

**ATLANTIC MEMO #26*****Consistent Regime-Change Policy in Iran***

The character of the Iranian State is such that rapprochement with the West is impossible. Therefore, a systematic policy of undermining the regime is the only way to stop the nuclear program and prevent a military confrontation.

1. The Nature of the Regime

The following suggestions are necessarily inconsistent with the majority approach, as we have a different assessment of the Iranian regime's character.

Iran is a vital supporter of Hamas and Hezbollah and seeking to destabilize its surrounding neighborhood. Furthermore, Iran's allies are a coalition of anti-Western and anti-Israeli powers. Conclusively, the regime's ultimate goals are the consolidation of an Islamic state, expansion of the Islamic Revolution and the destruction of Israel. Measures targeting the nuclear issue and the situation of human rights need to take this character into account, as it fundamentally differs from the primary interests of other states such as economic development, prestige, and security interests.

A nuclear-armed Iran would be the worst-case scenario in any strategy, as Israel's security interests would be undermined, which could lead to an intense arms-race as well as the likelihood of a military confrontation.

A consistent policy of regime change is necessary, as Western goals regarding Iran will not be achieved by complying with Tehran. Ultimately, the opposition movement has shown that they reject the rigid moral code and constant brutal harassment imposed by the regime. Most of Iranian society's most prominent figures are integrated within the opposition movement. Thus, the regime's clergy and militant-wing stand alone, as they are the state's sole executors. Hence, measures to strengthen the opposition movement could threaten the theocratic system.

Thus, all measures such as rapprochement with the existing regime (negotiations, trust-building etc.) should be downsized. Instead, efforts which strengthen dissent within the system and promote the opposition movement's goals should be enforced.

2. Policy Recommendations**2.1 Sanctions in Focus**

Economic sanctions are necessary to end Western technology transfers, which Iran relies on. However, the regime has shown an ability to substitute existing sanctions through Russian and Chinese sources. Additionally, EU sanctions came with loopholes which were bypassed. Thus, Iran's trade channels through Oman, the Emirates and Saudi-Arabia need to be identified and cut off.

The key player is Germany, whose high technology imports could not be replaced in the short term. Strategic and faster acting sanctions would weaken Iran's military infrastructure. Hence, Germany as a transatlantic power is responsible for taking the lead, with support from the other transatlantic partners. They will have to insist on Germany's head role. Loopholes to be dealt with from within Germany are the European-Iranian Trade Bank (EIH) and medium sized engineering enterprises.

Another critical loophole is EGL, a subsidiary of the Swiss-owned Axpo Group, which has completed a billion Euro mega-deal with the National Iranian Gas Export Company in 2008. Swiss ambitions also include assisting Iran's application for membership of the WTO. The Swiss government has to be pushed to abandon the EGL deal and official commitments with the Iranian regime.

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2.2 Strengthen the Opposition Movement

Most people are not likely to engage in politics when they feel alone. The protesters in Iran have repeatedly called for international solidarity with their struggle. Therefore, transatlantic civil societies must raise their voices to clarify that the Iranian opposition is broadly recognized. NGOs, journalists, scholars and human rights groups particularly have to espouse Iran's opposition.

Furthermore, women's rights groups should strengthen their engagement with Iranian women. These groups have been a major driving force in the protest against the regime since the requirement for women to wear the veil. Women are explicitly more suppressed than men in Iran, which means that they receive vigorous attention from transatlantic civil society. This underlines the necessity for NGOs of transatlantic partner countries, to engage with their Iranian counterparts. In the same manner, transatlantic media should offer assistance wherever possible, to Iranian TV, radio, and print media. Assistance could include technical equipment or campaigning know-how. It is up to the opposition whether to accept or reject such offers.

Moreover, Iranian bloggers, which need to be promoted, could be protected by their own fame. Iran's government will hardly be able to stash away people known worldwide. Engaging online with Iran's opposition needs to include all kinds of new social media, including Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

Not less important is fostering academic exchange. Scholarships and conferences for Iranian students and scholars are an essential means of doing so. Requirements for travel visas for Iranians should be waived. Assuming there is Iranian interest, religious dialogue should be intensified. Depending on the situation, the transatlantic partners have either to ignore or to confront Tehran's efforts to use these programs for its own propaganda. Thus, these initiatives should be considered as a confrontational strategy against the Iranian regime in order to delegitimize their hold on the Iranian people.

Last but not least, transatlantic governments must encourage Iranian civil society in its engagements as well as provide political support. Hence, transatlantic politicians have to back up the Iranian opposition in speeches and constantly name political detainees. Talks should be arranged and international campaigns initiated to free these people.

Any moves by the regime to boycott these efforts need to be countered by strong diplomatic initiatives which discredit Tehran's actions in front of the entire international community. Western countries should withdraw their ambassadors from Tehran, because Iran constantly violates human rights in an extraordinary manner.

2.3 Deterrence by Denial

From the perspective of political tactics, the military option can hardly be taken off the table. Israeli security concerns have to be considered. Additionally, the Iranian regime may interpret a move away from the military option as a ticket for a 'free ride'.

However, the military option offers not a sustainable solution; rather only a means in which to buy time. As Iran is developing medium range missiles as warhead carriers, missile defense as 'deterrence by denial' capability is the wisest way to go. Iran can be deterred from showing any kind of aggressive behavior when Tehran is forced to accept that its missiles are useless. Aside from the transatlantic partner countries, every missile defense system should take Israel and the Gulf states into account. Otherwise, further growth of current arms races or military confrontations may not be avoidable.

CONCLUSION

A consistent regime-change strategy of political and economic containment of the Iranian regime and strengthening of the opposition movement is the only workable way to prevent a military confrontation. A new government in Tehran would most likely have other priorities apart from going nuclear, rather aiming for co-operation with the international community.

Atlantic-community.org's Policy Workshop Competition 2010, sponsored by the U.S. Mission to Germany, challenged students with one of the toughest questions in international relations: *"What could a successful strategy for the transatlantic partners to overcome the deadlock on Iran's nuclear program look like?"*

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