

THE CASE OF IRAN: WILL NUCLEAR FINLANDIZATION BE AVERTED?

The author, based on discussions that took place at the ARI Movement's annual security conference in June 2007, expresses strong conviction that a nuclear-armed Iran poses great threat to world peace. He points out the parallels between Hitler's Germany and Ahmadinejad's Iran, emphasizing that the policy of appeasement toward Germany before World War II lingers today in the face of great risk for tomorrow.

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Following Iran's breach of the Paris agreement by resuming uranium conversion despite the generous proposal presented by the EU, negotiations for trade and political treaties have been paused again by the EU" -EU Website, "Recent History of the Struggle of EU – Iran Relations".

"The generous proposals presented to Iran could serve as a basis for long-term agreement, which would give Iran everything it needs to develop a modern civil nuclear power industry while addressing the concerns expressed by the IAEA and the Security Council. In the absence of action by Iran to meet its obligations, the European Council supports work in the Security Council towards the adoption of measures under Article 41 [precluding use of military force] of Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter." - EU Presidency Conclusions, February 12, 2007.

"I'm disappointed and devastated that Iran has backtracked from its declared moratorium on stoning by recently carrying out an execution in this horrendous method. The stoning of Mr. Jafar Kiani goes against Iran's repeated assurances to refrain from executions by stoning and constitutes a violation of international human rights law." - Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner (on EU Website), July 13, 2007.

"IAEA inspections since 2003 have revealed two decades' of undeclared nuclear activities in Iran, including uranium enrichment and plutonium separation effects...On September 24, 2005, the IAEA found Iran to be in noncompliance with its Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Safeguards Agreement reported Iran's case to the Security Council... [which] passed UNSCR 696 on July 31, 2006, giving Iran a deadline of August 31, 2006 to comply. Iran still failed to suspend enrichment..." – Congressional Research Service, September 6, 2006.

"Former Iranian President Rafsanjani and five Iranian officials, including a former Foreign Minister, are fugitives from justice by reason of their organizing the 1984 bombing of the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people." – Argentine Federal Judge Rodolfo Canciba Corral (International Herald Tribune, August 16, 2007)

"Over the past six weeks, at least 118 people have been executed [in Iran], including four who were stoned to death." – Taher in Wall St. Journal, August 6, 2007.

I begin with the conviction that world peace cannot tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran. Last June, I witnessed in Istanbul the specter of representatives of great countries, menaced by this danger, becoming "Finlandized," i.e. voluntarily diminishing their sovereign defenses in order to curry friendship with a seemingly powerful and assertive country. The classic prior example was Finland during the Cold War. Are we en route to seeing principal European powers, as well as Turkey, "Finlandized" in response to the Iranian nuclear challenge?

Discussions on "The Iranian Nuclear Challenge" at the ARI Movement Conference indicated that Finlandization is spreading in some circles from the Middle East to Western Europe. Speakers from Germany and the United Kingdom revealed the extent of the threat. Ulrich Irmer, former Foreign Policy Speaker of the German Liberal Party, indicated that the "soft power" of the European Union is unable to comprehend the urgency of the Iranian challenge. Irmer asked, Hamlet-like, "What can we do?" and answered his own question despairingly: "I can't think of an answer." According to the Conference Report, Irmer concluded: "Iran itself is a complicated issue and cannot be separated from neighboring countries or from Europe, the U.S.A. and other partners. All the partners should be brought together and all the problematic issues should be put on the table. Otherwise, without communication, no fruitful step can be taken." What a theatrical conference that would be, with expansive photo ops for Iranian President Ahmadinejad!

Irmer, undoubtedly a decent man, took no account of the reality that during years of "negotiations,"¹ Iran has treated the European powers - as well as the United Nations - like bazaar merchants treat bumpkin tourists, i.e., with contempt and duplicity. Iran has gained time to develop a nuclear arsenal by prolonging, enlarging and complicating "negotiations". Irmer tried one possibly concrete suggestion, which he called "the big bargain," i.e., that Iran be given "something" they want, e.g., cessation of efforts at regime change. That European politicians can countenance permanently imposing on Iranians –many of whom desperately want political change– a regime which systematically violates human rights domestically while supporting terrorism elsewhere, (e.g. Argentina, Iraq, Lebanon, Hamas), raises doubts as to whether Europe is able to defend even its own interests.

