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The Iranian Uprising and the Nuclear Threat: How should the West respond?

By Matthias Küntzel

This is the speech I gave on November 17, 2022 in Gainesville, University of Florida. The event was held at Pugh Hall Ocora and was organized by the University's Center for Jewish Studies, the Center for European Studies and the Bob Graham Center for Public Service.

Let me start with the Iranian uprising. It was triggered on September 16 by the murder of Mahsa Amini. The 22-year-old girl was beaten to death because she was wearing her hijab too loosely, but also because she is Kurdish and thus a member of an oppressed ethnic minority.

Her real name was Jina Amini, but Jina is a Kurdish name and therefore banned by the authorities. In her official documents, she was registered as "Mahsa", a Persian name permitted by the Islamic Republic.¹ This is only a small example of the systematic discrimination against Kurds.

Not only Kurds, but other ethnic minorities also suffer in a special way from the regime's terror. Therefore, in addition to the struggles of women, to which I will return, the uprising against the regime is also characterized by the struggles of ethnic minorities. This is especially true in the Kurdish northwest of the country as well as in the province of Sistan and Baluchistan, which borders Afghanistan and Pakistan to the southeast.

¹ Anna Mahjar-Barducci, Give Her Back Her Kurdish Name: Jina Amini, MEMRI Daily Brief No. 420, October 10, 2022.

Iran is a multi-ethnic state, only about half of whose inhabitants grow up with Persian as their mother tongue. The other half is made up of ethnic minorities such as the Azeris, Kurds and Turkmen, who have been discriminated against for almost 100 years and today support the struggles to overthrow the regime, sometimes by force of arms.

Crucial, however, is the determination and perseverance of the girls and women who have been risking their lives en masse and on a daily basis by removing and burning their veils, cutting their hair in public, or desegregating university dining halls and crowding into what are officially men-only halls.

Regime snipers kill youthful participants in demonstrations every day; by the end of October, at least 287 people had been shot or beaten to death by the regime, including 46 children and teenagers. 14,000 opponents of the regime have been arrested and thrown into overcrowded prisons.² Forty-two percent of those arrested were under the age of 20, and only 10 percent were over 35.³ You see: Here, children and young people are fighting for the future of their world.

Their unprecedented courage is mobilizing other segments of society: It is not only teachers who are on strike, but also workers in the large oil and gas companies and the conservative merchants of Tehran's bazaar. The perseverance and radicalism of the insurgents dwarfs all previous uprisings.

Let us face the facts: In Iran today, we are dealing with the first progressive revolution in the history of the Middle East. Will the regime be able to save itself once again? And what should the West do in this situation?

² Rainer Hermann, Anschlag auf Moschee, in: FAZ, 28.10.22, Mideast Mirror, 1.11.22.

³ Mideast Mirror, 20.10.22.

I have divided my talk into four sections. Part 1 addresses the question of why the regime clings so persistently to the headscarf. My second part looks at the ideological underpinnings of the Iranian regime. Part 3 deals with Iran's nuclear weapons program. Finally, I discuss the reactions in Washington and the European capitals so far, before returning to the insurgent movement in Iran at the end.

On point 1: Why does the regime cling so doggedly to the compulsory hijab?

The prominent journalist Masih Alinejad has compared the hijab requirement to the Berlin Wall.⁴ When the Wall disappeared, socialism was over in all of eastern Europe. If the headscarf disappears, it will be the end of the entire Islamist regime in Tehran. But why is the head covering the sticking point that can bring down this regime? To answer this question, I would like to take a short trip into history.

In 1979, Khomeini's Islamist revolution was victorious in Iran. It had received decisive impetus from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which had been founded in 1928, 50 years earlier. In the 1920s, the liberation of women in Egypt had just begun. There was a women's movement whose leader - Huda Sharawi - threw her veil publicly into the sea.

