



**ISIS Europe  
European Security Contact Group meeting**

**Preventing an Iranian Bomb:  
The urgent need to change strategy**

**Tuesday 27 November 2007  
1200 – 1330Hrs**

Venue: European Parliament, Paul Henri Spaak Building, Room 1C51.  
Rue Wiertz, Brussels

*Host:* **André Brie, MEP**

*Opening remarks:* **André Brie, MEP**

*Chair:* **Giji Gya**, Programme Director, ISIS Europe

*Speakers:*

**Bernd W. Kubbig**, Senior Research Fellow at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt

**Jerry Sommer**, Research Associate at the Bonn International Center for Conversion

*Discussants:*

**Stephen Pullinger**, Executive Director, ISIS Europe

Others TBC

Two speakers from leading research institutes in Germany will present their particular perspectives on how best to prevent the development of an Iranian Bomb. They contest that sanctions have failed to change Teheran's policies, and now is the time to put forward an alternative approach.

**There will then be opportunity for questions from the floor.**

## **Bernd W. Kubbig from the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt:**

### **Less economic pressure on Iran means more political pressure on Ahmadinejad**

Under which circumstances could sanctions prompt the Iranian government to suspend its uranium enrichment in order to prevent a war? From the sanctions literature three main conditions for success can be extracted: a great extent of unity within the sanctioning coalition, a considerable vulnerability of the target country, and as little economic and political costs as possible for the sanctioning states.

As far as the first condition is concerned one has to take the different agendas of the sanctioning states into account. Resolution 1737 of 23 December 2006 enlists three measures, the severity of which were diluted by the Russian and Chinese delegation. Washington's foreign and security calculations so far foresee not the integration but an increased international isolation of Tehran. The U.S. Department of the Treasury is applying silent as well as targeted travel diplomacy: leading delegates meet with top representatives of banks of allied states, prompting them to cease their investment activities in Iran.

The second mentioned success condition of financial and economic-political sanctions can be concretised in form of the four biggest weak points of the Islamic Republic. The first weak point, the aging infrastructure of the oil and gas industry, is the Achilles heel of the Iranian economy. The second weak point concerns the increasing contrast between petrol consumption and the extension of refineries in the Islamic Republic. Iran has to import oil products as well as gas. Iran's oil-consuming export policy is the Islamic Republic's third vulnerable point. The monoculture of Iran's export immediately conveys a great sanctioning potential. Iran's national economy and its serious problems pose the fourth weak point. There are no objective criteria for the third condition for the success of sanctions – comparatively low economic and political costs for the punishing states. In case of a general embargo which goes beyond the energy sector and targets Iran's external trade as a whole the concrete burden of each member of the alliance can be estimated if its importance for Tehran as a trading partner is taken into account.

Kubbig argues that the results of the current policy of sanctioning Iran have been poor. It would take an enormous level of unity which the international sanctioning coalition needs to achieve in order to make the identified economic weak points of Iran even more troublesome and to worsen the overall economic situation. Even if this was achievable, it would not automatically mean political efficiency.

This conclusion leads to two possible scenarios for the next steps of Brussels' and Berlin's Iran policy. The first scenario is based on the demonstrated weaknesses of the Iranian economy. This situation shall be worsened by stiffening sanctions. Such a development cannot be ruled out; but the odds are against it.

The second scenario is based on the limited effects of sanctions and the possibility that the Iranian people will increase the support of its administration because of the UN measures. Finally Brussels will have to deal with the question of a policy change. It is very unlikely that Tehran ends its nuclear program since the elites and the people in Iran strongly support it. That is the reason why a more realist approach should be taken. A "smart concept" which should consist of different elements can be singled out as a very promising alternative to sanctions or war. It ought to include the following steps: delaying the nuclear program, compromises on uranium enrichment, strengthening the inspections of Iran's nuclear plants, economic incentives, and offering direct diplomacy between Washington and Tehran. This concept does not aim at isolating Iran and abolishing all its nuclear plants. Instead of this it combines containment and engagement.



## **Jerry Sommer at the Bonn International Center for Conversion**

Jerry Sommer from BICC argues in his analysis of the Iran nuclear conflict that sanctions are not working. Although they have some economic effect – for example the price of imported goods in Iran is going up – politically this did not lead to a change of track by the Iranian leadership in regard to uranium enrichment.

