

Interview with Fred Fleitz November 25, 2013 | Washington D.C.

I worked on national security issues for the US government for 25 years. I was a CIA analyst for 19 years. I worked for John Bolton as his Chief of Staff at the State Department when he was Undersecretary for Arms Control and International Security for about 3 and a half years. I was with the House Intelligence Committee for about 5 years and, that doesn't add up to 25 because some of these jobs overlapped and in most of my jobs I covered proliferation, including the Iranian and North Korean WMD programs, especially the nuclear programs. When I was with the House Intelligence Committee one of my jobs was looking at finished intelligence by the intelligence community and I had the task of reading and briefing to national intelligence estimates on the Iranian nuclear program to members of the House of Representatives on the Intelligence Committee so this gave me a pretty good background of both the open source and the classified information on Iran's precision nuclear weapons.

Well many people don't realize that the Iranian nuclear program, owes its genesis to the United States because it started under the Atoms for Peace Program. The United States lent peaceful nuclear technology to the Shah who had a very ambitious effort to try to generate nuclear power in his country thinking one day the oil would run out. It was so ambitious that the United States could not fully support what he had in mind.

He wanted full control of the nuclear fuel cycle, including enriching uranium and recycling plutonium. The US government didn't quite go along with that and he pressed very hard. Uh, now he was fairly far advanced in terms of developing reactors and then in 1979 came the Iranian revolution. The reactors built in Iran were built by a German company, uh, in the port city of Bushehr. There's two reactor facilities at Bushehr. When Ayatollah Khomeini took over the country the regime had no interest in nuclear power. They thought it was a symbol of the west and they rejected it, at least this was their approach at first. Later they showed an interest in pursuing this I think because they believed that nuclear weapons were probably in their interest. However, in the late '80s the Bushehr plant was attacked during the Iraq and Iran war. Both Bushehr plants were damaged.

One was severely damaged beyond repair. The Islamist regime showed an interest in rebuilding Bushehr. They were not able to go to the Germans because they...the regime refused to pay the Germans after they ousted the Shah but the Russians showed an interest in rebuilding Bushehr and a contract was struck with them and that plant...it was an on-again, off-again contract. There's rumors of construction problems, the Iranians not paying, but the Russians stuck with it and I believe about two years ago Bushehr went online, which was pretty historic for Iran to have an operable nuclear program. And they've also the Islamist regime has also received assistance from the Chinese in terms of a facility to convert natural uranium into uranium hexafluoride, which is the gaseous form of uranium that's put into centrifuges to enrich into either reactor grade fuel and

could presumably be used to make weapons fuel and China has offered other assistance to the program over the years.

Well to talk about the Iranian nuclear program, there's two facilities right now that the United States is most worried about that is the Fordow enrichment facility, which is a facility full of centrifuges to enrich uranium hexafluoride into 20 percent uranium, which is close to weapons grade. Then there is the Natanz enrichment facility, which is a much larger facility that is being used mostly to enrich uranium hexafluoride to reactor grade. The Fordow facility is especially worrisome because it is hardened. It is built inside a mountain apparently to make it difficult if not impossible to destroy, uh, by air strikes, which the Iranians are fearful of, especially of Israeli air strikes. What's different about Fordow is that it will only have about 3000 centrifuges. There are about 16,000 at, uh, Natanz but these centrifuges are wired in such a way that...that they will be making 20 percent uranium.

The centrifuges at Natanz are set up in such a way that they're making reactor grade uranium but either set of centrifuges could be easily reconfigured to make weapons grade fairly quickly. There's other facilities that convert, um, natural uranium into uranium hexafluoride, uh, which also are of concern. Also, a big concern right now especially due to the ongoing negotiation with Iran to limit its nuclear program is the Iraq ARAK heavy water reactor. This has been under construction for several years. When completed this reactor will enable Iran to make plutonium out of its spent fuel rods. Heavy water reactors have significant advantages over the light water reactors at Bushehr. It is difficult to extract weapons grade fuel out of a light water reactor. It's possible but it's difficult. You have to remove the fuel rods early in the process, it's something that's easily observed.

You also have to have low enriched uranium, which is difficult and time consuming to make. A heavy water reactor can use natural uranium, which is a big advantage. All you have to do is have heavy water, which is in itself difficult but if a state can make heavy water, a heavy water reactor is an easier way to make, uh, weapons grade fuel. Now this reactor has been underway for several years. Um, there was some talk it could be done later this year or next year. I understand that this reactor's having technical problems and it's a significant matter of debate right now. Uh, the Israeli's want this reactor shut down. The French have called for work on it to be stopped and in a recent agreement that was struck with the Iranians, uh, Iran is not supposed to do work on it for a six-month period, which is supposed to be the first stage of a new agreement that was struck with them to limit their nuclear program. But I'm concerned and other experts I know are concerned that there still is not a commitment by Iraq to by Iran to abandon the Iraq facility. I mean they have agreed to stop some work on it but they don't appear to have agreed to stop and basically abandon the project.

