

IRAN'S ATOMIC COUNTDOWN

Peter Brookes

NY Post, September 14, 2011

Can anyone give me some good news on how the Obama administration's doing (after 2 1/2 years) on preventing the Islamic Republic of Iran from developing nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles that'll carry them?

Didn't think so.

The latest news suggests that, despite all the bloviating, finger-wagging and sloppy United Nations sanctions, there doesn't seem to be much—if anything—holding back the ayatollahs' atomic aspirations.

The always-cautious-and-slow-to-accuse International Atomic Energy Agency has come out with some startling info about Iran's nuclear know-how recently: Iran is installing a new generation of centrifuges at its facility at Natanz, equipment that reportedly will allow Tehran to enrich uranium three times faster. Plus, Iran is outfitting its new nuclear facility at Qom with new centrifuges—which experts believe will permit it to further increase uranium-enrichment levels far beyond what's needed for peaceful nuclear-reactor fuel.

The “fissile fortress” at Qom—located on a Revolutionary Guard base and securely tucked into the side of a mountain—is pretty clearly meant to produce the highly enriched uranium needed for the making of Iran's first bombs.

It's been estimated Iran already has enough low-enriched uranium on hand to produce enough highly enriched uranium for two to three bombs in relatively short order. And the IAEA...has “increasing concern” that Iran's peaceful nuclear program has a military angle. That is, the IAEA fears Tehran is working on a nuke warhead to put that uranium in.

Courtesy of Russia, Iran's first nuclear plant is also online now.... Tehran claims the Bushehr reactor is for power only, but many see a second use

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for the facility. At some point, the 1,000-megawatt nuclear plant—perhaps the first of many—could help Iran build a plutonium-based bomb, quickly pumping up the muscle of a nuclear arsenal.

Meanwhile, Tehran's burgeoning ballistic-missile program is building the capacity to deliver those nuclear payloads. A number of countries, including [the US], claim Iran is violating a ban on its missile activities. UN Security Council Resolution 1929 bars Tehran from "any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using ballistic missile technology." Iran has been as busy as a beaver with its satellite program, which allows it to develop—under cover of a seemingly-innocent civilian space program—the same missile technology needed for long-range military missiles.

From all accounts, the various pieces for a nuclear Iran are rapidly falling into place, should the regime decide to cross the atomic threshold: sufficient fissile material, a warhead to put it in and a vehicle to deliver it to a target. And all of this atop other recent troubling tales, such as word that Tehran is facilitating al Qaeda operations, including the movement of operatives, money and (probably) arms into Pakistan and Afghanistan. Not to mention its...political and social repression at home; meddling in Egypt and Bahrain; supporting Syria's bloody crackdown—and its arming of the Taliban and anti-US militias in Iraq.

Bottom line, there's no good news regarding Iran. The situation is getting worse on a number of fronts, especially concerning the mullahs' drive to build an arsenal of nuclear missiles. It should be plain to even the most casual observer that what we're doing isn't moving us in a direction of increased security, but the exact opposite. We need a new game plan for Iran now, Mr. President—before it's too late.

(Peter Brookes is a Heritage Foundation senior fellow and a former deputy assistant secretary of defense.)

NO MORE HYPOTHETICALS:

IRAN ALREADY IS A NUCLEAR STATE

Greg Jones

New Republic, September 9, 2011

The question of Tehran's status as nuclear power is a genuine matter of concern for international policymakers, but they have become far too accustomed to treating it as a perpetual hypothetical. The assumption has always been that Iran would never get a nuclear weapon, because the West would have enough advance warning to prevent that from happening, whether by means of diplomacy or force.

Unfortunately, the time for hypotheticals has passed. Given the latest advances in Iran's enrichment program, and the weaknesses of the international community's existing monitoring, we must reckon with the fact that we likely won't have time to preempt Tehran's efforts to build a nuclear bomb. The international community has no choice but to already treat the Islamic Republic as a de facto nuclear state....

Indeed, it's indisputable that Iran already has sufficient infrastructure in place to make highly enriched uranium (HEU). Iran would not even need to expand the centrifuge enrichment facilities it has used to make low and medium enriched uranium. It could simply continue the process and produce HEU using its existing centrifuges by a method known as "batch recycling".

Given Iran's current enrichment capacity and its current stockpile of low and medium enriched uranium—information acquired through inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)—I estimate that Iran can produce enough HEU for a nuclear weapon in about eight weeks from the time it decided to do so. That timeframe will shrink to only about four weeks by the end of next year, as Iran's enriched uranium stockpiles and enrichment capacity continue to increase....

It's important to note that we can not reliably depend on the IAEA to warn us of Iran's progress toward a nuclear weapon. As much as the IAEA claims that its safeguards are intended to provide "timely detection

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of the diversion” of nuclear material sufficient to produce a nuclear weapon, they are not designed with nearly enough immediacy given the current state of nuclear enrichment science. HEU can now easily be converted into a nuclear weapon within a week’s time—a period that renders IAEA safeguards entirely toothless, as it’s hardly enough for “timely” warning to be delivered and effective measures to be developed to prevent a bomb’s manufacture....

