



## It's Time for Israel to Join NATO

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[John Hulsman](#) y [Nile Gardiner](#)

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On the surface, Iran appears to have bested the international community in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. As former Secretary of State Colin Powell has observed, after two years of fruitless negotiation, the international community is no closer to halting Iran's quest for nuclear weapons.<sup>[1]</sup> Instead, the great powers endlessly debate where and when a diplomatic showdown will take place while Iran resumes its nuclear research. In essence, the world is fiddling while Rome burns. The West has one ace left to play before a final showdown looms. Extending NATO membership to Israel could convince Iran's Mullahs that developing a nuclear capability is not in their interest.

To put it mildly, the new president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, comes across as extremely dangerous and unhinged in his opinions of the state

of Israel, a long-term American ally. His recent comments are both anti-Semitic and fascist. By questioning the reality of the Holocaust, threatening to wipe Israel of the face of the earth, and urging that a Jewish state be relocated thousands of miles away, Ahmadinejad has made clear his intentions. Too often in the 20th century, people scoffed at statements such as these, only to watch in horror as barbaric actions followed earlier intemperate rhetoric dismissed at the time as the words of a madman. If we are to learn the lessons of history, we must take the Iranian leadership at its word.

While military force must remain on the table, a precision strike would be fraught with military, diplomatic, and economic risks. Having learned from the brilliant Israeli raid against Saddam Hussein's French-built nuclear

plant at Osirak in 1981, the Iranians have dispersed their nuclear projects to dozens of facilities, buried many of them underground, and shielded some in high-density urban areas, ruthlessly using the Iranian people as human shields. Diplomatically, a strike would complicate efforts to promote democracy and imperil pro-Western regimes such as Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Economically, Ahmadinejad has threatened to disrupt the oil market if a strike occurs, which would pose a direct threat to Western prosperity. While the United States must be prepared to use preemptive force to neutralize the Iranian threat if necessary, the huge complexity of the operation, plus its potential fallout, must be recognized.

On the other hand, endless talks between the EU-3 (France, Britain, and Germany) and Tehran are not solving the problem and will not disarm the Iranian regime. Behind the scenes of the negotiations, many in continental Europe secretly wish that the U.S. would simply accept the possibility of an Islamic Republic of Iran with a nuclear arsenal. They ignore, however, the harsh reality of such a foolhardy policy. The fallout from inaction would be disastrous. An arms race in the region would ensue, with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt all vying to develop their own nuclear weapons. Iran would become increasingly vociferous in its threats against Israel and could actively arm the myriad terrorist groups that depend upon Tehran's protection. Israel would not play along with this game of Russian roulette. The world would shortly face a major regional conflict, possibly involving the use of nuclear weapons.

#### **A Security Guarantee for Israel**

There is a way out of the present diplomatic morass that will signal to the Mullahs in Tehran that the West is serious about reining in their nuclear ambitions, but without allowing them to destabilize the Middle East. The United States should propose the quick admission of Israel into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a full and equal member.

Israel meets NATO qualifications: it is a democracy, has a free market economy, and is able to contribute to the common defense. In fact, unlike many new NATO members, it would be a net addition to the alliance, having lift and logistics ability, a second-to-none officer corps, and a first-rate military capable of all aspects of war-fighting. Israel spends nearly 10 percent of its GDP on defense and has active armed forces numbering 167,000 men and women, with 358,000 in reserve. It possesses up to 200 nuclear warheads, as well as a well-equipped Air Force and Navy. [\[2\]](#)

Israel's intelligence capabilities have been a vital asset in prosecuting the Global War on Terror, as few understand the conflict so well. Like the U.S. and Great Britain, history has forced Israel into being a genuine warrior nation. Its accession to NATO could only enhance the alliance's capabilities.

More importantly, Israeli accession to NATO would explicitly extend the Western alliance's nuclear deterrent to cover Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Now it will be Tehran, and not the rest of the world, that has a proliferation problem. Any nuclear or conventional attack on Israel, be it direct or through proxies such as Hezbollah or other terrorist groups, would be met by a

cataclysmic response from the West that would make the Battle of Omdurman look like a stroll in the park. [3] Israel's accession would leave the Mullahs with no illusions about the West's determination to respond to Iran's strategic threat to the region.

NATO membership is the strongest disincentive to Tehran against its aspirations to join the nuclear club. Iran wants the bomb primarily to intimidate Israel into a lesser role in the Middle East and, in effect, to hold the West hostage to its desire for regional dominance. Extended deterrence, with its proven track record in the Cold War, remains the last, best chance to get the Iranians to back down. Israel's joining NATO is undoubtedly the most effective way to resolve the crisis, short of immediate military action.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been searching for a continued role in the world after the fall of the Soviet Union. If NATO is to remain relevant, it must adapt to new threats on the international stage while retaining its timeless commitment to Western security and values. The present crisis meets these criteria; it requires only new thinking to meet this new and dangerous challenge.

In addressing the gathering storm over Iran, the NATO of the 21st century must embody the vision of Sir Winston Churchill, who recognized that the future of the West depends upon its ability to forthrightly confront and defeat apparently distant threats to its security, which are all too often nearer than they seem. The time to change the geopolitical calculus of the Middle East is now.

*[Nile Gardiner, Ph.D.](#), is the Bernard and Barbara Lomas Fellow, and [John Hulsman, Ph.D.](#), is Senior Research Fellow in European Affairs, at the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.*

## **Notas**

[1] Trevor Kavanagh, Interview with General Colin Powell, *The Sun*, January 17, 2006.

[2] See International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, 2003-2004.

[3] The 1898 Battle of Omdurman was one of the greatest victories in British imperial history. The massive defeat of the Mahdi Army in the Sudan marked the triumph of the West over Islamic extremism.