Well, the regime is...has committed substantial resources to build these centrifuges, to acquire the components to put together this program. It's a program that has been put

together in secret. Uh, I don't think we know exactly how much they've spent on it but it's been a substantial undertaking and, um, those of us who think that Iran has a covert nuclear program believe this for several reasons. First of all, so much money and time and effort has been built has been expended on a program in secret. If this was a peaceful program it could've been done with the cooperation of the International Atomic Energy Agency and indeed with their assistance. Instead Iran has probably spent more money and acquired equipment that is not quite up to specks because it tried to do this covertly and in my view, there's no reason to have done that unless Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons.

Well Iran has historically been very difficult to deal with and they've been more of a challenge than the North Koreans. We've tried to work with both states to limit their nuclear programs. The Iranians are more savvy in terms of diplomacy than North Korea. The North Koreans seem to almost have a tenure about some of the things that they will do and say, uh, and that's saying a lot because the Iranians have said some outrageous things and have been difficult to deal with but they have shown to have a knack for manipulating negotiations to buy time. We saw this with the EU3 negotiations in the 2000s, which I might add the current president Hassan Rouhani was one of the negotiators for, uh, in the 2000s and he agreed to a pause in the enrichment process in Iran, which was portrayed at the time as a great victory but in fact Rouhani later bragged about how he had bought time with for the Iranian nuclear program with this agreement and this is something we've seen repeatedly that they like talks because talks buy them time. We're now facing a different regime. Rouhani is not running the country versus Ahmadinejad. Rouhani is very savvy towards the west; his foreign minister is very savvy towards the west. Rouhani was educated...he got his master's degree in Scotland, his foreign minister studied at the University of Denver, they both speak fluent English, and they've proving to be an even more, uh, difficult challenge for western diplomats to deal with because they know the game. They know the west. They know how to appeal to the media. They know how to soften their image to make it difficult for western governments to take a hardline position.

Let's talk about the, uh, the Bush administration's experience with dealing with the Iranians and the IAEA and then let's move onto the Obama administrations experiences.

The Bush administration took a fairly hard line against the Iranian nuclear program and this began after evidence was revealed that the Iranians had covert nuclear work in about 2002 and it led the Bush administration to the International Atomic Energy Agency and demand that the agency pass a resolution condemning Iran. Now I was involved in some of those talks with Ambassador Bolton, who was then Undersecretary of State of Arms Control and International Security and I remember how much of a stir this created when Mr. Bolton went to Vienna and said that we're going to pass a resolution condemning Iran for violating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and these diplomats in Vienna said 'well that's just not done. We don't name people in our resolutions. It's called the spirit of Vienna. We all work together. We don't condemn people. Everything is done by consensus.' Well Mr. Bolton's view was very clear. Nations that violate treaties

banning proliferation have to be named and it took a while but he was able to convince, uh, these states in...in Vienna including some of our closest allies that we're going to do this one way or the other and the resolution went through but some of these diplomats who have lived in Vienna for years and years and years were not happy because he was upsetting the, uh, social circuit, cocktails and tea parties and tennis. I remember him chewing out a diplomat one time for playing too much tennis instead of, uh, going after states who were violating the Non-Proliferation Treaty of the IAEA. I think this was a significant accomplishment. As the 2000s went on more and more information was provided by an Iranian opposition group, the NCRI, of covert nuclear activities by Iran. The evidence started to mount and in itself each piece didn't indicate that there was a weapons program but as more and more evidence came up it was hard to...it was hard to go against. Iran was pursuing laser enrichment. Iran was trying to produce polonium 210 probably as a neutron initiator to start a nuclear reaction. Iran was engaged in plutonium experiments. Iran was producing, uh, centrifuges and trying to enrich uranium at Natanz. Iran had a secret facility at Fordow, which was also revealed. Over time the IAEA had a list of unanswered questions and some of the explanations by the Iranians were almost laughable for what this added up to.

