



Alexei Arbatov

Andrei Piontkovski

WHAT DOES AHMADINEJAD HAVE IN COMMON WITH GAVRILO  
PRINCIP: SOLVING THE IRANIAN PUZZLE

From: Alexei Arbatov  
To: Andrei Piontkovski  
Subject: Iran's nuclear program

Good day, Andrei,

The more I think about the Iranian situation, the more historical analogies, such as the run-up to 1914, come to mind. In this analogy, Iranian President Ahmadinejad appears in the role of Gavrilo Princip. Although no one wants a war in Iran, the inexorable course of events, escalation of the crisis, collision of ambitions, and radically different points of view may eventually lead to war. The probability of this eventuality grows with each passing month.

Of course, in contrast to 1914, this war is not likely to become "World War III." Nevertheless, the consequences of a war in Iran would be catastrophic, given the fact that there is already a war both in neighboring Iraq on the one side and Afghanistan on the other. The result could be something that we have not seen since 1945: a trans-regional "black hole" stretching from Palestine to the Hindu Kush—a continuous zone of terrorism and civil wars, chaos and failed states, ethnic cleansing and millions of refugees, as well as narcotics and weapons trafficking that periodically overflows from this monstrous "cancerous tumor" into neighboring regions (the Balkans, Asia Minor, the Caucasus, and Central and South Asia) and from there to the rest of the world. This will greatly stimulate international terrorism and WMD proliferation, and for a long time the cooperation of the major powers in fighting these scourges will suffer.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that each party to this conflict is not simply certain of the correctness of its cause, but in a certain sense is indeed correct. As a state party to the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Iran, in accordance with Article IV of the treaty, has the right to the peaceful use of nuclear power, a right that does not exclude the complete nuclear fuel cycle. Many non-nuclear weapon state parties to the treaty have a complete fuel cycle or its components, including Japan, Germany, the Netherlands, Brazil, Argentina, and South Africa. Whatever other countries may think about the Iranian program and its peculiarities, the country has the right to determine its parameters so long as it is undertaken within the framework of the NPT and under IAEA safeguards. Iran will not renounce this right.

*Sincerely,  
Alexei Arbatov*



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From: Andrei Piontkovski  
To: Alexei Arbatov  
Subject: re Iran's nuclear program

Good morning, Alexei,

Alright, let's talk about the Iranian nuclear program. But not in the purely legal sense; I see that as a fruitless approach. All of these discussions about "rights"—does Iran have the "right" to the creation of nuclear weapons... does Israel, a state that the Iranian president on almost a daily basis threatens to wipe off the face of the earth, have the "right" to a preventive strike against Iranian nuclear facilities—are generally useless.

Why? Because the present system of international law is made up of contradictory assertions. I wrote about this in detail in an article in *Yaderny Kontrol*, so I will not repeat my contentions this morning. I will just say that, as elementary logic makes clear, it is easy to derive an arbitrary conclusion from this sort of system. Nearly any state action in the global arena can be substantiated by one international norm or another.

Thus Iran, as a sovereign state, has the right to possess any modern weapon. The Non-Proliferation Treaty? Iran has the right to leave it at any moment and this would be more honest than its continuous series of deceptions and game of cat and mouse.

And Israel and its strategic ally, the United States, have the right to self-defense and are not obliged to wait until Mr. Ahmadinejad's dream of the destruction of Israel has been realized.

In case you, Alexei, have any doubts as to this interpretation of the principle of the right to self defense, I present the opinion of two very authoritative experts.

"If anyone even tries to use weapons of mass destruction or their equivalent against our country, we will respond with measures commensurate with the threat wherever terrorists, the organizers of their crimes, or their ideological and financial supporters might be. I emphasize, wherever they might be."

"In such cases, and this I officially confirm, we will launch strikes, including preventive strikes."

Guess, Alexei, who these hawks are that preach the concept of preventive strikes, thus violating the sacred principle of national sovereignty—Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney?

The first statement is from President Vladimir Putin's statement at a cabinet meeting on October 28, 2002 while the second is from a September 22, 2002 statement by Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov.

