

**HUNGRY FOR FREEDOM; STARVING FOR NUCLEAR POWER:
IRAN'S THIRST FOR A NEW FUTURE AND WHAT WE MUST DO ABOUT IT**

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1st day of Sukkot, October 3, 2009

Shabbat Shalom and Hag Sameach.

When Rabbi Roston asked me to give a talk in August, it seemed like a great idea. I have worked on Iran for awhile. I have been a member of the Metrowest's Community Relations Committee for the past two years spearheading programs on Iran that brought Jewish and Non-Jewish groups together to work on sharing information on the external and internal problems in Iran. But alas, like is always true in the Middle East. The premise for my talk in August now seems so "last month" after the events of nuclear deceit and the talks held in Geneva this past Thursday.

Luckily, I am a procrastinator and did not prepare my words until yesterday.

No seriously, the truth remains that one cannot look ONLY at the recent week in Iran. Sure I only have 15 minutes or so to address the topic at hand but that is why I titled this information session like I did. It is the external and internal actions that are currently at play that make any policy choices difficult. These changes are what actually engendered this week's meetings to take place in Geneva. For the first time it was not just the United States and Israel (and the neighboring Arab countries) talking about the danger of Iran but France, Germany and even the UN Security Council. (Although, let us be clear, Israel has every reason to be leader of this campaign of fear and anger.)

So what are these internal factors?

The truth is that until one month before the Iranian elections, it was looking as though there really was no election at all. Then because of some really crazy comments and foolish choices that Ahminidijad made, an economy that has gotten worse for the typical bazaari, the Iranian people really felt that even though the other candidates were not much better than their President that any change, even a little one was an improvement. As you know, it looked as though the Opposition headed by Houseein Moussavi or even Mehdi Karroubi (both former members of Parliament and Karroubi a member of the 79 revolution would win).

Then as I am sure you all know, Ahminidjad stole the election; but he did not won over his citizens.

In the days after Ahminidjad's new math was released there were:

Demonstrations in the street

Arrests and killing

Media coverage was initially unparalleled both for its coverage and the events that we were seeing before our eyes but within a few days, foreign journalists were sent packing and even the internet, cell phone service and twitter comments were cut off.

You know the Iranian Revolution in 1979 was called the cassette revolution because it started with audiocassettes of speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini that were smuggled into Iran to spread the message. If that is the case then this is truly a Blogging Revolution. When Iranian Internet sites were shut down, Egyptian bloggers and other Middle Eastern technophiles handed over all of their sites to the Iranian brethren so they could get their messages out to the world and because they were so inspired by their actions. This continues today by the way.

Through all the harsh measures imposed by Ahminidjad, this opposition continues and it does not appear to be subsiding.

Let me tell you about just the last two weeks alone.

Al Quds Day (Jerusalem Day) was September 19th

During demonstrations, Former President Mohammed Khatami was beaten

Last week the grandson of Ayatollah Khomeini was admonished and threatened because of his support for Moussavi

3 Grandsons of a most senior of Iranian clerics were arrested.

When Tehran University opened the school year on this past Monday, there were huge demonstrations and an enormous number of students were interrogated. Traditionally, the Iranian President appears at the festivities but he was a no show. The Education Minister snuck in briefly through a back door but when he was seen on the podium the boos and cries were so loud that he quickly retreated. Shortly thereafter, the gates to the university where it is important to remember was the place where the 79 Revolution first took hold were closed by security forces preventing students from entering and exiting. Riot police appeared and cell phones and cameras were smashed.

That same day, an outspoken reformist cleric and presidential candidate wrote a letter to the head of the Expediency Council, a committee of clerics that has the power to name and remove the supreme leader demanding the actions of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah all Khamenei be reviewed.

Now I could go on in great detail about all of the violent events public criticism of these events but let us just say here that this does not appear to be a Tiananmen replay whereby a demonstration that is quickly quelled and the country returns to the status quo. It continues and we need to find way to support this home grown initiative for change in a delicate, but public manner.

We need to remember that the Iranian people are the most pro American populous in the Middle Eastern region. Think of another country in the region where death to America is actually booed by demonstrators. They are also a very young population with 60% of the 75 million people in Iran are under 30. So these dissenters are going to be around for a while and we must let this opposition continue to foment even as new missiles and enriched uranium threaten our security.

Before I turn to nukes though there is one fundamental group of people in Iran that must be mentioned because it is the key to the regimes ability to survive domestically as well as its ability to strengthen Iran's position in the Middle East and the world as a whole.

The Revolutionary Guard.

Founded as a counterweight to the regular military and to protect the Revolution against a possible coup, the Guard's mandate has expanded over the last thirty years and has evolved into a socio-political economic force with influence reaching deep into Iran's power structure. Accountable to only the Supreme Leader, under Ahminidjad reign, guard members have been appointed ambassadors, governors, cabinet members to illustrate their political clout and rewards for devotion to its leader. The Guard has been deployed to help Hizbullah in Lebanon, and Muslim militants in Bosnia; it has shipped weapons to Hamas the Taliban in Afghanistan and Shiite in Iraq. The organization also controls strategic industries and commercial services, oversees the ports and airports and is therefore is heavily involved in all black market industries. It is this force that has taken the dominant role on the crackdown on the protestors.

