



FOCUS ON IRAN and the MIDDLE EAST

From the Desk of the Secretary General

Concern about a possible military attack on Iranian nuclear facilities is spreading fast. The consequences of such an attack could be extremely serious and might include:

- destruction of people and infrastructure;
- possible environmental contamination;
- retaliation and possible uncontrolled escalation of the conflict;
- creation of a large zone of higher instability from South Asia to north Africa;
- crisis for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime in the Middle East and possibly elsewhere (Iran is unlikely to remain a State Party of the NPT if its rights under Article 4 are violated in an attack by a nuclear-armed state that is not an NPT party, such as Israel);
- economic consequences, including the likely disruption of the oil market and the oil distribution system.

All of this is in addition to the already serious problems facing the Middle East: the Syrian crisis; instability and human rights violations in several Middle Eastern countries; and the large open wound of the issue of Palestinians rights. Recent statements from some Israeli leaders claiming that “Gaza is Iran” lead to fears that in the case of a possible Israeli attack on Iran, places like Gaza might experience a new round of devastating destruction: something that the people in Gaza do not deserve at all.

Pugwash has been at the forefront of action aimed at preventing a violent outcome to the crisis over the Iranian nuclear program. We have been contributing via our own Pugwash *modus operandi*, namely through a series of high-level meetings including political and military leaders sitting with other experts and scientists, in which we try to reach out to many of the relevant “stakeholders”.

We call the attention to the following points:

- respect for and recognition of the legitimate rights of all the countries involved should be supported;

- international control of civilian nuclear activities should be promoted and strengthened;
- confidence building measures are possible and necessary and should be encouraged;
- support should be given to all the efforts aimed at making the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

Some of us also stress that the problems will not be solved by “uncontrolled escalation” of sanctions against Iran or by cornering Iran in other ways. This approach is definitely counterproductive and elicits in Iran an understandable defensive reaction, including a desire to protect Iran by all means, including moving closer to the “capability” to make nuclear weapons.

We invite the Pugwash community and interested readers to look through the reports from our meetings on Iran in Israel (6 January 2012, 20-21 May 2011) and in Washington DC (23 February 2012). See also the reports from our recent Middle Eastern meetings in Cairo (30-31 October 2011), Ramallah (7 January 2012) and Gaza (2-5 February 2012), and Berlin (2-5 July 2011) where the Iranian issue was also discussed together with other relevant specific themes such as the development of the revolution in Egypt and its impact on the Egyptian political system, and the view of the Palestinians on the lagging or failing peace, and other regional issues.

Pugwash will keep promoting initiatives on peace, stability and elimination of weapons of mass destructions in the Middle East. We note that concerns about a possible war over the Iranian nuclear program have had some results. For instance, the press has picked up stories on some very popular joint initiatives over the web (especially Facebook) involving some Israelis and Iranians who are stressing friendship and denouncing war. People in the US who are concerned about the possibility of war are increasingly vocal. Presumably, we will see a new round of negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran. Even if this new round of negotiations does not bring immediate results, it may contribute to a better climate. During this election period in the US and later in Iran there may be time to initiate some additional Track II or parallel discussions that may bring some positive results in the future.

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