There was a reform trend in Islam led by Ataturk in Turkey and by Reza Shah in Iran. "Nothing in our religion requires women to be subordinate to men" declared the modern Muslim Ataturk. He opposed the headscarf and decreed legal equality.⁵

It was in opposition to these modernizations that the Muslim Brotherhood, the founders of Islamism, set itself up as a rallying point for the restoration of

⁴ „Fällt das Kopftuch, fällt die Islamische Republik“. Interview mit Masih Alinejad in: Jungle World, 20.10.2022.

⁵ Naila Minai, *Schwester unter dem Halbmond. Muslimische Frauen zwischen Tradition und Emanzipation*, München 1989, S. 76ff.

patriarchal domination: for is it not written in the Koran that "men are superior to women" (Sura 4, verse 34) and "stand a step above women" (Sura 2, verse 228)?

Even if the poor Muslim wretch had nothing to say socially, the Islamists encouraged him in the belief that he could at least continue to dominate the women in his house. This was of great importance for a men's club like that of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶

In the 1940s and 1950s, the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood - including its hatred of Jews - migrated through emissaries and translations from Sunni Egypt to Shiite Iran, where they came to power in 1979 with Ayatollah Khomeini.

It was here that the Muslim Brotherhood's misogyny first became state policy: as early as February 1979, the month he seized power, Khomeini annulled the right of Iranian women to divorce. In March 1979, women were banned from serving as judges and, for the first time, a young couple were publicly flogged for maintaining an unchaste relationship. Shortly thereafter, the age of marriage for girls was lowered to 9. Two decades later, under Khatami, it was raised to 13, but this still amounts to child abuse.

In 1983, a law followed under which failure to wear the compulsory veil could be punished with 74 lashes.⁷ The result was daily terror: In 2007 alone, 150,000 women were arrested for failing to observe the dress code. Countless families have painful memories of how humiliated fathers had to pick up their daughters from the police station. How mothers searched everywhere for their children, sick with worry that they might have been arrested.

⁶ Matthias Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew-hatred. Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11*, New York 2007, pp.11-13.

⁷ Wahied Wahdat-Hagh, *Der islamistische Totalitarismus. Über Antisemitismus, Anti-Bahaismus, Christenverfolgung und geschlechtsspezifische Apartheid in der ‚Islamischen Republik Iran‘*, Frankfurt/Main 2012, S. 246-254.

Golineh Atai, a prominent exiled Iranian woman, recalls the aggressive confrontations on the streets: women being grabbed by the hair, snared like wild animals and thrown out of moving police cars onto the street.⁸

Our brief review has shown that the issue in Iran today is women's liberation from Islamist bondage. The assertion that the enforcement of the hijab has "nothing ... to do with religion" is false. The headscarf compulsion is not based on the whim of some idiots, but on a specific interpretation of Islam.

It is no coincidence that the regime denounces Iranian women's attempts to free themselves from the headscarf as violations of the Koran and Islam. It is no coincidence that even as recently as late October, the Iranian "Office of Islamic Conduct" firmly rejected any relaxation of the veiling requirement.

Islamist rule presupposes the oppression of women. This is another reason why the uprising is being waged under the slogan "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" - "Woman, Life, Freedom". Its outcome is of global significance, but it particularly affects the Islamic world.

We might hope that the Islamic associations in the West would massively criticize or exclude the Islamic interpretation of this regime. Instead, some of them, for example in Germany, are cooperating with the Tehran regime's agents. These Islamic associations are, in my opinion, part of the problem.

I now come to Section II, the ideological foundations of the Iranian regime.

The supreme leader in Iran calls himself "Revolutionary Leader"; the troops sworn to him call themselves "Revolutionary Guards". Such designations are neither a pretense nor a joke. We must take them seriously: this regime really does see itself as a revolutionary power.

⁸ Golineh Atai, „Ihr ehrlosen Dreckskerle!“, in: Die Zeit, 29.9.2022.

