**The Non-Policy on Iran**

By Alan M. Dershowitz

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The Obama Administration is sending conflicting and confusing messages both to Iran and to those who fear an Iranian nuclear weapon. According to The New York Times, defense secretary Robert M. Gates sent a top secret memorandum to White House officials bemoaning the fact that the United States simply has no policy in place to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. At the same time, it is telling Israel that although Iran has threatened to wipe it off the map, the Jewish state should not take military action to prevent a second Holocaust. Indeed former national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, who has participated in White House discussions concerning the Middle East, has threatened that if Israel tries to destroy Iran’s nuclear weapon facilities, the United States is fully capable of shooting Israeli jets out of the air.

Although Gates subsequently denied that his memo, which he acknowledges writing, was intended as a “wake up call”, a senior White House official has confirmed that it was just that. There is no evidence, however, that the White House is prepared to confront the grave threat posed by a nuclear Iran. The policy that seems to be emerging from the White House is one called “containment.” But what is containment? It is little more than an acknowledgment of failure. Containment implies that the United States will not succeed in preventing Iran from securing nuclear weapons, but rather it will accept such an eventuality and seek to deter the use of nuclear weapons by threats and by the deployment of defensive measures. The analogy that proponents of containment point to is North Korea, which has nuclear weapons but has thus far been “contained” from using them. But there are vast differences between North Korea and Iran.

North Korea is a secular Communist regime that is risk averse and that has no sworn existential enemies. The goal of its leaders is simply to remain in power and maintain their totalitarian control over their people. Iran is a theocratic, apocalyptic regime that believes that it has a religious obligation to destroy Israel and threaten the United States. Iran, unlike North Korea, also operates through surrogates, such as Hezbollah, Hamas and other smaller terrorist groups. They could hand-off nuclear material to such groups, or to sympathetic individuals, for use as dirty bombs directed against its enemies.

When he ran for president, Barak Obama pledged not to allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons. He claimed to understand that a nuclear Iran would be a game changer and a direct threat to the United States and its allies. He now seems to be softening his position and that of the United States government.

If in fact the United States is prepared to accept a nuclear Iran, then it has no right to require Israel to accept the risks posed by a nuclear armed country that has overtly threatened its destruction. Every country in the world has the inherent right to protect its citizens from a nuclear attack. Israel, a nation that Obama has himself acknowledged was built on the ashes of one Holocaust, certainly has the right to take military action to prevent a second Holocaust, especially at the hands of a country that has explicitly threatened to wipe it off the map.

The world ignored the explicit threats of one tyrant who threatened to destroy the Jewish people in the 1930s, and he nearly succeeded in the 1940s. Israel cannot be expected to ignore Hitler’s successor, who while denying the first Holocaust, threatens a second one.

The United States has promised to regard a nuclear attack on Israel as a nuclear attack on its own country, but Iran does not credit such threats, since it appears that the Obama Administration has already broken its promise not to accept a nuclear Iran. Elie Wiesel put it well when he said that the Holocaust has taught the Jewish people to “believe the threats of our enemies more than the promises of our friends.” Iran’s promise to destroy Israel must be taken seriously, not only by Israel but by the United States. If the United States is not prepared to stop Iran from acquiring the nuclear weapons necessary to wipe Israel off the map, then Israel must be prepared to protect itself.

I am not suggesting that Israel should attack Iran’s nuclear weapons facilities. I don’t know enough about the military considerations that should go into any such an existential decision. But I am asserting, in unqualified terms, that Israel has an absolute right–legally, morally, politically–to take such an action if it deems it necessary to protect its citizens from a threatened nuclear attack. This is especially the case, if Secretary Gates was correct when he wrote in his memorandum that the United States “lacks a policy to thwart Iran,” as The New York Times headline announced. Someone must thwart Iran. An Iran with nuclear weapons simply poses too great a threat to the world to be accepted– or “contained.”