Thus, let us analyze the Iranian situation not on the basis of barren legal debates but on the basis of military and political factors. Iran gradually is taking all of the technological steps needed to obtain nuclear weapons (sometimes in secret, sometimes in the open). Simultaneously, and even outpacing this activity, Iran is developing its missile program, a program that would be utterly senseless without the prospect of equipping these missiles with nuclear warheads.

Well-wishers and lawyers for Iran can say that they are not completely convinced of the military nature of the Iranian nuclear program (up to the first nuclear explosion) as much as they like. What is important is that the governments of Israel and the United States, as well as the overwhelming majority of professional military experts, are convinced. And the leaders of Israel and the United States have already been quite clear that if diplomatic efforts fail they will prevent the further development of the Iranian nuclear program through the use of military force.

Yours,  
Andrei Piontkovski

*From: Alexei Arbatov  
To: Andrei Piontkovski  
Subject: bombing is not a solution*

Andrei,

Yes, Iran violated its IAEA safeguards agreement, hiding some of its projects and thereby arousing serious suspicions that it had military, not peaceful, nuclear plans. There is an array of indirect evidence of this.

But all of this is cause for a more thorough IAEA examination and the prevention of similar violations in future, not for the demands to end all uranium enrichment activities that have been advanced by the United States and included in U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1696 of July 2006 and 1737 of December 2006. Citing the unlawfulness of this requirement, Iran did not ratify the 1997 Additional Protocol, which it signed in 2003 (and would have allowed for virtually unlimited inspections) and now it is not permitting the IAEA to conduct inspections in accordance with the norms of this protocol. Iran justified the renewal of its uranium enrichment program, meanwhile, by citing the referral to the U.N. Security Council, after which it revoked its 2004 decision to “freeze” this program temporarily in the spirit of good will during negotiations with the “EU-3.” All of this is not grounds for sanctions, to say nothing of military intervention. Many states, including the superpowers, have a long list of past breaches of various disarmament agreements.

For its part, the United States is right that it cannot permit the presence of nuclear weapons in Iran, or even of the complete fuel cycle. Indeed, even under IAEA safeguards it is possible to create a uranium enrichment complex and facilities for plutonium separation for peaceful use and then, like North Korea, throw the IAEA out and leave the NPT with three months’ notice (Article X), enrich uranium to weapons grade, and rapidly build nuclear weapons. Washington’s hard line in this case is based not on Iran formally breaching the Non-Proliferation Treaty, but chiefly on the Islamic fundamentalism of the regime, its claims to the leadership of the Islamic world, its ties to organizations that some countries consider terrorist (although others do not consider them to be terrorist organizations), as well as the Iranian leadership’s provocative anti-Israeli and anti-American statements.

However, there are no international norms or treaty articles dealing with these issues. And the fact that the current Iranian regime (in contrast to the past regime under the shah, under which the Iranian nuclear program was initiated, with U.S. assistance) does not please Washington is not a reason for war in the view of other states that have good relations with Iran. Furthermore, the main weakness of the U.S. position is the blind alley of its policy in Iraq, which it invaded despite the objections of many other countries and the U.N. Security Council, under the pretext of destroying Baghdad’s nuclear program—a program that could not be found after the occupation.

*Alexei Arbatov*

*From: Andrei Piontkovski  
To: Alexei Arbatov  
Subject: Israel last resort*

Alexei,

Israel’s leaders have already made it clear that if diplomatic efforts fail they will halt the further development of the Iranian nuclear program militarily.

Yes, it will be very difficult to decide how to accomplish this. First of all, an operation to destroy the subdivided and dispersed Iranian nuclear complex is technically far more complex than the



single strike on the Iraqi reactor in 1981. But let us assume that the Israeli air force and special forces or U.S. cruise missiles can accomplish this task.

The political and military consequences of Iran's nuclear castration will be extremely negative. There will inevitably be civilian victims. Al Jazeera, the BBC, CNN, and Russia's RTR will indignantly describe the situation to all of progressive mankind. A new wave of hatred for Israel in the Islamic world is unlikely greatly to surprise or distress the Jewish state, but it will be accompanied by extremely painful military strikes. All of the "defensive weapons" that the Russian leadership has provided in recent years to its Syrian and Iranian allies ("Grad" and "Igl" missile launch systems and cruise missiles) will be launched against Israel. Some nuclear facilities may be hit. For a period of time oil exports from the Middle East will cease, delivering yet another blow to the global economy.

