbas is called the “the transportation capital of Iran,” because it enjoys sea, land, and air contact with other parts of the world. It has turned from being an isolated corner to a focal point for world trade, since the construction of the Mashhad-Bafq-Bandar Abbas double-track, electrified railway, which was completed at the end of 2004, connecting the Gulf to Central Asia and the Caucasus.

This writer, representing the International Schiller Institute and the Swedish LaRouche Movement (EAP), was one of the guest speakers, and presented the Schiller Institute’s ideas for a New Paradigm, based on economic development and cooperation among the nations of the region and the major powers of the world, on common goals such as the Strategic Defense of Earth and the common project to green the deserts. (See “A Revolutionary Development Plan for the Near and Middle East,” [EIR](#), Dec. 7, 2012.) A paper by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, titled “Double Standards in International Poli-



Hussein Askary

The conference poster

tics: Why Only a Paradigm Shift Can Save Civilization” was also presented to the conference organizers and printed in the proceedings, although she could not participate in person.

The conference was held in a very tense regional situation following the events of the so-called “Arab Spring” and the increasing destabilization that followed NATO’s military intervention in Libya in 2011, and the spread of U.S.-British-Saudi-backed jihadist terrorist activities from Libya to Syria, Mali, and Algeria. The threat of religious and sectarian war dominated most of the conference discussions. A lot of the blame was placed on Saudi/Qatari-backed militant Salafist groups, which are being used

to spread sectarian terror and division throughout the region, with complicity or silence from the U.S., Britain, France, and regional countries such as Turkey. The conference was also held in the shadow of the massive military deployment by Western forces in the Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean, whose clear goal is the targeting of Iran, and intimidation of Iran’s friends, Russia and China.

However, the line presented by Iranian officials attending the conference was conciliatory and open. The conference coincided with Iran’s negotiations with the 5+1 group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) on Iran’s nuclear program, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The Iranian side expressed hope that these negotiations would lead to a better process between the two sides, and to the gradual lifting of the harsh economic sanctions imposed on Iran.

The opening session was addressed by First Vice Pres-

ident Mohammad-Reza Rahimi and the Governor General of Hormozgan, Ibrahim Azizi (see *Interview*). Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi sent a message to the conference, which was read by IPIS Director General Dr. Mostafa Dolatyar.

Rahimi lamented what he called “Iranophobia” and the intervention by international powers in the internal affairs of the countries in the region, creating division among them, and a dangerous arms race in the Gulf. “In reality, in the current circumstance, the security of the Persian Gulf will not be secured solely through military force; rather regional countries must base their own security on mutual trust, expanding their interests, and mutual cooperation,” said Rahimi. He added that “the four main points of energy security—fighting terrorism, nuclear energy, economic development, and cooperation—have further increased the significance of the Persian Gulf within the global security system.” Concerning Iran’s role, Rahimi stressed: “The existence of a powerful Islamic Republic is not just a benefit to the entire region; rather, thanks to its possibilities, capabilities, and advancements, it can play a constructive role in providing political arrangements, security, and regional calm.” Most importantly, Rahimi called for “the establishment of a new security structure in the region, based on economic development and mutual arrangements among the nations of the region themselves.”

Foreign Minister Salehi focused on the common interests of the nations of the Gulf. “Religious, cultural, political, and economic commonalities, and, above all, the unchangeable fact of neighborhood, requires that we learn lessons from the past, look forward to a brighter future, and think of new horizons for cooperation and solidarity,” his message read.

Salehi stressed that the conflicts in the region were a result of foreign interventions. “Western powers, the United States in particular, have been trying to divide the regional countries by sowing discord, to widen differences through spreading phobia, and to prevent convergence in the region,” he said. He called for more unity among the nations of the region, and the establishment of a joint economic-political structure to prevent the current crisis from escalating.



Conference speakers. Askary is on the far right.

