Interview: Gen. Mahmoud Khallaf (ret.)

U.S. 'Surge' in Iraq Is To Prepare Attack on Iran

Dr. Khallaf is a strategic analyst and retired major general; a fellow of the Nasr Higher Military Academy; a Member of the Royal College of Defense Studies (RCDS) London; and honorary member of the Association of the United States Army, Fort Benning, Georgia. He participated in several training courses with the U.S. Army in the United States and Germany. Muriel Mirak-Weissbach interviewed him on March 10 in Cairo.

EIR: How do you view the regional situation, in light of today's Baghdad meeting, which brought together representatives of the U.S., Iran, and Syria for the first time in years? Do you see a shift in the U.S. posture, in the direction of the Baker-Hamilton Report's recommendations?
Khallaf: The situation has turned in favor of [President] Bush—*unfortunately.* Iran tried to play the role of more than just a regional power, and this has given Bush the opportunity to persuade the Congress and Senate that U.S. interests are threatened by Iran. It's not just the nuclear issue; it's the situation in Iraq. Iran has also made threats against Israel, and no one can ignore the role of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States. And Iran is seen as disturbing the Middle East—the Sunni communities in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Bahrein. I, along with many others, supported Iran for a long, long time. Iran supported the Arab world against Israel and against what was perceived as the new U.S. imperialism. But now public opinion in Egypt and the Arab world has turned against Iran.

EIR: Why?
Khallaf: Iran played the conflict in Iraq wrongly, supporting the killing of Sunnis.

EIR: But it is mainly the Shi'ites that are being massacred, like the 120 killed in the bombings a few days ago.
Khallaf: We don't need to go into details, how many Shi'a, how many Sunnis. The majority is Shi'ite in Iraq. Let me be clear: We all hated Saddam Hussein, but the way they executed him, and the timing—on the beginning of the highest Muslim holiday, Eid al-Adha—was too much. It was the holiest holiday for Muslims, the beginning of the Hajj pilgrimage. In the Lebanon War, we all supported [Hezbollah leader Hassan] Nasrullah, a Shi'ite. There were many Sunni *fatwas* [religious decrees] in support of Hezbollah. There is no difference between Sunnis and Shi'a. Then the day chosen to execute Saddam Hussein showed that the Shi'a were ignoring this.

EIR: But the Iraqi government is not only Shi'ites.
Khallaf: [Iraqi Prime Minister] Nouri al-Maliki is remotely controlled from Tehran; he is part of the problem, and will never be part of the solution. Now the whole Arab world is against Iran. If Bush strikes Iran, he will win the hearts and minds of the Arabs. If al-Maliki had waited one week, he would have shown respect for the Sunnis.

EIR: But the holiday is for all Muslims.
Khallaf: For the Shi'ites, it began a day later. They didn't even give Saddam Hussein the time to utter the whole pledge of faith. All Sunnis now hate Iran. When they executed Saddam Hussein, it was a violation of the heart of Islam. Ask anyone.

EIR: I would ask Saudi King Abdullah, who just met with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Together they mapped out proposed solutions to the Lebanese crisis, Palestine, and also Iraq.
Khallaf: Ahmadinejad is like a Prime Minister only; [Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei is on top, he's the Khalifa, he's the head of the armed forces, intelligence, police, national security. He's the one who makes decisions.

EIR: Of course. But Khamenei had sent a letter to King Abdullah via Ali Larijani, and he was the one who was behind Ahmadinejad's visit. If all Sunnis hate Iran, why did the King do this?
Khallaf: It's just politics. The King is not a mufti or a Khalifa. It's all politics, for the media. They shook hands—it's propaganda. Look at what is happening on the ground. Even after the Mecca deal [brokered by King Abdullah, between rival Palestinian factions], this has not led to any changes on the ground. Hamas and Hamas leader [Khalid] Mesha'al belong to Iran—also Nasrullah.

EIR: That's why it's so important: because the Saudis are supporting the Siniora government in Lebanon, and Iran supports Hezbollah. That's how they could reach an agreement.

Khallaf: The Saudis fear Iran because of their own Shi'ite community in the east.

EIR: If Iran is hit militarily, then what happens in Saudi Arabia and Bahrein?
Khallaf: Nothing. The police will take care of it. As for the Baghdad conference, I was asked about it on Egyptian TV today, and I said, "This is the 15th conference in 42 months."

EIR: But it is the first with the presence of Iran and Syria.
Khallaf: That makes no difference. The balance of power is completely different. The Iraqis at the conference, the Iraqi government, they are part of the problem. There have been lots of conferences—Cairo, Riyadh, Tehran, Damascus. *No one can control Iraq now.* The Iraqi streets are out of control, the militias are there.

EIR: How do you, as a military professional, assess the military situation in Iraq? And how do you think the conflict can be overcome? The Bush Administration is sending in 21,500 more troops, but this has led only to more casualties.
Khallaf: This number is not for stabilizing Baghdad. The U.S. sent in 21,500 troops for one reason: to prepare a strike against Iran. It's too late to do anything with more troops in Iraq.

What is the White House thinking? Bush will end his term in a short time. In order to achieve change in the Middle East, he has to do something dramatic. The neo-con ideologues won't leave the White House with the Middle East collapsed. So, what kind of action?

From the standpoint of strategic-military thinking, there are two possibilities: 1) withdraw, but the White House says no to this; 2) or "escape forward," not "escape backward." If I am a general in the field, I have the option either of escaping backward, withdrawing, or escaping forward. Escape forward is most likely. Why? In the field, I have to choose between worse and worse, or between worse and victory.