The program of this Islamic revolution is laid down in Ruhollah Khomeini's most important work, entitled "Islamic Government," which appeared during the 1970ies. Until today, this fundamental work has remained virtually unknown in the West. I can vouch for the fact that in Germany that there is not a single copy of this programmatic text in the libraries of the two most important foreign policy think tanks - the "German Council on Foreign Relations" and the "German Institute for International and Security Affairs".

In the 1930s, wrong decisions such as the "Munich Agreement" of 1938 were at least partly caused by the fact that Hitler's "Mein Kampf" was neither read nor taken seriously. Winston Churchill was one of the very few British politicians who had read Hitler's book. In his memoirs, he stated: "Only very silly people, of whom there are extremely large numbers in every country, could ignore all this".

Today, the West repeats this ignorance. Governments and the media hardly ever deal with the principles of the Islamic revolution.

"The Islamic state is a state of law," Khomeini's foundational book says, and that sounds quite familiar. But then follows an addendum that marks the gulf between the Tehran regime and the rest of the world: "In this form of state, sovereignty belongs solely to Allah."

This is the core idea of the theocratic state: there is no such thing as an autonomous human being. Our greatest crime, in the view of the ayatollahs, is that we are so arrogant as to believe we can decide for ourselves what laws to make. They call us a "world of arrogance" because we do not bow to the laws of the Sharia, but instead elect freely chosen representatives to the parliaments, where they make free decisions.

The transfer of sovereignty "solely" to Allah has other far-reaching consequences; I would like to elaborate on four aspects:

First, domestic policy: If there are no autonomous people, there can be no parties in the Western sense, but at best divergent wings of a single party, the "Party of Allah." This renders the hopes of many in the West that they can rely on the existence of supposedly reasonable elements within the Iranian leadership, such as the previous president Hassan Rohani, highly problematic, since all officials agree that politics as a whole must be subordinated to the will of Allah. All political wings operate under the premise that sharia law is sacrosanct; none of these wings, for example, questions the hijab requirement.

Second, foreign policy: according to Iranian logic, the international order must also submit to the sharia, which is why Tehran does not acknowledge the secular international system as a common framework. This is an important difference between the anti-Western stance of Russia and China and Iran's anti-Western stance. Tehran's mockery of the international order was evident in its occupation of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and its 444-day hostage-taking of embassy personnel; it is evident in terrorist activities around the world and in the death fatwa against British citizen Salman Rushdie; it is evident in its Holocaust denial and its annihilation announcements against Israel.

Thus, the Iranian constitution in Article 3 demands a "foreign policy on the basis of the Islamic criteria" and quotes in Article 151 the following verse from the Koran as a binding guideline: "Make ready for them all you can of armed forces and of horses tethered, that thereby you may dismay the enemy of Allah." (8:60) Here, the comprehensive arms buildup against "the enemy of Allah" is declared to be a constitutional requirement, thus revealing the real purpose of the nuclear program. But have our governments and media ever been interested in the wording of this Islamist constitution?

Third, martyrdom ideology: Khomeini radicalized the Muslim Brotherhood's death cult encapsulated in the motto: "You love life, we love death." According to his theological worldview, life is worthless and death is the beginning of genuine existence. "The natural world," Khomeini explained in October 1980, "is the lowest element, the scum of creation." What is decisive is the beyond: the "divine world - that is eternal."⁹ According to Khomeini's mind-set, shared by his successors, martyrs' deaths are nothing but the transition from this world to the world beyond where they will live on eternally and in splendor. Whether the warrior wins the battle or loses it and dies a martyr's death, in both cases, victory, either mundane or spiritual, is assured. This "cult of martyrdom inherent in Shi'ism ... may give Iran certain practical military advantages," boasted the regime journal "Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs" in 2012.¹⁰

Fourth, global aspiration: A global and messianic program derives from the claim to be fighting as a religious vanguard for a different world. "Our revolution," declared Ali Khamenei, the current revolutionary leader, "is the turning point in modern world history ... Our historical movement is creating a new civilization."¹¹ From the ayatollahs' perspective, this "new civilization" requires the eradication of the Jewish state. And, of course, the struggle has to continue until the radical Shiite interpretation of Islam has prevailed throughout the world.