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Religious Wars

Iranian officials repeated Iran’s official policy of working with neighboring countries on economic and cultural cooperation, avoiding reciprocal interference in internal affairs; however, the majority of Iranian scholars present—surprisingly, many of them young people—kept hammering on the sectarian problems in the region as a result of American-British-Saudi interventions in Syria, Bahrain, Iraq, and Yemen, against the Shi’a minorities.

The fact that the real goal is to destroy these nations as modern nation-states becomes diluted in the sea of sectarian Shi’a-vs.-Sunni emotions. This reflects the enormous dangers embedded in the Blair Doctrine of abolishing nation-states through regime change, and the divide-and-conquer British tactics of both the Bush-Cheney, and now, Obama administrations. Rational thinking is replaced by religious emotions, and solutions move further and further away from the agenda. New “academic” terms, never before known to this author, were presented at the conference by Iranian scholars, such as “Shi’aphobia” and “Shi’a geopolitics.”

One paradox was not resolved, due to the official Iranian line of calling the events in the Arab world collectively an “Islamic awakening.” The paradox that presented itself is: How then is it possible that the same United States and Britain are aiding this great “awakening” with weapons and terrorists, as in the case of Libya and Syria? Looking at political-social upheavals from a strictly religious key-hole entangled many of the speakers in self-contradictions.

Nonetheless, the Iranian officials participating in, and

moderating the sessions, who represented different governmental and quasi-governmental institutions, kept a certain healthy distance from these arguments and traps. Some of them, as in the case of Dr. Ali Reza Enayati of the Foreign Ministry, even warned some of the speakers against using religious and sectarian terms while criticizing Arab countries in the Gulf. He reiterated that this is not the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Dr. Dolatyar intervened in the final session to correct some of the Iranian speakers, stating that the policy of the Iranian government is to regard the people in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and other countries not as Shi'a, but as fellow Muslims. He even stated that the rights being demanded by protesters in Bahrain and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia are not Shi'a rights, but universal human rights.

Reflecting the very dangerous situation in the region, even conference papers presented by foreign scholars were dominated by discussion of the "Arab Spring" and its impact on international geopolitics and the Gulf, with the war in Syria and the threat of sectarian and religious wars taking center stage. Papers were presented by academics from more than 20 countries, including the United States (although none could travel to Iran), Germany, Russia, Great Britain, Turkey, Ukraine, Poland, several South American countries, Japan, India, and some Arab countries.

Several foreign guests, such as Prof. Aftab Kamal Pasha from India and Dr. Leila Nicolas Rahbani from Lebanon, made the point that one of the important causes of the instability in the region is the disintegration of the trans-Atlantic economic-financial system and the rise of the economic power of China, Russia, and their allies. This was reflected in several presentations, but unfortunately, merely as an academic geopolitical analysis, with no solutions in sight, other than balance of power and balance of terror that would hopefully deter the West from continuing its futile and destructive policies in the region.

The speakers expected nothing positive to come from the United States or Europe. The fact that there is a life-and-death fight going on inside the U.S. and Europe to save these nation-states and their citizens from the tyranny of the British imperial systems called the EU and the Obama Administration, does not really register in these circles.

Some reference was made here and there to the dismay of citizens in European countries and the U.S., as in the case of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, but

FIGURE 1
Iran



the speakers said that these moves are usually crushed by the state police apparatus and powerful economic interests and their controlled mass media.

Schiller Institute ‘Opens Doors’

This author addressed the conference on the second day, and with his presentation of the fight being waged by the LaRouche movement and the Schiller Institute in the United States and Europe against British geopolitics, and his outline of an alternative for all nations, the atmosphere inside the conference changed somehow, and “new doors were opened,” as one participant described it. Askary started by bringing greetings from Helga Zepp-LaRouche, and discussing her work as expressed in the two international Schiller Institute conferences that were held in Flörsheim, Germany, and New York City. But he shocked the audience by presenting the cosmic threats to Earth and the entire human race (taking up the meteorite blast over Chelyabinsk in Russia just two weeks earlier), reducing the academic talk of geopolitics and other small-minded chatter to nonsense.