But understand: the alternative to a preventive strike is the possession of nuclear weapons and means of their delivery by a man as deeply and passionately convinced of the need for a final solution to the Jewish problem as German Chancellor Adolf Hitler. Therefore, if Iran does not stop its nuclear program, there will be a strike. Of course, Israel wants to put off the fateful decision as long as possible, as long as there still remains some hope for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. The United States is not inclined to force events either, since it knows that an unprecedented wave of Islamic terrorism will not only strike Israel, but also America.

*Andrei Piontkovski*

From: Alexei Arbatov  
To: Andrei Piontkovski  
Subject: do not dramatize

Andrei,

Believe me, I realize that the United States and Israel are ready to start a war in order to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon.

But there are other players, too.

For both political and commercial reasons, Russia does not want Iran to have the full nuclear fuel cycle, but it is not ready to support full-scale sanctions, to say nothing of military measures, to avert this possibility. China's position is similar, while the European Union takes an intermediate position.

The general feeling that we are coming down to the wire is caused by Iran's persistent, gradual movement along a path that provocatively crosses the lines drawn by the United States, the European Union, Russia, the IAEA, and the U.N. Security Council, one after the other. And with each additional step taken with impunity, new demands and warnings from outside Iran become increasingly less convincing. Another factor accelerating the metronome is the approach of the U.S. presidential elections. Having gotten bogged down in Iraq, the Republican administration cannot come to the elections without having solved the Iranian nuclear problem.

I see the escape from the increasingly blind alley and the steady slide to war as follows.

First, one should not overdramatize and yield to the feeling that we are coming down to the wire. Given Iran's progress in the nuclear sphere, there is enough time for negotiations. Second, demanding that Iran give up equipment it has already built (the first enrichment cascades)—and to which it has a right under the NPT—is unrealistic. But the future of its program could be limited, and this could be the object of the six-party negotiations (the United States, Russia, EU-3, and China) with Iran. The arms limitation talks (in this case, focused on dual-use technologies)

should be conducted in the traditional way: such negotiations are never based on the all or nothing principle, and instead presume that a mutually acceptable compromise is possible.

Possible limitations to the Iranian program should take timing into account, namely: how much time is enough to leave in reserve from the moment of a hypothetical Iranian decision to leave the NPT and break with the IAEA, and the production of nuclear weapons? Incidentally, this principle is relevant in any arms limitation or disarmament treaties. We are speaking here about the period of time that will remain to adopt countermeasures after a hypothetical breach of the agreement by the other side or its withdrawal from the agreement.

If we stop Iran's enrichment program at the current level of 160 first-generation centrifuges, the time it will take to create nuclear weapons is estimated to be ten years or more. But it is unlikely that such an agreement can be obtained, given the progress of the Iranian program and the timing and political parameters of the negotiations. I think that an acceptable goal that could realistically be achieved is an interval of approximately five to seven years. This implies on the order of 700-800 first-generation (P-1) or 300-400 second-generation (P-2) centrifuges.

The political preparation for this solution requires action in several areas. First of all, technical experts must come to an agreement, after which the "six parties" must achieve a united political position. Then a package of economic, political, and technical proposals (including cooperation in the sphere of nuclear power) must be devised in order to interest Iran in coming to an agreement. An Iranian refusal of so tempting a proposal, giving it broad opportunities to develop peaceful nuclear technologies, could be seen as explicit evidence of its intention to produce nuclear weapons. In this case the major powers would be able to agree to impose full-scale, and not only symbolic, sanctions on Iran through a U.N. Security Council resolution and other measures.

In addition, Russia and the West need to reduce the acuteness of their other conflicts (for example, on NATO expansion into the post-Soviet space).