This missionary zeal is strengthened by a Shiite fantasy of religious providence: according to this fantasy, in the near or distant future the 12th Imam - a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, who disappeared into obscurity in 874

⁹ Cited in Daniel Brumberg, „Khomeini's Legacy. Islamic Rule and Islamic Social Justice,“ in R. Scott Appleby, ed. Spokesmen for the Despised. Fundamental Leaders of the Middle East, Chicago and London, 1997, 56.

¹⁰ Mahdi Mohammad Nia, „Discourse and Identity in Iran's Foreign Policy, Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs, 3, no.3 (fall 2012).

¹¹ Henner Fürtig, Islamische Weltauffassung und außenpolitische Konzeption, Berlin 1998, S. 148.

- will return, take power and rid the world of all evil. The more chaos and war prevail in the world, the more likely the arrival of this messiah, Shiite ideologues assert. This myth of the 12th Imam is even enshrined in Iran's constitution. Article 5 of this constitution emphasizes the hope for the imminent return of this imaginary 12th Imam, and explains that the revolutionary leader may rule as the 12th Imam's deputy only until that time.

Today, a vast majority of Iranians reject such fantasies. There is no other Islamic country where hatred of Islam, the mullahs and the ayatollahs is as great as in Iran. Let me present some figures from this spring: even before the start of the uprising, 67 percent of the population, aged above 19, rejected theocracy, and 72 percent did not want a religious figure at the head of the state. Almost half of the population no longer described themselves as religious.¹²

Yet precisely because the bulk of the younger generation is turning away from Iranian state doctrine, terror against the slightest hint of opposition is on the rise. On a fast-track basis, the salaries of the armed forces and police were recently increased by 20 percent.¹³ The regime hopes to hold on to power with a mixture of bribery and the most brutal repression. Through the international impunity and freedom of action it will provide, the Iranian nuclear weapons program is also an essential part of the regime's effort to maintain itself in the face of rising internal opposition.

This brings us to Section III - Iran's nuclear weapons program.

Generally speaking, such a program consists of three components: First, you need a critical mass of plutonium or highly enriched uranium. Second, you need missiles to deliver the bomb to the target. And third, you have to assemble a

¹² Shay Khatiri, The Islamic Republic Is Killing Islam in Iran, in: The Bulwark, August 23, 2022.

¹³ Rainer Hermann, Tausend Demonstranten in Teheran angeklagt, in: FAZ, 1. November 2022.

nuclear warhead: that is, you have to produce uranium metal, master the implosion technique, and miniaturize the whole thing so as to be able to mount the nuclear warhead on the launch vehicle.

At what point is the Tehran regime currently? Today, it has had enough highly enriched uranium to build two or three bombs.

It has, secondly, developed missiles that are nuclear weapons capable. This crucial part of the weapons' program has been ignored throughout the nuclear deal negotiations. Iran's progress in missile development can be seen right now in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, a war in which Iranian drones and missiles are killing Ukrainians.

On the third point, the details of weapons development, too little is known to make precise statements. One knows for certain that the regime conducted nuclear weapons research until 2009. But we do not know how far it has gone. This is currently the subject of a major dispute between the regime and the IAEA.¹⁴

It is, however, not the technology that makes the Iranian nuclear program so dangerous but the ideological context in which it arises: that mixture of a yearning for death and weapons-grade uranium, Holocaust denial and high-tech laboratories, antisemitism and rocket science, Shiite messianism and plutonium. Only in Iran is the Shiite fantasy of religious providence united with

¹⁴ The UN agency has proven that the regime secretly conducted experiments with uranium at three facilities. By concealing these facilities, it had already violated key provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; the regime's refusal, which continues to this day, to provide the IAEA with information about the use of the discovered uranium particles is a further violation of this treaty. This dispute actually has nothing to do with the nuclear deal. Most recently, however, Iran has demanded as a condition for a return to the nuclear deal that the IAEA drop its investigation and tacitly accept Iran's violations of the NPT. So far, at least, the West has not agreed to this.

the physics of mass destruction. For the first time since the splitting of the atom we find the destructive force of the bomb linked to the fury of holy war.

