

Nuclear Strife With Iran: Where Is the Solution?

by Jürgen Hübschen, Colonel (GS), ret.

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The West—led by the Bush-Cheney Administration—is issuing increasingly tough threats against Iran, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad threatens the West, especially Israel and the U.S.A. Ahmadinejad and the Bush Administration are both under considerable internal pressure. The wind is blowing in Bush's face, especially because of the Iraq disaster, and Ahmadinejad, who had been a successful mayor of Tehran, is not able to satisfy the hopes of his voters, especially the poorer layers.

The Iranian government is not ready to capitulate to the pressure from Washington without substantial concessions in exchange. Iran will not relinquish its right, clearly defined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to uranium enrichment for peaceful uses, with a corresponding concession. How can this Gordian knot be broken?

Militarily, the U.S.A. has no possibility of successfully forcing Iran to accept its political will. The U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are already overstretched. Thus, the only alternative would be to deploy cruise and other missiles with conventional or nuclear warheads. For Vice President Cheney and his neo-conservatives, both alternatives seem thinkable, although all military experts and also rational politicians in the U.S.A. have advised otherwise. In the case of deployment of conventional aerial attacks, Iran would respond against U.S. troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Israel would be hit by Iranian Shahab missiles. If tactical nuclear weapons were

deployed, the world would be drastically altered. NATO and the Atlantic partnership would be shattered. U.S. troops would be forced to withdraw worldwide—from Europe to Asia. A world war would not be excluded. All responsible politicians on both sides of the Atlantic are therefore challenged to do everything in their power, to ensure that an American attack against Iran does not take place.

For a “political solution,” Washington and forces in the EU are counting on the UN Security Council, though in opposition to UN General Secretary Kofi Annan. There, the “Iran case” is supposed to be dealt with. To do so, however, it will be necessary to provide proof that Iran is really secretly working on a military nuclear program, something that Tehran energetically denies. An order from the UN to Iran, that it should relinquish its right, enshrined in the NPT, to peaceful use of nuclear energy, including uranium enrichment, has absolutely no legal basis. Furthermore, Tehran would point out that Israel, Pakistan, and India too, who have not even signed the NPT, have developed nuclear weapons in the meantime, and reject any controls by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Even the “official” nuclear powers, China, France, Great Britain, Russia, and the U.S.A., would have a hard time arguing if Iran were to accuse them of violating the NPT, because it calls for complete nuclear disarmament. Were the UN Security Council to work with a double standard regardless, in that it allowed certain countries what it denies Iran, and slapped sanctions on Iran, then, as in Iraq, it would be the population, not the government which would pay the price.

Is there a solution at all, against this background? I think so.

First, in the context of negotiations below the level of the UNSC, Iran, for psychological reasons, should be granted the right to uranium enrichment for civilian use, in a fundamental and explicit form. Perhaps then Iran would not even insist on this right, if the community of nations offered it another option for nuclear technology, and were ready for more intensive economic cooperation. Naturally, Iran, for its part, and without any ifs or buts, must cooperate with the IAEA. A voluntary signing of the NPT additional protocol, which guarantees the IAEA further rights, would be a clear sign of good will from Tehran’s side.

Independently, India, Israel, and Pakistan must be unequivocally called on to enter the NPT and allow unhindered access of IAEA inspectors to all their nuclear facilities.

Finally, the “official” nuclear powers must be called upon to expedite their atomic disarmament. The demand presented many times by the UN, for a nuclear-weapons free zone in the Middle East region, must be declared an official aim.

Once again, in the conflict with Iran, credibility is required, and this must be shown in talks and actions. One should not lose sight of the fact that the “Iran case,” in the eyes of the Third World, has long since become a test case for the credibility of the West.