With the Russian proposal for a Strategic Defense of Earth (SDE) presented as the forum for cooperation among nations to face the galactic threat and to prevent nuclear war, and the Schiller Institute’s proposed proj-

FIGURE 2
The World Land-Bridge



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Rough outlines of the Schiller Institute's proposals. The circle at the center designates the Bering Strait bridge/tunnel, which would connect Eurasia with the Americas.

ects to green the deserts as a gathering point for nations on the surface of Earth, a new kind of discussion suddenly dominated the conference, with representatives from Asia, especially, coming forward with ideas for economic cooperation.

Dr. Osamu Miyata, Director of the Center for Contemporary Islamic Studies in Tokyo, proposed an economic agreement among the nations of the Gulf, backed economically by Japan and other major powers, in the common interest. He was supported by the Indian guests and some of the Iranian scholars. The discussion took off on how to practically achieve that. Optimism is a legitimate and common aspect of all human beings!

The Governor of Hormozgan attended the final session of the conference, and Askary was given a chance by the moderator to present the Schiller Institute ideas once again, pointing to Bandar Abbas on the Schiller Institute's map of the World Land-Bridge [Figure 2] as a link between Eurasia and Africa, and suggesting that the Strait of Hormuz become a launching pad for global cooperation rather than global war. Askary emphasized that all human beings share common goals no matter where

they come from, and those are to ensure a good future for the coming generations, and a decent physical, cultural, and moral condition for the present society.

In concluding the conference, Dr. Dolatyar reiterated the words of Foreign Minister Salehi: "In learning lessons from past events, we would like to look to a brighter future and think of horizons of cooperation and empathy. In order to take advantage of the capacities of regional countries and by increasing our own capacities, we hope to aid in the growth and flourishing of the region's economy."

Conclusion

Iranians believe, and correctly so, that they have been treated unfairly by the United States, in particular, and the West, in general. They stress that they have not attacked or invaded any other nation and have not played any subversive role against their neighbors. On the contrary, Iranians have shown a great deal of restraint against false accusations, and their help in supporting the anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan (who became allies of NATO), and even their support to the

supposedly U.S.-allied President Hamid Karzai's government in Afghanistan, has been met with ungratefulness and scorn. Iran has been hit by an opium war from British/U.S.-controlled Afghanistan, and terrorist activities against its eastern provinces emanating from inside Afghanistan. The fact that Iran has increased its influence in Iraq, the participants say, was a result of the insane U.S. policy of dismantling the Iraqi state and its institutions. Iran, as the Iranians themselves state, "merely filled a vacuum" left by Saddam's regime.

But the reality is that Iran is building a buffer security zone against U.S./Israeli attacks in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, as a defensive move. The harsh economic sanctions imposed on Iran are completely unwarranted, because the excuse that Iran is developing nuclear weapons is without foundation, even according to U.S. intelligence estimates. And the uranium enrichment program Iran is following is completely in line with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which the country signed long ago. When Iranians look at the treatment they are receiving for behaving well, and then look at Israel, for example, which does have nuclear weapons, never signed the NPT, and is occupying other nations' lands and mistreating the Palestinian people, but gets praise and support from the U.S. and others in the West, the Iranians conclude that no matter what they do, whether they are friendly or unfriendly to the West, they would get the same treatment. This is the main reason that the Iranian leadership is completely distrustful of the West. The only reason they are engaged in the 5+1 talks, is that China and Russia are included.

In any case, the policies of the U.S., the British, and their allies only lead to increasing tension with Iran and in the Gulf. Any incident in the Hormuz Strait, whether intentional or not, could lead to a war, from which no one in the region, and maybe the world, would recover. Only a change in U.S. policies in line with its genuine national interest and its true political tradition, as best represented by President Franklin Roosevelt, can pull the fuse away from the bomb in the Gulf.

The response to my presentation of the ideas of the LaRouche movement and the Schiller Institute, for "peace through economic development and cooperation," made it clear to me that there is a natural openness in Iran for such initiatives, and these can serve as a basis for a fruitful dialogue among Iran, its Arab neighbors, and the West, to secure lasting peace and stability in this sensitive and important region of the world.