Further, the nuclear powers must renew progress in nuclear disarmament, in accordance with their obligations under NPT Article VI (in particular, fulfilling several of the 13 practical steps agreed to at the 2000 NPT Review Conference).

And finally, the United States must clearly begin to withdraw its forces from Iraq. The situation there is severely tying its hands on other political and military issues, ruinously influencing stability in Afghanistan, and whipping up international terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

*Alexei Arbatov*

From: Andrei Piontkovski  
To: Alexei Arbatov  
Subject: Russia and nothing personal

Alexei,

Can the catastrophic course of events leading to a war in Iran be stopped? Yes, it is possible. But not in the way that you propose.

Your proposals are utopian. Let's take a pragmatic look: the Iranian leadership is not homogeneous, and there are evidently fierce internal disputes occurring. If the global community had a united position and there were a real prospect of serious political and economic sanctions, the "moderates" in Tehran could be pushed to accept a compromise.

Here Moscow's role is critical. You recently wrote to me, "Russia does not want... but it is not ready..." That is, you proceed from the fact that Russian policy is inconsistent. In my view, the motives of the Russian leadership and the logic of its actions are completely consistent and likely to lead to the desired result.



The considerations determining its logic, both political (the desire to do maximum damage to the United States) and economic (keeping oil prices high), complement each other harmoniously. Furthermore, as is well known (to my respected opponent, among others), the personal commercial interests of top government officials (kickbacks) in commercial transactions with Iran unfortunately play an important role as well. Some refer to this as a “lack of coordination between various agencies.”

At any forum where the Iranian problem is being discussed today—the U.N. Security Council, the “six parties” –Moscow plays the role of a “political roof” (*krysha*), covering for the Iranian regime and its nuclear program, announcing ahead of time that it will not allow any significant sanctions and thereby making it possible for the Iranian leadership to keep gaining the time it needs to complete its nuclear program.

But this policy has another side as well. It reduces the time that Israel and the United States still have for diplomatic maneuvering and brings a military solution closer. As far as Israel is concerned, the window for military action is also being sharply narrowed by Russia’s delivery of Tor M-1 air defense systems, which clearly push it towards forcing events.

One could say that this policy is irresponsible or that it is pragmatic. That is a matter of opinion. Those in the Kremlin are completely aware of the scenarios we examined above. It appears that an Israeli and/or U.S. strike on Iranian nuclear facilities will suit them for at least three reasons.

First, the Iranian nuclear problem will be solved. An Iranian bomb is in no way good for Russia.

Second, the entire fury of the Muslim world will, with redoubled energy, be focused on the United States and Israel, while Moscow, joining the noble indignation of all of progressive humanity, will earn more points in the Islamic countries.

And finally, last but not least, after exports from the Middle East are curtailed petroleum prices will increase to unbelievable heights. So the 10-15 members of today’s Politburo, who not only govern Russia but also own it, will be extremely pleased. Just business, gentlemen. Nothing personal.

All the best,

Andrei

From: Alexei Arbatov  
To: Andrei Piontkovski  
Subject: re Russia and nothing personal

I do not entirely agree with your assessment of the motives behind Russian policy. If Russia were only interested in high oil prices and was generally guided by considerations of *realpolitik* in its most cynical form, then it would in fact try to provoke the United States into military action against Iran. This would surely cause oil prices to rise to unprecedented heights, would get the United States utterly enmeshed in the quagmire of hopeless conflicts in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, and would thereby result in the end of the “American century” (its rule as the only superpower). This would lead to a deep division between the United States and the European Union, India, and China, as well as moderate Islamic regimes, and *simultaneously* put a final end to the Iranian nuclear program, which Russia of course does not want to have a military component. But Russia, I am sure, will do everything in its power to prevent a war, since all of its other consequences - where relations with the West, Iran, the fight against terrorism and the proliferation of WMD, and regional stability are concerned - would be catastrophic.

At the same time, Russia wants to have good relations with Iran, which are no less important for it today than good relations with the Shah of Iran were important for the United States 30 years ago, when the latter helped Iran to initiate a nuclear program on an even larger scale than is planned now, including the enrichment of uranium.