Most likely, they will move against Iran. It depends on the thinking in the White House. I wrote in many articles, that, according to my education, in Egypt and the U.S., it would be wrong to send the Army to Iraq. But they did it! It was crazy. They are crazy people. Now, however, withdrawal would be seen as a defeat. The U.S. has lost a lot, and may have to go in again, after a couple of years. The problem for the U.S., inside the minds of the White House, is not Iraq. Iraq is going to Hell. It is rhetoric to talk about stability in Iraq. If I were a U.S. general or chief of U.S. strategic planning, I would never for one second think of the Iraqi people. I would think only of the national security and the vital interests of the United States.

They will attack Iran. And Congress couldn't stop it, according to the Constitution.

EIR: You are misreading the situation in Washington; it has changed fundamentally since the Nov. 7 elections.
Khallaf: It doesn't matter. Congress can do nothing.

EIR: They can impeach.
Khallaf: You talk too much about impeachment. The U.S. President has veto rights, no matter what. Think about the appointment of Admiral [William] Fallon; the fact he is from the Navy means a lot. Think also about the fact that Bush gave [Gen. David] Petraeus the order two or three weeks ago, to pursue or kill Iranians inside Iraq. No one understands this. Petraeus doesn't need to receive such an order; he can do what he needs to protect his troops. As a general, if someone has to tell me, it should be the chief of staff or the minister of defense, not the commander in chief. But Bush gave the order to collect evidence of Iranian meddling, because it's the only way for Bush to strike Iran without any new authorization.

EIR: You mean, to create a Gulf of Tonkin-style incident?
Khallaf: It's easy to get "evidence."

EIR: If they go to war, what is the war plan against Iran?
Khallaf: There will be two phases: First phase will be severe strikes from bombers, from Diego Garcia, not from the Gulf—the heavy bombers, 250 pounds, the PU-2, to bomb tunnels. These were used against Hezbollah by Israel in Lebanon.

EIR: What would the targets be?
Khallaf: The nuclear facilities and military responding systems, air defenses and rocket launchers and military headquarters, to deny Iran any response. Iran's air defenses are very weak.

EIR: What about the systems they're received from Russia?
Khallaf: Since 1991, the Russians have developed no new technologies, no new air defense systems, so they are old systems. The U.S. fears Iran would attack Israel, so they will deploy Patriots. They can track any Iranian missile launching by satellite, and can destroy missiles on launch.

The second phase, after hitting only nuclear and military facilities, would be to strike electric power stations and refineries. This would collapse the economy.

EIR: Why do you see Fallon's appointment as a Navy man as so important?
Khallaf: Why put a white uniform in command of land or ground forces? He was Pacific Commander. What is this command? It's an area of responsibility going from the West Coast of the United States to the East Coast of the Horn of Africa. This means one-half the surface of the globe. This command is responsible for about 90% of the United States' interests, in one-half of the globe. To bring that man to CentCom means you are bringing the mind of the most sophisticated weapons in the whole area. He was a carrier commander in the Gulf War.

I wouldn't be surprised if, within a matter of weeks, Bush can say, there are many reasons for an attack: "The troops in Iraq are endangered by Iran, so I *ordered already* strikes against Iran." He will order the strikes at night and then go on television to announce what he has done. Bush has no choice, actually. Already the Congress, the media, are against him, he's between worse and worse. If he strikes, he'll be between worse and victory. He'll talk about how the "national security of the U.S. is in danger," the "vital interests of the U.S.," and of "our sons and daughters in Iraq."

Of course, it's a gamble, I agree with you. You in *EIR* said two years ago, referring to Seymour Hersh's exposés, and others, that there was a plan to strike Iran. At that time, I told you, no, from the military-strategic and political standpoint. Now, it is clear to me that there is no other choice, because the situation in Iraq is totally hopeless. The forces in Iraq will never achieve security. Iran will become a threat to U.S. national security.

EIR: Iran represents no strategic threat to the U.S.; that's ridiculous.
Khallaf: You say that, I say that, I agree; but that is how the decision-makers think.

EIR: You say now that the Sunnis would accept a U.S. strike on Iran. That's what [Vice President] Cheney was campaigning for during his tour here, in his meetings with the Saudi King and others. That's the thinking behind this crazy idea of the "GCC+2" [Gulf Cooperation Council plus Jordan and Egypt]?
Khallaf: It reminds me of the tour Cheney made to convince them before the Iraq War.

EIR: But do you really believe these governments would agree? Would Egypt go along with this?
Khallaf: The dominant points in Egypt's foreign policy are: 1) We never interfere in other countries; and 2) we are against the use of force to solve a political problem. We are for negotiations, for a political solution. Therefore, we won't militarily support a U.S. attack against Iran or Iran. We will support a political approach.

The United States understands this very well. There are no facilities to support the U.S. for the war against Iran or others. If Cheney comes to Egypt, this is what he will hear. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states are in the same situation. They are on the front lines.

Remember what President Mubarak told Cheney before the Iraq War. He said, if the U.S. went to war, it would create 100 bin Ladens. Remember also my comments, that I sent to Mr. LaRouche for a webcast some time back: I said, if they go to war against Iraq, it will ignite a fire that will burn for 100 years. Bush is the ideal President to do such a crazy thing. He has no choice. Unless an angel comes from Heaven to solve the problem.