

Europe and the Iran Issue

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The Iran Problem - Today

Iran's Nuclear weapon ambitions constitute Europe's foremost concern about the Mullah regime in Tehran where it is in power since February 1979. A knock-out strike from Israeli soil looms over the horizon with far reaching consequences in the Near and Middle East. Experts and governments differ in their assessment of the time span still needed for Iran – if it decided to go ahead to obtain a nuclear weapon capability. Governments and experts as well do not differ in the assessment of the goals that the regime hopes to achieve by way of acquiring the status of a nuclear weapon state without adverse consequences.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, key European countries such as Great Britain, France and Germany – as well as the United States and up to a degree the Russian Federation - have not spared any feasible effort to bridge the gap between the efforts on the part of the world community to ensure Iran's right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation-Treaty from 1968 – ratified also by Iran - for the peaceful use of nuclear energy and the credible renunciation of the country's anticipated ambition for nuclear weapons of their own; that means of a country with a great civilization. Die disparities between the position of the two sides could be bridged, if the most sensitive aspects of the Iranian program were to be outsourced – such as higher levels of enrichments. Also, lack of transparency and the hostile language against Israel chosen time and again by the Iranian President Ahmadimejad constitute the source of deep concerns outside Iran regarding the final goals of today's Iran.

In December 2010 another round of talks took place between the “P5 (Veto Powers of the UN Security Council) plus 1” (Germany) trying to find common language with the Iranian negotiator – Ambassador at the IAEA - Ali Asghar Soltanieh for – for the agenda of meaningful negotiations. In June 2008 the international group of countries engaged in this issue in the first instances offered negotiations on economic cooperation including support for the construction of nuclear power plants of a specific type provided Iran would prove to IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) that it is no engaged in the development of nuclear weapons. It was supposed to stop, at least interrupt its nuclear enrichment activities.

Even, the United States undertook initiatives that would meet some Iranian ambitions and Iranian preoccupations about US objectives in the region. There

are unconfirmed reports about confidential talks on bilateral issues resulting from the down fall of the late Shah in 1979 and dealing also with issues and cooperation regarding Iraq and Afghanistan among others on drug trafficking.

Also, contacts between Iran and Israel have been reported.

Iran is faced with the results of another round of international consultations on additional sanctions. This forth series of sanctions since 2006, was adopted by the Security Council including all Permanent Members of this prestigious international body on June 9, 2010. The sanctions are directed against the Iranian nuclear program as well as against the Revolutionary Guards; however the oil business is only affected in a marginal manner. The adoption of additional economically and financially more important sanctions by the European Union and the USA tells us, that the substantive content of the UN Resolutions adopted until now, remains to be rather limited. That means, Iran continues to count - on good grounds I presume - on the readiness of China, Russia and other countries to compensate for the further reduction of traditional financial and economic ties of the country with the economies of the Euro-Atlantic zone. This meets with the desire of Iran to root the country's economy more firmly with the upcoming economic, financial and industrial giants of Asia and South America and downgrade the cooperation with and technical dependence on Western countries. In the past, such aspirations lacked substance and credibility. In view of the rising economic powers in Asia and South America that may no longer be the case. Also the demand of the regions, enjoying high rates of growth such as China and India for oil and gas is rising more than anything else. So the market and the resources of Iran may get lost for the West for good without stopping the country from advancing its efforts for a nuclear weapons capability and for simultaneous economic advancement. Authoritarian states are experienced in exploiting in their publics the negative psychological impact of hostile actions of the Western world against them, in this case against the state of Iran as such - all the more that the nuclear program of the Mullah regime in itself is not controversial within the Iranian electorate. The internal conflict between the ruling Mullah class on the one hand and the electorate and middle classes in particular on the other hand is about legality of the regime itself, the rule of law and modern society. The United States and Great Britain are conceived by the Mullah regime as enemies of Iran, however the American way of life and the European civilizations are extremely popular throughout the country. The "Green Movement" in the country - relating to the Muslim use of green as the colour symbolizing the Muslim belief - has gained enormously in strength on the occasion of last year's presidential election. Politically the centre rooted "Green Movement" in Iran constitutes the political alternative to the current rigid and conservative Shiite rule. The ruling Mullah class continues to suppress the opposition by brutal means. Iran is now - second

only to China - the country with the largest number of executed death sentences per annum. In 2009 the number rose to more than 300 victims.

