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'Existential threats' and dinner with the Iranian president

by Claire Schaeffer-Duffy

NCR Today

Blogger David Swanson and dozens of peace activists dined with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in New York on Tuesday. The dinner with the Iranian president is an annual affair. This year's attendees included a Jewish lawyer, a Mennonite and an evangelical pastor from Texas.

Swanson's lengthy write-up of the evening is well worth the read. The piece provides an important counterpart to the talk of "existential threats" heard at the UN General Assembly this week.

Here's an excerpt:

Obama declared on Tuesday that if Iran were to develop nuclear weapons it would destroy the nonproliferation treaty. It would start a nuclear arms race. Iran would be, or rather it already is, a threat to Israel's existence.

But how exactly can Iran stop violating a treaty that it is not violating? What can it say to prove it does not have what even the U.S. National Intelligence Estimates say it does not have and is not working to produce? How can Iran prove a negative? Many of us still recall that impossible task being assigned to Iraq in 2003.

As Ramsey Clark, the U.S. attorney general at the time the nonproliferation treaty was created, argued at the meeting with Ahmadinejad, the United States is itself violating the treaty -- a treaty that would be better called the nonproliferation and elimination treaty, as it requires the elimination of nuclear weapons. Iran is a party to the treaty and in compliance with it. Israel has refused to sign

the treaty or to allow inspections. Iran received its nuclear power technology from the United States, which also gave it the plans to build a bomb -- this through a CIA project that might fairly be characterized as pure evil crackpotism. The United States has also spread that technology to India and Pakistan. The nukes in Western Asia are in Israel and on U.S. ships off the coast of Iran.

U.S. and Israeli forces have Iran surrounded, and are threatening war in violation of the U.N. Charter. Israel and the United States have attacked Iranian computers, assassinated Iranian scientists, flown drones over Iran, imposed sanctions on the Iranian people (including cutting off oil supplies and clean energy technologies). The United States has organized a massive military exercise off the coast of Iran, and has just taken the terrorist label off an Iranian terrorist group, opening the door to funding its operations. The very real threat of war on Iran is an existential threat to millions of human beings, a threat -- in other words -- of mass murder.

Swanson's blog goes on to look at the issue of "existential threat" in the context of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. The occupation of Palestine is "not so much an existential threat as it is an existential fait accompli," Swanson writes.

Exiled Iranian human rights activist and Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi opposes war on her homeland. The economic sanctions currently in place are making life very difficult for the Iranian people, she says, and to even threaten war would impede democratic reform in Iran because the government, under the pretext of safeguarding national security, would intensify its crackdown on pro-democracy activists.

Talk of war on Iran has already created something of an "existential threat" for pro-democracy activists in Bahrain. The tiny island kingdom hosts a crucial port for the US Fifth Fleet with its ships poised toward Iran. Unwilling to upset the monarchy, the Obama administration has turned a blind eye to Bahrain's torture and imprisonment of human rights defenders like Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and Nabeel Rajab.

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