I was at a meeting at the IAEA in Vienna, I went as a representative of the United States, for Mr. Bolton to some of the IAEA Board of Governors meetings and I remember the French were condemning us up and down that we were politicizing this and, uh, we had to take a more reasonable view but privately said 'well we agree with you. We think Iran is having a nuclear weapons program too but we're not going to say this publically.' It was frustrating but also it was reassuring to know that we're getting through; we're getting through to these countries. Uh, but it was a hard slog, uh, especially towards the end of Mr. Bolton's tenure when he was Undersecretary of State because everything we did was colored by the Iraq war. We had a solid...we had a solid case that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons but any claim of a covert WMD program was shot down by the left and by most of the European allies as the Bush administration, they're at it again; they're exaggerating. It was frustrating but that didn't stop the Bush administration from trying to push forward, it didn't stop Mr. Bolton from trying to push forward, and, uh, sometimes we simply gave press conferences at the IAEA outside of the chamber on the latest revelation in front of the international press sometimes to embarrass our allies to say 'well what about this...what about this piece of evidence? How do you explain it?' and I think we were making a difference. We were dragging some of our allies to vote for resolutions against the Iranians.

What's interesting is that this mattered to Iran. They did not want to be condemned in the IAEA. Now North Korea is different. They didn't care but the Iranians almost had an image to protect and that we tried to use to our advantage to try to use to see whether we could pressure them. Uh, they kept their non-aligned movement allies mostly with them but we...fortunately the IAEA is not dominated by third world like the UN General suddenly was so there was some potential for movement, uh, and I'm really proud of what we accomplished there. Now towards the end of the Bush administration things changed. Mr. Bolton left the office of the Undersecretary, uh, the focus on international negotiations in the State Department sort of moved to the Secretary's office and to the

National Security Council, and there was more of an effort by Secretary of State Rice to try to negotiate a solution, a diplomatic solution and to be less confrontation with the Iranians. Uh, one thing that happened that did concern me, I think it was in 2005, President Bush gave a speech that acknowledged Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear power technology under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Now there is such a right of course but when Ambassador Bolton was at the State Department we would not put out a statement like that because our...our view although we didn't state it publically was that states that violate the NPT with covert weapons have given up the right to nuclear technology and that is a criticism I have of the Obama administration. They should not go around talking about Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology when they have abused the NPT, when they have pursued covert nuclear activities with obvious weapons intent but we lost that debate and the Obama administration has sort of sited that in their efforts to try to move forward with, uh, negotiations, with Iran.

So, it was ironic that when President Obama was elected and when his team was assembled, his State Department team, that they stated that their goal was sort of to be the anti-Bush. They were not going to take the confrontational what they considered counter-productive approach of the Bush administration in trying to deal with the Iranian and North Korean nuclear program. But in reality, the policies of the previous two years or so under Secretary Rice, uh, were pretty mild. Rice was very interested in some type of reconciliation and she really had engaged in multi-lateral talks and efforts to reach out and the rhetoric had softened considerably from the beginning of the Bush years. But the Obama administration didn't see it that way. They thought they were going to take a much, uh, view of negotiations that would be much more aggressive and I think in some ways they thought they could charm the North Koreans and the Iranians to the negotiating table and get them to come to an agreement. This didn't happen. In May of 2009 North Korea tested a nuclear weapon. Between January and I think July 2009, the Iranians tested several long-range missiles. They put a satellite in orbit and a missile test that just about every expert I know believes was actually a test of a long-range missile, probably an ICBM or what will somebody be an ICMB. This stunned Obama administration officials. They really thought that I think the president's aura and his reputation would lead these states not to be so belligerent but that didn't happen and it sort of helped them understand that it was not George Bush that these states hate.

They hate the United States. It's a difference between the way they see the world. It isn't political difference. In fact, they don't see much difference between Barack Obama and George Bush. This was an Iran versus the United States or North Korea versus the United States matter. We are a western developed nation, western developed capitalist nation, they have different systems, and I think maybe after a year and a half this...I think the administration started to realize this and they changed their approach somewhat. But nevertheless, since the beginning of the Obama administration it has been obsessed with getting a diplomatic agreement with Iran and I think that, um, they've paused this occasionally when Iran did something belligerent such as testing missiles or when Ahmadinejad or ___ would say something very offensive about Israel or relations with the west or when the Iranians attempted to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States in Washington with a plot to blow up a restaurant. There also was an

incident where, uh, the Obama administration did something truly extraordinary when it designated, uh, an Al-Qaida cell...it designated and identified an Al-Qaida cell operating in Tehran with the support of the Iranian government. This was something where they were owning up to something where when the president came into power I don't think they would've admitted to but I have to give the president and his staff credit that they looked at the intelligence and realized we have to do this. This didn't remove their interest in a negotiated settlement but I think it did temper their enthusiasm a little bit. Um, one thing that happened under the Obama administration concerning Iran that was very, very troubling was what happened after the June 2009 presidential election. The election was controversial, the outcome according to many experts, uh, we colored because of massive cheating to allow Ahmadinejad to be re-elected and it led to massive, massive protests in major cities, especially in Tehran and these protesters were brutally beaten down by security forces.

