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"The Crisis with Iran and the IAEA"

A Luncheon with Geoffrey Kemp, Michael Eisenstadt, David Albright, and Dimitri K. Simes

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At a recent luncheon discussion at The Nixon Center, Geoffrey Kemp, Director of Regional Strategic Programs at the Nixon Center, Michael Eisenstadt, Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and David Albright, President of The National Institute for Science and International Security, acknowledged that Iran's pending nuclear crisis poses an enormous challenge to the international community, and there appear to be no simple solutions. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has warned Tehran that it must come clean about its nuclear ambitions before October 31, or it could be reported to the United Nations Security Council, which could impose sanctions. Dimitri K. Simes, President of the Nixon Center, moderated the discussion.

"We need the complete story..."

David Albright began the discussion by listing the urgent questions that Iran must answer if it wishes to prove its nuclear program is truly for civilian intentions and not manufacturing nuclear weapons. The most important question has to do with the IAEA's recent detection of "highly enriched uranium" (HEU), which could indicate the presence of weapons-grade material. The Tehran regime claims that the HEU traces came from imported centrifuge components, though it has not disclosed the companies or countries from which they came. Other possibilities are that Iran illicitly produced the materials itself, or possibly imported low-enriched uranium and converted it to HEU. Second, Iran must establish whether or not it tested centrifuges before June 2003, when production was first

acknowledged. The results could indicate a history of clandestine measures that do not match Iran's claim that its nuclear program is strictly for peaceful measures.

Adding to this, Albright expressed concern that the upcoming October 31 deadline is deceptive and will not be enough time to fully determine Iran's objectives. Cooperation now is not an indication of cooperation in the past. The IAEA will need to continue to press Iran to answer questions about its nuclear intentions. Albright warned that transparency under the IAEA may not be comforting enough for the Bush administration. During a follow-up discussion, the panelists debated whether the NPT regime may have become obsolete because it permits countries to legally obtain resources for energy that can be transferred to a nuclear weapons program. Signing of the IAEA's Additional Protocol may be one way to mitigate concerns about Iranian intentions. This Protocol would give the IAEA more access in Iran, as well as introduce a more rigorous inspections regime. However, Albright reasserted that the Additional Protocol still leaves many fundamental issues, such as enrichment components, out of the picture.

"No easy way out..."

Michael Eisenstadt focused his comments on the different courses of action the US and Iran may take. The Iranian regime is not likely to give up its nuclear infrastructure. Senior Iranian officials have signaled that they intend to keep the entire fuel cycle capability, including the enrichment

component. This policy conflicts with the Bush administration's security strategy regarding nuclear proliferation and rogue states. An Iranian regime with the potential to produce HEU is not in the interest of the US.

Eisenstadt declared that there are basic security concerns in the Middle East that fuel Iran's desire for a nuclear weapon. Given its lack of a robust conventional military, a bomb would be a simple way to assure security. Also, Iran's nuclear ambitions partially stem from a desire for self-reliance and national pride. This was a basic tenet of the Islamic revolution, Eisenstadt argued. Thus, security guarantees from the US, an unlikely scenario, would not be enough to persuade the Islamic Republic to abandon its fuel cycle.

Eisenstadt stated that the most likely strategy Iran will pursue is that of limited cooperation. Given this, he outlined several actions the US may take. Preventative military action, such as a surgical strike on Bushehr or Natanz, is one option. However, this option would pose high costs and may only delay, rather than prevent, nuclear ambitions. It was noted that the Israeli raid on the Iraqi Osirak nuclear facility in 1981 did not eliminate Iraq's weapons program, but simply delayed it. Another option would be some sort of sanctions regime. Although a comprehensive sanctions program would significantly pressure the Islamic Republic, coordination and support would be difficult to achieve. Eisenstadt also seemed skeptical about the probability of success of an effective negotiating strategy. He and others agreed that the divides between the US, EU, and Russian positions preclude a solid negotiating framework. Eisenstadt argued that the international community must come up with a "common vision" on Iran to spur progress, no matter what course of action it takes. Regime change should be the option of last resort, Eisenstadt stated. However, regime change must be kept on the table, if only to encourage the diplomatic process.

"The End of the NPT?"

Geoffrey Kemp stressed that the outcome of this crisis will have repercussions for the entire nuclear non-proliferation regime. The successful resolution of the Iran crisis will have positive effects globally, whereas a nuclear armed Iran could create disastrous ripple effects. Kemp argued that the closer Iran gets to producing a nuclear weapon, the less likely neighbors such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt will "sit still" without starting programs of their own.

Kemp suggested that the US may be in a tougher situation if Iran complies with the IAEA. He reiterated Albright's idea that the Islamic Republic could meet the technical obligations of the deadline

but still pose a security challenge. Again, the fact that the uranium enrichment and fuel cycle limitations are beyond the purview of the NPT and the Additional Protocol makes striking a deal very difficult. To tell Iran that it cannot have the same types of facilities Japan, for example, legally maintains appears like a double standard.

Kemp outlined several "carrots" and "sticks" the US and the international community can use to encourage Iran to give up its nuclear capabilities. One option is to allow the regime to retain nuclear facilities exclusively for power. The panelists suggested that the Europeans and Russians could live with this outcome, though the United States would likely not tolerate this result. Another carrot would be the aforementioned provision of a security guarantee. However, Kemp argued that this would be impossible to address without also tackling other issues, namely Iran's support of terrorist groups such as Hezbollah. Kemp agreed with Eisenstadt that the "sticks" available, such as sanctions and military possibilities are difficult to pursue.

Kemp argued that a successful resolution of an Iranian nuclear crisis must be dealt with by a coalition. The US cannot convince the Islamic Republic on its own, and the Americans do not appear ready to make concessions. European and American interests coincide with respect to Iran, and governments on both sides of the Atlantic should exploit their common interests to defuse the situation. This in turn will make it much easier to get Russia and others on board. The EU is in a good bargaining position vis-à-vis Iran because it is already involved in negotiations over trade, human rights, WMD, the Arab-Israeli dispute, and terrorism. All three panelists, along with moderator Dimitri Simes, agreed that the interests of at least the US, EU, and Russia must be considered in reaching an appropriate solution.

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