

## PRESENTATION MADE BY SINAN ULGEN AT THE MOSCOW NON-PROLIFERATION FORUM

At this point in the discussions, it is really difficult to make a cogent presentation without overlapping with what has been said. So instead of a more traditional presentation, I will focus on 3 points which are critical in connection with the international community's relations with Iran.

The first one is Iran's World view. It has already been expressed to some extent but I think it is worth mentioning it again. Iran views itself as being under siege and that the West continues to harbor a regime change agenda, particularly the US. Now you have to understand the historical context. Iran has had a troubled relationship with the West. From Russia's 19<sup>th</sup> century invasion of the country, the overthrow of the Musadagh regime with British and US complicity is still remembered vividly. The Iran-Iraq war where the West was seen to be supportive of Saddam is also pretty vividly etched in public memory. So even if the revolutionary spirit of the early days of the Islamic Republic are over, meaning that Iran does not seek anymore to export its own regime, the relationship with the West continues to be marred by it. As a result there is unshakable belief among the Iranian leadership that the US will continue, no matter what it says, to promote regime change in Iran. Iranian culture is extremely at ease with the mysteries of double or triple agendas. Or even the practice of *takiyyes*, which is to conceal the truth if it helps to achieve your aims. So it is not difficult to understand why even a best intentioned administration in Washington would have a difficult time convincing Iranian authorities that it has no regime change agenda. The risk here is of course is that at the end of the day, it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy.

The second element that shapes Iran's world view is the regional context. Not only does Iran believe that the US has an encirclement strategy with a huge military presence in the Middle East, military bases in Saudi Arabia and UAE, 5<sup>th</sup> fleet in Bahrain, troops in Afghanistan and the UAE. But perhaps even more importantly, Iran believes that this strategy aims to bolster a Sunni alliance against the regional interests of Iran. From this perspective the country to watch is Saudi Arabia. In short, the regional context is itself a source of instability, concern and threat for the Iranian leadership.

The bad news is that the Arab spring has further undermined this situation. And strengthened the siege mentality. Here we have to mention Syria and Turkey. Let me start by Turkey.

The repercussions of the Arab Spring especially as it is now being played out in Syria drove a wedge between Ankara and Tehran. It is not that long ago that Turkey had taken the lead to broker the fuel swap deal back in May 2010. That was a time when the Turkish leadership enjoyed quite a degree of trust in Tehran. The relationship between Turkey and Iran has never been easy. As Walter eloquently stated, these are two former imperial powers that struggled for regional influence. This competition continues to this day. But despite that, in the past decade, the relationship had noticeably improved. As a result, Turkey started to model itself as a facilitator and then a mediator between Iran and the international community. We can talk at great length about the value of Turkey's role and the ill fated Tehran Research Reactor initiative. But I fundamentally believe that when there is such a big trust deficit between Iran and the rest of the world , the presence of a Western country that could have helped to bridge that deficit was a very valuable asset. This asset does not exist anymore. It came apart as the two countries started to drift in opposite directions on Syria. The decision by Turkey to host the early warning radar system of the Missile Defense was also an element in this polarization. But that could have been manageable if not for Syria. The two governments have diametrically opposite views on the future of Syria. And as Turkey became more assertive and hostile in its policies towards Syria, abetting the Syrian civilian and military opposition to precipitate regime change, Tehran became more distant. So much so that we now hear occasionally bellicose rhetoric from Tehran. Statements such as after Syria it will be Turkey's turn. The TR government seems to think that Iran has also shifted its policy on the PKK and once again has started to give support to the Kurdish terrorists as retribution to Turkey. Just last week, Turkish TVs showed recordings of meetings between Iranian agents caught in Eastern Turkey receiving information from PKK members. So in short, Turkey drifted away from the world map of the Iranian leadership in the camp of less friendly states.

But Syria is perhaps even more important. This is a country that was the linchpin of Iran's regional strategy. It allowed Iran to extend its influence across

the Middle East and provided a physical connection to Hezbollah. Losing Syria would be a most serious shock to Iran's regional status. Tehran fears most the emergence of yet another Sunni, Muslim Brotherhood dominated regime in the Middle East, this time as its neighbor. So I think Iran's strategy on Syria would be to support Assad till the end, which may be approaching, but then shift to a strategy, a bit like in Iraq, to foster instability and sectarian polarization essentially to prevent or to retard the establishment of a Sunni dominated polity in Damascus.

These regional dynamics are very likely to rekindle Iran's sense of isolation. That may be good for countries in the region that see Iran as a rival and look at this geography as a zero sum game. But these developments do not bode well for the nuclear talks. Especially if we believe that Iran is seeking a nuclear capability as a result of its insecurities. These developments are likely to be making the Iranian leadership even more insecure.

When you talk to many Iranians about the nuclear program, they all say it is for peaceful purposes. But then in the same discussion they also say that they want to discuss about the regional security issues, talking about Israel's nuclear arsenal etc. It is clear to me that there is a connection between Iran's nuclear program and its security perceptions. The logical conclusion to draw from this analysis, and again this is a linkage that they establish, is that the nuclear program cannot be solely civilian. If it is to help Iran deal with the challenges of regional security, it has to be somewhat more than that. And many including the IAEA happens to believe that there is activity inconsistent with a purely peaceful program.

That does not however necessarily mean that the Iranian leadership has once and for all decided to obtain a nuclear deterrent. I think at this stage the decision has essentially been to explore, to learn and to reach the capability, so called threshold capability by pushing the boundaries of the NPT. They are exploring several pathways uranium centrifuge enrichment, laser separation , heavy water plant in Arak for plutonium. I think Iran genuinely believes that it has not violated its NPT commitments. That is obviously not the interpretation of the international community. Also Iran believes that the UNSC resolutions are illegal. That it has an inalienable right to uranium enrichment.

But Iranian authorities also want the West to believe their statements that they do not want nuclear weapons. There is the question of the fatwa against nuclear weapons. The other example often given in this debate is that Iran refrained from using its own WMDs even as it was attacked by the chemical weapons of Saddam. So the claim is that the possession of WMDs is inimical to Iranian religious and cultural philosophy.

I think the West should seize upon this interpretation. Instead of saying Iran is pursuing a clandestine weaponisation program we should say OK we believe you. We believe that you have no intention of fabricating nuclear weapons. That should be our starting point. So let's define what that means. And let's define all the subsidiary commitments that you need to make in order to reassure us that in fact you don't want nuclear weapons.

And I think the Lavrov plan is a very intelligent strategy. It is gradual, step by step but comprehensive. It is back loaded and not front loaded. Gives priority to easier steps. And builds trust gradually.

Post US elections there will be a window of opportunity for a new deal based on the principles enshrined in the Lavrov. My question is whether we can reach an agreement and even if we reach an agreement, can it be long lived if there is no process, regional, multilateral initiative focusing on regional security. If the Gulf and especially Saudi Arabia continues to purchase arms. We should certainly think about how to improve the regional and by extension Iran's strategic environment. From this perspective the NWFME initiative is to be welcomed. I don't harbor any big expectations at this stage. But it will test the waters and give us a sense of whether it is possible to create a regional platform to talk about regional security.