It was France that led the world in condemning this violence, not the United States because the United States was holding out hope that Iran would join a round of talk in its nuclear program, talks that I might add never happened and took this administration three days to say anything about these talks. I think that was unfortunate, I think that hurt, uh, America's reputation on the world scene because we're seen as the leader of democracy and this was an instance where we really had to step up and do something and we didn't and I think the Obama administration learned a lesson from that but still there are critics of the president who bring this up time and again. This was your moment to speak and you didn't.

Let's talk more about the Obama administration and talks.

Okay. Well we currently are in a period where the Obama administration believes it is close to negotiating a diplomatic agreement with the Iranians. Uh, there was a meeting in Geneva where there was a preliminary agreement struck that supposedly during the first six months of 2014 Iran will, uh, agree to limit some of its nuclear activities in exchange for a small amount of sanctions relief. The question about how we got here is very interesting. As I said the Obama administration has been very interesting in getting a deal with the Iranians for a long time. There have been about three or four meetings under the Ahmadinejad regime that did not go anywhere but the development that directly impacts on the November 2013, uh, agreement concerns uranium enrichment and this goes to the nature of Iran's defiance of UN Security Council resolutions in such a way that they created facts on the ground that made a diplomatic agreement almost impossible. So, in the spring of 2012 I think the Obama administration came to the conclusion that they could not get an agreement with Iran because it had decided to violate six UN Security Council resolutions passed since 2006 saying that they cannot enrich uranium and also to violate repeated demands by western countries that if there is an agreement all Iranian enriched uranium will have to be removed from the country.

So, in May of 2012 at a multi-lateral meeting with Iran in Baghdad there was remarkable change in American policy. All of a sudden, the western states led by the United States announced that Iran only had to eliminate its 20 percent enriched uranium and it

could...they did not say this explicitly but they made clear that Iran could continue to enrich uranium to reactor grade. Now there's a New York Times article that came out at the time where the Iranians were sort of perplexed and said they thought this meant they could enrich to reactor grade and a US official said on background that he wouldn't confirm that and he says, 'It hasn't been agreed to yet,' but over the following few months it became clear that this is exactly what was agreed to. And a...a myth started to develop that the only threat from Iran's enrichment program is from 20 percent enriched uranium. Now let me talk about what that is. To produce a nuclear weapon you have to produce nuclear weapons fuel and that's the most difficult part of making a nuclear weapon. You start with natural uranium, which is 0.7 percent uranium 235. That is the physiological form of uranium that can be...that will undergo a nuclear reaction. The process to move from natural uranium to the reactor grade is a difficult one; it's time consuming and it's expensive. Iran is using gas centrifuges to enrich natural uranium to increase the percentage of uranium 235 so it can be used as reactor fuel. Reactor fuel is 3.5 to 5 percent uranium 235. Once you get to the uranium 235 level of 3 to 5 percent it is not much of a leap to go to 20 percent or to 90 percent. 90 percent is weapons grade uranium.

The Obama administration started contending that only 20 percent is a risk. It's very close to weapons grade but reactor grade is not a serious threat because it's far away from reactor grade. Well my organization, the Langley Intelligence Group Network, LIGNET, has studied this very closely. We have found studies by the American Enterprise Institute and two other well-known think tanks of Washington that have concluded that Iran can make nuclear weapons fuel from 20 percent enriched uranium in maybe about a month. So, one weapon they can make enough reactor grade fuel in about a month. These groups have found that Iran could make reactor fuel...I'm sorry weapons fuel using reactor grade fuel probably in about two months. There's not much of a difference. This has to do with how Iran's uranium centrifuges are set up, the amount of 20 percent uranium they have, the amount of reactor grade uranium they have, so it isn't a significant difference, only cut off the 20 percent enriched uranium. Iran is enriching 20 percent uranium they say to produce reactor fuel for a small research reactor in Tehran called the Tehran Research Reactor but several groups have found that Iran is producing far more of this form of enriched uranium than it really needs for this reactor. It has about enough 20 percent enriched uranium now for one nuclear weapon. However, it has enough reactor grade uranium for three to five and possibly as many as eight nuclear weapons if this uranium was further enriched to reactor grade. And so, the reactor grade uranium is a significant threat and the Obama administration and western states began to propose in the spring of 2012 that Iran would be permitted to continue to keep this uranium under strict international monitors.

