



Unacceptable? Is the America of 2006 more willing to thwart the unacceptable than the France of 1936?

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In the spring of 1936--seventy years ago--Hitler's Germany occupied the Rhineland. France's Léon Blum denounced this as "unacceptable." But France did nothing. As did the British. And the United States.

In a talk last year, Christopher Caldwell quoted the great Raymond Aron's verdict: "To say that something is unacceptable was to say that one accepted it." Aron further remarked that Blum had in fact seemed proud of France's putting up no resistance. Indeed, Blum had said, "No one suggested using military force. That is a sign of humanity's moral progress." Aron remarked: "This moral progress meant the end of the French system of alliances, and almost certain war."

Today, it is President Bush who has said (repeatedly) that Iran's "development of a nuclear weapon is unacceptable, and a process which would enable Iran to develop a nuclear weapon is unacceptable." The "reason it's unacceptable," the president has explained, is that "Iran armed with a nuclear weapon poses a grave threat to the security of the world." The Iranians must "not have a nuclear weapon in which to blackmail and/or threaten the world."

Is the America of 2006 more willing to thwart the unacceptable than the France of 1936? So far, not evidently. According to the *New York Times*, "One of President Bush's most senior foreign policy advisers" recently

told a group of academics, "The problem is that our policy has been all carrots and no sticks. And the Iranians know it."

That acknowledgment could be the prelude to a new policy in which sticks are finally assembled and wielded. That policy would manifest a far greater sense of urgency about the diplomatic process, and about pursuing meaningful sanctions, whether through the U.N. or a coalition of the willing. That policy would mean supporting diplomacy with the credible threat of force--instead of rushing every few days publicly to reassure the Europeans (and the Iranians) not to worry, that we're on a diplomatic track now, and, for that matter, for the foreseeable future. It would also mean stepping up intelligence activities, covert operations, special operations, and the like.

And it would mean serious preparation for possible military action--including real and urgent operational planning for bombing strikes and for the consequences of such strikes.

That action would be easier if the situation in Iraq improved--which implies an urgent push to make progress there, with the deployment of more troops if necessary. Planning for action in Iran would be somewhat easier if the president finally insisted on a far-too-long-delayed increase in the size of the military. It would be easier, too, under the leadership of a new, not-discredited defense secretary in whom the president would have

confidence, since he has surely (if privately) lost faith in the current one.

Given Iranian president Ahmadinejad's recent statements and actions, it should be obvious that it is not "a sign of humanity's moral progress"--to use Blum's phrase--to appease the mullahs. It is not "moral progress" to put off serious planning for military action to a later date, probably in less favorable circumstances, when the Iranian regime has been further emboldened, our friends in the region more disheartened, and allies more confused by years of fruitless diplomacy than they would be by greater clarity and resolution now.

The strategist Eliot Cohen was correct when he told the *New York Times* last week, "I don't get a sense that people in the administration are champing at the bit to launch another war in the Persian Gulf." They're not. No one is. But it is also the case that a great nation has to be serious about its responsibilities, even if executing other responsibilities has been more difficult than one would have hoped.

As the president said in January 2002:

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastro-

phic. . . We'll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons. . . . We can't stop short. If we stop now--leaving terror camps intact and terror

states unchecked--our sense of security would be false and temporary.

These words remain as true today, four and a half years after 9/11, as they were four and a half months after that day, when we allegedly awakened from our holiday from history, and once again became serious about the world we live in.