It is highly unlikely that further sanctions – be it UN sanctions or EU/US sanctions will make a difference. So, as a proverb says: “If you are sitting in a hole, stop digging.” In any case, in view of the high oil prices and the resulting full coffers for Iran, any economic consequences of extended universal or unilateral sanctions will affect that country’s prospects of economic development only in the medium to long term, if at all. It seems highly unlikely that further sanctions, even if combined with incentives, will affect the unanimous, negative attitude of the diverse Iranian leadership to the question of suspending all uranium enrichment activities.

Also, Sommer argues, Iran has not taken any decision yet about acquiring nuclear weapons. There is no hard evidence that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapons program. As in the case of North Korea a political solution is possible. But this will require especially that the US administration turns its back on ideological, maximalist positions. A different strategy towards the Iranian nuclear programme would need to involve several complementary elements:

- The international community should start negotiations with Iran on the P 5+1 offer immediately without preconditions. It is too late to prevent Iran from developing the capability and knowledge of enrichment. Nevertheless, it is still not too late to prevent an Iranian nuclear bomb.
- In the negotiations the international community should focus on ensuring maximum possible international control of Iran’s nuclear facilities even beyond the “Additional Protocol” of the IAEA – not on preventing any enrichment. Furthermore, the negotiations could be used to ascertain how serious Iran has been with its various proposals regarding temporary or quantitative limits on enrichment activities on its territory, including the ‘Russian option’.
- The United States must start direct talks with Teheran without any preconditions. The USA must offer Iran a complete normalization of relations, including the end of all US sanctions and comprehensive security guarantees. The hopeless goal of forcing a regime change in Tehran should be abandoned. It is high time for a ‘paradigm change’ in US policy towards Iran as the US has managed in the case of North Korea. Such a policy of détente would weaken the hardliners in Teheran and put wind in the sails of those in the Iranian leadership who are willing to compromise.

The EU member states and the EU can and should be instrumental in promoting such a strategy shift and persuade Washington to show greater pragmatism and more flexibility in its treatment of Iran. However, this also means that the US partners will have to demonstrate more self-assurance in dealing with the United States than they have done in the past. The case of North Korea has shown that even the Bush Administration is able to alter an ideology driven course.

## *References*

**Bernd W. Kubbig**, born in 1950 in Gehrenrode (near Hannover), is a Senior Research Fellow at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, one of the leading security institutes in Germany. After having accomplished its post-graduation in Harvard University, Mr Kubbig joined the PRIF as a research associate in 1979. Now, he is a specialist of the US Foreign and Security Policy, Middle-East and Missile Defence and Space issues.

Bernd Kubbig's Publications within The Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (*PRIF*)

<http://www.hsfk.de/>

- **“International sanctions against Iran: Conditions of success and efficacy”** of Bernd W. Kubbig (in cooperation with Sven-Eric Fikenscher) which has been published in German this year.
- Bernd W. Kubbig, **Iran and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**. Briefing Paper für das Europäische Parlament, Policy Department External Policies, Brüssel, August 2006.
- Bernd W. Kubbig, **Thesen zur Iran-Politik der USA - taktische Annäherung oder strategische Wende?**, in: Internationales Konversionszentrum Bonn/ Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg (Hg.), Iran: Wege aus der nuklearen Sackgasse. Optionen Barrieren und Chancen für eine Vertragslösung, Bonn/Hamburg 2006, S.15-23.

**Jerry Sommer**, born in 1953 in Germany, is Research Associate at the “Bonn International Center for Conversion”, one of the five leading peace research institutes in Germany. Also, he works as a freelance journalist on foreign affairs and armament/disarmament issues for German media. After working in Bonn, London and Brussels he is now based in Düsseldorf.

Jerry Summer’s Publications within the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)

<http://www.bicc.de/>

- BICC Focus 4: **“Raus aus der Sackgasse: Handlungsoptionen für die deutsche Politik im Streit um das iranische Atomprogramm“**.  
([http://www.bicc.de/publications/focus/4\\_iran/focus\\_4\\_iran%20.pdf](http://www.bicc.de/publications/focus/4_iran/focus_4_iran%20.pdf))
- BICC paper 52:(editor) **“Iran: Wege aus der nuklearen Sackgasse, Optionen, Barrieren und Chancen für eine Verhandlungslösung“**.  
(<http://www.bicc.de/publications/papers/paper52/paper52.pdf>)
- Forthcoming: **„A Way Out of the Deadlock: Time For a New Strategy on the Iran Nuclear File“**



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