Now the recent deal that was negotiation with Iran to roll back their program requires them to do something about the 20 percent enriched uranium. Some of it will be converted into fuel plates for the Tehran Research Reactor. The rest of it will be diluted or down blended into reactor grade. So, the 20 percent uranium in theory goes away but it's not difficult to reconvert it back to the 20 percent level so that it doesn't really go away; it's simply been converted into another form. The Geneva agreement also deals

with the reactor grade uranium but doesn't do much about it. It says that Iran can keep this process of producing reactor grade uranium but any reactor grade uranium over the current total has to be converted into uranium oxide. This is also reversible so Iran will still continue to keep large reactor grade uranium stockpiled and it will be producing...it will continue to produce reactor grade uranium that could be ultimately used as bomb fuel in the future.

Well I think that's right and one...there's different elements. There's three elements of a nuclear weapon: there's the fuel, there's weaponization, and there's the delivery system. Many people think that because of a delivery system of a missile because that may be way off Iran's program...nuclear weapons program, the threat from it is way off and I agree with Ambassador Bolton that that's not necessarily the case. It is true that building a miniaturized nuclear weapon that will fit in a missile is a technical challenge and I question that that's something that Iran will be able to do any time soon. They're at least several years away in my opinion. I don't know this; it's just my guess. But nuclear weapons can be delivered in other ways. It could be put on a barge. They could be hauled by a terrorist. I guess it could be put in a van. Uh, there are other ways of delivering it but Iran may not have to actually deliver the weapon. Testing the weapon would have an...an enormous effect on international relations in the region. I don't know whether Iran would do that but the fact that they have one and tested on just like the North Koreans, did their own underground test, I mean that's...I don't think North Korea has the ability to put a nuclear warhead in a missile. Some people do; I don't share that view right now. So, there is a precedent for another autocratic state engaging in such behavior to try to gain some type of international leverage.

I have. I have heard some reports of cancer related to uranium nuclear activities. I don't know if it is related to a nuclear test or if it is some other form of nuclear development. This is a nation that is experimenting with enriched uranium, with plutonium, that is trying to make a reactor that is trying produce plutonium, and I have had some...I have heard some reports that that's been talked about in Iran.

I'm afraid not.

That'd be good.

There's been a debate over how effective sanctions have been to get Iran to the bargaining table and to get Iran to agree to give up its nuclear program. There are those who believe that sanctions are forcing Iran to consider giving up its nuclear program. I don't see it that way although I think the sanctions have pressured them to get to the bargaining table. I think they'd like to get rid of the sanctions and they'd like to continue the nuclear program. And I like to quote my former boss Ambassador Bolton who said of the North Koreans, "You shouldn't underestimate how much pain these autocratic regimes are prepared to make the people feel to advance their agendas," and I think that's true in Iran that the regime is no in danger of falling; they are in full control of the country. There's certainly an opposition movement and there are many people who don't like the regime but they are being they are being repressed. The regime would like these

sanctions lifted and I think keeping them up may someday help advance an opposition movement that could overthrow this government. I don't think that day is any time soon. What concerns me about what is happening right now and this is in late 2013, the current agreement that has been negotiated with the Iranians will slightly reduce sanctions between maybe 4.2 billion; that's what the Obama administration says. Some people say as much as 20 billion. But with the idea that there is movement on the diplomatic agreement it will be very hard to pass additional sanctions and I think the Iranians have increased their international leverage and they will be able to whittle away existing sanctions especially with nations with troubled economies, Spain, Italy, Greece, who are big importers of Iranian oil and really would like to resume their imports, especially the Greeks. It's not a lot of money for Iran but it's an opening to end sanctions that are doing a lot of damage to their economy. The people are suffering but I don't think this is necessarily going...this is necessarily going to pressure the regime to do something it wouldn't want to do and that is give up their nuclear program.

Let's talk about collaboration between North Korea and Iran.

One issue that I've spent a lot of time working on at the CIA, at the State Department, and the House Intelligence Committee is collaboration on WMD between North Korea and Iran. Now there's a lot I cannot say about this but it is a crucial element here and there have been press reports of Iranian scientists being present at North Korean missile and nuclear tests. I think this is very significant. It's also significant that the Iranian missile program is comprised of technology and missiles that they largely acquired from North Korea. This is a symbiotic relationship between two rogue states that had been really advancing each other's interests.

