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Our government has kept us in a perpetual state of fear - kept us in a continuous stampede of patriotic fervor - with the cry of grave national emergency.

– General Douglas MacArthur

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September 25, 2007

## What World War III May Look Like

**N**eoconservatives are great observers of war and warriors, though they are sometimes not in complete agreement about the numbering of the conflicts that they send other people's sons and daughters to fight. Norman Podhoretz, the patriarch of the neocons, believes that the Cold War was World War III and that the U.S. is now fighting World War IV against "Islamofascism." He intends to expand World War IV by slating Iran as the next domino to fall to America's military might. Podhoretz undoubtedly sees the current global conflict as something that is good and necessary, both containable and winnable, but as his judgment on Iraq was fallible, his prediction of Iran's rapid destruction is also unreliable. It might be useful to imagine just how war with Iran could play out if the Iranians don't roll over and surrender at the first whiff of grapeshot.

It might start with a minor incident, possibly involving an American Marine patrol operating out of the new base at Badrah near the Iranian border. The Marines are surrounded by superior Iranian forces claiming that the Americans have strayed inside Iranian territory. The Marines refuse to surrender their weapons and instead open fire. The Iranians respond. Helicopter gunships are called in to support the Marines, and artillery fire is directed against Iranian military targets close to the border. President Bush calls the incident an act of war and, in an emotional speech to the nation, orders U.S. forces to attack. A hastily called meeting of the UN Security Council results in a 17-1 vote urging the United States to exercise restraint, with only Washington voting "no." In the UN General Assembly, only the U.S., Israel, Micronesia, and Costa Rica support the military

action. The U.S. is effectively alone.

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In the first few days, overwhelming American air and naval superiority destroy Iran's principal air, naval, and army bases. Iranian Revolutionary Guard facilities are particularly targeted and are obliterated, as are the known Iranian nuclear research and development sites. Population centers are avoided, though smart weapons destroy communications centers and command and control facilities. There are nevertheless large numbers of civilian casualties and widespread radioactive contamination as many of the targeted sites are in or near cities. Infrastructure is also hit, particularly bridges, roads, and power generation stations close to known nuclear research centers and military sites. The U.S. media, which had supported the administration's plans to engage Iran, rallies around the flag, praising the surgical attacks designed to cripple Tehran's nuclear weapons program. Congress supports the bombing, with leaders from both parties praising the president and commenting that Iran had it coming.

The Pentagon and White House call the attacks a complete success, but Iran strikes back. With five years to prepare, Iran has successfully hidden and hardened many of its military and nuclear facilities, a large percentage of which are undamaged. The aircraft carrier *USS Eisenhower* operating in the Persian Gulf is hit by a Chinese Silkworm cruise missile and grounds itself in shallow water to avoid sinking. Three other support vessels are also hit and severely damaged when they are attacked by small craft manned by suicide bombers. Pro-Iranian riots break out in Beirut, where the government is forced to call in soldiers to shoot at the crowds. In the south of Lebanon, Hezbollah fires salvos of rockets into Israel. Israel responds by bombing Lebanon and Syria, which it blames for the attacks. Iranian Shahab-3 missiles also strike Israel, killing a number of civilians. The Israeli Defense Forces are mobilized, and troops are sent to the northern border. Syria and Lebanon also mobilize their forces. Rioters in Baghdad attack US troops and the American embassy and are driven back only after the soldiers open fire and call in helicopter gunships. Snipers attack American soldiers all over Iraq. Shi'ites sympathetic to Iran sabotage Saudi Arabia's eastern oil fields. The Saudi fields suffer some damage, and hundreds of alleged saboteurs are shot dead by Saudi security forces. An oil tanker out of Kuwait is hit by a Silkworm close to the Straits of Hormuz and runs aground. Another hits a mine planted by Iran. Insurers in London refuse to cover any tankers transiting the Persian Gulf. Oil shipments from the region, one quarter of the world supply, stop completely, and oil goes up to \$200 a barrel. Wall Street suffers its biggest loss in 20 years, with the Dow Jones index plummeting by more than 800 points.