What are the implications of nuclear weapons in the hands of people who consider death on the battlefield as a spiritual victory? Iran's former president, Hashemi Rafsandjani, who was considered a representative of the "pragmatic" faction, provided an answer. In December 2001, he declared that "the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything". A nuclear counter-strike, however, "will do no more than harm the Islamic world. It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality."¹⁵

Here Rafsandjani performs a macabre cost-benefit analysis. It is not possible to destroy Israel without incurring costs. But the costs for Iran of a nuclear counter-strike are, in his opinion, bearable for Islam. Some hundreds of thousands of new martyrs for Islam - the price is not too high.

This example shows that the assumptions of rationality and the desire to survive might not apply to a regime inflamed with such religious passion. A policy of containment and deterrence that succeeded when applied to the Soviet Union during the Cold War might not be applicable to an Islamic Republic with nuclear weapons.

Even without this worst case, nuclear weapons in the hands of the mullahs pose a particular danger. The Islamic Republic is not a status quo power, but a power that wants to change the world in a revolutionary way. Its passion to destroy the Jewish state draws on a religiously inspired hatred of Jews and Judaism. Even without nuclear weapons, Iran has blanketed the region - Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen - with terror, war, and chaos. With nuclear weapons, however, this regime – the only country in the world to openly deny

¹⁵ Qods Day Speech, December 14, 2001, by Chairman of Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi-Rafsandjani, see M. Küntzel, *Germany and Iran*, p. 120.

the Holocaust and to openly state its desire to wipe out a member state of the United Nations – will feel unassailable.

It is therefore not only justified but necessary that at least the Western powers insist that the Iranian bomb must be prevented.

This brings me to my last part and to the question:

Why have all the efforts of the last 25 years to prevent Iran's bid for the bomb failed?

Let's take a short look back:

In the 1990s, U.S. President Bill Clinton played a positive role by denying the Iranians access to nuclear technology at all. This was, in my opinion, the only reasonable position. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty does not require its members to provide nuclear technology to a revolutionary Islamist regime.

In 2006, President Bush jettisoned this Clinton doctrine. His new red line accepted civilian nuclear facilities in Iran but excluded weapons-related technologies such as enrichment. This change was in no small part a result of Europe's appeasement of Iran and stubbornness toward Washington, with Germany unfortunately leading the way. Nevertheless, in December 2006, the Bush administration at least achieved a unanimous Security Council resolution calling on the mullahs to immediately halt all uranium enrichment and plutonium projects. At the same time, sanctions were imposed on Iran to reinforce these demands. This resolution classified Iran's nuclear program as a threat to world peace. In the event that Tehran did not comply, the resolution threatened additional pressure.

Tehran did not comply; instead, it ignored each of the Security Council's demands. But there was no additional pressure, quite the opposite. In 2009,

President Barack Obama erased the Bush red line and for the first time accepted Iranian enrichment to 5 percent. This was a remarkable concession: anyone capable of enriching uranium to just 5 percent has already achieved nearly 70 percent of the technical effort required to produce weapons-grade uranium. From then on, the regime has been in a position to pressure the other participants in the nuclear talks by threatening to develop the bomb.

Finally, in 2013, the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany adopted an "interim agreement" with Iran that overruled the aforementioned Security Council resolution and paved the way for the JCPoA, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The JCPoA was concluded in July 2015 and entered into force on January 16, 2016.

How should this nuclear deal be assessed? On the one hand, it was welcome that under the terms of this agreement Iran had to mothball two-thirds of its ultracentrifuges, destroy the core of its plutonium reactor, and ship most of its enriched uranium abroad. This made it more difficult for the regime to reach for the bomb, at least for a transitional period.