By and large the country is also suspicious of Russian interests in the region. Iran is suspicious even more of Sunnites and about the interests of the Arab nations and of course of Israel, although Persians, Jews, Armenians as well as Sunnite Arabs have lived peacefully together for centuries on Persian soil.

In this regard, the Iranian perception of a Persian nuclear weapon can be conceived as part of the power play in the region – in particular in the effort to lead a political Anti-Israel coalition. Following the collapse of the Saddam Hussein-Regime and a weakening of the Iraqi political system Iran claims a leading regional role and therefore wants to keep - according to their rational - the nuclear weapon option credible all the more that Pakistan - a dominantly Shiite country – is a nuclear power already. However, the rivalry between Shiite Iran and the Sunnite ruled Arab states foremost Saudi Arabia and the Emirates cannot be put into doubt. There are Arab voices -as Wikileaks shows - that are in favour of a mortal strike against the Iranian nuclear installations by the USA.

It appears that the decision on additional European and US-American sanctions that are supposed to impose unacceptable cost on the Iranian economy and government are motivated up to a degree by domestic policy considerations of the Western countries and their public. They have to be seen also in connection with efforts to strengthen the international solidarity against Iranian nuclear weapons ambitions and activities, which include also the development of far reaching ballistic missiles. The pending issues on the Iranian nuclear program, the military build up, the support for the militant goals of Hizbollah and Hamas and finally the hostile language about the right for Israel to exist make the Iran of today a threat to peace in the Near and Middle East.

Iran and the Conflicts of the Region

Before discussing a more credible and effective set up of Western policies towards Iran than the ones now in place, consideration and attention has to be given to the question, in what way Iran relates to the other issues and other forces of the region:

A weakened **Iraq** is in the interest of Iran; however, nowadays a possibly independent Iraqi Kurdistan would constitute an immanent threat for the cohesion of Iran itself, all the more that the Kurdish minority in Iran does in fact enjoy certain economic liberties.

Iran tries to strengthen the Shiite political movements in Iraq and their political impact within the country.

The political and religious rival to Iran in the region is Sunnite dominated **Saudi-Arabia**, the guardian of the holy Shrines in Mecca - every year the goal of millions of pilgrims from all over the world. However, the Saudi kingdom's credibility in the region has suffered due to their close alliance with the United States. Recently the USA and Saudi Arabia concluded another major military modernisation program for the Saudi Armed Forces. Tehran tries to outmanoeuvre Saudi Arabia as the principal protector of the Palestine interests in the conflict with Israel. It continues to actively support Hezbollah and Hamas in Lebanon and in Palestine held territory. It preaches hatred against **Israel**. For hundreds of years the Jewish minority in Persia was safe – so this hatred is artificially imposed on Persia.

Iran seeks to protect Shiite minorities in war stricken **Afghanistan** (Hazara), and to provide support to Shiites in **Iraq**. It tries to improve relations and cooperation with India and to tie Pakistan to the gas pipeline-project between Iran and India – across the territory of Pakistan.

The Iran-Russia record is ambiguous in many respects: **Russia** reduced Persia's influence in the Caucasian region. It established - in cooperation with Great Britain - zones of interest in Iran prior to World War I and during WW II. It required the strategic involvement of the USA in the region in order to have the Soviet Union quit Persian soil after WW II. Between 1995 and 2010 Russia constructed two nuclear power plants in Bushir that had been built originally by Germany in the seventies. They could not be completed in the early eighties because of the break down of mutually trusted relations and cooperation in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

Relations with **Turkey** are handled on both sides in accordance with strategic interests. **Turkey and Brazil** opposed the most recent UN-Security Council Resolution on Iran.

What needs to be done in Europe?

Given this international strategic and regional set up it is fair to state that a great deal is at stake when it comes to decisions on war and peace in the region, a region torn by conflict in every corner with a varying composition of friends and foes.

In such circumstances: What should be the political, guidelines and the action plan for the European Union:

1. Europe recognizes the importance of Iran – irrespective of the nature of the ruling system - for the welfare and stability in the region – on the basis of the

existing international legal system, among others with regard to non proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems of particular ranges.

2. The ambiguity of Iran on the ultimate goals of its nuclear programme and the destructive position on the solution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a Two-States-settlement constitute major obstacles for the development of mutual trust and political stability in the region. There is a risk of war with incalculable consequences.

3. Therefore there is no alternative to negotiated settlements of the various conflicts at stake. The region has to be looked at as a whole with a number of related and unrelated conflicts. Therefore the answer has to be given in the light of the overall situation and its various areas of conflict.