The North Korean... North Korea has become the world's leading rogue vendor of missile technology and they sell missiles to Syria, to Libya, to Iran, to several other countries and they've made a number of sales to the Iranians and the Iranians have taken North Korean technology, which is also based on Russian and Chinese technology and they've actually improved some of the missiles that they've made. For example, the Iranians were able to launch two satellites into orbit long before the North Koreans were able to. The North Korean missiles kept blowing up or not getting into orbit. The Iranians achieved this twice using technology they originally acquired from North Korea, which I... I think is very significant. North Korea has gotten key revenue from Iran by these missile shipments and it is... it's sort of been a cat and mouse game with these shipments coming from North Korea to Iran. The US has tried to get smarter and smarter to find a way to stop, search, and seize one of these ships and the North Koreans have kept trying to find ways of getting missile parts and other technology to Iran without being stopped and they've come up with systems where, uh, situations where they can send a ship directly from North Korea through a Chinese port to Iran, uh, and stop at some type of, uh, fuel bunking area where there's no legal authority to stop it so the ship almost sales directly from China to Iran without stopping maybe with one... one fuel stop in an area where there's no legal authority to stop them.

There was quite a debate during the Bush administration on the legal authority to stop North Korean ships at sea that we believed to be carrying weapons of mass destruction and I regret that we could never get the legal authority that I think was obvious to stop these ships to search them when they're bringing missile parts to Iran. We can harass them, we can get bullhorns and...and yell at them but the North Koreans know that unfortunately we drew a line in the sand that we're not going to cross and we've had situations where American ships have been near North Korean ships being hit with fire hoses and obscene gestures by North Korean crews because they just knew the ship was going to be able to go onward to Iran. Uh, the US has tried a number of different measures to try to get states in every conceivable port to agree with us if North Korean ships would stop but unfortunately North Korea is doing this...but it really is a relationship that has advanced both WMD programs. The nuclear program I think is especially interesting. We don't know that there has been nuclear technology shared between North Korea and Iran. Many people suspect that it has been.

We know that both nuclear programs got to nuclear technology from A. Q. Khan, the father of the Pakistani nuclear program who also aided the nuclear weapons program in _____. But what other collaboration we don't know. There's some interesting possibilities. North Korea helped build the al-Qabar reactor in the Syrian Desert, which the Libyans destroyed in 2010. This reactor was identical to a similar reactor in North Korea. It was a reactor that would've produced plutonium from its spent fuel rods but there's a lot of unknowns about this reactor. Who paid for it? Did Iran pay for it? Was this an effort by Iran to build a plutonium-producing reactor in an area that the international community and the IAEA would not see? I suspect that's the case and I know Ambassador Bolton thinks that is the case and it...it suggests that there could be ways that these rogue states are collaborating to produce, uh, nuclear weapons and maybe other areas of WMD that may not be apparent to the general public.

I would like to talk about that, okay. There's a real concern that as Iran's nuclear program advances that is it going to spur a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. There recently were press reports that the Saudis are looking into the possibility of buying a nuclear weapon from Pakistan. There have been concerns about other gulf states who also may be thinking of developing a nuclear deterrent if Iran will get a nuclear weapon. There's been talk that Turkey might do this. I don't know what other states also might decide to go in this direction. The key is that there has to be confidence that the United States is leading the international community to keep the pressure on Iran to stop this program and not to concede that Iran is going to get a nuclear weapon and to adopt a policy of containment. There are an increasing number of experts in Washington who believe that may actually be the Obama administration's approach, that they've decided that Iran can't be stopped from getting a nuclear weapon, perhaps we can limit the process of their nuclear enrichment program and, we should therefore try to engage in some type of effort to contain their nuclear program like we did with other countries around the world. I think that's a mistake. I think that Iran is still a long way, uh, to getting a deliverable nuclear weapon.

They have not yet made nuclear weapons fuel as far as we know. Maybe they have a covert plan and did so but I don't think they have and, um, I think it's crucial that we keep the pressure up and not concede that they have a nuclear weapon until we think that they really do. If there was a nuclear arms race in response to the Iranian program I think first of all these nations would try to acquire nuclear weapons covertly. They would not want to violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty and they would not want to, uh, create a stir in relation with Europe and the United States. They also wouldn't want to create a stir with the Iranians. They wouldn't want Iran to know they were pursuing nuclear weapons until the right moment. I think the Saudis are most concerned because of the enormous animosity between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is Sunni, Iran is Shiite, Iran would like Shiite Islam...Iran is not just at war with the west; they're at war with Sunni Islam and they would very much like to do everything they can to cause instability in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis have been behind the instability in Bahrain, which is a Sunni Shiite dispute, um, so I think the Saudis have real security concerns about the Iranian military and Iran developing, uh, a nuclear weapon. All the gulf states do, which has led to enormous arms purchases over the last couple of years, uh, from, um, western defense firms. They are really arming themselves, buying advanced aircraft and anti-air missiles and other types of armaments because they're concerned about Iran is also building up and thinking about it as pursuing nuclear weapons. I don't know which other gulf states would try to pursue their own nuclear deterrent. I assume it would be someone...there's been some talk of Turkey doing this; I don't know whether that's really on the table or not but it is something that I think is worth thinking about.