On the other hand, this deal is characterized by a serious flaw: After 10 to 15 years, starting in 2026, important restrictions will cease to exist: Then the regime will be allowed – with the approval of the international community – to accumulate as much bomb-making material as it wants. Barack Obama personally acknowledged this. In other words, this agreement, which purports to stop Iran's nuclear weapons project, in fact paves the way for its completion in the medium term.

This nuclear deal was thus a bet on the future. It was hoped that the regime would respond to Western concessions with concessions of its own and lose its appetite for the bomb. This hope, however, was wishful thinking, based on an

almost unbelievable degree of ignorance. The West simply did not want to know about the ideological premises that govern Tehran's actions.

When Donald Trump appeared before the press in May 2018, to justify the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal, for all the clumsiness of his action, he had one argument on his side: the preamble to the nuclear deal emphasized that it was intended to serve "peace and security in the region." Tehran, however, had used the billions it received as a result of the nuclear deal for the opposite: It used the extra money to plunge the region into further war, which - you will remember - provoked the mass exodus of Syrians and Iraqis to Europe.

I am anything but a friend of Trump - and nevertheless take the position that it was essentially right to cancel the deal and reinstate the sanctions: First, to stop the escalation of war at that time, and second, to prevent the legalizing of Iran's nuclear weapons through the gradual expiry of the nuclear deal.

Then, starting in May 2019, the regime began to ignore the restrictions of the nuclear deal and to engage more and more aggressively in nuclear developments whose only possible purpose is that of building nuclear weapons: For example, the production of uranium metal or uranium enrichment to 60 percent.

Since taking office, President Joe Biden has been trying to reactivate the nuclear deal - an attempt that many have questioned. But the new administration has at least made it clear that it won't lift sanctions unless there is verifiable proof that Tehran too is returning to the rules of the nuclear deal.

Today, however, the real problem is that the Iranian regime is no longer interested in dismantling its nuclear weapons facilities - that is, returning to the 2015 nuclear deal. Today, it feels much stronger than it did in 2015; for some good reasons.

In 2015, all five nuclear powers of the UN Security Council put pressure on Tehran. Today we have a completely different situation: Russia and China have switched sides and form, together with Tehran, an anti-Western bloc.

Second, because the regime's forces have so far succeeded in brutally repressing its own people. For this reason, Tehran would rather continue to endure Western sanctions in the future than make concessions on its nuclear weapons program.

And third, because in the last three years it has achieved considerable success in advancing its nuclear weapons program. At the same time the assurances of the United States and the Europeans that they want to prevent the Iranian bomb have become increasingly implausible. "We are nearing the point," Britain, France, and Germany declared in December 2021, almost a year ago, "where Iran's escalation of its nuclear program will have completely hollowed out the JCPOA."¹⁶ Today, that point has long been passed! Nevertheless, the fiction of continued dialogue seems to be more important to the European powers than the nuclear developments on the ground.

At the same time - and this is in a way ingenious - the regime emphasizes a strong willingness to negotiate and refuses to accept the ending of these talks. The reason is obvious: As long as the appearance of negotiations can be maintained, it can continue to expand its nuclear weapons program undisturbed. We have a constellation here that has never existed before in the history of international non-proliferation policy: the regime feigns a willingness to negotiate and uses the hope of a new JCPOA as a camouflage net behind which the bomb can continue to grow.

¹⁶ Britain, France and Germany, in: The Iran Primer, December 20, 2021.

I find it striking that the Western powers continue to play along with this farce instead of declaring the JCPoA negotiations a failure. In doing so, these powers are sending the message to the Iranian population that they are still willing to accept the butchers who torture and kill Iranian civilians as partners in dialogue.

