

Rep. Gary L. Ackerman, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia made the following three statements about Iran:

"Middle East Regional Overview"
House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
October 28, 2009

While this hearing is meant to cover the range of issues facing the United States in the region stretching from Egypt to the Persian Gulf, in my opening remarks, I'd like to focus on Iran. Like many others, I've been thinking a lot about Iran and despite my best efforts, I keep coming back to, of all things, the second Reagan Administration.

It was in his second term that President Reagan and Secretary of State George Schultz negotiated significant conventional and nuclear arms control agreements, and helped thaw out the Cold War with frequent high-level summits. Throughout this period of intensive diplomatic engagement, however, President Reagan never stopped speaking powerfully and frequently about dissidents, human rights and freedom.

Obviously, the Soviet challenge then, and the Iranian challenge today are very different. But what really stands out is the way the Reagan team, in the second term, sustained a multi-focal, steady and comprehensive pressure on the Soviets.

The summitry demonstrated that the problem was in Moscow, not in Washington. The consistent focus on human rights and freedom reminded domestic, allied and Soviet audiences just how ugly the Soviet regime really was. Following some terrible strains in the Trans-Atlantic alliance in the first term, the second Reagan Administration worked hard on sustaining our relations in both Europe and East Asia to ensure that the Soviets had no political escape valve.

Following the initial, massive spasm of defense spending in the first term, the steady deployment of U.S. and NATO forces that were technologically passing by the Soviets simply couldn't be ignored. And, of course, the intelligence community made life in the Kremlin miserable, not only by stealing secrets, but organizing and supporting opposition to the Soviets wherever it could take root.

So, when thinking about our Iran policy today, what strikes me is how "thin" it seems to be. We seem to be depending on just one or two policy elements when, in fact, many more are possible. President Obama's support for direct engagement with Iran, as with the Reagan-Gorbachev summitry I've described, has already helped to heal a variety of political woes. But by itself, diplomatic engagement still leaves too much initiative in Iranian hands. Likewise with economic sanctions. If the Iranians remain recalcitrant and sanctions are applied, no matter how crippling—and I'd want them to be absolutely suffocating to the regime—the initiative is still left to the ayatollahs to decide when they've had enough.

But what seems most puzzling to me is that the Administration appears to have absolutely nothing at all to say about Iran's Green movement. Staying out of the way in June was smart, but the complete silence since then is inexplicable. Support within Iran for the nuclear program runs across the spectrum. But there's a strong case to be made that the Iranian regime went to Geneva and has bargained since then primarily because of their concern about domestic stability, rather than fears about international sanctions.

I've also heard from many leaders in the Middle East who complain that the Obama Administration doesn't seem to have any better a plan for increasing multilateral political or security coordination in the Persian Gulf than did their predecessors. And, while the Administration has increased American attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, at least in part to win broader Arab support for pressure against Iran, my question is, where's the support?

The Iranians are actively stirring up trouble, or developing or maintaining the capacity to do so, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Kuwait and Morocco. Where's the countervailing U.S. response? Where's the Truman-like policy of committing ourselves to support our allies in their struggle to remain free from threats and subversion?

I am not suggesting another Cold War, or holding Iran up as the new Soviet Union. My concern is that we're dealing with the Iranians piecemeal, and thus giving them too much opportunity to shape events to their liking. And I'm not calling for linkage, where success in one area depends on success in one or more of the others. But I think we do need a comprehensive approach.

Like Gorbachev's team, the regime in Tehran is facing an unprecedented challenge from within. Why is it then that we seem incapable of taking advantage of this fact after bemoaning for years the insufficiency of our leverage? We don't need to make threats and we certainly shouldn't allow ourselves to get sucked into yet another conflict. But I can't help but wonder, why can't squeeze with five fingers instead of one or two?

Statement in Support of the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act
House Foreign Affairs Committee (markup)
October 28, 2009

I have been, and I remain, a strong advocate for sanctions on Iran. For many years, through Democratic and Republican administrations, I have felt it to be vital to force Iran to pay a price—some price, any price—for its, regional subversion, and state sponsorship of terrorism and, most of all, its nuclear proliferation.

Today, we are going to move forward a sanctions bill that I believe will strengthen the Obama Administration's ability to conduct effective diplomacy. The world, and I mean both our allies and others, needs to know that the U.S. Congress is dead serious about sanctions should diplomacy fail to resolve the real concerns about Iran's nuclear program.

For those who worry that sanctions may lead to conflict, I would suggest that the opposite is true. With Iranian proliferation on the horizon, what is feckless is reckless. If you don't want war, it seems to me that you must back the toughest possible sanctions.

But sanctions alone are almost certainly not going to be sufficient to force the Iranian regime to change course. The violence throughout Iran in June following the rigged presidential election, as well as the subsequent escalation of political repression, have both demonstrated Iran's rulers are ready to do 'whatever it takes' to preserve their grip on power. And, given the 10 years of sanctions followed by war against Saddam's Iraq, and what hasn't happened to nuclear North Korea, I suspect Iran's thug-ocracy sees nuclear arms as their ultimate insurance policy.

