



"TALKING ABOUT NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT"

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" The most dangerous flashpoint in my opinion is the Middle East. This coming stand-off between Israel and Iran, which I think will happen eventually, is a great, massive danger. I'm particularly worried about Israel's attitude here, not that I'm that critical of Israel, but the fact is that it regards itself as having its existence threatened by countries around it. And if one of those has nuclear weapons, which will then encourage others to get them, then I wouldn't trust Israel to react to that in what I would regard a sensible way. So that's one possibility.

Pakistan and India is another possible flashpoint. We see how unstable Pakistan is today. The Pakistanis say that their military are firmly controlling their nuclear weapons. They would go further, and say that the fissile component of their nuclear weapons, the plutonium or highly enriched uranium in them, is kept separately from the weapon itself. You know, there's this component, which is not very big, the size of an orange or something, it can be unscrewed and kept separately, from the weapon, the missile warhead, and guarded separately. Whether that's true or not, I don't know. The trouble with Pakistan is that the intelligence people, the ISI - which are a sort of power unto themselves - what action they would take if trouble occurred is very difficult to say. It is a very unstable situation. There are a lot of vested interests, power centres in Pakistan: the military themselves, the intelligence agencies, and so on. And we just don't know where the correlation of forces is, particularly with regard to their nuclear weapon.

The Pakistani-Indian situation: the nationalism involved, the chauvinism, is very great. It's very hard to say how these people will react in a crisis. So that certainly is a possible flashpoint. One should be very worried about the instability of Pakistan, but also the reaction of India to that instability. So, yes, one should certainly be concerned about it.

Of all the countries that may proliferate, who may get nuclear weapons, countries that don't have them already, Iran is of major interest. They have ambitions to have nuclear power. They say, they have oil of course, but they want to sell the oil to earn foreign currency. They want to export it, and therefore they need nuclear, they say, to produce electricity, instead of burning

their valuable oil, this is what they argue. But they say, “our ambitions are civil, peaceful, that we do not intend to get nuclear weapons”, and since we have no real evidence that they are having an active nuclear military programme - nuclear weapons - then we have to take that at face value, although many people have suspicions that they have ambitions to get nuclear weapons.

The major reason for this suspicion is their activity in enriching uranium. Iran has built themselves a rather large enrichment plant: it's 30,000 or more centrifuges, and they plan to increase that to 50,000, at a place called Natanz. People suspect that they will use that enrichment technology to produce highly enriched uranium, over 90%, for weapons. That's their major reason for doing the enrichment, people argue. The Iranians deny that.

On the other hand, I think there is no question Iran will be able to produce nuclear weapons in the not too distant future, if it takes a political decision to do so. There's no evidence that they have decided that at the moment. In fact the International Atomic Energy Agency that inspect the Iranian nuclear programme, - because Iran is a party to the Non-proliferation Treaty, so that they have to allow in inspectors from the IAEA to inspect their nuclear activities, - these inspectors say we see no evidence that Iran is doing anything other than civil nuclear work.

So there we are. You have to make a judgment. Is Iran likely to get nuclear weapons or not? We don't know whether they are doing so at the moment. The Israelis suspect that they are. They regard this as a major threat to their existence, and people think that Israel may take military action to stop Iran doing that. But they would be very foolish to do so in my opinion. Of course that doesn't stop the Israelis doing things. Because if they do take military action, then the Iranians will put all their efforts, not into civil nuclear, but into getting a military weapon, obviously. It seems to me to be rather obvious.

And they could do that very quickly, because some nuclear infrastructure will survive, and if the Iranians have any sense, they will be clandestinely putting some of their centrifuges aside in secret and well-protected facilities to use after a military attack to enrich uranium for a weapon. And they could do that rather quickly. They may even be stockpiling the uranium, or some of it, that they are enriching already.

So a military attack on Iran would be absurd. It would be the height of madness to attack the Iranian nuclear facilities. But, as I say, history shows that doesn't stop a politician from doing it. Therefore I think we have to worry about that.

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