HILLARY'S IRAN COMMENTS

There's a lot of outrage over Hillary's comments on nukes and Iran yesterday (some of which will be broadcast today on the Today show). Some of that is not surprising, given the way the comments make her sound like Dick Cheney without his meds.

But there's a kernel of sense in her comments that is being missed—and we'd be much better off pointing out that kernel and understanding it and its limits—than magnifying the sound bites that make her look so bad.

Here's the transcript that Ab2kgj put together.

> Well what we were talking about was the potential for a nuclear attack by Iran, if Iran does achieve what appears to be it's continuing goal of obtaining nuclear weapons, and I think deterrence has not been effectively used in recent times, we used it very well during the Cold War when we had a bipolar world, and what I think the president should do and what our policy should be is to make it very clear to the Iranians that they would be risking massive retaliation were they to launch a nuclear attack on Israel.
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> In addition, if Iran were to become a nuclear power, it could set off an arms race that would be incredibly dangerous and destabilizing because the countries in the region are not going to want Iran to be the only nuclear power. So I can imagine that they would be rushing to obtain nuclear weapons themselves. In order to forestall that, creating some kind of a security agreement where we said, 'No, you do not need to acquire nuclear weapons if you were the subject of an unprovoked nuclear attack by Iran

> the United States and hopefully our NATO allies would respond to that as well.' It is a theory that some people have been looking at because there is a fear that if Iran, which I hope we can prevent, becoming a nuclear power, but if they were to become one, some people worry that they are not deterrable, that they somehow have a different mindset and a worldview that might very well lead the leadership to be willing to become martyrs. I don't buy that, but I think we have to test it.
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> And one of the ways of testing it is to make it very clear that we are not going to permit them, if we can prevent it, from becoming a nuclear power, but were they to become so, their use of nuclear weapons against Israel would provoke a nuclear response from the United States, which personally I believe would prevent it from happening, and that we would try to help the other countries that might be intimidated and bullied into submission by Iran because they were a nuclear power, avoid that fate by creating this new security umbrella.

What got people's attention were the words "massive retaliation." But what got missed were the two concepts that have guided our nuclear policy since World War II: a security umbrella and deterrence.

What Hillary is addressing (which got missed by many people going nuts about this statement) is that within fairly short order—certainly before Iran gets nukes—other countries in the Middle East are going to start pursuing them. Can Saudi Arabia, for example, allow its rival for hegemony among Islamic states acquire nukes without itself acquiring them? And considering that Saudi Arabia provided significant funds to Pakistan for their nuke program, presumably the Saudis could acquire nukes (though perhaps not build them) reasonably easily.

So Hillary is trying to address both the problem of Iran's pursuit of nukes but also the inevitable arms race that will (has?) started in response to Iran's attempts. So Hillary's seemingly sane response to this challenge is to do what we did after World War II: to provide the countries that wanted nukes with a security guarantee, to persuade them not to develop their own programs (this happened particularly well with Japan and Germany). And, to assert something Bush's cronies refuse to believe—which is that the Iranians, like all leaders of nation-states, can be persuaded not to use nukes by the threat of assured destruction. (In her support for deterrence, at least, Hillary is less belligerent than the nuts currently in the White House.)

The reason Hillary sounds like such a raving lunatic about bombing Iran is because she is—as we speak—laying the groundwork for that kind of deterrence program, proving she can sound sufficiently belligerent to scare the mullahs running Iran.

So for those who think Hillary is a raving lunatic, it'd be well to 1) address whether or not deterrence paired with a security umbrella would work and 2) if not, then how we're going to prevent Iran's demonstrated interest in acquiring nuclear technology from destabilizing the Middle East.

You're all going to address the NIE that shows that Iran does not now have an active program, and it's an important point. While Iran, of late, has accelerated its enrichment program, we don't have reason to believe Iran is also, for example, developing the missiles that can carry nukes. Which ought to provide one hint how to respond to this without all the belligerence—to start, first of all, by saying "we should implement a strategy that works for all countries in the Middle East now, while we still have time." I'll come back to this point. But it doesn't change the fact that—particularly with the increasingly tense fight for hegemony among

Islamic states—there is and will continue to be a burgeoning arms race in the Middle East. That should be—and Hillary and Obama ought to have rephrased it (though by the time it came up in the ABC debate, they were probably just desperate to get that terrible thing over)—how do we prevent a nuclear arms race from breaking out across the Middle East?

So would Hillary's strategy work? Is a security umbrella and deterrence a real plan in the Middle East, as it was in Europe and Asia?

This is the area where people ought to be challenging Hillary's statements.

And, in my non-expert opinion, the answer is no. There is no way we—with our close relationship with Israel—can convincingly offer a security umbrella for the entire Middle East. To establish a convincing security umbrella after all, we'd have to persuade every country that might potentially acquire nukes that we would protect them in case of an Israeli strike. Hillary seems to deliberately leave the countries that might want a security guarantee vague—surely, she's thinking of Saudi Arabia, but she may also be thinking of Iran, though no Presidential candidate is going to state that we might offer to defend Iran. But there is no way we could convince Iran, our mortal enemy since 1979 (or, if you're Iranian, since 1953), that we would protect them in case of an attack by Israel. FWIW, I think France could credibly establish such an umbrella, possibly even China. But not only is France unilaterally cutting its own nuclear weapons, I can assure you the US is not going to want France or especially China providing security guarantees (and presumably obtaining preferential oil deals in exchange) in the Middle East.

Any effort to prevent further nuclear proliferation in the Middle East (Hillary conveniently neglects to mention Israel's nuclear arsenal, and doesn't consider that Pakistan and India are integrated enough into the Middle East such that it is naive to assume

an arms race isn't **already** fully engaged) needs to start with the acknowledgment that 1) Israel has nukes and that 2) the US is not now a credible entity to offer a security umbrella.

If Hillary or anyone else is serious about using a security umbrella to foster peace in the Middle East, they're going to have to convince the US to cede at least part of its hegemonic position in the Middle East to a credible security guarantor, France or China. Which, of course, means the US is going to have to free itself from its dependence on oil. So long as we are utterly dependent on oil, nukes will continue to be a going concern in the Middle East.

Okay, I've tried, best as I can, to take Hillary's comment as the rational statement I think she intended it as, steeped as it is in the existing—but increasingly unworkable—paradigm of US foreign policy that has existed since World War II.

That said, WTF is she thinking??? She has already been fighting to spin her vote on Kyl-Lieberman as a sane vote for engagement and not what it really was, a vote to give Bush more keys to war. Even though this statement—as most of her statements on Olbermann—was painfully scripted, she seems unaware that she was spouting belligerent sound bite after belligerent sound bite. Sure, this might help her among PA's most conservative voters. "Hurrah! Let's vote for the woman who wants to obliterate the brown people!!" It's still not going to help her with the majority of Democratic voters who want out of Iraq and definitely don't want to start war with Iran.

I honestly think it was intended to be a rational argument in favor of an established foreign policy paradigm. But boy did she miscalculate.