This is, in part, why Russia adhered to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1696, in the hope that Iran would yield before the threat of sanctions and stop the enrichment of uranium. And this is why Moscow proposed the creation of an international enrichment center on its territory. This is why Russia is drawing out the commissioning of the first reactor bloc at Bushehr NPP. And at the same time, Russia has spoken out against sanctions that would provoke Iran to counter-sanctions, and would initiate an escalation of the conflict from which it would be hard to back down, and which unavoidably would lead to war.

But why does Russia have to accept U.S. policy unconditionally and pressure Iran just because its current regime does not please the present U.S. administration? And by the way, many U.S. NATO allies, the head of the IAEA, the previous U.N. Secretary General, UNMOVIC head Hans Blix, and even the U.S. Democratic opposition do not agree with this policy. Should we really join Washington “without looking,” out of a sense of solidarity with our allies and in a spirit of “strategic partnership,” as Britain and Spain did in Iraq in 2003? But why, then, did the United States not conduct itself and does not conduct itself in the same spirit with respect to Moscow, when the issue was the 2003 war in Iraq, withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, CTBT ratification, Putin’s proposals on a strategic dialogue after the expiration of START-1 in 2009, and about the weaponization of space, the probable expansion of NATO in the Ukraine and Georgia, and WTO negotiations, to say nothing of the “historical” correction of Jackson-Vanick? The point here is not the enumeration of the claims the United States and Russia make against each other, but the fact that the rest of U.S. policy creates a terrible environment in which to reach agreement on so complex and delicate an issue as the Iranian program.

It is another matter entirely that Russian policy is inconsistent and passive, and addresses only peripheral aspects of the issue and leaves the initiative (and also the responsibility, which, possibly, Moscow is attempting to avoid) to the EU-3, Iran, the United States, and the IAEA. This dooms us to react to and drift with the flow of events. As for what I would view as the best direction for Russian policy, I have written that above.

As far as “kickbacks” are concerned, one has to have solid facts to make this sort of accusation (addresses, names, and writes), not hypotheses, even if they appear reliable. I do not have such facts in my possession, but I am also not ready to completely exclude them, and therefore cannot adequately consider their possible influence on the practical diplomacy of Moscow. Generally speaking, personal interests are always mixed up in greater policy issues, and not only in Russia (simply recall Iraq and Halliburton, Schroeder and BTS, as well as many other examples). But to estimate their importance in this particular case is very difficult, although it is clear that to reduce everything to such interests is incorrect (as our propaganda of earlier times used to do, explaining the arms race as due to the “appetites of the U.S. military industrial complex,” and in more recent times explaining U.S. action in Iraq as a result of its ambition to “get its hands on the oil.”)

And how, in your opinion, should Russia behave in this situation?

A.

From: Andrei Piontkovski  
To: Alexei Arbatov  
Subject: krysha no more

If someone is still capable of stopping the Iranian nuclear program peacefully, then it is Russia. But this possibility means not providing a *krysha* (roof) to protect Iran from western sanctions and selling it weapons, but by making it clear that there is a serious possibility that Russian cooperation in the nuclear and military sphere could be curtailed.

A.P.



From: Alexei Arbatov  
To: Andrei Piontkovski  
Subject: what Iranians want

Andrei,

Basically, in order for us to understand more easily how Russia should behave, we must figure out what Iran's goals are. Does it really want to build nuclear weapons?

I, for my part, can only state with confidence that it wants to hold this option open. It is unknown whether in the final analysis it will actually build nuclear weapons, but Iran believes that it must acquire the technical capability, in the form of an industrial nuclear fuel cycle, to create these weapons rapidly, and is obstinately striving towards this goal, citing the articles of the NPT.

*Alexei*

From: Andrei Piontkovski  
To: Alexei Arbatov  
Subject: re what Iranians want

Alexei,

You see, "holding open the option to build nuclear weapons" is for all practical purposes the same as "building" them; that is, nearing the forbidden goal or, as you correctly formulate it, "obstinately striving" towards it every day.

You know, what particularly surprises me—both in your argument and in the position of those experts who are evidently close to your heart—is the formula: "don't allow sanctions, to say nothing of war." This formula is problematic and is internally inconsistent!