So, even as we proceed—as we must—on enhancing our capacity for unilateral sanctions, and even as we continue—as we must—on developing crippling multilateral sanctions that can be applied if diplomacy proves ineffectual, we should bear in mind that there may not be ANY level sanctions sufficient to compel a change in Iran's nuclear program.

I would suggest that we need a strategy more comprehensive than just diplomatic engagement followed by sanctions. President Obama's support for direct engagement with Iran has already helped to heal a variety of political woes. But by itself, diplomatic engagement still leaves too much initiative in Iranian hands. Likewise with political and economic sanctions. If the Iranians remain recalcitrant and sanctions are applied, no matter how crippling—and I'd want

them to be absolutely suffocating of the regime—the initiative is still left to the ayatollahs to decide when they've had enough.

After bemoaning for years the insufficiency of our leverage over Iran, why we have chosen to ignore Iran's Green movement which so clearly has the ayatollahs absolutely terrified? Iran is sowing chaos and terror throughout the Middle East. Where's the Truman-like policy of declaring our support for any nation trying to remain free from Iranian threats? We do need to pursue engagement and we do need to have sanctions ready in case it fails. But we also need a policy that supports the democratic movement within Iran; that strengthens our allies ability to resist Iranian subversion; that enhances political and military coordination in the Persian Gulf; and that makes clear to all nations that political support for Iran will come with a price in their relations with the United States.

If we don't come up with a comprehensive policy, one that applies pressure to Iran across the board, I suspect President Obama is soon going to have to decide whether an Iranian nuclear weapon is truly "unacceptable," in the full meaning of that word, and with the full knowledge of what that means.

"Iran in the Western Hemisphere"

House Subcommittees on the Western Hemisphere, the Middle East and South Asia, and
Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade

October 27, 2009

I want to thank my friend Mr. Engel for organizing today's trilateral hearing on Iran's activities in the Western Hemisphere. I don't think it takes a lot of convincing to make the case that Tehran's goals in our part of world are not benign. The ayatollahs' foreign policy has always been simple: a good offense is the best defense.

We see this vividly in the Middle East, where Iran has built up Hezbollah and Hamas to create chaos and terror, and most importantly to drive events away from Iran and to create deterrence. Likewise in Iraq, where Iran has stoked the fires of sectarianism with arms, money and political support, all in the hope of keeping Iraq prostrate. Iran's strategy in Afghanistan is much the same, with Iranian military aid even going to the Shia-hating Taliban, all in an effort to prevent the United States and our allies from bringing order and stability to Afghanistan.

In each case, Iran seeks to maximize its gains by betting on insurgents, terrorists and militants, hoping that their allies will either take over the body politic, or by murder and intimidation, seize an important or even a dominant position in the political system over the long term. What should worry all of us is Iran's intentions to establish the same capabilities in this hemisphere.

It's a "heads I win, tails you lose" strategy. And it's worked remarkably well for a remarkably low cost. Every year, the State Department report on state sponsors of terrorism describes in remarkable detail the extent of Iran's activities to create chaos, turmoil and crisis around the world. Every year since 1979, Iran makes threats, supports subversion, and dispenses military assistance to terrorists at war with their own or other governments. And every year, the international community does absolutely nothing whatsoever.

As a major oil producer in a volatile region, the world has decided to minimize the significance of Iranian misbehavior. While Israel is routinely condemned in the United Nations for defending itself against aggression and terror, Iran, which is actively making trouble, or developing or sustaining the ability to do so in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen and Morocco, faces not a single word of censure. As a feat of diplomacy, it's really quite remarkable. When considered in light of Iran's steady march toward acquiring nuclear capabilities, which is in clear contravention of both

Iran's NPT obligations and three mandates from the UN Security Council, Iran's success in avoiding punishment is altogether astonishing.

Iran has gone untouched for two reasons. First, by supporting Hamas and Hezbollah, Tehran has effectively co-opted the Palestinian cause which, due to the salience of the issue and the political weakness of the Arab states, effectively neuters the entire Arab League. And with the Arabs goes the Organization of the Islamic Conference. It's not that states with strong ties to the United States, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia or Pakistan think Iran is undeserving of censure.

The governments of each of these countries are well aware that Iran is the greatest threat to both peace and stability in the Middle East, and to the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. The problem is that the governments of every one of these countries are absolutely petrified of the price they would pay in public opinion if they acknowledged these convictions publicly.

Second, Iran has, tapped effectively into the lingering hostility born of the anti-colonial struggles of the last century. Over time, appeals to fight against the United States and the West may have less resonance in a world where colonial domination is more of an abstraction than a memory. But in the present, anti-colonialism still delivers the goods diplomatically for Iran, and has given Iran entrée into the Western Hemisphere. The fact that Iran is seeking hegemony over the Middle East, and that in June it effectively went to war against its own people, has apparently done nothing to diminish Iran's credibility with some of the developing nations in this part of the world.

We are not going to be able to constrain Iran until we understand the full scope of its ambitions, and begin to work in a truly comprehensive manner to constrain, counter and defeat those ambitions. Today's hearing on Iran's activities in the Western Hemisphere is thus extremely important.