**Atomic Ayatollahs**

By Col. Oliver North

April 22, 2010

Fox News

Original Source: *http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,591384,00.html*

Washington, D.C. — If there was ever any doubt, it must now be clear to everyone that the Obama administration has no idea how to stop the Iranian regime from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Earlier this month, as he warmed up for what the White House billed as "an unprecedented nuclear security summit," President Obama trotted out a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia and announced new, self-imposed restrictions on building, testing and using U.S. nuclear weapons in his Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). He also made the meaningless claim that "outliers like Iran or North Korea" would be increasingly isolated "so long as they are operating outside of accepted international norms."

Thankfully, START requires ratification by the U.S. Senate. The O-Team's NPR will be debated in congressional committees, because even unilateral disarmament has to be funded. But the absence of any foreign policy on Iran's headlong pursuit of a nuclear arsenal is the sole prerogative of the executive branch. Threats to "isolate" the theocrats in Tehran or the despots in Pyongyang are hollow and everyone knows it.

Last week, someone at the Pentagon was worried enough about the lack of coherent policy or planning that they leaked to The New York Times what one officer dubbed, "The CYA, 'What If?' Memo." The document to which he refers is a classified memorandum Defense Secretary Bob Gates sent in January to the "White House National Security Team" urging them to consider how we are going to deal with a nuclear-armed Iran.

This memo and the talk it has spawned make very good news for the Ayatollahs. They now know that short of armed intervention, the Obama administration cannot deter Iran from building all the nuclear weapons it wants.

The mullahs were never worried about the United Nations' toothless nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iranian lies to IAEA inspectors fill volumes. Nor were they concerned about "severe" United Nations Security Council economic or diplomatic sanctions. Unlike Obama, the Ayatollahs on the Supreme Council don't care if anyone likes them; they want to be feared. And now, there are increasing reasons to do so.

The O-Team effort to shore up anxious allies has proven to be one of mixed messages and little reason for optimism, especially in Tehran's Target No. 1: Israel.

In the aftermath of the leaked memo, Gates took pains to reiterate that "all options are on the table" for Iran and North Korea despite new restrictions in the Obama NPR. But just hours later, Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Mike Mullen said that military action against Iran is a "last option."

Last week, Michele Flournoy, undersecretary of defense for policy, testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that "We are working to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons" and told the solons "it's a top priority of the administration." But this week she told a gathering of security officials in Singapore that military force is "off the table in the near-term." Meanwhile, General David Petraeus, commander of U.S. Central Command, has reportedly been busy assuring Arab states in the region that Aegis-equipped vessels in the Persian Gulf and U.S.-provided Patriot anti-missile batteries being installed on Iran's periphery are an adequate defense against Tehran's mid and long-range ballistic missiles.

This week, as the White House and State Department started drawing up talking points for "a fourth round of sanctions discussions at the U.N. Security Council," the Iranians made an announcement of their own. According to a Notice to Mariners and Airmen, filed in accord with the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Iranian Navy and "maritime forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps are conducting "a three-day military exercise in the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz." Twenty percent of the world's crude oil passes through these waters. As the Iranians intended, the price per barrel immediately jumped.

According to conventional wisdom, there is nothing anyone can do short of military action to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The flaccid response to Iranian internal dissent means there will be no "regime change." The Israelis know they can't get to the Iranian nuke sites and missile facilities without U.S. acquiescence. The Iranians have taken Obama's measure and concluded he just isn't up to any of that.

But there is one thing, short of war, the president can still try before the Ayatollahs finish building their bombs. He can issue an executive order barring any company, regardless of nationality, that does business with an Iranian government entity, from doing any business in the United States.

Doing so means there will be hell to pay at the U.N., the World Trade Organization, the E.U. and maybe even the World Court. But barring business sure beats waiting to be incinerated by the Atomic Ayatollahs in Tehran.

— Oliver North is a nationally syndicated columnist, the host of "War Stories" on Fox News Channel and the author of "American Heroes."