I think Pakistan selling a nuclear weapon is really a pretty extreme step. It's been speculated in the press and I don't know that that is true, but uh, I can see the Saudis trying to make them quite an offer to get them to do that. Now Pakistan is not a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. They are already on the outs with the United States over nuclear matters because of A. Q. Khan and a failure to cooperate in debriefs of A. Q. Khan. It would damage relations with the west if they were to sell a weapon to the Saudis but there could be a day where they decide that they're willing to take that risk.

I'm not familiar with that.

We could talk about terrorists.

One element that has not been present in the recent multi-lateral talks in Iran is that Iran is a state sponsor of terror and they are a back of Hezbollah and they are backing the insurgency in Syria. They are a key backer of the Assad regime. Now Iran of course denies that they're backing terrorists but there's simply no doubt that they are sending terrorist fighters into Syria to fight with the Assad regime because they see this as a Sunni Shiite struggle. Assad is a member of a Shiite minority and...a Shiite sect. Iran is backing them and not just for that reason but because Syria is one of Iran's closest allies and gives Iran a...a present in the Mediterranean and an opportunity cause mischief in the region. Iran is backing Hezbollah, which is causing instability in Lebanon and Hezbollah has a presence in Latin America, which we've seen, which is a concern in Venezuela.

Over the last few years there have been instances of terrorist...terrorist events around the world concerning American, British, and Israeli diplomats. They are sort of amateurish attacks mostly on diplomats. Whether they were backed by the revolutionary guard or Ahmadinejad is not known but it's something that's put diplomats from these countries on high alert because it looks like the Iranians are trying to engage in some type of attack.

Well I want to talk about the way European states have dealt with the Iranian nuclear program because it's very interesting. During the first term of the Bush administration, the George W. Bush administration, it was pretty clear that the approach of the EU3 states, Germany, France, and...and the UK, was to engage in diplomacy because they were worried that maybe the Bush administration was going to bomb or they didn't like our aggressive diplomacy and they were engaged in multi-lateral talks with the Iranians, actually with now the current president Rouhani who was their chief negotiator. And I met with some of these negotiators and I met with some of the low-level staffers and we were pretty critical on them because we thought they were being –

Well I wanted to talk about how the Europeans deal with the Iranian issue, specifically the French, the German, and the British. During the first Bush administration, the George W. Bush administration, they took a different view than they do right now. They were sort of concerned that maybe President Bush was going to order an attack on Iran and they didn't like the confrontational approach by the Bush administration and they wanted diplomacy and they were engaged in multi-lateral diplomacy, what was called the EU3 talks with Iran and the negotiator for the Iranians was actually now President Rouhani as their chief negotiators and I dealt with some of these European negotiators and met with their staffs and I remember that my colleagues and I...we used to give them a lot of trouble that they were being led down the garden path by the Iranians, that the Iranians were just using these talks to buy time and they condemned us as right-wing Neanderthals and that we really had to be more reasonable with Iran and the diplomatic solution was the better way to go; we should go that way.

Well Rouhani later admitted that he was actually using these talks to buy time and he was actually manipulating the Europeans, which I thought was interesting. But in the second Bush administration things changed. The second Bush administration, mostly due to the leadership of Secretary of State Rice, was much more interested in diplomacy despite the fact that the Iranians were becoming more belligerent and testing missiles and saying all things about Israel and the Europeans started criticizing the Bush administration of being too soft, which was just incredible, and I used to go to a weekly luncheon at the American Enterprise Institute with representatives from the French and German and British embassies and the tide turned in a couple of years and finally after we would yell at every...every quarter they started yelling at us because we were being too soft and it was fascinating. That has continued into the Obama administration. The tough states on Iran have been the Europeans. They're sanctions are much tougher than the sanctions adopted by the United States, their approach to the Iranian nuclear program have been much tougher. The French, Germans...let's say the French and the British succeeded in

convincing the European Union to implement an oil embargo, which is an enormously significant sanction.

How they convinced all 27 states to do that I don't know but it was quite an accomplishment. The Obama administration has consistently resisted any legislation to implement sanctions against Iran. Some of these sanctions have passed over the President's objections but he insisted on having waivers inserted into the legislation, which I might add he's used regularly to exempt states filing these sanctions. The Europeans have not done that. Their sanctions have been pretty tough. In, uh, one of the recent rounds of talks with the Iranians we were very close to getting a deal but the French stopped the talks because they thought on a number of levels the agreement was simply far too generous with Iran and did not insist that the Iraq heavy water reactor, that work on it be at least suspended and it was startling to see this agreement that was almost implement tanked because the French were condemning their western allies for coming up with an agreement, which they thought was too soft. It was a bizarre situation but it simply shows that the dynamics have changed a little bit. We saw similar tough policies on Libya. The French and the British were far ahead of the United States in support rebels against Gaddafi. A White House official used the phrase 'leading from behind is the US policy.' I think concerning Iran and Egypt and Syria we've seen that approach by this administration and we've seen a surprisingly more assertive approach by the European.

