



**The U.S., Europe and Iran: What Policy for What Threat?
Remarks at L'Institut D'Études Politiques de Paris
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Good evening. On behalf of my AJC colleagues and myself, thank you for creating this opportunity for me to present our organization's perspectives on perhaps the most critical strategic issue confronting Europe, the United States, our allies and energy suppliers in the Middle East, and, indeed, the future of nuclear non-proliferation and the entire international security architecture: Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear-weapons capability - and the steps that can be taken to thwart them.

I'd like to begin this evening not where the flyers announcing this program suggested an American Jewish Committee spokesman would likely begin in discussing the Iranian challenge. I'll begin not in the United States or in Europe, but in the Persian Gulf - or, as they prefer to call it in the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arabian Gulf.

Just last Saturday, I completed a nine-day tour of three Gulf states - the latest in a series of periodic consultations my AJC colleagues and I have been conducting in the region since the mid-90's. The objective of this and similar trips has been to build bridges across religious and national divides; to puncture myths and counter prejudices about Jews and Arabs; to encourage cooperation in various sectors and at various levels between these countries and Israel - as a means to help improve the climate for regional peace; and to discuss common problems and, perhaps, common strategies to resolve them. In the course of the week, I met with cabinet ministers and business leaders, think tank directors and diplomats, military planners, human rights activists and university students. Our conversations were frank, our agenda was broad, and, on many issues, there was considerable congruity in our thinking.

It may not surprise anyone in this sophisticated audience to learn that the viability of the Arab-Israeli peace process, the latest developments in the search for a formula to induce Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas back to the bargaining table, was not the primary focus of our discussions - although, of course, the peace process was a subject of concern and frustration. No, the most urgent talks we had were on the topic of Iran.

From the perspective of any of the small GCC member states, with native populations of no more than one or two million (and sometimes considerably less), Iran is a dominant presence - and, with an ideological regime that rejects the fundamental concept of strategic cooperation between the West and the Muslim world, it is a persistent threat. In Gulf states with a significant, or even a majority, Shi'a population, Iran is seen in a further dimension: as an aggressive, radicalizing factor in internal affairs.

As I have seen in each visit I have made over the last 15 years, every Arab state in the Gulf views Iran through multiple lenses: as an important trading partner; as a cultural and demographic fixture in Gulf societies; as a supporter and an exporter of extremism - and as financier and arms supplier to movements destabilizing and terrorizing one Arab country, Lebanon, and one state-in-the-making, Palestine; and as a direct threat to the security of GCC regimes.

Business and political leaders and policy analysts in the Gulf recognize Iran as a significant factor in sustaining and deepening civilizational conflict. When a Canadian journalist is beaten to death in an Iranian prison ... when a young woman is murdered in a street protest over the 2009 Iranian election and the air of freedom is brutally sucked out of an entire generation ... when the Iranian president mocks and denies the facts of the Holocaust ... when in the Iranian construct "modern" and "Western" equal "decadent" and "evil" ... the divide between West and East grows immeasurably wider, the wall of suspicion grows higher, the burden on adherents to Islam living and working in other societies grows heavier.

The prospect of the brutal, zealous, truth-twisting mullahs in Tehran - the most polarizing forces in the East-West divide, and the rulers of a large and rich country just a few dozen kilometers away - having access to the deadliest form of modern weaponry fills Gulf leaders with dread. It also fills them with plans: plans to vastly expand and upgrade their military forces, in ever-closer partnership with the United States and other Western allies; plans to

install new anti-missile systems; and plans, should it come to this, to pursue nuclear programs of their own and to consider breaking out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and obtaining weapons capability.

This is the not-very-distant future we are now creating: a future in which the region that is the world's most significant energy supplier is increasingly militarized, increasingly radicalized, and very likely, with great wealth and fear and unfettered by NPT restraints, increasingly nuclear.

The question of whether Iran does or does not acquire nuclear weapons capability, and what the most effective response should be, is at its most immediate and urgent, I would argue, right there in the Gulf - amid the oil and gas fields and the sea lanes that deliver energy to the world ... amid societies that nourish the faith of more than one billion adherents across the globe ... and amid economies that are deeply invested and enmeshed in the industrial and commercial life of Europe, the Americas, and the Far East.

From my most recent conversations in the Gulf, and discussions over recent months elsewhere in the Middle East, I know that the Iranian nuclear threat, a powerful extension of Iran's hegemonic ambitions, is a pressing Arab problem before it is an Israeli or an American or a European problem. But it is also - now and ultimately - very much our problem ... which we have allowed to grow in severity and complexity, and which we have sought to address together - ineffectively until now - and which now summons us to the most urgent action. Because, given the resources and technical prowess of Iran and the worldview of its bunkered, morally bankrupt, theocratic regime, the problem of Iran's drive for nuclear weapons capability is unquestionably the preeminent global security challenge we face.

Allow me to summarize our dilemma: Iran is on the verge of nuclear arms capability. It has already amassed enough enriched uranium to make, with further enrichment, at least two and possibly more nuclear bombs.

If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, or were to stop short of deploying such weapons but possess the ingredients and the knowledge to do so, the regional security regime would be permanently and drastically altered. Its actual or presumed nuclear arsenal would threaten not only its neighbors - including its almost-neighbor, Israel, which Tehran has repeatedly threatened directly, and toward which it has proven its hostile intent through its proxies and clients Hezbollah and Hamas - but it would also threaten Europe and other regions reachable by new generations of ballistic missiles.

