



"IRAN'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM AND HOW TO COUNTER IT"

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Thank you very much for the invitation to address the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Israel on Tehran's nuclear threat.

The IAEA Confirms Iran's Nuclear Weapons Program

Last week, the IAEA ended the debate over whether or not Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons. The Agency's November 8 report reveals that Tehran continues to enrich uranium, conducts experiments on nuclear triggers and is engaged in a program to design nuclear warheads for long-range missiles. "The Agency has serious concerns regarding possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme," the report states, adding that credible information "indicates that Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device." Equally troubling is that with respect to Iran's work on its Shahab-3 missile, which can reach Israel, "any payload option other than nuclear...could be ruled out."

The evidence shows that time is running out to stop the bomb. Iran's existing stockpiles and enrichment capability puts it in a position to produce in just 62 days enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear device, [according to](#) Stephen Rademaker and Blaise Misztal of the Washington-based Bipartisan Policy Center. As international inspectors only examine Iranian nuclear facilities approximately every two months, "Tehran is approaching the ability to produce a bomb's worth of highly enriched uranium before the international community realizes it has happened."

Lessons from Past Mistakes

The politicization of the IAEA Under ElBaradei

Some of the evidence presented last week has been known to the IAEA for years but not clearly communicated to the world. For example, revelations about Iranian work on a nuclear warhead already appeared in a 2008 IAEA report, when Mohammed ElBaradei was still the Agency's director general. The problem was that in that earlier report, the IAEA, as the British daily *The Guardian* [put it](#), only "alluded vaguely" to that same warhead. ElBaradei [explained](#) earlier this year that his restrained reports on Tehran's nuclear programme "were framed to avoid war" and that under his leadership the organization had to be aware of the "political implications of our work."

Even after leaving office, ElBaradei, now a candidate for the Egyptian presidency, continues to downplay Tehran's nuclear weapons program. In an interview just a few months ago [he said](#): "I don't believe Iran is a clear and present danger. All I see is the hype about the threat posed by Iran."

ElBaradei and the IAEA received the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize "for their efforts to prevent nuclear energy from being used for military purposes." His "cautious" reports, though, have probably had the exact opposite effect. Under his 12-year watch, one of the world's most dangerous regimes has made steady progress toward acquiring the world's most dangerous weapon.

Europe, as a strong believer in multilateral and international organizations, is not blameless here. As concerns arose whether ElBaradei was, [in the words](#) of former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, "muddying the message," some EU member states failed to exercise their oversight responsibility. When ElBaradei's election for a third term came up in 2005, the US looked in vain for an alternative. According to [media reports](#) at the time, no candidate was willing to step forward after other board members, including France and Germany, threw their weight behind him.



The Limits of Engagement

The other lesson is that Europe's policy of engagement has not produced any results. Engagement continued even after Iranians openly admitted that they were using the talks only to buy more time for their nuclear program. For example, in an interview that aired on Iranian Channel 2 on August 4, 2005, then Chief Iranian Nuclear Negotiator Hosein Musavian [said](#): "Thanks to our dealings with Europe, even when we got a 50-day ultimatum, we managed to continue the work for two years. This way we completed [the uranium conversion facility] in Esfahan. This way we carried out the work to complete Natanz [nuclear enrichment facility]."

Engagement can be a legitimate tool but it appears that in Europe it had become policy dogma, which EU governments refused to question even in the face of Tehran's admission that it was trying to run out the clock. It is important that Europe recognizes the limitations of this policy so not to repeat the same mistake again.

What To Do About the Iranian Nuclear Threat? Keep Up the Military Posture

The primary focus must be on avoiding a military confrontation. Many analysts believe that air strikes would at best delay Iran's progress. Moreover, military force against Iran could generate a host of collateral problems, including attacks against U.S. forces in the region and Hezbollah and Hamas attacks on Israel. Having said that, the military option hasn't been ruled out. While it is currently not favored, US and allied partners have developed military scenarios should other means of thwarting Iran's nuclear weapons capability fail to reach the desired results.