Oh and just this week, the Guard purchased over fifty percent of Iran's Telecommunications company for 7.8 billion dollars. You all remember the importance of telecommunications in light of the opposition right.

And finally in an attempt to bring everyone up to speed, the missiles that were launched earlier this week were launched by members of the Revolutionary Guard.

It is this corps, which is the key to Ahminidjad's retention of power not only because of their strength and brutality but also because of this economic growing power under a cloud of current and imminent sanctions.

So since the election it has been the regime's overriding goal to buy time and try to reestablish and consolidate control without any foreign interference in its internal affairs. What better way to defer the world's attention than to come clean to the International Atomic Energy Agency about a small nuclear facility that the American, Israeli and European intelligence agencies were about to expose and focus the discussion back on your strength as a country on the cusp of nuclear capability.

That, my friends, is what happened last week. This small nuclear facility located in an underground tunnel complex on the grounds of an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp Base near the religious town of Qom provided benefits to all of us.

And Now I am going to tell you why.

Israel has long wanted to halt the Iranian nuclear program but the world did not do much about it.

While many have complained of the recurring human rights abuses in Iran even before the election, no one was doing anything about it

Sanctions programs are only successful if everyone is on board and up until this summer, United States was going at it primarily alone.

Sanctions still have limited effectiveness but its potency is now stronger with the French on board in light of recent events.

Whether you favored a Bush policy of not talking to the Iranians or were encouraged by Obama's willingness to sit down, the truth is that until last week, the Iranians were not willing to come to the table to join us.

But now we have a new game of political chess!

On Thursday, for the first time in thirty years, the United States accompanied at times by the Security Council plus Germany sat down to discuss something. Ironic that it took the United States thirty years to sit down with Iran and they met with the only government since the initial revolutionary coup that was not democratically elected.

Did the talks accomplish much? Well they agreed to meet again.

They agreed to a freeze, in return for a freeze. A freeze in nuclear progress in return for a freeze on further sanctions. A few other minor things and for what it is worth, if you value their insight, they agreed to full cooperation with the IAEA

But of course the real question remains, how trustworthy are the Iranians? Not very. But it is also just as clear that Iran will ensure that these negotiations continue in order to show their people that they are legitimate rulers who are on par with great powers. For this to happen, they will have to provide something.

So I have hopefully given myself a few minutes to answer the obvious question (although I really need another twenty), what do we do know.

I pose it to you all this way.

Let us examine our options.

Increase Sanctions.

As I said early, for sanctions to be effective, everyone has to be on board and China is not and we are unsure of Russia although if I had to put money down, I would bet a lot against it. Not only that, even with all of the effective work that the USG has accomplished, led by the US Treasury the Iranians have found ways around the sanctions. The Chinese replaced US and European conglomerates. And In January for example, Lloyd's Bank agreed to pay \$350 million in fines and forfeiture for among other things disguising illegal transfer of more than 300 million on behalf of Iranian banks and customers.

Iran is China's second biggest oil supplier and their appetite is unquenchable. Sino-Iranian relations have truly become a report all on their own.

Military action. For obvious reasons I do not believe that this is a preferred course of action for the Americans and let me add while there is a part of me, like each and every one of you here that would love to see the Israelis pull an Orisrac 2, we all know that in truth this will also not benefit the Israelis. Firstly, we now believe that there are many little Qoms and they have acquired the knowledge so it would only slow down a little bit. Secondly, at this rare moment, major countries are in agreement that Iran is the bad guy and Israeli attacks would alter that as well as impact the region as a whole negatively at this present time. Of course any military action benefits the hard-liners and will heal political rifts

Dialogue.

Yes, we do not trust them but in the short term this is the best option. Iran's lies have provided us with this opportunity and we must move cautiously and slowly through these murky waters for the time being.

This is what I suggest.

This month there is a freeze for a freeze but let us see what happens. US Department of Treasury must keep investigating the illicit dealings of the Iranian Central Bank and all other financial transaction. The architectural blueprints for further sanctions should be prepared behind close doors

The IAEA and intelligence community must investigate and public announce all of their findings. The end game here of course is a complete map of nuclear sites with a history of how each was created and provisioned.

Our European Missile Defense Plan and other military strategies of course must be altered as we find out more information. We may not be planning for an immediate launch but we keep prepare.

Continue to cover the events in Iran. We must show our support for the Opposition and show them that we are not forgetting them. Last weeks rally at the UN was not just a Jewish one. This is a new phenomenon.

We hope as dialogue continues the topic broadens.

Our talks will not strengthen the Iranian leadership but actually undercut the mullahs because there will be no reason to blame the US for all of Iranian internal political and economic problems. With each meeting either a benefit for the people will be announced such as fewer sanctions but the people will not reap any economic benefits as the Revolutionary Guard strengthens as corruptness intensifies.

And what happens if Iran does not mean any of our demands?

Well even the Russians and Chinese are uncomfortable somewhat with all of this arms trading and procurement of nuclear materials. The less the regime offers, the more support we will get in our attempts to sanction this regime.

There is no quick solution here. Hey it is the Middle East. Aside from Israel and Iran, regime change only comes through old age or assassination, so in truth the last few months have moved at a blistering pace.

So I hope my 15-minute blitzkrieg of events sheds some light and some hope in these scary times.

I hope for good, and prepare for the worst.

Just another typical day in the region.

Shabbat Shalom