Only serious sanctions or a convincing threat of sanctions can stop the Iranian nuclear program. And may fail to stop it. Everything depends on the distribution of power among various groups in the Iranian leadership, about which we know nothing. However, the "no sanctions" policy is guaranteed to allow Iran's hawks to continue to "obstinately strive" towards a nuclear bomb. Which, according to the understanding outlined above, will make an Israeli or U.S. nuclear strike on Iranian nuclear facilities inevitable.

From: Alexei Arbatov  
To: Andrei Piontkovski  
Subject: change the formula

Andrei,

Let's unpack *my formula*—"no enrichment and no sanctions"—although it is not *mine*. Yes, it is problematic. The second half weakens its position, but the first makes it completely unrealistic. We demand that Iran (as do Resolutions 1696 and 1737) relinquish facilities that it already possesses, and to which it has a right under the NPT, merely because we do not like the regime. There are few regimes that please everybody! But we have international laws, which should be the only criteria for judging and penalizing states. Taking the enrichment complex that already exists away from Iran can only be done by force, which would flagrantly exceed the limits of appropriate reaction. After the Iraq war this will not be accepted not only by the Islamic world, the "third world" in general, China, India, and here in Russia, but also in Western Europe and a significant proportion of U.S. political circles.



Do we really want to start a “world war” thanks to 164 P-1 centrifuges, which will take 13 years to create enough material for nuclear weapons?

Therefore, we have to change both parts of the formula. We have to determine, both for ourselves and for the other “five parties,” the permissible, safe limits of enrichment, present these conditions to Iran (let’s say, a certain number of centrifuges of one or another type), and if it fails to agree then threaten sanctions because they will have clearly indicated their aspiration to develop a military enrichment capability that is not justified either by the energy program or Iran’s natural uranium reserves. Both the “no sanctions” and the “give up everything” policies strengthen those in Iran who, possibly, are “striving for a nuclear bomb.” We truly do not know the correlation of forces within the Iranian leadership. But our task is not to guess about this correlation or Iran’s real intentions. Instead, it is to use a more subtle and realistic policy to influence it in order to strengthen moderate forces and halt the development of the Iranian nuclear fuel cycle at a safe distance from a nuclear bomb (under full IAEA control, which is, at this point, more important than plus or minus a few hundred centrifuges). This is traditional arms control, and only it can result in success, not ultimatums issued from a sinkhole, particularly in the light of the recent events in North Korea.

But we keep talking about *desirable* policy. Let’s agree that the two of us see this in completely different ways. But what about possible future developments? According to your prognosis, where will the pendulum swing in the next few months?

Alexei Arbatov

From: Andrei Piontkovski  
To: Alexei Arbatov  
Subject: Akhmadinejad goes to war

In the next few months events will develop via inertia. Iran gradually will carry out its nuclear program, heartened by the apparent helplessness of the “global community.” Russia will continue to play its role as a *krysha* (providing cover) in the Security Council, and helping Iran win time. It’s possible that for tactical reasons Russia may even support some toothless resolution, which it has done everything possible to soften in advance.

The Israeli General Staff and U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff will continue to elaborate plans for strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. Tor M-1 missiles will be deployed to their military positions.

Do they understand what this course of events will inevitably lead to in Iran? Yes, without question. And certain moderate circles in its top leadership would like to find a way to halt the military nuclear program. However, it would seem that lately the balance of power within the Iranian leadership has shifted noticeably in favor of President Ahmadinejad, who as you note resembles Gavrilo Princip.

Ahmadinejad is no longer a marionette appointed by the ayatollahs, but an independent political figure thirsting for even more power. He understands very well that the United States and Israel will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons. Consciously provoking both the United States and Israel, Ahmadinejad is bringing about a military resolution to the crisis, which, he calculates, will not only make him Iran’s absolute leader but also a hero throughout the Islamic world. In addition, as a religious fanatic, he believes in the coming of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam and believes that it is his religious duty to hasten the Imam’s appearance, which is to be preceded by a series of catastrophes, according to Shi’ite tradition. 