The approach by France is really very interesting, especially under socialist president Francois Hollande and in early 2013 it looked like radical Islamist rebels were going to take control of Sudan. Holland invaded Sudan. I mean they really stunned the world. They had the permission of the Security Council and they had the permission of the western allies. What was most striking is that when socialist president Francois Holland invaded Mali earlier this year, not only invaded it with the support of the UN Security Council and regional and European state, but he invaded it because he did not want to see an al-Qaida base being built so close to France. He asked for western help, he asked for American help, Europeans gave him a little logistical support, the United States did too, the United States gave some intelligence support but no troops on the ground. Holland did this on his own and he paid a price. There were French hostages who were executed because of this move but it shows that there have been some differences in international leadership over the last few years and I think it's significant and I think it's been noticed by some of the rogue states like Iran.

Israel sees the Iranian nuclear program as an existential threat and they make no bones about this and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been very clear that a nuclear Iran is something that is simply can't tolerate. Now these fears have been exacerbated by some of the really ugly and threatening rhetoric by the Iran regime including Ahmadinejad's threat to wipe Israel of the map. The Israeli's take this very seriously. There's not going to be another holocaust. They're not going to allow a situation where a rogue state is going to make such type of threats and Israel is not going to take them seriously. The events of 2012 and 2013 are very interesting because we had several issues coming up simultaneously. Relations between Netanyahu and President Obama

became very bad because Netanyahu was moving hard enough against the Iranian nuclear program. There are those who believe that Netanyahu was at least implicitly backing Mitt Romney for president against Mr. Obama when he ran for re-election. I mean there were numerous press pieces to this effect. Hell, I don't agree with that actually but there certainly were many people who were alleging that this was the case. There were reports of Obama officials very angry because they thought this was the case.

I believe that in the fall of 2012 Netanyahu made a strategic decision to desperately try to patch relations with Mr. Obama because he realized that he was going to be re-elected. Now in September 2012 Netanyahu came to New York to speak to the UN General Assembly. President Obama refused to meet with him. Now Mr. Obama claimed he was busy and he couldn't meet with all these representatives; however, a year later he was prepared to meet with President Rouhani so I didn't find that a convincing explanation but let's give the President the benefit of the doubt. Netanyahu did meet with Secretary of State Clinton. He gave a speech on the Iranian nuclear program using a formulation about 20 percent enriched uranium that I don't think Netanyahu actually believed in but it was an argument that the Obama administration was making and I think he did that for two reasons. First of all, he wanted to patch relations with the United States because he knows it's crucial for Israel's security to have a good relationship with...with the US leadership. Israel also was facing a crucial ___ election in early 2013 and I think Netanyahu thought it was time to dial back the rhetoric a little bit, focus on domestic issues, and regroup to go after the Iranian nuclear program later.

What we've seen since the ___ elections is Netanyahu examining multi-lateral talks that the United States has participated in with Iran that in his opinion are going down the wrong road and this was very apparent in May 2012 when the United States implicitly agreed that Iran would allow...would be allowed to continue to enrich uranium to reactor grade. Uh, it seemed apparent in 2012 that the Obama administration was worried that Israel might bomb Iran. I think that their concerns grew again in the spring of 2013 when Israel reacted so badly to this concession on Iran's nuclear program. Netanyahu has been adamant in his opposition to the recent talks in Geneva and I believe he's going to step up his rhetoric right now because he's very concerned that the agreement that has been struck with Iran is not in Israel's interest and will allow Iran to continue to, uh, continue covert activities to build a nuclear weapon.

I think US/Israel relationships were improved in the fall of 2012. Uh, the president visited earlier in 2013 and I think relations were on the upswing. I think the Geneva talks have hurt them very badly and I think we're in a situation now where Israel may be engaged in more foreign policy initiatives independent of the United States without telling the United States because they're...they've sort of decided that we simply aren't on the same page on the Iranian nuclear program. I don't know if Israel is going to attack Iran. I tend to think that they won't but if they attack I don't think the United States will be informed in advance.

I think Iran would love to do that and I think if they can see an opening to divide the United States and Israel or the United States and Saudi Arabia they'll do it. I'm not sure

they're that clever but I bet they're thinking about it right now to see if they can find a way to get a deal that allows them to lower sanctions, continue their nuclear program, and put a wedge between the US and Israel.