

Europe's Iran Problem
Problem? What problem?
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The leaders of Europe can no longer pretend that they don't know what Iran is up to. A leaked internal document prepared for the European Union's foreign ministers warns that it is probably too late to prevent the Iranian government from acquiring nuclear weapons. "At some stage we must expect that Iran will acquire the capacity to enrich uranium on the scale required for a weapons programme." The document also admits that efforts to impede the Iranian nuclear program have failed. "In practice . . . the Iranians have pursued their programme at their own pace, the limiting factor being technical difficulties rather than resolutions by the U.N. or the [International Atomic Energy Agency]." Nor do the limited sanctions announced by the U.N. Security Council hold out any hope: "The problems with Iran will not be resolved through economic sanctions alone."

So now they know. Years of diplomacy have made virtually no difference. Carrots and sticks have been tried and failed. The regime in Tehran is determined to become a nuclear power--the first nuclear power with a yearning for martyrdom. Europe's strategy has hitherto been merely to play for time--but time is on Tehran's side.

Europe's reaction? Nil. By tacit agreement, it has been left to Israel and the United States to hint at possible military action to destroy the nuclear facilities that European companies have helped to create. Europe has done little to isolate Iran or put pressure on its leaders and its people. Germany and other European Union states head the list of trading partners with Iran. As was the case with Iraq, the fact that so many Europeans are making so much money out of an evil regime has contributed to Europe's political paralysis.

Yet Europe has an overwhelming interest in preventing the emergence of an Islamist bomb. European territory would be directly threatened by a nuclear-armed Iran, equipped with long-range missiles. Europe would also be in greater danger than the United States from terrorist organizations armed with radioactive ("dirty") or even nuclear bombs from Tehran. Iranian terrorists have a history of setting off bombs in Europe. Nuclear blackmail is far more likely to be used against European states than against the United States, and European states are judged by Tehran to be far less likely to retaliate than Israel.

For these and many other practical reasons, Europe should be reacting far more vigorously than it is to the Iranian provocation. But there is an even more important reason Europe should be forcing the issue rather than appeasing the mullahs.

The moral case for stopping President Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamenei in their tracks is that both have vowed to annihilate Israel. Ahmadinejad's threat ("Israel must be wiped off the map"), repeated in different forms several times over the past two years, is well known. He was quoting Ayatollah Khomeini, whose successor as supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, set out his solution to the Middle East problem in 2000: "the annihilation and destruction of the Zionist state." The means to

accomplish the eradication of Israel are now almost in their grasp.

Why, the political establishment of Europe implicitly asks, should we lift a finger for Israel? Well, Israel is Europe's orphaned offspring. It was Europe--specifically Britain--that conceived the Jewish National Home in Palestine with the Balfour Declaration in 1917. It was Europe--specifically Germany, but with help from collaborators in almost every nation on the Continent--that drove hundreds of thousands of Jews to emigrate, and then murdered six million who could not escape. It was Europe--specifically the E.U.--that gave the Holocaust a unique status in defining the values that Europe's institutions enshrine. Generations of children have been taught that the commemoration of the Holocaust is not only a moral imperative, but constitutive of European civilization.

Now that the threat of a second Holocaust is staring Europe in the face, however, its leaders are in denial. Worse: They seem insouciant. Why is the E.U., which makes so much of its humanitarian credentials, which sees itself as a creature of the Enlightenment, so seemingly indifferent? The answer, I fear, lies in the process that has deprived Israel of legitimacy and branded Zionism as a relic of European imperialism. That process has been grinding away for decades, but only now is it becoming plain that Europe's vast superstructure of collective atonement for the Holocaust has been hollowed out from within. The calumny that Israel--the most liberal and egalitarian country in the Middle East--is an "apartheid state" has hardened into a conviction. The mud has stuck.

Yet if Israel is attacked and--God forbid--destroyed by Iranian nuclear bombs, then European civilization will have perished, too. The destruction of Israel would signal the demise of the Judeo-Christian morality that ennobled Greco-Roman culture to create the only Europe that was ever worth preserving. I for one could not live in a society that could even contemplate such a second Shoah. I would turn my back on such a Europe, shake the dust from my feet, never to return.

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