



Naiveté Regarding Nuclear Attacks

This article was written in response to Gideon Rachman's article, "Good news: you are unlikely to be nuked any time soon," that appeared in *The Financial Times* on July 24, 2007. This article was subsequently submitted to the editor of *The Financial Times*, who chose not to publish our article.

Gideon Rachman (Good news: you are unlikely to be nuked any time soon) shows an excellent understanding of Thomas Schelling's *The Strategy of Conflict* and brinkmanship relative to the current quest for nuclear weapons by many nations hostile to the West. However, he appears to be quite naïve in his assessment of the risks posed by nuclear proliferation.

Every United States' Presidential administration from JFK to Nixon to Reagan to Clinton and now President Bush has recognized the dangers to civilization posed by nuclear weapons. And each successive administration has done its part to reduce existing arms and limit further proliferation. But unlike the Cold War in which the enemies were easily identifiable sovereign nations, today's nuclear threats are not just from rogue nations but from shadowy, opaque terrorist organizations embedded throughout the world including in the U.S., Great Britain, France, etc.

North Korea has been successful in using its nuclear programme for economic gain by blackmailing the Western powers. Other, such as Venezuela, may well follow North Korea's lead or go even further, engaging in a high stakes game of brinkmanship with the West. However, the concept of brinkmanship does not apply to al-Qaeda and the terrorists who are willing to kill themselves in order to murder innocent peoples. Brinkmanship is an unknown concept to Islamic extremists who are willing to use their twisted interpretation of their religion to justify the massacre of thousands.

Given this, does Mr. Rachman really believe that brinkmanship characterized the showdown with Iran, a nation whose president has publicly stated that another nation, Israel, should be wiped off the map? Unlike the Cold War where the United States and the USSR struggled over political differences, Iran and the terrorists have made this struggle one of religious differences intertwined with political issues.



It further appears that Mr. Rachman shares the views of many throughout the world who underestimate the resolve of al-Qaeda, its terrorists, and their state sponsors in this quest for nuclear weapons. As the A.Q. Khan affair illustrated, nuclear technologies and secrets are available on the black market to the highest bidder. It is only a matter of time before this technology falls into the wrong hands, and once in possession of this information, it is only a matter of time before terrorists or states who sponsor terrorism master the enrichment process.

Finally, Mr. Rachman displays an apparent indifference and blasé attitude towards the risks of nuclear attacks by terrorists or rogue nations. This indifference breeds complacency. Complacency is exactly what al-Qaeda is hoping for to enable its operatives to secure the nuclear technologies necessary to pull off the next big attack—an attack that could dwarf the 9/11 tragedy. At that point, will brinkmanship save London or Paris or New York?