That’s not to say that...Iran [will] divert nuclear material from IAEA safeguards anytime soon. After all, why should it? It can continue to move ever closer to the HEU required for a nuclear weapon with the blessing of the IAEA. Iran would only need to divert nuclear material from safeguards when it would want to test or use a nuclear weapon. Recall that the U.S. was unable to certify that Pakistan did not have nuclear weapons in 1990, but it was only in 1998 that it actually tested a bomb....

We should accept that Iran already represents a...nonproliferation policy failure.... Sanctions on Iran and sternly worded U.N. Security Council resolutions have not slowed, let alone stopped Iran’s enrichment effort. Nor does there appear to be any realistic military options to stop Iran....

As a nonproliferation failure, it is not, of course, the first of its kind, resembling as it does the failures that allowed Pakistan and North Korea to ascend to the status of nuclear powers. But the fact that it is not unprecedented does not diminish the risks involved. As the United States’ policies towards Pakistan and North Korea illustrate, now that Iran is a de facto nuclear weapon state, there is little that can be done except to hope that these countries can maintain control over their nuclear weapons. The costs we face if something goes wrong—a nuclear detonation in cities such as Tel Aviv or New York—are horrific, even unimaginable. But one thing that’s already clear is that naive optimism doesn’t do us any good.

(Greg Jones is a defense analyst and a senior researcher at The Nonproliferation Policy Education Center in Arlington, VA.)

ISRAEL HAS NO MARGIN FOR ERROR WHEN IT COMES TO IRAN

National Post, September 3, 2011

*The following is excerpted from Hirsh Goodman's
The Anatomy Of Israel's Survival*

Of all the existential threats Israel faces...common wisdom has it that Iran is at the top of the list. Iran is maniacally dedicated to Israel's destruction, and says so on every occasion, in every language, and at every opportunity. By now even the parrots in the Tehran zoo can repeat the mantras of hatred calling for Israel to be wiped off the map, its people sent back to Poland, Palestine liberated, for the cancer to be removed from Arabia, and the West's agent of evil, Israel, crushed and expelled.

Not since Hitler have the Jewish people theoretically faced such a threat. Half of the world's Jewish population currently lives in Israel. Now, like then, the Jews actually have very little to do with the problem, but provide a convenient whipping boy for the Iranian regime and its aspirations of regional hegemony and control of the Gulf. Israel has no unavoidable disputes with Iran once you get past its right to exist—no common borders or contested resources. The two countries' armies have never clashed. Yet it is ostensibly because of Israel that Iran is rushing to attain nuclear weapons and expending considerable amounts on missile and satellite programs, among the other weapons it is amassing for its day in the field with the Jewish state. Or so Tehran says.

A nuclear Iran, it is now recognized, is not Israel's problem alone. It possesses missiles that bring the Gulf states, Egypt, Turkey, Europe and Russia all within reach. A nuclear Iran would be transformative, a country not easily gone to war against, and one that will have considerably more power on the regional stage. And if Iran goes nuclear, it is almost certain that Turkey and Egypt will accelerate their own programs and Saudi Arabia would buy an off-the-shelf bomb from Pakistan. Libya agreed to dismantle its nuclear program in December 2003. The international crisis that broke out with Colonel Gaddafi's regime in March 2011 would have looked very different had Gaddafi had

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the bomb.

A nuclear Middle East is in no one's interest; therefore, opposition to the prospect is wide. The United States, China and Russia have imposed sanctions on Iran in the hope of impeding the bomb. Israel and Saudi Arabia find themselves on the same side of the fence.

But Iran is Israel's problem most of all. No other country is existentially threatened by Iran, in a position to suffer irreparable damage if attacked with nuclear weapons. Those imposing sanctions and locked in diplomacy to try to resolve the problem are involved in global power play, not a life-and-death situation. Iran is not calling for the destruction of Turkey or Saudi Arabia, and if America, China or Russia loses the game, as they indeed might, it is not their heads that will be on the chopping block.

For Israel, there is no margin for error. Over 70% of Israel's population, one-third of all the Jews in the world, and its ports, airports, refining capacities and industry are located along the coastal plain, 161 miles long from north to south and some 10 miles deep, about the size of an average game park in Africa. I took a helicopter ride recently, taking off from the Herzliah airfield just north of Tel Aviv. Hardly 600 feet in the air and you see it all in the palm of your hand, from Ashkelon shimmering in the south to the Haifa bay and Acre in the north, the cities of Holon, Rehovot, Nes Tsiona, Petah Tikva, Netanya, Ramat Gan, Kfar Saba, all packed together like eggs in one basket. Along the coast are the chimneys of power stations and desalination plants, ports and tourist areas. The highways to either side are packed with afternoon traffic and the new office and residential towers that have sprouted up between Tel Aviv and Ramat Gan, glowing in the sunset. In one glance you can see five of the country's major universities, all of its ports, its major international airport, highways, railways, and the centre of its business life. I remember the pictures from Hiroshima and Nagasaki and think of what happened there. Imagine the devastation of a bomb five, 10, 100 times more powerful in an area as dense as this one...would be, to use a phrase attributed to Moshe Dayan, "the destruction of the Third Temple." Everything would be lost. There would be no second chance.