Consequently, the European Union should set up a **High Level Group of Politicians and Experts** for the regular policy review of the regional situation between the Hindukush Region and the Mediterranean Area. The High Level Group would be tasked to assess the development of the various conflicts and their interrelationship. The Group would be charged with the task of reviewing the Union's policies and of developing initiatives under changing circumstances, considering among others varying regional compositions for political and other initiatives. This aspect – to include countries from the region into the consultation process - would be important in order to activate regional interests in the context of the common cause.

Initiatives could include recommendations in the diplomatic, the political, the economic and the security fields.

The objective would be to inter-relate the policy of the European Union and of its member states with regard to the region and to bring about a cohesive, credible and effective policy that could have – over time - an impact on the course of events in the region.

4. Correspondingly, **public and non-public conferences** need to be organized for the conflictual region at large in order to bring about a higher level of understanding in our part of the world for the complexities of the interrelated problems and for each one of the conflicts. This has to be done because we observe a declining degree of understanding and support for the positions held by the European Union and its member states.

It would be important to include the United States into these talks – because of their weight in any conflict and every solution, all the more that the US and Iran look back to a long and protracted relationship on nuclear issues and cooperation. In the sixties, the USA and Iran concluded a treaty on “Nuclear

Energy for Peace” The USA helped to establish a Research Reactor in Tehran, and negotiations started for the construction of Nuclear Power Plants envisaging as well a complete nuclear fuel cycle.

5. The strategy of the European Union towards Iran in particular should be two-fold:

On the one hand – in defence of the international legal system – a violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation regime and the verbal as well as the factual denial of the existence of the state of Israel – cannot serve as basis for fruitful and reliable relations with Iran. Therefore the regime of sanctions is unavoidable for the time being, although its impact may be limited because of many loopholes and circumventions.

On the other hand – the readiness for negotiations and economic as well as scientific and technological cooperation on the basis of the existing international legal system - has to be repeated time and again. The issues at stake should also be discussed with various sectors of the Iranian society. Such conferences could be set up – in the beginning – with limited participation and may be without the public. Participants may be from the official and the non-governmental part of society. In this regard, isolation should be lifted. Right now, the former Iranian Ambassador to Germany and Iranian Negotiator for the Nuclear Talks with the “5 plus 1”-Group, Hossein Moussavi, lives in the USA as a guest professor at Princeton University. This is a perfect example of the kind of contacts needed right now – in order to break the ice.

The objective would be to develop understanding for the European Union position, for the position of the international community, but also for the complexities of the Iranian preoccupations about the role of Western countries in the Middle East. Over time, understanding could be improved – may be on the Iran issues, may be on other regional issues.

At one time, changes in political positions with international implications may occur on the Iranian side: Then, we will be in need of experienced people for European and US Affairs in Iran and in Europe as well as in the USA for Iran. The network has to be nit now. It should not only comprise Iranians in exile. The experience in East-West-relations during the Cold War tells us, that it is highly desirable and in the end useful to develop such informal links with people from all walks of life, including the official ones across the Great Divide in times of tension. This series of contacts could break the monopoly of the official line on how to read the world of today. Let us recall the significance of the Final Helsinki Act dated August 1975 for the eventual ending of the Cold War in 1990.

Such an approach would mean as well, that speakers from academic and other sectors of our society and from our political system would also have to speak on conferences in Iran – closed ones as well as public ones.

That means: We have to be prepared for the worst course of events. At the same time we have to strive for a better course of events. However, in this regard, the initiative is with us! We must not miss the opportunities of the day. An example in this regard was set in Manama, Bahrain in December 2010 on the occasion of a Security Forum, where US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton spoke – to be followed the next day by the Iranian Foreign Minister. The Iranian Foreign Minister had also attended the Munich based annual International Security Conference. This is one small step towards our goal to bring about transparency into the suspected hidden workshops of the Iranian nuclear program and thus achieving the inclusiveness of Iran into the international dialogue.

Obviously, official conferences do not suffice; there needs to be the inclusion of civil society that has many faces, also in Iran. Can it be included – may be step by step in a process of confidence building? There may be setbacks and small achievements only in the beginning.

Given the high risk of war that any conflict situation in the Near and Middle East carries with it at all times, we must not miss the bus to break or circumvent the seemingly unavoidable road to war – without submitting any country or people to the will or blackmailing of another, an offensive power.

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