Simply taking the military option off the table, though, which is what some European leaders suggest, would be a grave political and diplomatic mistake. Even if the decision had been made not to attack Iran, it would be counterproductive to communicate this openly to Tehran. If the West wants to avoid war, it is imperative to keep up a robust military posture. Without that credible threat of the use of force, diplomacy and sanctions are far less likely to succeed.



The Flaws of Containment MAD Is No Deterrent for Religious Fanatics

Containment is increasingly being discussed as a possible solution to the Iranian threat. Supporters of such a strategy point out that it worked just fine during the Cold War. This view ignores that the Communist system did not believe in the messianic figure of a hidden Imam, whose second coming could be triggered by an apocalyptic event. Listen to what Bernard Lewis, the West's leading scholar on the Middle East, has [said](#) on this issue:

“MAD, mutual assured destruction, [was effective] right through the cold war. Both sides had nuclear weapons. Neither side used them, because both sides knew the other would retaliate in kind. This will not work with a religious fanatic [like Ahmadinejad]. For him, mutual assured destruction is not a deterrent, it is an inducement. We know already that [the mullahs ruling Iran] do not give a damn about killing their own people in great numbers. We have seen it again and again. In the final scenario, and this applies all the more strongly if they kill large numbers of their own people, they are doing them a favor. They are giving them a quick free pass to heaven and all its delights.”

The usual counterargument is that the real power in Iran is supposedly held by more moderate people who don't share the president's appetite for suicidal policies. But can we really be sure of that, particularly as Ahmadinejad is increasing his power through his links to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps? And who counts as a moderate? Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former Iranian president—considered a pragmatist in the West—[suggested](#) back in 2001 that his country would not be deterred by the fear of retaliation: “Application of an atomic bomb would not leave anything in Israel, but the same thing would just produce damages in the Muslim world.”

This statement underlines that it is rather dangerous to assume that the Iranian clerical regime and the West share the same definition of “rational behavior.”



The Threat from Rogue Elements and Terrorists

The recent assassination attempt on the Saudi ambassador in Washington is a case in point. If successful, it could have constituted an act of war against the world's only remaining superpower—not exactly what one would consider rational behavior.

One theory holds that it may have been planned by rogue elements in Iran. If correct, though, this would hardly be reassuring. It would raise serious questions about Iran's unity of command and whether such rogue elements could also get their hands on nukes.

This leads us to another great problem with containment. It's useless if Tehran could hide behind terrorists for its dirty work to maintain plausible deniability. The Iranian regime could simply circumvent the logic of MAD by passing on a bomb to terrorists, thus escaping retaliation altogether. If a bomb went off in Western city, it could be months before it was ever identified as Iranian. And even then, according to a recent *New York Times* [report](#) citing US officials, confidence in the conclusion might be too low for the president to order retaliation.

Accidental Nuclear War and Proliferation

But let's assume for argument's sake that the Iranian regime is not suicidal and is not intent on starting a nuclear war, either directly or through terrorists. Even then, the policy of MAD would be much more perilous than during the West's struggle with Communism. Despite the Cold War rivalry, there was at

least a relative degree of trust between the West and the Soviet Union and clear channels of communications existed between the two sides (remember the red telephones!). And yet, we now know that during the Cold War, misunderstandings, miscalculations and technical errors brought the world a few times to the brink of nuclear war.

How is then MAD supposed to work with a regime that doesn't even have diplomatic relations, let alone red telephones, with the US and Israel and where there exists not even a modicum of mutual trust? (For more on this issue, please refer to "Containment Breach" by Robert J. Lieber and Amatzia Abram, [Foreign Policy](#), 2 December 2009)

The policy of containment also overlooks that Iran's acquisitions of the bomb would most likely trigger a nuclear arms race around the region, from Saudi Arabia to Egypt, greatly enhancing the threat of accidental nuclear war and proliferation.



