

Can Nuclear Conflict With Iran Be Defused?

by Jürgen Hübschen

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The Iranian President Mohammad Ahmadinejad threatens the West, especially Israel and the U.S.A.; and the West—under the leadership of the U.S.A.—threatens Ahmadinejad. Where should this lead, if those on opposite sides insult and suspect each other, instead of speaking with one another, as Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has emphatically demanded? President Bush and his government, and the Iranian President both have the common problem of trying to create an internal political effect with their harsh words. The wind is blowing in the face of the American President for many reasons, but, above all, due to the lack of success in Iraq; and Ahmadinejad also faces considerable internal political difficulties. The man who, as mayor of Tehran, was outstandingly successful, and thus became a bearer of hope, particularly to the masses of the Iranian population, cannot at the outset fulfill the dreams and wishes of those who voted for him.

Last but not least, it is for both parties also a matter of pride and honor. The Bush government does not want to allow itself to be shown up by an ambitious middle-level power, and the Iranian government is not ready to renounce, without something corresponding in return, its specifically defined right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, of uranium enrichment for peaceful purposes.

How can this Gordian knot be cut?

Militarily, the U.S.A. has no possibility of expecting success in bending Iran to its political will. U.S. conventional ground troops are already under excessive pressure in their sorties in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus there remains only an attack by cruise-missiles with conventional or nuclear warheads. For Vice President Dick Cheney and his neo-conservatives, both options appear to be thinkable, although all military experts and rational politicians in the U.S.A. have advised against it. In the case of an attack by conventional cruise missiles, Iran would hit back with its airforce and long-range artillery against the American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq; also Israel would be attacked with Iranian “Shahab rockets.”

In the case of an attack by tactical nuclear warheads, the so-called mini-nukes, the world would be altogether changed. NATO would fall apart, the trans-Atlantic partnership would cease to exist. U.S. troops worldwide would be forced into retreat, from Europe to Asia. A world war could not be ruled out. All responsible politicians on both sides of the Atlantic therefore must do everything possible to make sure that an American military attack on Iran doesn't occur.

People in Washington, and also in the European Union, are backing the UN Security Council, for a political solution, as opposed to the UN Secretary General.* There the “Iran case” should now be handled. But it is necessary to first provide the proof that Iran is actually working in a way that's forbidden, on a military nuclear program. That will be energetically disputed in Tehran.

The Nuclear Proliferation Issue

An instruction from the United Nations to Iran, to renounce its written right in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to peaceful use of nuclear energy, including uranium enrichment, has no legal basis. The same loud demand from the U.S.A. and the EU is politically understandable, but legally totally irrelevant. And that is also the reason why Iran has again taken up its uranium enrichment, in the presence and under the oversight of the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA).

Tehran refers to the right by which Israel, Pakistan, and also India, meanwhile have nuclear weapons, and thus clearly violate the spirit of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which these three countries have not signed. Thus all three states have refused any control by the IAEA.

Also, the “official” nuclear powers—China, France, Great Britain, Russia, and the United States—would have great difficulties with their arguments if Ahmadinejad referred to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, because it demands total nuclear disarmament by these countries.

Should the UN Security Council nonetheless renew the twofold (two-faced) measures, through which it grants other states what it denies to Iran, and decides on sanctions against Iran, it would presumably not be the government, as in Iraq, which would pay, but the population.

Proposals for a Solution

In the face of this background, is there still a solution?

I think yes. First of all, the right to uranium enrichment in every country, for civilian purposes, should be fundamental and expressly conceded to Iran, by the negotiations and even on the level of the UN Security Council, for psychological reasons. Perhaps you'll be surprised at such a concession, because Tehran doesn't totally abide by this law. It could be that Iran declares its readiness not to make use of its right, in the case that the community of states offers it another option

* Kofi Annan has sought to have the matter handled by the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA)—ed.



