

Op-ed

Iran: Diplomacy Not War

The Bush administration has adopted a policy of threatening to use military force if Iran begins to develop nuclear weapons. In 2002, the Pentagon in its “Nuclear Posture Review” named Iran as one of the seven countries against which nuclear weapons might be used. The President has stated that Iran is part of an “axis of evil.” Vice-President has stated, “We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon.”

Rather than starting another war, the U.S. should use diplomacy and work to establish a Nuclear-Free Middle East Zone. Further, this is a war the U.S. cannot win.

Peace Action is again calling for a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East. The first call for a NWFZ in the Middle East was a resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1974. The resolution also called states to place their nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. The General Assembly has renewed this call several times.

It is also pertinent that UN Security Resolution 687, passed in 1991, which demanded Iraqi disarmament, did so within the context of “establishing in the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction.” It was alleged violations of this resolution, which the Bush administration used to justify its 2003 invasion of Iraq. However, the U.S. has refused the establishment of a WMD-free zone for the entire region.

In 1974, Israel was the only Middle Eastern state that possessed nuclear weapons. Israel remains so today, and has rejected calls to sign the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty or place its nuclear facilities under I.A.E.A. inspection as mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 487. Other countries, including Iran, in the region have long asserted that Israel’s nuclear arsenal poses a threat to their security.

With Iran withdrawing certain facilities from I.A.E.A. supervision, there is a crucial urgency to establishing a Middle East NFZ. There have been other efforts to achieve a NFZ. The U.S. led the 1991 Madrid Conference for Arab-Israeli peace, including a process for negotiating a NFZ, but was later halted when the U.S. failed to push Israel to compromise. In 2003, a draft U.N. resolution for a Middle East NFZ was tabled when the U.S. threatened a veto.

Clearly, another effort is needed, with the full weight of major powers behind it. The U.S. and Europe must make it clear that their efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons must be even handed.

The pattern of threatening selected states with sanctions, or even military action, while tolerating the acquisition and possession of nuclear weapons by other states, suggests less interest in non-proliferation than in geo-politics according to Kevin Martin, Executive Director for Peace Action.

Such double standards do not just apply to Israel. The President has just entered into a nuclear cooperation agreement with India, which violates both U.S. laws and international agreements prohibiting such support for countries, which have refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and have developed nuclear weapons. India now has the capacity to produce 6 – 10 nuclear weapons per year. If the Senate approves the President's nuclear deal, India will potentially be able to produce nearly 50 nuclear weapons annually. The U.S. has also agreed to provide nuclear-capable aircraft to Pakistan. Both countries are in violation of UN Security Council resolution 1172, which calls on both Pakistan and India to eliminate their nuclear weapons programs.

At the same time we are threatening Iraq not to develop nuclear weapons, the President's 2007 budget calls for billions for research and development of new nuclear weapons.

The Nuclear Free Zones have been an effective approach to preventing nuclear proliferation. Latin America, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Antarctica have all been established as NWFZ's and no nation in those regions has, since the establishment of these NWFZ's, chosen to seek nuclear weapons capability. The Middle East and South and Southwest Asia are the only portions of the Global South not currently part of an NWFZ.

We have forgotten that the U.S. was the midwife to the Iranian nuclear program 30 years ago. In 1976, President Gerald Ford offered and encouraged Iran a full nuclear cycle. The CIA calls this failed policy "blowback" – Iraq, Iran, where will be the next "blowback?"

Another war is not the answer. N.C. Peace Action urges Congress to seek a diplomatic solution.

Sincerely,

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