The Consequences for the Neighborhood

Even if nuclear war could really be avoided, Iran would still be able to leverage the mere possession of the bomb to advance its revolutionary program. Iran is already the world's chief sponsor of terrorism, supporting both Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as terrorists in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is fueling sectarian violence in the Gulf region, for example by supporting Shiite insurgents in Yemen. If this is what a conventionally armed Iran is doing, imagine what a nuclear Iran would do! Using threats and proxies, Tehran could try to bring the Gulf region under its control, where many states, including Saudi Arabia, have sizeable Shiite minorities. It could also use its nuclear umbrella to control Iraq and embolden Hamas and Hezbollah to escalate their military confrontation with Israel, thus greatly complicating the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. (For a more detailed analysis, please refer to "Nuclear Weapons and Iran's Global Ambitions" by Ash Jain, [The Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#), August 2011).

"Crippling" Sanctions Needed Europe Is Still Iran's No. 1 Trade Partner

Moving forward, the focus must therefore be on tough sanctions. None of the UN Security Council sanctions imposed on Iran since 2006 have had what Secretary Clinton called a "crippling effect." Europe is certainly to be congratulated for going beyond the UN resolutions. But the goal of the sanctions is not to make life harder for the average Iranian or to showcase European unity but to stop the Iranian nuclear weapons program.

The weakness of past sanctions is further underlined by the fact that the EU remains “Iran’s first trade partner,” to quote the European Commission. Trade with Iran even soared in 2010: Imports climbed 53% to €14.3 billion from 2009 while exports rose 9% to €11.3 billion.

Most of European exports are machinery and transport equipment, but not all of the trade is harmless. British media [reported](#) last week that a UK technology firm has sold IT products to Iran which could be used to track down protesters. *The Wall Street Journal* already [reported](#) in 2009 that with the assistance of European telecommunications companies the Iranian regime has developed “one of the world’s most sophisticated mechanisms for controlling and censoring the Internet.” It is shameful that European companies play a role in the suppression of Iran’s pro-democracy movement.

Sanctions With Bite

Nothing short of crippling sanctions, targeting the central bank and the energy sector, can still derail Iran’s nuclear program. We therefore suggest the following steps:

- The UN Security Council should significantly tighten the current sanctions regime, including such steps as barring correspondent relationships with the Central Bank of Iran. The Security Council must develop adequate mechanisms, based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter, to ensure that its resolutions are implemented.
- Further steps should include complete travel bans for all Iranian regime officials, freezing of correspondent relationships with Iranian commercial banks, an end to all export financing, denial of landing rights to Iran Air, denial of access to capital markets for key Iranian investors and commercial partners, and suspension of the export of refined petroleum products to Iran. Entities and individuals linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps should be among the first targets of intensified sanctions.
- In the event the Security Council fails to act effectively, the US and like-minded countries, including European Union member states, should impose such comprehensive new sanctions individually and collectively.
- The U.S. government and other governments, including those in the EU, should actively seek to stop the development of Iran’s oil and gas resources, the regime’s primary source of income, and to cut off the supply of high-tech equipment and expertise. EU member states should significantly curtail their trade relations with Tehran.
- Like-minded countries, such as those in the EU, should adopt measures similar to the US Iran Sanctions Act first enacted in 1996, and expanded in 2010 by the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Divestment and Accountability Act (CISADA), a broad initiative that contains strong economic measures, including new sanctions on the export of certain advanced-technology products to Iran. CISADA facilitates grassroots efforts across the US, authorizing states to divest government funds from foreign companies engaged in Iran’s energy sector.

Thank you for allowing me to outline the dangers of the Iranian nuclear program and how Europe could help stop it. My colleague Joshua Goodman and I would be happy to take any questions or respond to any comments you may have.