Iran could be expected to use its enhanced regional power to seek hegemony over the Gulf - the vital energy supply routes through which 40 percent of the global supply of crude oil transits. Its policy influence on, and its political influence within, the GCC states as well as Iraq, Jordan, Syria and other regional states would grow.

A nuclear Iran would stir the already simmering tensions between Shi'a and Sunni societies. I do not believe it is far-fetched to envision the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps transferring - or threatening to transfer - weapons-grade material to be used in "dirty bombs" by Hezbollah or other terrorist groups; such capability would make the prospect of a pragmatic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and wider Arab-Israel peace (and we must note that Iran opposes such a pragmatic solution) infinitely more complex. It would further undermine French, U.S. and other efforts to stabilize and normalize Lebanon. And it would set off an accelerated and dangerous regional arms race.

The first victim would be the NPT regime and the international order that regulates the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. From Egypt to Saudi Arabia to Turkey and beyond, many regional players will seek to acquire nuclear arsenals to deter Iran. The risks for Europe and South Asia - and, of course, for Israel and other regional allies, and for global interests in Middle East stability - are obvious. The risk of accident, of miscalculation, of the deadliest technology falling into the most reckless hands, is enormous - and intolerable.

Iran's revolutionary ideology is not necessarily tinged with a yearning for the End of the Days, though it would be foolish to dismiss the existence of such feelings among Iran's ruling elites. In spite of their rhetoric, Iran's leaders may be guided by a rational calculation - the desire to ensure the survival for the Islamic Revolution and to strengthen it, both internally and regionally, in order to achieve regional hegemony. But the revolutionary nature of the regime means that, at a minimum, Iran aspires to redefine the regional order of power in its favor, and remake it in its own image. Nuclear weapons would exponentially increase Iran's ability to achieve that goal.

What can we do about the Iranian nuclear threat?

I think we can begin by acknowledging that international appreciation of this threat has heightened significantly in recent years. We have seen four United Nations Security Council resolutions imposing political and economic sanctions on Iran - the most recent, last summer, representing the firmest response by the world body to Iran's continued defiance of its treaty obligations and its threats to world order. We have seen a very significant European Union sanctions measure, in which France exerted extraordinary leadership, and we have seen a number of

governments around the world step up to the challenge with their own unilateral economic and political sanctions measures.

From available evidence, the sanctions are starting to bite. The Iranian economy is suffering. Crucial investments in the energy sector are being deferred. Access to capital has been constrained as key financial institutions around the world, under pressure from the U.S. and other governments - and on their own volition, to safeguard their own reputations - have halted transactions with Iranian banks. Deliveries of cargo and refined petroleum products have been impeded by interruptions in Iran's access to insurance on such shipments.

What we have seen over the last year and a half, as a new Administration in Washington has signaled its intention to both continue and tighten existing sanctions and to extend an offer of diplomatic engagement to Iran - policies entirely consistent with the policies in place at the end of the Bush Administration - is ever-closer cooperation between key European powers and the United States; in particular, there has been close alignment between Paris and Washington in assessing the Iranian threat and devising measures to address it.

While this cooperation has been fruitful and welcome, and has showcased leadership and generated success on the political front, there is no evidence that economic and diplomatic pressure on Iran is producing consequent effect on the regime's nuclear progress. Experts in the International Atomic Energy Agency and elsewhere tell us that Iran is continuing to install new cascades of centrifuges, and its stockpile of low-enriched uranium is continuing to grow. There have been reports, of course, of trouble in the Iranian program - of technical problems that have set back the timetable for further enrichment and perhaps the fashioning of a nuclear device. But there is no indication that the Iranian regime is any less committed to acquiring this capability, no indication that the nearly universal condemnation Iran's program has generated has had any impact on the mullahs' nuclear ambitions. In the face of international censure, in the face of international sanctions, they are determined to move forward.

This determination and intransigence presents the United States and Europe - as well as our Gulf allies and the Israelis, all directly threatened by Iran - with several policy options, and a set of profoundly difficult choices.

The first choice, I would argue, is a question of ultimate objectives: Are we prepared to accept that the Iranian regime - which routinely violates international law with its arms supplies to terrorist organizations, actively works to subvert Arab regimes from Morocco to Lebanon, brazenly threatens the security of more than one UN member state, and shows no conscience in its abuses of its own citizens' rights - can be the reliable custodian of nuclear weapons technology? Successive American presidents of both major parties, and the President of France, and other global leaders have said no. If the answer is truly no, the policy options are stark.

In fact, I believe the only responsible option is to signal to Tehran that the international community is united and resolute; that diplomatic engagement with Iran and the development of common understandings with Iran are desirable - but that engagement and understanding are not ends in themselves, and cannot substitute for, and cannot be allowed to defer, the necessary action Iran must take to comply with its international obligations; that the military means to focus Iran's attention and, if necessary, to prevent it from fulfilling its nuclear ambitions remain viable, and are at the ready.

Any other option - protracted bargaining while the nuclear clock continues to tick, or acquiescence to Iran's ambitions and an assumption that a Cold War strategy of containment will work against a regime with a very different ideological framework - is unacceptably dangerous. Any other policy course but determined and tough engagement, international unity, and the maintenance of a convincing military option exposes all of us, Americans and Europeans, our regional allies, and the international order on which we rely, to intolerable risk.

Thank you.