

Topic: Iran

A wide-ranging discussion centered around several major points regarding the US relationship with Iran. Several participants felt that Iran might be a more confident nation and consequently would feel less threatened if it possessed a nuclear weapon. It was pointed out that Pakistan is a Muslim country with nuclear arms,,although Pakistan is ostensibly a US ally.

Iran has scheduled elections in the near future- this may make some difference. One question is how much authority the civilian government has vis-a vis the Ayatollahs and the Revolutionary Guard. Is it possible for the US to find a negotiating partner?

North Korea represents an interesting almost parallel situation. They and others see a nuclear weapon as a useful deterrent against perceived US aggression. They have noticed what happened to Iraq and Libya after they lost or gave up their nuclear programs.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict represents a major obstacle towards the development of a rational US policy towards Iran , as well as the rest of the Middle East. Our unswerving support for Israel has helped produce increasing hostility towards the US in the region. Can we change our policy and take a harder line against the right-wing Israeli government? And do the hard-liners in Israel intend to attack the Iranian nuclear sites? One other possible issue is the precise translation of Ahmadinejad's reported statement threatening the destruction of the state of Israel.

The issue of nuclear weapons as a deterrent was further discussed – one difficulty is the problem of possible irrational behavior by leaders, with North Korea as a prime example. Is there a way to defuse the situation with Iran? One possible avenue might be the use of cultural exchanges. Another approach could be a successful effort to stop Israel from building settlements in the West Bank. The US administration would need to court public opinion in the US for any definitive move in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict Also, ,in another direction, might the US be able to work through the more moderate political groups in Iran?

The nuclear non-proliferation treaty is seen as a major obstacle by the Iranians. They feel that their national pride has been insulted and that possession of nuclear weapons is an important element to insure national sovereignty.

Finally, the question came up about the effectiveness of sanctions on Iran. It appears that these sanction hurt the Iranian people more than the government. Iranians also believe that the US congress will never be willing to eliminate sanctions. They have only to look at Cuba to see how this issue can persist.