

You Can't Turn Your Back On Technology Forever

Contributed by C.W. Spaulding
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Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past. -George Orwell
Control. That is at the heart of two of the recent developments on the world radar, the escalating tension over Iran's nuclear program that led to further sanctions and the escalating furor over rampant mistakes by referees at the World Cup that led to a review of available technology. FIFA has a vested interest in maintaining referee control over what happens on the pitch and in supporting officials' judgment of illegal activities.
The US and other nuclear powers have a vested interest in maintaining control over who joins the nuclear club and supporting officials' judgment of illegal activities.
The problem with both situations is that their control is an illusion. Neither FIFA or the US (or the UN or IAEA or any other institution you can name) can control the future of technology, because technology has a power beyond any enforcement. Their resistance to the spread of technology is futile.

Don't believe me? Just look at the facts. The International Atomic Energy Association was founded in 1958, when only three states—the USSR, US and UK—were nuclear powers. Since then, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and possibly Israel have joined them, along with random other countries that have not tested but may possess the capability. The IAEA doesn't even have enough power to determine who officially has weapons let alone their regulate safety.

Likewise, the Treaty on Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was implemented in 1968 with the intention of control of and accountability for the technology. However, nuclear weapons sharing between NATO states, accounting for the nuclear weapons inherited by several countries after the fall of the Soviet Union, several states' choices to dismantle rather than destroy active warheads, and other convoluted circumstances mean that in the end, our only choice to take a country's word for it that they're responsibly meeting their obligations to not endanger the world. Neither the institution nor the treaty has done an effective job of preventing the spread of technology.

Technology, obviously, has always been hailed as the wave of the future. Technological innovation and creativity is fueled by assessing the world as it could be instead of what it should be. This viewpoint eliminates the fear tinting the uncertainties of the future. Institutions like FIFA and the US government view the world's future as it should be: referees should be able to make accurate, unbiased calls and conventional military superiority should mean that a state can get its way with weaker states.

But neither has been the case. When looking at the future, technology emphasizes hope where institutions recognize vulnerability. When the forces of technology and institutional authority work hand in hand, it is a powerful partnership. When institutions try to fight the development of technology, they are usually fighting in spite of overwhelming evidence that it is a losing battle.

How many erroneous calls will it take before FIFA implements the technology that will make the officials more accurate and less subjective? How much controversy and resentment will be created and nursed before FIFA loses its legitimacy and its officials gain a permanent reputation as incompetent and unfair? Likewise, how long is the US going to pretend that sanctions are a legitimate method of containing Iran's nuclear ambitions?

Sanctions have proven ineffective—the very fact that Iran has refined uranium to 20% purity while under UN sanctions should be stark evidence that the US needs to consult its playbook for a new strategy. Only fools (and the insane) do the same thing over and over again and expect different results. The hunger for technology and the status, accuracy, and efficiency it brings will control the future. With globalization, the opportunities to convert that hunger into actual advancement are readily available.

Indeed, the advancement of technology has always controlled the past. The invention of the airplane, the assembly line, and the space shuttle are but a few examples of technological drivers for state success. The US ended World War II by dropping two nuclear bombs on Japan. During the Cold War, politics, economics, and social policy were held hostage to the dominant priority of nuclear parity between the US and the Soviet Union.

Iran's past colors their future intentions for nuclear technology. Iranian leaders' past comments of their intentions towards Israel and the United States, its history of violence toward its citizens, and its secret buildup and trade with partners more concerned with profit than nonproliferation affect the world's reaction today.

Past violence also affects the football world and reinforces the need for absolute respect for the officials on the field. The number of deaths, injuries, and eruptions of chaos that has occurred at football games exceeds any other world sport. Mitigating violence is a serious priority, and one way of achieving that is by supporting the absolute authority of the referees. Serving as a backdrop to the boiling frustration are football fans everywhere who can readily cite the numerous, blatant examples where split second decisions by ill-positioned or ill-informed officials have cost teams dearly. In order to control the future, then, you must control perceptions of your past.

And the present? At present, FIFA views goal line technology and instant replay capability as competition for referees instead of assistance. Again, vulnerability overcomes opportunity. The US views Iranian nuclear capabilities as a road to inevitable strikes against Israel and worries about the enormous insecurity of Iran's command and control in the face of possible revolution, uprising, or even a simple repeat of what occurred during the last "election."

It is miraculous that the atomic bomb has not been used in an attack since 1945, and there is rife evidence that Iran is ready to blow as its population becomes more restless and vocal. Nonproliferation is a pipe dream, but an unstable regime with weaponized plutonium is a nightmare. In the face of these concerns, only the terminally naive will buy into President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's mocking of the US by acting like it is crazy for suspecting Iran's intended uses. It is no secret that Iranians do not support Ahmadinejad, but they do support their growing nuclear capabilities.

More elite than any football club, Iran is seeking membership in the nuclear club because it knows the levels of respect, leverage, and consideration skyrocket for a country with nuclear capabilities. The US—or the UN, or NATO, or any treaty's enforcement mechanism—can't control the spread of nuclear weapons because it is fighting the market. The demand is high, Iran has the ability to buy, and no piece of paper is going to circumvent the invisible hand. Furthermore, U.S. insistence on world government intervention in Iran's performance is not going to produce effective results and in the end will hinder its own goals.

The technology is here. The future has already met the present. No organizational ban will stop its eventual use. No edict will overcome the motivations to develop controversial technology further. Both institutions need to review their calls to ignore developing technology and implement a new strategy that incorporates its eventual spread. Otherwise, they could face consequences of wasted opportunities for their own growth and eventually undermine their own strength.