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Hübschen told the seminar: "One wins allies, not through military force, and also not through political diktat, but through cooperation and confidence-building measures."

in the nuclear domain—as is the case with the Russian proposal—and declares itself thus ready for an intensive industrial collaboration with Iran. Nonetheless, the government in Washington must bring itself into direct talks with Iran, and signal Tehran, that it is possible to have a fundamental rethinking of American-Iranian relations.

Naturally, Iran, for its side, has to cooperate—without ifs or buts—with the IAEA. A voluntary signing of the additional protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which provides additional powers to the IAEA, would be a clear signal of goodwill from Tehran.

Irrespective of that, India, Israel, and Pakistan must be forced to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and provide unhindered access to IAEA inspectors to all their nuclear establishments.

Last but not least, the disarmament from the realm of nuclear weapons by the “official” nuclear powers, must be hastened.

The demand, already raised many times at the United Nations, for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East region, should be declared an official goal of the world body.

Once more its credibility has been questioned in the conflict with Iran, and it is essential to show this credibility in words and also in deeds.

But next to credibility, realistic thinking and political foresight are also indispensable. Iran is on the way to becoming a regional power, and this cannot be stopped by the West in the long run. In addition to Iran’s own capability, it has a close relationship with Russia and also plays a decisive role with China. History has taught that it is the smartest thing, if one can not defeat a potential enemy, to ally with him.

This is even more necessary in connection with Iran, because there is now an increasingly genuine collaboration between the Iraqi and Iranian governments. This tendency could

strengthen further through the current political negotiations in Iraq for the construction of the government. The secular forces around the U.S. favor the former Prime Minister of the previous government, Iyad Allawi, have lost the elections in Iraq, and with that, the political influence of the U.S.A. dwindles in the “Land of Two Rivers.” A political coming-together between Iraq and Iran is also an alliance between the number two and number three among the states with the greatest proven oil reserves worldwide. The greatest oil reserves have been found in Saudi Arabia, and that in the settlement area of the Shi’ite minority, which has close ties with Iran. The Gulf states don’t want a renewed discrimination against Iran, but above all, don’t want a provocation of the powerful neighbor, who dominates the opposite coast of the Arabian Persian Gulf, and controls entrance into it.

In addition, one can see the danger of a fundamentalist arc on the Arabian Peninsula, which extends from Iran, over Iraq, Syria, and Palestine, all the way to Lebanon. Toward the East there is the danger that it would expand from Iran to Afghanistan. The archaic systems in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would not be a match for the pressure of such a crescent.

Through the electoral victory of Hamas in Palestine, Iran has now won an ally with government responsibility, next to Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, an ally which in the European view, has an important position on the opposite coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Last but not least, you should not overlook the fact that the “Iran case” has finally become, for many states of the Third World, a test case, which concerns the future relationship between the so-called evening and morning lands.

If the West and the East do not show a mutual readiness for dialogue, and the political will to deal with all questions on an equal footing and eye to eye, without closing down these discussions for any reason, that is an extraordinarily dangerous development to be feared.

Because in many Islamic countries, there is neither a positive perspective for the future, nor does the “enlightened world” seek to convey and put through its own ideas and systems; one thus finds a return to traditional values in Muslim societies. The view of man and the dominant system is not oriented forward, but backward.

Before this background, there arises out of the nuclear conflict with Iran, the civilian war in Iraq, the renewed destabilization in Afghanistan, the electoral victory of Hamas in Palestine, the Mohammad cartoons, the current photos of torture in Abu Ghraib, and the United Nations report on the mistreatment of prisoners in Guantanamo, a political mix which must be identified as highly explosive. Prudence and political sensibility by all participants are therefore required, more than ever.

An important step toward de-escalation would be simultaneous talks with Iran and Hamas, and that eye-to-eye, and without any preconditions. That is, one wins allies, not through military force, and also not through political diktat, but through cooperation and confidence-building measures.