

USADI Dispatch

A publication of the U.S. Alliance for Democratic Iran

Volume 1, No. 42

Thursday, August 19, 2004

USADI Commentary

Failure of Diplomacy and Engagement to Halt Iran's Nuclear Program

The diplomatic track in dealing with Iran's nuclear threat set in motion last fall following the accord between Tehran and the European Union's big-3, France Germany and Britain, has finally come to a halt. Tehran simply gained a year to advance its nuclear program.

The Iranian policy of deception and double-talk continued even after signing this agreement. Today, there is a universal belief that Iran's nuclear campaign is far from being civilian in nature. There is also a consensus that Iran's nuclear drive represents a clear and immediate danger to regional security and beyond.

The Undersecretary of State John R. Bolton told the Associated Press in an interview this week that Iran has informed British, French and German officials it could produce weapons-grade uranium within a year and a nuclear weapon no more than three years after that.

Some experts and officials insist that engaging Iran or referring its nuclear dossier to the United Nations' Security Council still offer a good chance to stop Iran's progress. Others believe that even if the Council were to take some action, it would not be sufficient to dissuade Iran from its campaign.

This is exactly where the two main policy camps part ways.

The "pro-engagement" camp argues that in the absence of any other viable approach, direct dialogue offers the best alternative and that Tehran's demands, however brazen, must be accommodated.

The other side of the divide proposes a tougher approach, ranging from a pre-emptive strike against Iran's dispersed nuclear activities to covert action. Others in this camp endorse a comprehensive policy formulation based the notion that Iran's nuclear threat and its sponsorship of terror could be halted once and for all through a regime change.

Engagement advocates have little to show for so far. The EU's big-3 diplomatic investment last fall proved to be a dismal failure. Moreover, the recent ascendance of the most extreme political faction of the clerical regime undermines the plausibility of the engagement approach.

Those espousing toughness lack creativity and backbone, for they offer no concrete or specific road map as to how a regime change could be realized. No one takes their argument that the U.S. should try to engage average Iranians in the streets of Tehran and other cities seriously; the mere pronouncements of support for the democracy movement are not sufficient. Concrete and practical steps are needed.

The ruling theocracy in Iran is bent on acquiring the A-bomb. It seeks political and military regional hegemony, a cornerstone of the Khomeini's vision for an Islamic Empire. No amount of negotiations and incentives would dissuade the mullahs.

Unlike its neighbors to the east and west, Iran has a century-long history of relentless struggle against despotism. The call for regime change in Iran goes back to more than two decades. Tens of thousands of Iranian democracy activists have been sent to the gallows and thousand of others have languished in Iran's prisons.

That said, any meaningful option on Iran must by necessity include reaching out to Iranian opposition groups who have been fighting for a secular and representative government for the past quarter century. No selective approach would succeed.

Only when Washington grasps fully the sheer extent of the destructive and multi-faceted threat Iran poses to the well-being of Iranians and to the security and stability of the region, would it recognize that the call of Iranians for a regime change must be heeded and the door to engagement must be shut.

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

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The Washington Post

August 18, 2004

Iran a Nuclear Threat, U.S. Says

Iran told British, French and German officials last month that it could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a nuclear bomb within a year, Undersecretary of State John R. Bolton said yesterday in arguing the case for international pressure on the Islamic Republic.

In a speech at the Hudson Institute, Bolton characterized Iran as a grave danger. He said the U.S. strategy would be to isolate rather than "engage" with the country, a tactic European allies are still hoping will work.

Bolton's comments came as the Bush administration is preparing for a key meeting in Vienna. The United States hopes to persuade allies to further rebuke Iran and refer the matter to the U.N. Security Council, which can impose sanctions or embargoes.

"They've told the EU three [Britain, France and Germany] that they could produce, they could enrich enough uranium for a nuclear weapon within a year and they could produce nuclear weapons within the range of our own assessment, which is a way of threatening the Europeans to get them to back down," Bolton said of Iran.

It remains unclear whether Iran is capable of carrying out its threat. U.S. officials say Iranian diplomats may have been bluffing when they met with European officials in Paris in July. And there were discrepancies between Bolton's account and those of European and U.S. diplomats, who said that Iran's deputy negotiator, Hoseney Moussavian, said Iran could start enriching uranium within a year, but it would take longer to enrich enough for a weapon.

France, Britain and Germany have been trying to persuade Iran through diplomatic means to give up its nuclear ambitions but have had little success...

"This regime has to be isolated in its bad behavior, not quote-unquote engaged," Bolton said.

European and U.S. intelligence estimates are that Iran is concealing its nuclear capabilities and could be five years away from building a bomb.

Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency have been scouring Iran for signs of a weapons program and are trying to verify Iran's claims. ... "It is the accumulation of this public and uncontradicted evidence, not just our own sensitive intelligence information, that leads us to our conclusions about Iran's true objectives," Bolton said.

Bolton also cited a recent press report that said Iran had tried to buy deuterium gas from Russia. The substance could be used to boost an explosion in a nuclear bomb...

National Review Online

August 13, 2004

Iran's Sadr Strategy

The on-again, off-again military offensive to destroy Moqtada al-Sadr's "Mahdi militia" in the holy city of Najaf was on again Thursday. This outcome will be crucial to the competition between the conflicting goals for the future of Iraq: ours and Iran's. Ours is to defeat the insurgency and enable freedom to take root. Theirs is to prevent a stable democracy from governing Iraq, and to damage our tenuous relationship to half the Islamic world.

The Shia majority of Iraq, long oppressed under Saddam, was ripe for insurgency or even revolution long before Saddam fell. Iran's radical Shia kakistocracy has been funding, supplying — and in Sadr's case operating — the insurgency in Shia Iraq ever since Coalition forces began massing to attack Iraq in 2002. According to one estimate, there are at least 30,000 Iranian-funded insurgents in Iraq... If the Imam Ali shrine is destroyed in a Coalition operation, the Iranians will use that fact to divide and discredit the Allawi government. They will try to raise all of Shia Islam against the American occupiers in Iraq and American interests everywhere.

The Najaf fight won't end today, tomorrow, or perhaps even next week. The Iraqi forces fighting with us against Sadr's men may not be sufficiently strong or dedicated to end the matter for days or weeks. Allawi, facing very strong opposition in his own government, may change his mind and demand we stop short of the necessary conclusion. But even if we win this fight without destroying Shia Islam's holiest site, even if the Iraqis manage to kill Sadr and defeat his force decisively, the Iranian interference in Iraq won't end. Until it does, there will be no peace in Iraq. The central point of the Iraqi insurgency is now — as it has been for more than a year — Tehran.

Excerpts from an article by Jed Babbin, the author of Inside the Asylum: Why the U.N. and Old Europe are Worse than You Think.