More than that, they declare their willingness, in principle, to provide billions of dollars in additional funds to this regime if, as a result of an agreement, international economic sanctions are lifted. According to Al Jazeera, in this case 17 Iranian banks and 150 economic institutions would be exempted from sanctions. At least \$7 billion in frozen funds would be freed and an increase in Iranian oil exports of more than 50 times would be allowed.¹⁷ But how can anyone want to give money to a regime that is killing its own people?

Those who holds out the prospect of funding the torturing regime cannot at the same time be in solidarity with Iran's struggling population. You have to choose one side or the other.

This brings us back to the uprisings in Iran.

Will the mullahs' repression work? Or will the mass movement in Iran be able to enforce its declared goal - regime change?

There are voices, also in Germany, that are for stabbing the Iranian uprising in the back - voices that say that Iranian women had better resign themselves to their fate and not provoke or weaken the regime. But does this reasoning, this dismissal of the Iranian insurgency, still hold water today?

Iranian women have begun a process that can be disrupted but cannot be reversed. When hundreds of thousands remove their veils, no morality police

¹⁷ Al Jazeera Staff, Iran nuclear deal 'imminent' with crippling sanctions removed, Al Jazeera, 19. August 2022.

can stop them. Only those who move feel their shackles. An entire generation of young Iranians has moved in recent weeks and will no longer resign themselves to their shackles. The Iranian rulers “know that their regime ultimately rests on the awe of unchallengeable power. That neither teenage girls throughout Iran nor [former allies of the Supreme Leader] see this majesty any longer suggests that Mr. Khamenei’s time is running out.”¹⁸

President Biden, after all, has shown solidarity with the struggle of women in Iran. In doing so, he distanced himself from the grave mistake of the Obama administration, which ignored the mass protests of the Green Movement for weeks in 2009. But are words of encouragement and individual sanctions enough today?

I believe it is necessary to also end the 20-year dialogue about Iran's nuclear program, which has comprehensively failed. Time and again, the regime has humiliated the Biden administration. This administration, however, has been eager to humbly play down the humiliation again and again so as to save the "dialogue." But things cannot go on like this.

Right now, the democracies of the West should reinforce the unexpected and unprecedented pressure that the Iranian uprising has generated inside Iran by applying maximum pressure from the outside - by breaking off all talks with the regime, by isolating it politically and economically, and by credibly threatening military force in case the regime wants to leave the Non-Proliferation-Treaty or build the bomb.¹⁹ Let me quote Professor Jeffrey Herf: Only "when and if the leaders in Tehran believe that American [and European] threats to use force

¹⁸ Reuel Marc Gerecht and Ray Takeyh, Iran’s Hard-Liners Are Starting to Crack, Wall Street Journal, November 2, 2022.

¹⁹ Howard Berman, Michèle Flournoy, Jane Harman, Leon Panetta, David Petraeus, Dennis Ross, and Robert Satloff, Statement on Improving the Potential for a Diplomatic Resolution to the Iran Nuclear Challenge, December 17, 2021.

are credible, then - and only then - might they turn away from a catastrophic course on which they are clearly headed."²⁰

This presupposes, however, that the Western public is prepared for the possibility of a confrontation with the Iranian regime. It is time to stop concealing the daily provocations of this regime instead of taking them seriously and denouncing them again and again. And it is time that the public learns about the antisemitism of this regime and the special danger of the Iranian bomb.

Today, we are not faced with the alternative of either preventing the Iranian bomb or supporting the Iranian insurgency, because both concerns are inextricably linked. A democratic regime change will be the best way to prevent the Iranian bomb without going to war, while the prevention of the Iranian bomb is a condition for the victory of Iranian women.

The fight for freedom and the fight against the Iranian bomb are pursuing the same goal: an end to the terror emanating from this regime. At least in principle. Today, however, it is the Iranian people alone who are fighting. The West still clings to the fiction of the nuclear deal and holds back. Can it go on doing so? Thank you for your attention.

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²⁰ Jeffrey Herf, Time is on Iran's Side. There's no more kicking the can if we are to prevent a nuclear Iran, www.americanpurpose.com, 14. January 2022.