More disturbing was the presentation of Shirin Akiner, lecturer in Central Asian Studies at the University of London. She has no problem with accepting a nuclear-armed Iran: "If Pakistan and India were allowed to become nuclear powers in the past, how can we deny Iran its own nuclear capacity?" Akiner, an expert on Central Asia, warned that Iran is respected and trusted in Central Asia as a reliable partner, but that Turkey has lost much of its standing in this region. According to the Conference Report, "Akiner challenged the dominant paradigm that views nuclear Iran as a major threat to international security." The author of this article presented Akiner with a different paradigm, i.e., that Iran

¹ In September, Iranian President, Ahmadinejad told the Security Council that its case against Iran was "closed."

has been patiently testing Western resolve since inception of its fundamentalist state. The Mullahs observed unappreciatively that France gave them a sanctuary from which to undermine the Shah. I pointed out that “while the Shah was not an ideal ruler, in the real world, he was far preferable to the regime that succeeded him.” I pointed out the dereliction of Jimmy Carter – a President so deficient in defending America’s interests that voters overwhelmingly unseated him after one term – who foolishly did not lift a finger to save his ally, the Shah thus helping subject Iran to the long nightmare of theocratic rule. I pointed out that Iran next tested the resolve of the West by taking American diplomats hostage, a violation of international law which even Hitler and Stalin eschewed. Carter cowered in the face of this outrage. The hostages were freed only when it became clear that a new President, Ronald Reagan, would do what was necessary to hold Iran accountable.

I recounted the abduction of British sailors and their compelled appearance wearing Muslim garb on Iranian television, following which the most the EU could do was to state its “concern.” The word “concern”, if intended to frighten Mullahs, fell far short of its mark. I reminded Akiner that the notion that a dangerous totalitarian regime should not be resisted was a continuation of what much of academia – particularly British academia – had said in the 1930s with regard to Hitler and in the 1950s regarding the USSR.

Akiner responded that the British people treated the abduction of the sailors as “a joke.” Not content to give her the last word, I asked what the Iranians would do if members of their military were paraded on British television wearing Christian garb. I concluded: “If the British people took this as a joke, I’m afraid the joke² is on them.” Fortunately, Akiner’s views are those of an academic and not of a policy-making official. At least not yet.

To my dismay, journalist Mustafa Akyol, my friend and a highly respected defender of moderate Islam and human rights, exhibited comparable misunderstanding. Referring to Iran’s threat to annihilate Israel with a nuclear weapon, Akyol cited the Cold War Doctrine of MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction), which posited that nuclear war was avoidable because each side rationally knew the other would destroy it. He said that Iran understood that a nuclear attack on Tel Aviv would precipitate a reciprocal response. Akyol surely understands that Shi’a Islam thrives on apocalyptic views and practices. Professor Bernard Lewis has written: “This will not work with a religious fanatic [like Iranian President Ahmadinejad]. For him, mutual assured destruction is not a deterrent, it is an inducement. We already know that [Iran’s leaders] do not give a damn about killing their own people in great numbers...” Former Iranian President Rafsanjani (considered a “pragmatic conservative”) said: “If a day comes when the world of Islam is duly equipped with the arms Israel has in its possession, application of

² According to John Bolton, American U.N. Ambassador ousted by Congressional Democrats because he refused to compromise with terrorists, the Iranians were testing the British “to see if there would be any price to pay for committing what would have once been considered an act of war.”

an atomic bomb would not leave anything in Israel, but the same thing will just produce damages in the Muslim world, it is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality.”³

Sadly, few speakers seemed ready to address the reality of the threat posed by a nuclear-armed Iran already possessing a vast array of intermediate and long-range missiles.⁴ A notable exception was Arif Keskin, Middle East analyst for ASAM (a defense-related think tank) who challenged Turkey’s “passivity” toward Iran and “argued that the political crisis surrounding Iran’s nuclear development is part of the Iranian regime’s anti-Western and anti-democracy agenda.” He noted that while Iran is more fragile than perceived, Iranian nuclear ambitions remain “one of the main security challenges for Turkey and other world states.” But he had no solutions for these challenges other than “concerted action by EU, Turkey, the U.S. and Russia to engage in open dialogue with Iran.” In the months since the Conference, Turkey’s ties with Iran have accelerated with cooperation on non-nuclear power plants. There is no reason why Turkey should not seek good relations with its neighbors. But Turkey should hold no illusions about the danger of having Iran as a nuclear-armed state next door. Indeed, possession of nuclear arms by Iran would undoubtedly motivate other Middle Eastern states fearful of the Shi’ah drive to power, to acquire similar weapons for ostensible self-defense. The dangers of nuclear proliferation in such a volatile region, coupled with the possibility that terrorists could unseat one or more of the already unstable regimes, provides yet another reason to stop Iran before it is too late.

Mordehai Amihai, Consul-General of Israel, reviewed violent Iranian activities during the past 20 years in the course of which “the world witnessed an Iran that acted inconsistently and surprised the spectators.” He pointed out that the world community is playing into the hands of Iran by allowing it to delay and prolong negotiations while it worked on nuclear development. He concluded that the world should “be reluctant to trust Iran’s ‘harmless’ intentions.”

I told the Conference that every method short of military force, including financial and travel sanctions that really bite, should be employed to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. But, I argued, if non-military means did not produce this result, then a devastating military strike should be organized - unsettling as this prospect and its consequences may be. I tried to remind participants that, had a military strike been directed at Hitler in the early 1930s, much bloodshed could have been avoided. Iranian nuclear weapons could do much greater harm than even Hitler did.

³ Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat 201* (2007).

⁴ Robert G. Joseph, U.S. Special Envoy for Nuclear Proliferation, says that Iran is “expanding what is already the largest intensive missile force in the region and that we could wake up one morning to find that Iran is holding Berlin, Paris and London hostage to whatever it’s demands are. A nuclear-armed Iran would not actually have to use nuclear weapons. The mere threat of using them would be sufficient to allow the Mullahs to believe they could achieve their demands.” See Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat 203* (2007).

I was aware that my comparison of Ahmadinejad with Hitler, together with the suggestion that military force might be necessary, horrified many. But all of the diplomacy, sanctions, and hopes for regime change have not slowed down, by even one day, Iran's drive to become a nuclear power. As Norman Podhoretz,⁵ the neoconservative patriarch, pointed out in a provocative article in *Commentary* (June 2007), *The Case for Bombing Iran*:

“Ahmadinejad, like Hitler, is a revolutionary whose objective is to overturn the international system and to replace it in the fullness of time with a new order dominated by Iran and ruled by the religio-political culture of Islamofascism.

“...The plain and brutal truth is that if Iran is to be prevented from developing a nuclear arsenal, there is no alternative to the actual use of military force – any more than there was an alternative to the actual use of force if Hitler was to be stopped in 1938.”

Or, in Ahmadinejad's words:

“Today, we must prepare ourselves to discharge the responsibility [placed] upon us... which transcends the Muslim world... Islam is the truth. This truth was only partly revealed in Judaism and Christianity, but is fully revealed in Islam... Today, as ever, the world needs the Hidden Imam... Our mission transcends the geographical boundaries of the Muslim [world]. Our clerics have a responsibility to call upon humanity as a whole to [embrace] the [true] monotheism and the rule of monotheistic principles.”⁶

The consequences of a military strike against Iran would be horrific and would set back decent Iranians struggling for regime change. But the consequences of allowing Iran to possess nuclear weapons are far more horrific, as “moderate” Arab states have begun to perceive.

President Bush promised in his 2000 State of the Union Address:

“We'll deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons.”

⁵ A current blog says that when Podhoretz, at a White House meeting, quoted Columnist Robert Kagan's observation that negotiating sanctions with Iran was giving “futility its chance,” both President Bush and Adviser Karl Rove burst out laughing. See David Paul Kohn <http://www.dyn.politico.com>, Sept. 24, 2007.

⁶ Kayhan, August 19, 2007.

Yes, terrible things have happened in Iraq revealing the determination of forces which prefer brutal rogue regimes over democracy. But every person seriously concerned about the consequences of a world taken hostage by a nuclear-armed Iran must hope that President Bush - and his successors - will honor that promise. There are hopeful indications that Europeans are deciding to realistically resist “Finlandization.” The record of the United States –under Democratic as well as Republican presidents –in rescuing Europe from its own disasters leaves room to hope that this time, pre-emptive defense will be timely. It is refreshing to see key Europeans comprehending the crucial stakes.

French President Sarkozy and his Foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, are evidencing robust trans-Atlanticist determination to stop Iran before it is too late.⁷ Kouchner even said the world must “prepare for the worst, and the worst, sir, is war.”⁸ Sarkozy warned against using the W-word prematurely, but he made his determination clear. Even the August 2 *New York Times* – which to security-minded Americans resembles a soft-power *Euro Journal* – protested on September 27, 2007, Mohammed El Baradei's efforts to pre-empt the Security Council if Iran “answers IAEA questions”, and urged El Baradei must “insist that Iran does what the Security Council has ordered: Suspend enrichment.” If the Germans can resist short-term economic gain, and the Russians and Chinese step up to their responsibilities, progress may be possible. The Russians are reported ready to ship enriched uranium to an Iranian power plant but are said to be showing “growing irritation with Iran's refusal to halt nuclear enrichment.” These are hopeful signs that Iran may not achieve a nuclear arsenal through Finlandization. The peace of the world requires success in thwarting these Iranian ambitions.

Epilogue

Under veto-threat pressure from Russia and China, at the end of September the Security Council postponed further sanctions until November. Continued stonewalling by these two permanent members could impel a US-led coalition to bypass the UN.

⁷ “Kouchner threw his rock into the pond of hidden diplomatic non-utterances by using the word ‘war’ just prior to his trip to Moscow because the primary target of his message was Russia. The idea that an Iranian nuclear bomb would be without consequences for world peace emanates from the most ignorant fantasies, as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt would not bow to the nuclear hegemony of Iran. Beware of the damage! In the dime-sized Middle East, with its ill-defined borders, its theological disputes and its oil, a potential nuclear civil war is painted on the horizon. To recognize this reality is to recognize why Kouchner was right to talk of war.” See Andre Glucksman, *International Herald Tribune*, Oct. 5, 2007.

⁸ Haaretz, September 16, 2007.