The U.S. offers Iran a cease-fire, which Tehran rejects. Two days later, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan is assassinated under orders from Tehran. Fearing that he will be next, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf flees to Dubai. Order breaks down in both countries. The Pakistani army declares a state of emergency. Several leaders in the Pakistani tribal areas that are sheltering Osama bin Laden declare themselves independent. Fighting increases in Iraq with U.S. soldiers being targeted by both leading Shi'ite militias. U.S. troops evacuate Baghdad, fighting their way out with heavy casualties. There are reports of Iranian soldiers and militiamen massing at the border. Rioters in Basra succeed in cutting the main roads leading to

Kuwait that supply U.S. forces.

The U.S. scrambles to contain the damage, pressuring the Pakistani army to put down the riots and secure the country's nuclear arsenal, while at the same time trying to restore order in Kabul through the multinational force. Several NATO allies balk at using their soldiers in what they see as a burgeoning civil war, and the U.S. suffers heavy losses in street fighting before withdrawing to its bases. Taliban-backed militias take over much of Kabul and Kandahar. Afghanistan's Mazar-i-Sharif, which is largely Shi'ite, declares itself part of Iran. Waves of Iranian soldiers and militiamen cross the border into Iraq, where they are welcomed by the Iraqi militias. U.S. troops are under siege countrywide and are forced to withdraw into their bases where they can be supplied by air. The Iraqi government resigns and is replaced by a group of Shi'ite clerics. The government in Lebanon falls and is replaced by a coalition headed by Hezbollah. A salvo of Iranian Silkworm missiles sets the Saudi Arabian eastern oil fields ablaze. Saudi Arabia sends an urgent message to Tehran declaring that it is "neutral" in the fighting and will not assist the U.S. in any way. Kuwait sends the same message, as does Egypt. Kuwait refuses to allow the U.S. to use its men and supplies at Camp Doha against Iran. In Bahrain, rampaging Shi'ite crowds depose Sheik Khalifa al-Khalifa and set up an Islamic Republic which immediately demands that the U.S. Fifth Fleet dismantle its headquarters and go home. The Dow Jones index loses another 1,000 points.

The U.S. attempts to get China and Russia to mediate with Iran to end the fighting, but they refuse to do Washington any favors, noting that they had opposed the attack in the first place. Suicide bombers attack London, Washington, New York, and Los Angeles. The attacks are poorly planned and inflict only a few casualties, but panic sets in and the public demands that the respective governments do something. The U.S. tells the Iranian government that unless resistance ceases, nuclear weapons will be used on select targets. India and Pakistan are alarmed by the U.S. threat and put their own nuclear forces on high alert, as does Israel. Russia and China also increase their readiness levels to respond to the crisis.

Iran refuses to concede defeat, and the Iranian people rally around the government. The U.S. public clamors for action. Oil prices continue to surge, and even the long term viability of petroleum supplies is in question as the Straits of Hormuz continue to be closed. Another U.S. ship is sunk by suicide attackers in the Persian Gulf. U.S. troops are under fire nearly everywhere in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Anti-American rioting takes place in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Dhaka. The U.S. consulate general in Karachi, Pakistan, is overrun and sacked. Forty Americans are killed, along with hundreds of Pakistanis. The Pakistani army announces that it can no longer protect Americans. There are frequent terrorism scares in a number of American cities, which are under red alert security lockdown, though there are no new attacks. As a preventive measure, Muslim leaders and some antiwar activists are arrested and detained at military prisons, including Guantanamo. Israel continues to be bombarded from inside Lebanon and Syria. Its air attacks on targets in both countries inflict major damage on civilians but are unsuccessful in stopping the rockets. Rioting rocks the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas flees to Cairo. India threatens to attack Pakistan if there is

any question about the security of Islamabad's nuclear arsenal.

The United States uses a neutron-type bomb against the main Iranian nuclear research center at Natanz, which it had already bombed conventionally and destroyed. It vows to bomb again if Iran continues to resist. Iran is defiant and fires another wave of Silkworms at U.S. ships, sinking one. Suicide bombers hit U.S. targets in Iraq and Afghanistan. Russia and China place their nuclear forces on high alert. Pakistani militants take over parliament, aided by radical elements in the army and the intelligence service. India launches a preemptive strike against the main Pakistani nuclear centers at Wah and Multan, where the country's arsenal is believed to be concentrated. Pakistan has hidden some of its nukes elsewhere, however, and is able to strike back by bombing New Delhi. World War III has begun.

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