

The following article by Amb. Bolton ran in Liberal (Italian Newspaper), November 27, 2008 under the title "Why Israel is planning on Attacking Iran".

Last week, the International Atomic Energy Agency (“IAEA”) issued new reports on illicit nuclear activity by Iran and Syria. The Iran report adds significant new details to what we already know about Tehran’s twenty-year-long quest for nuclear weapons, confirming yet again that Iran has ceased even any pretense of real cooperation with the IAEA. The Syria report describes graphically that country’s continuing, successful efforts to stonewall the IAEA investigation of the nuclear reactor being built near the Euphrates River by North Korea, before it was destroyed by an Israeli air strike on September 6, 2007.

On November 27, the IAEA’s Governing Board meets in Vienna to decide whether to respond to these direct violations of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the threats they represent to peace and security in the Middle East and around the world. Past IAEA responses are not encouraging.

Consider the following:

Iran . For well over five years, the IAEA, the United Nations Security Council, the European Union and the United States have tried diplomatic means to prevent Iran from acquiring an indigenous capability to produce nuclear weapons and deliver them via ballistic missiles. These efforts have failed in every material respect. Negotiation and economic sanctions have not dissuaded Iran, which has now defied five overwhelming Security Council resolutions demanding that it cease its uranium enrichment activities.

North Korea . Similar multilateral diplomatic efforts (known as “the Six-Party Talks”) to convince North Korea to dismantle its existing nuclear weapons program have been underway for almost exactly the same time, and with the same non-result: North Korea has done nothing, even before the August disappearance from public view of the dictator Kim Jong-il, to reflect a strategic decision actually to implement its repeated promises to give up its nuclear program. In its latest act of defiance, the North insists it will permit no further verification activity, it continues to threaten South Korea, and it demands additional economic assistance before even agreeing to further negotiation.

Syria . Syria was constructing its nuclear reactor, which appears to be a clone of the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon, during precisely this same period. Syria failed to disclose its activities, as required by its IAEA Safeguards Agreement, and to this day denies that it was building a reactor. Moreover, Syria refuses to

allow inspectors access to other significant locations, thus preventing the IAEA from learning exactly what Syria was doing, and with whom it was doing it.

Thus, after six years of failed diplomacy, Iran continues to march toward a nuclear weapons capability, North Korea retains and may well be expanding its arsenal of nuclear devices, and Syria's program remains shrouded in secrecy. We know these countries have long cooperated in ballistic missile research and development, and the North Korean reactor in Syria proves that they cooperate in the nuclear field as well. Indeed, it is all but inconceivable that Syria and North Korea would jointly build a reactor without, at a minimum, Iran's acquiescence, and quite likely with Iran's financial support and active cooperation. How should we describe this three-way cooperation? "Axis of evil" comes to mind."

The American presidential transition now well underway, moving inexorably toward the January 20 inauguration of President-elect Obama, highlights that we face a potential point of no return, one highly damaging to our common effort to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic missile systems to deliver them.

Many once believed that the Bush Administration would use force against Iran's nuclear program if diplomacy failed. Now, however, that prospect seems most unlikely. It is even more unlikely that the Obama Administration will do anything other than join the European Union's continuing failed diplomatic efforts. Both President Bush and Senator Obama say that it is "unacceptable" for Iran to have nuclear weapons, but they do not really mean "unacceptable." If they did, the use of force would be a real prospect, and not simply a hollow threat.

By contrast, when Israel's leaders say that a nuclear Iran is "unacceptable," they mean concretely that they will not allow Iran to possess nuclear weapons. Israel has a record of backing up its words: it destroyed Saddam Hussein's Osirak reactor near Baghdad in 1981, and it destroyed the North Korean reactor in Syria last year. Israel will not allow its enemies to confront it with an existential threat. Anyone who doubts Israel's resolve need only consult the historical record.

Israel's time to decide is growing short, however, since Iran, with Russian help, continues to improve its defenses against air strikes, and is likely further dispersing and hardening its nuclear production facilities. Accordingly, Israel's option of using military force grows less viable by the day, increasing the pressure on its leaders to make a decision whether or not to strike. That decision may come before January 20, when Israel would still have a sympathetic President Bush in power, or it may come later, as Israel strives to increase the likelihood of military success.

Even if Israel waits for the Obama Administration, it cannot risk waiting beyond the middle of 2009, given Iran's nuclear progress, as the IAEA details. It may be, of course, that Israel chooses not to act even then. But there should be no misunderstanding that the threat of a nuclear Iran will mean that other countries in the region -- Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey -- could also decide to go nuclear, and that the threat not just of proliferation but of the actual use of nuclear weapons will increase.

This week's IAEA meeting will probably not make any significant decisions. And if not, it will simply be one further missed opportunity on the way to a far more dangerous world for us all.