The Iranians know this; hence the temptation, the dream, that it could be done, even knowing that Iran would suffer terribly as a result. But

with a population 10 times that of Israel and a country 75 times as large, Iran reckons that no matter how harsh the punishment meted out in return for attacking Israel, it would be mauled, not killed. In this context, none of the symmetry and deterrence that kept the Cold War cold applies.... Iran's regime is based on brute power; its calculations cannot be put into a rational context. From Israel's point of view, they must be taken at their word. To do otherwise would be to invite catastrophe....

COLUMBIA STUDENTS VS. AHMADINEJAD

Arnold Ahlert

FrontPage, September 23, 2011

On September 10th, an article was published in the Columbia Spectator, Columbia University's student newspaper, announcing that 15 members of the Columbia International Relations Council and Association (CIRCA) would be attending a private dinner with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. It was supposed to take place on September 21st, while the Iranian despot was in New York to deliver a speech before the United Nations General Assembly. CIRCA vice president of academics, Tim Chan...noted that the prospect was well received by group members. "Everyone was really enthusiastic," Chan said. "They're thrilled to have this opportunity." Other Columbia students, notably Jacob Snider, David Fine, Eric Shapiro, and Sam Schube, were far less enthusiastic. They mobilized against the event, and after Iran's mission to the United Nations rescinded the invitation to CIRCA due to the adverse publicity, the group held a rally protesting the Iranian tyrant anyway.

"A group of like-minded friends and I decided to initially protest a private off-the-record dinner between [CIRCA students] and Ahmadinejad," explained rally organizer Jacob Snider.... After reading the news of the dinner in the Spectator, [Snider] was compelled to act: "I sat with [the news] for a couple of hours.... I was walking on campus and looking around, and I saw people having normal conversations, and it just wasn't sitting well with me...."

Snider then contacted his friend David Fine.... "I called and asked him if

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he'd heard about the dinner. He said yes and thought it was ridiculous, but he didn't know what was going on or what to do about it. I said 'consider me your ally and let's do something together....' We used the power we had at our disposal and did something." That something turned into a rally in which the original name, "Just Say No To Ahma(dinner)jad" gave way to "Just Say No to Ahmadinejad...."

Fox News originally reported that Columbia president Lee Bollinger would attend the dinner and that the university itself had sponsored it. This apparently was not the case, but the news prompted the Shurat HaDin-Israel Law Center in Tel Aviv to send a letter to Bollinger condemning the invitation and threatening legal action. "Hosting Ahmadinejad at a banquet is not merely morally repulsive: it is illegal and likely to render Columbia University and its officers both criminally and civilly liable," said the letter from the center....

In 2007, Bollinger had in fact invited the Iranian president to speak at the university, despite much controversy. "It should never be thought that merely to listen to ideas we deplore in any way implies our endorsement of those ideas, or the weakness of our resolve to resist those ideas, or our naiveté about the very real dangers inherent in such ideas," Bollinger said at the time. "It is a critical premise of freedom of speech that we do not honor the dishonorable when we open the public forum to their voices. To hold otherwise would make vigorous debate impossible."

And while Bollinger was critical of Ahmadinejad in his opening remarks, calling him a "reprehensible and dangerous figure who presides over a repressive regime," there were times during the speech when Columbia students applauded the Holocaust-denying Iranian president. Reflecting on the 2007 event, Snider conceded that there was a "distinct difference between an open forum, or a public sighting or speaking, versus a private dinner.... You have dinner with family and friends. You don't have dinner with hated world leaders and people who commit crimes against their own citizens."

When the CIRCA invitation was revoked, the group of protesters decided that this was not the time to abandon the campaign. "Once we realized the dinner had been canceled, we moved to continue the rally under the

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premise of a more general protest of the human rights violations that take place every day in Iran—perpetrated by Ahmadinejad,” said Snider....

Those attending the rally heard from former Iranian political prisoner Shirin Nariman, who addressed the crowd that had gathered in front of East Campus. “When I was 17, I had a 13-year-old friend who was arrested and killed,” she said. “This is the oppressive Iranian regime, and we need to reject such a regime and their representatives, which is Ahmadinejad.” She then honed in her opposition on the dinner and the focal point of the rally. “It’s morally wrong. It shouldn’t be done,” Nariman said. “Many people were killed for a dictator to come to power. Is this what Columbia wants to associate with?...”

Jacob Snider was proud of what he and his fellow organizers accomplished.... Noting the reality of student apathy, Snider was moved by the recognition and the knowledge that other students had been reached by the group’s message. He concluded: “I think it’s good for the spirit of saying what you believe.... We wanted to put our beliefs into action, not just go back to class and “say yeah, well....”

Indeed. The success of this counter-campaign demonstrates that a few courageous voices, who make the effort to be heard, can become a powerful tool for truth.